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# A Comparative Ethnography of Rituals and Worship among Hindus and Zulus in South Africa

(with special reference to death rituals and ancestor  
veneration)

**Rajendran Thangavelu Govender**

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the  
Faculty of Humanities: School of Languages and Literature  
University of Kwa-Zulu Natal

**Supervisor: Prof. Phyllis Jane Zungu**

**Durban December 2007**

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## DECLARATION

I, Rajendran Thangavelu Govender

REG. NO: 200101566

Hereby declare that the dissertation entitled:

**A Comparative Ethnography of Rituals and Worship among Hindus and Zulus in South Africa.** (With special reference to death rituals and ancestor veneration)

is the result of my own investigation and research and that it has not been submitted in part or in full for any other degree or to any other University.

.....  
R. Thangavelu

Signature

.....  
2008/04/04

Date

R. Thangavelu Govender  
4/4/2008

## ABSTRACT

This study examines the similarities and differences between the historical background and the current performance of Hindu and Zulu funerals and associated ceremonies.

After presenting an account of the historical development of the Hindu and Zulu communities in South Africa, a chronological account of the performance of each of these funeral ceremonies are presented. This account includes a detailed description of the rituals performed when a person is on his/her death bed, the actual funeral ceremonies and the post death rituals and ceremonies associated with ancestor veneration. The incidence and significance of The Anthropology of Geste and Rhythm in each of these ceremonies are demonstrated according to the theory of Marcel Jousse. The Hindu and Zulu ceremonies are then analysed and interpreted to demonstrate an individuals life crises which Van Gennep called the "Rites of Passage" and distinguishes three phases: separation, transition, and incorporation. The discussion accounts for the transmission of traditions over generations, and which demonstrate the anthropological and psycho-biological nature of memory, understanding and expression as evident in the performance of Hindu and Zulu funerals and ceremonies and the manner in which the ancestors are venerated in South Africa. The research was undertaken mainly in Kwa-Zulu Natal. However to fill research gaps in the Hindu investigation a study was undertaken in some parts of India as part of the Ford Foundation International Fellowship Programme.

Abbreviated title: An analysis of Hindu and Zulu funeral rituals and ceremonies.

## ISIFINYEZO

Lolu cwaningo lucubungula ukufana ngokunjalo nomehluko phakathi kwesizinda esingokomlando nendlela osequhuthshwa ngayo manje imingcwabo kanye nemigidingo ehambisana nemingcwabo ngokwesiHindu nesiZulu.

Ngemuva kokuchaza ngokukhula okungokomlando kwemiphakathi yamaHindu namaZulu eNingizimu Afrika, kuzophawulwa ngokulandelana, indlela okuqhuthshwa ngayo ngamunye wale migidingo yokungcwaba. Lokhu kuchaza kuzofaka nencazelo ephelele yezinto ezihambisana nezinkolelo ezenziwa uma umuntu esegulela ukufa, imigidingo yokungcwaba uqobo lwayo, okuphathelene nezinkolelo okwenziwa emva komingcwabo kanye nemigidingo ehambisana nokukhonza amadlozi. Ukuvela kanye nokubaluleka kwe-*Anthropology of Geste and Rhythm* kulowo nalowo mgidingo kukhonjiswe ngokwethiyori kaMarcel Jousse. Imigidingo yesiHindu nesiZulu ibe isihlaziywa futhi ihunyushwe ukuze kuvezwe nezimo ezinzima zempilo zomuntu ngamunye, lokho u-van Gennep akubiza ngokuthi “Amasiko okukhula” bese ebala nezikhawu ezintathu: ukwehlukana, ukuguqukela kwesinye isimo kanye nokuhlanganiswa. Kulolu cwaningo kuvezwa ukudluliselwa kwamasiko ezizukulwaneni ngezizikulwane, okuveza indlela yenkumbulo enesimo esiveza izici eziphathelene nemvelaphi yomuntu, ubuhlobo phakathi komzimba nengqondo, ukuqonda nokubeka izinto njengoba kutholakala ekusingathweni kwemingcwabo nemigidingo ngokwesiHindu nesiZulu kanye nendlela okukhonzwa ngayo amadlozi eNingizimu Afrika. Lolu cwaningo lwenziwa kugxilwe kakhulu KwaZulu-Natali. Nokho, ukuze kugcwaliswe imininingwane ethile yocwaningo lokuphathelene namaHindu, kwadingeka ukuba kwenziwe ucwaningo nasezindaweni ezithile zasezweni laseNdiya njengengxenye ye-Ford Foundation Fellowship Programme.

Isihloko esifinyeziwe: Ukuhlaziywa kwemingcwabo nemigidingo yesiHindu neyesiZulu

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Ernst Cassirer says:

It is not immortality, but mortality that needs to be proved.

Death leads to re-death, not to the end of life, for the spiritual body is always seeking new existence. In order to satisfy my quest to accomplish this study on death rituals, many people have contributed in various ways. I would like to take this opportunity to show my gratitude to them.

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13. I would like to dedicate this research to my late parents Thangavelu (Peter) and Patchiamma Govender and my late In-laws Sambosivan and Lutchmiammal Annamalay who was all steeped in Hindu culture and who have now joined all my ancestors in the ancestral kingdom watching over me and my family.
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15. Lastly but not least, I would like to thank everyone who helped me directly or indirectly in one form or the other in my quest to realize my academic dreams.

## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to the memory of my late parents, Thangavelu and Patchiamma Govender, who brought me up in an Oral family milieu, that have informed my choice of career, the focus and direction of this research, and other choices in life.

You have since taken your place in the Ancestral Kingdom with the rest of my ancestors.

May your souls rest in peace.

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## SECTION A

### CHAPTER 1

#### 1.1 Introduction

Just as the soul in this body passes through childhood, youth, and old age so too it passes at death into another body... As a man casts off worn garments and takes others that are new, so does the embodied soul cast off its worn out body and enters into others that are new...It is never born, it never dies having come into being once, it never ceases to be. Unborn, eternal, abiding and primeval, it is not destroyed when the body is destroyed. (Bhagavad Gita 2-13-22)

Studies of different customs of different societies show that even though the customs differ to a certain degree in different creeds the underlying motif is the same.

Even though we belong to different religions, we all belong to one big family of Humanity and as such our aspirations, needs, joys and sorrows cannot differ very much from one another.

We tend to fight with each other to prove which religion is better but the underlying truth is that the message conveyed by all religions is the same. This is determined by going down to the roots of all groups in society. Truth is always unchanging and eternal. A careful analysis of the interpretations of religious texts shows that followers who interpret the same truth in different ways come out with different conclusions. This is clearly demonstrated in the African concept of *Ubuntu*. The President of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki in his Heritage Day address at Taung, North West Province in September 2004 had this to say,

As we know, the African people in this country have, over many centuries evolved a value-system of *Ubuntu* with its basic tenet aptly captured by the saying: *motho ke motho ke batho*. Many of us have been brought up to uphold values based on this old-age African adage. Through socialization many Africans have ensured that our families and communities are themselves grounded on the value-system

of *Ubuntu*.

A close examination of the central tenets of the values that drive the behaviour and approach of the Afrikaner, Indian, and Jewish communities reveal that there are many elements that are consistent with the value-system of *Ubuntu*.<sup>1</sup> However we have not done enough to articulate and elaborate on what *Ubuntu* means as well as promoting this important value system in a manner that should define the unique identity of South Africans. Indeed, there has been a campaign to ensure that *Ubuntu* becomes synonymous with being South African.

The rituals and practices of the Zulu and Hindu community of South Africa are the product of the thinking and experiences of their forefathers and mothers, which form part of previous generations. They formed religious ideas, they formulated religious beliefs, they observed religious ceremonies and rituals, they told proverbs and stories which had religious connotations, and they introduced certain laws and customs which safeguarded the life of the individual and his community and contributed to a harmonious society.

The rites, rituals and customs play a major role in the life of every person, irrespective of religious, tribal or cultural affiliations. However, this is more prominent in the case of Zulus and Hindus. Right from the time of conception and birth, up to a person's passing away and even after it, rites and rituals follow the Zulu and Hindu at all times, much like a shadow.

It needs to be borne in mind that Africa is going through a tremendous and rapid change in every aspect of human life. Many individuals are becoming increasingly detached from the corpus of their tribal and traditional beliefs, concepts and practices. On the other hand, these concepts have not all been abandoned, nor are they likely to be wiped out immediately by

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<sup>1</sup> Humanness – willingness to be of service to others and the promotion of peace and harmony in the community.

modern changes.

In a comment made by Rasna Warah in the Mail & Guardian 3 April 2007,

According to Ngugi, language is more than just a means of communication; it is the essence of our being, the very core of our soul as an African people, “the medium of our memories, the link between space and time, the basis of our dreams”...when you erase a people’s language, you erase their memory.

Different practices and beliefs can be attributed to the cultural and geographic environment from where they have sprouted. According to Narain (2004:3),

All religions believe in the Power of Prayer. Muslims and Christians believe in Heaven and Hell that souls inherit after death depending upon their deeds here on earth; whereas Hindus believe that Heaven and Hell are on this plane itself, depending again upon the good or evil deeds committed. Thus, we believe that when a soul enjoys joy and a sense of contentment, he is in Heaven, whereas when he has no peace of mind, then he is in his own custom-made Hell.

Mankind has tried every possible means to prolong life. This is clearly demonstrated by the great medical and other achievements aimed at putting an end to suffering caused by the different kinds of illnesses. However, it must be realized that notwithstanding all these great achievements we have to face the reality of death.

Strong (2004:1) argues that this inevitable aspect of human existence has become a taboo subject in the western world. The difficulty that we have in discussing death leaves many people unprepared for what some believe is the end to their existence. It is therefore, necessary to prepare for this eventual reality by focusing on the methods to be used to provide a proper and relevant send off of the deceased. Different societies have their own unique ways of conducting the various rites associated with death and the different methods of remembering the dead.

This research focuses on what happens before, during and after a Hindu and Zulu person dies. Drawing on the theory and Anthropology of Geste and Rhythm, I have examined responses to death as they occur within the unique set of linguistic, cultural, social and historical circumstances which characterizes the South African society. The research does not only document and explain contemporary practices but also reviews the ways grief; mourning and death rituals have been approached by academics, priests, elders in the community, cultural leaders and ordinary members of society.

It must be emphasized that the South African perspective was researched as the practices locally differ substantially from those of the Hindus in India. This can be attributed to various factors including the detachment from the motherland, assimilation and other factors. This has been tested with research conducted in India as a visiting scholar attached to the Hyderabad University and visiting various places such as Varanasi, Mangalore, Bangalore, Cochin, Chennai and Pondicherry.

South African people of Indian origin have always maintained linkages with India for their spiritual and cultural needs. According to the draft Arts and Culture Policy Review Document (2007:70).

Even though some of the people may harbor sentimental memories and values about their country of origins, the likelihood is that a sizeable number of them may not even think of going back home. They are likely to regard South Africa as their new home while having some sort of connection with their motherlands and their cultures. Physical and psychological space must exist for them not to feel alienated from the mainstream of society. To prevent or eradicate any preponderance of xenophobia, the nation, particularly the government, must find a way of including them in its policies and service delivery programmes in a non- patronizing manner such that their presence must enhance and influence the culture and quality of life for all, including that of the indigenous inhabitants without severely compromising their originality.

At the Pravasi Bharatiya<sup>2</sup> Conference, held in New Delhi in January 2003, the former Prime Minister of India, Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee said,

Indians who have chosen to settle in foreign lands should be loyal to their country of adoption. The biggest challenge facing every immigrant community is to integrate harmoniously into the political, economic and social life of the host society, while preserving and cherishing its civilizational heritage. Over the years, Indians have achieved this delicate balance virtually everywhere, without a contradiction between their adopted citizenship and their original Indian identity.

There are a number of *sanskaras*<sup>3</sup> (anthropological milestones) that we have to go through, from birth to death. For my Masters degree, I investigated the rituals and practices of the Zulu and Hindu community with specific reference to the marriage ceremony. My research for my PhD is on Death Rituals and Ancestor Veneration – the reason I chose veneration is because we do not worship the dead, we honour them, respect them and venerate them.

Furthermore, in this study I have emphasized the unity of traditional Zulu and Hindu religious philosophy by focusing on death rituals and ancestor veneration. The approach used does not in any way provide an in-depth analysis of religious and philosophical systems of the Hindu people in general but I have chosen to highlight both the similarities and differences considering the Zulu and Hindu people of South Africa. For this reason, I have used examples from various parts of South Africa, in so far as general observations and giving detailed illustrations from an oral point of view.

This study of the Zulu and Hindu religious systems is a study of local people who are entwined in the complexities of both traditional and modern life. Our written knowledge on oral tradition is comparatively little. However, in recent times, aspects relating to indigenous

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<sup>2</sup> Pravasi Bharatiya Divas"(PBD) is celebrated in India and abroad on the ninth day of January every year. The choice of the date is significant as it was on this day that Mahatma Gandhi himself a Pravasi Bharatiya in South Africa for almost two decades finally returned to India in 1915 to lead India's freedom struggle.

<sup>3</sup> A life-cycle ritual performed at important stages during a person's life, to purify the body and the spirit.

Knowledge Systems<sup>4</sup> and Oral tradition have been receiving much attention from all spheres of government, academics and from the non-government sector in South Africa.

As a result of the Group areas act of the previous dispensation, cultures were distributed spatially over the Kwa-Zulu Natal province. This enabled the Zulu and Hindu community to occupy a specific portion of this surface. The members of the different cultures were to be found living as members of specific local groups divided by race, religion and linguistic affiliations.

According to Otterbein (1972:6), a local group is a geographically distinguishable aggregate of people. It may be as small as a single family or as large as a city. Thus local groups within a culture can vary in size and complexity. A culture can be so small – in either territory or population size – that it only contains one local group or it can be so large that it contains hundreds of local groups. In the Zulu community the local groups could take the form of clans with each clan being controlled by a Traditional leader while among the Hindu community, divisions are based on linguistic differences.

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<sup>4</sup> Is the local knowledge – knowledge that is unique to a given culture or society. Indigenous Knowledge (IK) contrasts with the international knowledge system generated by universities, research institutions and private firms. It is the basis for local-level decision making in agriculture, health care, food preparation, education, natural-resource management, and a host of other activities in rural communities

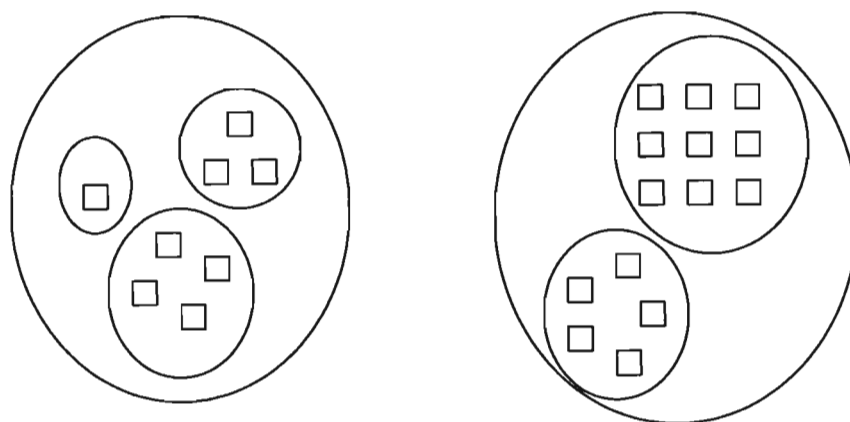


Fig. 1 Diagram of basic Concepts (Otterbein 1972:7)

**KEY:**

\*Squares represent man-made structures

\*Small circles represent local groups

\*Large circles represent culture

During the period of colonization much had been done to destroy traditional cultures. In addition to colonizing African land, Europeans also colonized African knowledge not just to claim it as their own, but also to disconnect Africans from their heritage and culture. According to Motshekga (2006:1), the founders of African nations lamented the destruction of African civilizations by slavery and colonization and yearned for the rebirth of Africa.

In recent years there have been great strides in all sectors of society to remedy the ills of the past. In South Africa, the Africanisation<sup>5</sup> process is high on the political agenda, with the introduction of the African Renaissance Programme. The “African Renaissance” is a concept popularized by South African President Thabo Mbeki in which the African people and nations are called upon to solve the many problems troubling the African continent. It reached its height in the late 1990s but continues to be a key part of the post-apartheid intellectual agenda.

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<sup>5</sup> Providing Africans with cultural continuity, which in turn helps to clarify African identity. In South Africa, Africanisation is generally seen to signal a (renewed) focus on Africa, on reclamation of what has been taken from Africa, and, as such, it forms part of post-colonialist, anti-racist discourse. With regard to knowledge, it comprises a focus on indigenous African knowledge and concerns simultaneously 'legitimation' and 'protection from exploitation' of this knowledge.

The phrase was first used in 1994 in South Africa following the first democratic election after the end of apartheid. However, the optimistic tone of the still forming concept took shape with then-Deputy President Mbeki's famous "I am an African" speech in May 1996 following the adoption of a new constitution, in which Mbeki pronounced,

I am born of a people who are heroes and heroines [...] Patient because history is on their side, these masses do not despair because today the weather is bad. Nor do they turn triumphalist when, tomorrow, the sun shines. [...] Whatever the circumstances they have lived through and because of that experience, they are determined to define for themselves who they are and who they should be.

According to Mzamane (2007), African Renaissance,

Is an episodic and cumulative epic story of the rise of a once enslaved people across the globe? It is a continuing revolution that unfolds toward the total liberation of people of African origin in the political, economic, cultural, educational, technological and social spheres. In its wake, it liberates those Frantz Fanon describes as the 'wretched of the earth', wherever they may be and in every sphere of life.

Today, many indigenous knowledge systems are at risk of becoming extinct because of rapidly changing natural environments and fast pacing economic, political, and cultural changes on a global scale. Practices vanish, as they become inappropriate for new challenges or because they adapt too slowly.

The Indigenous African knowledge systems (IKS) movement provides a common platform for indigenous Africans to rediscover their past, identity, culture and knowledge systems in order to contribute towards human civilizations. Furthermore, the processes of IKS require a philosophical framework that will transcend tribal, ethnic, racial and religious divides which historically caused conflicts on the African continent and negatively affected the cultural, social, and economic emancipation of the people of Africa. (Motshekga 2006:2).

According to Christina Qunta, in an article “*Celebrating the continent, Africa*” which appeared in the Daily News 29/08/2007, Pg.8

Universities in this country and I suspect in other parts of the continent, as a matter of routine, ignore not only the ancient history of this continent and its important contribution to civilization, but also ignore indigenous systems of knowledge in philosophy, religion and government. The problem is that our universities are located in an African country but philosophically situated in Europe.

President Thabo Mbeki also calls for renaissance scholarship in Africa, the purpose of which should be to correct the distortions that define Africans as being ‘something other than what we are, as not quite human, perhaps sub-human but definitely not human’. In South Africa, he has championed the introduction of similar research and scholarly projects to revise African history in accordance with the facts that were distorted by European settler and colonial historians. In his Accra Address delivered on 5 October 2000, he stated that,

It is therefore critical that we begin deliberately and consciously to engage in the process of reclaiming our history, our culture, our heritage so as to challenge the stereotypes, distortions of Africa and Africans which even some amongst us have been socialized into accepting as fact. (Accra: 2000)

There are many viewpoints with regard to traditional practices and its role in modern society. Ntshangase (2006:16) argues that while we embrace some Western influences, we should take a good look at ourselves. According to him, some of the foreign influences were forced down the throats of traditional societies resulting in harm being done psychologically and spiritually. Examples cited are foreign names, some of which have no meaning; indulging in Western style marriages without understanding the deep meaning of the spiritual significance of the union of marriage. As a result of this, there are high incidences of divorces, something that was unheard of in the past 20-30 years. He goes on to say that,

It is our belief that through these ceremonies, we reclaim our essence as a people. Through these ceremonies we appeal to God to give back our strength and pride in much the same way that some people would go to church for a spiritual revival or communication with God.

Traditional ceremonies are symbolic of an entire mind shift, which essentially challenges us to ask ourselves: who are we, where do we come from, where are we in the current dispensation, and indeed what are the positive things that we can take from past traditions, and which we should jettison? If other people can be allowed to stand on pulpits and mountain tops to sing praises to their gods, why can't we be allowed the space and time to communicate with our own gods in a language they understand? According to Ntshangase,

The revival of some of these ceremonies is an ongoing process of rediscovering ourselves and charting the spiritual path we have to travel as a people (2006:16).

Culture is a dynamic phenomenon transmitted from generation to generation. The new society that is sought to be achieved must also be able to socialize their offspring into a new way of life. To that end, the practice of traditional and modern types of rites of passage, rituals and customs must be revived, upheld and encouraged to shape the behaviour of the young ones as they prepare themselves for adulthood.

Flowing from this would be the creation of a collective national memory that would ensure that people learn from the past to adjust themselves accordingly for the future as well rounded members of society. There is a need to look at how current cultural legislation could be used to assist in the process of removing the practices from a realm of obscurity, and, at times shame, to that of national pride. (DACT 2007:74)

South Africa's Constitution respects and encourages people from all walks of life to indulge in religious practices as they deem fit.

Since the new Democratic dispensation in 1994, people are free to participate freely in their cultural, religious and linguistic endeavours. The Bill of Rights of the Constitution of South

Africa states;

Everyone has the right to use the language and to participate in the cultural life of his or her choice ... (paragraph 30)

Furthermore the creation of the Commission for the Protection of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities<sup>6</sup> in 1997 have provided further guarantees for communities to practice their religion, cultures and languages without any interference.

The South African society is becoming more and more vocal when it comes to the preservation of their cultural identity.

The sentiment of the people were expressed in an article that appeared in the Daily News, 19/09/2007 Page 3, "*Leave us alone*". This was a resounding message from African communities who oppose government and civil society groups that have interfered in their cultural practices at a public consultation forum for the Heritage Transformation Charter held in Durban on 18/09/2007. The communities said they did not appreciate outsiders dictating how their rituals should be practiced when they did not understand the culture.

At the same forum, National Heritage Council Chief Executive Adv Sonwabile Mancotywa said, heritage was viewed from many perspectives.

But despite the diverse viewpoints we represent, we are all here to explore the potential of heritage in our endeavour to transform the inherited racially skewed South African socio-political landscape. (Daily News 2007:3)

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<sup>6</sup> The CRL Commission was established, as an agent for social change, to address issues relating to cultural, religious and linguistic communities. The commission has wide-ranging powers to promote respect for the rights of cultural, religious and linguistic communities, to promote cordial inter-community relations and to recommend the establishment of councils for South Africa's various communities. One of the interesting aspects of the Commission was that it appeared to accord rights to communities – rather than to individuals – as was the case with most of the other provisions in the Bill of Rights.

Mbiti (1975:17) sums up African religion as very pragmatic and realistic. It is applied to a situation as the need arises. The followers of African Religion are not bound by any authority which goes back in history. They just follow it as it has been handed down to them by former generations, changing whatever is necessary in order to suit their circumstances in life.

## **1.2. Analysis and definitions in title**

An analysis and definition of the key concepts of the title will assist in grasping the contents of the research undertaking as the chapters unfold.

*A Comparative Ethnography of Rituals and Worship among Hindus and Zulus in South Africa. (With special reference to death rituals and ancestor veneration)*

### **1.2.1 Comparative**

The comparative method in anthropological studies has been widely used by many anthropologists for a variety of reasons. According to Barnard et al. (1996:118) for decades it was assumed that the comparative method was abandoned when evolutionism was attacked. They further elaborate that not only evolutionists, but diffusionists, functionalists and structuralists have all compared. Different strategies were used for different purposes.

The method chosen for comparison is the method of *illustrative comparison* as described by Barnard et al. (1996:119). This method involves comparing phenomena by selecting cases casually or unsystematically to explain processes or events. A variety of goals may be pursued through this method – inferential history, validation of concepts and categories,

typology construction, supporting general statements etc.

### 1.2.2 Ethnography

As a category of anthropological research, ethnography is characterized by the first hand study of a small community or ethnic group. Such studies combine to varying degree descriptive and analytical elements, but the central characteristic of conventional ethnographies is that the focus is on one specific culture or society. Consideration is given to theoretical or comparative generalizations from the standpoint of the ethnographic example.

Typical ethnographic research employs three kinds of data collection: interviews, observation, and documentation. This, in turn produces three kinds of data: quotations, descriptions, and excerpts of documents, which result in one product: a narrative description. This narrative often includes charts, diagrams, photographs, appendix, and source documents that help to tell "the story" of the rituals and worship of the Hindu and Zulu community of South Africa.

In my research the focus is on the Zulu and Hindu community. According to Smith (1986:99) and Young (2004) the origin of modern ethnographic research tradition is generally traced to Malinowski, who as part of his *functionalist* theory of society stressed the primacy of field research and *participant observation*, and argued that anthropologists must have daily contact with their informants if they were to adequately record the "imponderabilia of everyday life" that were so important to understanding a different culture. As a practicing Hindu and working with the Zulu community in my vocational undertakings I am in regular contact with the people being researched.

According to Barnard et al. (1996:193) ethnography may profitably be envisioned as point of an anthropological triangle (Fig. 1). The other two points are *comparison* and *contextualization*. Together the three points of this triangle define the operational system by which anthropologists acquire and use ethnographic data in writing ethnographies.

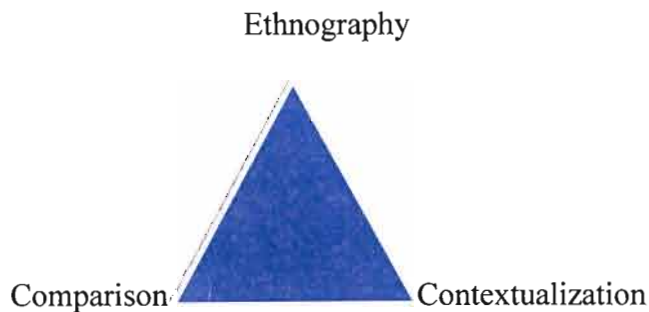


Fig. 2 Anthropological triangle

### 1.2.3 Rituals

A ritual is regarded by some anthropologists as a category of behaviour, in which case it may be defined as a form of ceremony characterized by its religious nature or purpose.

According to the Oxford Dictionary and Dictionary.com, a ritual is a set of actions, often thought to have symbolic value, the performance of which is usually prescribed by a religion or by the traditions of a community by religious or political laws. A ritual may be performed at regular intervals, or on specific occasions, or at the discretion of individuals or communities.

With most of us living in the hustle and bustle of the modern world, very little time is spent trying to live consciously with deliberate intention. Very few of us actually stop and think about why we are doing what we are doing. Most individuals and families participate in

rituals because they feel that they just have to do it. Many respond by saying that since their parents or grandparents performed certain activities it was therefore necessary for them to follow the tradition. We just do it because that's how we've learned to live. Even in some of the rituals and rights of passage explored today have lost their meaning and sacredness because there is no explanation on WHY we do this. For example, I remember the many rituals and prayers conducted by my late parents in honour of the ancestors as well as the rituals associated with my marriage ceremony. I had no idea what it was, or why I was doing it. I was just told by my parents and the Brahmin (priest) in the case of my marriage rituals that I had to do it as it was part of tradition.

Although the many rituals were a part of my family life, I often felt that the lack of sacredness left something to be desired. As I was growing up I used to think a ritual was a strange activity that involved animal sacrifices and other strange and frightening ceremonies to communicate with the spirits. It was with a great deal of fear that I fulfilled those ritual obligations. I was led to believe that if I do not do it I will be punished by God. It did not occur to me until much later that anything could be seen as a ritual; as long as it holds some sacred value to a person. Unfortunately in most cases, it is not the teaching and learning of the ritual sacredness that is passed down, but rather the physical motions of the ritual itself; a ritual "shell" so to speak. So while we practice the rituals, we are still left questioning why we are doing them.

### 1.2.4 Worship

Worship usually refers to specific acts of religious praise, honour, veneration or devotion, typically directed to a supernatural being such as God, goddess or in the case of traditional African Societies, the living dead or ancestors.

Religious worship may be performed individually, in informally organized groups, or as communal worship with a designated leader such as a Brahmin, priest, traditional leader or a pastor. The worship may take place in the privacy of a home or as communal worship in a church, synagogue, temple, or mosque. In South Africa, traditional African religious groups such as the Shembe<sup>7</sup> also worship as a group in the open in selected areas.

In most religions, worship is shaped by a holistic worldview, which incorporates both a ritual and moral component to worship. Provision for specific ritual acts is described, but appropriate action in all spheres of life is also required. In others words, one is invited to honour God by the way you live your life. South African examples of this include the Satya Sai organization, Divine Life Society, Ramakrishna centre, Saiva Sithanda Sungam, Shembe, and Zionist Church etc.

Typical acts of worship include, prayer, sacrifice in the form of food, animal clothes etc., rituals such as *yajna* or *hawan* (raising of fire), festivals like *Navrathree*, *uMkhosi Wokwe Shwama* (reed dance), *Shivaratree* etc., pilgrimages to Mecca, Shembe (*eNhlankazi* Mountain, eBuhleni, eTsheni, Jolivet), North West Province (Zionist Church), Varanasi, Hardiwal etc. (Maharaj 2006; pc) (Padayachee 2006: pc).

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<sup>7</sup> An alternate version of Christianity, which has evolved based on the Old Testament rather than the New Testament. It was founded by the prophet Isaiah Shembe .

### 1.2.5 Hindus

The word 'Hindu' was originally used by the Persians as an ethnographic term to describe the non-Muslim inhabitants of the lands beyond the Indus River. The term Hinduism was later coined by adding the suffix '-ism', jointly by the Orientalist scholarship, British administrative convenience, and the responses of some Indian intellectuals to the challenges of colonial rule. (Barnard et al. 1996:271).

About 83 percent of the population of the Republic of India and a majority of the population of Nepal may be said to be Hindu; significant numbers of Hindus have also migrated from South Asia to other with wide-ranging powers to promote respect for the rights of cultural, religious and linguistic communities, to promote cordial inter-community relations and to recommend the establishment of councils for South Africa's various communities. One of the interesting aspects of the Commission was that it appeared to accord rights to communities – rather than to individuals – as was the case with most of the other provisions in the Bill of Rights. In 1860 the majority of indentured labourers and passenger Indians belonged to the Hindu religious group and spoke the languages of Tamil, Hindi, Telegu, and Gujerati. They were divided by language but were united by their Hindu religion. In fact many cultural analysts believe that it was for this reason that the people of Indian Origin survived through very difficult times and conditions in South Africa in the early nineteenth century.

According to Barnard et al. (1996:271), the worship of deities, seen as powerful beings who can respond to supplications with both worldly boons and help in achieving salvation, is central to most Hindu traditions. Most of the deities are worshipped at the homes of Hindus

or are found in Temples which are places for communal Hindu worship. The structure and character of these places of worship differ according to linguistic and caste needs. At the apex of the sub continental pantheon are the male deities, *Brahmā*, *Vishnu* and *Śiva* with their Goddess consorts, *Saraswathi*, *Lakshmi* and *Parvathi* respectively. *Brahmā* is referred to as the Creator of the Universe, *Vishnu*, the preserver and *Śiva* the destroyer. Hindu goddesses are viewed as embodiments of *Śakti*, divine energy, which underlies fertility and abundance but is also manifested in disease, destruction and death.

### 1.2.6 Zulus

The literal meaning of the word ‘Zulu’ is ‘sky’ or the ‘blue space above’. It may also refer to ‘heaven’ in the Christian context, but, since the pagan tribesman has no equivalent of heaven – or of hell – it is best to interpret ‘Zulu’ to mean the sky and ‘amaZulu’ to mean ‘the people of the sky’ (Elliot 1978:14).

Historians have traced the beginnings of the Zulu clan back to about 1670 to *Malandela* an old man who lived a nomadic life in the *Babanango* area of Natal’s northern midlands. In his wanderings, he found a haven on the picturesque slope of *Mandawe* Hill 14 kilometers outside Eshowe where he lived with his wife, *Nozinja* and two known sons, *Qwabe* and *Zulu* and a small group of adherents (Elliot 1978:14).

Today, the homeland of the Zulu in South Africa comprises of areas stretching in the main from the Indian Ocean in the East to the Drakensberg Mountains in the west and from the Pongola River in the North, to the Tugela in the South. Despite a large movement of young Zulus into the cities where they are employed in the different economic sectors many have

chosen to remain in their traditional rural environment practicing their customs which are so old that their origins are still to be unraveled.

### **1.2.7 Death**

Like Birth and other Life Crisis, every human being in society have to go through a social transformation by experiencing death, both as a personal and family crisis and as a crisis of social structure and role replacement. According to Smith (1986:70), death in itself maybe regarded in some societies as a 'Rite of Passage' in which the dying person becomes an 'ancestor' who will continue to have a social responsibility, while in other societies the dead are completely removed from the sphere of social life among the living. In most societies, the dead may still have an influence on the living as it is believed that they manifest themselves in the world of the living in what may be considered a period of transition.

The organized ritual centering around death symbolically marks the end of a person's time on earth, the 'living' plane, but more importantly it helps the survivors to organize our relationship with the deceased, to remember the deceased within a framework (both in the future and during the bereavement period) which is representative for that specific time, and also to celebrate the death with decorum (Browne 1980:316).

### **1.2.8 Ancestor Worship/Veneration**

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century ancestor worship has been the subject of much attention in Anthropological studies. The term 'ancestor' is used in anthropology to designate those forebears who have passed on and are remembered. Ancestors were seen as an extension of

the contemporary social structure of the human race. The forms and methods of remembrance differ from society to society. The length of time that is designated for the remembrance of ancestors also differs. It is a common belief that religious activities are performed for the ancestors with the belief that dead forebears can in some way influence the living (Barnard et al.1996:43).

In many traditional societies, it is believed that the ancestors exercise a moral guardianship over their descendants. They often appear in dreams of the living for the purpose of transmitting messages of good tide or sound warnings for forthcoming bad fortunes. In some cases, they punish their descendants by sending them diseases. Measures are put in place to appease the ancestors e.g. in the Zulu community a goat is often slaughtered as a means of veneration, while Hindus offer food and clothing to the ancestors as a means of veneration.

The main goal of ancestor worship is to ensure the ancestors' continued well-being and positive disposition towards the living and sometimes to ask for special favours or assistance. The social or non-religious function of ancestor worship is to cultivate kinship values like piety, family loyalty, and continuity of the family lineage. While far from universal, ancestor worship or ancestor veneration occurs in societies with every degree of social, political, and technological complexity, and it remains an important component of various religious practices in modern times.

### **1.3 Aim of Study**

The chosen topic and subsequent investigation provided the researcher with an opportunity to investigate the extent to which the disappearance of oral tradition has led to the fossilisation

of the meaning of the performance of the rituals, and a loss of identity and sense of spiritual communion among the Hindu and Zulu traditional societies in South Africa. This is far from what was prescribed by religious and other texts as well as oral transmission where death and ancestor veneration was seen as a means of connecting the living world with the spiritual world.

The study also hopes to make a vital contribution in the understanding of practices that have been transmitted orally as it will contextualise and provide a written document of Hindu and Zulu practices that are presently in the realm of the oral tradition. Finnegan (1992:7) maintains that oral tradition is strictly speaking...those recollections of the past that are commonly or universally known in a given culture...and have been handed down for at least a few generations

The study seeks to examine several objects. The primary object of the study is:

- to examine Hindu and Zulu death rituals and ceremonies in order to establish the extent to which the mnemonic structural laws discovered by Marcel Jousse and outlined in the *Anthropology of Geste and Rhythm* (2000) can be identified and demonstrated.
- to adopt a formalistic and thematic analysis of traditional Hindu and Zulu death rituals and ceremonies currently practiced to determine to what extent it employs oral traditional forms.
- to identify the incidence and degree of fossilisation of meaning in the performance of selected Hindu and Zulu death rituals. This is to assist all participants to a better understanding of the rituals and ceremonies associated with Hindu and Zulu deaths

and ancestor veneration.

- to determine the similarities and differences in the performance of selected Hindu and Zulu rituals and ceremonies and how these can be accounted for traditionally and historically.
- to investigate and analyse the death rituals and ceremonies as practiced by the Hindu and Zulu communities.
- to investigate the extent of ancestor worship among the Hindu and Zulu community and how it influences the death rituals and ceremonies.

I chose to study death rituals, because it is one of the significant events of life. For something to be truly anthropological, it has to be spontaneous. It is not about a social construct or something that grouped human beings together. It is an inner urge that literally forces its way out of our intuition and into our consciousness and makes us understand and realize that the birth of a new child is hugely significant and that the child becomes a person when s/he gets a name.

The central question of the Anthropology of Geste and Rhythm is how is it possible that the human being (*Anthropos*) which is a small entity in comparison to the cosmos have managed to keep their traditions intact.

The main purpose of my research undertaking is to ask the following questions. How does oral tradition of knowledge works? How does the handing down of tradition from one generation to another takes place? And how long has this oral tradition been going on?

The shortest time line is a hundred thousand years, the longest is fourteen million; some argue for 1.2million years and that is a very long time. Writing as a means of record is only

5000 years old, so we have to realize that for the very vast majority (99.9%) information has been passed down by the oral tradition and memory and not the prescribed written tradition. And the mistake that is made with cultural anthropology is that they regard all of the modes of expression as being culture. One of the problems that emerge from this notion is that in many parts of the world including South Africa many people think folk lore has been made up. The knowledge of the oral tradition was not made up; it was what happened in the people's real lives (Conolly 2007: pc).

Things that are common are considered anthropological while the things that are different are ethnological. The anthropological is what is common to the species; the ethnological is what is common to the group (e.g. Hindu or Zulu), and then there is a third element known as, autological which is an individual's specific way of doing something.

The aim of this research is to look at these three things – it looks at it *anthropologically* at how human beings as a species, observe death and ancestor worship; it looks at it *ethnologically* as how Zulus and Hindus have passed on their tradition from one generation to the next; and then within the sub-groups how individuals have done things differently because of changes, transformation or personal choices and that becomes *autological*.

The researcher also wishes to contribute to the documentation and understanding of his religio-cultural identity as a Tamil speaking Hindu and an understanding of the spiritual significance of the rituals performed during a Hindu and Zulu ceremony for the deceased. Furthermore, as an Arts and Culture Administrator in the Province of KwaZulu- Natal, responsible for organizing and developing cultural activities for all communities, it is of paramount importance for the researcher of this study to develop an understanding of the

traditional Zulu culture, which is the most dominant culture in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal in order to foster a greater spirit of cultural tolerance and simultaneously contributing towards nation building.

#### **1.4 Assumption**

This study assumes that the Hindu and Zulu death rituals ceremonies to venerate the ancestors are still to this day characterized by oral tradition and are likely to remain so for many more decades.

Being detached from their motherland, in the Asian sub-continent and living in a different society has affected the Hindu community of South Africa to a certain degree. Despite this, they continue to practice their customs and traditions, which they have imported from various parts of India. Mahatma Gandhi once stated that just like a child clings to its mother's breast for nourishment, the Indians living outside India depend on India for spiritual and cultural nourishment.

Although some changes have occurred to the performance of Hindu and Zulu death rituals, which can be attributed to regional and other differences, the impact of Christianity has not had a great influence on traditional rituals and practices of the Hindu and Zulu. Magwaza (1993:3) believes that changes in people's material, political, educational and spiritual life must result in some corresponding change in their oral tradition. Every attempt is made for the survival of cultural practices in spite of language loss.

### 1.5 Scope and limitations of the study

The focus of my investigation will be to tackle the consequence of “PUTTING PERFORMANCE ON THE PAGE”. This study takes into account the fact that it is extremely difficult to capture the three dimensional effect of dynamic performance and record it on the page as there is no one way of performing any human ceremony. Jousse maintained that ‘dead’ written texts are only used as a means of discovering the ‘living gestualisers’. Chamberlin (1998:12) remarks that by “putting performance on a page”, societies are able to “affirm their identity, establish their history, and demonstrate the intellectual and emotional integrity of their critical and creative practices”. As societies change, their institutions also change. This is also true of the Hindus and Zulus. Manqele (2000:3) feels that Zulu practices “have assumed a new dimension in contemporary contexts and the songs and other performative acts reveal this innovation”.

The researcher has undertaken to demonstrate how the Mnemonic Laws and Mnemotechnical devices discovered by Marcel Jousse can be applied to the rhythm-melodic gestual-visual/oral-aural performance of selected Hindu and Zulu ceremonies by ‘putting performance on the page’. I have also described the practices and processes involved in Hindu and Zulu death rituals and ancestor veneration, based on the theories of Marcel Jousse in the *Anthropology of Geste and Rhythm*.

The following processes were used to carry out the investigation:

- observations of Hindu and Zulu funerals and ceremonies to venerate the ancestors.
- observation and analysis of video recordings, tape recordings and .photographs.

- participation in Hindu ceremonies related to ancestor veneration.
- the use of research assistants to conduct interviews with informants in the Zulu community.
- interviews with cultural experts and informants in the Hindu community.
- analysis and interpretation of data

### 1.5.1 Observation of funeral ceremonies

Over the last ten years the researcher has attended a number of Hindu and Zulu funerals and ceremonies locally, nationally and internationally either as an observer or as a speaker. However, due to the constraints of this study and in order to maintain focus, he has restricted himself to the analysis and interpretation of a few Hindi, Tamil and Telegu funerals. There was no opportunity to observe a Gujarati funeral. However following interviews with Hindu priests it was found that the Gujarati community in South Africa followed Vedic traditions and were very similar to the funerals conducted by the Hindi community with minor variations based on caste.

In addition to the focused observations of funerals and ceremonies in South Africa and India, the researcher has also viewed memorial ceremonies on video recordings. Unfortunately due to the nature of the event, there were no video recordings of funerals. The researcher viewed two films, “*Fire*” by Mira Nair which focused on Death in Varanasi and the issues pertaining to widowhood in the Hindu community and “*Siddhartha*” produced and directed by Conrad Rooks which focused on a son, father and grandfather (three generations) trying to unravel the meaning of life.

The recordings of memorial ceremonies and the associated rituals were useful as they could be ‘played’ and ‘re-played’ repeatedly until one has grasped all the details. Much of the actual performance, such as the rituals, the chanting of *mantras*,<sup>8</sup> the songs, the audience participation etc. enabled him to analyze and interpret the funeral ceremonies more easily. In fact, without the video recordings, it would have been virtually impossible to get all the detail used in this study.

Most of the Zulu funerals attended by the researcher were concluded in a Christian way. Nevertheless the researcher was able to analyse and interpret traditional Zulu funerals and ceremonies associated with ancestor veneration through literature sources and interviews with traditional leaders, academics and local community informants. Many family members were reluctant to talk about death. The research undertaken by Nyawose (2000), *Living in Two Worlds: Codes and modes of Expression at Zulu Funerals in Kwa-Zulu Natal at the turn of the millennium*, was a valuable resource in understanding Zulu funerals.

The information gathered does not claim to be universal for all the Zulu and Hindus in South Africa.

### 1.5.2 Interviews

The researcher supplemented observations with oral interviews with the following individuals and groups who provided valuable insider and implicated data:

- Brahmins (priests) from both the North and South Indian community in South Africa

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<sup>8</sup> Is a religious or mystical syllable or poem, typically from the Sanskrit language. Their use varies according to the school and philosophy associated with the mantra. They are primarily used as spiritual conduits, words or vibrations that instil one-pointed concentration in the devotee.

and India (Appendix A)

- temple officials from organizations and traditional leaders.
- a representative selection of families in mourning.
- research scholars and academics in South Africa and India (Schedule B)

In South Africa, a sample study was undertaken and interviews were conducted in the Southern, Northern and Midlands of Kwa-Zulu Natal and included areas such as *Durban*, *Stanger*, *Mahlabathini*, *Ndedwe*, *Maphamulo*, *Phoenix*, *Malvern*, *Chatsworth*, *Merebank*, *Port Shepstone* and *Pietermaritzburg*. Furthermore, interviews were conducted in *Benoni* (*Gauteng*), and *Rylands* (*Western Cape*) where a sizable number of Hindus reside.

These interviews were essential to the research and analysis, for they provided insights into the meaning and metaphors used and explained the practice and procedures adopted in Hindu and Zulu rituals and worship. Interviews were recorded with the aid of a battery-powered digital tape recorder and later transcribed into written form for analysis and interpretation.

This study is intended to describe the traditional Zulu and Zulu death rituals and ceremonies as they are performed in South Africa, today and is compared to how these rituals were performed in the past or in other parts of the world. Studies of the past and international practices were conducted for the purpose of comparison and to determine the extent to how these practices have changed.

Besides the changes over time, there are always regional differences in cultural practices and this study does not claim that the findings are universal for all Hindu and Zulu people. According to Magwaza (1993:4) the Zulu differ in their “practices from area to area, clan to

clan, nuclear family to the next”. However, there are certain elements, which are common to all ceremonies associated with death.

Similarly, the South African Hindu community also differs in their performance of rituals and practices. Some Tamils prefer to conduct to their ceremonies according to the Saivite<sup>9</sup> religious customs, which do not subscribe to rituals while others have a preference for the Vedic and Puranic ceremonies, which are characterized by many rituals. There are a number of religious and cultural organizations that co-ordinate memorial ceremonies. Although the ceremonies are arranged differently, they all adhere to the rituals and practices as prescribed by the *Vedas*. Therefore, one can obviously not expect everybody to perform and practice rituals and ceremonies in a similar way. Magwaza (1993:4) argues that oral records are never “uniform nor fixed” but change with “place, time, age, need, capability and circumstance”. There are often recurrent patterns in different regions and ceremonies.

This study focuses on the practices and processes, which are common to most of the funerals ceremonies performed in South Africa for the Hindu community and the traditional Zulu community.

## 1.6 Division of Chapters

The thesis was structured in a manner that provided for a smooth flow of information that can be clearly understood by all.

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<sup>9</sup> Shaivism, encompasses the traditions of Hinduism that focus on the deity Shiva. Followers of the tradition are called Shaiva(s) or Shaivite and worship Shiva as the supreme God. The worship of Shiva is a pan-Hindu tradition, practiced widely across many parts of South Asia, especially India, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

Section A is divided into two chapters.

Chapter 1 : as an introduction, it covered the following topics:

The parameters of the dissertation; background information to this research undertaking in the form of an introduction, analysis and definitions in title; aim of study; assumption; scope and limitations.

Chapter 2 : outlines the theoretical framework, methodology and literature review

Sections B and C involve the actual research on the rituals and worship of the Zulu and Hindu community and comprise:

Chapters 3-6 : deals with the Zulu research and includes the historical development of this group; the processes and rituals carried out when a Zulu person is on his/death bed; the processes and rituals carried out when a Zulu person dies and ends of the post death rituals and ancestor veneration and

Chapters 7 - 10 : deals with the research of the Hindu community and includes the historical development; processes and rituals carried out when a Hindu person lies on his/her death bed; processes and rituals carried out when a Hindu person dies and post death

rituals and ancestor veneration amongst the Hindus.

Section D brings the research process to its logical conclusion with

Chapter 11 : showing some of the similarities in Hindu and Zulu Death rituals and ancestor veneration,

Chapter 12 : conclusion

Chapter 13 : bibliography.

The chapters are preceded with a declaration; abstract; acknowledgements; dedication and a list of illustrations and ends with a list of appendixes which include a list of mantras, prayers and funeral songs; schedule of observations, and schedule of interviews.

### **1.7 Recapitulation**

In this chapter an introduction was provided as a background to the research undertaking. Key concepts such as, “Ubuntu”, “Africanisation” and “Indigenous Knowledge Systems” were explained in the context of the transformation since the advent of democracy in 1994. The importance of rites, rituals and customs was explained to show the impact it has on traditional societies. Various attitudes towards the concept of death were illustrated as a precursor to the detailed study that unfolds in the research. The chapter also introduces the aim of the study; the assumption; the scope and limitations of the study and a summary of the chapters.

## CHAPTER 2

### 2.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### 2.1.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter the focus was on providing an analysis and definition of the key concepts of the title; the aim of the study; and the assumption, scope and limitations of a study of this nature while this chapter deals with the theoretical framework and methodology used to obtain data and the analysis thereof.

The main focus of this research undertaking will be based on the theory of Marcel Jousse which is to be found in the *Anthropology of Geste and Rhythm* and his *Oral Style* theory.

The work of Arnold van Gennep *Les Rites de Passage* (1909) in which he systematically compared ceremonies that celebrate an individual's transition from one status to another within a given society will be used to explain the rituals associated with death and the associated ceremonies for venerating the ancestors in both the Hindu and Zulu context.

When I undertook to research for my masters degree I had a basic understanding of the Anthropology of Geste and Rhythm by Marcel Jousse. However, recent scientific advancements clearly support the Anthropology of Geste and Rhythm. I am now in a much stronger position to argue that the Anthropology of Geste and Rhythm as an underpinning explanation of what I have

done in my previous and current research by citing modern science.

Through this research, I am documenting information for social understanding and nation building, on a broader perspective. By using the anthropological approach I am suggesting that there is something other than an historical perspective, there is a perspective of origins. My study is not an historical account of the Hindu and Zulu people. In this regard we have a number of historical documents of how these communities developed, but my research is an attempt to determine the origins of these practices.

My research is about the Hindu and Zulu community of South Africa. It is about African people and seeing African people and their behaviours through an appropriate local lens instead of a foreign one. Many cultural and social anthropologists have conducted research about the cultural practices of African people through a foreign lens. Mbiti as a black theologian is looking at Africans through the lens developed in him at Canterbury. And even Jousse said that he had to go home to Beaumont-sur-Sarthe for three months every year to check his perspective because he was living in Paris among the highly literate society, the perspective shifts so subtly that the person does not know that his perspective is changing – that one lens is closing and another is opening.

I have chosen Anthropology of Geste and Rhythm as it has provided me with a real understanding as to why fellow South African researchers have looked at the African perspective of studying certain rituals and practices, just as Hindu people have looked at the *Kavady*,<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A Hindu religious festival dedicated to Hindu deity Lord Muruga that is celebrated by Tamil people in South Africa. Kavady translates in Tamil language as a pole slung across the shoulder to evenly distribute the weight of

marriage and other practices – because they all dealt with the history and origin. These researchers have produced work which was seen through a local lens.

Nyawose (2000) in his Masters dissertation, *Living in two Worlds: Codes and Modes of expression at Zulu Funerals in Kwa-Zulu Natal at the turn of the millennium* used Jousse's Theory of Geste and Rhythm to demonstrate how expressions in Zulu culture in the form of oratories, praise singing and personal stories can best be explained through the “corporeal-manual” modes of expression which is found in the offerings of gifts and sacrifice while the “laryngo-buccal” modes of expression found in the various songs, chants, slogans and speech.

Similarly, there are many other research works that used Jousse's *Law of Human Expression: the Anthropology of Geste and Rhythm* as a Theoretical framework to explain oral tradition in a South African context while at the same time providing valuable insights into the traditions and cultures of the Zulu and Hindu community of South Africa. Some of the areas investigated include *An investigation into the presence of gestual and oral expressions in the performance of the Yajna: a Vedic perspective* (Debipersad: 1999); *The Oral Transmission of Popular Knowledge and Understanding of Some Hindu Deities and Rituals among the Hindi Speaking People in Durban* (Bansilal: 1998); *Transformation and Continuity in the Umemulo Ceremony* (Blose: 1997); *The binary opposition of left and right hand in Zulu culture.* (Buthelezi: 1991); *Izwe Alithuthuki by Phuzekemisi as sung in KwaZulu-Natal: Maskandi song as social protest analysed as an Oral-style text.* (Hadebe: 2000); *The history of the Amahlubi Tribe in the Izibongo of its Kings* (Hadebe: 1993); *Prana and Pranayama in the Hindu Oral Tradition with reference*

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whatever is being carried, usually in bundles on either ends of the pole. The carrying of kavady symbolizes the carrying of one's burden and then resting it at the feet of the Lord.

*to the Jewish Rouhah*. (Hunsraj: 1998); *Zulu Song and Poetry: A Study of Metaphor, Imagery and Symbolism in Maskanda performance* (Magubane: 1995); *Orality and its Cultural Expression in some Zulu Traditional Ceremonies* (Magwaza: 1994); *Elements of satire in Zulu folk-songs* (Makwaza: 1998); *Orality and Transformation in some Zulu Ceremonies: Tradition in Transition* (Ngcobo: 1996)

According to Somers (1996:5), many South African Hindus are both oral and literate. There is the spoken word by which they communicate and learn and they also have the ability to read and write. Their formal education includes both oral and literate forms of communication but some knowledge was obtained informally by watching, listening and practicing what others do. This is how beliefs have been learnt, the unwritten side of culture. Most of the omens and beliefs cannot be found in any literature or school curriculum but they are passed down from parent to offspring, from generation to generation.

It is important at this junction to determine how oral memory works. If rituals and practices are perpetuated and sustained orally, how exactly does this process work? How is our oral tradition, in this case the rituals and practices associated with death, learnt and retained, ready to be passed on to the next generation? Or as Marcel Jousse, as translated by Sienaert (1990), asks:

How does man, placed amid the innumerable actions of the universe, conserve the memory of those actions and transmit it faithfully from generation to generation to his descendants? More specifically: how does oral man, oral society, in the absence of writing, remember, conserve and transmit its' values and beliefs?  
Or: How does oral memory work?

This is significant because the rituals and practices of both the Zulu and Hindu community in South Africa are not learnt from any formal source but from the people around them and this

learning process is explained by Somers (1996:9) by making reference to Jousse as translated by Sienaert (1981), who explains that children instinctively imitate their elders from childhood, with miming being the first expression or language of the child. What the child expresses is what the environing universe impresses upon him and it is through this constant pressure and constant impregnation of reality upon him that man perceives the real world. Man is shaped by the encompassing world that impresses itself upon him and it plays itself out and through him. Man, therefore relates to the world which charges upon him the play of actual experiences. This is not a passive process because man, upon receiving the reality, plays it out in the form of gestures. Because all the information and all the forms of human thought and expression are gestural and rhythmic, Jousse calls this the “Anthropology of Geste<sup>2</sup> and Rhythm.”

## **2.1.2 The Anthropology of Geste and Rhythm and the Oral Style theory of Marcel Jousse**

### **2.1.2.1 Historical Background**

Marcel Jousse was born in 1886 in the settlement of Beaumont-sur-Sarthe, West of Paris, a rural area that was populated by *paysan* (peasant) farmers (Jousse 2000:16). Jousse was first and foremost a scholar of considerable merit in a number of fields: anthropology, psychology, ethnography, pedagogy, theology, linguistics, mathematics, oral traditions/oral studies...It is also significant that he was able to explore these disciplines in such a manner that the connections between them was easily demonstrated: he was a true inter-disciplinarian. By the age of fifteen,

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<sup>2</sup> Is the ‘emotive-thoughts’ and ‘thought filled-feelings’ of indivisible human thought and emotion. It transcends ethnic language, and is therefore anthropological.

in addition to his native French, he had learnt the following languages: Hebrew, Aramaic<sup>3</sup>, Latin, and Greek, which he used to trace the roots of the Hebrew-Christian scriptures.

Because of Jousse's early experience with the people of his 'oral' community, and their remarkable memories, he developed an abiding respect and understanding for human memory and its capacity to store information. He was most concerned that so many book-learned people disregarded the role of Memory in intelligence, learning and understanding...

Had we all been brought up in milieux more open to memory, the problems would have been presented very differently. The great mistake we have made in education is to have adopted only the teacher's point-of-view, so, the perspective of our psychology, is that of the teacher. The gravity of this error becomes very clear when one studies the work of Lévy-Bruhl. (Jousse 2000:16)

Jousse was a product of a living oral culture, and was able to offer a theoretical perspective of the thinking and perceptions of an 'insider'. His holistic insights have made valuable contributions to the explanation of the origin and development of language, learning theory and practice, the role of culture and tradition, the nature of oral composition and performance and how these contributed to the complex fabric of ethnic and anthropological behaviour. In an attempt to account for the human physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual operations, Jousse introduced the perspective of the Anthropology of Geste and Rhythm as a means of "understanding the human at a fundamental level that accounted for and transcended ethnic identity and individuality" (Connolly Vol.4, 2001: 26). Jousse remarks that the natural memorizing capacity of man is related to the structure of the language employed in human expression, which reflects his own balanced, rhythmical and formulaic psycho-physiological

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<sup>3</sup> Is a group of Semitic languages with a 3,000-year history. It has been the language of administration of empires and the language of divine worship. It is the original language of large sections of the biblical books of Daniel and Ezra, and is the main language of the Talmud. Aramaic was the native language of Jesus.

structure and operation. He also identifies what the relationship is between memory, learning, understanding and expression in humans.

### **2.1.2.2 Modes of Expression**

According to Jousse (2000:23) there are three types of human expression:

- Corporeal-manual mode of expression - expression by means of the body, face and hands, revealed in movement, mime and dance.
- Laryngo – buccal mode of expression – expression by means of the larynx and the lips, revealed in sound, speech and song.
- Mimographic mode of expression – by means of mediated modes of expression, revealed in drawing, painting, beadwork, sculpting or other artifacts.

Jousse (2000:21) places the above modes of expression into different stages. He mentioned that:

The first stage of Manual-Corporeal Style, living expressive geste or Mimodrama, which projects itself in mimic silhouettes, and which, given stable form on a surface, results in mimograms. Later, the second stage transforms these gestes into laryngo-buccal gestes that develop to the point where they become a means of intercommunication, at which stage; we have Oral Style (1981). After further use and development, all the concretism of the Oral Style reaches a point where it becomes algebrisation, and we get written style.

Jousse (2000:61) identified the corporeal-manual mode of expression as the most immediate and spontaneous of all modes of human expression as it engages immediate and total access to the visceral microscopic memory of the Anthropos. Through his investigations he found that,

What we have to investigate is something very much more profound than language, something much more primitive, more virginally anthropological: the corporeal- manual geste, which is not yet transported into the laryngo-buccal geste. True human expression is not language, reduced to the geste of the langue: it is the expression of the entire being....

Jousse describes man as ‘an indivisible complexes of psycho-physiological gestes’, both voluntary and involuntary. The inner gestes (microscopic) are not visible and constitute our thoughts and emotions. The outer gestes (macroscopic) are visible and audible and manifest themselves in human expression such as movement, dance and mime, sound, speech and song, writing, painting etc. According to Conolly (Vol.4, 2001:208) the “objective observation of these microscopic and macroscopic gestes” is part of the scientific study of the Anthropology of Geste and Rhythm.

My work is based on an Anthropological study as I am looking for what is common, what is essential to the behaviour of the Anthropos. I have chosen death, because it is one of the five anthropological milestones. And we become so familiar with these that when it comes to a time to be critical, we forget the most obvious. For my masters degree, I investigated the fourth Anthropological milestone which deals with marriages in the Zulu and Hindu community.

Where does the term Anthropological milestone come from? In 1987, at an educational conference at the Edgewood College of Education, the keynote address was delivered by an

academic, Professor Harriot Ngubane – the Professor of Anthropology at University of Cape Town. According to Connolly (2007: pc) who attended the conference, her key note address was a life changing experience for many delegates who attended. Prof. Ngubane was immensely passionately disturbed that there were only five Africans in the Dept of Anthropology at the University of Cape Town but 100's in the Dept of Sociology. She said that this was completely skewed, that Africa needed far more people in the Dept of Anthropology than in Sociology, because Sociology dealt with urbanization and Anthropology dealt with our origins. It made no sense at all that academics and researchers were dealing with Sociology before we dealt with Anthropology and to her this made no sense at all.

The second factor that she impressed upon delegates was that it can be largely and loosely affirmed that all human beings, irrespective of race, creed, colour, language or religion, they all celebrate at least five significant events in their lifetime viz., birth, naming ceremony, coming of age, marriage and death. That there were other rituals that interspersed but these five were marked by significant ritual and celebrations. And since people were not responding to text books and theories, and that this was a spontaneous behaviour, therefore it could be called anthropological. It was a construct, it didn't come from the outside, it wasn't man made, just that the human being's spontaneous urge to celebrate these five events because since the dawn of time people have felt these five to be significant.

I chose to study death rituals, because it is one of the spontaneously significant events of life. It is not about a social construct or something that grouped human beings together. It is an inner urge that literally forces its way out of our intuition and into our consciousness and makes us

understand and realize that the birth of a new child is hugely significant and that the child becomes a person when the child gets a name. And the child moves from one stage of being into another stage of being at the point which they become capable of parenting children. Coming of age ritual, young boys being sent into the mountains to learn how to become adult men happens all over the world. Then there comes a time where spontaneously there is an urge to find a mate, to nest and to procreate. This is another biological urge which results in marriage. Then the internal dissolution of the physical self as we advance into old age, and eventually the biological clock stops working resulting in death.

Conolly (2007: pc) argues that one of the great confusions about Anthropology is that people think it's cultural – the expression is cultural, but the urge is biological. If one wants to become critical, one can say how confused academics become when it comes to Anthropology. Anthropology is the study of the biology and evolution of our humaneness. All of these expressions of songs, dances and rituals are expressions of deep seated biological urges to do a certain thing.

In most societies, especially oral societies, if members of a community fail to fulfill some of these duties, there is a sense of unfulfilledness, as if there is no closure. Our emotions are disturbed, and it causes stress in mankind, in the human race. The human race is stressed because certain of the urges have not been met.

Magwaza (2001: pc) describes the experiences of her own traditional marriage ceremony as “overwhelming”. The traditional ceremony took place long after her official marriage ceremony.

The richness and excitement derived from her own experiences during the traditional marriage prompted her to undertake research into traditional cultural practices. She remarked that it was an eye-opener, which assisted in her chosen career path. She has also vowed not to send her children to boarding schools, as this is where she was cut off from her culture and tradition, and she did not have an opportunity to observe many Zulu traditional ceremonies at home. It was only when she participated in her own marriage ceremony that she understood what she had missed. She also states that from her observation, there is a cultural revival, especially among the younger generation.

Personally, when I conducted the coming of age ceremony for my daughter, Nameshni, the *Kaateri* prayer (removal of hair for the new born) for both my children, and the various rituals for the funeral ceremonies of my parents and parents in law, I felt a great sense of fulfillment and was at peace knowing that I have satisfied some of the religious and traditional needs of my living and ancestral family.

The same applies to death, irrespective whether it is a modern Zulu or Hindu home, there is still that urge to perform certain rituals. Failure to do this will result in a feeling of emptiness causing undue emotional stress. Most of the people interviewed for this research in South Africa and in India have said that they performed the rituals because they want to feel satisfied that they have given the person the final rites in a proper manner. If they don't do it, it is going to stress them and make them emotionally unstable.

Rituals also play an important role in social cohesion and contribute towards facilitating

collectivity. Prof. Venkata Rao (2007: pc) describes how a recent family gathering to honour his late parents brought together members of his family whom he had not seen for a long time. He goes on to say that the bonds of families need to be regularly renewed. If rituals are able to achieve this objective, then it has an important role to play in society. This tie in with what Radcliff-Brown (1958:40) has to say, that the chief function of a ritual or ceremony is to express and thereby maintain in existence sentiments that are necessary for the social cohesion.

In most oral societies including the Zulu and Hindu community in South Africa, information is passed from generation to generation, in an orderly and classified way, despite all the obstacles of modern day.

The Anthropos, placed in the centre of the universe is able to transfer information from generation to generation in a remarkable way. This brings us to the concept of celestial and the human mechanics as described by Marcel Jousse. According to him,

My scientific studies led me, some twenty years ago, to pose the following problem to experimental and ethnic psychology: “How does man, placed at the heart of all the immeasurable *actions of the universe*, manage to conserve the memory of these actions within him, and to transmit this memory faithfully to his descendants, from generation to generation? (Jousse 2000:30)

Anthropos (human beings) could do these incredible things because there was an interactive relationship between the human being and the universe which Jousse describes as the *acting one, acting on, the acted upon* in *The Anthropology of Geste and Rhythm*.

The indefiniteness of these **Cosmological** interactions constitutes the **Universe**, or the **Cosmos**, which, as its name indicates, imposes order or authoritative direction. The Anthropos is *objectively assured* of this

essential and interactional order. The **Cosmos** can thus be objectively defined in terms of the indefinitely and dynamically crystallized repetition of: an Acting One – acting on – an Acted upon, an Acting One – acting on – an Acted upon, an Acting One – acting on – an Acted upon ...” (Jousse 2000:112)

According to Connolly (2007: pc), Jousse said that he discovered the law of interaction, not inter attraction which is the law of gravity (Newton) – interaction – and who is acting on us, he said, the universe is acting on us, and if we want to understand the universe as God, then that is fine too. He says the universe is playing on us, and this was translated from French and the French word for play is *Jeu*, but included in the meaning of *Jeu* is not only plays but operates. So in the original meaning what he was trying to say was that the universe play/operate the human being and that the human being play/operate the universe and every part in it. It operates through our faces, through impressions, eyes, noses, skin, and gustatory mechanisms.

The death in a family (an external event) is stimulating a whole series of events in your gut by telling you what you need to do, in order to give a person a dignified last rites; whether you are a Zulu or whether a Hindu it is a natural series of events that evolve from inside, anthropologically, that prompts you to do something, and if you don't do this, you are left with a feeling of something unfulfilled and incomplete – a feeling of emptiness.

This is not something we do to satisfy society, it is something we do to satisfy our deepest, oldest, inner urges. There is scientific evidence in that; it is not a psychological phenomenon; its origin is in this gut memory. It is not a theological framework, but an under pinning explanation of why people go to so much trouble; spend so much of time, energy and money to bury the dead. Poor families battle to pay for modern burial expenses which could cost anything up to thirty five thousand rand (R35 000) for a typical Zulu funeral (Nyawose 2000:45). Whereas a

typical Hindu funeral including the various ceremonies could cost approximately fifteen thousand rand (R15 000).

This is especially prevalent among rural people who are much more traditional in their outlook. Their attitude towards death and ancestors is of deep respect so much so that they will do everything possible according to what they believe is correct. Furthermore traditional people do all the things properly for their ancestors because they believe that they will one day reach the ancestor world when they die and meet their families so they ensure that everything is done properly; if not, it will have an effect on us when we eventually reach the other side.

Because of the powerful position of the ancestors, burial rites become very important. Improper or incomplete funeral rites can interfere with or delay the entrance of the deceased into the spiritual world and may cause his soul to linger about, as a restless and malevolent ghost. Funeral ceremonies are long, complex, and expensive, but it would be a great disgrace for a family not to observe the proper rites, even if they must go into debt to do so (Raboteau 1978:13).

This research is not a religious study; it is knowledge about being human. Some of my analysis is on a religious level but that is only superficial. For me it is the study of memory, because where does this urge come from? It can only come out of the memory. My preoccupation with the anthropology of geste and rhythm shows that I am not looking at the rituals and practice of the Hindu and Zulu community at the relative surface level of religion; but I am investigating the source of its origin. In this context my study goes beyond religion and psychology.

The origin about the practices of death and ancestor veneration of the Hindu people in South

Africa originated from indentured labourers that came to South Africa in 1860. These people who came from different backgrounds, integrated with the Zulu and other communities, sharing knowledge and other attributes. My research has shown that most of the practices that are performed here are similar to that of the motherland. Investigations and observations of rituals and practices of the Hindus in different parts of India have revealed that the Hindus in South Africa have retained most of the practices of the motherland, but have discarded some practices that are associated with castes in specific regions or due to climatological reasons. This can be attributed to the fact that the Indentured labourers came from many areas of India and they were numerically too small to transfer the entire cultural and religious system from their adopted villages where each village worshipped specific *Gramma Deivas* (village deities).

According to Conolly (2007: pc), the urge to perform certain rituals are similar. However, the manner in which it is done is different (tainted) because of interaction. The text of death rituals in South Africa is created by the context of South Africa, while the text of death rituals in India is created by the context of India. However the reason for the urge to do certain things is found in the Anthropology of Geste and Rhythm. The actual expression will change because of climatological reasons; geographical reasons; influence of other cultures; colonial influence; other religious ideologies; and new thinking where people disregarded certain practices *Sati*<sup>4</sup> worship. Modernity also contributed to changes in expression. Certain practices are done to suit the present day. For example, previously they cremated a body using cow dung and wood because there was no electricity, but technological advancement has introduced new techniques such as gas and electrical furnaces. However, the purpose of reducing the body to ashes is the same. This is anthropological. The bible says ‘*earth to earth and ashes to ashes.*’ In this regard,

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<sup>4</sup> Hindu funeral practice in which the widow would immolate herself on her husband’s funeral pyre.

irrespective, whether a Christian, Zulu or Hindu is burying or burning a corpse it is '*earth to earth and ashes to ashes.*' We come out of the earth and go back to the earth.

### **2.1.3 *Les rites de passage* (The Rites of Passage) of Arnold van Gennep**

#### **2.1.3.1 Introduction**

Arnold van Gennep was a noted French ethnographer and folklorist born in Ludwigsburg, Germany in 1873.

He was the first observer of human behaviour to note that the ritual ceremonies that accompany the landmarks of human life differ only in detail from one culture to another, and that they are in essence universal.

Van Gennep is best known for his work regarding rites of passage ceremonies and his significant works in modern French folklore. He is recognized as the founder of the field of folklore in France. Arnold van Gennep's 1909 concept of "rites of passage" represents his prime contribution to anthropology, and subsequently became a major means of interpreting funeral rituals.

#### **2.1.3.2 The Rites of Passage**

The analysis of ceremonies associated with 'life crises' which Van Gennep called *Les rites de*

*passage* (The Rites of Passage) (1909) is considered to be his unique contribution to the academic world. As a structuralist, this work includes his vision of rites of passage rituals as being divided into three phases: *preliminary*, *liminaire*, *postliminaire* (pre-liminal, liminal, post liminal). *Liminaire* translates into English as liminality—the state between or the threshold experiences (Godesky 2006:1). According to Van Gennep (1909), Bowie (2006:149) and Bornstein (2003:168) most rites of passage fall into three main phases: separation, transition, and incorporation.

The *preliminary* stage, are rites of separation; in the case of death the deceased is taken away from his/her familiar environment and former role and enters a very different and sometimes foreign situation and is expected to adjust and become familiar with. The living members that are left behind also experience the rites of separation as they need to make the necessary adjustments after being separated from their loved ones.

The *liminal* state is in between, where the transition actually occurs; Viewed in terms of Van Gennep's model, death is readily classifiable within the category of the liminal experience; that is, a transitional state between life and death, in which the individual has been isolated from his/her familiar social context, routines and activities and passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state (Duffy 2005:1). During this stage the remaining members of the family also adjust and prepare for a life without the deceased member of the family.

The final stage, *postliminaire*, or the rites of incorporation, involve returning to the community changed by the experience, bringing back what you have discovered. This phase takes place when the deceased is formally admitted into a new role in the ancestral kingdom having being prepared for it in the earlier transition and separation rites. This is achieved by performing a number of rituals. Rituals are also performed to assist the living members to be incorporated in the living world.

The classification of any life-crisis ceremony in the Hindu and Zulu community will reveal the validity of the three-fold classification of *separation*, *transition* and *incorporation*.

The prevalence and elaborateness of different rites in many societies have contributed to the danger that the associated mechanical activities may ignore the theoretical problems in which Van Gennep was also exposed to. Like Jousse, Van Gennep was not only interested in the “what” but also in the “how” and “why”.

Van Gennep saw “regeneration” as a law of life and of the universe. He believed that the energy which is found in any system gradually becomes spent and must be renewed at intervals. For him this regeneration is accomplished in the social world by the rites of passage of any society which is evident in the rites of death and re-birth. In the case of the funeral rites of both the Zulus and Hindus, this regeneration is evident in the great emphasis being placed by these communities on ancestor veneration for the former and the belief in re-incarnation for the latter.

Rites of Passage refer to the processes by which a creature moves from one state, level, or role to another. This process is usually psychologically, physically and spiritually intense. Many Rites

of Passage, such as human birth, adulthood status, and death have become ritualistically celebrated and are experienced in various ways depending on the culture. The ceremonies may differ in different cultures but they are universal in function. Van Gennep (1960). Most cultural groups have ritual ceremonies which are intended to mark the transition from one phase to another. Most rites of passage are religious ceremonies. They do not only mark the transition between an individual's life stages but they reinforce the dominant religious views and values of culture (O' Neil 2007:1).

Death and the related funerals separate the deceased from the status of a living parent, spouse, or community member. The period of preparing the dead for burial or cremation moves them into a transitional phase from the known to the unknown. Such moments of transition are associated with a degree of uncertainty and sometimes potential danger. By conducting certain rituals the living members of the community pay their respects to the dead, marking their former identity with them, express sorrow for the bereaved, and by so doing, reaffirm their continuing relationship with them.

Van Gennep saw mourning simply as an aggregate of social taboos and negative practices marking isolation in society of the surviving family members which death has rendered to be impure. According to Khumalo (2007:pc), a Zulu woman whose husband has died has to undergo *ukuzila* (mourning) and is subjected to certain social restrictions as will be explained in the main text. Similarly, the Hindu widow also has to undergo a period of mourning for at least a year and also have to forego certain social privileges.

Mourning is a transitional period for the survivors and they enter it through rites of separation and emerge from it through rites of re-integration into society (Van Gennep 1960). The *iHlambo* (washing) ceremony marks the end of the mourning period for a Zulu widow and a re-integration into society. Similarly, the completion of the one year memorial ceremony with the associated rituals allows the Hindu person to be re-integrated into society.

The transitional period of the living is the same as the transition period of the deceased (Van Gennep 1960). Thus, among the Zulus and Hindus the period of widowhood corresponds to the duration of the journey of the deceased's wandering soul as it joins the ancestral spirits or is reincarnated which normally takes about twelve months.

During mourning, the living mourners and the deceased constitute a special group, situated between the world of the living and the world of the dead and how soon living individuals leave the group depends on the closeness of their relationship with the dead person.

The rites which lift all the regulations (such as the special dress) and other restrictions such as not attending family functions or places of worship should be considered as rites of reintegration into the normal life of society. For example, after three months of mourning a Hindu widow is invited by a close family member where she is given new clothing to wear to relieve her from the white apparel which characterized the mourning period. This is a symbol that she is being slowly absorbed into society.

The transition period in funeral rites differs from society to society. Firstly, the length of keeping the corpse at the home or mortuary before burial or cremation is a guiding factor. For example,

the Hindu communities in Gauteng have a preference of keeping the corpse at the home of the deceased overnight for a night vigil before cremation the next day. However in Kwa-Zulu Natal and the Western Cape this is not the case. The body is kept at a mortuary and brought to the home of the deceased the day of the funeral. In any event, the funeral takes place very soon after death unless close family members are expected to attend from overseas. Amongst the Zulu, it is common for the body of the deceased to be kept at the mortuary until the first Saturday after the death of the person when funerals are normally held to give an opportunity for family members to attend from far and wide. However traditional funerals ceremonies are also performed during the week. Among indigenous African religions, religious belief and practice are not restricted to one holy day each week, be it Friday, Saturday, or Sunday, but are present in the most common daily activities as well as in special ritual ceremonies.

Among the Hindu and Zulu community, the transitional period is sometimes subdivided into several parts, and in the post liminal period, its extension is systemized in the form of commemorations. For some Hindus, ceremonies are held on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> 9<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> day followed by the one year ceremony. Among the Zulu ceremonies are also held at different intervals which show the levels and nature of transition. Some of the ceremonies include, *iHlambo* and *ukubuyiswa*<sup>5</sup> (bringing back home) ceremonies.

Van Gennep believes that society in the world beyond is very much organized, like it is here on the living plane. Everyone re-enters and is incorporated into the ancestral world in the same categories of clan, age-group or occupation he had on earth. Children who die for example have not been properly incorporated in the world of living and therefore, will not be prepared to be

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<sup>5</sup> Call back the spirits of the deceased to guard the living.

incorporated in the world beyond like adults. Therefore, it is common in most societies like the Zulu and Hindu for the funeral rituals of children to be simple without many rituals. In most Hindu societies around the world, children are buried and not cremated since it is believed that they do not have a soul and a right to the world of the ancestors and be incorporated in the society established there. The purpose of cremation is to give access to this world. The date and time of the burial is determined by the almanac.<sup>6</sup>

Van Gennep describes some of the practices in different societies that satisfy *rites of separation*. This can also be seen in the practices of the Hindus and Zulus: the various procedures in which the corpse is transported; placement of the corpse on the floor as soon as death is confirmed; burning or burying the tools of the deceased; it is the practice of Hindus to give away the clothes of the deceased; the practice of *sati* and washings, anointing and rites of purification in general. Van Gennep also outlines the physical procedures of separation: a grave or cremation furnace, a coffin, a grass mat, tombstone or memorial plaque, the closing of the coffin or the shoving of the coffin into the gas furnace are often solemn conclusions to the entire funeral ceremony. As for the destruction of the corpse itself (by cremation, premature putrefaction,<sup>7</sup> etc.) its main purpose is to separate the components; the physical body and soul in preparation for incorporation into the other world. Van Gennep (1960:164)

In a funeral ceremony or the ceremonies that follow there are many examples of *incorporation*: the meals that are shared by family and friends following a funeral. The purpose according to

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<sup>6</sup> Is an annual publication containing tabular information in a particular field or fields often arranged according to the calendar. Astronomical data and various statistics are also found in almanacs, such as the times of the rising and setting of the sun and moon, eclipses, hours of full tide, stated festivals of churches, terms of courts, lists of all types, timelines, and more.

<sup>7</sup>the decomposition of animal proteins, especially by anaerobic microorganisms, described as putrefying bacteria.

Van Gennep is to reunite all the surviving members of the group; in Hindu tradition there is a daily *satsang*<sup>8</sup> at the home of the deceased for the period until the 11<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup> day ceremony; incorporation is also found during the day after the final 16<sup>th</sup> day memorial service when family members come together to break fast by eating non-vegetarian meals. This shows the incorporation of the mourning family back into mainstream life. The deceased is also incorporated in the process because in Hindu tradition food is offered in the name of the deceased, in some cases alcohol and even a lit cigarette is offered if the deceased partook in this while he was living. In Zulu custom after one year has lapsed since the death of a person, the *ukubuyiswa* ritual is performed. This symbolic ritual means that the spirit of the deceased is brought back home. The main aim of this ritual is to integrate the spirit into the community of the *amadlozi*<sup>9</sup>

Van Gennep (1960: x) stated that the intention of The Rites of Passage was to help clarify and to systematize existing data for the benefit of subsequent scholars. He went on to say that,

The estimate of a man's contribution to knowledge or theory is often based on the extent to which his ideas have become incorporated into the literature, or to which they have been attacked, defended, or further expanded. (1960: x)

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<sup>8</sup> This typically involves listening to or reading scriptures, reflecting on, discussing and assimilating their meaning, meditating on the source of these words, and bringing their meaning into one's daily life. Worship through singing of devotional hymns.

<sup>9</sup> Human spirit or soul. Ancestral spirits.

## 2.2 METHODOLOGY

The methodology involved five different areas:

- a comprehensive desktop literature review.
- a series of in-depth interviews conducted with informants, cultural practitioners, academics, priests, traditional healers and other relevant stakeholders.
- a series of consultative and discussion forums to unpack and refine themes of the research viz. rituals and worship of the Hindu and Zulu community.
- quantitative and qualitative analysis.

The study of the Hindu and Zulu death rituals and ceremonies was conceptualized mainly according to the work of Marcel Jousse (1886-1961). Methodologically, Marcel Jousse distinguishes between different kinds of '**laboratories**' for the study of the Anthropology of Geste and Rhythm.

The method used for this study the traditional anthropological ethnographic approach based on a participatory observation method. Ethnography is a written description of a particular culture; the customs, beliefs, and behaviors which are based on information collected through fieldwork.

Selection of informants was not based on the researcher's personal judgments but on identifications made by community members. They were chosen because of their knowledge and understanding of the traditional practices of the identified cultural groups.. Likewise the conclusions about cultural understandings of the phenomena of interests are not the personal

insights of the researcher, or even of particular community members, but are views cross-validated through repeated, in-depth interviews with a broad cross-section of representative informants. The findings were validated through conventional archival research, consultation with cultural and religious experts from the Zulu and Hindu community.

Typically, the ethnographer focuses on a community (not necessarily geographic, considering also work, leisure, and other communities), selecting informants who are known to have an overview of the activities of the community. Such informants are asked to identify other informants representative of the community, using chain sampling to obtain a saturation of informants in all empirical areas of investigation. Informants are interviewed multiple times, using information from previous informants to elicit clarification and deeper responses upon re-interview. This process is intended to reveal common cultural understandings related to the phenomena under study. It should be noted that ethnography may be approached from the point of view of art and cultural preservation, and as a descriptive rather than an analytic endeavour (Garson 2007).

Like with most ethnographers my intention was to collect a wide range of information concerning rituals and practices of the Zulu and Hindu cultural groups in order to present a holistic portrait about their way of life and the extent to which traditional practice are still being followed.

The research started with the framing of the objective of the study. After analyzing existing literature in the various subject areas of Hindu and Zulu rituals and practices with specific focus

on Death rituals and ancestor worship, the objective of the study was formulated. For this literature was collected on Zulu Culture, Hindu culture, Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS), oral history, theories from books and journals, libraries, government records, newspapers. After working on a literature review, the question to be addressed was developed for research. After this the selection of study area from where the data collection for the research was identified.

### **2.2.1 Selection of study area**

Based on the information available from secondary sources and the fact that two cultural groups were being studied a representative sample of informants, cultural experts, religious and spiritual practitioners and academics were selected from different parts of South Africa, but mainly from Kwa-Zulu Natal which houses the majority of People of Hindu Origin and the Zulu speaking people. For the purpose of observation and interviews for the Zulu community the areas chosen was the North Coast, South Coast, Natal Midlands and a sample from Northern Natal.

With regard to the Hindu study, observations and interviews were conducted in Durban, (Merebank, Chatsworth, Isipingo, and Phoenix), Pietermaritzburg, Stanger, Gauteng, and Cape Town. Furthermore in order to determine the nature and extent of change in religious worship amongst the Hindu community in South Africa, a study was undertaken in India where observations and interviews were conducted with local informants, academics, anthropologists, and cultural leaders in the following areas: Hyderabad, Varanasi, Bangalore, Madikeri, Mangalore, Cochin, Chennai, and Pondicherry.

### 2.2.2 Literature Sources

A number of sources informed this study as outlined in the literature review and bibliography and as demonstrated in the text.

### 2.2.3 Fieldwork, data collection and observation

Jousse regarded the world of the human race as an **anthropological laboratory**, and every individual is therefore a potential subject of research, regardless of temporal, geographical, social or cultural situation.

Fieldwork is not just a single method but a varied set of procedures. The core of fieldwork is participant-observation. As participant-observer, I have tried to live intimately as a member of the Hindu society which I belong to and forms part of my study. Anthropologists believe that taking the role of a participant-observer in another culture enables the researcher to understand the intellect, sensitivity, and emotion of another human being. In this regard I tried to interact as much as possible with members of the Zulu community to gain a better understanding of their cultural practices. As Director of Arts and Culture in the Province of Kwa-Zulu Natal I am responsible for the preservation, promotion and perpetuation of all cultures in the Province. This further enabled me to get a better understanding of the Zulu culture.

Fieldwork is important as the information obtained can have a direct impact on the members of the culture described. Others with power over the community may also read about the culture

and on the basis of what they read, make decisions and take actions which will change lives in the community (Banton 1966:55).

Data analysis and theory development came at the end, though theories may emerge from cultural immersion and theory-articulation by members of the culture. However, the ethnographic researcher strives to avoid theoretical preconceptions and instead to induce theory from the perspectives of the members of the culture and from observation. During the research process I validated Marcel Jousse's Theory of Geste and Rhythm and other theories by going back to members of the Zulu and Hindu community for their reaction.

My theory and method were inextricably mixed – the theory is a generalization of a number of factors – factors that have been formulated from my observations and listening – I have recorded what I saw or listened and questioned as I was talking – so the theory is the development of a pattern – I observed and recorded the Zulu way (method), I observed and recorded the Hindu way (method) and then I interpreted what is common between them. What I saw happening over and over again in both cultures during the process of observation and listening formed the basis of the commonality of my theory. An attempt has been made to explain the commonality – how is it possible that certain practices of the Zulu people and Hindu people are the same – the answer is simple, it is anthropological. So it is clear that my method and theory are inextricably entwined into one another and cannot be separated from one another; my theory is generalized out of my method, out of my collected data, and my observations.

My approach was the grounded theory approach where I observed, interviewed, recorded, sought information, spoke to people, listened to them before attempting the chapters on theoretical framework and methodology. This was done last after conducting field research, observations, recordings, interviews and so on. In fact, for the purpose of my research this method was most suitable. It is difficult to choose a theoretical framework and then go to the field as it forces the researcher to make premature decisions on his findings. How can you find something if you already know what is to be found – because it will taint the research process and the researcher will go back and change the chapters. In the light of this argument it is clear that a research proposal is always subject to change and should not bind the researcher to what is contained in a proposal.

Methodologically, this study was based on the insider (*emic*)<sup>10</sup> and outsider (*etic*) perspective, as the study requires data from different sources and communities, who are involved in the system. People's lives must be understood as they themselves understand them, not merely as we as outsiders understand them. We refer to this approach as *emic* and contrast it with the *etic* one, the outsider understands. To see life as others do requires involvement, participation and human empathy; otherwise one remains an outsider. Yet there must also be some intellectual detachment, or this hard-one insider's view can never be effectively analyzed or reported (Edgerton 1974:3).

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<sup>10</sup> Is the ethnographic research approach to the way the members of the given culture perceive their world. The **emic** perspective is usually the main focus of ethnography. It is an insider or native perspective as opposed to **etic** or external view. The terms were coined by Kenneth Pike (1954) from the analogous linguistic terms *phonemic* and *phonetic*

As a member of the Hindu community I have witnessed a number of funeral behaviour and participated in a number of ceremonies for my late parents as well as my late in-laws. In this case I have adopted the ‘insider’ or ‘implicated’ (Stoller 1996) view as a researcher of this project. During my study visit to India I performed a number of rituals for the three generations of my ancestors as prescribed by ancient texts. This was performed at the Holy Ganges River in Northern India and the Cauvery River in the South.

Jousse, M. (1990) proposes that human behaviour is observable from two standpoints, viz., those of microscopic and macroscopic observers. The macroscopic observer is the audience observer, while the microscopic observer is the performer observer.

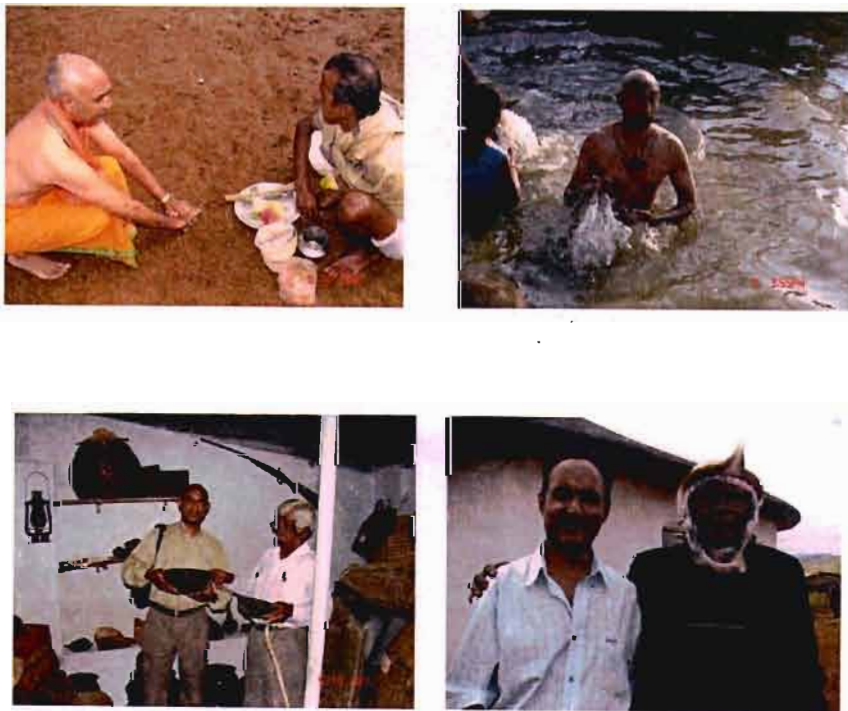


Fig. 3 Macroscopic and microscopic observation in India and South Africa (Govender: 2007).

This theory of Marcel Jousse, whom himself acquired knowledge and skills through oral style, will also form the basis of this study. In this study of death rituals and ancestor veneration, I have been both a macroscopic observer in the sense that I have been observing the performance of the rituals and processes in both the Hindu and Zulu community, to collect data as to how the ritual is performed, who performs it, when and where it is performed and why it is performed. I have also been a microscopic observer as I personally participated in many of the Hindu rituals associated with death and ancestor worship (for my late parents, in-laws and other relatives).

#### **2.2.4 Tools and techniques**

The sources of information used consisted of primary sources, which was generated through fieldwork that is, people interviewed, observations and myself as a primary source because of my experience in the performing the death rituals for my late parents and other relatives. Fieldwork included rapport establishment, which is helpful to make friendly relations with people.

Secondary sources included journals, conference papers, newspapers, dissertations, thesis, local and international publications and unpublished documents. An important document used was a letter written by my late mother while she was on her death bed (Appendix 3, Govender: 1999). The contents of the letter contributed in some way in the direction of this research.

A search from the internet was undertaken. Key terms such as Death Rituals (Zulu and Hindu), ancestor veneration, ethnography, Zulu traditional customs, and Hindu traditional customs were inputted. A printout was obtained and a selection of the relevant sections was read for

information and further sources which were then pursued. Index cards were used to record the bibliographic citations and were chronologically arranged. A short analysis of each source relevant to the study was noted using phrases, abbreviation and quotation marks with page numbers.

In the first stage, secondary data was collected from the relevant secondary source material such as, ethnographic, oral studies, historical studies, reports, articles etc.

### **2.2.5 Key informants/interviews**

Selection of key informants is one of the important tasks in the fieldwork. Key informants are individuals who talk regularly with the community and from whom much of what the researcher learns. The selection of informants was not based on the researcher's personal judgments but on identifications made by community members and recommendations by my supervisor. In the same manner the conclusions about cultural practices of the Hindu and Zulu community are not personal insights of the researcher but are views that were cross-validated through repeated, in-depth interviews with a broad cross-section of representative informants which included Brahmins (priests), traditional leaders, academics and cultural leaders.

Interviews were conducted in neutral and comfortable surroundings and averaged less than one hour each. However, the interview with some of the academics especially Prof. Joan Conolly lasted over two hours due to the nature of the information sought. The interviewees were encouraged to give an account of their experiences, insights and opinions spontaneously and in

an unstructured way, as the researcher wanted to encourage honest and natural responses. This was supported by information drawn from books, articles, unpublished dissertations, and newspapers. The questions were intended to elicit responses with regard to their feelings, opinions and attitudes towards either Hindu or Zulu death rituals or ancestor veneration.

A schedule was prepared for collection of data on general information based on death rituals and ancestor veneration. The schedule consisted of questions ranging from the family details to cultural practices of the two societies.

The schedule of interviews spanned over two years from 12 June 2005 to 25 October 2007. Due to time constraints there was no fixed time of the interviews. The availability and flexibility of the interviewees determined the interviewing time. Death and the associated rituals cannot be predicted. Hence the observation of the processes was spontaneous and was undertaken at short notice.

The interviews took place mostly at the place of the interviewee. The question and answer method was used and notes were taken. Although questions were prepared in advance there were times when I was forced to divert from the fixed questions.

During the course of an interview, there are a number of expressions from both the interviewer and interviewee, which are “both *gestual-visual/oral-aural* in nature”. In the case of the Zulu community interviews were conducted in *isiZulu* and was transcribed and translated into English for the purpose of this dissertation by a research assistant.

After the general data, specific data regarding the culture was gathered from key persons in the community like priests, *Indunas*,<sup>11</sup> cultural leaders, people who are the custodians of information on oral culture. Discussions were held with academics, cultural leaders for the purpose of retesting the information obtained from the informants.

Because of the qualitative nature of the investigation, unstructured, open-ended informal interviews were conducted. But the use of structured open and close ended interviews was also applied in the research. Due to time constraints where desirable, group interviews were conducted to get some specific or focused information from certain groups of people.

The researcher participated in some of the ceremonies to determine the symbolic explanation of the ritual process and the meanings the community give to some of the rituals and ceremonies.

#### **2.2.6 Data collection and analysis**

Data was gathered through observations of people participating in rituals associated with death and ancestor veneration.

Those primary sources were required to share their experiences on:

1. The processes and activities carried out when a person is on his/her death bed.
2. The nature and activities during a death ceremony.

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<sup>11</sup> Zulu name for a state official appointed by the king, or by a local chief. Also commander of group of warriors. Various levels of responsibility occurred; rank would be indicated by the amount of personal decoration.

3. The rituals and events that are observed to remember the dead.

The data collected from the villages were subjected to qualitative analysis from quantitative analysis. The issues of death rituals and ancestor veneration in both the Hindu and Zulu community were analyzed from the theories of Marcel Jousse and Van Gennep and interpretations were carried out.

### **2.2.7 Audio and video recordings and photography**

Recordings were made of the interviews with informants and observations at funerals and ceremonies. With the permission of the interviewee a digital tape recorder was used. The recorded information was transcribed into written format.

Reviewing and transcribing the audio tapes resulted in a detailed analysis. This method of recording oral texts enabled me to ‘play’ and ‘re-play’ in order to arrive at an informed analysis.

Photographs were taken with a digital camera and stored in a computer. This new advanced system of storing photographic images on computer memory sticks provides researchers with an easier and more cost effective way of storing information for later use. This method made it possible for me to make selections of visual images to compliment written data. However, where photographs were not easily obtainable due to the sensitive nature of the research, images were downloaded from the internet.

Many problems were experienced with obtaining photographs of both Hindu and Zulu funerals, especially the traditional rituals and ceremonies. This was largely due to the nature of the event which is a very emotional period in the lives of the surviving members of the family. However when it came to memorial ceremonies the situation was a bit better and I managed to obtain some photos. Similar to the research on marriages for my master's degree I experienced problems obtaining photos from the Zulu community.

I watched a number of films that showcased some of the funeral ceremonies and related activities, viz., *Water*, by Mira Nair, *Siddharta*, *Pithamagan*, and *Gandhi*. Although these films were commercial in nature they provided me with an opportunity to have a glimpse of some of the ceremonies.

### **2.2.8 Research ethics**

In the conducting of interviews and the taking of digital photographs, every attempt has been made by the researcher to respect the autonomy and protect the welfare of all participants. The informed and uncoerced consent of the participants were obtained. Furthermore, permission to conduct research and a written consent of participants or family members was obtained when photographs were taken at family funerals or ceremonies which are of a very sensitive nature (Appendix 8). The researcher informed all participants, in the language they could understand of the aims and implications of the research project and of any other considerations which might reasonably be expected to influence their willingness to participate. An interpretor was used for the IsiZulu, Hindi and Tamil language participants.

### 2.3 Literature Review

In this study, information about Hindu and Zulu death rituals and ceremonies associated with ancestor veneration has been drawn from a variety of sources. However the researcher has commenced his research with what Marcel Jousse has pronounced and weighed it against what other authors say in order to highlight the similarities or differences, which further exhibit the basis of Jousse's theories.

In this study, the researcher has taken into account the fact that authors may have different views in respect of:

- the manner in which rituals are performed and understood.
- the extent to which a performance that is orally transmitted, is reliable, accurate and valid.
- the differences and similarities, which exist between an oral and a written performance.
- the relationship, which exist between oral and written texts.

My review of literature covers the works of:

Aliaga (2007), Banton (1966), Berglund (1976), Jousse (2000), Ong (1982), Conolly (2001), Muthu (1974), Panday (1969), Singh and Nath (1991), Kearns (1991), Chitty (1992), Apte (1978), Krige (1936), Radcliff-Brown (1956), Krige et al (1981), Magwaza 1993), Manqele (2000), Gumede (2000) Morris (1987), Radcliffe-Brown (1958) and (1922), Vitebsky (1993),

Settar (1986), Nishimura (1998)

**Jousse M (2000)** in “*The Anthropology of Geste and Rhythm*” provided the oral technical terms and definitions which the researcher’s study is based on. Most of the concepts used by Jousse were used in this work to back up the assumption that the Hindu and Zulu ceremonies studied are indeed based on oral tradition.

The book is divided into theoretical and practical sections. In the first part, which deals with the theoretical aspect of his research, the psycho-physiological laws of human expression are explored. He demonstrates the critical importance of cultural identity as a feature of socio-psychological balance, and identifies the indivisible psycho-physiological nature of the human being, long before technology was sufficiently advanced, to provide him with such insights. The second part shows how these laws are applied to the Galilean (gospel) tradition. In the same way, this work has helped the researcher to show how the laws of human expression described by Jousse could be applied to Tamil and Zulu marriage ceremonies. This work has also provided the researcher with an opportunity to examine the function of human thought and expression.

**Ong W. J (1982)** in “*Orality and Literacy – the Technologising of the Word*” gives the characteristics and nature of the oral culture, which the researcher finds, reflected in the Hindu and Zulu ceremonies associated with death and ancestor worship. He surveys and interprets the extensive work done during the last few decades by him and others on the difference between orality and literacy.

Ong's assessment of the intellectual, literary and social effects of writing on oral tradition and his reviews of the exciting new discoveries that have revised our understanding of the Homeric poems of African epics, have helped the researcher in the analysis and interpretation of the Hindu and Zulu funeral ceremonies, which form part of an oral culture.

**Conolly J (2001)** in *An annotated and glossed English translation of Memory, Memorisation and Memorisers in Ancient Galilee by Marcel Jousse: A Study of the Origin, Nature, Analysis and Recording of Mnemonic Rhythmo-stylistic Texts* provides a comprehensive insight into the work of Jousse, the father of oral studies. The value of this research undertaking is greatly enhanced by the addition of a glossary, which assisted the researcher greatly in finding direction and focus in his study. The definitions and explanations of terms associated with the different laws of human expression and the Mnemotechnical devices have helped him to analyze and interpret the Hindu and Zulu funeral ceremonies more effectively. The method of defining the terms and providing examples of usage contributed to an easier and better understanding of complex Joussean terminology. Putting performance on a page is not an easy undertaking. Conolly's glossary provided a window to the understanding of the theories of Marcel Jousse. An interview with the author complemented the literature review as she was able to provide much more insight into orality studies and the concepts outlined in the book became alive.

**Berglund A. (1976)** *Zulu Thought Patterns and Symbolism*. The author deals with the religious beliefs and practices of the Zulu community. The main focus is on the role played by the ancestors and the religious orientation of the Zulus. Issues like untimely death, *ukungena* (widow inheriting); death and burial customs, *ukubuyisa* (bringing back the spirit of the deceased) have

given me valuable insight notwithstanding the fact that these were seen from the lens of a foreigner. Berglund also deals with sacred spaces like the *umsamo* (back of the hut), *iziko* (hearth), *ikhothamo* (doorway arch) and the back of the cattle enclosure.

**Msimang C T (1975)** *Kusadliwa Ngoludala*, An expert in Zulu culture the author developed his subject matter by interviewing Zulu elders, *sangomas*<sup>12</sup> and observed many rituals and practices of the Zulu in various parts of Kwa-Zulu Natal. The outcome of his investigations provides valuable insights into Zulu rituals like, puberty, marriage, death and the role of ancestors in Zulu life.

**Thorpe S. A. (1991)** *African Traditional Religions*. The writer demonstrates that there are many common features between African Religious systems and other religions. This helped me in my comparison between Zulu and Hindu religious practices. The subject matter also proves that African Religion has a status of its own as a world religion.

**Pandey R (1969)** in “*Hindu Samskaras – Socio-religious Study of the Hindu Sacraments*” traces the Hindu *Samskaras*<sup>13</sup> through their origin and development. He outlines the changes and modifications that they have undergone. Through very detailed explanations, an endeavor has been made to link and piece together the scattered materials of the *Vedas*, a few *Brahmanas*, the *Grhyasutras*, the *Dharmasutras*, the *Smrtis* and other treatises, into a comprehensive whole and

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<sup>12</sup> Is a practitioner of herbal medicine, divination and counseling in traditional Nguni (Zulu, Xhosa, Ndebele and Swazi) societies of Southern Africa (effectively an African shaman). The philosophy is based on a belief in ancestral spirits. Both men and women can be called by the ancestors (a consequence of refusing the calling is usually ongoing physical or mental illness). A trainee sangoma (or twaza) trains under another sangoma, usually for a period of years, usually performing humbling service in the community

<sup>13</sup> A life-cycle ritual performed at important stages during a person's life, to purify the body and the spirit.

to supply a historical perspective for their proper understanding.

**Singh C and Nath P (1999)** in “*Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies*” provide a brief description of the customs and ceremonies of the Hindus. The details were very useful for my study as they threw some light on the philosophical texts and the performance of the *Samskaras*. The author also provided some valuable insights into the *Vedas*, the fountainhead of Indian glory, which are divine revelations. An attempt was made to provide the reader with details of man’s religious duties, the rites and rituals he should perform and how to satisfy his religious and social commitments.

**Chitty S C (1992)** in “*The Castes, Customs, Manners and Literature of the Tamils*”, presents a simple but informative account of the Tamils in South India and their movement to other parts of the world. The sections on the origin of the Tamils and their division into various castes assisted in the historical development of the Tamils, while the sections based on the physical and moral characteristics of the Tamils as well as their customs rites and ceremonies provided some very good insights to enable the researcher to describe the different modes of expression.

**10. Krige E. J. (1936)** in her compilation of “*The social systems of the Zulu people*”, gave me a thorough understanding of the Zulu people. The author commences by tracing the Zulu history and its influence on the tribes of Southern Africa. The information helped the researcher to trace the historical development of the Zulu. Most of the other chapters embrace the social structure and organization of the Zulu people, some of which are still applicable today and still influence the thinking and behaviour of the Zulu people. However, it must be noted that some of the

findings of the author are disputed by modern Zulu academics.

**Nyawose T. (2000)** in his unpublished dissertation "*Living in Two Worlds*", *Codes and Modes of Expression at Zulu Funerals in Kwa-Zulu Natal at the turn of the millennium* provides a comparative analysis of modern and traditional funerals in the 'Zulu community. In the past most research was conducted by scholars and academics as seen from the foreign lens. Although these scholarly works provided much insight on the customs and traditions of the Zulu people, it still lacked a sense of authenticity which only an African researcher could provide. As a resident of an African township the researcher has adopted the insider approach very effectively in presenting his findings. The outcome of the research was a result of him attending and participating at many funerals in the urban and rural areas. The information provided me with a very clear understanding and a verification of a number of rituals and practices which I have investigated through literature sources and informants during my fieldwork. My limitations as an outsider in the Zulu community was overcome by the information contained in this work, as the author was able to penetrate the community because of his knowledge of the language, customs and behavior of the community he was researching.

**Magwaza T (1993)** in her unpublished thesis "*Orality and its Cultural Expression in some Zulu traditional ceremonies*", deals with a number of traditional Zulu ceremonies, and emphasizes the role of oral tradition in Zulu society. Magwaza highlights the cultural importance of the ceremonies, which forms an integral part of society's culture. They depend on the power of the spoken word and its artistic devices. In her presentation, the author shows how expressive devices that are oral and those that involve material aspects complement each other as people's

means of communication. This assisted the researcher in his analysis of the different modes of expression found in traditional Zulu funeral ceremonies.

**Gumede J. T. (2000)** in his research project, *“The Anthropology of Geste and Rhythm in Modern Zulu Roman Catholicism: A Brief Historical Critique and a Microscopic and Macroscopic Oral Style Analysis of Selected Liturgical and Biblical texts”* has employed an Oral-style analysis to interpret a number of Zulu Liturgical texts using Marcel Jousse’s theory of Anthropology of Geste and Rhythm. This helped the researcher a great deal as he has used the same theory to analyze and interpret the Zulu and Hindu ceremonies. In his presentation Gumede has shown that human expression has universal anthropological features that embrace language and expression at the ethnic level equally and without prejudice. The study also showed how fossilization of the written text can be challenged, thereby suggesting means of re-energizing the printed word. He also tackled the consequence of “putting performance on the page”; showing to what extent the Mnemonic Laws and Mnemotechnical devices of Marcel Jousse are embedded in the printed text.

**Aliaga M (2007)** *Ethno sociological Researches in Azerbaijan: Contemporary State and Perspectives*. The book was devoted to the research of the process of the adaptation of immigrants in a foreign ethnic environment. I looked at this study to gain a perspective on how the Hindus adapted to the new South African environment in 1860 when they were indentured. During the time of the collapse of the world colonial system, it appeared that many "primitive" peoples, as defined by ethnologists, became involved in the national-liberation movement and ethnic conflicts in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Quite a lot of people of tribal, "tribal" groups

migrated to Europe or North America, this creating a problem of mutual relations and contacts of representatives of these peoples with European peoples there. The subject matter in the book dealt with most of these problems. The main focus was on the role of the traditionalism in social behaviour of groups especially the *Azerbaijan*. This provided me with insights on how the Zulu and Hindu population in South Africa was subjected to similar social issues. This work was a valuable resource in understanding ethnic migrations and how traditional societies adapt to new social conditions and environments.

**Banton Michael Ed. (1966) *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*.** The publication contains five essays, of which two are very broad in scope (basically attempts at a definition of religion and consequent methodological suggestions for anthropologists), while the others consider more specific aspects of particular religious systems (and attempt to draw theoretical conclusions from them).

In *Religion as a Cultural System* the bulk of the essay is devoted to Clifford Geertz explaining the definition of religion and illustrating the explanation with examples from various religious systems. Turner's essay *Colour Classification in Ndembu Ritual* is a study of the role of the red-white-black colour trio in Ndembu ritual life (and more generally in ritual systems in Africa and around the world). He restricts himself to a descriptive, down to earth approach.

In *Religion: Problems of Definition and Explanation* Melford Spiro presents a definition of religion as "an institution consisting of culturally patterned interaction with culturally postulated superhuman beings". He argues (against functionalist explanations of religion) that an

unintended consequence of religion cannot be a reason for its existence.

**Brian Morris (1987)** *Anthropological Studies of Religion: An Introductory Text*. Morris's book covers psychological and sociological approaches as well as the more narrowly anthropological. The theorists covered include Hegel, Marx, Weber, Mueller, Spencer, Tylor, Frazer, Durkheim, Radcliffe-Browne, Mauss, Malinowski, Freud, Jung, Eliade, Levy-Bruhl, Evans-Pritchard, Douglas, Leach, Turner, Levi-Strauss, Geertz and Godelier. Between them they cover the whole range of different ways of looking at religion, including functionalist, structuralist, symbolist, intellectualist, dialectical and psychological viewpoints. The book is excellent for anyone looking at the nature of religion itself or the history of religion.

**Pickering D (1995)** *Cassel's Dictionary of Superstitions*. In this book, Pickering attempted to present a fairly comprehensive survey of superstitions old and new. The coverage includes superstitions from many cultures and many eras. Special attention has been paid to curious beliefs that have sprung up in relatively recent times. A distinction was also made in the book between true superstition and those beliefs that might be more accurately described as folklore, mythology or religion. Many superstitions included in the book evoke the rituals and ceremonies of the Christian Church, while others are derived from classical legends or from the rites of witchcraft and black magic.

**Mbiti John S. (1970)** *Concepts of God in Africa*. The book presents a portion of the traditional religious and philosophical wisdom of the African people who Mbiti consider as not religiously illiterate. The information is gathered from over two hundred and seventy

different tribes. The book which is intended for use by students in universities, colleges, theological seminaries and other educational institutions is described as a pioneer piece of work containing a systematic study of the African reflection about God.

**Mbiti John S. (1989).** *African Religions and Philosophy*. Mbiti portrays Africans as very religious by nature. They have very diverse religious beliefs and practices. In this book he covers a wide range of topics such as, the concept of time, God, Nature, creation, spiritual beings, royalty, and stages of development, marriage and death. Some of the concepts described by the author helped to get a better understanding of my research endeavor.

**Mbiti John S. (1975/1992)** *Introduction to African Religion*, This book covers a wide range of topics pertaining to African Religion. This includes, art, symbols, rituals, shrines etc. belief in God, spirits, man, stages of development, marriage, death, religious objects and places, magic, morals and values, religious leaders etc.

**Shils E. (1981)** *Tradition*, This book deals with the theoretical concept of syncretism. According to this theory traditions change when their adherents are brought or enter in the presence of other traditions. This was investigated to determine whether this had anything to do with the changes in Hindu practice in South Africa. The spread of societies from one part of the earth's surface to areas where they were previously unknown affords the opportunity for the traditions of the expanding society to come into contact with traditions with which they have no common ground except that they both deal with the situations to which all human existence is subject.

**James B H (2006)** refers to syncretism as a blending of schools of thought and is often associated with establishing analogies between two or more discrete or formerly separate traditions. Most academic studies of syncretism focus on the blending of religion and myths from various cultures, viewed positively, syncretism seeks underlying unity in what appears to be multiplicity and diversity. Alan Barnard and Jonathan Spencer (ed.) (1996) refers to syncretism to the hybridization or amalgamation of two or more cultural traditions.

**Bowie, Fiona (2000)** *The Anthropology of Religion*. This book combines discussion of the origin and development of ideas and debates within the anthropology of religion with a look at where the subject is going today – the interests and preoccupations of current practitioners. An interesting aspect of this publication is that throughout the book relevant links are made with other disciplines, particularly religious studies. Another innovative aspect is that although there is a development of ideas throughout the book, each of the eight chapters is self contained, with its own bibliography, and the chapters could be approached in any order. Each chapter aims to introduce central theoretical ideas in the anthropology of religion and to illustrate them with specific case studies. Reference is made to the works of nineteenth and early twentieth-century scholars, the founding figures or “ancestors” of modern anthropology, and contemporary ideas and practices.

**Otterbein Keith F. (1972)** *Comparative Cultural Analysis: An Introduction to Anthropology*. In this publication, Otterbein lays out systematically the important topics and key concepts of cultural anthropology. The topics and concepts are discussed in detail in the different chapters and they are summarized on a data sheet at the end of the book. The different sets of concepts are

fundamental to all research in anthropology. The different concepts were necessary for me as a researcher who only wished to only obtain an introductory knowledge of anthropology. By reading and re-reading portions of the book I was able to easily grasp important ethnographic concepts in order to form important conclusions on aspects relating to cultural anthropology in my study on Hindu and Zulu customs and practices.

**Burde Jayant. (2004)** *Rituals, Mantras and Science: An Integral Perspective*. In this book the author discusses the place of science in rituals and mantras. Using structural analysis he shows that rituals in general, whether religious, political, social or otherwise have common structural patterns. These patterns are shared by poetry, music, dance and gymnastics, but not by language. Consideration of animal rituals and pathological (compulsive) rituals leads him to propose a general theory which unifies all ritual-like activities. He also introduces the concept of *ritual instinct* which can make the theory simpler and more elegant. He shows how knowledge can be divided into science, non-science and pseudo-science to understand the true status of such strange phenomena as miracles, supernatural powers, *siddhis*, *samadhi*, rebirth and ESP.

**Vertovec Steven (2000)** *The Hindu Diaspora: Comparative Patterns*. In this publication the author provides a theoretical innovative analysis by providing key patterns and processes of change that have affected Hindu Beliefs, practices and identities in the Diaspora. He examines the construction of the category 'Hinduism' in both India and abroad. Trinidad and Great Britain are given detailed historical and ethnographic attention. The notion of 'Diaspora' is given much attention and is well defined in the Indian context but is not limited to this particular Diaspora community. The book also provides a detailed explanation of the past, present and future impact

of Indian Diaspora in the respective countries of settlement.

**Sharma K. et al. (eds.) (2004)** *Theorizing and Critiquing Indian Diaspora*. This publication contained papers that debate and formulate the key theoretical concepts about the Indian Diaspora such as that of homeland, acculturation, religion, caste, ethnicity, double citizenship, gender and other interrelated issues. The successes and failures of the Indian Diaspora in different countries of the world are also taken up for analysis. The paper by M.F.Salat, *The End of the Beginning: A note on the Afro-Indian Diaspora* provided some valuable insights on the Diaspora in Africa and some of the information made reference to the situation in South Africa.

**Jain R.K. (1993)** *Indian Communities Abroad: Themes and Literature*. As an internationally reputed anthropologist Professor Jain sums up in this publication contemporary themes and literature in sociology and social anthropology pertaining to the global phenomenon of Indian Diaspora which is the scattering of the peoples of Indian Origin in all parts of the world including South Africa. The book also addresses the issues of race relations, plural societies, intercultural relations, globalization and ethnicity.

**Sharma R et al. (2003)** *Indian Diaspora: In Search of Identity*. This book is a collection of papers presented to the International Conference on the Maintenance of Indian Languages and Culture Abroad held in Mysore, India in 1994. The papers focused on case studies as well as theoretical issues pertaining to the Indian Diaspora. The focus was on 'insiders' observation and 'outsiders' interpretations. The main objective of the conference was to take stock and review the situation of Indian language and culture as practiced in countries of Indian Diaspora and to

suggest plan of action for the future. The papers from the different participants which included, social scientists, social activists, academics and media personnel provided much insight to meet the objectives.

**West. M. and Whisson. G. Micheal., ed. (1975) *Religion and Social Change in Southern Africa; Essays in honour of Monica Wilson.*** The authors provide a comprehensive outline of key concepts in traditional African Religion. The effective spirits in Cape Nguni world views are the ancestors. The nature of the ancestral shades is well known and described accordingly. They provide an economical explanatory theory for the phenomena of dreams, trance and death. The author also explains the Place of Spirit Possession in Zulu Cosmology. He provides a brief description of what the Zulu people described as ‘old’ or ‘traditional’ forms of spirit possession

**Borgatti Steve: *Introduction to Grounded Theory.*** The author commences with providing a meaning to the phrase "grounded theory" which refers to theory that is developed inductively from a corpus of data. If done well, this means that the resulting theory at least fits one dataset perfectly. This contrasts with theory derived deductively from grand theory, without the help of data, and which could therefore turn out to fit no data at all. This means in part that the researcher takes different cases to be wholes, in which the variables interact as a unit to produce certain outcomes. Part and parcel of the case-orientation is a comparative orientation. Cases similar on many variables but with different outcomes are compared to see where the key causal differences may lie. This was important in my comparative study of Zulu and Hindu cultural practices.

**Saraswati Baidyanath (2005)** *Voice of Death: Traditional Thought and Modern Science*. This publication is an outcome of a conference organized in memory of the death anniversary of Nirmal Kumar Bose. The theme was, *Death in Traditional Thought and Modern Science*. Participants included, indologists<sup>14</sup>, anthropologists, sociologists, philosophers and physical and social scientists. The main purpose of the conference was to determine a world view and valid theory of death. Some of the papers provided valuable insights in my research on death rituals and ancestor veneration.

To complement my reading of the different papers I interviewed the aging author, Baidyanath Saraswati at his new home in Varanasi. According to him he has chosen this holy pilgrimage site to spend his last few years before his own death, as being close to the river Ganges is a step in achieving instant *moksha* (salvation). During the course of the interview he gave an overall picture of the purpose and nature of the conference and emphasized a number of times that death must not be studied in isolation. Of equal importance is the study of life.

**Von de Vijver, Fons and Kwok Leung (1977)** *Methods and Data Analysis for Cross Cultural Research*. This book addresses methodological features of cross-cultural research. Methodological considerations in carrying out cross-cultural research often centre on the enhancement of the interpretability of observed cultural differences and on the reduction of the number of alternative explanations of these differences. The book provides a comprehensive analysis on how differences between cultural groups can be attributed to culture. Culture is too global a concept to be meaningful as an explanatory variable. The authors explain how the process of unpacking culture can take place which usually consist of three steps. The first is

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<sup>14</sup> Refers to an academic who studies the history, languages, and cultures of the Indian subcontinent.

substantive; it refers to the choice of appropriate context variables to verify or falsify a particular interpretation of cultural differences. The second aspect involves the design of the study and finally statistical techniques are required to evaluate the success or lack of it of the variables explaining cross-cultural studies.

**Radcliff-Brown A.R. (1958)** *Method in Social Anthropology*. This book is a presentation of Radcliff-brown's major methodological papers as well as the nature and development of social anthropology. The papers written at different points in Radcliff-Brown's professional career have exercised much influence on the development of anthropological studies and have been widely published in journals and reports. The papers also reflect the strong arguments made by Radcliff-Brown for a rational division of the several; subjects that are found under the term "anthropology". In his introduction to the book, Strinivas (1958: x) states,

The great stimulus given to anthropological studies by the theory of evolution has resulted in bringing together, within the framework of a single subject, several distinct disciplines, such as physical anthropology, ethnology, prehistoric archeology, linguistics, and social anthropology.

The chapter, *The Comparative Method in Social Anthropology* was also important since I was conducting an Ethnographic comparison of the rituals and worship of the Hindus and Zulus.

**Nishimura Yuko (1998)** *Gender, Kinship and Property Rights: Nagarattar Womanhood in South India*. This work seen from the lens of a foreign researcher provided a valuable insight into the customs and traditional practices of the Nagarattar caste in South India. Of particular interest is the fact that most of the South African People of Indian Origin originated from the South and therefore it was found that most of the current practices in South Africa have been brought from

these parts.

**Settar, S (1986)** *Inviting Death: Historical Experiments on Sepulchral Hill*. The book provides a detailed explanation of the codified rules of the art of inviting death, descriptive accounts of death embraced by *puranic*<sup>15</sup> personalities in literary work, historical experiments preserved in lithic<sup>16</sup> records. The subject matter is presented in a manner that will engage most social scientists, anthropologists, historians, sociologists, psychologists, philosophers as well as students of religion and art. Although the material has a strong bearing to the cultural practices of the people of Karnataka, it can assist scholars in understanding key concepts associated with death, especially suicides and terminal illnesses. It helps in understanding how and why rituals are performed.

**Vitebsky Piers, (1993)** *Dialogues with the dead: The discussion of mortality among the Sora of eastern India*. This publication focuses on the study of religion and psychology in tribal India and looks at the unique form of dialogue between the living and the dead, conducted through the medium of a shaman in trance. This helped in understanding some of the practices of the Zulu who look up to *sangomas* (traditional healers) for similar reasons, especially in interpreting dreams of the ancestors. The author shows how the dead sometimes nurture their living descendants, yet at other times they inflict upon them the very illnesses from which they have died.

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<sup>15</sup> Is the name of an ancient Indian genre (or a group of related genres) of Hindu or Jain literature. They primarily are post-Vedic texts containing a narrative of the history of the Universe, from creation to destruction, genealogies of the kings, heroes and demigods, and descriptions of Hindu cosmology, philosophy and geography.

<sup>16</sup> Are the analysis of stone tools and other chipped stone artifacts using basic scientific techniques.

**Radcliffe-Browne A.R. (1922) *The Andaman Islanders*.** The book is based on research carried out in the Andaman Islands in the years 1906 to 1908. When this work was being written anthropologists and ethnologists were concerned either with formulating hypothesis as to the origins of institutions or with attempts to provide hypothetical reconstructions of the details of cultural history. The different chapters are written with the intention of explaining the ‘meaning’ and the ‘function’ of rites and myths without giving any definitions. The author explains that the meaning of a word, a gesture, a rite, lies in what it expresses, and this is determined by its associations within a system of ideas, sentiments and mental attitudes.

The book also provided the researcher with some interesting methodological approaches to conduct research in tribal societies which was valuable in the approaches towards the Zulu community.

## **2.5 Recapitulation**

This chapter focuses on the theoretical framework used as a basis for the research undertaking. In this regard the Theory of the Anthropology of Geste and Rhythm of Marcel Jousse and the Rites of Passage theory of Arnold van Gennep were discussed in great detail. The second part of this chapter outlined the methodology used to conduct the research. This was followed by a literature review which focused on worldviews of prominent anthropologists on aspects relating to death and its associated rituals as well as ancestor veneration.

## **SECTION B - ZULU DEATH RITUALS**

### **CHAPTER 3**

#### **HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE ZULU NATION**

##### **3.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, the various factors that contributed to the emergence of the Zulu Nation in South Africa is discussed. The rise of King Shaka Zulu and other important figures and the roles they have played in the character of the Zulu is also discussed in great detail. This forms the backdrop for a study of the cultural practices of the Zulu people which will be discussed in later chapters.

##### **3.2 Historical development of the Zulu Nation**

The presence of Bantu speaking populations in the Eastern part of South Africa as far as the Kei River can be attributed to archaeological findings of about 450 sites found during the period, 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. and 1000 A.D. Artefacts, pottery, and the shapes of villages' bear testimony to the presence of Bantu in this region. Research has shown that the migrations of the Bantu people of Natal and Zululand as it was then known was from the north. Dates and exact details of these migrations are not known, but they have been derived from tribal legends and genealogies as well as from the written records of survivors of shipwrecks and of early travellers.

Before the rise of King Shaka<sup>1</sup>, the history of the small Zulu clan is linked with that of other northern Nguni groups. The Zulu people are the descendants of a very ancient population, which about 6 000 years ago, lived north-west of the equatorial rain forest and started migrating towards the south about 2 000 years ago. The Zulu of Kwa-Zulu Natal belong to the larger Nguni linguistic group whose origin is lost in an oral tradition that precedes recorded history. The Nguni population in the East Coast comprised of a small clan, of approximately 20 000. The Zulu reality was there, but in a different form. The Zulu recognize themselves as *Amazulu*<sup>2</sup>, who claim some form of origin from original Zulu ancestors. According to Bryant (1929) as quoted by Canonici (1996:1), the most ancient ancestor was thought to be *Malandela* (1597-1691), whose kingdom was split between his two sons; *Qwabe* and Zulu (1627-1709), who was succeeded by *Phunga* (1657-1727) and *Mageba* (1667-1745). *Mageba* was succeeded by *Ndaba* (1697-1745), then by *Jama* (1727-1781), the father of *Senzangakhona* (1757-1816), of *Mmama* and *Mnkabayi*. *Senzangakhona* was succeeded in turn, by his three sons: *Shaka* (1757-1828), who ruled from (1816 to 1828); *Dingane* (ruled 1828-1840); *Mpande* (ruled 1840-1872).

### 3.3 The Rise of King Shaka

The rise of King Shaka was the beginning of a revolution, in the history of Southern Africa, that affected the lives of many communities, from the Eastern Frontier of the Cape to as far north as Lake Tanganyika. One of the most important results of the life of Shaka was that he united the Zulu Nation, which was to remain intact until 1887, when it was brought under colonial rule.

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<sup>1</sup> A Zulu leader who is widely credited with transforming the Zulu tribe from a small clan into the beginnings of a nation that held sway over the large portion of Southern Africa between the Phongolo and Mzimkhulu rivers. His military prowess and destructiveness have been widely credited.

<sup>2</sup> The name "Amazulu" is taken from the Zulu language word for the Zulu people.

King Shaka built on the work of Dingiswayo. By organizing age groups into regiments and stationing them in the Royal Household, Shaka was able to successfully inspire his subjects to a great deal of loyalty to himself, his regiment and most importantly to the Zulu Nation. The common language and culture helped to unite the Zulu nation. Despite the defeat of the Zulu army in the late nineteenth century, the unity of the people remains. This effect is still felt today as is evident in most Zulu practices.

According to Canonici (1996:1), the Zulu as a cultural group is a rather recent historical reality. He claims that only at the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, through the military genius and power of King Shaka, that a great nation was forged out of the many Nguni-speaking clans living in KwaZulu-Natal. Shaka was able to amalgamate the Nguni clans into tribes because of the following:

- His military strategy was based on attacking the enemy in a buffalo-horns formation. The soldiers walked bare-foot and were taught to use the short stabbing assegai instead of the traditional long throwing spear. This forced them to combat at close quarters, where there was no salvation for the weak or coward.
- He amalgamated the clans into a Zulu national system by creating military regiments, based on age groups, which cut across the various clans.
- He imposed the Zulu language from his own dialect, *Mntungwa*, which has become the main form of spoken Zulu.

- Because of his many successes, he was able to attract a large following. Everybody likes to identify with a successful leader. There was loyalty to the regiment, loyalty to the king and loyalty to the nation.



Fig 4. Image of King Shaka, the King of the Zulu Nation.  
Reference: [www.eshowe.com](http://www.eshowe.com), Shaka Zulu

The main purpose of King Shaka's reforms was to bring together the numerous tribes of the Nguni into a single Zulu nation, which he named after his own forefather, Zulu. All power was concentrated in his person as King and Chief Commander. All his subordinates were automatically regarded as members of the Zulu nation, and were required to adopt the Zulu language and customs.

While unity was taking place under the leadership of Shaka, there was evidence of splinter groups in the fringes. This has resulted in differences in dialects, sounds, local traditions, dress, beadwork and a choice of colours. Evidence of this is found today in the daily practice of the Zulu. While there are some ceremonies that are the same at national level, there are customs that are different at local level because of previous traditions. Therefore, it is not surprising to find that death rituals that take are performed in the North Coast of KwaZulu-Natal may differ from

the ceremonies that are performed in the South Coast of KwaZulu-Natal or in Northern KwaZulu-Natal. According to Govender (2002:64) there may be different types of manifestations in the application of religious and social ceremonies, but they all have the same meaning.

### **3.4 The Development of Zulu identity**

During the beginning of 1815, the Zulu identity became more prominent than other Bantu identities. This was because the Zulu kingdom displaced the Mthethwa kingdom and conquered dozens of other smaller kingdoms and communities. Culturally, these communities already had much in common. Similarities of culture and mutually intelligible language extended south to the Xhosa, Mpondo, Thembu, Xesibe and Bhaca kingdom. The expansion of political powers, such as the Zulu and Swazi kingdoms, created new identities for many people in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

During the 1830s, when the Zulu kingdom was still relatively new, the conquest of whites during the colonization process had a remarkable influence on the cultural identity of the Zulu nation. White conquest took decades resulting in many chiefdoms remaining in the independent Zulu kingdom while others came under the British colony of Natal. Many people and chiefs, only recently conquered by the Zulu kingdom, fled into Natal, rejecting political Zulu identity, although retaining cultural affinity. However, as all Zulu-speaking people came under white South African rule, and as white rule became more oppressive, evolving into apartheid, the Zulu identity and memories of the powerful independent kingdom became a unifying focus of cultural resistance.

The Zulu who constitute about seven million are the single largest ethnic group in South Africa today. The majority of Zulus are found in the Province of Kwa-Zulu Natal while others have settled in various parts of South Africa. The Zulus have a relative linguistic and cultural homogeneity and a proud military past, centred on the monarchy. Shaka was assassinated in 1828 by his half brother Dingane. A long line of descendants links these historic figures with the current monarch, King Goodwill Zwelithini who was installed in 1971 and is recognized and supported by the Provincial Government of Kwa-Zulu Natal.

It would be wrong to relate the pervasive cultural nationalism of KwaZulu-Natal simply to the historical existence of the Zulu Kingdom, the most powerful and cohesive state in Southern Africa, in the nineteenth century. According to Marks (1989:216),

...twentieth century ethnic consciousness is not an unmediated transmission of innate and immutable past values and culture.

Barrington Moore (1967:485-6) reminds us that:

Culture or tradition.... is not something that exists outside of or independently of individual human beings living together in society.... The assumption of inertia, that cultural and social continuity do not explain, obliterates the fact that both have to be recreated anew in each generation, often with great pain and suffering.... To speak of cultural inertia is to overlook the concrete interests and privileges that are served by indoctrination, education and the entire complicated process of transmitting culture from one generation to the next.

The customs, traditions and language of a society provide an excellent window into the social fabric of that society. This contributes to a better understanding of the needs and aspirations of groups and individuals, which makes it easy for transmission of cultural values. By quoting Marks (1978) he further argues that by using the building blocks of past history, language and

'custom', the black intelligentsia of Natal were able to introduce a twentieth century ethnic consciousness through intense ideological labour. This had a tremendous influence on the white ideologies of South Africa, which were designed to confront new and dangerous social conditions. The paradoxes in this situation are apparent when it is appreciated that it was the Christian African Community – the *amakholwa* ('the converted'), many of whose forbears had fled the Zulu kingdom in the nineteenth century, who forged the cultural ethnic organisations in the twentieth century. Thus, Solomon kaDinizulu, the son and heir of the last Zulu king, founded the first Inkatha movement, (1989:217). Marks (1978: 190-3), found that the origin of the Inkatha<sup>3</sup> in 1922-4 owed as much to the deliberate reconstruction by the Zulu royal family and the intelligentsia of 'traditional' institutions as to any spontaneous reaction of the Zulu people.

In 1937, Albert Luthuli, later to become President of the ANC, founded the Zulu Cultural Society. In its origins, it shared Inkatha's objective of fighting for state recognition of the Zulu Royal house as paramount and added to it a concern for the preservation of Zulu tradition and custom at a time when these seemed to be disintegrating in the face of the pressures of proletarianisation and urbanization, according to Marks (1978:217). He added that with the Zulu Regent, Mshiyeni KaDinizulu, and the South African Minister of Native Affairs as patrons, the society was par excellence, an instrument of the Zulu Christian intelligentsia.

The social disintegration of the Zulus attained a degree of urgency in the 1930's. In Natal, from the beginning of the twentieth century, white missionaries and administrators had deplored the

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<sup>3</sup> Zulu name for the sacred 'grass coil', symbol of the Zulu nation. The Inkatha National Cultural Liberation Movement founded by Dr. Mangosuthu Buthelezi in 1975 had some of its roots in the cultural organization, "Inkatha", established by King Solomon in the 1920's.

disintegration of 'tribal discipline' as Africans were increasingly proletarianized and in contact with whites in town.

Marks quoting from the (Blue Book on Native Affairs, 1904) revealed that as early as 1904, James Stuart, then Assistant Magistrate in Durban, and to become one of the foremost recorders of African oral tradition, outlined what he saw as a 'crisis' resulting from the 'multifarious commercial tendencies' which were acting to transform African 'ancient habits and customs, their beliefs and modes of being' (1989:219).

The complexities of the traditionalism, which imbued the ethnic ideologies, should not be underestimated. While proclaiming the virtues of their past and the wholesomeness of traditions, the 'new African' was too much a product of the mission station and western culture to give unreserved approval to an unconditional; return to 'tribal' life.

Rev. John Dube, on being pressed by one of the Commissioners at the Native Economic Commission in 1930 whether he could 'reconcile the tribal system with progress', replied

Well, it is the only thing we have and I think that if it were properly regulated, it would be the best. The tribal system has many advantages and I cannot get away from it. It is under the tribal system that our Natives hold the land and, if I want land, I must associate the occupation of the land with the tribal system... (1930-32 Native Economic Commission, Evidence, 6268), quoted by Marks (1989:221)

Despite Dube's adherence to the Zulu Monarchy and his key role in the Zulu society, he did not have unconditional support for the 'tradition'. This can be attributed to the influence of Christianity on the social system of the Zulu. As late as 1925, he categorically denounced the

practice of *lobola*,<sup>4</sup> which was by this time gaining acceptance by white missionaries and administrators as a protection for woman:

The women who respond more quickly to the preaching of the gospel are confronted with the difficulties of *lobola*. This custom is a great hindrance to the spread of the Gospel. So long as our women are looked upon as an asset of commercial value, so long will the native be retarded. An unprejudiced diagnosis of the custom show that it is the root of many things that hamper the progress of the Native people.... Why is that the natives who have worked on the farms of Europeans since boyhood...? So soon as they return to home they revert to their old sluggish habits, saying I bought my wife to do all my work? Those who have learnt to cook for the best white families, when back in their homes do not even attempt to improve old time methods. All this can be traced to the evil of *lobola*. (Report of the Sixth General Missionary Conference of South Africa held in Johannesburg June30- July 3), quoted by Marks (1989: 222)

An appendix to the Charter of the Zulu Society published in 1939 as quoted by Marks (1989: 224) captures the flavour of the thinking related to Zulu tradition, asserting that ‘Not all customs are suitable in modern times, but instead of thoughtless elimination, there should be “the substitution of something better”.

In addressing the disintegration of the fabric of Zulu life under the impact of proletarianization and urbanization during the 1930’s, Marks reveals that there was great concern. In particular, as the Charter of Zulu Society makes clear, there was the fear that the ‘departure from wholesome Zulu traditions’ meant a lack of discipline in the home. Particularly ‘alarming’ was the loss of control over women, as ‘mothers’ of ‘our leading men, chiefs and counsellors, and over the young, who’ by force of circumstances, leave their homes at an early age to work in towns and to attend schools.’ (1989:225)

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<sup>4</sup> Is a traditional southern African dowry custom whereby the man pays the family of his fiancée for her hand in marriage. The custom is aimed at bringing the two families together, fostering mutual respect, and indicating that the man is capable of supporting his wife financially and emotionally.

The fear that the Zulu would be regarded as primitive, the desire to appear 'respectable', and sensitivity to racist stereotypes of African culture were dominant also in the words of K.G. Msimang extracted from the Natal Native Teacher's Journal, January 1949. And quoted by Marks (1989:231)

.... the African people must be careful not to keep on with customs and beliefs of ancestors, which will make them laughing stock. It is no secret that many people of the other nationalities like to see some of the dances because, as they say, they like to see a bunch of baboons performing, or because they want to see something 'wild' or 'primitive'. No matter to which race we belong, we must remember that all things are not necessarily good because they have come down from our ancestors....

However, Percy Ndhlovu had a different opinion on psychological colonisation as reported in the Natal Native Teacher's Journal, April 1949 and quoted by Marks (1989:232)

... That there are those among educated and civilized Africans who have such an inferiority complex that they imagine their own fellow men are looked upon as monkeys or baboons when they indulge in primitive dancing is lamentable. The civilized and educated African should see no shame or disgrace in trying to uplift his wild fellow men by selecting what is good and rejecting what is bad. When these dances were in full swing morals were far better than they are at present...

In the same way that *isiZulu*<sup>5</sup> has grown out of an original African language, Zulu culture has grown from a common African culture through a double process of selection and assimilation of what is originally African and of elements adopted and adapted from the various populations with which the people have come in contact during their long migration journeys to the south.

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<sup>5</sup> Is a language of the Zulu people with about 10 million speakers, the vast majority (over 95%) of whom live in South Africa. Zulu is the most widely spoken home language in South Africa (24% of the population) as well as being understood by over 50% of the population. It became one of South Africa's 11 official languages in 1994 at the end of apartheid.

### 3.5 Zulu Kinship

The ideas of kinship and the family play an important part in traditional Zulu society and influence almost every aspect of their culture. The description of the Zulu kinship system and the principles underlying it is a useful starting-point in any study of Zulu life. The bonds of kinship, which is prevalent amongst the Zulu, are very extensive and serve to bring together and knit into a group, different people. This is done by means of the classificatory system of relationship and the sib or clan, which is an outstanding feature of the Zulu social structure. Within the context of the *umndeni* (localized segment) and extended family, the house-property complex provides the means by which marriage; property relations, social affiliation, rank and status are organized.

The laws and customs (*imithetho namasiko*) form the most important code of conduct in any Zulu society. In traditional Zulu Society, the King in Council (*Ibandla*)<sup>6</sup> laid down the laws and anyone who broke the law was liable to punishment either by death or by the payment of a fine. The customs on the other hand arise from what the whole nation has been observing with respect for a very long time to be the accepted practice. The revival of traditional customs in African society is intended as a manifestation of the African renaissance, a practical reclaiming of those elements of African culture that will help restore the moral fibre that has been disturbed by outside elements such as colonization etc.

According to Taldykin (2005:2) the traditional beliefs and practices of the Zulu people have developed in a way which promotes social harmony among its members.

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<sup>6</sup> Zulu name for a tribal council, assembly, and the members thereof.

People tend to obey customs much more readily than the law. In modern Zulu society, some customs have fallen away due to Western influence and Christianity. According to Ramji (1998:1), within each ethnic group, there are different pockets, characterized by social class, education, religious and political beliefs, and occupational background. He further states that like any other continent, the people in the region have been exposed both positively and negatively, to other cultural, educational, medical, nutritional and religious influences including Christianity and Islam for more than 500 years. However, when one takes into consideration the death of a person in a specific region, the differences in ethnic groups are less important than the similarities which stem from having lived in the same general geographic area, under similar socio-economic circumstances, and exposed to similar health conditions.

However, despite the cultural diffusion of Western thought and religion among the Zulu people, traditional thinking, according to Berglund (1976), is not only still very much present in Zulu society, but is receiving more and more attention especially by those who live in rural areas. Perhaps the survival of indigenous belief systems is due in part to the fact that in times of crisis, people turn to tradition as a comfort and as a means of unifying themselves. Considering the social trauma associated with colonialism and apartheid, the Zulu responded by clinging more tenaciously to their heritage as a means of psychological survival in a society which systematically degraded and disrespected them as a people. Berglund (1976) points out that it is the rituals and symbols of a society which express the relationships between members of that society and makes living in that society a meaningful experience.

*Ukuhlonipha*, the respect pattern of behaviour among the Zulus still exist today in one form or

the other. This behavioural mode plays a very significant role in uniting the Zulu community in a multicultural society. The strongest bonds holding individuals together in traditional African society is the descent from a common ancestor. According to Gluckman (2005:8), their social organization is built up largely on the basis of kinship for members of the same lineage tend to live in the same village or at least close to one another in the same area.

Africa has a very rich heritage of what past generations of African peoples thought, did, experienced and passed on to their children. This heritage forms a long line which links African forefathers and mothers with their descendants who now feel proud of it. A study of such a rich heritage makes it possible to see and understand something of the people who lived not only a short while ago, but several hundred or thousand years ago (1975:2).

### **3.6 The transmission of Zulu culture**

Furthermore it must be understood that the African heritage in South Africa like in other parts of the continent is rich but not uniform. There are many similarities in the cultural practices among the different linguistic groups, but there are also differences from time to time, from place to place, and from people to people. Some of this heritage originated on African soil; it is, therefore, genuinely African and indigenous. But some developed through contact with peoples of other countries and continents. (1975:3). These practices have been transmitted orally through many ages through the medium of stories, proverbs etc. According to Mbiti (1975:8),

Stories, proverbs, riddles, myths and legends are found in large numbers among the African peoples. They have been handed down orally. Some of them are a record of actual events, but most of them are created by people's imaginations.....Myths are often a way of explaining certain things. For example, some myths

explain how death came into the world.

The rituals and worship patterns of the Zulu people have been largely responsible for shaping the character and culture of African peoples throughout the centuries. Although the types of ritual or the method of performance is not found in any sacred books, it is embedded in the memory of the people and is subsequently passed on from generation to generation.

Great importance is attached to death as an anthropological milestone in the traditional Zulu society. In this regard, many complex and even long rituals and ceremonies are associated with death and ancestor worship. In every Zulu society like in other African societies people are very sensitive to what is done when there is a death in the family. Death marks a physical separation of the individual from other human beings. This is a radical change, and the funeral rites and ceremonies explained in the ensuing chapters are intended to draw attention to that permanent separation.

### **3.2 Recapitulation**

In this chapter the historical development of the Zulu nation was traced in order to provide a background to the study of the customs and traditions of a nation that is steeped in oral tradition as will be discussed in the next three chapters with the focus on death rituals and ancestor veneration. Reference was made to the different research approaches and archaeological findings that provide a valuable insight to a group that forms the largest percentage of the population in Kwa-Zulu Natal. The role of Shaka in the formation of this tribe was also highlighted.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE PROCESS AND RITUALS CARRIED OUT WHEN A ZULU PERSON IS ON HIS/HER DEATH BED

#### 4.1 Introduction

In this chapter the processes and rituals carried out when a Zulu person is on his/her death bed is described. The Zulu concept of God is analyzed and the different belief systems outlined. The roles of traditional healers as mediators are also discussed.

Music, dance, and rituals play an important role in Zulu life. Birth, death, and marriage are all occasions for major celebrations that often include the ritual slaughter of an animal. Small goats are often raised expressly for this purpose. The beginning of a new harvest is also marked by major festivities. Dances are performed for many occasions and represent unity among the village.

The Zulu believe in one supreme god, whom they call *uNkulunkulu*,<sup>1</sup> but this god is thought to have less influence on their lives than the ancestor spirits. According to West et al (1975:48) it is believed that the Supreme being or God also known as *uMvelinqangi*,<sup>2</sup> lives up above (*eZulwini*) along with the Goddess often referred to as 'princes of the sky' (*inkosazana yezulu* or

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<sup>1</sup> Is the creator god and great ancestral spirit of the Zulu people. Unkulunkulu is believed to have grown on a reed in the mythical swamp of Uhlanga. In the isiZulu language, the name means "the very great/high one".

<sup>2</sup> According to indigenous belief the creator *uMvelinqangi*, appointed the ancestors (the amaDlozi) to be the protectors and helpers of the living.

*uNomkhubulwane*). The spirits of the deceased live below, hence, they are referred to as ‘those underneath’ (*abaphansi*). Both the deities who live above are remote and are rarely invoked. The ancestors therefore, play an important role in the lives of the living as they are concerned with the day-to-day activities of the people. In fact, according to the Zulu people they do not die but move to the world underneath, *buya kwelabaphansi* (Vilakazi 1965:89).

The approaches towards the worship of ancestral spirits in traditional Zulu society are somewhat uniform. However, there are a few variations in thinking which can be attributed to the differences in rural and urban settings and the tendency for the urbanized Zulu to be more influenced by western thinking, resulting in the practices to be more sophisticated.

#### **4.2 Practices carried out when a Zulu person is on his/her deathbed**

When a Zulu person is on his/her deathbed, there are a number of processes that take place in order to solicit divine intervention.

According to Bryant (1967:711),

A Zulu family head, if stricken with mortal illness when on a journey, was always brought home to die, carried upon a rough stretcher of wicker-work (*ūHlaka*); and if stricken at home, he was always carried to the principal hut.

Firstly, the cause of illness may be traced. Some of the family members may go to the *sangoma* (diviner) to find out the cause of the problem. The role of a diviner in traditional Zulu society is absolutely essential. Diviners are called *umngoma*, if male and *isangoma* if female. It is the

diviners who interpret the sentiments of the ancestral spirits to the lineage members. The decision to consult the *sangoma* is reached by the prominent family members after they have tried all means available to get the sick normal. In other words this happens after the sick person has been taken to *Nyanga's*<sup>3</sup> (indigenous healers) for help. The *sangoma* may perform the *ukubhula* (the diviners' way of communicating with the *amadlozi* (ancestral spirits) with the intention of immensely detecting the cause of the problem.

The *sangoma* performs the *ukubhula* in front of the people who consults him/her. After an intense ceremony which includes the throwing of bones and the analysis thereof, the *sangoma* discloses the problem or the cause of the illness and tells the family members concerned, to go back and carry out certain rituals that may be identified as the main cause of the illness. Either these are considered remedial rituals to assist the sick to heal quickly or to hasten the person towards death in order to be connected to the ancestors.



Fig.5 Sangoma analysing bones for the purpose of interpretation.  
Reference: [www.eshowe.com](http://www.eshowe.com), Sangoma Healing Ceremony & Initiations

<sup>3</sup> Literally "the man of the trees") is a Zulu word for a traditional healer. An *inyanga* is an herbalist who is concerned with medicines made from plants and animals, while a *sangoma* relies primarily on divination for healing purposes. The knowledge of the *inyanga* is passed through the generations from parent to child.

When a person is sick and is on his deathbed the family come together to beg and talk to the ancestors for the sick person to live and not suffer and die. This is done in the form of a prayer. If this does not help the witchdoctors are consulted for some medicine to assist the sick person.

According to Ramji (1998:1), Zulu speaking people in South Africa believe that a person exists as a totality – as a whole physical and spiritual being. The body forms the spiritual aspects complemented by the spirit. He adds that when a person is sick, both the body and spirit are affected, and for health to return, it is believed that both physical and spiritual treatment is necessary. Ramji (1998:1) states that the physical side of most sickness is best treated by modern medicine as much research has been done in this field. However, when it comes to the spiritual side, this is best understood and treated by the *sangomas* (traditional healers).

#### **4.3 After the *sangoma* has been consulted**

After returning from the *sangoma*, the burning of the *impepho*<sup>4</sup> is performed. This act is a means of communicating with the ancestors. An appeal is made to the ancestors by the head of the family or an old woman to be present as the remedial rituals are performed. By this time, the *amadlozi* are informed that their complaints are at this stage known, and they are asked to soothe or remove illness from the sufferer. The *amadlozi* are further informed that the pending ritual that has been identified by the *sangoma* will be carried out.

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<sup>4</sup> Impepho is a traditional African herb burnt as incense by the diviners in order to attract the attention of the ancestors. Having a variety of Traditional uses, Western practitioners have made use of it for cleansings and spirit contact work.



Fig. 6 Impepho, traditional African herb  
Reference: [www.vuya.net](http://www.vuya.net), *Impepho*

On completion of the ritual, the beast to be slaughtered is also reported to the ancestors before it is slaughtered, depending on the nature of the ritual that the *sangoma* has identified. The sick person may recover depending on the extent and nature of the illness and the anger of the ancestors.

A situation may arise when the sick person may not recover. In this case, the family after consultation with the elders and other members of the family pray for the death of the individual in order to be relieved from ceaseless pains. According to Ramji (1998:2),

It has been observed by many people that when an elderly person is so ill that death is inevitable, the family develops a positive or accepting attitude to the death. In a sense mourning begins before death when the family accepts death as inevitable. The family will have done all that is possible as far as treatment is concerned – they will have tried both spiritual and traditional medicine and modern medicine.

In most cases an African person prefers a slow and lingering death not through the aid of a machine but a natural prolongation of the dying process so that he or she could make their peace, say farewell to friends and relatives, and give final instructions to immediate relatives. Although it rarely occurs today in our modern cities with its sanitized hospitals, death is preferred in one's home with the family providing comfort to the dying person. In traditional cultures, the family

comes together and children are involved in the conversation. The dying person is comforted and encouraged to embrace death with dignity.

In this modern age there have been some modifications to the rituals that are performed for a dying person. It must be noted in many cases people die in hospitals because of a variety of reasons. Certain illnesses require hospitalization and it is often difficult for working families to offer the same support for the seriously ill patient. There is also the belief in African society that a dying person taints the house. Traditionally if a person dies in a hut, that hut has to be pulled down after the funeral (Nyawose 2000:11). In modern society municipal laws do not allow for such practices. To satisfy this need an *inyanga* (herb doctor) is consulted who cleanses the homestead after a person has died at home.

Some hospitals do not allow any traditional practices to be performed because of certain health protocols. However in recent times hospitals are becoming more and more sensitive to the cultural needs of patients and allow rituals. The Hospices in South Africa which provides facilities for the terminally ill patients encourage family members to perform traditional rituals for the dying person. They also provide basic ritual ingredients for family members. Many private and some government hospitals transfer a person who is on his/her death bed to a private ward to enable family members to perform the necessary rituals. This is part of the palliative care programme which is being supported by hospital authorities (Nair 2007: pc)

In the case of an old person, an ox or cow may be slaughtered. This ritual is referred to as *ukucelela ogulayo indlela* (to ask the way on behalf of the sick person) or *ukupha ogulayo*

*umphako wendlela* (the giving of food to the sick for the way). In most instances it is the sick person who usually requests for the liver of a beast which is then followed by slaughter. The sick person eats the liver, if he/she can and then dies afterwards. In some cases if the dying person is unable to eat, the liver is forced in his mouth. It is believed that the dying person must eat his farewell supper. The family in the mean time stands beside the dying person to offer support during the last moments. It is also a symbol of accepting the reality and the family's willingness to part with the dying person.

Should the person concerned not die after having been given the *umphako wendlela* (food for the way) a humble approach is made by some of the family members who ask the dying person to confess if he/she has a guilty conscience due to some evils that the person may have committed before. The confession and the anticipated death will have a bearing on the opportunity to unite with the ancestors. Although everyone becomes a shade (ancestral spirit), not every spirit is let into the community of ancestral spirits. For example, those who have committed an offence and not confessed it before death are not allowed into the community of ancestral spirits.

After confession, the person may then die. Ramji (1998:2) says,

When the timely death of the elderly occurs, the family will simply say she or he has been relieved of the pain or suffering and is resting from pain.

It must be noted that the ritual for slaughtering a cow or goat for food for the way, *umphako*, does not apply to a young person. When a young Zulu person is sick, whether slightly or seriously, it is hoped that the person will recover. A young person's death is accepted only when

he/she has died, and not beforehand. If all attempts to assist a sick person to recover fail, than the reality of death must be accepted and the necessary rituals performed to unite the deceased with the *amadlozi* as will be discussed in the next chapter.

#### **4.4 Recapitulation**

In this chapter an outline of the processes that are carried out when a Zulu person is on his/her death bed are described. The different belief systems; the concept of god and the role of traditional healers are also introduced.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE PROCESS AND RITUALS CARRIED OUT WHEN A ZULU PERSON DIES

#### 5.1 Introduction

There are a number of rituals that are performed when a Zulu person dies to ensure that the soul of the dead person moves easily into the world of the ancestors. In this way, the family retains link between the living world and the world of the ancestors without losing contact. According to Ramji (1998:1), the spirits inhabit all natural things at every home. He further elaborates that,

...for the Zulu speaking people, death is a mystery associated with the other world from which people come into the world at birth and to which they return in spirit form on death. The cessation of life in this world is believed to mean the continuity of life in the other world. Life is explained as starting in this world, although it is said to be initiated from the other world. Death is regarded and moreover accepted as inevitable.

In this regard, people do not deny but make a distinction between two types of deaths, timely and untimely deaths.

Timely death is regarded as the inevitable passing on of the elderly to the next world or simple expressed as going 'home'. The home referred to is that of the ancestors of the lineage underground according to Ramji (1998:2). This type of death presupposes a number of children and grandchildren who survive the deceased. In isiZulu, it is referred to as *ukugoduka*, *ukudlula*, *ukuhamba* and *ukuqhubeka*, which all give notions of a passing on, a continuation. (Berglund 1976: 79)

Untimely death which is described as *ukufa*, *ukubhubha*, and *ukugqibuka* which imply a sudden disruption of the cycle of life is mainly due to unnatural causes. It is often regarded as a serious interference in a human's life. The cause of death in this case is often attributed to acts of witchcraft or sorcery which is motivated by envy, jealousy and anger. Medicine is then used to harm victims. If witchcraft is suspected remedial measures are undertaken to prevent the corpse from becoming a *Zombie*<sup>1</sup> (a lifeless, supernatural spirit). *Insizi*<sup>2</sup> is either used to smear the corpse or inserted in a cut made on the corpse. Sometimes *insizi* is also placed in the closed fist of the dead person as a weapon to protect him against wizards. In some cases the corpse is sprinkled with goat's bile before being transferred to the coffin. *Umuthi* (traditional medicine) is also used to repel evil spirits from entering the body (Nyawose 2000:12).

Ramji (1998:2) believes that information as to the cause of untimely death is often sought from the traditional healers and the religious leaders who will, in addition to indicating its origin, say that preventative measures are to be taken to straighten the living and enhance ancestral protection.

In traditional Zulu society, when a person dies, the relationship of his immediate and extended family are altered. This relationship is reconstituted with properly structured funeral rituals. The ritual of death ceremonies provides them with a social reaction to this new situation adapted to their special relationship to the deceased. The rites are intended to send off the departed peacefully, to sever his links with the living, and to ensure that normal life continues among the

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<sup>1</sup> Is a reanimated corpse. Stories of zombies originated in the Afro-Caribbean spiritual belief system of Vodou, which told of the dead being raised as workers by a powerful sorcerer.

<sup>2</sup> Powder from charred herbs, roots or animal medicine. It is always black. Possesses the ability to render the evil of sorcery ineffective.

survivors (Mbiti 1975:121). Even though the spirit leaves the body, it is thought in many parts of Africa that for a while it lingers on around the body or homestead. For that reason, the right funeral rites must be performed to send it off, to enable it to go away, and to let it join other spirits (Mbiti 1975:124). It is also believed that sometimes the spirits of those who died away from their homes, or those who were not properly buried, may demand ritual transfer to their home compound or reburial of their remains. This message is normally relayed through dreams.

When a person dies his relationship with his fellows are affected by a number of factors including the mystical beliefs about the cause of death; by the actual manner of his death; and by the beliefs about death itself. Consideration of all these factors will result in the complicated death ceremonies. The ultimate aim of these ceremonies is to readjust and reconstitute the social relationships; the disposal of the body; reaction to the mystical causes and forces of death; the life of the spirit in the after world and the links of the after world with the world of the living.

Traditional Zulu make a distinction between three aspects of being. The *inyama* (physical body), the *umoya* (the spirit), and the *isithunzi* (the personality or character). Once the *umoya* is gone out of the body, which is dying, it is believed to naturally decay after being buried in the ground. The *umoya* and *isithunzi*, which are inseparable, are said to go *uya kwabaphansi*, those underneath.

After the announcement of a death in the family, the first thought of the surviving members of the family is to dispose of the corpse which is considered as a source of pollution in the kraal. According to Khumalo (2007: pc) when the person is certified dead it is customary for the

families or all the next of kin to come together to prepare for the funeral. However he goes on to say that only the females are allowed to prepare the corpse, males are not allowed to do this task. The males are responsible for taking the corpse to the grave.

According to Krige (1962:160), in the time of Kings Shaka and Dingane only kings, chiefs and soldiers of note were buried, others were simply abandoned in the bush. However this practice no longer exists because every member of the community is given a decent burial.

The nature and extent of the rituals will depend on the age, sex and status of the person in society. For example, a child is buried immediately following a brief ritual before the altar of the ancestors whereas the rituals associated with adults are more elaborate. When a child or unmarried person dies, the funeral ceremonies are simple and are attended by close relatives.

The body is buried reverently and the spirit commended to the ancestors. However, according to Krige (1962:60), the death of a kraal head is accompanied by much more elaborate rituals and a much more longer mourning period, for, the higher the status of the deceased, the greater is the blow to society and the longer it takes to restore equilibrium. For a chief or king, it is a national affair which involves the suspension of normal life in order that people may pay their last respects to their dead king or queen (Mbiti 1975:121).

Gluckman (2005:6) explains that there is no fixed process for funeral rites and variations from it; a death creates a different social situation according to the status, or manner of death, of the deceased, and each funeral involves the participation of different persons behaving in prescribed

ways.

There are also different variations of mourning depending on the status, age, sex and geographical location of the deceased. According to Elliot (1978:45) in the past it was tribal custom that when a kraal head or senior man dies, then his family keeps a rigid ritual of mourning in which they may not, for a time, till their lands, eat certain foods or do certain types of work.

According to studies undertaken by Maguda (2004:141), literature reveals that mourning rituals among the Nguni people are patriarchal and seems to have men's interests at heart. She further states that men make decisions for what is to be done by women. Maguda (2004:141) makes reference to Daber (2003) who states that in most African societies, the cultural rites of mourning and cleansing are gendered, discriminatory and life-threatening for women. Maguda (2004:141) further argues that,

...during *ukuzila* the women's feelings are ignored; women are expected to follow the instructions that are laid down for them by men. The tradition needs revision so that it is less oppressive, recognizes gender equality and is in line with the current legal developments in a democratic South Africa.

The mourning period (*ukuzila*)<sup>3</sup> normally begins at death. According to Krige (1962:166) it is strictest until burial when nothing at all may be done in the kraal, but it relaxes slightly towards the *iHlambo* about a month after death. A husband mourns for at least six months and a wife mourns for a year.

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<sup>3</sup> It is a social custom which means a particular activity which must be avoided or a religious custom that forbids a particular activity because it may offend God.

When a person dies, family members, women specifically, expatriate. It is believed that by screaming in response to death, *ifu elimnyama* (the back cloud), figuratively meaning death, will be terrified and takes time to come back again. Women's screaming draws the attention of the neighbours who then rapidly rush to the *umuzi*<sup>4</sup> where someone has died with the aim of rendering help to and consoling the bereaved family.

Immediately on the announcement of the death all relatives and close friends must be informed of the death in order for them to pay respects to the dead. It is believed that if family members are not informed of the death, it may have a negative effect on their lives. According to one informant, a family member lost his job because he had not been informed of the death of his child and had not therefore had a chance to throw a stone '*ukuphonsa igabade*' on the tomb or to purify himself.

The essence of a funeral is that it brings together all the family members, neighbours and friends. The funeral rites stress the family unity, largely in sacrifices which affirm the bond of the survivors, the dead and their common ancestors. According to Gluckman (2005:4),

Through all the rites run the expression of group unity. A funeral is the ceremony *par excellence* which all relatives must attend, lest they be suspected of causing the death by witchcraft. It is too the only ceremony when, if individuals are unavoidably absent, they are brought by proxy into the rites. Their belongings are purified for them and when they do return home, they must first ritually eat of food before they can enter the homestead.

The neighbours reach the *umuzi* (homestead) that experiences *ifu elimnyama* (death) with immediacy. On their arrival, they take the family members who are lamenting into the house

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<sup>4</sup> Zulu name for a family based village or homestead, also the people who live there. It is also a name of a rope-like plant that is used around the neck during mourning.

with the dead person. The children are then taken to other *izindlu* (houses) in a homestead. The neighbours and some of the family members start to take care of the *isidumbu* (corpse). The corpse is placed on the relevant side of the house. If the man dies, his corpse is laid on the right hand side of the Zulu hut and if it is a female, she is placed on the left hand side.

## 5.2 The processes that take place when a Zulu person dies

The wife whose husband has died should cover her whole body with a blanket; even her face should not be visible. The *umfelokazi* (widow) sits *ohlangothini lwabesifazane lwendlu yesiZulu* (on the side of the females in a Zulu hut) against the wall. She will stay in the hut until the funeral. The mourning wife sits on a mat in the same room where the corpse is placed. She is accompanied by female family members and women from the neighbourhood who provide support and encouragement to handle the trauma (Khumalo 2007: pc)

According to Khumalo (2007: pc) in the olden days the mourning wife covered herself in blankets as a sign of mourning and at night she would take the attire of her late husband and wear it. This act is to show that now that her husband is dead, she is now in charge of the home even though she is still mourning. Every body will come to her and ask for an advice even the children will come to her and ask for advice until the mourning stage is over. Furthermore, the wife will place an apron or skin (*isiphuku*) around her shoulder as a sign of mourning. However he adds that in present times, this is not done and the wife wears normal clothes.

Khumalo (2007: pc) and Mnguni (2006:173) also explains that near the corpse two kinds of mats are placed. A long one called *icansi* and the small one called *isicephu* where a set of clothes of the deceased are placed. After the funeral the clothing is wrapped in the big mat called *icansi* and put away until the mourning period is over when the clothes are distributed to family members.

Other family members and neighbours will perform the required tasks. Women brew *utshwala besiZulu* (Zulu beer) which will be drunk by men who will be tasked with preparing the grave.

On the other hand, when a woman dies, a widower just stays in the house with the corpse of the wife. He need not cover his body with a blanket as in the case of a widow.

### **5.3 Preparations after a Zulu person's death**

There are differences in the nature and extent of the funeral ceremonies for the deceased in the Zulu community.

In some cases the kist in which the dead person's clothes were kept is emptied and left open until he/she is buried. The kist is an important asset of a woman as it is a symbol of marriage and possession. It is not removed from the house with the corpse. In the olden days a box made of planks were used for the same purpose.



Fig. 7 An example of a kist – traditional symbol of Zulu marriage  
Reference: karongwefurniture.co.za, *Kist*

In a traditional funeral of olden days, Krige (1962:161) states that,

Before the corpse becomes stiff, the knees are drawn up under the chin, the arms are placed against the sides and the whole body bound firmly round with the blanket or hide or mat of the deceased. Then the corpse is placed in a sitting posture with the back to one of the supports of the hut and covered up from view until burial.

After death has been confirmed the corpse is washed, hair removed and then dressed. The eyes and mouth are closed to resemble sleep. The corpse is then laid out on a new mat in the inside of the hut and a long sheet is hung from the roof in order to create an atmosphere of privacy. This is in line with the theory of separation espoused by Van Gennep (1960). Traditionally, the corpse was positioned in a squatting position but in recent times the dead body is straightened. This can be attributed to the fact that in modern times the corpse is placed in a coffin and this can only be done if the body is in a straight position.

The death of a Zulu person is reported to the *induna*.<sup>5</sup> In the dawn of the funeral day, the *induna* alerts other people of the area about the reported death. The *induna* shouts loudly standing on a peak of the hill to make sure that his announcement is disseminated as far as he can. In the

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<sup>5</sup> Is a Zulu title meaning *advisor, great leader, ambassador, headman, or commander* of group of warriors. It can also mean *spokesperson or mediator* as the *izinDuna* often acted as a bridge between the people and the king

townships the message of the death of a person is relayed by councillors or by word of mouth. Funeral notices are also displayed at strategic places like shops or taverns or even placed in newspapers (Khumalo 2007: pc).

The night before the funeral is the night of the *umlindelo*<sup>6</sup>. During this period family members gather and sing traditional songs and reminisce about the deceased person. This practice was influenced by the introduction of Christianity. According to Krige (1962:163) on the day of the death, no one partakes in any food or water nor is any cooking done. Very little talking is permitted unless it is absolutely necessary.

In recent times the preference by most families is to have the funeral on a Saturday as it is convenient for family members who are working to attend the funeral. On Friday, a senior member of the family visits the mortuary in order to fetch and escort the deceased back home. According to Nyawose (2000:15), some carry with them a small twig of *umlahlankosi* or *umphafa*, (*Ziziphus mucronata*), a twig that is associated with the connecting power between the deceased and the surviving members of the family. This is a modification as, traditionally, the twig was used to integrate the deceased with other deceased family members who now reside in the ancestral kingdom.

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<sup>6</sup> The gathering of people at night to stay with the bereaved family in a house where there is a corpse which forms part of the night vigil.



Fig.8 A *umphafa* tree and a twig of *umphafa* used to connect to the ancestors  
Reference: SA National Biodiversity Institute (2007)

According to Young and Darrel (2004:2), in ancient times, when a person died far from home (often in battle), the elders of the family would send a party to ‘fetch the spirit’ of that person and the party would carry a branch from the *umphafa* tree. At the place where the person had died, they would call out his name and announce that they had come to take his spirit home. Similarly, it is said that if another was with the person when he died, he should carry a branch of the *umphafa* home from that place, to take the spirit of the dead person home to rest.

According to Mnguni (2006:173) the preparations for the funeral start even if the corpse is still at the mortuary. Traditional beer (*utshwala*)<sup>7</sup> is brewed and a beast to be slaughtered is identified. The gender of the beast must match the gender of the deceased. The beast is slaughtered on the very same day of the funeral.

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<sup>7</sup> Zulu name for the thick, creamy sorghum beer, which was especially rich in nutrients and formed a part of the staple diet.

On the day of the funeral, men of the area will come and assist by digging the grave. This task begins early in the morning. While the men are busy digging the grave, relatives, neighbours and some family members stay in the house with the corpse to wait for completion of the digging of the grave. The grave is normally dug by very close relatives, usually the brothers of the deceased or the eldest son as well as male neighbours. If the son is too young, he is assisted by the whole male neighbourhood.



Fig.9 Grave digging are performed by a male family member  
Reference: [www.eshowe.com](http://www.eshowe.com)

According to Gluckman (2005:4),

...the brothers who supported the dead man when he was alive have to give him their last office as gravediggers, and, where necessary, support the chief son, the heir, in his ritual observances. Part of the ceremony is directly to institute the heir and exhort him to behave well. The brothers are magically cleansed and purified for, since death is infectious, they are likely to follow the dead. Even their spears are contaminated; they are cleansed with medicines and, among the Zulu, formally used again in a ritual hunt.

Before the grave is dug, a member of the family will come with a spear (could be an older son or a brother) to indicate where the grave must be dug stabbing the spear into the soil as an

indication that that man was the head of the *kraal*<sup>8</sup>. The digging commences first two times by the son or brother than the other grave diggers continue. The spear will remain there until the grave is done (Khumalo 2007: pc).

Only after covering the grave with the soil, will the boy take out the spear and break it and put it in his clothes at home until the cleansing ceremony is performed. The breaking of the deceased person's spear is the sign that he is dead (his spear is broken). When the cleansing ceremony comes, this young man will repair the same spear and use it for hunting,

If the father of the Kraal or the head of the kraal (*uMnumzane*) dies, a beast will be killed (*hlatshwa'd*) early in the morning of the burial and not before. The reason for this practice is that according to the Zulu Custom, the cow (an ox or bull) must be slaughtered on the same day and be eaten and be finished on the same day, because, while the head of the kraal is still lying there, there mustn't be another corpse which is lying there at the same time (Khumalo 2007: pc). Another reason for killing the beast is to obtain the hide which is used to cover the corpse in preparation for burial. The skin was thoroughly cleansed with some type of manure to ensure that there were no diseases that may accompany the corpse. Khumalo (2007: pc) explains that traditionally, the Zulus did not use coffins but the corpse was buried with the skin of a bull. It is only in recent times that coffins have replaced the skins. However, he explains that skins were used only for the head of the kraal, for ordinary people, a blanket was used to cover the corpse instead of a coffin.

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<sup>8</sup> Is an Afrikaans and South African English word for an enclosure for cattle or other livestock, located within an African homestead or village surrounded by a palisade, mud wall, or other fencing, roughly circular in form.

Elliot (1978:45) explains that in the past, the Zulu embalmed their chiefs by encasing them in the hide of a freshly slaughtered ox and then placing them in front of the fire in their hut to dry out. It was only after this had been done could they be buried, because their bodies were no longer of any use to the witches who might otherwise have dug them for witchcraft and medicine.

According to Khumalo (2007: pc) when a body remains soft and flabby instead of stiffening, it is believed that this is as a result of witchcraft. It is said that somebody has done something to the deceased (*ukuthwebula*) where the person although dead is considered to be half dead. It is also believed that when the body is in this state it is an indication that another member of the family will soon follow. The body is then beaten up and scolded that it must be stiff and not flabby (*Qinisa umzimba*). This is remedied by engaging the services of a witchdoctor who will use *muti*<sup>9</sup>(medicine) and take care of the grave until the situation normalizes.

According to Bryant (1969:715), in traditional Zulu society, most Zulus were buried at home. The family head alone had the privilege of burial alongside the top of the cattle fold. Close family members of the clan were also buried within the kraal, at the back or sides of their respective family-huts, but their mothers, including the principal wife were always buried outside the kraal, behind the respective huts.

It is commonly believed in most societies that those who take their own lives have always been regarded with disapproval by most religions and this is reflected in the superstitions concerning them. According to Zulu custom, when the man has committed suicide, he is buried where the

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<sup>9</sup> Is a term for traditional medicine in Southern Africa as far north as Lake Tanganyika. The word *muti* is derived from the Zulu word for tree, of which the root is *-thi*. African Traditional medicine makes use of various natural products, many of which are derived from trees.

suicide was committed. There is also the belief that the deceased is buried outside the normal graveyard in an isolated manner. In the case of the death of Albinos the burials are normal but very secretive. The belief is that the body or skin of the Albino can kill other people (Khumalo 2007: pc).

According to Khumalo (2007: pc) the funeral for a person who died in an accident is similar to that of a person who committed suicide. They do not bring the corpse to the house because it is believed that by doing this; you will be bringing in bad luck. Even the clothes of the person are not brought back to the house of the deceased. He further explains that according to Zulu custom, the body that was involved in the accident was taken directly to the mortuary. When the corpse is brought to the home of the deceased for the funeral ceremony, it is kept in front of the gate until a goat is slaughtered. This is to communicate with the ancestors so that the soul of the deceased must be purified and also to prevent any further deaths in the family. The gall (*inyongo*), chime (*umswani*) and the blood of the goat is mixed with traditional medicine and water which symbolically represents the cleaning of the wounds before taking the corpse into the house (Mnguni 2006:183). The goat that is slaughtered first is not eaten but is buried in a separate grave. This will enable the bad spirit to go with the goat and not trouble the surviving members of the family.

For a person that has died violently the rituals are similar with a slight variation. An *Inyanga* (Zulu traditional healer) is used to perform the rituals which are done immediately after death or some time after burial (Nyawose 2000:13). He further explains that the manner in which the above rituals are performed depends on the *Inyanga*. In some cases, two goats are used for this

ritual which is normally done at the homestead and burial site. In the first instance, the goat is slaughtered outside the homestead. The *Inyanga* pronounces,

*Nasi isilwane (imbuzi). Umndeni uyakuhlansa amanxeba nezilonda edamini legazi ukuze wamukeleke kobabamkhulu nasezinyanyeni emadlozini*

Here is the goat. The family is cleansing your wounds from the pool of blood in order that you are accepted by your forefathers and ancestors...

The blood of the goat which is mixed with a little chime and *umuthi* will be sprinkled on top of the grave while a family member communicates with the dead person by saying,

*Size lapha ukuzokuhlansa izilonda namanxeba akho.*  
We have come to clean you today from your wounds...

The goat's meat will be cooked outside the homestead and shall be distributed to non family members.

The second goat is taken to the burial ground and is sacrificed in the memory of the dead person. An elder of the family pronounces,

*Ngalembuzi size ukuzolanda ukuba uhlanganyele nezinyanya kanye nomndeni wakho.*  
With this goat, we now have come to invite you to join the ancestors and your family...

Unlike the first goat, the meat of the second goat is cooked inside the hut and the family is allowed to eat the meat which must be thoroughly cooked without any sign of running blood in the homestead during this ritual (Nyawose 2000:14).

When a person dies by violent means (*ukufa ngengozi*), there is no night vigil as this will bring bad fate to the surviving members of the family. Among some tribes the corpse of a person who dies by lightning is buried near a river in cool soil as this unfortunate accident renders the victim ritually hot and therefore a target for lightning. Similarly, the corpse of a drowned victim is buried near a river. If this is not done, the belief is that the river will claim another victim (Nyawose 2000:20). Further to these rituals, other precautionary rituals will be undertaken by an *Inyanga* for the purpose of purification and cleansing.

There are also certain rituals that are performed for the purpose of revenge, especially when a person has been killed by stabbing or shooting. Most of the rituals performed for violent deaths described above will be performed. In addition, some families will put a black fowl treated with *umuthi* (traditional medicine) into the coffin with the dead body. The belief is that when the fowl suffocates to death, the person who was responsible for the death will suffer a horrible death (Nyawose 2000:22).

The funerals of *Amagents/ amaginsa* (Gangster) or *Abobabe* “molls” or affiliates of gangsters have a peculiar characteristic. According to Nyawose (2000:30) in such a funeral, a display, or exposure of power by the acquaintances are the order of the day. The sentiments expressed at the funeral are not normal as there is much hostility towards the deceased who is regarded as a traitor by leaving his friends and acquaintances behind. Nyawose outlines some of the characteristics of this type of funeral which includes; lighting candles along the road leading to the place of the deceased as part of a night vigil; chanting throughout the night; not allowing a priest to officiate at the funeral. Furthermore, on the way to the graveyard, the *Amagents* shoot

bullets in the air while the *Abobabes* ululate as they dangle from windows of luxury vehicles that are driven recklessly at great speeds. The cars are also spun around, raising clouds of dust as a symbol of solidarity with the deceased. At the end of the funeral one of the cars (normally a stolen one) is burnt to ashes and the remains are buried with the corpse. Because, they can't bury the car with the deceased, they normally put the remnants of the car as the belief is that the deceased will need it in his new life in heaven. It is similar to burying the corpse with his belongings (Nyawose 2000:31).

In the case of twins, Khumalo (2007:pc) explains that if one twin dies he is buried normally but before the deceased twin is buried, they put the surviving twin to lie in the grave first and then they bury the deceased one. The date and time of the funeral is kept a secret and the burial normally takes place in the early hours. All this is done to prevent the deceased from troubling the remaining twin.

Pickering (1995:478) explains that according to ancient traditions, it is believed that twins share one soul: and if one dies and rigor mortis does not set in the usual way, this is a sign that the dead twin is waiting for its partner to join it in the afterlife. It is for this reason that no animal is slaughtered until after the death of the second twin. This is because twins are regarded as one person. The belief is that the death will only be regarded as complete after both twins are dead. The spirit of the beast can not accompany the first twin but has to wait until the dual journey is completed (Nyawose 2000:19). Thus, there is no slaughter of a beast during the death of the first twin if the other is still alive. Water that is used for washing the twin that is still alive is poured into the grave of the deceased twin.

According to Berglund (1976:364) and Krige (1962:161) literature has shown that most burials in Africa, including that of the Zulus, have been conducted after sunset. This practice has stopped in recent times except for a few isolated instances, where the deceased have been buried at night in order to honour the dead person. The main reason for burying after sunset was mainly to protect the wizards from finding the burial spot. In the olden days the burial places were kept secret in order to prevent any acts of witchcraft which may affect the deceased as well as the surviving members of the family. Shangase (2006:101), however, states that in many instances the time of burial is at sunset if it is a male and before sunset if it is a female or a child.

When the men who are digging the grave have completed the task, they inform the family members about that. According to Khumalo (2007: pc) in modern times, food and drinks are prepared for the gravediggers as they set down to complete this task. However in olden days, none was prepared, because the grave was dug at dawn, in most cases at three o'clock in the morning, because during the time the burial was taking place as early as eight o'clock, but now that is why they are taking beer and that's why the grave will only get ready at two o'clock in the afternoon. During those days, when the grave was done people went straight to the river to wash their bodies and went straight to their homes and no parties were held unlike today where the emphasis is on parties. He further comments that in these days, people finish late digging the grave because they now start with the beer and get drunk before they start working on the grave.

After the grave is dug, the family members and relatives including neighbours are then asked to come and see the corpse before it is removed from the house to the grave. Only the face of the dead person is disclosed to allow people to see him/her for the last time. In the past, the body was prepared for burial by having the face washed with preparations of leaves of a smelling

shrub, and the head was shaved, the hair being buried with the body. However, in modern times all the hair is not removed. If it is *umnumzane* (the head of the family), who has died, his wife has to remove a little hair from his *abdulla oblongata* and, has to wash his face before he is taken to the graveyard. The body of the deceased is cleansed irrespective of the age and status of the deceased.

Traditionally, during the funeral ceremony, family members used to sit on grass mats or mattresses next to relatives and friends who are seated on chairs. However, in modern times, both the immediate family members and relatives and friends prefer to sit on chairs. The bereaved family occupies the front position next to the coffin followed by the church choir and other attendees.

According to Mnguni (2006:173), when the rituals are completed at home the corpse is taken to the grave to be buried. The wife of the deceased will then wash herself with the *muthi (intelezi)* which is mixed with the goats gall (*inyongo*). Community members and the relatives who were present will wash themselves with the *intelezi* as well.

It must be noted that in recent times people are encouraged to cremate the bodies because of the shortage of grave space. In eThekweni, for the past four years, city parks and cemetery officials have been on a mission to encourage people to cremate. According to Thembinkosi Ngcobo, the Head of Parks and Cemeteries in the eThekweni Municipality: “The shortage of grave sites was so serious that the council was forcing people to cremate” (Makhaye 2007:14). However in response to this, Prof Sihawu Ngubane, the Deputy Dean of Humanities at the University of

Kwa-Zulu Natal said that nothing will change people's belief with regard to burying or cremating. He further argues that,

People will tell you that from time immemorial, people were given a dignified send-off by being buried in the ground. They see cremation as tantamount to sending loved ones straight to hell. Black people often go to the grave site to pray and ask for things from their departed members. Now, when he or she is burnt and ashes thrown into the sea where will family go to communicate with the deceased? (Makhaye 2007:14).

The men lead the funeral procession to the graveyard. There is absolute silence during the procession. It is important to note that in the past, a person of Zulu origin was not buried with a coffin, he was buried with *icansi* (a mat made up of a certain type of grass called *amagceba*). The *icansi* that is used to wrap the corpse is the one that the corpse has been laid on in the house. The corpse is also wrapped with the blankets that have been used when the person was alive. According to Hammond-Tooke (1974:104), if an important person dies, the corpse is wrapped with the skin of a black ox especially slaughtered for the occasion.

Bryant (1967:717) describes two principal methods of arranging the human body in burial, viz. the contracted and extended method. According to him, the contracted posture was common among the Zulus and is among the oldest methods. He goes on to say,

Some persons have suggested that the ancient habit of contracted burial may have been born out of the beautiful thought of replacing man in the bowels of Mother Earth as he had been first found resting in his mother's womb...A more plausible explanation would be, that it was simply a space and labour saving device.

According to Khumalo (2007: pc) it was a Zulu custom for the grave to be prepared in a way to accommodate the corpse to be placed in a seated position facing his home. A shelf is built inside the grave and the clothes of the deceased are placed inside to prevent the soil from touching the

body. Shangase (2006:103) states that the corpse is placed slowly, and with dignity into a hollowed out corner (*igumbi*). However for ordinary people, they do not make a special shelf, instead the corpse is placed on a mat, and chopped pieces of wood are placed over the corpse and then the entire grave is filled with soil. The same applies for the burial of children. According to Zungu (2003) the legs of the deceased are folded so that the corpse takes a position similar to that of a foetus inside the mother's womb. Death is a new birth according to Oosthuizen (1985:7) as quoted by Zungu (2003). This account for the central position that the rites associated with funerals take within the African context. The rituals of funerals are rebirth rituals.

People belonging to the Shembe religion prefer not to use a coffin. They believed that if a dead person is kept in the coffin, he will not come back as an *idlozi* (ancestor) since he will not be in a position to come out of the coffin as it is tightly sealed. They argue further that the dead person will not be able to talk as *idlozi* because he is confined in a coffin. However, this practice no longer exists as coffins are used extensively in Zulu funerals.

A person is buried together with some of his clothes. It is usually the responsibility of an old woman to select the clothes that will be put into the grave. According to Bryant (1967:701) and Krige (1962:162) some selected personal belongings such as the dead man's head ring, snuff box with a small quantity of snuff, a small earthenware pot filled with water, mats, blankets and eating vessels are placed next to the corpse. Not all of the person's clothes should be buried with him. Some clothes and valuables are left to be used by relevant family members after some time after the death of a person. Sometimes grains, a mielie (maize) cob or pumpkin pips are placed in the deceased hands. Krige (1962:162) explains that this is done to safeguard the crops in the field

which will not die like the deceased.

According to Wilson (1957) as quoted by Mbiti (1970:257), among many African peoples, food, drink, weapons, tools, and other objects may be buried with the corpse, to equip the dead for the journey and provide him with some means of establishing at least the start of his new life in the next world. Elaborate rites are also carried out by various societies, some of them covering a period of several months or even years. Mbiti (1970:257) goes on to say that it is generally believed that if the dead are not properly buried, they may take revenge upon the living or remain unpeaceful in the land of the departed.

There should be no metal items near the corpse. It was common practice not to allow the personal assegais<sup>10</sup> of the deceased to go anywhere near the grave. This is to prevent the deceased from fighting with his ancestors. If this happens, it will affect the living members of the family or it may even affect the cattle. According to Bryant (1967:702) as a precaution, all the assegais were removed from the deceased hut immediately after death. Water that has been used to wash the body of the dead person is poured into the grave including other things that have been used to prepare for the burying of the dead.

When the corpse reaches the grave, it is set down upon a mat, and the skin-blanket is removed, the cords unstrung (for the body was by this time stiff), and his principal wife cuts off the old man's head-ring and washes his head with the *umsuzwane* plant (Bryant 1967:701).

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<sup>10</sup> A light spear or lance, especially one with a short shaft and long blade for close combat, used by Bantu peoples of southern Africa.

There are certain variations in the way Zulus bury their dead. Some of these variations are attributed to geographical reasons. According to Berglund (1976:78), Zulus living in the stone-covered areas of the Msinga district, bury their dead with a stone placed at the feet, over the head and under the knees of the corpse, while people in a district where stones are not plentiful, will use pieces of broken clay vessels for the same purpose. But both the stones and the pieces of burnt clay are interpreted similarly which simply makes reference to the corpse as a symbol of being lifeless like stone or hard clay (*njengetshe*) and is of no use anymore. According to Bryant (1967:701) the stones were an integral part of the burial procedure. The grass pad (*inkathá*) between the stones and the bearers hand was intended to insulate him technically from actual participation in that burial and consequent contamination and so save him from the necessity of later on, going through the purificatory rites. According to Krige (1962:162), stones are placed on the grave to *xhawula* or shake hands with the deceased's spirit.

There is much diversity associated with Zulu burials which are associated with the manner and reason for the person's death. Bryant (1967:715) provides many examples such as when a person dies of consumption or similar chronic chest disease. He was never buried at home but was taken to some distant stream where he was buried, so that his chest complaint might 'go off with the water' (*isifúba sakhé simuke namanzi*). This was done in order to prevent other members of the family from getting the same illness. It is clear from this that Zulus were already aware of infectious diseases.

An adopted servant or menial labourer (*isikúza*) was buried without much formality anywhere out in the veld and the hut he had occupied was thrown away outside of the kraal and burned.

A person who had died of famine was not buried at all; instead his corpse was taken out and laid out alongside a tree in some wooded area of the veld. However, in Zulu Society this is very rare. They would never allow a person to die from famine because of ubuntu. In Zulu, it is stated as *Alikho ithuna lentandane*.

When a woman died at childbirth, her abdomen is split before the burial, 'so that the wind might escape' (*ukuba kuphume umoya*). The baby foetus is buried next to the mother (Khumalo 2007: pc). On the other hand, when the mother died after delivery of the infant, the child was taken and placed in a wood or under a bush and left to perish. However, this will not take place if the grandmother was there to suckle the baby. If the mother lived and the child dies at birth, the mother gathered all the children of the family and made them wash their hands with ashes or with *intolwane* water (*ukuhlambisa*) to get rid of the *umnyama* (bad luck).

When the rituals are completed, the burial pit is finally filled with sand. The chief son takes up and throws the first sod, and all the relatives, friends and neighbours do the same. Then finally, the whole grave is filled in by a few special males and covered over with stones or bush. Most men do not throw the soil by hand as women do; instead they use tools. The diggers also prepare short pieces of wood to put into the grave to prevent soil from falling on to the body (Khumalo 2007: pc). In some places, a shelf is dug in the grave on the side in which the body is placed. Others place branches over the body to protect it from direct contact with the soil (Nyawose 2000:18). In case of traditional burials, no sacramental rites are performed on the burial ground and the body is fortified by doctoring it. If it is a Christian burial, there shall be sacramental rites performed, and the body and grave are fortified by prayer and blessed water, which is sprinkled

over the grave in order to prevent any wizard or bad spirits from taking control of the spirit of the deceased (Shangase 2006:102).

According to Bryant (1967:702) around the mound of sand, cuttings of the prickly pear (*isihlehle*) or the dwarf-euphorbia (*isihlontwana*) or fresh posts of the *umunge* or the *umnsinsi* trees are planted. When the soil is being filled, the members of the family take a small piece of earth (*iGáde*), spit on it for luck and cast it into the grave to ensure the good graces of the deceased.

Berglund (1976:80) makes reference to ethnographical records which describe Zulu funerals where mention is made of the habit of watching the grave for some time after the funeral. According to him, informants are convinced that the watching of the grave is a precaution against any further evil that may befall the deceased as a result of the work of *abathakathi*. Berglund further states that the length of the time a grave should be watched varies considerably depending on the social status of the deceased. Normally, a grave of a child is not watched but the graves of chiefs and other members of the community who are considered important are watched for a long time. Some people bring cement and burglar guards to put around the grave for protection.

Gluckman (2005:8) describes the graves of chiefs as being more solid and the location is sought to be preserved by groves of trees and legends, so that people can often return from great distances to sacrifice animals there as a means of communicating with the deceased leaders in the ancestral kingdom. In addition, their greater social importance is thus, expressed. When a

village is moved a special ritual is performed to transport the ancestors to the new site. The main purpose of the burial sites is to restore kinship relationships among the survivors and of the dead man to his ancestors and descendants.

Another custom that is revealed in certain literature, is removing the body from the back of the hut opposite the doorway. Special exits have been created for this purpose. Although Berglund (1976:365) states that no significant explanation could be given for this custom, Khumalo (2007: pc) explains that the man (the head of the kraal), must not go out through the main gate or where people normally exit. There is a belief that if that man walks out of the gate he would have failed those who remained behind. The other thing is that when the corpse is being moved out of that hut, it must be moved with the legs first and not with the head. That is why now people are buried facing the West because there is a belief that when the trumpet blows, they will all rise from the East. Nyawose (2000:17) explains that the corpse is taken through the door in a reverse manner to prevent the soul from finding its way back to the home of the family.

The head of the family is usually buried in the cattle kraal within the *umuzi* (homestead). Immediately after the Zulu person has been buried, a goat is slaughtered. Its bile and *umswani* (dung) is mixed with water in a container and is used by people who have been to the funeral to wash their hands before they leave. Even the objects used to dig the grave such as spades, picks etc. are washed with the *intelezi*. The tools are left at the deceased's home until *umxokozelo* has been performed. This is accompanied with the cleansing of the tools that were used for digging the grave. Death is always associated with *isinyama* (misfortune). It is believed that by washing their hands with this mixture, all forms of misfortune will be repelled and it is also a means of

warding off evil spirits. The slaughtering of the goat is performed outside the premises, especially outside the *isango lomuzi* (the main entrance of the homestead).



Fig 10 Ritual slaughter of a goat to appease the ancestors. (Mnguni: 2006)

After having washed their hands, the family members and some people who have attended the funeral go to the river to have a symbolic bath. By so doing, they are further removing misfortune that has been brought by death. It is compulsory for the widow to go to a running river to take a full bath so that *isinyama* (misfortune) is carried away by water into the sea. According to one informant, people who attended a funeral, bite the roots of grass called *isiqunga* and spit the mixture on the child's head to prevent him/her from being haunted by the spirit of the deceased.

Immediately after death has struck all the normal activities of the kraal are curtailed and a number of strict taboos are observed. People also stop working as a sign of mourning. The tilling of the soil and the milking of cows is prohibited during the mourning period. Therefore milk products, especially *maas* (curd) are not consumed. This practice still continues today, notwithstanding the fact that the *maas* is purchased from shops. It is often difficult to adhere to

traditional customs in modern times, as it is often difficult for family members to stay away from work for a lengthy period.

All forms of entertainment, such as parties, discos, cinema and watching television, are strictly prohibited during the mourning period as a sign of respect for the deceased. In some instances, sexual intercourse is also not permitted during the mourning period as it is considered as a form of entertainment. The sexes sleep in separate rooms for some time.

The house, in which the dead person has been laid, is immediately polished with *ubulongwe* (cow dung). The cleaning is normally performed by the widow of the deceased. The cleansing is a means of removing misfortunes that have been brought by death out of the house. The family members and other relatives continue to sleep in this house for about a week after the funeral. It is also common practice during the mourning period for the widow to sleep in different places each night. This is to deceive her husband's ghost, lest it returns to have relations with her, which will prove to be detrimental to the wellbeing of the widow.

Khumalo (2007: pc) explains that the women who has lost her husband will be experiencing a great deal of loneliness. In order to provide support and encouragement, those that are close to her will remain until such time they have to leave to continue with their own lives. They also encourage the surviving wife not to cry but instead to allow her late husband to go peacefully. It is common practice for the widow to receive *isiyalo* (admonitions) from the more experienced and seasoned women as to how a widow should behave. In some cases, she is allocated a new husband, usually the brother to her husband (*Ukungenwa*) (Nyawose 2000:39).

According to Bryant (1967:706), the wife of the deceased was not deserted in her loneliness. Since the day of the funeral, her married sisters had left their own huts and family and come to mourn in hers, sitting there throughout the day and sleeping there at night. They would continue to do so until they had partaken in the *umuthi omhlophe* (white medicines) three days after the funeral. During this period, they would assist with odd jobs to keep themselves busy while providing support to the principal wife and family members. Khumalo (2007: pc) explains that the period after the funeral is characterized by diligent work by the wife and other mourners. If this is not done, laziness will prevail. This is termed *kuzomjwayela* (she will get used to it) in Zulu. To overcome this, the lady of the house must keep herself fully occupied.

They also busied themselves by making plaited *umuzi*<sup>11</sup> rushes which are temporary mourning bands (*isingwazi*) to be worn by themselves round the head and waist. After partaking in the medicine ritual, the bands are removed and replaced with more permanent ones. Twelve months after the burial, they would again be released from them, with the slaughter of an ox, but once more, only to be bound by stronger bands, now consisting of hides, which they would likewise, wear for another year, at the end of which time, the slaughter of the final ox would set them entirely free, not only from further mourning, but also, if they wished, from all bonds of widowhood or single life.

During the stay at the kraal of the deceased the younger wives also assist in the general clean up. Bryant (1967: 707) states that the old earthen floor was broken up and a new floor put down. The floors of the other huts were merely smeared with cow dung. The pillar against which the corpse

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<sup>11</sup> Zulu name for a family based village or homestead, also the people who live there.

had rested, the grass binding round the doorway (against which the corpse may have rubbed when passing out) old mats and clothing of the deceased, were all removed and burned. The cleaning up process was in preparation for the anticipated visit by scores of *isikhuzi* (sympathizers) who were expected to visit the mourning kraal to sympathize with the bereaved family. According to most informants, it is custom, among the Zulu, to give away the property of the deceased, as people fear to use it.

During their stay, there were other duties to be performed, at as early an hour as possible. Some of the wives went out into the fields and sprinkled them with water in order to remove the *ummnyama* (occult evil or bad luck) thought to have descended upon them by the death of their owner.

Water plays a significant role in traditional Zulu culture. According to Emoto (2005: xviii) water has the ability to copy and memorize information. It is believed that the memories of the ancestors live in water.

#### **5.4 The morning after the funeral**

The day after the funeral heralds the period of mourning. During mourning social life is suspended for all those that have been affected by the death. The length of mourning is determined by how close the social ties were with the deceased and by the social standing of the dead person. If the dead man was a chief, the suspension affects the entire society.

The family at large partakes in the eating of *umuthi* called *amakhangala* (medicine) that is eaten after the funeral) which is prepared by an indigenous healer. With the death of a family member, family members become weak emotionally, physically and spiritually. The *amakhangala* medicine is, therefore, used to make the bereaved family stronger. This kind of medicine is used outside the premises of the homestead since it is a death related medicine. The family is also encouraged to *phalaza* (to induce vomiting) to remove all *isichitho* (bad luck). This is achieved by using *ubulawa*.<sup>12</sup> According to Bryant (1967:705) this medicine is supposed to possess the property of ‘driving away the trepidation’ or superstitious alarm (*ukususa uvalo*) and to ‘brace up’ (*ukuqinisa*) the system (*umzimba*) generally. According to Krige (1962:159) and Shangase (2006:100), the surviving members of the family need to be specially fortified with strengthening medicines because they were very close to the deceased and are therefore in a position of danger themselves and a source of pollution to the community. In this regard, they cannot take part in the normal life of society until they have been purified after the mourning period and then resume their normal life in society. The ingredients of the medicine may vary. According to Krige (1962:163) the medicine may contain *amakhubalo* (medicinal roots), various ground stones such as blue stone, or potash, black powders, fats and any other substance that are considered to have a strengthening effect.

Bryant (1967:704) outlines that the (*isililo*) (public wailing) was a common mourning practice in traditional Zulu society on hearing the news about a death or an arrival of a corpse from the mortuary the day of the funeral. The *isililo* is described by Krige (1962:161) as quoted by Shangase (2006:101) as a most mournful and dispiriting sort of dirge. A typical wailing

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<sup>12</sup> The medicine that belongs to the ancestors, which is used to induce or clarify dreams of ancestral spirits and open minds to receive the messages of the ancestors.

ceremony is characterized by having all the married women making an appearance and participating by putting their hands behind their heads (*ukuthwala ekhanda*), smacking their breasts, wringing their hands, or even throwing themselves on the ground while wailing until they were exhausted. Bryant (1967:725) states that the wailing custom is so universal throughout the world, that it was futile to seek its origin in any particular place or race. Shangase (2006:101) explains that according to the Shangase clan, wailing is not condoned, but those who want to wail are consoled until they slow down the loudness at or before the funeral and not after. The tears were restrained in recognizing the fact that the deceased was not dead, but was rather 'going home' to join his ancestors

An ox was slaughtered 'to wash the hands' (*eyokuhlamba izandla*) of those who had taken part in the actual burial and who till now, remained with the bereaved family. In some cases, goats were also used for the same purpose. Krige (1962:165) refers to this as a goat for purification. Bryant (1967:704) describes this as,

From the beast the *umswani* (grass in the first stomach) was removed, and with it, each one of them 'washed' his hands. This was done for the purpose of 'washing off the dead man' (*uku-m-hlamba*), as also 'to wash away all evil consequences' (*ukusus'ummnyama womuntu ofileyo*) otherwise apt to follow the handling of a corpse.

Two dishes are placed at the entrance of the homestead. One with water mixed with *umswami* (inside contents of the goat) and the other with water mixed with *isiqunga* grass. The mourners are expected to wash their hands with these mixtures in order to be purified. Traditionally, no towels are used to wipe the hands (Khumalo 2007: pc).

Ash is also placed in the water together with a coin. Married girls from the family use water

mixed with ashes and which have money to wash their hands. The purpose of washing the hands in this manner is to eliminate the dark shadow that has befallen the grieving family. Members of the family believe that this death or black shadow has to go with the deceased person and it must never happen again within that homestead. This is normally done the day after the funeral. After washing their hands the mourners are not allowed to look back, but to proceed straight to the home of the deceased. The belief is that if one looks back, the shadow of the dead will follow them again (Mkhwanazi 2007: pc).

The coin is then put in a safe place where no one can see it especially the witches to prevent them from using it for sinister reasons. It is for this reason that the coin is not kept for very long for 'security' reasons. However, if any mourners visit the home of the deceased family after this period, they merely wash their hands with ash and water.

The traditional healer further prepares the other *muti* (traditional medicine) that is used to sprinkle in all the houses of the homestead of the bereaved family, including the family at large. This kind of medicine is also mixed with the *ubulongwe* (cow dung) which is used to polish the Zulu huts after the funeral. It is believed that cow dung has unique sterilizing qualities. This *muti* is also sprinkled on the tree branches with leaves, which are given to goats. With regard to cattle, the *muti* is sprinkled on the pole, which is laid on the floor of the entrance of the *isibaya sezinkomo* (cattle kraal). This is done so that the cows will jump over the pole that is treated with *umuthi* (medicine). Death is believed to even affect the livestock. Death can lead to the misfortune that can cause the decrease in livestock. It is for this reason that the *muti* is given to the livestock as a precautionary measure.

On the very same spot where the *amakhangala* are eaten, family members have to undergo *ukugundwa kwamakhanda* (the removal of the hair from the head). The existing hair on the heads of the family members are associated with misfortune, so the growth of new hair after the removal of the old, marks the new stage, which follows death. The shaving of the hair is a symbol of separation, showing that one of the families has been separated from them. At the same time it is an indication of people's belief that death does not destroy life, since the growth of new hair indicates that life continues to spring up (Mbiti 1975:121-122).

According to Ramji (1998:3), the mourning process in traditional societies is both communal and an important family occasion which gives great support to mourners. As a sign of mourning, shaving the head by male members of the family of the dead person is as common as wearing black clothes, a black arm band or a black cloth by both female and male members of the family. A month after the funeral these small pieces of black cloth which are pinned on the clothes of the family members are burned (Mnguni 2006:215).

According to Ndimande (2005:3) mourning rituals among the Zulu people are patriarchal which favour the men. The rationale for mourning among the Zulu people is to pay respect to the deceased, themselves, to the family members, to the ancestors and to the community at large. Among the Zulu people and in most African societies the cultural rites of mourning and cleansing are gendered and discriminatory. This is evident by the dress code for mourning women. She further argues that among Zulu people, mourning dress is gendered as only females are expected to wear it as will be explained in later chapters.

Ndimande (2005:6) further explains that dress for the widow is associated with stigmatization and mutilation, which is not the case with the widower. The widower does not wear anything to distinguish himself from the rest of the men that he is a widower. The culture of wearing the mourning dress is very much an integral part of the death ritual. Liberal feminists view the gendered construction of some cultural norms as symptoms of inequalities. Rituals of mourning are regarded as some form of cultural practices that are valued and guarded against cultural extinction in patriarchal societies (Daber 2003:24).

The implication of not wearing clothing to symbolize mourning is tantamount to disgrace or disrespect not only for the deceased but for the entire clan. According to Ndimande (2005), it is the responsibility of senior female members of the community to coach the newly bereaved widow on what to do and how she is expected to behave during the mourning period. However, there may be instances where it may be the wish of the husband for his spouse not to wear any mourning clothes. In this case, it is imperative for the wife to honour the wish, failing which will have detrimental results.

In an article, *It's a bogus 'African culture' that puts widows on the floor*, Sunday Times (July: 2007) Mohau Pheko stated that African "culture" expectations for a bereaved wife were too oppressive as the archaic practices authorises the husband's relatives to start stripping the widow of her late husband's belongings and inheritance while she sits obediently draped in black, on the customary mattress. Furthermore, the idea of being placed under a sort of house arrest and exiled from the rest of society would serve as a constant reminder of how oppressive the death of a life partner is when you are African women. In the same article, she makes reference to a response

by Commissioner Boogie Khutsoane of the Commission on Gender Equality on the question of the mattress being placed on the floor for the widow to sit on.

Commissioner Khutsoane explained that it began during the Sophiatown days (the 1940's and 1950's) when relatives and friends would come from afar to comfort the bereaved and stayed for days before the funeral. Because the houses were too small to accommodate everyone, to make room for the visitors and relatives, the mattress was placed on the floor and the bed taken out.

Mohau Pheko argues that it is rather strange that even when people live in mansions, this practice, which made a lot of sense in that context, has now become coded with restrictions on women and has become a “cultural” practice.

According to Commissioner Khutsoane, the black clothing itself has an interesting background. In antiquity, African people did not wear clothing. The Westerners wore black as a symbol of bereavement. It is not clearly understood how and when this practice was transferred to the African community.

According to Magwaza (1999:268) great reverence is expressed for the deceased, by a number of formalized gestures that involve dress and bodily modifications. Members of the family, not only the nuclear, are expected to cut their hair in mourning after the burial. The immediate next of kin on the other hand, would have clothing items that are indicative of his or her special mourning status. In the olden days, if the next of kin was a woman, before and at the burial site, she would be easily spotted by a large animal skin over her head concealing her from the public eye.

Magwaza goes on to say that the wife of the deceased can be identified by a large cowhide worn over her shoulders which she will take off once a cleansing ceremony has been performed for her. Beadwork would be either removed for mourning or hidden by reversing the beaded cloth. In modern times, skins have come to be replaced by blankets or rugs and the cowhide cape is replaced by the wife being clad in black from tip to toe. She also states that it is not a rare sight to see women clothed either all in white, grey, navy or green. The attire of men in modern times has also undergone some changes. Animal skins have been replaced by blankets. Many men demonstrate their mourning status by simply wearing a black band over their arms for a period of six months.

### **5.5 The responsibility of a woman whose husband has died**

A woman whose husband has died has to undergo *ukuzila* (mourning). Ndimande (2005:6) explains that according to Zulu culture, the mourning of a woman takes a period of two years, but this has changed in modern times where the woman only mourns for one year.

Ndimande (2005:6) further explains that within the two years, there are taboos and stigmatization of widows. There are restrictions from social activities while she is using her mourning dress. When she is attending church she has to come early before others and sit at the back. She has to also leave early before other churchgoers. She is not allowed to mix with others as she is considered to be impure by virtue of having lost her husband. During her church visit, she must provide herself with an *Isicephu* (a Zulu sitting mat) as she is prevented from sitting with others. According to Zulu custom, this is a symbol of respect to herself and to the ancestors

and to those around her. The widow is also not allowed to plough while in her mourning dress as it may render the crops impure.

She must also have a cold water shower as early as possible before other members of the family. Furthermore, the widow is expected to have her own personal utensils that include a tea set and dinner set because she is not allowed to mix with other members of the family, especially the children. The only person that she is allowed to associate with is her aging grandmother who has gone past the stage of menstruation.

After her husband has been buried, she has to wear a black dress with a big collar overlapping the shoulders. She also has to wear a black headdress or a cape/shawl. People will be in the position to identify the widow due to the clothes she wears. This will make people react in a humble manner towards the widow when they speak to her. However, Magudu (2004:141) believes that there is no consensus about the origins of the custom of women wearing black as a symbol of mourning. According to the interviews, she conducted; it became clear that it did not originate from the Nguni people of South Africa. Most of the people interviewed believe that it had its origins in Europe and was introduced through colonization. Other people argue that it has to do with Industrialization.

According to Ndimande (2005) it was introduced as a way of distinguishing those women whose husbands had passed away so that they could be respected. Another possible reason was that it was introduced after the Second World War to identify women whose husband had died so that they could obtain Government benefits.

Ndimande (2005:7) explains that in the Shembe religion a women whose husband or child had died is required to wear special clothing i.e. a cloak (*isiphika*) and a head cloth (*iduku*). The clothes are normally navy in colour and are worn for about a year.

After the husband has been buried, a widow has to bath in the river for seven consecutive dawns. This is part of the cleansing after death. A woman has to be humble in all she does as a part of mourning. She need not visit friends without a valid reason. She is not allowed to attend any social gatherings, be it a parent's meeting, community gathering or church. She has to be in the homestead for most of the time. The widows of the deceased wear a string of *intambo* (woven grass) round the head, above the forehead for a whole year as a symbol of mourning. Historically *umhlahlo* or *umuzi* a rope-like plant found near a river, was woven and put around the neck of the bereaved until it broke, in three to four weeks. The plant is very strong and is able to survive in its local environment due to its drought resistant leaf structure, and its tough, sharp prickles. In the same way, the bereaved must endure the tough challenges of losing a loved one.

According to Maguda (2004:142) women are subjected to many discriminatory practices in the mourning and purification processes while men are not expected to do anything similar. She argues that the multiple cleansing ceremonies are costly and exacerbate the poverty of the mourners and the children. She quotes (Daber 2003) who states that women are regarded as impure and unlucky; therefore, they have to undergo a series of cleansing ceremonies. It is believed that the widow carries darkness from the death of her husband and this will only be eradicated through a series of purification ceremonies. However, when the woman dies, the man is cleansed on the same day as the children, after a month. There are no further cleansing

ceremonies, no more costs to bear, and he is not expected to wear the symbolic mourning clothes that distinguishes him from those that are not in mourning. Some informants attribute this practice to the fact that the men are part of the working class who has to return to work shortly after the burial to ensure a guaranteed income. In traditional society, women were expected to remain at home and tend to the kraal. However, the status of women has changed in recent times as more and more women are absorbed in the working environment. In this regard, some of the traditional practices have changed to accommodate the changed circumstances.

Magudu (2004:143) have expressed a number of concerns with regard to the various discriminatory practices. Her major concern is that all the men who make decisions during the mourning period do not take responsibility to ensure that the widow's children have food, since their mother cannot continue with her normal activities. She states that although there are very little documented studies to support this contention, but oral accounts of grandparents provide sufficient insight into the fact that the male members of the extended family used to provide, financial, social and emotional support. However she adds that the circumstances have changed in modern times whereby the extended families no longer provide any support to the mourning family; they only dictate what needs to be done.

According to Bryant (1967:703) in the past, a common practice after burial was when the wives went in and dressed in their finest outfit (*ukuvunula*). The main wife had dressed herself from neck to knee in her husband's gala costume (*umqubulo*), planted his best feather plume upon her head, and in her left hand had taken his war-shield and in her right his dancing stick (*isichopho*). The other wives also followed her example, wearing the deceased best skin girdles, his arm and

leg fringes and feather ornaments, and carrying in their hands dancing sticks and shields. One by one they now emerged from the hut, and in a single file marched down the kraal and passed out through the gateway. They immediately started singing their husband's old clan anthem, as well as his favourite songs that had been sung at their wedding dances.

The religious rituals, ceremonies and festivals are always accompanied by music, singing and sometimes dancing. Music gives outlet to the emotional expression of the religious life, and it is a powerful means of communication in African traditional life. It helps to unite the singing or dancing group and to express its fellowship and participation in life (1975:27). At the end of this chanting all the costumes and ornaments of the deceased, which the wives had been wearing, and all other similar goods, were collected together in a heap within his hut, in preparation for burning

According to Ndimande (2007: pc) the singing of clan or the household song (*iculo lomuzi*) is sung in order to communicate with the ancestors. The singing of these songs will enable the ancestors to determine what family activity or ritual is taking place for example when the leader of the family (*umnumzane*) is buried The song is never sung when a young man, unmarried person or woman is buried. The song is sung to link the head of the family to the ancestors so that he can be able to inform the ancestors of the death of his family member in order for the deceased to be incorporated in the ancestral world.

Ndimande (2007: pc) uses the following examples to illustrate his point,

*eKwakhuphuk'u hhanyana , zinyane lembube bayimpi (repeat)*

*Zinyane lembube ohhh ubayimpi (repeat)*

According to Ndimande (2007: pc), the above song is sung by the Mkize clan when they bury the (*iNkosi*). They sing this song when the corpse is taken from the home to the graveyard and at the time when they are actually putting it into the grave. The song is normally sung by the *Amabutho*<sup>13</sup> (regiment). They actually cover the entire process with this song. The song is also sung when the new *inkosi* is inaugurated. The main reason for this is to inform the ancestors of the new developments and to seek permission to allow him to rule over the subjects.

Ndimande (2007: pc) also explains that different clans or families use different songs to communicate with their respective ancestors. For example, the following song is used by his own clan, the Ndimande clan,

*Iziwe nguwe maNguni anobuya nazo (repeat)*

*Oh zibuyile Kuyasa baNguni ano buya nazo (repeat)*

Ndimande (2007: pc) further explains that if the song is not sung, it will create problems for the surviving members of the family as the role of the deceased is to act as a voice for the living by informing the ancestors of the needs of the family. If the ancestors are unaware of these needs confusion and uncertainty will reign resulting in unhappiness and turmoil. The slaughtering of a cow or goat accompanied by the singing will appease the ancestors who in turn will protect the new acquisition.

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<sup>13</sup> Zulu name for a regiment (or guild) of Zulu warriors, based on age-group.

Bryant (1967:703) also outlined that throughout the burial day, it was common for the wives to fast and go to bed. However, other members of the family, men and girls, were not compelled to fast but had to confine to basic foods, such as beer and *umunyuzwa*. This ritual procedure was termed *ukupuziswa amanzi* (to be given water to drink).

Bryant (1967:708) outlined several restrictions that the wife of the deceased was subjected to after the death of her husband. All wives had henceforth to refrain (*ukuzila*) from eating the entrails of any slaughtered beast; they must not sit upon a mat of hide; they must not enter the cattle-fold, and they may not perform any field-work, until the expiry of about a month. Furthermore, a wife or daughter might not attend a wedding-dance, a son may not hunt, and neither a son nor a daughter may have any sexual intercourse with a lover or sweetheart, until the *iHlambo* ceremony had been first performed.

According to Krige (1962:167) after a year the widows are purified by being smoked or steamed with roots and herbs. She further states that a widow may not remarry before a year has passed. However after the purification ceremony she may remarry if she desires. However, according to Khumalo (2007: pc) there are certain restrictions. The widow must be loyal to her in-laws and not her original relatives/family. Shangase (2006:101) explains that traditionally, the death of the family head of an adult is marked by the fact that a widow should not engage in any new love affair, whether following a custom of levirate union or not, until, she first engages herself in sexual intercourse once with a mad man who she will never meet again. In this way, she has purified herself (*ukususa umnyama*).

Krige (1962:168) further explains that after a year, the widows may be courted by the brothers of the deceased who are eligible to *ngena* them according to custom. The widows are free to choose whom they wish or even decide not to be *ngena*'d at all and leave the husbands kraal for their own home. Khumalo (2007: pc) explains that it is the first husband who is recognized by the ancestors. The object of the *ngena* custom is, to maintain things as they were before, to keep the children in the kraal, for the very young ones would have to go with their mother for some time at least and to maintain the friendly relations between the kraal and the people of the widow. In most cases the surname is also retained.

A big feast is normally accompanied by the *ngena* as a public declaration that the widow is being *ngena*'d by a certain person. There is an abundance of beer and a beast is slaughtered to inform the ancestors that the widow has chosen to remain at the kraal of her late husband. The beast killed on this occasion is known as *inkomo yomhlangano* (the beast for bringing together unity), and is taken from the estate of the deceased. It is now hoped that the widow will receive the blessing of the ancestors and be rewarded for this pleasing behaviour. The feasting that follows the funeral rites is partly to comfort the bereaved family and to bring life back to normal, and partly to thank those who have officiated at the funeral rites (Mbiti 1975:121).

According to Khumalo (2007: pc) in the Zulu tradition, there is this custom which says that the brother of the deceased must take care of the wife and children of the deceased after his death. In Zulu, this is known as *ukungena*. He pledges that he will raise the children of his brother as his own. He can also have children with that woman, without her getting married again because in Zulu culture, a woman marries once. However, if the widow decides that she does not want to

be protected within her late husband's household as she is seeing somebody outside the family circle, she will be allowed to live with the other person. In this case, the outsider will be invited to meet the late husband's family and be introduced to the whole family and also that man will be reminded of the link of him and his partner to the original family. To seal this relationship, a goat will be slaughtered to introduce that new man to the late husband of that woman.

The new man is also told that if he raises the children of his new partner, they are not his; they still belong to the deceased. A goat is slaughtered as a symbol of welcoming that man to the family. However, the new man does not pay *lobola* as he will not be marrying the lady, instead he will just be living with her.

Nyawose (2000:23) explains that before any sexual intercourse of the above mentioned couples takes place, the man must first undergo a process of fortification. This is for his own welfare lest he follows his predecessor to the grave, for it is thought and believed that the wife may have been used as a medium with which the wizard affected death.

Khumalo (2007:pc) further explains that if there are children coming out of that new relationship, for instance if it is a girl, when *lobola* has to be paid, that new man has to call the family of the deceased to accept the *lobola*, as this is not his own biological daughter. The only thing that he will get is whatever the family of the deceased gives to him as an appreciation of saying thanks for raising the children. This act is called "*Imali Yeqolo*", "*imali yedolo*" in these days, that money is now associated with child's grant by the Department of Social Welfare.

According to Khumalo (2007: pc), in most cases one beast will be given to that man who raised the children of the deceased. This girl will be called by the surname of the family of the deceased even if her biological father has another surname.

### **5.6 The responsibility of the man whose wife has died**

Before the funeral, the husband has to stay in the house where his dead wife is laid. The man does not cover his body as the women do. After the funeral a man mourns at heart, he wears nothing that will identify him as a widower. However, according to Ndimande (2005:7) there are cases where men wear a black strip to illustrate their grief about the death of a loved one.

According to Ndimande (2005:7), in the Shembe religion men do not mourn the death of a family member, because a man is called *indalabantu* (creator) who does not feel the pain as much as a woman feels. The same applies to children.

After the funeral of his wife, a man is subject to bathing in the river for seven consecutive dawns. As a sign of mourning the man's head is shaven and he is also showered with sympathy and support during this mourning period. A widower, will at the end of the year, cleanse himself by slaughtering a goat, which shows that his mourning is over and that he may now re-marry if he wishes to (Krige 1962:168).

According to Ndimande (2005:8) a man only mourns for six months. After completing the period of mourning he is free to remarry. It is believed that a man is not meant to stay alone without a

woman. However, before remarrying he needs to undergo a ritual at the home where he was born. This is followed by a ritual at his late wife's home so that the spirit of the deceased wife would not trouble him after his remarriage.

### **5.7 The responsibility of parents whose child has died**

Before the funeral, the child's mother has to cover her body with a blanket. It must be noted that a woman whose child has died will not cover her head and face with a blanket. In other words, the blanket covers the parts from the shoulders to the toes. As previously mentioned, it is only when the husband dies that she covers her whole body, i.e. including her head and face. The distinction therefore lies in this act.

After the funeral, the child's mother wears a black or green cloth over her shoulders. This also serves to identify the woman as someone who is experiencing *ifu elimnyama* (black cloud). People then will be calm when communicating with this person by treating him/her with respect and showing compassion.

The father on the other hand, mourns at heart. Before the funeral, he stays in the house where the corpse of the child is laid. After the funeral, he has to remove hair from his head as part of the mourning and cleansing process.

Both parents are subject to bathing in the river for seven consecutive dawns, after the child has been buried. In so doing, they are removing *isinyama/ibhadi* (misfortune) that emanates from the death that they have experienced.

## 5.8 The responsibilities of children whose parents (either mother or father) has died

Children have to mourn at heart. They wear a small piece of cloth on their arm to identify them as people who have lost one of their parents. However, Bryant (1967:706) states that as a sign of mourning, children were required to wear a single *umuzi* (rush) around their waist as a symbol of mourning. This was removed after the burial and handed over for keeping to their several mothers who later on would hide them in the neighbouring bush. In some cases, the children also remove hair from their heads as a sign of mourning and cleansing.

The eldest child is also subject to bathing in the river for seven consecutive dawns. Other children may bath for three consecutive dawns but it is not compulsory. (This is in accordance with the “*Khoza* Clan”). In the *Chiliza* clan, it is compulsory for all children to bath for three consecutive days. It is clear that clan differences dictate the actions or processes that are followed when partaking in certain rituals and practices (Chili, 2005: pc)

## 5.9 The termination of mourning

### 5.9.1 *Isidwaba* Ritual

A woman who has died has to be given *isidwaba* (a pleated skirt made of cowhide and softened by hand). This ceremony is performed three months after her death. In this ritual, a goat is usually slaughtered and through this, the woman concerned is symbolically believed to be dressed with *isidwaba* since it is believed that she is naked after death.

According to the *Khoza* clan, a cow is slaughtered when the *isidwaba* ritual is carried out. In the *Mavundla* clan, a widower has to exit the mourning period by slaughtering a goat, which will be used to remove misfortunes of losing a wife. This ritual is coupled with *isidwaba* ritual.

The *isidwaba* ritual is never carried out for an unmarried woman who has passed away; instead, the *ithawula* ritual (the towel ritual) is carried out. It is said the unmarried woman is given the *ithawula* to dress in since she cannot dress in *isidwaba* in her family of birth. A goat is also slaughtered to complement the ritual.

### **5.9.2 The *iHlambo* (washing) ceremony.**

The end of the mourning period is observed with the *iHlambo* (washing) ceremony. Almost all the clans that have been interviewed reported that after three months of a man's death, the ritual known as *iHlambo /isihlangu* is performed. This ritual is called *isihlangu*, since it is usually said that the man who died is now given his *isihlangu* (shield), which is a symbol of manhood. The *iHlambo* ritual requires that a cow be slaughtered. A goat is also slaughtered to wash the hands which accumulated impurity during the mourning period. With the slaughtering of the goat, the widow is now ready to remove the black dress that, she has been wearing since her husband's death. A widow has to bath in water mixed with the goats dung as a symbol of wiping away misfortune from her. According to Shangase (2006:104) the purification beast is slaughtered and eaten with white medicine to cleanse the people from the defilement of death and to herald the end of the mourning period.



Fig.11 Preparation of cow after the ritual slaughtering.  
Reference: [www.eshowe.com](http://www.eshowe.com)

During the day of *iHlambo*, men of the neighbourhood bring their traditional weapons with them to the homestead where the *iHlambo* ritual is being carried out. This is normally done in the morning. The men remain in the kraal until the completion of the ceremony. Here, they sing the *iHlambo* songs, which have been especially composed for this ritual. Men then pop out of the kraal and go to the river to bath. On their way to the river, they continuously sing the *iHlambo* songs. On their arrival at the river, men bath without soap, using the traditional *muti* (medicine) prepared for this ritual bathing. After they have finished bathing, men put *muti* in their mouths and then they spit out that *muti* while facing the boundaries of the neighbouring tribal authority. This is a symbol of repelling the death to other communities, which are different from them. After spitting, the men turn back and leave the river while singing. Dogs usually accompany men who hunt on their way back to the *umuzi* (homestead) where the ritual is taking place. According to Bryant (1967:709) the wives did not partake in the hunt but rather ceremoniously assembled, together with other wives from the neighbourhood and hoed up a tiny field ‘for the deceased’, simply turning up the soil, planting nothing in it and then going back home.

On their arrival to the *umuzi*, men from the river are approached by the widow before they enter through the *isango* (gate). The widow kneels down and gives the men a clay pot, with *utshwala*

(Zulu beer) in it. The men then drink and thereafter go inside the premises to the cattle kraal where they put down all their traditional weapons. The weapons are then cleansed by a widow, who sprinkles them with Zulu beer. After this, the men leave the kraal singing traditional songs. They then go to the *indlu* house where they will be served with meat of the cow that has been slaughtered as well as with Zulu beer. Most of the celebrations start at night, and just before dawn, all the men take a small green sick and throw it across a river in an area that belongs to another iNkosi. In this way, the tribe has been purified (*ukukhipha ihlambo or ukujikijela*) (Shangase 2006:104).



Fig.12 Making of Zulu beer

Reference: [www.eshowe.com](http://www.eshowe.com), Making beer in Zululand

According to Bryant (1967:708), a full six months was generally allowed to elapse after the death of a person before the *iHlambo* ceremony was performed among the higher ranks of society. However, three or four weeks were deemed sufficient for the common folk.

All the members of the deceased family are subjected to mourning until the completion of the *Ihlambo* (cleansing ceremony). For the men and children, the shaving of the head is a symbol of mourning. After three months, the men are freed from their mourning responsibilities. According to Zulu custom, he is free to choose other wives.

He goes on to explain that the only person that must continue mourning is the widow for a period of twelve months, because the *Ihlambo* takes a period of twelve months before the big ceremony of freeing the widow takes place. During the first *ihlambo* that is after three months, she won't take out the mourning clothes (she will continue mourning along) because that *ihlambo* is the mourning of her husband as he prepares to connect with his ancestors.

Khumalo (2007: pc) also explains that it is said that within this period of three to twelve months that the deceased is still in the grave and on the earthly plane. It is said that until the *ihlambo* is performed will the deceased rise up to the ancestors (*siyamkhuphula*). At this stage, even his clothes are clean and can still be used by other people.

The widow will still remain for another twelve months (which is two years now) after the *Ihlambo* and then a big ceremony will be performed and then at this stage she will be taking out her mourning clothes but will still remain the widow. After the period of widowhood, she can then appoint somebody that she wants to marry because she is now free.

Bryant (1967:709) described the *iHlambo* as,

The prescribed period having at length expired, the 'washing' took place. Another ox was slaughtered, beer was brewed in abundance, and, since all men in the neighbourhood were expected to take part in the ceremony, a great public hunt (with a hope for an increase in the meat supply) was organized. All which, as said, was for the purpose of washing the spears, and incidentally it marked the end of mourning-time and a release from most of the taboos.

While the men went on a hunt, the wives did not want to feel left out. They also participated in their own 'washing' ceremony by instituting a little meat and beer entirely on their own, and

called it 'the washing of the widows' (*ukuHlamb' abaFélwakazi*). (Krige 1962: 167) describes the *iHlambo* in modern times is being simply called the *ukuPhothula* or cleansing. In modern times very little hunting takes place due to environmental laws and restrictions.

After the *iHlambo* all the taboos associated with the mourning period are lifted and normality returns in the lives of the surviving members of the family.

When a child has died the after death rituals are not done immediately. The rituals are only carried out after some years when it is considered that the child is now an adult.

According to Khumalo (2007: pc) there is a believe that our ancestors are not dead but reside in a place called a "place of peace" where they live and discuss other things as elders. You can never be an ancestor or be called an ancestor without having the two *ihlambos* after you passed away. The first one will take you to the family and you will become a boy there, the second one is when your wife is taking out her mourning clothes that means now you can go home and look after your home spiritually because now you are a man having finished everything in life. The deceased now has an important role to play as he will be acting as a messenger, sending the messages from the forefathers to the living and from the living to the forefathers.

Nyawose (2000:40) explains that every person who dies has a sacrifice performed after the period of mourning in order to integrate him/her with the rest of the ancestors. This last ritual is the rite of incorporation of the deceased into the land of the dead and the reintegration of the bereaved family into normal social life. This is also expanded by Van Genner in his Rites of Passage (1960).

### 5.10 The *ukubuyiswa* ritual (bringing back home)

After one year has lapsed since the death of a person, the *ukubuyiswa* ritual is performed. This symbolic ritual means that the spirit of the deceased is brought back home. A person who has died is said to be brought back home so that he/she will be a good *idlozi* (ancestor). In fact, just after death the spirit (a combination of *umoya* and *isithunzi*) hovers in the air until the *ukubuyisa* ritual is performed. The main aim of this ritual is to integrate the spirit of the dead person with the spirits of the ancestral world and the community of the *amadlozi* (Vilakazi 1965:89). According to Kunene (1985) as quoted by Zungu (2003) after many years of association with the community of the earth, the ancestral spirits are absorbed into the primordial cosmic power. It is believed that the ancestors gradually merge into the womb of their Great Creator and they are heard of no more.

Magubane (1998:62) sees the *ukubuyisa* ceremony as the bringing home of the spirit of the dead person. Only when he has been *buyiswad* can the dead person resume his duties. According to Krige (1962:163), after the burial the spirit of the deceased is thought to be wandering around the veld or the grave. The purpose of the *ukubuyisa* (bringing home) is to unite the deceased with the ancestors. The *ukubuyisa* ceremony is therefore, a very important ceremony, and one that secures the blessings and help of the deceased for the whole lineage. Hammond-Tooke (1993:153) explains that death and burial did not necessarily contribute to the creation of an ancestral spirit. A special ritual was necessary to effect the change of status of the dead person to an ancestor. He further states that misfortune will occur if this ritual is not performed. However, Nyawose (2000:43) argues that the power and influence of an ancestor is proportionate to the power and

influence he/she has wielded while on earth. Further the character of the ancestral spirit is the same as the character he/she bore on earth. Death does not change the status of the deceased at all.

According to Krige (1962:169) there is no stipulated time when the *ukubuyisa* must be held and in some cases it is held three or four years after the death.

According to Buthelezi as quoted by Mnguni (2006:119), the *ukubuyisa* ceremony is in most cases performed a year after the funeral. A month before the function is done, relatives and neighbours are invited. Two weeks before the actual function, the houses are renovated and the yard is cleaned. One week before the ceremony, preparations for the brewing of traditional beer are done. Three days before the function, the beer is prepared. On the day of the slaughter of the beast for the ancestors, the beer is strained and kept in big calabashes.

Before the *ukubuyiswa* ritual, it is believed that the person who has died is not a part of the *amadlozi* (ancestors) since he/she is away from home. After the *ukubuyiswa* ritual, the one who died is then regarded as *idlozi* who is duty bound to safeguard the family against all the evils of the earth.

For both the married woman and a man, a cow is slaughtered for this ritual. A goat is also slaughtered. If the deceased was unmarried or a minor only a goat is used for this ritual. However Krige (1962:169) states that there is never an *ukubuyisa* for a woman, for it is only the male ancestors that are important, The goat serves as a means of reporting the ritual to the

ancestors. According to Shangase (2006:106), the goat is slaughtered by cutting it across the neck while the ox is killed by stabbing it behind the horns (*emhlabankomo*). Shangase (2006:106) further explains that only the inside parts of the goat are cooked and eaten on the same day. The whole goat is kept hanging at the back of the hut until a day after the *izithebe* (feasting day). On this day the meat is cut and divided into different parts as each portion belongs to a certain category of people. The *inhloko* (head) is reserved for the men, the *isisu nemlenze* (tripe and legs) is for the women, the *iphaphu* (lungs) is for the young boys, etc.

During the *ukubuyisa* ritual a large ox is killed and sometimes one or more goats, for it appears that in the case of an important man, everyone gives something, the important relatives providing beasts or goats, the lesser ones giving money or smaller gifts. On the occasion of the *ukubuyisa* the name of the deceased is included in the praises of the ancestors for the first time after his death, and he is specially asked, when the meat is placed at the *unsamo*, to come back to the village and look after his people (Krige 1962:169),(Hammond-Tooke 1974:323) and (Shangase 2006:106). Often as a further measure to ensure his return, the person who is the chief officiator at the unreal ceremony, normally the eldest son takes the branch of a tree and drags it from the grave into the house. By doing this it is hoped that the deceased is brought back home.

According to Buthelezi as quoted by Mnguni (2006:120), before the beast is slaughtered, members of the family will go to the grave of the deceased. They carry with them the incense (*impepho*) and a branch of the *umlahlankosi* tree, usually the *umphapa* whose branches are used on the graves of the chiefs. It is believed that the chief sits on the branch while it is being pulled with a string to the home of the deceased (Shangase 2006:106). The incense (*impepho*) is burnt

whilst the family head talks to the deceaseds informing him or her about the ceremony and asking him or her to come home to take care of the family and to bring good fortune for everyone.

Mnguni (2006:120) further explains that after leaving the grave, the leader carries the *umhlankosi* branch and updates the deceased on the status of their whereabouts. Once inside the *umhlankosi* branch will be placed at the interior of the rondavel (*umsamo*) and the branches will also be perched on the roof poles informing the deceased that they have now arrived. After this the whole family assembles in the kraal where the beast is slaughtered. As the beast bellows the noise encourages the women to ululate (*kikiza*). The bellowing is an indication that everything is going well and the ancestors are happy.

According to Xaba as quoted by Mnguni (2006:75), the *ukubuyisa* ceremony is normally performed on a Saturday which is a convenient day for most family members and friends. On the Thursday prior to the funeral a fowl is slaughtered and incense (*impepho*) is burnt. A senior member of the family talks to the ancestors (*amadlozi*) informing them about what is going to happen. Goats are then slaughtered on Thursday, and the meat is hung overnight, cooked and served the following day just before the slaughter of the cow/ox. On Friday afternoon incense (*impepho*) is burnt again to inform the ancestors about the slaughtering of the cow/ox.

On Saturday, the meat is cooked and served with traditional Zulu beer (*utshwala*). The family members will commence the proceedings with a song which is usually the deceased's favourite. This will be complimented by rhythmic marching to the kraal to meet the local men. They, in turn will join in the singing and proceed to the main rondavel. Inside the rondavel, the singing

will continue and the women will start ululating creating a jovial atmosphere. These activities are well coordinated by the elders who automatically assume a leadership position.



Fig.13 Preparation of food for the *ukubuyisa* ritual  
Reference: [www.eshowe.com](http://www.eshowe.com)

The person, who is responsible for performing the *ukubuyiswa* ritual, wears a gall bladder around his wrist. According to Taldykin (2005) gall bladders are thought to attract the ancestral spirits because the bitterness of the gall is sweet to them, therefore all gall bladders are inflated and used for various ritual purposes. According to Krige (1962:170) the sons of the kraal are lined up, and gall is scattered over their feet so that the spirit may remain with them wherever they may go, for the gall is very pleasing to all spirits, who love to lick it. The ritual functions in traditional Zulu society are usually organized and performed by males.

Another goat is slaughtered during the *ukubuyiswa* ritual. This goat is for cleansing the kids of the person who is being *buyiswad*. A Zulu beer, *Utshwala besiZulu*, is brewed during this ritual. According to the Shangase clan, if the ceremony is at the *uMnumzane* or *iNduna*'s household, the *insonyama* and a ten liter of beer is taken to the Royal homestead to pay allegiance to the *iNkosi*. In modern times this practice has been abandoned; instead the *iNkosi* is given the cash equivalent (Shangase 2006:106).

There are variations in the *ukubuyiswa* ritual depending on the age and sex of the deceased.

#### 5.10.1 Ukubuyiswa for an adult male.

If it is a man being *buyiswad*, men collect in the cattle kraal, *esibayeni sezinkomo* during the day of the ritual. The cattle kraal is located within *umuzi* (homestead). Men bring in meat in the *isibaya* (kraal) and they eat it on that scene. According to Mnguni (2006:186) the type of joint that is braai-ed differs between males and females. For a male the joint called *isixhanti* is used while for a female the joint called *isiphanga* is used.

After the men have finished eating meat, the head of the family or his brother has to take a bone and put it on the *ugqoko* (a wooden artefact on which the meat was served) and than starts reciting the praises of the prominent *amadlozi* of the family. Whilst this recitation is progressing, all the other people available remain quiet. The recitation of the *amadlozi's izibongo* (praises) serves as a way of inviting the *amadlozi* to this ceremony. In other words the other *amadlozi* are humbly asked to come and enjoy together with a person whose *ukubuyiswa* ritual is being carried out. After this, the men of the family including others perform their praises and this is called *ukugiya*.

The role of the married women of the family is to perform *ukukikiza* (ululating) while kneeling down before the kraal during the recitation of the *amadlozi's izibongo* (praises). Ululating women entertain both the participants and the *amadlozi* during the ceremony.

After the reciter of the *izibongo* has finished the recitation, the *ihubo lesizwe* (the tribal song) is then sung. Men then pop out of the kraal while singing and stamping down their feet and go to the main house usually known as *indlu yangasenhla* since it is believed that the *amadlozi* stay there and it is the house in which the *impepho* is burned. On reaching *indlu yangasenhla*, other members of the family and the community including women will join the singing. Thereafter, an *ihubo lasekhaya* (the family song) is sung. This song is viewed as a binding factor in the family as it links the living and the dead. After the *ihubo lasekhaya* (family song) has been sung through, a prominent family member (a male) will announce the intention of the ritual to the public. That will then be the end of the ritual ceremony, people start parting after they had drunk and eaten.

#### 5.10.2 Ukubuyiswa for an adult female.

- Men only eat meat in the kraal. The *izibongo* are not recited.
- Women eat meat indoors.
- The type of meat or joint of the beast that is braai-ed is the flank (*umhlubulo*) and the leg (*umlenze*). Mnguni (2007:185)
- The family song is then jointly sung in the *indlu yangasenhla* (main house)
- Women then sing and perform their *izigiyo* (special personified solo dance song) as a sign of commemorating the woman concerned.
- The relatives (women) perform the *izigiyo* of the woman whose ritual is progressing including the *izigiyo* of other family who passed away.
- Thereafter, people drink, eat and party.

An unmarried woman who has died while living with her family after death does not qualify for *ukubuyiswa* ritual ceremony after her death. Instead the *umemulo*<sup>14</sup> ceremony is celebrated for her, which also requires that a cow be slaughtered. If her *umemulo* was carried out before her death, there is no point in organizing another ceremony after her death. This will be time consuming and very costly.

### 5.10 3 *Ukubuyiswa* ritual for a child

When a young child dies, the parents count the number of years since his/her death. When they feel that the child would now be an adult if he/she was alive, important rituals for the child are then performed.

If it was a boy, they start from the *ihlambo* ceremony and follow the same procedure as with men. Thereafter a cow is slaughtered for the *ukubuyiswa* ritual since the parents believe that he is now an adult who can be brought back home as a good *idlozi*.

If it is a girl who died young, *umemulo* ceremony is carried out in the place of *ukubuyiswa*. A cow is also slaughtered for this ritual ceremony.

### 5.10.4 The procedure after the *ukubuyiswa* ritual ceremony

All the kids of a parent who died need to undergo *ukugezwa* (cleansing). This *ukugezwa* of

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<sup>14</sup> Is the coming of age for a child in a family. According to the Zulu culture when a member of their family attained puberty stage it is a must for the family to declare such by performing certain rituals to qualify her/him to adulthood

children of the dead is done at the family of birth of their mother. A goat is a prerequisite for the carrying out of this ritual.

### **5.11 The importance of inversions in Zulu death rituals**

According to Berglund (1976:364), in the Underworld, where the shades (the word shade is used in anthropological literature on Zulu traditional believes to refer to ancestral spirits) are said to live, everything is said to be upside down and reversed. That is why it is typical for things to be done in the opposite way during death. Berglund (1976:365) provides a number of examples of this practice which he termed funeral inversions. Speech is reversed (saying yes when meaning no); clothing is sometimes worn inside out, a leader of a Zionist church in Durban reversed his collar from back to front on occasions when he conducted funeral services, while widows sometimes turned their skirts inside out during the funeral of their husbands, objects are also turned in different directions; it is recorded that on a number of occasions when a polygamous man was being buried, his *iqadi* (right hand side wife) carried her husband on the left hand side while the *ikhohlwa* wife (left hand side wife) carried on the right hand side when the body was transported to the grave, thereby reversing the traditional positions in the family. There are many examples that have been recorded. However, according to some informants it is stated that Zulu women did not come close to the coffin or body.

Berglund (1976:367) suggests that these funeral inversions are to help the new ancestral spirit to feel comfortable in their new environment. It is for this reason that diviners often do things in reverse. The risk of not doing things in reverse will be that the spirit of the deceased will be

troubled and this will affect the living.

Miss Bendann, as quoted in Berglund (1976:376) offers a psychological explanation of funeral inversions basing her argument on what she calls, the principal of opposition. According to her because of the strong relationship between the corpse and the living, the acts of funeral inversions serve as a shock which the living must experience when they become aware of the deceased. They therefore show their feelings in a negative way by doing things in reversal.

Professor Radcliff-Brown as quoted by Berglund (1976:377) on the other hand builds his assumption on the fact that funeral inversions are a notion of hostility between the society of living and the world of the spirits. He argues that the society in which the individual is a link will act as a protector to the individual, protecting him from the dangers and hardships which are caused by the deceased. Professor Radcliff-Brown finds the solution to funeral inversions on the assumed hostile relationships between the living and the deceased.

It is therefore, clear that inversions play a very important role in traditional Zulu funerals. In his summary, Berglund (1976:379) states that the deceased is thought to leave his/her old relationships, within the age-set, immediate family ties and the upper world. The rituals help the deceased to be released from previous bonds and be easily incorporated in the next. This is best described by a Sangoma as quoted by Berglund (1976:379),

If you bury without these things (i.e. reversals) than you are simply putting the person into the earth like a dog. What will become of him, if nothing is done that will assist him? He just remains there without anything taking place.

Another diviner had this to say, Berglund (1976:379),

Doing the things that pertain to a funeral is like accompanying the man on the way. If you go with the man, especially if he is going through an unknown land, than you are helping him find the way. So, this is done so that the man may find his way, being on the journey to that place (the nether world).

## 5.12 Recapitulation

It is clear that the rituals and procedures associated with death in the Zulu community as described in this chapter, are geared towards helping the deceased leave his/her old relationships with the living world with the aim of entering the world of the *amadlozi*. The correct procedures will help the deceased find the best possible way to the unknown land. The rituals make the journey to this unknown territory easier and more relevant for the deceased. This chapter focused on most of the rituals that are traditionally performed after the death of a Zulu person. The variations in terms of status, clan, sex, age etc have been covered.

## CHAPTER 6

### POST DEATH RITUALS AND ANCESTOR WORSHIP AMONGST THE ZULUS.

#### 6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the focus was on the rituals carried out when a Zulu person dies. This chapter will focus on the rituals that are performed after the actual funeral ceremony. In traditional Zulu culture the funeral ceremony does not put an end to all activities in relation to the deceased. Many rituals are performed to ensure the safe passage of the deceased to the ancestral kingdom as the soul integrates with the other ancestors.

The religion of the Zulu, like many of the other Nguni peoples, is characterized by ancestor worship. The ancestral spirits play a key role in traditional Zulu society. This belief system propagates that when a person dies, he or she will continue to watch over his or her people from the spiritual world. The belief in ever present ancestral spirits who watch over the activities of the homestead creates a sense of accountability among the members of the traditional Zulu society. The ancestral spirits communicate with the living through diviners and dreams and by sending illness; they give fertility or barrenness, pestilence, rain, and good crops. According to Hammond-Tooke (1974:104), the most important part of traditional belief is the ancestor cult. The belief in the immortality of the soul and that it is the ancestors who hold in their hands the destinies of their descendants.

According to Folkard (2005), the Zulu have a saying,

According to the power and authority a forefather had in his lifetime, so it is from the place where he has gone.

This in effect, means that a person carries into the next world the influence that he had during his lifetime. The spirit of the King will watch over the whole Zulu nation, while the ancestral spirits of the family will care for that immediate family, as well as their cattle, goats and crops. The ancestral spirits therefore, act as mediators between the Lord of the Sky and the surviving members of the lineage group. The importance of the ancestors as mediators needs to be emphasized. They are both accessible and in touch with Zulu affairs, unlike the Supreme Being which is often difficult to conceptualize and thus, remain vague.

The ancestral spirits, act as mediators between us and God. We send our ancestors to send messages to God and God will send our Ancestors to send His messages to us. The Zulus believe that the ancestors often communicate with the living world through dreams. The response is to slaughter a cow or goat to appease them (Khumalo 2007: pc).

According to Mnguni (2006:20), the Zulu people believe that the Spirit of the ancestors' watches over the family and therefore the members of the family should behave in a manner that would please the ancestors. Through the concept of *ukuhlonipha* (respect) the Zulus believe that they cannot have a direct contact with *uNkulunkulu* (Almighty God), but are able to communicate with God through the ancestors. According to Mnguni (2006:20),

...ritual slaughtering of their most prized possessions, the Zulu people believe, releases a flow of

blood which acts as a vehicle to the Almighty God. Cattle and goats are regarded as a means to communicate with the ancestors and the slaughter is ritualized for this purpose.

In an article that appeared in *The Star*, 24 September 2007, *Heritage a major influence for black*, pg. 3, it was stated that the Freedom Park Trust was expected to host a cleansing and healing ceremony as well as the symbolic return of the spirits for South African's who have died in the liberation struggle. The spirits were to be symbolically laid to rest at *Isivivane* at the Freedom Park, near Pretoria as part of the Heritage Day celebrations. Dr Mongane Wally Serote, the CEO of the Freedom Park Trust, said that the cleansing and healing rituals symbolized the return of the spirits of the dead, where it was impossible to exhume the remains for return to the home country. One of the aims is to release the spirits of those who died in exile to return home and to bring about closure for the bereaved families on their loss; which is a necessary step towards reconciliation. According to Young and Darroll (2004:2), the *isivivane* is a sanctuary, a final resting place for all the people who fell in the fight for freedom in the eight conflict events that have shaped South Africa. *Isivivane* roughly means 'cairn of stones' found in a circular structure, commonly found in southern African villages, where generation upon generation is buried. It is a place where the spirits can come home to rest, a place of the ancestors, and of the cattle that are mystically linked to the ancestors.



Fig. 14 Isivivane, a resting place for the spirits at Freedom Park  
Reference: [www.freedompark.org.za](http://www.freedompark.org.za), 2004

African cosmology gives special significance to stones, boulders and rocks. They represent mountains and caves, the significance of which has already been noted. According to Credo Mutwa, as quoted by Young and Darrel (2004:2),

The stones and bones of the earth and some of the mountains are identified as places where the gods reside. Because they are ancient and timeless, because they have long been here before us, they carry sacred networks of information.

*Umphafa* (Buffalo Thorn) trees have been planted to form a green backdrop to the *isivivane*. The choice of this tree was inspired by the special reverence in which it is held by the Nguni people as was discussed in the previous chapter.

Mbiti (1970:267) outlines that every African society has ways of establishing and maintaining contact between human beings and the departed. These include the pouring of libation, giving formal and informal offerings (mainly of food), making sacrifices, propitiating, praying, and fulfilling requests made by the departed. These acts serve as a means of contact, communion and

fellowship; they are a token that the departed have not been forgotten; they symbolize welcome and hospitality towards the departed; they serve as a means of appeasement if the departed have been offended and angered.

According to Mbiti (1975:18), Africans do not worship their departed relatives. He agrees that the departed relatives are believed to continue to live and to show interest in their surviving families. This is achieved by various means such as building shrines for the departed and placing bits of food or drink at their graves, and sometimes mentioning them in their prayers. These are merely acts of respect for the departed and do not amount to worshipping them. It is this reverence for the spirits of the dead that observers, ignorant of African traditional beliefs, misunderstood as “ancestor worship”. Shrines, sacred places and religious objects are outward and material expressions of religious ideas and beliefs. They help people in practicing and handing down their religion (1975:24).

Mnguni (2006:20) describes a number of anthropological events that are commemorated by the ritual slaughtering of beasts in memory of the ancestors.

- On the death of a family member – *Umgcwabo*
- A year after the death of a family member – cleansing ceremony – *Ukubuyisa*
- On marriage – *Umshado*
- When a traditional healer qualifies – *Ukuthwasa*
- On the birth of a new born – *Imbeleko*
- Coming of age ceremony – *Umemulo*

The Zulus regard their ancestors as their Angels, because they are the ones that are taking the messages up and down. They can come at night or at anytime when they are there to deliver the message especially when you are asleep. They are called *Amathongo* because they come when you are asleep (*ebuthongweni*).

Onukwugha (2004:3) describes how Africans conceptualize death by making reference to the term “transition” which is used to refer to dying. In African society, it is very rare to hear people say a person has died. Saying that the person has transitioned in the African context means that he or she has gone to the next life. The term also implies that the person has not left us, but the person has simply changed form into a spiritual existence. The term ‘passed on’ is also used frequently to express transition.

The heart of African traditional religion is characterized by ancestor worship. However some proponents of the African traditional religion dispute the use of “worship”. They claim that our people cannot “worship” ancestors, instead they “serve” and “honour” them in the same way they did whilst they were alive. The main belief in ancestor worship is that the dead continue to live in our midst and are part of our daily lives and should be acknowledged in the affairs of the living. They are praised and thanked when a person have encountered good tidings and consulted in times of need and are subsequently appeased through sacrifices whenever they are displeased about some wrongdoing by the living.

Although African peoples use these intermediaries in performing some of their acts of worship, they do not worship the intermediaries themselves as such. They simply use them as conveyor

belts, as helpers or assistants. By speaking through intermediaries they feel that they show more respect, esteem, honour and courtesy towards God, who must be approached with reverence and humility (Mbiti, 1975:69).

Onukwugha (2004:1) provides an explanation for the acceptance of death and the importance of ancestor worship in African society.

Though death is inevitable, the African both denies and accepts death in daily life. This double perspective can be seen in a set of beliefs sometimes referred to as 'ancestor worship' or 'reincarnation'. Many Africans believe the spirit of the deceased remains in the world and that the dead person can come back embodied in another person.

It is in the light of this belief that John S. Mbiti as quoted by Onukwugha (2004:1) asserted,

For the Africans, death is a separation and not annihilation; the dead person is suddenly cut off from the human society, and yet the corporate group clings to him. This is shown through the elaborate funeral rites, as well as other methods of keeping in contact with the departed (Mbiti 1970:46).

It is for this reason that many rituals are performed after the death of a person to ensure that the deceased takes its rightful place in the ancestral kingdom. According to Taldykin (2005), it is customary after death to talk directly or indirectly to the spirit of the deceased person since it is about to become a shade (ancestral spirit) and enter the ancestral kingdom. The communication also serves to remind the deceased of their task to watch over and protect the surviving lineage members. There may be strained relationships between the shades and surviving lineage members which must be worked out through various rituals in order for communion to take place (Berglund 1976).

Communion with the ancestral spirits is a huge part of traditional Zulu culture. As quoted by Taldykin (2005:2), Berglund (1976:102) demonstrated the intimate way in which traditional Zulu people view their relationship with the shades in a quote from an elderly Zulu woman who was asked about her conception of the shades. She said they are in me. When they are in me, I know that they are there. They are happy with me and I am happy with them. I think of them always. They know I am thinking of them. There is complex ritual communion between the shades and the lineage members in the widest, most intimate way. During a typical ritual beer drinking session, a large portion of beer is set aside for the shades and it is believed that they drink and socialize right along with the living members of the family. There are also special clan songs called *ihubo*, which are sung at special lineage occasions which serve to unify all the members of the family whether dead or alive.

In emphasizing the importance of ancestor worship, Gluckman (2005:9) states that it needs a distinct effort and organization of high order to keep links strong. It is obvious that the common ancestor must be remembered at all times. This is done by sacrifices and commemoration. A man may or may not believe in magic, but if the ancestors send him illness, he must sacrifice, and there are certain periodic obligations to them which must be fulfilled, at birth, initiation, wedding and death ceremonies/ritual.

According to Mbiti (1970:178) sacrifices and offerings constitute one of the commonest acts of worship among African peoples. The examples are overwhelmingly many. In some cases, the sacrifice or offering is made to god alone; in others it is to God, the spirits, and the departed; in others it is only to the spirits and the departed, who are considered intermediaries between God

and men. The intermediaries are a link between God and the creator and human beings. It is believed they have easier access to him than ordinary people, although anybody can approach God directly if they have needed to do so. The idea of intermediaries fits well with the African view of the universe, which holds that the invisible world is in some ways higher than that of man, but God is higher still. In order to reach God effectively it may be useful to approach him by first approaching those who are lower than he is but higher than the ordinary person (Mbiti 1975:68).

He goes on to say that sacrifices and offerings are acts of restoring the ontological balance between God and man, the spirits and man, and the departed and the living. When this balance is upset, people experience misfortunes and sufferings, or fear that these will come upon them. Sacrifices and offerings help, at least psychologically to restore this balance. When the sacrifices and offerings are directed towards the departed, they are a symbol of fellowship, recognition that the departed are still members of the human families, and tokens of respect and remembrance of the departed. The remembrances go back four or five generations, and are called the living-dead.

When people offer prayers, sacrifices and other offerings, they sometimes address members of their families who died recently. For national or communal needs, the people may address departed kings, chiefs, clan founders, or the divinity or spirit of the area.

Communion with the ancestral spirits is not limited to only special occasions. The spirits are considered to be present in the homestead as the living members. There are specific places within a homestead which are associated with the ancestors including the back wall where there is a

shrine called an *umsamo*, the doorway and the cattle enclosure. It is also common knowledge among the traditional Zulu community that the ancestral spirits reveal themselves in the form of snakes (males) and lizards (females). These animals are usually revered because they are considered to be incarnations of ancestors. When a green snake appears at the hut, people consult a *sangoma* to find out why it came. Green snakes which are not poisonous represent the *amadlozi* in Zulu culture.

Every disembodied Zulu spirit receives at a new embodiment in the form of a special kind of harmless snake. This snake in the re-incarnated form of the deceased will wander around in the neighbourhood of its relatives, unable to settle down properly as a spirit until the surviving relatives conduct the (*ukubuyisa*) a special ritual to be brought home again (Bryant 1967:731). The spirit can also be in the form of crabs, mantis etc. (Khumalo: 2006: pc). Other manifestations of the living dead are said to occur in dreams, visions, possessions and certain illnesses or mental disturbances. In dreams and visions, people claim to encounter the spirit of the living dead, to talk to it, and to receive certain instructions or requests from it (Mbiti 1975:126).

Communication with the ancestors takes place during important ceremonies. As mentioned the cleansing ceremony (*ukubuyisa*) is performed for a person who passes away whereas the 'fetching' ceremony (*ukulanda*) is done if the family moves from an old site to a new site and in doing so leaving some family members who were buried in the old site which has been left behind. It is believed that according to Zulu tradition the location of the new home will not be known by the ancestors as none of them have been buried there. This is why it is necessary to perform this ritual to let the ancestors (*amadlozi*) know where they are so that they can continue

to protect them (Mnguni 2006:102)



Fig.15 Communication with the ancestors' takes place at most functions. In this case Inkosi Zulu of Umzimkhulu communicates with his ancestors for the commencement of a cultural function.

Reference: Govender: 2007

During ceremonies dedicated to the ancestors special clothes are worn by both men and women to show respect towards their ancestors. According to Magwaza (1999:264), communicating with the ancestors was and is still considered sacred. The women adorn articles of *ukuhlonipha* (respect), i.e. scarves that are worn crossing from shoulder to the upper waist. The act of this kind of *ukuhlonipha* is known as *ukuwoyiza*. She goes on to say that some women show respect by adorning beads in place of cloths or scarves.

The ancestral spirits also reveal themselves in dreams or omens by transmitting certain messages which need to be acted upon. Bowie (2000:142) describes the dreamtime as the period of creation “long ago”, in which ancestral beings emerged from a featureless landscape. The “story places’ are where ancestral beings emerged, acted, or reintegrated themselves with the landscape, while the story lines tell of the ancestors’ journeys across the land. She goes on to say that all living creatures and natural phenomena are imbued with ancestral spiritual power, and are linked via these story places and lines, where the interaction of the ancestral beings with the land

transformed them into rocks, birds, trees, waterholes, and so on.

The Zulus believe that dreams are the media through which the ancestors speak to them. Most people cannot interpret the messages contained in these dreams as they are often 'opposite' in meaning. This supports the notion that the spirits live under the earth. It is believed that while it is night-time on earth, and dark and people are asleep and dreaming, it is daytime underneath and the spirits are busy with their own affairs. That is when the spirits speak to their families on earth, but because it is light there and dark here, their messages come through in reverse, like for example, when a black cow is seen in a dream it will in reality turn out to be a white ox. The roles of the diviners (witchdoctors) are crucial in interpreting the dreams as many of the ordinary folk can seldom understand a dream. The diviners are therefore the intermediaries between earth-dwellers and their spiritual families (Elliot 1978:14).

It is believed that the spirits are also active in the physical body of the lineage members of the family. When the child is in the womb, the female's ancestral spirits are believed to be nourishing it with blood and continuing to strengthen it with seminal fluid. The spirits then continue to work in the women's breast while the child is feeding to create food for the child (Berglund 1976). Sometimes when babies are disturbed during their sleep they either cry or smile or even attempt to talk. This is attributed to them communicating with the ancestral spirits.

It is a common belief amongst the Zulu that good fortune in any enterprise depends on the approval of the *amadlozi*, who lived underground and was concerned with every aspect of the lives of the living descendants.

The *amadlozi* do not refer to the ancestral spirits, but the spirits or ghosts of other beings. It is believed that this spirit has a tendency to force you to perform certain tasks sometimes much to your disapproval. It is also believed that if you do not do accordingly something unpleasant will happen to you or your family. In Zulu when you are forcing somebody to do something we say “ubamba *lowomuntu ngesidlozana*”. This action of forcing somebody to do something is called *isidlozana* (Khumalo 2007: pc).

There are many other ways through which Zulus worship ancestors, *amadlozi*.

Ma Sigebengu and Moses of the Gumede clan (2005: pc) described the following ways through which a link is established with the ancestors of their clan:

- Zulu beer is brewed and placed at the back of the main house, the *umsamo*. They state that some ancestors will appreciate this and bring good fortunes in the *umuzi* (homestead).
- a goat is slaughtered after the *amadlozi* have pleaded. They usually plead in the midst of dreams.
- a goat is also slaughtered for the *amadlozi* thanking them for a particular fortune.

Hammond-Tooke (1974:105) explains that propitiatory offerings may be daily routine offerings of a little food or drink at meals, or at least whenever a new brew of beer is made or an animal slaughtered. It is believed that the spirits partake in the offerings by licking the meat that is set aside for them. They may also be regular offerings made at special occasions such as the opening of the agricultural season or the harvest. Offerings may also be made at thanksgiving

ceremonies in order to appease the ancestors.

Taldykin (2005:2) explains that in recognizing the importance of these ancestral spirits, offerings and sacrifices are often made to these spirits for protection, health, and happiness. These offerings are made to show the ancestors that they are not forgotten. An example is when at family festivals and other social events, a little beer is poured on the ground for the dead before the people drink it. It is believed that if the ancestors are forgotten, they will be unhappy and will reveal themselves through some misfortune that will be inflicted on the guilty members of the family.

According to Mnyandu (1997:89) in the Zulu thought patterns, *amadlozi* play a major role because they are the agents through which the traditional Zulu prayer. This is best illustrated in the following prayer quoted by Mnyandu (1997:90),

Yes! Yes! I implore you, O! Grandfathers who completed so many noble undertakings. After having sacrificed this bull which belongs to you, asking every kind of prosperity, I cannot deny you nourishment, since you have given me all the herds that are here and, if you ask of me the nourishment that you have given me, is it not just that I return it to you?. Grant us many beasts to fill these tables! Grant us much grain, so that many people may come to inhabit this village and your name may never be extinguished. (O'Connor, 1961:64)

The above prayer clearly shows that ancestral veneration plays a very significant role in Zulu society. They help with;

- instilling a sense of oneness

- demonstrating a sense of loyalty towards the ancestors through prayer and praise.
- providing a channel for public opinion concerning the development and problem solving in society.
- providing an oral record of historical and cultural events.
- evaluating the relationship between society members and the spiritual reality

Because of this respect for ancestors, the Zulu believe that gravesites are sacred and must never be disturbed; angry spirits might cause harm. They also believe that ancestor spirits sometimes come back to the world in the form of snakes. If a snake appears, songs are sung to praise members of the Zulu nation and to pass on oral histories.

According to MaGumede of the Mavundla clan (2005: pc)) the *amadlozi* usually talk through the livestock. In other words, she said a goat or cow can be infected by an unusual disease. Seeing the unusual symptoms, the *isangoma* is then consulted to foretell the cause thereof. If the *amadlozi* has a complaint about something important that is ignored/unknown in the family, then the problem will be solved when a particular ritual is carried out.

Tholakele of the Mthethwa clan (2005: pc)) stated that they sometimes slaughter a goat, saying that they are giving a particular ancestor his/her food. She further stated that they give the *amadlozi* food in return for the good things that are happening in their lives.

The head of the Chili clan (2005: pc)) said that slaughtering a goat/cow when required is the best way of maintaining a link between his clan and the *amadlozi*. If the head of the family passed away, the eldest son or his brothers in the absence of the eldest son of the family will perform the

prayers.

MaMxoveni and Mandla of the Khoza clan (2005: pc) reported that with regard to any changes that take place in the family, the *amadlozi* are informed through the burning of *impepho*. They further stated that beast slaughtering is another way of linking with the ancestors. They recommended that this should be a consistent practice if we want to remain connected to our ancestors.



Fig.16 Jacob Zuma, President of the ANC, offering thanks to his ancestors  
Reference: Sunday Tribune: 25 November 2007

Khumalo (2007: pc) explains that the use of goats, *impepho* (incense) and beer to communicate with the ancestors is significant because all these elements have a strong smell. It is believed that both the ancestors and God acknowledge the smell of these elements and respond to the people.

Khumalo (2007: pc) further explains that in Zulu is believed people who are dead are people who are sleeping (*Abantu Abalele*). Therefore, there must be a noise to raise them. When you stab a goat, it makes a noise. When I'm talking to the Ancestors, I must shout in Zulu saying "*uyathetha*", because we want to raise them when they are asleep. The bellowing of the animal is

supposed to represent communication with the ancestors. Among the Zulus, the goat has been accepted to be the only animal to be slaughtered for a sacrifice. This is because when it makes noise, it signals to the ancestors that a certain family by a specific clan name is slaughtering something and they want the ancestors to come and be part of the celebration.

In his book, about the importance of various animals to African spirituality, Credo Mutwa (1996) writes the following poem about the importance of the goat in African culture.

I hear you cry, oh *imbuzi*, on the altars of our ancestors  
 I hear you cry, oh goat, in the shrines of our forefathers  
 You are the one who asks the questions  
 That is the meaning of your name  
 The animal which asks questions  
 Questions which often have no answer  
 You are the delight of the old men  
 Old men without teeth who grow old on your milk  
 You are also the delight of the gods  
 The angry gods who adore your flesh  
 You are the creature that came from the heavens  
 Sent by the gods to human beings on Earth...

You have to shout out loud so that they will wake up and listen to you. Khumalo (2007: pc) uses an example to explain this. When a lady is pregnant and she is in labour pains the midwife will help her to deliver the baby at home as in the olden days there were no hospitals and the baby was delivered by midwives. If there was difficulty with the labour, the old women (*ogogo*), grand mothers will take the sticks and beat the roof of the house and shout as to why the woman is having difficulty with delivering the baby. This act of beating the roof is to communicate with the ancestors to help the lady in distress. Thereafter, the baby is born without any further problems.

Communication with the ancestors commands a lot of respect and one of the rules of respect to a Zulu person is not to call adults by their first names. Addressing a person by his praise words is also a good way of motivating that person to accede to your request. It is therefore, fitting that ancestors are addressed in a proper and respectful manner in order to implore them to protect the family against any ills. They can be highly infuriated by a display of disrespect. He also adds that when the slaughtering is done silence must be observed as the ancestors do not like a noisy environment (Mnguni 2007).

## 6.2 Perspectives on the practice of traditional Zulu rituals in modern society

Moses Gumede (2005: pc) said that some Zulu people no longer worship the *amadlozi*. According to him,

Akukho okungalunga uma ungalikhonzi idlozi ngoba liyimpilo kumuntu ongumZulu  
(Nothing can go smoothly if a Zulu person does not recognize or worship the ancestors.)

MaSigebengu Gumede (2005: pc) stated that there are things that are no longer done, but which were done in the past years with regard to *amadlozi*. She commented that the main cause of this is the fact that presently, there are fewer older people who are the custodians of the Zulu tradition. “The younger generations”, she says, “have no one to get advice from.”

MaNgiba Mavudla’s perspective (2005: pc) is that the modern Zulu society is not remembering the ancestors in an effective and appropriate manner. She says the *amadlozi* are worshipped in the rondawel thatched with grass. She went on to say that in the modern world people worship

the *amadlozi* in corrugated thatched houses. This has a negative effect on the communication between the ancestors and the living world.

MaGumede Mavundla (2005: pc) stated that there are differences in the way Zulu people worship the *amadlozi* in modern times. In the past years, there were standard ways of worshipping the *amadlozi*.

Tholakele Mthethwa (2005: pc) stated that in present times we are exposed to western types of drinks whereas the traditional Zulu beer was drunk in most of the ritual ceremonies as the *amadlozi* like the smell of Zulu beer.



Fig.17 Drinking traditional Zulu beer

Reference: [www.eshowe.com](http://www.eshowe.com)

M. Chili (2005: pc) believes that the reason that the ancestors are becoming less recognized in the modern times is that people are no longer keeping livestock. It becomes difficult for a large number of people to afford buying cows or goats for ancestral worshipping purpose. This is further exacerbated by the fact that a lot of people are presently without jobs.

Ancestral rituals have been modified to meet the fashion demands of modern society. Most of the youth attend the rituals and practices which are outside their homesteads (Lucky Chili 2005: pc). The *amadlozi* are now less respected, especially by the youth (MaMxoveni Khoza 2005: pc) According to Mandla Khoza (2005: pc) some of the things are modernly omitted when Zulu ritual practices are carried out. This is because some of the Zulu live the traditional and western life simultaneously.

According to Gluckman (2005:9), a group will be regarded as large and strong if it has a long ancestral lineage. The strength of the family is determined by the extent it can go back into the past to determine its origins. Since the people are linked together through their ancestors, the dead must not be lost to society. They represent the past life of the group and bind together the living. It is for this reason that the ancestors are praised in full glory at marriages, births, feasts, and funerals. The ancestral cult is a mechanism by which kinship bonds are affirmed and the hierarchy of society expressed.

In an article that appeared in the Sunday Times 17 December 2006, Ntshangase describes different ways in which ancestors are venerated. Firstly, during the *umkhosi wokweshwama* (first fruits ceremony), new produce from the fields are harvested in early summer and the community gather at a specified venue on the appointed day. There, they would communicate with god through the ancestral spirits. They would thank God for the harvest and pray for future blessings. As part of the ceremony, the community would also sing the praises of the reigning king and seek blessings from the ancestors to provide him with the necessary wisdom and strength to lead the Zulu nation. The king in return, will thank god for a good harvest and ask for the protection

of the livestock – the cornerstone of the sustenance of the people.

Another example cited by Ntshangase (2006), is the *umkhosi wezinsizwa* (the ceremony for young men). The strength of the king was determined by the strength of his regiment. At this ceremony the new regiment would be given a name by the king, such as *udakwakusutha*. The men would be blessed and fortified by strong medicine by the resident traditional healer. The new regiment will then be reported to God via the ancestral spirits, and the community will make a plea to God for the protection and strength of the regiment.

In the context of African religion, Ntshangase (2006) explains that there would be special prayers conducted by the elders, on behalf of the new regiment, which was regarded as being representative of the entire army during the ceremony where the ancestors play a major role.

An important stage in the process of strengthening the new regiment was for the men to prove their strength and readiness to be inducted into the army and the world of adult men. To do this they were required to kill a black bull with their bare hands. After being taught the necessary skills by the elders they overpowered the bull, slaughtered, skinned and roasted it. Once the bull has been killed, certain prayers and rituals were conducted to communicate with the ancestors. These practices have received mixed reactions in modern day society.

In a letter to the editor, (Sunday Times 17 December 2006), R Becker writes that the word culture has taken a new meaning in South Africa. The so-called “Zulu warrior” spending 20 minutes torturing a bull to death with their bare hands in the name of culture is certainly

unacceptable. He goes on to say,

What is a Zulu warrior in the first place? Which war are they fighting? They are not warriors in any sense of the word; they are bunch of brutal, bloodthirsty thugs. ....As for the ceremony being a 'sacred Zulu prayer related to the new harvest', what a load of hogwash. It is plain barbaric, pagan behaviour directed at a non-existent god or so-called ancestor. I hope they have a worst harvest, and wish every one of them would get trapped in a kraal with 150 irritated bulls.

According to Jennifer Skutelsky, letter to the editor, (Sunday Times 17 December 2006),

Academics protect the right of people to do whatever they want, if what they do fall within the sphere of cultural practice. We don't have the right, they say, to impose our own values on others. I say that's nonsense. Have we found a way to label stupidity as tolerance? What defines "savage, cruel and barbaric" is the infliction of terror and suffering upon those who depend on our goodwill. The torment and torture of animals, no matter the motivation, is barbaric.

Fred Khumalo (Sunday Times 17 December 2006) argues,

Cultures evolve and some customs get jettisoned along the way. Today, there are many other ways of expressing one's gallantry rather than killing a beast with one's own bare hands...apart from its out datedness, the ritual killing of a bull with one's bare hands is so impractical. It is simply dumb because it wastes time and energy....

On the other hand, LS Mtembu, in a letter to the editor, (Sunday Times 17 December) writes,

Yes, we understand about animal rights but, at the same time, you must bear in mind that this is the African continent and we as Zulus are practicing our culture as Africans. We are tired of these white people trying to suppress our religions and cultures. Whether you kill a cow by bare hands or gun, it's the same thing because in the end the animal will die.

In the light of the above arguments and according to Ntshangase (2006), the reigning Zulu monarch, King goodwill Zwelithini ka Bhekuzulu, has given himself the very difficult and challenging task of reviving all of these important national ceremonies. During the dark years of

colonial rule and the apartheid era many important concepts and aspects of traditional life – from

colonial rule and the apartheid era many important concepts and aspects of traditional life – from which Africans derived their pride- were discontinued, as they were perceived to be barbaric. As a result of this Africans were denuded of their essence; their ceremonies and beliefs were distorted. He goes on to say that,

We should remember who we are. It is our belief that through these ceremonies we reclaim our essence as a people. Through these ceremonies we appeal to God to give us back our strength and pride in much the same way that some people would go to church for a spiritual revival or communication with God.

### **6.3 Recapitulation**

This chapter provides some insight in understanding into the importance of ancestor veneration in traditional Zulu society. The role of diviners in linking the living world with the ancestral world was highlighted. The various ways, in maintaining contact with the ancestors were discussed. The opinions of different informants were analyzed to determine the extent to which ancestor veneration is practiced in modern society. This chapter also concluded the discussion of the rituals and practices of the Zulu community. In the next three chapters the focus will be on rituals pertaining to the Hindu community.

## **SECTION C**

### **CHAPTER 7**

#### **HINDU DEATH RITUALS AND ANCESTOR WORSHIP**

##### **7.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, an historical background of the Hindu community in South Africa is sketched in order to understand the cultural practices of this diasporic community. The system of indentured labour; the reasons for recruitment and the hardships endured by the immigrants are outlined. The cultural practices of the motherland analyzed and compared to the practices of the adopted country and the reasons for some of the changes discussed following investigations by academics that focused on the Indian Diaspora. The characteristics of Hinduism and the linguistic similarities and differences are highlighted in order to understand the rituals and practices of the North Indian and South Indian communities in South Africa.

##### **7.2 Historical Background**

The Southern tip of Africa is one of the most treacherous coastlines, yet, the most fertile and scenic geographical location on the world map. This region holds a sizeable Indian population of over 1.5 million, with an Indianness that springs directly from the development of its cultural, educational and linguistic edifices. The bulk of this minority heterogeneous community endured a long and tedious process of development since the inception of the first human cargo as

indentured labourers on board the ship S S Truro and S S Belvedere. Although in some instances this vibrant community left an indelible footprint on the sands of the Eastern seaboard of South Africa, the successive generations have identified themselves as first and foremost as South Africans. Their contributions are clearly etched into the fabric of South African life. The pioneers initiated a strong value system coupled with a sense of community and family, authentic Indian cuisine, cadres of freedom and human rights, fighters, champions, wealthy, poor, religious and atheist.

The perennial flow of indentured labourers and subsequent linkages between India and South Africa was clearly articulated by the former President of South Africa, Dr Nelson Mandela who stated in India, 25 January 1995,

We are poised to build a unique and special partnership forged in the crucible of history, common cultural attributes and common struggle.

The arrival of Indians in South Africa started in 1860 when the first batch of Indians disembarked from the SS Truro a paddle steamer. The ship left Madras on October 13, 1860 and reached the Port of Durban on November 16, 1860. The batch of Indentured Indian labourers comprised of 340 labourers made up of 197 men, 89 women and 54 children. The “SS *Belvedere*” followed a few days later with 351 additional indentured labourers from Calcutta, from the north of India.

The Indian population of South Africa owes its presence in the country due to the serious labour problems that was being experienced by the Sugar Industry that commenced in the province of Kwa-Zulu Natal. The success of the industry in other parts of the world especially Fiji and

Mauritius compelled the local authorities to recruit the much needed labourers from India. Recruitment drives were conducted in various parts of India, but most of the interested parties hailed from the southern and eastern parts of India in the provinces of Madras, Bihar, Agra and Oudh. There were numerous factors that contributed to the decision for these individuals to leave their family and homes and embark on a new journey to travel to South Africa and settle in a land that was far away from home. According to Naidoo (1986:114) the majority chose to leave the motherland in order to escape from conditions of extreme poverty, while others were spurred by ambition and adventure. The people in the group were diverse in terms of skills and interests. There were a heterogeneous assortment of skilled workers such as mechanics, domestic workers, gardeners, chefs, barbers, carpenters, accountants, nurses and maids. It is clear from this list that very few qualified to be labourers for the sugar plantations. The list disproves the theory that all the indentured labourers were recruited from the class of “untouchables”, a class of people that were shunned by society and were living in semi-starvation in India. Naidoo (1986:115).



Fig.18 Indentured Indian labourers  
(Source: Durban Cultural and Documentation Centre)

By being forced to remain in South Africa the majority of the indentured labourers quickly adopted to the new circumstances which made them less conservative and more susceptible to changes in their customs and habits. It must also be remembered that most of the immigrant Indians came from many villages in the southern parts of India each having its own distinctive religious and cultural practices.

The other group of Indians that arrived in South Africa consisted of free or passenger Indians who paid their own way to the country and were not subjected to any of the restrictions placed on the movement and employment of the indentured labourers. They were mostly Gujarati speaking Hindus who arrived about twenty five years after the indentured labourers. They hailed from the province of Gujarat and were merchants and traders, ranging from the petty bagman to the wholesale importers and exporters, craftsmen, goldsmiths, cobblers, confectioners and produce vendors.

The last ship to bring indentured labourers to Natal was the S.S. Umlazi which arrived in July 21<sup>st</sup> 1911. Between 1860 and 1911 some 152 184 Indians arrived on 384 ships turning South Africa into the biggest concentration of the Indian Diaspora after Mauritius, Trinidad and Tobago. The majority of the indentured labourers were Hindus from the Madras Presidency and Travancore who spoke the Tamil and Telegu language. The rest were from Orissa and Bengal. Among the 3 200 indentured labourers coming on eight ship loads selected at random, approximately 2 percent were Brahmins, 9 percent were Kshatriyas, 21 percent were Vaishyas, 31 percent were Sudras, 27 percent were untouchable castes, 3 percent were Christians and 4 percent were Muslims (Kuper 1960:7). As a matter of interest the first person to disembark from

the ship Truro 16 November 1860, was Davarum a Telegu speaking Christian. (Extracted from the Ships List, KZN Archives)

When the Indian indentured labourers arrived in South Africa, they brought with them India's ancient brand of culture, religion, language, music, tradition and other social practices. As a result of their strong cultural background they have been able to maintain their identity.

Jayaram N. (2004:27) explains that migrants carry with them a socio-cultural baggage which is often in the folk form and have regional variants. The experience of these cultural elements in different diasporic situations has been varied: some of these elements have disappeared; some have survived or persisted; others have experienced assimilation, syncretism or change and a few elements have been revived. He goes on to say that,

Overseas Indians adhere to their traditional culture so ostensibly that at times it appears that they are more Indian in their cultural orientations and practices than resident Indians in India.

According to Govender (2002:2),

Within this context we see a minority community in a pluralistic society, continuously stitching the threads of peaceful co-existence and restoring their cultural umbilical cord with that of Bharat.

In a paper, *Perspectives on Indians Abroad*, Sharma (2004:47) expands that if one looks at the socio-cultural perspective of the Indian Diaspora, there are three recurrent themes; The first is that overseas Indians tend to recreate Indian social structure wherever they go; the second is that

they tend to hold fast to their native culture in their lands of adoption; the third is that their mode of adaptation is marked by a clear preference for economic integration more than cultural assimilation.

Salat (2004) state that, the Indians who went to Africa, have by and large, retained their essential Indianness – their religion, language and communal culture, unlike the Caribbean Indians who are Indians by origin but culturally an entirely different community. India, for them, exists only as an inherited memory, a mystified reality.

In 1995 the reseracher presented a paper entitled, “*The Preservation of Indian Culture in a Post-Apartheid South Africa*” at the 5th International Tamil Conference in Thanjavur, South India. The paper dealt with all the rituals and practices of the Tamil speaking community in South Africa. After the presentation, a prominent academic from India stood up and exclaimed that she was quite amazed that the People of Indian Origin still engage in these old traditions while most of the people of Tamil Nadu no more engage in these practices as they are very much westernized.

Poovalingam, in an article, *Blood and sweat watered Natal soil*, 15 August 2007, pg 18, writes that although most of the indentured labourers were illiterate soon after their arrival in South Africa they set about establishing their own, *patshalas*, *palikootams* and *maddressas* (vernacular schools) for the children, when the English government neglected that duty. The costs were borne from their meagre earnings.

Formal groups and organizations were increasingly established on local, provincial and national levels. Some noteworthy examples are, *The South African Hindu Maha Sabha*, the umbrella body of Hindu organizations; *Kwa-Zulu Natal Tamil Vedic Society*, *Gujerati Sanskruthi Sabha*, *Hindi Shiksha Sangh*, *Andhra Maha Sabha of South Africa*, *Indian Academy of South Africa* and many other organizations catering for the linguistic, cultural and religious needs of the Indian community. The Indians living far away from their motherland felt proud of the existence of a number of fertile languages all linked together through a deep affinity for their cultural and religious commonalities. The languages that they brought with them from their motherland are natural vehicles of expression of thoughts and feelings of the people that use it. In this way they have contributed towards the promotion and preservation of Indian culture.

Although the immigrant labourers hailed from different parts of southern India and differed linguistically, they had a common outlook in respect of their religion, customs, culture and traditions. According to Naidoo (1986:120), the new environment posed a major challenge to them. Through determination and hard work they were able to overcome many of the problems that confronted them. He went on to say that,

Whilst there has been a process of inner social and cultural cohesion, they could escape the impact of westernization resulting in progressive social and cultural changes and in the emergence of a new community which differed in many respects from the original immigrant community (1986:120).

The immigrant Hindus were divided into three groups based on linguistic differences viz. Tamil, Telegu and Hindi. The Gujerati speaking people were mostly from the passenger Indians. There were also a relatively small group of immigrants of Malayalam, Marathi and Kannada descent. Due to their small numbers, these groups have lost their linguistic identity and have been

absorbed into the Tamil way of life due to many similarities.

While these four groups differ linguistically, they are united by a common religion, Hinduism.

### 7.3 The characteristics of Hinduism

Vertovec (2000:8) explains that, there is no scripture that is authoritative for the vast number of Indians living within and outside India, or for the different periods of history and no central ecclesiastical body holds any parallel authoritative position. Ritual practice, especially, represents a sphere entailing a vast range of difference with regard to focus, intent, and actual undertaking. He further argues that,

Throughout virtually the entire history on Indian civilization, such differentiation of doctrine, authority, and practice has been particularly operative in the religions of relatively discrete social segments, particularly defined by caste, sub-caste, and sect (or *sampradaya*), a tradition focused on a set of beliefs transmitted through a line of teachers). Moreover, language differences, regional histories, and provincial customs throughout India combine to produce highly localized religious undertakings and practices (2000:8).

According to Matlins (2000:97), unlike many religions, Hinduism has no founder and no common creed or doctrine. The first attested usage of the word Hinduism in English was as late as 1829. It was only after the arrival of, and colonization by, Europeans that subsequently the term 'Hinduism' was derived from 'Hindu', a term used by Persians in the first millennium AD to designate generally the people of India that live in the region of the Indus River (Vertovec 2000:9).

Generally, Hinduism teaches that God is both within being and object in the universe – and transcends every being and object; that the essence of each soul is divine; and that the purpose of life is to become aware of that divine essence. There are many forms of worship, ritual and meditation in Hinduism. The main intention is to lead the soul toward direct experience of God or Self. Hinduism is more than just a highly organized religious and social system but rather as a way of life. He further explains that the central beliefs of Hinduism revolve around two key concepts, *dharma* and *moksha*. *Dharma* emphasizes the social and physical world in its demand upon human destiny to uphold and preserve the physical world and society as a whole. On the other hand, *moksha* refers to the ultimate release from the world, or salvation that can only be obtained by transcending all physical and social limitations.

It is believed by many that the different gods and goddesses in Hinduism are merely ways of conceiving and approaching the one God beyond name and form. The different forms of worship through images, symbols and rituals help different individuals to attain some form of spiritual realization. Some individuals do not need any form of external worship. Whatever forms an individual chooses to pray, the main goal is to transcend these forms and the world as it is ordinarily perceived and to realize the divine presence everywhere.

According to Behadur (2006: pc) there are six underlying themes that describe Hindu world-view. They are diversity, time, tension, tolerance, monism and religious integration. The Hindu world-view knows no sacred/secular dichotomy. Hinduism is a world view based upon many deities and endless life-death cycle. The main tenets of Hinduism revolve around the existence of Monotheism (one God). The five principles by which Hinduism abides are:

- Supreme Being;
- prayers;
- Law of Karma;
- reincarnation; and
- compassion

Inspiration is drawn from a number of authoritative sources which are divided into two classes: the *Śruti* (primary authority) and the *Smṛti* (secondary authority).

*Śruti* literary means what is heard. According to Sarma (1971:11), great *Rishis* are said to have heard the eternal truths of religion and have recorded them for the benefit of mankind. These well documented records are called the *Vedas*. The literal meaning of the word *Veda* is “supreme knowledge” and is applied to four books of scriptures which were written in Sanskrit. They are the *Rig Veda*, the *Yajur Veda*, the *Sama Veda* and the *Atharvana Veda*. Each *Veda* consists mainly of three parts:

- The Mantras<sup>1</sup> or hymns
- The *Brāhmanas* or explanations of mantras and rituals and
- The *Upanishads* or mystical utterances revealing profound spiritual truths.

The *Upanishads* are considered by many religious scholars to be the most important and form the foundations of Hinduism.

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<sup>1</sup> Is a religious or mystical syllable or poem, typically from the Sanskrit language. Their use varies according to the school and philosophy associated with the mantra. They are primarily used as spiritual conduits, words or vibrations that instill one-pointed concentration in the devotee.

Joshi Kireet (1991:4) states that the *Vedas*<sup>2</sup> have been regarded as the “highest source of knowledge” throughout the long history of Indian tradition, and the entire line of orthodox systems of philosophy. He refers to the *Vedas* as the “highest indisputable authority of knowledge and truth”.

The secondary scriptures are known as *Smṛti*. These derive their authority from the *Sṛuti* and the main object is to expand and exemplify the principals of the *Veda*. They consist of the following:

The ritualistic aspect of the religion allows for the worship of deities in the Hindu pantheon. Lord *Shiva*<sup>3</sup>, Lord *Vishnu*, Lord *Muruga*, Lord *Ganesha*, Goddess *Parvathi* and *Saraswathi*, etc is regarded as higher deities and constitutes an important element of both temple and domestic worship. Rituals and ceremonies are observed and offerings in the form of fruits, sweetened rice and flowers are made to them. There are many temples dedicated to these deities all over the country including faraway places like Kimberly and East London.

#### 7.4 Hinduism in South Africa

In South Africa, there is a clear distinction between the forms of worship, social customs and beliefs of the *Aryans*<sup>4</sup> of the north and the *Dravidians*<sup>5</sup> of the south. Many *Dravidians* followed

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<sup>2</sup> Are large corpuses of texts originating in Ancient India. They form the oldest layer of Sanskrit literature and the oldest sacred texts of Hinduism. According to Hindu tradition, the Vedas are *apauruṣeya* "not human compositions", being supposed to have been directly revealed, and thus are called *śruti* ("what is heard").

<sup>3</sup> The principal deities of Hinduism. Often called "the Destroyer", Shiva is one of the Trimurti, along with Brahma the Creator and Vishnu the Preserver.

<sup>4</sup> Is an English language word derived from Sanskrit and Avestan term *ārya*- meaning "noble" or "spiritual". It is widely held to have been used as an ethnic self-designation of the Proto-Indo-Iranians

<sup>5</sup> Refers to populations who speak languages belonging to the Dravidian language family. Populations of speakers are found mostly in Southern India.

the *Saivite* religion which is based on the *Saiva Siddhanta* philosophical system. This system has special features which distinguish it from other Indian systems of thought; special features are not concealed, but boldly set out and defended against other schools of thought (Pillai 2000: i).

According to statistics and ship records the majority of immigrants that arrived to work on the plantations were Tamil speaking. It is for this reason that many of the traditions and practices had a strong Dravidian influence.

It is clear that Tamil culture has a “long antiquity”. Many of the old Tamil customs are still in practice, even though some of them have changed or become extinct because of the changing times. It should, however, be observed, that the Tamils, like the Egyptians of old, “consider themselves the most ancient of mankind, and own no other country as their primitive residence than that which they now inhabit” (Sivagami 1980:182).

In South Africa the caste system was not firmly entrenched like it was in the motherland because the immigrants came from many different localities and villages in India and were numerically too small to reconstruct the small scale organization on which caste-group and sub-caste group behaviour had been based.

The disappearance of the class boundaries in South Africa gave way to the integration of a new group with a common Hindu identity. Some of the so called lower castes who had belonged to cults and sects with their own village deities (*Gramadeivas*), abandoned their distinctive practices, animal sacrifices, spirit possession and demonic tendencies and joined the so called

‘high class’ religious sects. However, it must be noted that there are still large groups of Hindu worshippers in South Africa who still subscribe to cult practices which involve animal sacrifices and other spirit practices. It is common for many Hindus of South Indian origin who observe prayer in honour of the Goddess *Mariammen*, *Kaliammen* and *Gangaiammen*, which involve animal sacrifice and in some cases, the offering of alcohol and *ganja* (marijuana).

According to Jain (1993:25), along with sanscritization, the religion of the overseas Indians was also marked by a process of syncretism<sup>6</sup>. This process mostly operated at two levels – between the north and south Indians and between Hindus and local Christians. At this level the pressure from modernist elements made the south Indians abandon goat and fowl sacrifices and give up their observance of various superstitions. In South Africa the general trend was to either adopt northern rituals as propagated by organizations that propagate Vedic principles. Reformist religious organizations such as the Ramakrishna Centre, Divine Life Society and the Hare Krishna Movement also attracted many devotees.

Syncretism at the second level occurred between Hinduism and Christianity. In Gauteng it is common for many Hindu devotees to name the Hindu place of worship as “Church”. Other examples include called the naming ceremony of a new born baby, “Christening” and adopting the Christian pattern of sitting on wooden benches, and the use of a pulpit similar to the one used in a Church by many Saivite congregations.

It is an accepted fact in Hindu religious philosophy that God is nameless and formless. It is for

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<sup>6</sup> Consists of the attempt to reconcile disparate or contradictory beliefs, often while melding practices of various schools of thought. Syncretism also occurs commonly in literature, music, the representational arts and other expressions of culture.

this reason that different names and different forms are attributed to Him. According to Kuppusami (1993:18) every Hindu, irrespective whether he is of Aryan or Dravidian origin have accepted in his mind that God is one. Every God accepted by Hinduism is elevated and identified ultimately with the central reality, which is one with the deeper self of man. Kuppusami illustrates this by making reference to Radhakrishnan a Hindu philosopher, who has said in the publication , *Hindu Way Of Life*, that the addition of new Gods to the Hindu pantheon does not endanger it, and approvingly quotes the following South Indian song,

Into the bosom of one great sea  
Flow streams that come from hills on every side  
Their names are various as their springs  
And thus in every land do men bow down  
To one great God though known by many names

While the above describes the different scriptural sources in which the Indian settlers derived their different forms of worship it is important to discuss how they used it to communicate with the divine element, individually and as a community settled in different parts of the Province and the country. This was achieved through the processes associated with ritualism. According to Sarma (1971:20) there is no religion without ritualism. It is through the rites and ceremonies which our childhood is witnessed and in which the first impressions of religion are obtained. Sarma further elaborates,

Ritualism has, first of all, an important social function. Religion, like language, comes to us in our early years as a social product. It comes to us in the form of ritual with a meaning behind, just as language comes to us in the form of sounds with a meaning behind. Ritual is the embodiment of faith and it binds together large groups of believers (1971:21).

The establishment of a number of Hindu temples and religious, cultural and linguistic organizations in various parts of the country bears testimony to this theory. Wherever the Indians settled, they built shrines for the purpose of worship. According to Mikula et al (1982:9) as the communities and individuals became more prosperous, Hindu priests and teachers were imported and vernacular schools were established. Religious festivals were celebrated on a large scale and pilgrimages were undertaken. The makeshift structures of the early days, gave way to the more permanent buildings. In this regard, skilled temple builders started to become available.

According to Jain (1993:26), the role of the Indian priest was extremely important in giving the Indians a sense of direction and psychological protection in a society basically hostile to them – racially, socially, culturally and economically. The pundits would be the focus of social and cultural resistance and they would propagate the traditional Indian values (Singh 1974:49-50) as quoted by Jain (1993:26).

Ritualism played both a religious and a social function. It binds together not only the different units of society during a generation, but also the different generations of a race. An excellent example of this is evident in the *Mariammen* festivals that were hosted by the Mariammen Temples in Mount Edgecombe and Isipingo, catering for the indentured labourers in the North and South Coasts of Kwa-Zulu Natal respectively. Annually, thousands of devotees converged at these temples during the Easter weekend to pay homage to the Mother element of God. The annual visit to the temples provided an opportunity for the labourers to socialize with one another. In this regard, colourful stalls were available selling all types of textile, ornaments, food and other essential requirements. Entertainment was provided for all age groups in the form of

fun rides, music, dance, drama and puppetry. This type of social encounter is still evident in these and other temples in Kwa-Zulu Natal which forms an essential means of uniting the Hindu community.

The marks of civilization are found in the day-to-day activities of people. Although there are certain individual behaviour and customs, which are unique to different races, there are many commonalities which aim to unite the relatively small Hindu community far away from the Motherland.

### **7.5 The changing trends of Hindu rituals and practices**

There have been a number of changes over the years to the traditional Hindu funeral ritual as a concession to popular practices, local and social customs and psychological needs, which did not have any connection with the original ritual. Kuppusami (1981:33) explains that over the centuries, procedures for conducting ceremonies amongst Hindus have undergone some changes in respect of preparation, performance of rituals and actual conduct of the ceremony. He attributed the changes to a changing mixed cultural environment. However, rituals considered basically important are observed with little change.

According to Naidoo (2006: pc) the traditional funeral of India changed radically in South Africa. Many changes can also attribute to government regulations that forced people to make radical changes to their traditional customs and belief systems. According to Naidoo (2006: pc) the first change was somewhere around the 1880's when medical offices arose, therefore you could not take a body anywhere unless the medical officers for that estate were informed. As a

result, sometimes the post-mortems were delayed, even in natural deaths. The main reason for the delays was the poor transport infrastructure during the period 1880 to 1902 which delayed the transportation of the bodies. These delays contributed to the decomposition of the bodies as South Africa is generally hot.

In India, when one dies, the body is removed immediately to be certified. The maximum delay is two hours when the person dies in hospital and less than an hour when he dies at home. Hence there were no delays in the funeral ceremonies. Generally, Hindus too, liked to bury or cremate before sunset but that customs had to give way to the requirements of the health laws of the land. Openly carrying the corpse without a coffin through the streets was also stopped and people were forced to place the corpse in a coffin and have it transported in a hearse. Naidoo (pc: 2006) explains that wealthy Hindus who could afford the hearses used beautiful black coaches which were driven by glamorous white horses. In this way much prestige and dignity was added to the funeral ceremony. One of the famous undertakers that started this was T. Ragubaru and Sons whose funeral parlour business was booming as the Indian was now improving economically and the funerals could be transported and taken to the cremation grounds.

Naidoo (pc: 2006) explains that funeral ceremonies in the early days were based on practices that prevailed in India. According to him, when a person died the body was transferred onto a bamboo framework, with syringa leaves which acted as a disinfectant and carried by the people to the nearest riverside. In Durban they used to cremate the body on the banks of the Umgeni River. Later, they introduced laws in South Africa to place the body on two railway lines (still can be seen at Clare Estate crematorium). The steel lines prevented the water from rotting the

box. The body was placed on a small platform of wood, long woods – thick tree trunks and sand in between. On this, they placed the bamboo framework and covered the body with cakes of dry cow dung, and then they would put woods on top of that. After a series of rituals this was lit. When the body was carried to the place of cremation, someone always danced – it is happiness for the soul that has been released from the tragedy of human life. According to Naidoo (2006: pc) the soul suffers a lot when in the body, so when it is released it is a time for merriment and happiness. He goes on to say that the dancing originated in communal settlements of Magazine Barracks and Railway Barracks and was greatly influenced by the *morum* dance which was practiced by the Muslims.

Naidoo (2006: pc) further explains that many rituals also disappeared because of the non-availability of the resources that existed in India. For example in the early years after the arrival of the indentured Indians, a common practice was to embalm the face and other open parts of the body. This was achieved by rubbing a mixture called *seeka*. They would also grind three kinds of seeds and apply on the face and some of it will be placed near the feet of the dead body. Between 1860 and 1905 this practice was abandoned because of the unavailability of *seeka*. Furthermore there was also very limited sandal wood. These resources were re-introduced when the shipping lines became more frequent.

## **7.6 The emergence of reformist Hindu movements**

The ancient Indian was deprived of resources to perform certain rituals which needed certain ingredients. It was therefore natural for Hindu religious leaders to abandon certain rituals which

resulted in a transformation in religious practices.

In the light of these, organizations such as the *Saiva Sithandha Sungum* (Organization formed to propagate Saivism) and the *Hindu Maha Sabha* (parent body of the Hindus) formed by Dayanand Saraswati started reform movements which suited both the laws in South Africa and the changing patterns which were prescribed by using resources that were readily available.

Recent examples of Hindu religiosity include *Krishnamurti*, *Maharishi* (Transcendental Meditation), *Sai Baba*, *Bhakti Vedanta*, *Swami Prabhupada*, *Balyogeshwar* (Divine Light Mission), etc. These spiritual and philosophical leaders introduced morals and value based teachings for the benefit of the Hindus.

According to Naidoo (2006: pc) South African Hindus were the pioneers of reforming the funeral rituals. Like they have done with traditional weddings – the rituals are still there, but the more beautiful aspects were retained resulting in shorter and more meaningful weddings.

The Sungams have played a pioneering role; the *Arya Samaj* Movement under *Dayanand Saraswati* has played a significant role. Other reformists include *Muthu Pillay*, a man called *Ramsamy Naidoo* – founder of united press who introduced the first Tamil paper in the country called *Tamil Vedam* which was used as a medium of educating people on culture and religion. There was a clear reason to introduce reforms – lack of resources, lack of authentic, ritualistic knowledge, and the fact that many people were illiterate who remembered by oral tradition, so what they remembered, they did. Some of the scholars transcribed the texts and passed on the

knowledge to other priests. Naidoo (2006: pc) states that people had to adapt or lose out, so hence came the change and for the better. The results were that among the South African Indian Community the funerals are more dignified, minus the rituals and more conclusive of real values. In South Africa, a number of local Hindu priests and elders were able to perform traditional funeral ceremonies by receiving their basic training from the elders in the community. The training is based on information which was transmitted orally, from generation to generation.

Interviews with various individuals, priests, academics and cultural leaders, and observation of funeral ceremonies have shown that the basic structure of the Hindu funeral ceremony is the same with slight variations in some of the rituals depending on linguistic, geographical and social customs and traditions.

## **7.7 Recapitulation**

The focus in this chapter was on the historical background of the Hindu community of South Africa. The South African Indian Diaspora was described and the importance of the indentured Indian labourers to the economic, political, social and religious transformation was discussed in great detail. This formed the background to a discussion on Hinduism and the linguistic differences in the practice of the ancient religion. The changes in the basic practices of Hinduism in South Africa, and the role of reformist movements in these changes were highlighted. This background provided the foundation for the discussion of Hindu rituals and practices in South Africa which will be introduced in the next few chapters.

## CHAPTER 8

### THE PROCESS AND RITUALS CARRIED OUT WHEN A HINDU PERSON IS ON HIS/HER DEATH BED.

#### 8.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an outline of the various processes that are followed when a Hindu person is on his/her death bed. Introduction of the concept of *karma*<sup>1</sup> and the importance of ritual ingredients such as the *tulasi* leaves and water from the river Ganges are highlighted. The variations in rituals and practices for the North and South Indian community are described. Examples of *mantras*<sup>2</sup> and prayers are provided and their significance in Hindu religious practices is explained.

The general picture of Hindu death rituals in South Africa has not been well documented. The basic pattern of death ritual, at one level is quite simple. Prayers are offered to persons on their death bed, helping them to focus on the name of God as they die. After death, the body is washed, dressed and carried from the home for cremation or burial. During the cremation or burial the eldest surviving son or other relative conduct the last rites; after the cremation the remains are thrown in the river or sea. Subsequent rites are performed to ensure that the spirit of the deceased passes on the proper journey. However, linguistic differences, caste origins and

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<sup>1</sup> is a concept in Hinduism which explains causality through a system where beneficial effects are derived from past beneficial actions and harmful effects from past harmful actions, creating a system of actions and reactions throughout a person's reincarnated lives.

<sup>2</sup> is a religious or mystical syllable or poem, derived from the Sanskrit language. They are primarily used as spiritual conduits, words or vibrations that instill one-pointed concentration in the devotee.

other social factors contribute towards varying differences in the processes involved in death rituals which make it much more complicated than expected.

According to Strong (2004:6) religions such as Hinduism offer our own immortal souls satisfying answers to questions of life and death. The ancient mythic texts provide real reasons for our existence on earth. They also demonstrate that death is something that can be prepared for instead of being feared. Rabindranath Tagore, (1916:87) a Hindu poet from the early twentieth century aptly describes this as,

...because I love this life, I know I shall love death as well

Behind most of the customs and rituals there lies a tremendously rich tapestry of symbolic messages giving meaning to what constitutes human nature, how we come into being and how we pass on into a variety of new identities after death. Davies (1997:84) states that good and bad deaths provide very fruitful information for illustrating the human control of death. He states that good death is one in which a person is prepared through fasting and drinking Ganges water, the body is weakened so that the spirit may leave more easily and so that faecal material will not spoil the final moments. In other words, death is a kind of voluntary offering of the body to the deities; one should not cling to life. A bad death is one which snatches life away as in an accident or when vomits or faeces stain the body. Those dying good deaths are said to burn easily, and in popular perception their body is viewed as almost self-igniting and glowing with a divine radiance. Bad deaths, by contrast, yield bodies, which turn black and are hard to burn.

According to Hinduism Today (1997:3), a Hindu approaching death works very hard to complete any unfinished tasks, the allotted portion of his total *karma* in his present birth. If death approaches while there are still many loose ends such as misunderstandings unresolved, misdeeds or obligations unfulfilled, another lifetime may be required to get rid of that *karma*. It is therefore, common for an aging or ailing Hindu to go around to friends and enemies, giving love, help and blessings, working to resolve conflicts and differences, offering apologies and fulfilling all known obligations. In most cases, when death is imminent, the dying person executes his own will, distributes his property and other assets to heirs charities and endowments, without leaving this task to others.

After satisfying himself, the person then turns to God, reads scriptures, attends temple and amplifies meditation and devotion. If the person is unable to do this himself he is aided by relatives or friends. If the person is still physically fit, he may go on a pilgrimage to sacred spots or retire to a secluded spot to practice *japa*<sup>3</sup> and *yoga sadhanas*. The family on the other hand, do not prevent these efforts, realizing that the person has entered life's final stage, that of renunciation, or *sanyasi*<sup>4</sup> (Maharaj, 2006: pc).

In Hindu belief, there are realms of existence and classes of beings that exist throughout this universe. Some of these beings live in regions above this earth and others in regions below this earth. Some are classified as beneficial and others are classified as non-beneficial. Among the

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<sup>3</sup> Is a spiritual discipline involving the meditative repetition of a mantra or name of God. The mantra or name may be spoken softly, enough for the practitioner to hear it, or it may be spoken purely within the recitor's mind. Japa may be performed whilst sitting in a meditation posture, while performing other activities, or as part of formal worship in group settings.

<sup>4</sup> Is the *renounced order of life* within Hinduism. It is considered the topmost and final stage of the varna and ashram systems and is traditionally taken by men at or beyond the age of fifty years old or by young monks who wish to dedicate their entire life towards spiritual pursuits.

class of beneficial beings, are the *pitrs*, who include the ancient progenitors of mankind as well as the deceased relatives of the living.

## **8.2 When a Hindu person is on his death bed.**

Traditionally there is a preference for the person to die at home. However this is always not possible since in South Africa, like in many other countries, the dying is increasingly kept in hospitals for mechanical and medical support. There are instances where family members request to have the dying person removed to his home as they believe that there are many merits associated with dying at your residence in the presence of loved ones. This also gives family members an opportunity to perform certain rituals in the privacy of a home which may not be easily performed at a public institution.

When death is imminent, family and close friends are notified. The person is placed in a room or in the entryway of the house, with the head facing east. A lamp is lit near the head and the dying person is encouraged to concentrate on his favourite deity and religious mantra. If the dying person is unconscious during imminent departure, a family member or priest chants the mantra softly in the right ear. The closest relatives place a drop of milk or water consecrated with *tulasi* leaves or if available water from the Ganges river in the mouth of the dying person. The *tulasi* (*Ocimum Sanctum*) plant or Indian basil is an important symbol in the Hindu religious tradition. *Tulasi* is also extensively used to maintain ritual purity, to purify if polluted and to ward off evil. A leaf is kept in the mouth of the dying to insure passage to heavenly realms. The mantras differ according to the religious beliefs of the dying person and his family. The following sanskrit

mantra is recited when the *tulasi* leave is placed in the dying person's mouth.

*Yanmule sarvatirhaani, Yannagre sarvadevataa, Yanmadhye sarvavedaascha, Tulasi taam namaamyaham*

*I bow down to the tulasi, At whose base are all the holy places, At whose top reside all the deities and In whose middle are all the Veda ( Hindumommy :2006).*



Fig.19 The *tulasi* plant, an important Hindu symbol. (Reference: Wikipedia: 2007)

According to Maharaj (2006: pc) verses were recited from the *Atharvaveda* to revive the dying person. When these failed, funeral rites were started.

In many cases, when one is nearing death, he usually calls friends and relatives for a friendly discourse. This meeting either takes place in a hospital or at home to promote his future when a decision is made to give charity to organizations or temples.

According to Filippi (1996:108),

Just as in old European fables, the dying Indian calls his sons, relatives and intimates around him in order to give last instructions, his will, and recommendations for what will take place after his departure.

He then asks for forgiveness and then finally takes leave.

In some cases when the dying person is very close to death, his actions and sounds become very strange and sometimes can evoke much fear. According to Filippi (1996:107) when the dying person sleeps he no longer takes the foetal position, but stretches out like a corpse; he dreams of walking south in the direction of the abode of *Yama*, and dreams of garlands, flowers, incense and songs. He starts having many premonitions (*kāladūta*) and his body begins to tremble. Filippi (1996:107) goes on to say that a death omen is the apparition of certain species of doves (*kapota*) and of owls (*uluka*). After hearing these sounds, death can arrive almost immediately.

I had an opportunity of observing a number of persons on their death bed, The late Mrs. Kugen Pillay (12 May 1994), The late Mrs. Lutchmееammal Pillay (25 October 2005) the late Mr. Bula Pillay (12 September 2007) and the late Mr. Bully Annamalai (15 November 2007) I have observed, as described above some strange sounds emanating from the dying persons. This has been described by Mehta (1990: 7-8) as the soul withdrawing its power from the body, the heart beats become slow, breathing becomes long and hard, the sense organs cease to function.

The five sub-breaths i.e. *Pran*, *Apan*, *Vyan*, *Saman* and *Udan*, in the various parts of the body leaving their regions, join the main breath from which they were evolved or subdivided at the time of birth. The main breath rushes towards the heart to help or to encourage it, but finding the soul on the last lap of exit, it helps the soul in its flight from the body. This is the reason why there are so many strange noises emanating from the dying person. Some informants attribute these strange sounds as the dying person communicating with *Yama*, the messenger of death.

Others have stated that during this state the dying person is able to see and communicate with the ancestors. According to Sharmla Naidoo (2007: pc) who had an opportunity to stay close to her mother who was in a coma, she had heard her mother in full communication with people who had died some time ago as if she was responding to a conversation with people that was mentioned during her utterances.

I have observed during the late Bulla Pillay's dying moments that he messed himself by urinating. According to Mehta (1990:8), it is said that the souls leaving the body through its upper apertures – eyes, nostrils, ears or mouth are superior to those leaving the body through the lower apertures or sex organs. This particular aperture remains open after death hence, the urinating.

According to Maharaj (2006: pc) at the time of death, a prayer is offered to the Lord, be it the *Maha Mantra*, or whatever mantra we are familiar with, to expedite the exit of the soul from the body. After the soul leaves the body, a *tulasi* leaf, a piece of gold or *Ganga Jal* (water from the River Ganges) is placed in the mouth of the deceased and the body is covered with a pure white, uncut cloth. After a doctor certifies the death, the body is sent to a mortuary. Traditionally the corpse was placed on straw mat on top of a stretcher made of *Udumbara* wood (*Ficus Glemarata*) or bamboo, nowadays; however, Hindus are dressed in their best attire and placed in coffins. According to Filippi (1996:133), the straw mat is believed to possess the power of protecting the corpse from the attacks of *piśācas* (a soul in torment).

The principle that remains is that the old, shabby clothes must be changed, and new, pure ones adorned, for entry into the next world. In ancient India, and still prevalent in some parts of India today, a man belonging to a lower caste cannot touch the body of a Brahman for example, for, it was believed that such pollution would obstruct the Brahman's passage to heaven. But this does not take place in South Africa.

If the person is a Saivite, *Aum Nama Sivaya* is intoned while the mantra, *Aum Namō Narayana* is recited for a Vaishnavite. The names of Gods are repeatedly whispered in the ears of the dying person in order to mitigate his sufferings, and, if possible, to brighten his last hours. Holy ash or sandal paste is applied to the forehead of the dying person. In some cases, the leaves of the holy basil is scattered over the head of the dying person. While chanting holy mantras, a few drops of milk, water from the Ganges River or any other blessed water are trickled into the mouth or sprinkled on his head if he is unable to take anything orally. It is believed by most people that the river Ganges is a symbol of the Divine Being. Bathing in the river assists man to wash away most of his sins. It also helps to wash away the sins of his ancestors. It is considered that during the last moments of one's life, it is beneficial to be near the Ganges or be exposed to the waters of this Divine River. Therefore, it is believed that by putting water from the Ganges in a dying person's mouth, it secures a speedy entrance into heaven and the abode of Lord Shiva. The Ganges offers liberation from *samsara*<sup>5</sup>, the cycle of rebirth, and Varanasi is considered an auspicious site for cremation and for scattering the ashes of the deceased (O'Connell et al. 2007:45).

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<sup>5</sup> Refers to the cycle of reincarnation or rebirth in Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism and other related religions.

During my study visit to Varanasi, I have seen a number of people on their death beds that have been brought to the River Ganges so that when the eventual time of death arrives they will attain immediate *moksha* (salvation). Special quarters have been built to accommodate these people.

According to Filippi (1996:109), In Varanasi where the River Ganges is found, some prefer to ask for hospitality at two existing shelters that facilitate one's passing away: these are the *Kāśī Mukti Bhavan* and the *Kāśī Lābha Bhavan*. Here, one is not given medical assistance, but exclusively ritual assistance



Fig.20 A special shelter at the Ganges for people who want to spend their last days before dying.  
(Varanasi, October: 2007)

In the South Indian community, when a person is on his death bed, the family is brought together to pray to the Almighty that this soul goes in peace. Each member of the family gets to put the milk in the mouth of the dying person. It is said that when we come into the world, the first food we eat is the milk, and when we leave the earth, we send you off with milk. Milk is nutritious and gives life, but we also leave the earth with milk. The family is prepared for the eminent death by giving them encouragement, praying together for strength and also giving them advice. The following songs from the *Thevaram* is sung; *Mandiram Avather Niroo*, and *Madhi Mandhalam*, and *Sivane Kathaver Thirer*. (Appendix 5) The purpose for singing these and other devotional hymns is to provide the dying person with strength and to set the soul free.

The normal practice when a Dravidian or Tamil is on his death bed, and when the doctor gives up hope for recovery, a lamp is lit, and a prayer is offered to the Lord while giving milk and water to the person irrespective of whether the person drinks or it runs out of his mouth. One of our great Saints in Dravidian literature, Pattinathal wrote '*Kan panjadum mooner*' – before the eyes can't see – '*Sevi kerkelikum mooner*' – before the ears can't hear – then it is only the wind that goes in and out, that is the time you pour the milk, whether the milk runs one side of the mouth – *kaduvai paduvaai mooner* – then you know that the life is going and you sing *Nama Shivaya padigam* (Appendix 5). This song is sung because the conscious mind of the dying person will be able to recognize the song (Padayachee 2006: pc).

When a person is on his death bed, we think of the past *karmas*, and plead with the master that this person lived a very good life, went through some trying times, and now that he has come to this stage, we pray that He will forgive him for any known or unknown mistakes. Appropriate hymns are sung to give comfort to the dying person – though the person cannot speak or see, he can hear the words so his thought will be one with God (Kisten 2006: pc).

According to the North Indian tradition when a person is on the death bed – some people do the *Gauthaan* prayer. *Gau* is cow, *dhaan* is gift. A Brahman (priest) is called to do a very special prayer. This prayer has two purposes – one, to release the soul from the body and two – when the soul is on its journey, it has to pass through a river, so when you give the cow as a gift, this cow will take you across the river. If you didn't, then that soul has to swim across the river which is boiling. When you give the cow, the soul can either be released from the body or the person can recover. There were many examples where this has happened even in his own family.

When we did the *Gaudhaan* in the hospital the next day the man was normal. So if your time is not due, you won't die (Maharaj 2006: pc).

According to most Hindu traditional groups, when a person is on his/her death bed, relatives are gathered around the dead person, the officiating priest recites some passages from religious scriptures such as the *Bhagavad Gita*<sup>6</sup> or the *Ramayanana*. Filippi (1996:116) describes the atmosphere of the final moments of a dead person as,

So it is in this atmosphere, consecrated by vibrations of sacred texts, by the perfumed air of flowers and incense, near the sacred *gārhapatya* fire, sprinkled with Ganges water, and lying on the naked and fertile earth, or rather lulled by the five *bhūtas*, that man concludes his earthly existence.

Traditionally, a dying person or a new corpse is laid on the floor; for the heaven is for the Gods, earth for man, and, in the in between space, dwells the spirits. *Kusa* grass and gold coins are placed on the body's orifices, especially the mouth. *Kusa* grass represents immortality and everlasting and like priests, Vedic mantras, the sacrificial fire, basil (*tulasi* leaves), never loses their effectiveness. Gold coins on the other hand are a symbol of the importance of the ritual.

In the Vedic tradition as espoused by the Arya Samaj movement, there are very little rituals that are performed when a person is on his deathbed. According to Pundit Behadoor and Dr Rambilas (2006:pc), in the event of a patient who is seriously ill, lying in bed, the duty of any priest is to give that particular person, who has a soul in him, the encouragement to live further on. There is no such mantra or any specific kinds of hymn that is used for the purpose of sayings to the Lord

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<sup>6</sup> Is a Sanskrit text from the *Bhishma Parva* of the Mahabharata epic.

that: “here is someone that is suffering and please take his soul away”. That is not a practical thing in the belief of the Arya Samaj.

A prayer is offered to the Lord to enable the power of the Lord to prevail over the dying person so that he is able to survive with the encouragement that is given to the patient, by pleading with the Lord to give this particular person the energy in his body, to enable the patient to have all his pathological problems in the way of pain, trauma, etc. to be removed. A further plea is made to give the person the appetite that he needs for the consumption of food and medication to enable his body to benefit from the energy that whatever he takes in the way of any remedial measure that are taken to revive him, give him energy, enable him to stand, enable him to recognize people so he can be in a position to communicate.

The objective in this particular prayer, which is referred to as a prayer of health, is predominantly and primarily to give this particular patient new energy and a new outlook in life. It is a sort of encouragement for the patient in order that he feels that we are here to encourage him to be able to speak, open his eyes, to be able to hear, to be able to understand the importance of communications, meals and his co-operation in the event of any kind of measures that we may undertake for his benefit.

According to Satgur (2006:pc) a prayer is conducted by chanting the mantra, ‘*Om trayajanam...*’, asking God to give the individual peace and comfort and for divine grace to prevail in order to remove his pain, his trauma and any other psychological problems that may have persisted or that have caused him to be in that state and condition.

According to the *Hinduism Today* (1997:4), it is believed that those who depart full of hatred and resentment go to the world of those who also died of lower consciousness. On the other hand, those who depart with love in their heart enter a world where there is bliss and positive energy. A woman in California narrated as quoted in *Hinduism Today* (1997:4),

Shortly before my husband died, he held my hands and asked me to recite the *Lalitha Sahasranama* and to say the mantra we were initiated into. He repeated after me in a loud voice when suddenly his face began to shine with a luster, and he became overjoyed and beaming. He started almost shouting with joy that he is seeing the temple and Deities – *Siva*, *Ganesha* and *Muruga* – smiling at him. In this glowing way, he passed away shortly thereafter while I recited the mantra in his ear.

According to many religious sources and based on sworn testimonies of many people, it is believed that at the time of the great departure (*mahaprasthanā*) to the other world people on their deathbed experience certain visions of a lit tunnel where there is light at the end of which there are beings of a divine nature. Incredible energy, unconditional love, complete safety and total perfection are some of the feelings that have been experienced in this well illuminated tunnel. It is therefore concluded that Hinduism teaches that death is blissful and a light-filled transition from one state to another. (*Hinduism Today*: 2004). A Vedic funeral hymn encapsulates this experience,

Where eternal lustre grows, the realm in which the light divine is set, place me, Purifier, in that deathless, imperishable world. Make me, immortal in that realm where movement is accordant to wish, in the third region, the third heaven of heavens, where the worlds are resplendent (*Rig Veda*, *Aitareya Aranyaka* 6-11).

Family members keep vigil until the departure by singing hymns, praying and reading verses from different scriptures. Audio recordings are also used to communicate the hymns to the dying person. If the person is unable to come home, this is also performed at the hospital. The hospitals

in South Africa cater for the diverse cultural needs of the people. The Chatsworth Hospice which caters for terminally ill patients makes available all the necessary religious texts and symbols to assist family members to perform the necessary rites for the dying person.

### **8.3 Recapitulation**

In this chapter, a description is given for the rituals that are performed for a Hindu person that is on his/her deathbed. The variances relating to linguistic differences are also considered. Reference is made to the researcher's observations of death bed experiences and his study visit to Varanasi where many Hindus prefer to die in order to receive immediate salvation.

## CHAPTER 9

### THE PROCESS AND RITUALS CARRIED OUT WHEN A HINDU PERSON DIES

#### 9.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a summary of the history of Hindu beliefs and ritual practices regarding death and the veneration of ancestors. It includes examples of the final rites for the disposal of the dead, *antyeṣṭi*, and a discussion of the post-mortem rites of *śrāddha* (prayer for the ancestors) and *tarpana* (libations of water, milk etc) which form the basis of Hindu ancestor worship.

It is the aim of every Hindu to lead a life based on good *Karmic* action. The Vedic scriptures outline a series of suggested rituals called *samskaras* (sacraments). There are sixteen sacraments that each Hindu person has to undergo during his life on the earthly plane. These rituals begin before a baby is born and continue through different anthropological milestones such as birth, naming ceremony, education, marriage and retirement. The last sacrament (rite) in the life of a Hindu is the *Antyeṣṭhi Sanskara* or funeral ceremony, which concludes a person's worldly career. Since Hindus believe in re-incarnation, the value of the next world/life is higher than that of the present one. For this purpose, the survivors of the departed soul consecrate his death for his future felicity in the next world and these ritualists are very anxious to have the funerals performed with meticulous care.

Due to various reasons, some of the *Sanskara* may not be performed. However, death is inevitable which necessitates the performance of the *Sanskara* associated with this final milestone in a person's life i.e. the ritual disposal of the body either by cremation or burial.

At first, man made every attempt to avert death and hence, arose many primitive type of ceremonies. He ultimately had to accept death as the natural end of the human life and therefore, made proper arrangements for making the death and the life after death easy. Hindus believe that upon death, the soul separates from the body and that the latter is final. Thus, the deceased, though disembodied, was supposed to be still living.

The newer and virtually universally accepted notions of death and afterlife assume that according to his or her *karma*, a Hindu will be reborn sooner or later in another body. If all *karma* has been eliminated, liberation from rebirth has been accomplished, the highest aim of all (Klostermaier 1998:40).

Hinduism teaches that although the physical body dies, atman, or the individual soul, has no beginning and no end. It may, upon death, pass into another reincarnation, the condition of which depends on the karma, or consequences of one's actions, reaped during the life that has just ended, as well as during previous lifetimes.

But if, over many lifetimes, the deceased has realized the true nature of reality, the individuality of the soul will be lost upon death and it will become one with Brahmin, the One, and All-encompassing soul (Matlins 2000:98).

Maharaj (2006: pc) makes reference to the Bhagavat Gita 2/20 where it is stated that the soul was never born, nor does it die. It will emerge again. It is unborn, eternal, everlasting and without age. Even when the body is destroyed, the soul remains untouched.

Poovalingam in an article, Social therapy for the bereaved, Post 25 July 2007, pg. 22, explains that amidst life, it has been said, we are in death. The Tamil expression is that, *pirappin iruppu than* – meaning that upon birth, the only certainty is death. Death is the natural order of things. He states,

A tree reaches maturity. The flower emerges. And that after pollination creates life. A fruit develops. And ripens. And after it has remained ripe for a while, it falls off the tree. For the fruit itself to be immersed into and to be merged into the soil as compost, ready to provide sacour for new life. And the seed, sometimes remaining dormant for a while germinates, and gives rise to another tree. For the cycle of birth and growth and of death and re-birth to go on endlessly. In the Hindu philosophy, that is represented by the doctrine of Creation and of Sustenance and of Destruction. To give rise once again to re-creation. The images of Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Sustainer and Shiva the destroyer (2007:22).

The concept of *Karma* is described in the Gita as,

As a person puts on new garments, giving up old ones, the soul similarly accepts new material bodies, giving up the old and useless ones (1986:95).

*Karma* simply means all human activities and their consequences. Good deeds leave a positive imprint, bad deeds a negative one. Joined to the notion of rebirth- an almost necessary corollary to the understanding of the world as an ever self-repeating process (*samsāra*). The accumulated *karma* of a lifetime determines the next bodily existence. Good *karma* results in a birth into a higher caste, a healthy body, a wealthy family, perhaps even as a superhuman being, a *deva*, and a sojourn to heaven. Bad *karma* could lead to rebirths not only in less desirable human circumstances, but also as animals in hells. Bodily defects or ill health are the consequences of bad *karma* accumulated in earlier lives (1998:41).

According to Behadur (2006:pc) it is stated in the in the *Mahabharata* that with good deeds a soul takes rebirth amongst the Gods and when there is a mixture of good and bad deeds, one

takes rebirth as a human. The deeds performed in the last and current births definitely show up as the fruit of actions. None of the deeds done by mankind passes without bearing fruit.

Kisten (2006: pc) explains that God does not punish anyone, but through the deeds of man, he has to come back to earth to pay back for his *karmas* by the process of re-incarnation. When a person has done so much of good in his past life that when the soul goes to the master, he is born as a child who has everything provided. Kisten (2006: pc) goes on to say that the soul does not take immediate birth again because then it will know the previous life, it stays on the earth's plane for a while and goes to the Master for judgment and then takes rebirth.

According to Maharaj (2006: pc) we are normal human beings who think that if we do not perform certain rituals, something will go wrong. It is stated, according to scriptures that when we die, we go up and down until all our demerits are eliminated. But the fact that we are living, sitting here, we are exposed to evil all the time, tramping of the ants, and things that we do intentionally or unintentionally. The more *sevas*<sup>1</sup> (good deeds) that we do, the more merits we achieve. He goes on to say that when we are born, our death is determined – that everything is written.

As explained by Swami Sivananda of the Divine Life Society, if you sow rice you cannot expect a mango. Similarly, if you sow the seeds of evil actions, you will reap a harvest of pain and suffering. If you sow the seeds of a virtuous action, you will reap the harvest of pleasure. This is the law of *karma*.

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<sup>1</sup> refer to volunteer work; selfless service; work offered to God (in Hinduism and Sikhism)

The survivors participate in rituals out of fear or love. It is believed that owing to the fact that the deceased, who has interest in family relations, property and wealth, would still linger about the house. It is also believed that the deceased might cause injury to the family as he is alienated from them. Attempts in terms of rituals are made to avoid his presence; he will be asked to depart at an official farewell address and even actual barriers are put between the living and the dead. He will be provided with food and other necessities for a traveler, to resume his journey to the next world. For those that are concerned about their loved ones, necessities are provided so that he may not suffer of want during his journey into the next world.

According to Maharaj (2006: pc) and Padayachee (2006: pc) when a person dies unnaturally, for example, suicide, it is not your time to die. It is therefore, believed that the soul is tormented and it will affect family and their wellbeing. The soul will wander around until it has reached the real time that it was supposed to die, and it is only then that rebirth will take place. For example, if a person is expected to live for 60 years, but commits suicide on the 30<sup>th</sup> year, that soul has 30 years more to roam around like a spirit – that is why they say *Peiyaayi kanavalaiki* – I become a devil, I roam around until I reach the true age for judgment (Padayachee 2006: pc).

It is believed that those who die suddenly, through accident or murder, have no time to prepare. Traditionally, full death rites are not performed after such deaths, because rebirth is expected almost immediately. It is for the same reason that rites are not performed for children who die young. In most cases, in India, children are buried rather than cremated. According to Filippi (1996:104)

Premature death, in some rare cases, may even be interpreted as a positive sign of a complete realization.

By this, it means the soul will travel quickly to reach *moksha* (salvation). It is believed that the longer we live on earth the longer we will experience difficulties.

According to Naidoo (2006:pc) when one of his uncles committed suicide by hanging himself, the people said that he died and went to *Swargalogam* – the dark world, because he did not complete his natural tenor on earth. He has therefore cheated on God who had given him life. He had also cheated on *Yama Dharmaraj* who is supposed to escort your life, to the heavens or to hell (judgment). Naidoo further explains that since a person who has committed suicide has cheated on his destiny, the house or the room where he died will be kept in darkness for 16 days, no light, no lamp, nothing. And nobody was allowed to go into that room because the belief was that the soul would return to the room and repent, the angels will not come into natural light, and they will judge him, pronounce the sentence and relieve the soul. However on the 16<sup>th</sup> day or 11<sup>th</sup> day they would do the normal memorial ceremony.

That is why we must counsel people who are weak and going through problems to assist them for their future lives. Maharaj (2006: pc) states that in some books by the *acharyas*,<sup>2</sup> they say that in this *Kali Yuga*<sup>3</sup> period, there will be lots of disembodied<sup>3</sup> spirits – ghosts. Therefore, the *acharyas* warn people especially the youth, of going out late at night.

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<sup>2</sup> Is a Divine personality who is believed to have descended to teach and establish *bhakti* (devotion) in the world and write on the philosophy of devotion to God

<sup>3</sup> Is one of the four stages of development that the world goes through as part of the cycle of Yugas, as described in Hindu scriptures, the others being *Satya Yuga*, *Treta Yuga* and *Dvapara Yuga*. The *Kali Yuga* is traditionally thought to last 432,000 years. It is mostly referred to as the Dark Age, mainly because people are the furthest possible from God.

According to Asnani (2000:2), Hindus believe that broadly an individual is composed of:

- a) Soul: Which never gets destroyed: It is immortal. It witnesses birth and death in various bodies.
- b) Subtle Body: This accompanies the soul, birth and after birth, till the subtle body gets completely purified and the soul merges into the total Universal Consciousness. This subtle body goes out of the gross body, in company of the soul at the time of death.

The (soul + subtle body) takes rebirth of a type depending on the actions of the individual. A person with a good record of actions in the past takes birth in a beautiful, healthy human body, and in a pious and prosperous family. On the other hand, a person with a record of evil and cruel actions in the past, takes birth in one of 8 400 000 types of bodies, including animals, insects, etc.

While the death ritual of Hindus today retains many features of ancient Vedic traditions, the actual beliefs of Hindu are strongly shaped by *puranic* influences. Vedic ritual contains no hint of *karma* and rebirth, beliefs which so strongly colour the worldview of later Hinduism (1998:40).

Hindu funeral rites can be simple or exceedingly complex depending on the customs or beliefs. However, it is believed that whatever method is chosen, if the ceremony is completed with proper devotion according to customs, means and ability of the family, it will properly conclude the earthly sojourn of any soul.

In the last decade or so, a remarkable revival of Vedic ritual seems to be taking place in India and other parts of the world. The *Ārya Samāj* a nineteenth century revivalist movement and other similar movements are actively promoting Vedic ritual as a means to underscore the basic unity of Hinduism as built on the foundation of the Vedas.

In South Africa, the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha has been responsible for implementing simplified rituals and practices in all aspects of life and death. According to Behadar and Rambilas (2006: pc) there has been a very big change in people in seeing and believing in the practical aspects of life. Behadar goes on to say that,

Because of the manner in which we conduct our rituals, especially concerning death, it seems to appeal to the younger generation. The youth are beginning to question the practical aspects of things. In some instances, there are no answers, but the Vedic way we are able to clearly explain everything that we do. It is short, it is very dignified, it is meaningful and the people understand the purpose – less traumatic. It is better to explain things than to leave it to the imagination of people (Behadar 2006: pc).

According to Dasa (2003), Hindu rituals for the dead, whether of the most ancient period or of later times, serve five purposes: disposal of the body, consolation of those grieving, assistance to the departing soul to reach *pitṛ-loka*, (*Pitṛ-loka* is the name of the realm of existence wherein the *pitṛs* (ancestors) dwell), sustenance to those *pitṛs* who have reached that destination, and a call by the living for help at special times from the *pitṛs*.

It is the role of the living relatives to perform particular rites at specific times, so that the departing soul was able to obtain the necessary form by which it could partake in the enjoyments of the *pitṛs*. Therefore, in all stages, the living relatives had to perform some required rites.

In relation to the rituals associated with death, Dasa (2003) outlines that the study of this ancient belief system can be divided into three periods of development: the Vedic period, the *Grhya* period and the *Puranic* period. In the Vedic period, it was believed that the spirit of a dead person became a *pitr* (ancestor) immediately after the disposal of the body. As soon as the spirit became a *pitr* it became a recipient of various Vedic sacrifices known as *pitr-yajnas*.

During the *Grhya* period, it was believed that a soul did not become a *pitr* immediately after death, but entered an intermediate stage of life called a *preta*.<sup>4</sup> This *preta* being could only become a *pitr* after certain rituals called *ekoddista-sraddhas* were performed by living relatives for the sole benefit of the deceased soul and not for the ancestors in general. This usually took a year to complete.

During the final *Puranic* period, the idea expanded to include a new stage of life called the *ativahika* stage. As soon as the physical body was cremated, the soul did not become a *preta*, but instead took on an initial *ativahika* body. In order to release the soul from this stage, a set of even more specialized rites called *purakas* had to be performed by the living relatives. This *ativahika* stage generally lasted for ten days after which the soul became a *preta*, wherein the *ekoddista-sraddhas* would be performed to complete the transition into a *pitr* after one year.

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<sup>4</sup> is the name for a type of supernatural being described in Buddhist, Hindu and Jain texts that undergoes more than human suffering, particularly an extreme degree of hunger and thirst. They are often translated into English as Hungry ghosts. *Pretas* are believed to have been jealous or greedy people in a previous life.

## 9.2 When a Hindu person dies

When a Hindu dies, the corpse has to be disposed in a manner which has the following ingredients:

- respect for the deceased
- hygienic principles of life
- socially acceptable and beneficial system

The main objective of the proper disposal of a corpse and the performance of all the rites and ceremonies associated with it is to free the survivors from all the pollution and disease and to liberate the soul. Until the rites and ceremonies are duly performed, it was believed that the soul was not finally dismissed to its place in the next world; it does not find place in the cult of ancestral worship and it continues to be a *Preta* (Spirit) in this world, unpleasantly hounding its relatives.

In keeping with these principles most Hindus follow a fixed pattern when it comes to preparing the body of the deceased for disposal drawn from the Vedas and other religious scriptures. There may be differentiations based on linguistic, geographical, sect, caste and social customs and family traditions. Most of the rites are fulfilled by family members, all of whom participate, including the children. The details of various rituals have suffered much alteration during the passage of time, but the fundamental division of the rite is still the same.

Immediately on being notified of the death of a person, a priest who specializes in astrology is consulted to look at the *Panjaagam* (astrological book), to determine the ruling for today. If the star is inauspicious, we do a prayer on the day of the cremation and during the 13<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup> day ceremony (Maharaj (2006: pc) and Moonsamy (2006: pc)).

Padayachee (2006: pc) explains that according to ancient Dravidian culture, when a person dies, the body must be cremated or buried within 12 hours. In modern times, the body is kept at the mortuary for longer periods in order to accommodate people who travel from far and wide. This is incorrect as it interferes with the processes involved with the transformation of the soul.

The span of life is linked by two astronomical milestones – birth and death. He goes on to say that some of the undertakers are very dishonest people; they make times not according to astrology, but according to their convenience and the availability of the crematorium (Naidoo 2006: pc). The *almanac* is very detailed as it takes into consideration the date and time of death, the phases of the moon and the planets. So, if it is considered an inauspicious time of death, there is a special remedial prayer for it. It is called *amaithi shanti* prayer – “peace of mind” prayer which is not very expensive and is normally conducted by a priest before the *hawan* (raising of the fire) ceremony at home. Naidoo (2006: pc) further explains that sometimes if the time was inauspicious there will be a barrier / curtain that will stop the soul from going to heaven. It is for this reason that many families go out of their way to ensure that these prayers are performed.

There are twenty seven *Nakshatras* (stars) which govern our destiny on earth. (*Ashwini, Mrigasira, Purnavasu, Pushya, Hasta, Swati, Anuradha, Shravana, Rrevati, Bharani, Rohini,*

*Purva Phalguni, Uttara Phalguni, Purva Ashada, Uttara Ashada, Purva Bhadrapada, Uttara Bhadrapada, Ardra, Kritikka, Aslesha, Magha, Chitra, Vishakha, Jyeshtha, Moola, Dhanishtha, Satabisha).*

Of the twenty seven *Nakshatras* (stars) that we have, five of them are inauspicious. The *Nakshatras* are a constellation of stars. When a child is born, the *panjaagam* is also consulted to see if the birth was at an auspicious time. In the birth, there are six inauspicious *chatras.viz. Moola, Jyeshtha, Ashlesha, Magha, Revati, and Ashwini.*

A *shanti* prayer is performed as a remedial measure – *mool shanti*. Similarly, if the death occurs in one of the 5 inauspicious *michatras*, we do a *pan chat shanti* prayer. That prayer brings about peace to the whole family because it is considered that if the person dies in one of the 5 inauspicious *chatras*, there is going to be pain, trauma and other related factors that come with the inauspiciousness, so a *pooja* (prayer) is done.

Behadar and Rambilas (2006: pc) argue that for the understanding of the creation of day and night, there is no inauspicious time. Every day and every night that the Lord has created, to an auspicious mind, is auspicious. They go on to say that what actually happens these days when death occurs, the arrangements that are made with the undertakers and the crematorium authorities are for the convenience of family members.

However, Naidoo (2006: pc) states that his personal philosophy is that we must integrate Hindu rituals in the funeral sector for practical reasons and be realistic in the different rituals and procedures.

If the person dies at home, the corpse is laid in the home's entryway with the head facing south on a bed or on the ground, reflecting a return to the lap of Mother Earth (Hinduism Today 1997:6). A lamp is kept lit near the head and incense burnt. The lit clay lamp illuminates the dark path which the deceased must follow in order to reach his new destination (Filippi 1996:155). According to Narain (2004:1), the Hindus believe that when a man dies his spirit comes out from the body and, because of his attachment to his family and material possessions, continues to inhabit his home. According to Rajbally (1969:244) the pure sacrificial fire was lit in the house to remove the impure fire (Atharva Veda X11.2.43-45).

Naidoo (2006:pc) explains that when a South Indian died, the body was generally laid down on the ground, not on a bed or build up, because man comes from the earth and should go back to the earth. His clothing were taken off and they put a shroud around him, to show that man is devoid of all materialistic things, because you will be burying a corpse, not a soul.

A big clay lamp is lit and remains burning until the completion of the memorial ceremony which according to traditional belief is that the deceased presides in the lamp. Since the spirit does not possess a physical form anymore, it rests on the flame that has been lit near the body. On the 10<sup>th</sup> day or 16<sup>th</sup> day after the person's death the lamp which has been lit in the house is carried to the sea or river, after the ceremony where it is released together with the other offerings. The immersion of the lamp in the water is to inform the spirit that now he should truly break attachment with the former life, and start his progress in the world beyond. (Padayachee, 2006: pc).

According to Behadur (2006: pc) the lit lamp next to the body has no real significance. The practice of lighting the lamp originated in India where a particular person had passed on. Generally, the person that died in the village lived in a hut with only one opening and perhaps if they had a window it was very small. And in the event of that kind of setup, inside this particular little shelter there was no light going through, and as a result of that, the light was shut out and it was totally dark inside. So in essence, the body was placed on the floor and a glowing lamp was placed next to the body in order to enable people who have come to pay respects to the deceased to have an opportunity to see the face. That little light produced the flame to brighten the entire area, enabling those that came into the hut to see the face through the brightness that this little lamp had created. It became a traditional practice of people, even after the house had electricity, to continue to burn the lamp to keep up the practice

According to most of the informants, when a person is certified dead, the corpse is removed from the home or the hospital to the nearest mortuary or funeral parlour for preparation. Naidoo (2006: pc) explains that although there were many mortuaries the body was never kept for more than a day. The corpse is relegated to the cemetery as soon as possible. The main reason for this was because of the spread of bacteria and to prevent any unhygienic conditions. The corpse is only brought to the home of the deceased or the place of the funeral on the day of the funeral. However, in most cases in Gauteng the corpse is kept overnight at the home of the deceased.

Moonsamy (2006:pc) and Padayachee (2006:pc) state that in recent times the undertakers take the body away and bring it back in the morning because people can't sit up whole night because they have to go to work. Moonsamy (2006: pc) further argues that times have changed, people

don't sit at a funeral house anymore, there are too many attractions such as television as well as family and work commitments.

In order to keep the shape of the head intact, a cloth is tied under the chin and over the top of the head. The thumbs are tied together, as are the big toes. Rajbally (1969:244) makes reference to the Atharva Veda XV111 by stating that, 'the corpse was washed (Atharva Veda V.19.4), and the big toe tied together with a bunch of twigs, 'lest death should walk back to the house, after the corpse was sent out.' (Atharva Veda V1.19.12).

According to Naidoo (2006: pc) this was done for logical reasons rather than for any religious reasons. In order to avoid the spread of bacteria, they would firstly tie the mouth up, because if the mouth is open, it is bad for bacteria in the throat area. It wasn't a ritual, just sensible hygiene. Body would become stiff, rigor mortis would set in, so they put the body into position which would be easy to cremate. They would gather the legs together and tie the two toes, purely because when rigor mortis sets in, the legs will go apart. It also looked ugly apart, so these practices were part of sound, logical thinking.

If the person dies in hospital the family is notified where they complete the necessary paperwork and has the body removed to the mortuary for storage until arrangements are made for the funeral. According to Hindu belief it is not permissible to embalm the body or to remove any organs for the purpose of organ transplant. Hindus did not believe in desiccation or mummification. The Indo-Aryans outgrew this stage as early as the Vedic period. According to their faith the spirit departed from the dead body, and since it would not return to the same body,

there was no sense in preserving it.

However in modern times there is a tendency for some members of the Hindu community to disregard scriptural instructions by choosing to donate some of their organs for the purpose of saving lives. According to many Hindu scholars this practice goes against the basic tenets of Hinduism as it prevents the dead person from satisfying all the necessary procedures before attaining salvation.

About four hours before the body is taken to the funeral home, family members give the dead body a ceremonial bath at the mortuary, using three kinds of oil. The number three is very significant in Hindu tradition and will feature throughout this research. Three, expresses all aspects of creation, including birth, life and death; past present and future; and mind, body and soul (O'Connell 2007:108). The body is washed, hair and nails are clipped and a shroud is placed around the body. Depending on the availability, fragrant sandalwood paste is applied to the corpse. Naidoo (2006: pc) states that since the soul is being prepared to go to its maker certain precautions need to be adhered to. The body has to be washed, rubbed dry, and lots of expensive perfumes are also rubbed on the body for it to last a long while, and they would also put a beautiful paste called sandalwood.<sup>5</sup> Sandalwood is a cooling agent, and when smeared near the face, it will give a lovely aroma. And they say that the sandalwood is the closest to the human body.

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<sup>5</sup> Is the fragrant wood of trees in the genus *Santalum*. Species of this tree are found in Nepal, southern India, Sri Lanka, Hawaii, South Pacific islands and Australia. It is used as fragrance in perfume and incense, and for woodworking. In Hinduism, sandalwood is often used for rituals or ceremonies. It is considered to bring one closer with the divine.

According to Maharaj (2006:pc) when the soul leaves the body it can start to decay, so by rubbing ghee, turmeric paste and perfumes it will assist with diffusing the bad odour that is present. The body is dressed, garlands are placed around the neck, flowers are heaped on it and scents are sprinkled respectfully on the body, in preparation for the public viewing and for the various death rituals to be conducted before cremation or burial. If it is a male that passes away, he is dressed in white calico. A garland is placed around his neck, and *thulasi* grass is placed below the corpse in the coffin. A *tulasi* garland and *tulasi* wood is used to protect the spirit of the dead against any demons. The presence of *tulasi* in a house brings much harmony and health to the bereaved family (Padayachee, 2006: pc).



Fig.21 Corpse draped with flowers before cremation (Varanasi, August 2007)



Fig.22 The placement of ritual ingredients on the corpse before cremation (Varanasi, August 2007)

And finally according to Naidoo (2006:pc) they would put a dot on the forehead, which varies according to the religious belief – if the person was of the *Vaishnavite* faith they would put the *Naamo*, if a *Saivite*, they would put three stripes of *vibuthi* (ash) which represents the holy Trinity (*Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva*). A red dot is normally put for woman. And in some cases the whole body will be smeared with *vibuthi*. The *vibhuthi* is made from cow dung, from the new born calf, the cow has a lot of uric acid so when you burn this it becomes rough, but the calf does not have so much of uric acid content, and when burnt it is much smoother, and then they add perfumes. It is believed that Lord Shiva sanctified the calf and therefore the cow dung has certain spiritual powers. Naidoo (2006:pc) goes on to say that there is a beautiful *thevaram* song called *Maasal Veenaiyam* (appendix 5) which states that when you adorn the sacred ash it gives you a free passage to the heavens above, without any obstructions.

According to Filippi (1996:134) it was tradition for the corpse to be dressed in specific colours which had a symbolic meaning. The colour chosen for men is white, sometimes yellow, while it is always red for women, symbolizing the whiteness of semen and the redness of blood, in preparation for a new conception. Filippi goes on to describe that according to Indian beliefs, death – which in the large majority of cases conditions one's rebirth in another species – does not facilitate sex changes. Usually a soul is reborn maintaining the same gender.

At the home, religious pictures are turned to the wall and in some cases mirrors are covered. According to most of the informants, a portion of the home is transformed like a temple where an altar is created. At the altar a statue of Lord Nadaraja, god lamp, *kuther villiker* (ornamental lamp), clay lamp, *agarabathi* (incense) stand, bouquets of flowers and a *deepam kalsam* is

placed. In some cases the photograph or symbols of the family deity is also placed at the altar. In many cases, the photograph of Satya Sai Baba or other spiritual masters is also placed at the altar depending on the belief of the family.

According to Filippi (1996:132) during this time the immediate family falls into *ásauca*, the time of impurity connected with the mourning period, due to the psychic imbalance provoked by the death of a close family member. During this period the *sapindas* (family members who partake in funeral rituals) go through a crisis. This is a period of weakness in the family of the deceased. This period is characterized by subtle attacks of evil spirits whose aim is to invest the home or to use the mortal remains of the deceased to further evil deeds, which will cause much damage to the family.

Padayachee (2006: pc) states that rice flour is spread on a tray and left near the lamp. This is to determine the fate of the soul. He further elaborates that a symbol will appear on the rice flour which will give an indication as to the form in which the soul will be reborn. According to the scriptures, *Thai maanavar* it is stated that if a person dies in the present generation he will be born again in another form. The rice flour is therefore used traditionally to check what print will form. If there is no print, then the deceased has reached salvation.

There is no fixed rule of how the altar should be created. It is left up to the prerogative of the individual families. A carpet is placed in front of the altar for the service group to sit and render devotional hymns. Naidoo (2006: pc) states that at the same altar, a set of clothes and other favourite items of the deceased is kept until the completion of the, memorial ceremony .The

clothes are what the person wore and therefore symbolize attachment. According to Naidoo (2006: pc) the clothes of the deceased are placed at the altar as a reminder of the worldly possessions that he had. On the completion of the memorial ceremony, this is normally distributed to family members in order to remember the deceased. In many cases, the clothes are given to the poor. According to Padayachee (2006: pc) it is not advisable to keep the personal possessions of the deceased as this forms close attachment and affects the transformation process of the soul.



Fig.23 Placement of clothes of the deceased in front of the deity. (Bakerton, November 2007)

In some cases, a cup of tea, coffee, fruit and other favourite food items are also kept during this period. It is believed that since the soul of the deceased is still on the earth plane until the completion of all the memorial ceremonies, the deceased partakes in the meal. This arrangement is done until the completion of the memorial service (Moonsamy, 2006: pc).

It was a common practice after a death of a Hindu for elderly relatives or friends to remain in the room to vigil with the deceased. During the vigil, they are able to defend the mortal remains in this delicate moment when the individual soul is being transformed. This vigil also acted as a precaution to prevent any subtle being or act of witchcraft to interfere in this process. Black

magicians and vampires could profit from taking over the psychic residue of the deceased and use it for their evil aims (Filippi, 1996:132).

As soon as people enter the funeral home, they offer prayer, and then sympathize with family members. The son or the bread winner is advised about procedures to be made for the funeral. Communication is made with the local undertakers, booking the hearse, booking the crematorium, and other logistic arrangements. This is normally done by the undertaker as part of a service to the family. The exact time for the funeral to be conducted the following day is given by the undertaker to the family, so that they can advise or put an advert in the newspaper or radio. The undertaker provides this information based on the availability of the hearse, crematorium, etc, as there are only two furnaces and there are many other funerals taking place. All this statistical and logistical information is given to the family, because the most important thing is for the people to know the time of the funeral (Govender 2006: po).

In the home, on that day you are not supposed to cook food on your stove. The neighbours or relatives bring the food, which are usually boiled or simple meals. According to Maharaj (2006: pc) boiled food is easily digested in the body. The families of the deceased are going through a period of grief, consumption and absorption is much easier when you eat vegetables. If the food is too solid and pungent, the absorption in the body is not easy. Eating simple foods displays the love and sacrifice for the deceased. For the next ten days immediate family members are expected to eat boiled food, while the person who performed the last rites should eat salt less food. This is to show respect to the deceased by sacrificing certain luxuries.

Behadar (2006: pc) explains that there is no religious significance for not cooking at home but the practice is attributed to the fact that family members are stressed by the kind of event that has occurred which is full of grief. The members of that family are deeply engrossed in grief and hence, they are not in their normal state of mind. As a result of the sympathy that has arisen in the mind of people who sympathize with the grieving family, they assist the family in the preparation of meals. The food comes from some charitable neighbours, friends or relatives who bring prepared food. But there is no restriction that that particular family must not prepare anything to be consumed.

According to Maharaj (2006: pc) when the coffin comes home, a special prayer is performed to receive the deceased. He goes on to say that there are lots of controversy to which side the head must face and which side the feet must face and everybody wants to have a say. Death occurs suddenly and the family is not prepared for this event. According to scriptures, the head of the corpse is supposed to face north. A lamp (*dhiya*) is lit and a bucket of water is kept at the side of the body. There is no scriptural explanation for this practice. It is believed that it is a practice that originated in India where people traveled great distances to attend a funeral and in order to refresh themselves water was sprinkled on their faces and feet.

Relatives and friends are called to bid farewell to the deceased and sacred songs are sung at the side of the body. According to Govender (2006: po) the body arrives at the funeral home at a time determined by the *almanac*.<sup>6</sup> The coffin is not immediately opened as people will be traumatic and start screaming. The body is first taken to the house where immediate family

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<sup>6</sup> An almanac is an annual publication containing tabular information in a particular field or fields often arranged according to the calendar.

members will be given an opportunity to view the face and to offer prayer. The chief mourner is expected to perform the prayer when the coffin is opened. This is a very traumatic time and is accompanied by lots of crying, and lots of emotions. After this is completed, the coffin is taken to the marquee and placed in the designated area. People will pay their respects and walk around the coffin. According to Behadur (2006: pc) there are ways in which the people practically pay tribute to the person, by picking up a petal of the flower that is made available, which is lying on the coffin, to offer it into the coffin. This is a sign of love and respect the mourner has for the deceased. However, according to the Vedic way, it is more significant to use sandalwood rather than flower petals as it is considered sacred and has more value.

Service groups will start rendering *bhajan, thevarams, thiruvagasam, arutpa, thirupuguzh* etc. These are all religious hymns with very important messages. A soothing, divine environment is created under the marquee. A number of individuals and groups render service as it is quite tiring for one service group to sit for over 6 hours which is the average time of a typical Hindu funeral ceremony. During the course of the funeral, appropriate messages, eulogies, speeches are rendered by family and friends about the character and how the deceased interacted with the community. According to Rajbally (1969:244) a farewell address was presented to the dead as stated in the Rig Veda 14.7.8.

The researcher outlines some unique events at the funeral of the late Morgan Pillay which he observed on 22/10/2006.

A young gentleman came with his guitar indicating that the late Morgan gave him this guitar as a gift and he wanted to render a few musical songs in memory of the late Morgan Pillay. The family agreed and he was given the opportunity to sing. Another gentleman who took Morgan to the hospital mentioned that

Morgan had a liking for a certain devotional cassette that was playing in his car, so the guy requested that the cassette be played and this was done. Unique requests are exceeded to and deviates from normal standardized funerals and this was done with the approval of the family.

At the funeral of the late Chris Murugan, a prominent musician which took place in January 2007, the coffin was led to the crematorium by a group of musicians who played the saxophone and other instruments. Furthermore, a prominent violinist, Harry Arunachellan played a violin solo as a tribute before the coffin was lowered to the incinerator.

If available, a priest who specializes in funeral rituals is called to conduct the necessary rites. However, from observance of a number of funerals in South Africa, this task is normally performed by elders in the community who through the transmission of oral tradition have learned to conduct all the necessary rituals in times like this. It is also noticeable that most of the temple priests who hail from India and Sri Lanka do not perform funeral rituals because of the ritual impurity associated with a funeral. They believe that their participation in funeral rituals will have a negative effect on their performance as temple priests. Most of the rituals are completed at the home of the deceased because at the crematorium you are restricted because of time constraints since the furnaces are used extensively.

The 'chief mourner' leads the rites. This is normally the eldest son in the case of the father's death and the youngest son in the case of the mother's death. According to the *GP*, 11.8.2-4 as quoted by Filippi (1996:136), the following list of substitutes is authorized to perform the funeral rites in the absence of a son: the nephew, the great nephew, the brother, or the brother's male descendants. In the case of the extinction of all the males in the family, a female relative may officiate.



Fig.24 The chief mourner leads the cremation rites and starts the fire. (Varanasi, August: 2007)

The person doing the last rites has to observe certain rules – first, he has to shave off all his hair and wear white clothes. This is symbolic of showing grief. According to Padayachee (2006: pc) the officiating priest which is normally provided by the undertaker, conducts the rituals and prayers at the home before the body leaves for the crematorium. The priest will ask the chief mourner who is going to do the particular ritual, to tie a white calico on his waist and they carry the lamp and go three times round the coffin. The person then breaks a coconut and say, *vari kooti anipather* – third world to the deceased, from his house he has moved away to another destination. Moonsamy (2006:pc) explains the symbolism associated with the coconut .He states that a coconut is pure white when it is broken. The chief mourner is asking the Lord to make the soul of the deceased as pure as the purity of the coconut, which is housed inside the coarse outer covering. Even though the water that nourishes the palm tree that bears the coconut may be polluted, no matter what dirt or filth there is at its feet, the palm produces the coconut with its absolutely pure liquid.



Fig.25 The chief mourner, dressed in white and shaven head, as a symbol of respect (Varanasi, August: 2007)

Rambilass and Behadur (2006: pc) explains that according to Vedic tradition the ceremony at the home of the deceased is very simple without any elaborate rituals. Once the time arrives for the prayer to commence with the rituals, then the programme of the actual communion that is needed with the Lord for the deceased in order for the soul to rest in peace, the underlying *mantras* and *slokas*<sup>7</sup> from the *Antyeshthi Prarthana* (Aryan Prayer) and the *Shanti Paath* is chanted as quoted by Hemraj et al (2003:2) Appendix 3. This is normally performed about fifteen minutes before the body is carried away to the crematorium.

While the Vedic and Saivite funeral ceremonies are very simple and straightforward, the ceremonies that have *puranic* origins are more elaborate.

According to Maharaj (2006:pc) six *pindhas* (rice balls) are offered on the day of the funeral – very important – three by the house, one at the entrance of the cemetery, one on arrival at the crematorium, and the last one just before the body goes into the incinerator. The *pindha* is placed in the right hand of the corpse so the corpse will go with the *pindha*.

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<sup>7</sup> Is a Sanskrit word used to denote a prayerful verse written to follow certain grammatical rules.

A prayer is offered to the Lord. Maharaj (2006:pc) explains that death is like changing a garment, or death is only the changing of a house, from old to new, the soul is immortal, it never dies, the cycle of birth and death is a continuous process until that soul has not erred and receives *moksha*. The prayer that is offered to the Lord is to give this soul a peaceful journey to its destination, and that prayer is also offered to *Yamaraj* – head of that department – in the scriptures it is referred to *Yamraj Prathana* – prayer to *Yamaraj*. According to Filippi (1996:183) the *yamadūtas* (helpers of death) are sent into the world to carry away the souls of those who have exhausted their vital breath.

A *pindha* is a small ball of rice, which is offered to appease the Lord. The first one is offered to Lord *Vishnu*, the second to Lord *Brahma*, and the third to Lord *Shiva*. Fourth, fifth and sixth is offered to *Yamaraj* at the crematorium.

One of the practices of removing the *sindoor* (red dot on the forehead and scalp of a married woman) and *thaali*<sup>8</sup> (gold pendent tied around the neck of a married women) when a husband dies is a common ritualistic practice at most funerals. However according to most of the informants there is no scriptural backing for this very practice and many families avoid performing it as it is very traumatic as explained by Maharaj (2006: pc)

It is very traumatic for the person, imagine you call her in front of everybody and add injury to it by washing away the *sindoor*, making it a spectacle. People must have a wake up call, we are doing things to dehumanize people, we should support the mourning lady and not humiliate her, we should be guarded, and start questioning unnecessary practices, we should not allow such a spectacle to take place, the old people are very staunch, you need to stop it or it is going to go on and on. All the lady has to do from the day after the funeral is to stop putting the *sindoor*.

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<sup>8</sup> Refer to the wedding chain in traditional Hindu wedding ceremony that the groom ties around the bride's neck. This *taali* is also called *mangalsutra* and is symbolically akin to the exchange of rings in western weddings.

Moonsamy (2006: pc) also cites other examples of rituals that are performed with no scriptural backing but are merely customary practices that have been passed on from generation to generation. For example, in some cases if a married man dies a ritual which is similar to a marriage ritual is performed to undo the marriage vows; they do the *nalangu* (cleansing ceremony) and undo the vows. For a female they do the same thing and remove the *thaali*.

According to Naidoo (2006: pc) when a husband dies, it is the height of tragedy for a woman, to sit like a bride and they do the *nalangu*, He goes on to say that there is a school of thinking, the reformist of the 21<sup>st</sup> century – Swami Haridas Giri and Nyananada Swami who said it is an act of cruelty to expose our woman to this remarriage ceremony. The marriage ended the moment the husband dies, but she should keep the things she holds sacred, like the *thaali*, she must only remove the *thaali* when she marries another man. As long as she is living and not married to anyone, she can even put a dot, because her status is still that of a married woman. If people reform, it will make it easier on the heart and mind of this poor woman. It is very cruel that, all the people, with morbid curiosity looking on. The woman is more broken hearted by the ritual than the actual passing away of the husband. Some of our women have the pleasure in taking out the *thaali*. This is cruel and uncompassionate which does nothing but revoke memories.

Naidoo (2006: pc) states that the family should leave it to the woman to decide whether she will continue to wear the *thaali* or dot. Furthermore it could be done as a private ceremony rather than making it a public spectacle.

Moonsamy (2006: pc) further explains that in some instances, he has observed that when a young unmarried man died, they did the marriage ritual for him with a banana tree. He argues that this is a totally unnecessary ritual with no logical or scriptural authority. However, according to Moodley (2006:pc) there is a superstitious belief that if an unmarried person is sent off there is a possibility that his spirit (*Pitr*) will roam around and follow young females or vice versa, therefore they believe that if they do a wedding and marry him off by exchanging garlands and doing the marriage rituals then they will be sending him off as a married person and he will not follow unmarried girls or his girlfriend if he had one, hence they marry him to a banana tree. It is also believed by some that the symbolic marriage is performed by parents in order to assist the son or daughter to escape punishment, since he/she has not accepted full responsibility in respect of family life.

Both Naidoo (2006: pc) and Kisten (2006: pc) describe a tradition that was performed for many years but is slowly disappearing. Turmeric paste is placed underneath the lamp. The chief mourner who will later put the *kolli* (carry the clay pot) must tap the feet of the dead and without turning back must go and place the turmeric paste on the wall in the house or in a saucer. It is believed that by placing the turmeric paste on the wall or saucer the footprints of the departed soul is taken and stuck on the wall and will remain in the house until the 16<sup>th</sup> day memorial service. After the completion of the ceremony the priest removes it and places it into the river together with all other prayer material.

When it is time for the coffin to leave the home of the deceased after the completion of all the necessary rituals a procession of relatives and friends accompanies the bier, chanting *Rām nām*

*satya hai*, (the name of Rama is truth) in the case of a North Indian funeral while the hymn *mutheneri* (Appendix 5) is sung at a South Indian funeral.

Kisten (2006: pc) explains that before the coffin is placed in the hearse three camphor is lit which represents the trinity *Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva*. A *morro* (woven cane tray) which has rice, beetle leaf, beetle nut, money is given to one of the family members accompanying the corpse or a funeral attendant who throw it on the road as the hearse moves to the crematorium. In some cases, when the corpse leaves the house for the crematorium, popcorn is thrown on the road from the house to the corner of the road or to the crematorium. According to Kisten (2006: pc) and Moonsamy (2006: pc) this practice has no relevance in South Africa. In India, where this originated, there were many cremation grounds. The elements that were thrown on the ground served as a path finder for those that came late. In South Africa, there are very few crematoriums which are well known by many and furthermore, the funerals are well advertised in the print and electronic media so there is no need to provide directional clues for the mourners (Appendix 7).



Fig 26. Morro, woven cane tray. Reference: columbusandcook.com

According to Padayachee (2006:pc) before the hearse leaves the home of the deceased water is thrown at the bottom of the hearse from a brass container which puts off the light of a burning

camphor as a sign to show that the soul is now prepared for release from the material world. Moonsamy (2006: pc) argues that this practice has no relevance in South Africa as the intention of this practice in India was to throw water at the feet of the mourners in preparation for the long journey to the crematorium.

It is customary that when the body leaves the home for the cemetery, some people make seven stops before it reaches the crematorium. The number seven is significant as it symbolically represents the seven sacred rivers: *Ganga, Jamuna, Sarasvati, Narmada, Kaveri, Sindhu, and Godaveri*. According to Maharaj (2006:pc) this practice has no scriptural backing. It is merely a tradition that has been adopted from India where people had to travel long distances to cremate the body and it was necessary to make stops to seek relief from carrying a heavy corpse. This action of stopping to rest, eat and freshen up was a necessity then; however it became customary later on, when people halted between the home of the deceased and the hearse.

### **9.3 At the crematorium**

The body is transported by a hearse to the crematorium or cemetery in the company of relatives and friends. Very close and sensitive relatives who cannot stand the sight of confining the body to flames do not accompany the body to the crematorium.

Hindus traditionally cremate the dead, for a faster and more complete release of the soul. The funeral rites serve two purposes. Firstly, it is a means of informing the deceased that he has, in fact died. This prevents the disorientated soul from lingering close to the physical plane. Most of

the rituals and the accompanying chants urge the deceased to relinquish his attachments and continue his journey.

On the other hand, the rites are also directed to the living providing an opportunity for family members to say a respectable and dignified farewell, to express grief, loss and a whole lot of other emotions that is typical when one loses a loved one. However according to *Hinduism Today* (1997:5), the deepest significance of the funeral rites lies in their yoking the inner and outer worlds, *Bhuloka* and *Devaloka*, and their recognition that a family consists not just of its living generations, but its ancestors as well, as explained in later chapters. The ceremonial uniting of the deceased with his forefathers and yearly honouring of ancestors keep open the inner communication which makes the family prosperous and preserves its longevity.

Although most Hindus are cremated, exceptions are small children, *samnyāsis* (ascetics) and the followers of some sects like the *Vīraśaiva*, who practice burial (Klostermaier 1998:39). Filippi (1996:175) explains that children who die before the age of two are normally buried. This includes the aborted foetus, or the stillborn child which is considered beings who could not have been exposed to the possibility of realizing any real action or ritual *karma*. He goes on to say that death occurring in infancy guarantees a human rebirth (*GP*, 11.24.4). Children less than four years old are believed to be incapable of performing evil actions. This is why no ulterior expiatory rites are necessary, and the mourning period following their death is very brief (*GP*, 11.43.3).

Prof Abdul Kalam (2007: pc) argues that cremation appears very late in human history. He explains that all Hindus do not cremate the dead. It is ecologically based. Areas that are characterized by mountains, deserts and forests won't allow for cremation. The original ways of disposing the dead was by means of burial and this is still the preferred choice by many tribal communities in India. The influence of religious invasions had an impact on the decision to cremate. The practice of burial is known to date back as far as 80 000 years, and is common in societies where doctrines of bodily resurrection are popular (O'Connell et al. 2007:169).

However, according to Sharma (2003:1) the Hindus originally started the practice of cremating their dead for several reasons. They did not want to leave dead bodies around to be consumed by vultures as in the case of the Parsees. Such a sight could be very traumatic. Especially to the family of the deceased. Hindus also had a reverence for their dead and wanted to maintain sanctity of the corpse against attacks from savages. He further explains that, during the early days of civilization, digging a grave would be more difficult, laborious and time-consuming because of lack of proper tools. In comparison, cremation was easier and cheaper (needing no land); because everyone going to the crematorium to pay respects to the dead would simply carry some wood with him to add to the fire.

Members of the *Arya Samaj* movement feel that for purposes of releasing the five elements that man is constituted of (earth, water, fire, ether, air) back into the atmosphere, it is more appropriate to cremate the corpse rather than burying it. Cremation was regarded as a hygienic way of eradicating diseases, as it was believed that if heavy rains fell onto the graves and washed with it the germs and diseases of the decomposing corpse into streams and rivers then marine life

would be endangered, and so will those that consumed the fish and other sea life. The most important reason of choosing cremation, however, was for the purposes of finality – as the *Arya Samaj* believes that death is the end of the mortal life. Cremation symbolized purification, sublimation and ascension. The fire itself signified the fleeing of the soul while the smoke symbolized its ascension. It also represents the liberation of spirit and release from Earth. For the Hindus the flames symbolize *Brahma*. (O'Connell et al., 2007:169,175).

The most potent factor that gave the custom a lasting position was the religious belief of the Indo-Aryans that fire was regarded as a messenger of God and the carrier of the oblations offered to them. Since *Agni*<sup>9</sup> is the essence of life (sun, heat, energy are manifestations of *Agni*), many worship God via the fire, by placing offerings into the fire (*hawan*). This oblation was also extended to include human and animal corpses that were offered to the Gods. After the dead was consigned to *Agni* and reduced to ashes, it could receive a new body in the world of *Yama*, and join the *pitara* and his ancestors.

The actual cremation is regarded as an offering into the Sacred Fire, conducting the corpse to heaven as a sacrificial gift. The dead person is a sacrifice to and is, according to widespread notion, carried to heaven and the world of the forefathers (*Pitrloka*) by the smoke.

Behadur (2006: pc) provides a detailed explanation for the use of sandalwood, *hawan samagiri* and other ingredients during the cremation process. He explains that when a particular body goes into the incinerator and has to be burnt and reduced to ashes – every form of flesh – no matter

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<sup>9</sup> The word *agni* is Sanskrit for "fire" (noun), Agni has three forms: fire, lightning and the sun. Agni is one of the most important of the Vedic gods. He is the god of fire and the acceptor of sacrifices.

which animal or living creature – every flesh has its constituent of animal matter – there is flesh, there is liquid, there is fat, there is bones, there is marrows, and all the other parts of the body that constitute it. So when fire begins to burn, a particular part of the body constitution emits a kind of an odour. Fat has its own odour, ordinary fatless flesh will have its own odour – any other enzyme or juice which is given rise by the organ or cell which is responsible for its production will have its own odour. So when the total human body goes into the incinerator, it gives off a combined odour of all the parts that are in the fire.

In order to purify the cremation process and to keep the odour and pollution minimized, a certain quantity of *samagari* (hawan mixture) is used during the cremation process. *Samagari* is specially cultivated wheat. There are about nine or ten types, which have a natural fragrance about it and this is very powerful. Actually when this type of wheat is pulled out, the soil is shaken off and the roots are also used, because it has the same essence that the bark and leaves have. So, it adds to the aroma and flavour of the existing plant. When the *samagari* is placed into the fire, in conjunction with the human body that has its own odour, then this particular fragrance from the ingredients that is added to the ghee, camphor, wood, and every other constituent of the fire which is burning it has a suppressing function. It also contributes towards refreshing the atmosphere that is absorbing the smoke and adding to the existing odour in the atmosphere by the odour of the body in the fire. The greater the quantity of the ingredients that we use, the lesser is the effect of that odour. The sandalwood is considered to be a very important kind of wood because the root is used for its medicinal values, the bark is used again for its medicinal value, and the wood itself can be ground into paste. We call that sandal wood paste – and the great sages, *rishis*, *munis* and other spiritual leaders who are considered to be

very holy, used this paste as a natural body cooler.

#### 9.4 Burial versus cremation

According to Filippi (1996:115), many archaeological excavations have revealed the popular custom of burying the dead, especially under the domestic floor, near one's fireplace. Most of the people were buried in the embryonic position, in order to facilitate their rebirth. This burial position was accorded possibly in the belief that as a man came out of his mother's womb, so shall he return whence he came.

Naidoo (2006:pc) states that being of a rural nature, the ancient South Indians believed in burials, because they always believed that if you buried somebody, you can go and visit them from time to time. Up until today many people still regularly visit the cemeteries to honour their loved ones especially on special occasions like *Deepavali*<sup>10</sup> or anniversary celebrations. They feel some physical connection with the body in the ground. Even when the Indentured labourers were becoming free and even now in the later years, burial was still the majority choice for the Hindu. According to Srinivasa Iyengar (1929), cremation is not part of the original Tamil culture and is considered an Aryan influence. It came into existence after the introduction of the fire cult in Tamil Nadu and cremation was considered to be an offering of the dead to the gods through fire.

Naidoo (2006: pc) explains that the change from burials to cremations was largely due to the

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<sup>10</sup> Is a major Indian festive holiday, and a significant festival in Hinduism. Many legends are associated with Diwali. Today it is celebrated by Hindus as the Festival of Lights, where the lights or lamps signify victory of good over the evil within every human being.

laws of the lands. In the early days of the indentured settlement burials took place at the farms which later changed to designated burial sites after obtaining a proper death certificate. Previously people used to bury people in shallow graves and every time there was heavy rains the bodies would float down Victoria Street and the railway station at Soldiers way. Three feet would never cover a body in a storm that is why the depth of the grave was changed to six feet.

So according to Naidoo (2006: pc) the traditional funeral of India changed radically in South Africa. The municipal by-laws altered the procedures and rituals which forced families to complete all the rituals associated with the final rites at home. At the crematorium the rites were further restricted because of time constraints. Unlike in India where there were many cremation grounds in South Africa there were very few which made it necessary to have a number of cremations in one day. Furthermore cremations could only be done after 2pm because of prevailing winds which used to blow the smoke away in the direction of residential areas causing pollution.

### **9.5 Procedures at the crematorium**

At the crematorium, some ceremonies are performed by a trained priest. In South Africa this service is normally provided by the undertaker using freelance priests or elders who specialize in funeral rituals. Most of the spiritual knowledge gained is through oral transmission. When the body arrives at the crematorium, the body is respectfully placed at a dedicated prayer area where certain rituals are performed to prepare the body for the cremation.

According to Moonsamy (2006: pc) there should be no crying at the crematorium, otherwise the dead person has to absorb tears and mucus against his/her will. According to Filippi (1996:147) tears have the power of augmenting, the sultriness of the deceased (Raghuvamsa, V11.86) probably because of the salty taste. In a letter written to her family, the late Patchiamma Govender, the mother of the researcher wrote on her death bed that she did not want anyone to scream and cry at her funeral (Appendix 3). The researcher observed during his visit to the Holy Ganges River where bodies are burnt and disposed that no crying took place during the cremation process. Most of the informants were of the opinion that crying will confuse the soul and the disturbance caused by the crying will interfere with the process of the soul travelling to a new destination.

Furthermore although in South Africa, females do sometimes attend the final rights ceremony at the crematorium, it has been observed in India that females are strictly prohibited from attending and participating in any rituals at the cremation site. In the past and in some cases in recent times the practice of *sati* was popular. *Sati* is regarded as a traditional practice by a Hindu widow, sacrificing herself on the husband's funeral pyre. A woman who died by burning herself on her husband's funeral fire was considered to be an extremely virtuous woman and for this sacrifice, she would go straight to heaven. Singh (2004:5). However India has put plans in place to tighten laws against *sati*, by holding entire communities responsible and increasing the maximum penalty to life imprisonment (Sunday Times: 2007). In South Africa there is no known record of the practice of *sati*. This may be attributed to the tough laws governing these types of practices.

Although a widower may remarry, the remarriage of a widow is not permitted in traditional Hindu society. According to Rocher (1965) the *Smritis* books oppose remarriage of widows very strongly. A woman is, however, according to the Rig-Veda, permitted to marry her deceased husband's brother. If she remarries other than a close relative, her ties with the conjugal family of the first husband are ritually terminated. Whereas married women enjoy many privileges and are regarded as auspicious, widows are despised. They are not permitted to participate in any rituals or *puja* (prayer) and are regarded as inauspicious. They are not even permitted in temples.

### 9.5.1 Rituals performed at the crematorium for Hindu of South Indian origin

As soon as the corpse arrives at the crematorium the coffin is taken to the designated ritual area. Aided by the priest, the chief mourner performs an *abishegam*<sup>11</sup> (cleansing) for the *Siva Lingum* (black granite stone which is a symbol of Lord Shiva). This is achieved by washing the *Lingum* with *patcherpayir*, *seeka*, sour milk, milk, rose water and the rice that was prepared earlier. (Kisten, 2006: pc). However according to Padayachee (2006: pc) this ritual originated in the North and is not performed by all South Indians. He further explains that there is the story of *Harichandran*, a mythological figure who never spoke a lie. He was tested by God and he lost his Kingdom but he still did not say a lie, he sold his wife and child and became a crematorium caretaker. He continued in this new vocation until his last day, still not speaking any lies. It is for this reason that in the North, people acknowledge *Harichandra* by placing the body by him (the guard) and by the *Siva Lingam* and perform certain rituals before allowing the body to be cremated. There is no ritual like this in the scriptures. *Harichandra's* story is a myth and people

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<sup>11</sup> Ritual performed to thank God. Milk, ghee, curd and honey provide sustenance to the body, and are used to perform the *abishegam*. It is also believed that by performing an *abishegam*, God will provide the devotee with continued prosperity, just as a seed once planted and cared for will return the favor with its fruits.

worship him for not speaking a lie.

A white cloth is placed near the coffin where the attendees are expected to throw money which goes to the caretaker – that is the present day Harichandra. The chief mourner will turn a coconut and do a prayer and people are allowed to view the face.

It is also common at a cremation for a person to speak on behalf of the departed soul highlighting the role that the deceased played and giving strength to the family and telling the children to carry the name of the father. Announcements are also made giving the time and date of the 15<sup>th</sup> night and 16<sup>th</sup> day ceremony. An officiating priest who is contracted by the undertakers will take over from there.

When the corpse goes to the crematorium the second part continues. The coffin is once again opened for viewing. Although this is not an acceptable practice, it is done for the convenience of people that were unable to view the corpse at the home. It is for this reason that the final rites is not done at the home of the deceased. That is the main reason for having a second part of the ceremony at the crematorium (Padayachee 2006: pc).

During the final rites, each member of the family is given a lit *agarbathy* (incense stick) and a block of camphor which they hold in their hands as they walk three times around the coffin. After completing the first round *hawan samagari* and ghee is placed into the coffin; the second round milk is poured into the coffin and the third round the lit *agarbathi* is placed into the coffin while the unlit camphor is placed on the coffin while bidding the deceased farewell. (Moonsamy,

2006: pc)

The chief mourner carries a clay pot (*kolli* in Tamil) containing water on his left shoulder and circumambulates the body three times in a counter clockwise direction (everything is done opposite at the time of death) while holding a fire brand behind his back. In some Tamil communities the eldest son performs the *kolli* for the father while the youngest son performs it for the mother. He is normally assisted by one of his uncles. At each turn around the coffin, a relative knocks a hole in the pot with a knife, letting water out, signifying life's leaving its vessel. At the end of three turns, the chief mourner drops the pot. Then without turning to face the body he places a piece of sacred wood (mango stick or sandalwood) dipped in ghee into the coffin. He is followed by other members of the family. After placing the stick in the coffin the mourners never turn back and look at the pyre, they always went forward.

According to Naidoo (2006: pc), many people still practice this, the belief is that by doing this the dead will not trouble you in dreams or neither will they haunt you. Up to today a lot of people, do not turn back and look at the furnace, they walk straight. A small fire is lit in the coffin before it is consigned to the chamber. While doing this, he chants '*Namo! Namah!* The attendant priest recites an appropriate prayer as the body is shoved into the chamber.

Naidoo (2006: pc) further explains that it was common practice, especially in olden days for people to sing devotional hymns when the pyre was burning. Even when the body was carried from the house on the bamboo pyre, people danced and sang songs in order to express their joy that the soul has been released from the tragedy of human life. However this is no longer practiced in South Africa.

According to Moonsamy (2006: pc) and Padayachee (2006: pc) the songs from the *Thevarum* or other appropriate devotional hymns are sung at the crematorium while the mourners are given an opportunity to pay their last respects. Before the body is placed in the incinerator, the hymn *Muthernerri* (appendix 5) is sung. When the body is buried the hymn *Valvather mayam* (appendix 5) is sung. Naidoo (2006: pc) explains that one of our Saints said, '*Valvavather Mayim, Manna varai thinam*' – Life is an illusion, death is certain. In this way, we pray to God to forgive the deceased for all the wrongs that he had committed, and take him onto the lotus feet of the Lord and to open the doors for the soul to travel without any obstacles. We also pray for strength and guidance for the family. The *Om Nama Shivaya mantra* (appendix 5) is also recited at many cremations or burials.

According to Naidoo (2006: pc) before leaving the crematorium or cemetery, it is common practice to place a few coins on a white sheet that is placed at the exit. The original intention of this practice was to supplement the income of the gravedigger who was lowly paid and not for any other reason. He also makes mention of the fact that at some funerals, a live chicken was released when the person died unnaturally or when the person died on an inauspicious day. The chicken was offered in place of the life that should not have died. The life had a future, and a span, and was robbed of it, so a chicken was sacrificed in place of the life. In some cases the chicken was buried so that the soul will have peace. The soul won't be held responsible for dying before its time; instead the chicken would be responsible.

### **9.5.2 Rituals performed at the crematorium for a Hindu of North Indian Origin**

Maharaj (2006: pc) explains the procedures that are performed at the crematorium for persons of

North Indian origin which are very similar to the procedures adopted by the South Indian community as they are based on the scriptural authority of the *Garuda Puranam*. However, procedures of the followers of Vedic practices like the *Arya Prathinithi Sabha* are somewhat different as explained below.

A prayer is offered to the Lord. This is followed by a *hawan* ceremony which is conducted by the priest. *Hawan* is a fire. Fire is the mouth of the Lord. It must be noted that no *hawan* ceremony is performed if the corpse is buried. *Hawan Samagri* is placed into the fire and the names of all the servants of *Yamaraj* are chanted because they will be in charge of the soul. The fire is circumbulated ten times. The fire will consume the final body in the incinerator. An appeal is made to *Agni devata* (the fire God) to consume this body painlessly. This is done by chanting the *mantra*, *Ram Naam Satya he!* while the corpse is placed into the incinerator.

According to Behadar and Rambilas (2006: pc) in the Vedic funeral, a clay lamp is lit which is symbolic of the fire that will be used to ignite the main fire that will reduce the body to ashes. Once the fire gains momentum family members offer the *hawan samagari* with the recital of appropriate hymns or mantras (chants). With the word *swaha* at the end of the hymn the family members will offer the *samagari* to the body. In most cases the inner casing of the casket is removed and brought onto the podium as burning the outer coffin is a waste of time and money. The mantras that are recited are divided into three categories. Behadar (2006: pc) explains that some of the mantras are very long, and due to time constraints and delays along the way, some of the mantras may be reduced. However, the full complement of the mantras that are necessary for the actual ceremony to take place is recited as it contributes to the final sacrament. Behadar

(2006: pc) further explains that the final mantras are a means of paying homage to the Lord for having given this particular deceased person the life of a human being.

The three sets of mantras differ in length and meaning. The first set makes reference to the person whilst he was living thanking him for abiding to the basic principles of life and performing the duty that was expected of him as an adult.

The second set of mantras is short and these actually refer to every organ in the human body – the Lord is thanked for all the organs that performed their duty. The mantras acknowledge the important role the human body played in allowing the different organs to function in a harmonious and integrated manner. Furthermore, since this is the last stage that we are going to see this person in the human form, tribute is paid to the Lord for having granted him the mental power and ability and the physical power and ability to be what he was.

The third set of mantras is a means of communicating to the Lord that the deceased deserves this dignified farewell because of the duty that this particular person performed whilst alive. After the reciting of the three groups of mantras, the body is taken into the incinerator, which takes about 60 to 75 minutes to be reduced to ashes.

While the body is burning, lengthy portions of Vedic hymns for the dead are recited. *Yama*, the lord of the netherworlds, is invoked to prepare for the deceased a good place among the ancestors (1998:39). According to Holck (1974:32) as quoted by Strong, (2004:2) the first mortal fate with death was named *Yama*. This dubious honour makes him uniquely qualified to lead the

way for others after death. The sacred scriptures of the *Rig Veda*, which makes reference to him as King *Yama*, promise that all who have been good will receive admission to *Yama's* paradise and the everlasting enjoyment of all the heavenly pleasures, including the restoration of a sick body, the maintaining of family relations and the highly desired apotheosis.

On the other hand, *Agni* the god of fire is requested to carry the departed safely into the realm of the fathers. According to Asnani (2000:2) fire is worshipped as a manifestation of God to whom the body is given as the last offering of the human birth. The fire conveys the offering to heaven. According to Davies (1997:82) an individual is composed of flesh, which is believed to come from the mother's menstrual blood, and of bones, which originate in the father's semen. The foetus, growing in the womb, is nourished by the 'heat' that comes from the mother and the food that she eats.

He further illustrates that death, symbolically speaking, parallels this pattern of birth for just as the maternal heat helps produce the foetus so the heat of the cremation fire destroys the flesh, leaving the bones behind. It is though the elements derived from the female are destroyed, along with the sin of the individual, which is symbolically associated with body hair, itself destroyed by fire. The remaining bones are placed in the river which is associated with the female principle of existence and thereby, in a symbolic sense, becomes a fertilizing agent. One of the popular interpretations of cremation cited by Parry as quoted by Davies (1997:83) refers to the corpse as rising from the pyre as smoke which becomes transformed into clouds and into rain which in turn produces vegetables as food; this, in due course, becomes male semen. Death thus contributes positively towards the creation of new life.

In most cultures, people often seem to want to take control of death and make it appear to serve positive ends rather than be a negative terminal point of life. This is clearly evident in the traditional view of life and death in India as describe by Davies (1997:84). It is quite possible to interpret the cremation as a kind of sacrifice, one which is connected with the distinction between a good and a bad death.

The preparation for death is like the preparation of sacrificial offerings. The burning area is prepared as are sacrificial sites. The wood for cremation is like the wood used for offerings to the deities. The way the pyre is lit and the materials added to it all reflect the rites of sacrificial offering. In fact, according to Parry as quoted by Davies (1997:84) the cremation is called the sacrament of fire, *dah sanskar*, or the last sacrifice, *antyeshti*.



Fig.27 A funeral pyre that resembles a sacrificial offering (Varanasi, August 2007)

In present times, most cremation takes place in a gas chamber. According to Behadar (2006:pc), only the very immediate members of the family are allowed in the chamber, because of limited space and the prayer will only concern the immediate family members. Females were left out because of the emotional and trauma associated with the burning of a body. It is for this reason

that women are not encouraged to enter the chamber for the concluding rites.

## 9.6 Disposal of ashes

The ashes of the deceased are collected from the crematorium approximately 1 hour after the completion of the cremation. Water is sprinkled on the ash and the remains are collected in a tray and placed in a clay pot. The ashes which are ground to dust are dissolved in milk which symbolizes purity and immersed in a river or the sea with appropriate respect by completing certain rituals. The belief is that because milk is the first thing a human consumes when born and it should be the last when the ash is disposed. However, according to Naidoo (2006: pc) when the ash is burnt, it is hot, so they pour milk to make it cool. This is purely a hygienic factor. The milk is very symbolic because it sustains life. According to Naidoo (2006: pc) in the last 10-15 years, they've used a special grinder to grind the bones to ashes. Previously you would get big pieces of bones which were an ugly sight to immerse. It left bad memories. Methods of cremation and burial are very hygienic in this country. Once the body goes into the furnace you have no access to it, all you get is ashes at the end, but in India, they still persist in cremation in the open grounds. Flowers and garlands are placed with the ashes as it is placed in the water.

According to Moonsamy (2006: pc) a prayer is performed at the riverside or sea before the ash is disposed in the water. This is done by placing the ashes on a banana leaf, in an open box. Thereafter, milk is poured around it, and lit camphor and flowers are placed on the ashes while performing a prayer. In some instances, 3 kinds of fruit, milk and sweet rice are also offered during this prayer. A symbol of Lord *Ganesha* made of turmeric powder and water is placed with

the ash and sent into the water. It is hoped that by using this symbol all obstacles will be removed, making the way clear for the soul to travel to its new destination as it is common belief that Lord *Ganesha* is the remover of obstacles.

The aim of every Hindu is to ensure that the ashes eventually reach the *Ganges* River, the abode of Lord *Shiva*. According to Strong (2004:5) spreading the ashes in the waters of the *Ganges* has positive repercussions for the deceased. The *Ganges* River is referred to as the “River of Heaven” or the Goddess and mother; she is considered sacred from her source in the Himalayas, all the way to the sea. The power of the *Ganges* to destroy sins is so great that, people say,

...even a droplet of Ganges water carried one’s way by the breeze will erase the sins of many lifetimes in an instant. (Eck 1982:217)

Hindus believe that dying in Varanasi and having their remains scattered in the Ganges allows their souls to escape a cycle of death and rebirth, attaining *moksha*, or salvation (Sunday Times June 10, 2007).

During my visit to Varanasi in October 2007 I had observed hundreds of people who have come here for various spiritual reasons:

- to perform the *shradda* ceremony for their ancestors
- to bathe in the River Ganges for the purpose of spiritual cleansing and,
- to come and die at this Holy place to achieve immediate *moksha* (salvation)



Fig.28 Bathing in the Holy Ganges for spiritual cleansing. ( Reference: Varanasi, 2007)

The Ganges River is considered as the gateway to the Ancestral world while the River Cauvery is seen as the temporary halt for the departed soul as it makes its way to the final destination.

According to Bhala (2005) it is believed that when ashes are immersed into rivers (like the holy River Ganges), with dedication and devotion, respect is accorded to the departed soul. He goes on to explain that immersing the ashes in water is important because the ash also contains tiny bones. Part of the material that constitutes bone is phosphate. Phosphate is an excellent ingredient for growing grain. Water containing phosphate that irrigates the banks of the rivers helps with irrigation. The belief of the elements going back to nature when the person dies is prevalent here.

After disposing the ashes in the water, the mourners walk away without looking back. According to Moonsamy (2006: pc) this is done to make detachment easier and to prevent the soul from lingering on the earthly plane.

In South Africa, the task of disposing the ashes is made easy with the establishment of the *Sivananda Ghat* at the Clare Estate Crematorium by the Divine Life Society of South Africa in 2003. Another Ghat is planned near the Msundusi River to serve the cremation needs of the Pietermaritzburg community. As soon as the ashes are ready for disposal members of the immediate family are given an opportunity to dispose the ashes at the *Ghat* in a dignified and respectful manner while at the same time ensuring that the ashes reach the Indian Ocean. This is made possible by the fact that the water disposal unit at the *Ghat* is connected to the uMgeni River which in turn flows to the Indian Ocean and hopefully to the Ganges River. Water is brought from the Ganges River for the fountain that will lead to the river and eventually to the ocean. The concept of the Ghat was adopted from the Ganges River in India. According to Pundit Maharaj, Post (2007:14) it is a very dignified way to dispose of human ashes and is a much needed facility.



Fig 29 The Ganga pool at Sivananda Ghat with container into which ashes of the deceased are deposited.  
Reference: [www.sivananda.dls.org.za](http://www.sivananda.dls.org.za)

According to an article in the Post, 26-30 October 2005, bereaved families seeking relief or closure to a loved one's death participate in the "All Souls Day" which is held at the Sivananda Ghat on the first Sunday of each month.



Fig. 30 Immersion of illuminated lights and the performance of the Hawan on “All Souls day”  
Reference: [www.sivananda.dls.org.za](http://www.sivananda.dls.org.za)

### 9.7 Return from the crematorium

It is necessary for the mourners to cleanse themselves upon returning from the crematorium as they have been in contact with the corpse all the time. Before entering the house, they touch, as a way of purifying themselves, the stone, the fire, cow dung, grain, *thil* seed (sesame seed), oil and water. Fire, water, ether are all natural elements (Maharaj, 2006: pc).

The mourners are requested to sprinkle water on their heads and enter the house with the cry “*Hāri Bol!*” or *Aum Namah Shivaya* on their lips. This tells the members of the family that the last rites of the deceased have been performed and is a signal of renewed expressions of grief (Wilkins, 2001:384). According to Moonsamy (2006: pc) water is sprinkled to avoid any evil vibration or bad spirit or bad wind that may follow the mourner from the cemetery or crematorium. Naidoo (2006: pc) explains that a bucket of water is placed outside the house in order to enable the mourners who returned from the crematorium or cemetery to sprinkle on their heads three times. This symbolically acts like a cleansing agent, because you were suppose to go

home and have a bath, the bath is to cleanse the evil thoughts that the soul might have left.

Those who have been to the crematorium are encouraged to have a bath and change their clothes before getting back to normal work. Dealing with corpses causes ritual impurity, and so all those associated with the funeral have to undergo purification ceremonies before rejoining society. Furthermore, in the process of touching the dead body or being close to it, the person might be tainted by harmful bacteria. Fire and water are cleaning and purifying agents of nature. According to Srinivas (2003) birth and death result in ritual pollution for the whole house (*Tithe* in Tamil means death pollution). The ritual impurity will not wane away no matter how many baths you have but will only conclude after a prescribed period is over (sixteen days for deaths). Some mourners chew leaves of the *Pichumanda* or *Neem* tree, and rinse their mouth. The aim is to sever relations with the dead, and the articles, are supposed to serve as barriers against the inauspicious spirit of the dead. Nowadays the people even place a knife and broom for this purpose.

The Arya Samaj is very critical of those who return from the grave after having cremated their mother or father, and then begin placing knives and brooms in order to ward off the spirit that may have returned home with them. They feel that this is not right as the mother whom you loved yesterday, you fear today as a ghost (Rambilas 2006: pc).

Following the symbolic purification, the mourner then goes to the God lamp, offers a prayer, and then places holy ash on the forehead. During the prayer the mourner says,

The man or woman of this house is gone, when I go in, he is no more there, so please assist me to adjust to the new situation (Moonsamy, 2006:pc).

Thereafter, the mourner joins other members of the family for a meal which is called *dhuker sapader* – the meals which are normally prepared by relatives or friends are very simple vegetarian dishes. In Gauteng the standard meal is potato, cabbage, *raso* (king soup) rice, salad or pickle while in Kwa-Zulu Natal vegetable breyani or other vegetarian curries are served (Naidoo, 2006: pc).

According to Hinduism Today (1997:8), during the days of ritual impurity, family and close relatives do not visit other's homes; neither do they attend festivals, temples or take part in any celebratory functions such as marriages for the next few days until the memorial ceremony is completed. According to Maharaj (2006: pc), until such time that the *pindas* are not offered properly, the immediate family members cannot do *kathas* and *jandhas* and other celebratory functions. But the normal offering of water and fruit and milk can continue normal after the 13<sup>th</sup> day. Padayachee (2006: pc) states that there should be a clear distinction between prayers for rejoicing and normal prayer. In the South Indian community, people do not fast during *Purtasi* when someone dies. According to Moonsamy (2006: pc), this is an example of abdicating our responsibility to God when someone dies. During the 12 months after the death of a family member there is every reason to pray for the well being of the departed soul.

According to Padayachee (2006:pc) for the period until the 11<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup> day memorial service, all the family members get together through daily visits, bringing food and offering support to the mourning family. In India, the deceased family do not cook for 16 days as they are in mourning

making it difficult to go shopping when they are grieving. According to Naidoo (2006: pc) the food is normally provided by the *samandhis* (in-laws) or neighbours to relieve the burdens during the mourning period. Some observe this mourning period up to one year. However, in South Africa, like in many other countries, these observances have become optional due to work and other commitments. It is not possible to remain at home for such a prolonged period.

Naidoo (2006:pc) goes on to say that every day people will sing beautiful songs from the Tamil or Telegu scriptures – *Thevaram, Thiru Pugazh, Arutpa*, delightful songs to settle and calm the minds of the people who have been affected by the tragedy. And by the 11<sup>th</sup> day or 16<sup>th</sup> day things would have been calmed – the difference in days for Tamil and Telegu is because of the distance– to give people from far who were unable to attend the funeral an opportunity to pay their respects in memory of the deceased and to provide support for the bereaved family.

During the mourning period, regular services held at the home of the deceased where groups or individuals are invited to sing bhajans or devotional songs complimented by readings of the scriptures. The selected songs and scriptural readings are aimed at providing support and encouragement to the family and to encourage the joyous release of the departed soul rather than to encourage excessive lamentation. It is believed that the departed soul is acutely conscious of the emotional forces directed at him and prolonged grieving can hold back the soul on the earthly plane preventing it from reaching the kingdom of the ancestors (Hinduism Today 1997:8/9). In some places, like Hindu Bali it is shameful to cry for the dead.

## 9.8 Memorial ceremonies

Death is a natural phenomenon, but pollutes the members of the household. Purificatory rights are exercised during the main period of mourning.

The memorial ceremony following the death of an individual varies according to various customs and traditions. In South Africa, it is common for this ceremony to be held on the 11<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup> or 31<sup>st</sup> day after the cremation and thereafter after one year. In some traditions the ceremony is a repetition of the funeral rites.

According to Filippi (1996:149), the days of *aśauca* (funeral impurity, mourning) differ depending on one's caste, age and sex. The length of thirteen days is purely indicative. In reality, caste and regional customs vary enormously in the Indian complex social environment. According to the *Grhya Sūtras*, *aśauca* lasts ten days for *brāhmanas* and *ksatriyas*, fifteen days for *vaiśyas* and a month for *śudras*. The younger the age of the deceased, the shorter the period of impurity for the family. The same applies for females.

According to Klostermaier (1998:39) for a full year ceremonies have to be continued at certain intervals in order to ensure the safe and final passage from this life to the next. (1998:39). The ceremonies are accompanied by certain rituals and singing of appropriate songs to create an atmosphere of soft and soothing adjustment of family members and friends to the new situation without the presence of the deceased.

The rites which follow cremation involve making offerings of rice balls and of food and gifts to particular priests. These are believed to assist the transformation of the deceased from a ghost-like status into the status of an ancestor. Davies (1997:83)

It is believed that the departed soul travels through the *retaloka* (the world of ghosts and spirits) to the *pitraloka* (the heaven or the world of the ancestors). Many rituals are initiated to aid the journey of the deceased. During this ritual, the Gods are invited and offerings are made. (Kamat: 2002)

According to Strong (2004:4), the rites that are performed after a person's death are important as it assist the soul in finding its way to *Yama's* realm. She further states that those that have been meritorious and have done good deeds will be compensated accordingly by being sent to heaven to await their fate. There, the *Gandharvas* (demigods of fertility) sing for them while the celestial nymphs dance for them. Since there is no punishment, they go forth immediately on very high divine carriages. On their return, they are born into families of kings and other noble people, living a life of tremendous comfort while maintaining their good conduct.

Strong (2004:4) further describes the fate of those that participated in less honourable thoughts and action as being less pleasant. She makes reference to the *Arthashastra*, a Hindu textbook which offers a detailed description of some of the more frightening realms. The deceased will have to endure a very miserable journey before reaching a very dangerous destination. During this journey the body is tortured where it is dragged through rough grass, thorns, ants, snakes and rocks where there is also a blazing fire and hundreds of pits and a blazing hot sun burning with

rays. After undergoing this terrible ordeal the deceased reaches the abode of *Yama*, who then points the way to his final destination.

This final destination of the damned is determined by the thoughts and actions of their past life. Each hell is designed for a particular punishment. The list of possible punishments and hellish realms are far too numerous to be mentioned.

According to Strong (2004:5), surviving a stay in hell is just the first step in repaying a karmic debt. Once the soul has escaped its torment in the Underworld, it is reborn into a life where it will continue to learn the lessons of life.

The evil man becomes born as an animal, among the worms, insects, moths, beasts of prey, mosquitoes, and so forth. There, he is born in elephants, trees and so forth, and in cows and horses, and in other wombs that are evil and painful. When he finally becomes a human, he is a despicable hunchback or dwarf, or he is born in the womb of a woman of some tribe of the Untouchables. When there is none of his evil left, and he is filled with merit, then he starts climbing up to higher castes, *Shudra*, *Vaishya*, *Kshatriya*, and so forth, sometimes eventually reaching the stage of Brahmin or king of men. (Doniger O'Flaherty, Textual 120)

It is common practice among Hindus in South Africa to hold anniversary commemoration ceremonies with memories of respect, affection and prayers for the welfare of the departed person. The ceremonies differ according to linguistic variations.

### **9.8.1 Memorial ceremonies for Hindus of South Indian Origin**

Among the Hindus of South Indian origin, relatives gather for a meal of the deceased's favourite foods on the 3rd, 5<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, or 9<sup>th</sup> day after death. A portion of food is offered before the shrine that

has been created for the deceased which has his photo and some of his clothes and other favourite personal items. Later, after the prayer the food is left at an abandoned place along with some lit camphor. According to Kisten (2006:pc) in India when the people passed on some people missed the funeral, so they will meet on the 7<sup>th</sup> day, it is referred to as *Yetaan Thookor*- you are mourning for the loss, and give support to the family, as if you would on the funeral because that is the first time you seeing them. In South Africa among the South Indian community the 7<sup>th</sup> Day ceremony is also given much attention and attracts many people.

Among the South Indian community, the 16<sup>th</sup> day ceremony for the Tamil speaking members of the community and the 10<sup>th</sup> day ceremony for the Telegu speaking people of the community are very important and are done on a grand scale. Naidoo (2006: pc) states that for a child the ceremony is conducted on the 9<sup>th</sup> day.

Poovalingam in an article, *Social therapy for the bereaved*, Post, 25 July 2007, pg. 22, explains that observances each night for 15 nights and a function on the 16<sup>th</sup> is emotionally and socially therapeutic. It helps the immediate bereaved family to come to terms and to re-adjust. This is explained in the social functionalist theory of Radcliffe-Browne (1958) and Van Gennep's theory of integration (1960). There is also the factor of societal interaction which makes for cohesion. All of which is beneficial. Poovalingam states that there are, however, many shibboleths, some invented by the Brahmins for personal gain. There is recognition that much of the social conventions developed over the centuries by our forbears are helpful and useful. While it may be advisable to shed those which are dysfunctional, there are those that are beneficial to individuals and to the community in general. They are worth retaining (Poovalingam 2007).

There are two parts to the prayer. The main prayer, which is a private affair involving only immediate members of the family takes place in the house. This is followed by a public ceremony which normally takes place in a marquee at the home of the deceased or at a community hall.

The ceremony with the immediate members of the family commences with the *Kalsam* prayer which is preceded by a prayer offering to Lord Ganesha. Govender (2002: 167-170) provides a detailed explanation of the significance of these prayers.

### ***Kalsam***

The *Kalsam* represents God, and the entire creation. Therefore, great care is taken in the preparation of the *Kalsam*.



Fig.31 The *kalsam*, symbolising the Divine Element. (Govender: 2002)

The *kalsam*, with the coconut is a medium of communicating with the Divine Master. During the assembling of the *kalsam*, the officiating priest recites the appropriate *mantras*, to consecrate the prayer area.

The *kalsam* acts as a medium of connection between the participants and God. Therefore the *kalsam* can only be assembled during an auspicious time or else it will have no relevance.

The three strands of *dharbar* used with the *kalsam* play a very important role. The three strands are placed around the coconut to form a pinnacle with a pointed edge on the top. It is then tied with a piece of cotton. The *dharbar* acts as a means of amplification for the *mantras*. It is believed that God's blessings will come through the pinnacle and settle in the *kalsam*. The *dharbar* serves the same purpose of a *gopuram* (tower) of a temple, whereby the *bakthi* (light) and the *prana* (blessings) will come through the *gopuram* and settle in the *murthies* (deities), which are housed in the temple. The *kalsam* then acts as a temple.



Fig.32 *Dharbar* or *Kusa* grass used in Hindu rituals. Source, (Selva: 2007)

### Prayer to Lord Vinayaga (Ganesha)

A *Pillaiyar*, a cone-shaped model symbolising *Lord Vinayaga* or *Ganesha* is made out of *munja* (turmeric paste). On top of the cone, a sprig of turf grass is placed to signify everlasting freshness. A small quantity of *gadampudi* and *kungum* is sprinkled on the cone to complete the representation. In some instances, a deity or *murthie* of *Lord Ganesha* is used instead of the

turmeric cone.



Fig.33 Representation of Lord *Ganesha*, the remover of obstacles.(Govender:2002)

The Ganesha prayer, the Kalsam prayer and in certain cases a prayer using three stones representing Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva completes the first *jaamum*. This is followed by the *yagiam* or hawan (raising of the sacred fire).

### **Yagiam (raising of the sacred fire)**

The sacred fire is lit during appropriate recitations of *mantras* to purify the atmosphere by burning aromatic herbs and to symbolically kindle the fire to introduce an element of divinity in the memorial service.

The *Yagiam* involves the raising of the sacrificial fire. Raman (2006:pc), states that this fire, which is known as *Omam Valarthal*, and all the lamps that burn in the sanctified area represent

the light of the universe – the ‘*Arul Jothi*’ which dispels all darkness, all ignorance and all evil. It illuminates the mind, providing radiance and inner wisdom. Fire is also regarded as the power and source of all energy and evolution.

The lighting of the fire for ablution signifies the essential elements for all aspects to live in the material world e.g. ***Fire (Sun), Moon, Water, Sky, and Air***. The fire must constantly flame until the memorial ceremony is completed and finalised. This signifies that there is continuous light, for the fulfilment of the important rituals and commitments.



Fig.34 Preparation for the *yagam* (sacrificial fire) (Govender: 2002)

Padayachee (2001: pc) emphasises the importance of the *Mahayagna* or *Yagam* in the memorial ceremony. The purpose of this ritual is to ensure a trouble free passage for the soul as it embarks on a new journey. The offerings made to the fire are all natural elements that will assist in the development of the fire in order for the priest to complete the necessary *mantras*. Some of these elements include roots, beans etc. Vegetable ghee is also used to develop the flames. The ghee is mixed with powdered roots and nine types of seeds. This represents the *Navagrahas*, or the

planets, which according to ancient scriptures control the destiny of man.

A piece of lit camphor is placed in a large container comprising dry mango sticks, which is used for the purpose of raising the sacrificial fire. The participants are given '*hawan samagari*', which is made up of various natural elements, which have to be introduced to the fire each time the priest recites a set of *mantras*. The participants utter the word, '*swaha*', when they place the mixture in the fire. The *mantras* are recited to invoke the blessings of all the deities

Venketraman (2001: pc) states that both camphor and incense have great significance in Hindu religious ceremonies. They are both symbolic of self-sacrifice. Both the camphor and the incense provide positive benefits for other people, by providing either light or a sweet and refreshing aroma. But in doing this, it destroys itself. In the same way, when the bereaved family turns camphor as part of an *aradhanay* (prayer) after each ritual, they are in fact declaring that they are prepared to make sacrifices in order to make the journey of the soul pleasant and rewarding.

### ***Yellam Thani***

The ceremony inside the home is completed with the ritual called *yellam thanni*. This is done with beetle leaves in the person's palm. *Sandhanam*, *kungum*, *yellam*<sup>12</sup> (sesame seeds) and *kush* or *dharbar* grass are placed across the leaf. Milk is poured onto the leaf and the milk is first let out in the right of the bucket – right is east, left is west, forward the South and turns the hand

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<sup>12</sup> In early Hindu legends, tales are told in which sesame seeds represent a symbol of immortality.

right around – north. According to Moonsamy (2006:pc) we don't know whether the soul is gone to the east, west, north or south and we pray to God that whichever direction the soul has gone that He forgives and accepts the soul.



Fig.35 *Yellam* or sesame seeds which are used in Hindu rituals.  
Reference: en.wikipedia.org, *Sesame*

Filippi (1996:161) explains that according to the *Garuda Purana* sesame seeds have the power of consuming the faults of the deceased (*GP*, 11.2.17). Sesame is also said to have originated from Lord Vishnu's perspiration (*GP*, 11.2.16).

### ***Pinda* ceremony**

The next part is the 16 *pindas* (rice balls) cooked and placed onto the banana leaf. In between is *kush* or *dharbar* grass, on the balls we place *sandhanam*, *kungum*, *manja* and we place a camphor on each ball. The 16 balls represent the days of mourning – our religion is through symbolic representation then only people understand what you are doing – and for the 16 days of mourning you saying goodbye to the deceased and place ball on the tray, each person of the family come and light camphor and place a flower – we say goodbye with flowers.

On concluding the above rituals the family that participated in the above rituals joins other relatives and friends who have gathered at a marquee at the home of the deceased or at a

community hall to partake in a memorial service.

The second part of the memorial service is much more elaborate involving the participation of the extended family and friends.

According to Moonsamy (2006: pc) and Padayachee (2006; pc) a colourful altar is created in the form of eight steps with sixteen lamps on either side. This is complimented with brass pots, flowers and other decorative elements. The significance of the 16 lamps is the 16 stages in a man's life from birth to death – 16 *sanskaras*.

At the pinnacle of the steps a covered photograph of the deceased is placed. The photograph is unveiled to the public when the prayer commences. According to Naidoo (2006: pc) the photograph gives an opportunity to see the face of the deceased whom they may have not seen for a long time and the fondly remember the person. Naidoo (2006: pc) goes on to say that when a person committed suicide his photograph was not placed at the altar as he leaves behind much agony and punishment to those that he has left behind who believe that he cheated on life. However in recent times this has changed.

We are born to live a natural life and life is sacred in any religion, and when you commit suicide you ignore the basis of living and it will be difficult to attain *moksha*. (Naidoo 2006: pc)

Offerings of sweet meats, savouries (*vade, bhajia, samoosas* etc) are placed on a tray in front of the altar together with three kinds of fruit and milk. A musical group rendering bhajans and devotional hymns are specially commissioned to render a spiritual service for the evening which normally lasts for approximately an hour. Naidoo (2006: pc) states that there is a strict ritual

format in the conducting of the memorial service. The prayer commences with the lighting of the camphor which is an act of purification. This is followed by the *divathanam* which is the turning of the *deepam kalsam* three times around the pictures of the deities and the photograph of the deceased. Naidoo states that the manner in which this is performed has changed immensely in South Africa and puts the blame on local priests.

He explains that the *deepam kalsam* is supposed to be turned to the eternal sound, the primordial sound of the *aum* – so if you are a Tamil, you turned the *divathanam* according to the Tamil *aum*, not as a circle. If you a Telegu you turned the *arti* in the shape of the Telegu *aum*, which is a beautiful thing.

Naidoo (2006: pc) and Govender (2006:po) explains that the chief mourner who put the *kolli* will do the first *divathanam* (prayer) and unveil the photo while bhajans dedicated to Lord Ganesha is normally sung by the prayer group in order to remove obstacles and ensure the success of the event. Then there are songs exhorting the Gods above such as *Sivaner Portri* will be sung (Appendix 5). He goes on to say that all these songs have an enormous meaning. God is omnipresent, South Indian literature is resplendent with the presence of God, but we point heavenwards, because we imagine that heaven is where the Gods reside. Heaven is unreachable, yet it is eternal. Therefore our prayers point upwards.

Naidoo (2006: pc) states that in most memorial ceremonies conducted in South Africa there is no order and emphasizes the need for order and structure. The last song that is normally sung at most memorial ceremonies is songs dedicated to Lord Shiva such as *Sivaner Potri* or *Om Namō*

*Shivaya, Shivaya Nama Om* where the family of the deceased asks Lord Shiva to open His doors, and His abode to receive the soul of the departed. Lord Shiva is the ultimate custodian of the soul. When and the service is over, an invitation is extended to the rest of the members of the family to do the *arthi*<sup>13</sup> worship (final prayer), which is peace on the soul and helping the soul on its journey, there is a special song that is sung during the *arthi* (Appendix 5).

According to Govender (2006:po) people start arriving early for a memorial service in order to partake in a vegetarian meal before the commencement of the ceremony as they normally come straight from work and are very hungry. Thereafter people were invited to sit in the main auditorium in readiness for the main service. In South Africa they make sure they feed you, if the service is going to be at 19h00, they feed you before, if the service is early, they feed you after, but it does not have a religious connotation attached to it. It is more a measure of convenience. People coming from work too, so it is very good social thinking and engineering. That's where the ceremony ends.

The ceremony is complimented by appropriate discourses to provide support and encouragement to the remaining members of the family. At the conclusion of the service the immediate family members are requested to do the concluding prayer which is normally accompanied by the *Thevaram* rendition, *Muthineree* (Appendix 5). The *deepam kalsam* is turned three times around the photo and flower petals are sprayed onto the photo. After the immediate family members conclude their prayer other relatives and friends are invited to offer prayer in the same format.

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<sup>13</sup> **Aarthi** or **ārati** is a Hindu ritual, in which light from wicks soaked in ghee (purified butter) or camphor is offered to one or more devas/devis. It is said to have descended from the Vedic concept of fire rituals, or *homa*.

According to Kisten (2006:pc) and Naidoo (2006:pc) there is a practice that originated at the Magazine Barracks, a communal settlement for Indian municipal workers in Durban that started in the late 40's called *Sarmakavi* which is still performed by some families today. The *sarmakavi* which used to start at midnight is a type of singing session performed by the priests in order to keep the bereaved family occupied for the night of the 16<sup>th</sup> day memorial ceremony until the next day where the family was expected to perform certain rituals at the river. The reason for this was to prevent family members from sleeping as they were expected to prepare the deceased for a new journey. According to (Naidoo: pc),

What I feel, when a person passes on the wound is slowly starting to heal, but when you get a group coming on the 16<sup>th</sup> day and singing the *sarmakavi*, which is songs with lyrics denoting the life and times of the deceased, they open the wounds, they make the people too emotional by calling the names of all the family members and their relationship with the deceased with the intention of invoking family members to cry. Therefore I feel that it is best to have a service with *thevaram* and other devotional songs depicting the different deities and not songs mentioning the deceased. This makes it less traumatic for the family members.

Kisten (2006: pc) states that it is important to explain to all participants the purpose and significance of the different rituals as this will contribute towards effective participation rather than doing something without any knowledge and understanding. He further states that it is important to do something that has relevance rather than doing something because it was done by our forefathers. According to him,

As a follower of the religious philosopher Ramalinga Adigal – who says *kan mudi parakalaam, mun mudi porkirern* – all that was not called for we must leave it on the road side. I will explain to people that if a prayer is being conducted, this is how it was done in the past, do you want to do it or leave it out. If you look at the young people they don't have so much time to concentrate, so don't prolong the ceremony. Do the necessary, the basics. Leave the unnecessary.

Kisten (2006:pc) explains that it was for this reason that reformist movements like the *Saiva Sithandha Sungum*, *Arya Pratinidhi Sabha*, *Ramakrishna Society*, *Divine Life Society*, *Ramalinga Institute* and other movements emerged and introduced reformist strategies in the performance of certain practices for the sake of satisfying the youth.

According to Moonsamy (2006: pc) the morning after the ceremony the wife's *thaali* is removed by three widows. During this ritual – the lady sits in the corner, a *nalangu* (cleansing ceremony) is performed for her, whereby *sandhanam* (sandalwood paste) *kungum*, and *manja* is rubbed on the cheek, the *thaali* is cut and placed in the bowl of milk and the lady has a bath, covers her face and she sits in the corner. Moonsamy goes on to say that this ritual had now been discarded by many families. In modern times the widow opts to keep the *thaali* to show her eternal love for her husband.

According to Kisten (2006: pc) in Kwa-Zulu Natal the *pinda* ritual is performed the morning after the memorial ceremony at a river where no women are allowed. Michaels (2005) explains that a *pinda* is a mixture of barley flour, sesame, water, sugar, milk, yoghurt, honey, and clarified butter – but mostly just a mixture of rice flour, water/milk. It is also believed that during the insemination ritual the mother to be should eat this mixture of rice and milk as it is believed that the rice grains correspond to the male semen. The rice symbolizes growth and is meant to provide the person with a body in which to dwell in the world of the ancestors.



Fig.36 The performance of the *pinda* ritual, with a priest and rice balls (*pindas*). Reference: Varanasi, 2007

The *pindhas* are turned around the head of the chief mourner and placed it in the water. The number of *pindas* will depend on the number of days after the funeral. Kisten further elaborates that the *pinda* ceremony is not performed for ceremonies involving the death of young children as they have not completed all their *samskaras* (stages in life). After that completion of the ceremony the chief mourner has a bath in the river and then taken home. However according to Kisten (2006: pc) since most of the rivers are polluted sixteen drops of water are symbolically placed on the head of the chief mourner before being taken home to have a bath.

All the other elements that were used in the different rituals the night before and during the *pinda* ceremony are then disposed in the river accompanied by lit camphor on a beetle leaf. The participants pray to the Lord that the soul must travel to its new journey without any obstacles. Furthermore the priest asks for forgiveness on behalf the deceased and members of his family for any shortcomings that may have occurred during the performance of the different rituals.

The *pindas* are fed to the crows, cows and the living elements in the river. Kamat (2002) describes how unfulfilled desires of the dead prevent the soul from liberating. This is indicated by the refusal of the crow to eat the *pinda*. He illustrates this by using the death rituals of his deceased father as an example.

I invited the crow to eat the pindas, saying that crows were my father's favourite birds. The crows came near the food, but did not bite. The gathered relatives asked me if I knew of any of unfulfilled wishes of my father. I promised publicly that I'd continue to run his website, and that I'd preserve his cameras and letters. As if they understood, lot more crows approached, but none would bite yet. The crowd exclaimed that there must be something else, and I promised to my father that I'd take good care of my mother. Again, as if they heard my thoughts, the crows ate away the rice balls.

According to Naidoo (2006: pc), left over food are given to crows or thrown into rivers. As scavengers, crows have allegedly always been likened with the agent of death, since ancient times. Therefore, it was also thought that the souls of the deceased sat on the wing of the bird that circles the house. If the crow does not eat the food, then this is interpreted as a bad sign. Crows are also considered immortal because they have supposed to have drunk from the rector of immortality and allegedly no one had ever seen a dead crow.

Kisten (2006:pc) states that in most cases after completing the rituals at the river the chief mourner is taken to a temple where an offering is made of fruits and milk to the Lord which signals the end of the mourning period and heralds in a new beginning for the family as they make adjustments without the deceased. An appeal is once again made to the Lord to transport the soul of the deceased to its new journey without any obstacles.

In the Hindu community the day after the 16<sup>th</sup> day memorial ceremony the chief mourner and other members of the family (if desired) remove their hair following a ritual at the river or seaside. In many places members of the immediate family have their hair shaved off, and some of their normal activities are suspended until all the funeral rites have been performed. The main reasons for shaving the hair is as a gesture of surrender, respect and humility. A shaved head can

also indicate sacrifice or submission. (O'Connell et al., 2007:164). The ordeal of shaving and bathing is also for the benefit of the souls of the departed. It is a means of eliminating some of the sins of the deceased. (*Hindu Tonsure*: 1908)



Fig.37 Removal of hair as a mark of respect to the deceased.  
Reference: Varanasi:2007

On the 30<sup>th</sup> day, the family goes back to the temple and offers the *Mocher Villaku* (clay lamp with ghee and sesame seeds) asking God to forgive the departed soul by offering prayer with a lit clay lamp and three kinds of fruit, milk and a coconut.

Kisten (2006:pc) and Naidoo (2006:pc) explain that after the 16<sup>th</sup> day ceremony the family members break their fast by preparing non-vegetarian meals which is first offered in front of the photo and clothes of the deceased with a prayer. Most informants agree that this practice arose out of tradition rather than any scriptural authority. However Rajbally (1969:244) states that there was scriptural evidence, (Rg.X.18.3) that after the different ceremonies there was feasting and resumption of dancing and laughter. Filippi (1996:163) explains this celebration marks the end of the *aśauca* (mourning) and the family returns to its normal state (*rtviya*). He goes on to say that, from the moment of their relative's death to this banquet of reconciliation, the relationship between the living and the line of ancestors had been interrupted.

According to Munnappa (2005: pc) after the memorial ceremony there will be another kind of ceremony where you cook some non vegetarian food, take it to a place reserved for the ancestors. Relatives and friends are invited and the food is offered to the ancestors, in the name of the one who just died. This is called *Karana* – the man who is responsible.

There are a number of ceremonies after the 16<sup>th</sup> day prayer. However the nature and extent of the ceremony varies from family to family and only involves the immediate family members. According to Moonsamy (2006:pc) in Gauteng a small ceremony is held after one month followed by the bigger yearly ceremony, while in Kwa-Zulu Natal memorial observances are also held during the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> 9<sup>th</sup> and finally the 11<sup>th</sup> month. In all these prayers, except for the yearly ceremony all the other ceremonies are held only among the family members. There is also no need for a priest. Offerings of cooked vegetarian food and some savories are made in the name of the deceased.



Fig.38 Offerings of vegetarian meals and savories during a memorial ceremony  
(Reference: Govender, 2006)

The final ceremony is performed after one year. The format of the ceremony is similar to the 16<sup>th</sup> day ceremony except that no rituals are performed at the river. It is believed that during this time the soul is either taken to the divine home of the Lord or takes a rebirth.

The above ceremonies which have its origins from the *Garuda Puranam* a scriptural authority that forms the basis for most of the rituals that are practiced by both the majority of the people of South and North Indian origin.

### 9.8.2 Memorial ceremonies performed for a person of North Indian Origin

Customs for this period vary. Some Hindus, especially with origins in the North, offer *pinda* (rice balls) daily, for nine days. The *pindas* represent the subtle body that the soul is going to travel as for the next 12 months. Others combine all these offerings and perform the *sapindikarana* rituals for a few days or on the tenth day. This is attributed to the fact that the mourners have to go back to their daily routine as soon as possible. The pinda ceremony on the 11<sup>th</sup> day is normally dedicated to the ancestors. Filippi (1996:167) explains that the transformation undergone by the deceased in his first year is described in *Puranic* myths as the journey of the soul from the land of the living to the kingdom of *Yama*. The pindas offered by the son with different *śrāddha* rites are considered to be stopovers in the journey.

Filippi (1996:167) further explains that if there is an interruption or negligent performance of the *śrāddha* rites, the soul of the deceased, the *jiva*, remains indefinitely a prisoner in the dream state, incapable of enjoying the conditions of a new subtle existence.

According to Filippi (1996:152),

The ten days following the funeral ceremony are dedicated to the formation and development of the subtle body, by means of ritual feeding. Each of these days corresponds to a lunar month, ending with birth in the world of the ancestors.

The spirits of the ancestors (grandfather, great grand father and great, great grandfather are invited to the *pindas* to receive the spirit of the deceased. The spirit is represented by one separate pinda which is broken and merged into the other pindas which represent the ancestors. This process is known as *Sapindikarana* which marks the end of the journey of the deceased and also completes the ritual impurity. After completion of the ceremony, the *pindas* are fed to the crows or thrown in the river for the fish. Filippi (1996:153) explains that the rites made during the ten-day period create the instruments to adapt the *linga śarīra* (subtle body) of the deceased to a new condition of existence.

According to Maharaj (2006: pc), the *sapindi-karana-sraddha* is the last of these sixteen *sraddhas* that are meant to elevate the departed soul to the rank of a *pitr*. It is performed in a similar manner to the previous *sraddha* with the following additions. The performer sets out four vessels with water, sesame and fragrance. Three are for the standard hierarchy of *pitrs*, the father, the grandfather and the great grandfather, and the fourth is for the recently departed soul. The performer then pours the vessel meant for the recently departed soul into the vessels of the three standard *pitrs*. Similarly, four cakes of rice (*pindas*) are prepared and the cake belonging to the recently departed soul is broken up and added to the three cakes belonging to three standard *pitrs*. After the performance of this rite the *preta* being becomes a *pitr* and joins the assemblage of fathers in their abode (*pitr-loka*).

Maharaj (2006:pc) makes reference to the *Garuda Purana* (religious manual for the do's and don'ts for Hindus) in providing a detailed explanation of the rituals and processes involved in the ceremonies following the death of a Hindu. The *Garuda Purana* is the dialogue between Lord Vishnu and his bird carrier *Garud* – Vaishnavites believe that Vishnu is the same as Krishna – so

the *Garuda Purana* is important to Vaishnavites.

According to him, for the next ten days in the home where mourning takes place, scriptures are read. To heal the wound of the grieving family passages from the *Bhagavad Gita*, *Ramayana* and other religious scriptures are read. For example in the *Bhagavad Gita* in Chapter Two the Lord explains the concept of death, so the person who is going through this will understand this, so there will be a little bit of consolation .

Maharaj (2006: pc) also explains that for ten days, the home is under quarantine, just as when there is an epidemic, no interaction with the outside world. It is only on the tenth day, the Brahman (priest) is called to shave the hair of all the other family members as a sign of grief. Offerings made up of a blanket, sandals and an umbrella is given to the Brahman. The soul does not have a body like us, it has to go to the next world, and the umbrella is there to protect it from the scorching sun while the blanket is a symbol of warmth and comfort for the soul. In practical terms, these items were given to the Brahmans in India because they had to be protected from the inclement weather and the great distances they had to travel to perform the various rituals. However, in South Africa these traditional practices have no relevance in modern society where the modes of travel and the climatic and other conditions are much more pleasant.

Maharaj (2006: pc) explains that the 13<sup>th</sup> day ceremony is a very important ceremony, as it is the spring board for the soul to move. If that ceremony is not done you are halting the soul to move. That ceremony is the green light that God gives for the soul to start its journey. In that ceremony another *pinda* is offered where we merge the soul with the other 3 generations of the deceased,

and ask the Lord to free the soul to move freely. The soul has to pass through 16 stations to reach the final destination. That is why we offer 16 pindas from the 13<sup>th</sup> day ceremony. Each station of the journey, when the soul arrives there, the soul will have food, sustenance for the soul in which to complete its journey.

After the 13<sup>th</sup> day ceremony, you move to the 6<sup>th</sup> month and then the 12<sup>th</sup> month because it is a long journey. The 6<sup>th</sup> month the trauma is still fresh, and if you go twelve months and keep the *pindas* then the soul has to come back, that is why we do the 6<sup>th</sup> month. Here again, hawan is done, putting food in the Lord's mouth. Praying that this journey by the soul be a peaceful one; not scorched by the burning sun, not burnt by the boiling waters, by the thorny mountains. And every time you pray the Lord listens and this is our duty as offspring's, how else do we show our gratitude to the people who built empires for us.

According to Maharaj (2006: pc) this ceremony which marks the end of the mourning period is conducted in the same way as the other memorial ceremonies but varies according to customs and traditions. A priest is engaged to conduct the *shradda* rites at the home of the deceased. *Pindas* are offered to the ancestors like previously.

However a small percentage of Hindus who follow the Principles that are enshrined in the Vedas perform very simple ceremonies as is explained by Behadar and Rambilas (2006: pc). There is another group that follows the Saivite religion which is a scientific and logical religion which adheres to Hinduism as away of life.

According to Behadar and Rambilas (2006: pc) only three *hawans* are performed after the cremation and there are no further ceremonies. *Antyesti Sanskar – Anth* means end, this actually concludes all forms of prayer. There is no prayer that is conducted after this final prayer. No sixteen days, 1 year – nothing, the third day finally completes the prayer and life goes back to normal in that particular family.

Sharma (1966) explains that it is very important for rituals to be expressive of the faith and not have an independent existence. In a progressive community, rituals should always be prized more for their moral and spiritual values than for their sentimental or aesthetic values.

On the day of the cremation when the family returns home from the crematorium a first hawan is performed. The hawans are performed on the same afternoon that the disposal took place. The members come home, have a bath, refresh themselves and sit for hawan. The first hawan is dedicated to purity where family members ask the Lord to purify the mind, the body and the heart, the soul of the members of the family, as well as the environment that has been terribly disturbed. Furthermore an appeal is made to the Lord to give the environment the kind of purity and peace that needs to prevail, and the way this is achieved is to get the family together and understand that they need unity at this stage in their life. They must be united in times of trouble, in times of need, in times of bereavement of this nature. According to Hemraj et al (2003:5),

The discourses should be such as to raise the morale and spirit of the family members.

The singing of bhajans and other appropriate songs complement the hawan ceremony as they are spiritually elevating to the grieving family. According to Hemraj (2003:6) and Behadar

(2006:pc) cooking and feeding guests after these hawan ceremonies is not compulsory as the family is in mourning and have no time and energy to socialize.

The second hawan is performed for the state of the body because obviously the death has caused people to lose appetite, to lose sleep, to lose some of the items that they indulge in during their daily lives. Their life has become disruptive due to the death of a loved one which negatively influences their health. Because of this there is a need to create awareness for a sense of normality to return to the family. It is hoped that normality be restored within 24 hours, by which time the family are ready to perform the third hawan, which is on the third day.

According to Behadar and Rambilas (2006: pc) the third day hawan is the most important (third day from the funeral). For the purpose of convenience these three hawans are scheduled during the afternoons to accommodate family members who are working. Sometimes an invitation is extended to the extended members to attend the hawan, and they have the opportunity to be with the bereaved family in the form of encouragement and support. The third hawan is to restore the mind to normal state. During the third hawan the *Shanti Karan* mantra is recited – *Shanti* means peace and *Karan* means the actual creation of that peace, and that peace comes about from this mantra, so that the mind of the persons that were so disturbed and traumatized by the death of the person is now gradually coming back to its normal state.

In all these prayers that we have, it is a continuous period of counselling which is conducted by the priest and he, from time to time delivers in his sermons the encouragement that the members of his family must have for the purpose of overcoming the grief and at the same time it is there

for the purpose of reducing the weight of the grief that is in the mind, that is pulling the grieving family members down.

Just as the Vedic practice in the Saivite religion the only form of prayer that is done is the singing of hymns to Lord Shiva to bring solace to the bereaved home and pay tribute to the Almighty to guide the soul through its journey. In no way are any songs sung in praise of the dead.

There is no offering of *pindas* (rice balls) or ceremonies to pay tribute to the dead but some take part in a yearly thanks giving service and meals are offered to those that attend. Here too, hymns are sung in praise of God. The Saivites do not participate in the *Pitir Pakh* or *Maligai Patchai* rituals as they do not believe in offering food to the dead – they see no point in doing so as the soul has taken on a new birth and the corpse has been burnt to ash. If they refrain from offering food to God because they cannot see the logic in God eating the Prasad, then the same applies to offering food to the dead. Instead of offering food to the dead, which will not be consumed by the dead, but rather given to dogs or thrown away, Saivites believe in offering charity to living beings who are in need of it. Members of the Saivite institutions sometimes have clashes with their family members when they do not partake in some of the known rituals that people have been following for years. For this reason, the members are asked to sign a document that states that upon their death, their funeral has to be performed according to the Saivite beliefs.

Behadar (2006:pc) explains according to Vedic practices that the entire funeral procedure, from the time the body left the house till the third day prayer, prayer is continuous and the sermon is

continuous for the family to regain energy, strength, vision, foresight, normality. He further argues that the *hawans* and discourses are not directed to the deceased but to the living family members. He elaborates by saying that,

We have to be very practical, in that we have to look after those people who have survived. The prayer is directed to people who have undergone trauma. However in our prayer we also consequently mention that there is need for the soul to be in peace. We say this because in our philosophy we believe in *punarjanma* – *punar* means again, *janma* means to be born. We also believe, like the Gita says, that death is the beginning of life. And our first 6 mantras that we recite are extracted from the Gita and that explains very clearly what death actually is. Death is a point where the soul leaves the body, what happens to the soul is described in the Gita.

## 9.9 Recapitulation

In this chapter which forms the basis of the research undertaking, all the rituals associated with Hindu funeral ceremonies and memorial ceremonies were discussed in great detail. Since there are differences in procedures due to linguistic variations, an attempt was made to present the findings of research undertaken in the South and North Indian community of South Africa. This was complimented with research and observations conducted during a study tour of different parts of India.

## CHAPTER 10

### POST DEATH RITUALS AND ANCESTOR VENERATION AMONGST THE HINDUS

#### 10.1 Introduction

Ancestor veneration is the reverence granted to deceased relatives who are believed to have become powerful spiritual beings or, less frequently, to have attained the status of gods. It is based on the belief that ancestors are active members of society and are still interested in the affairs of their living relatives. In this chapter the focus is on how ancestor veneration is observed by Hindus in the South and North Indian community of South Africa following the death of a loved one. This is compared to the practices in India. The importance of memorial offerings is highlighted to explain how the ancestors oversee and protect the interests of the living.

According to Srinivas (2003), the spirits of the dead ancestors (*karanavas*) are regarded with great reverence and propitiated periodically. It is believed that they continue to take an interest in the affairs of the family. They expect the surviving members to take care of their property, to observe the rules of the moral code, and to show piety to the various deities and themselves. It is believed that they have the power to reward those who are pious and to punish with disease and misfortune those who are impious.

When people die they became ancestors, forefathers, heroes, ghosts or demons, depending on the manner of death, on the relation between the deceased and the survivors, as well as on the kinship, temporal and spatial distance to the deceased. Notions of the next world generally reflect highly respected goals of the society. The threat of living the wrong life, paid for after death, affects socially virtuous behaviour.

In an article that appeared in *The Post* (26-30 October 2005), the Head of the Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa, Swami Saradananda, said Hindu scriptures clearly stated that “we should not dabble with the spirit world”. He went on to say that Hinduism believed in reincarnation and when a person died the soul embarked on a journey into its next life. He said that there should be no interference in this process. It could be damaging. People who sought closure or were unable to accept death should find solace in prayer or counselling

According to Mehta (1990:8), there is no uniform time limit for the souls to be re-incarnated after exit from the previous body, but all must get rebirth (*Atharva Veda* 20/132, 40, *Rig Veda* 56/14). There are three types of living beings in every species – superior, ordinary and inferior according to the magnitude or the quality of their high, common or low performances in their previous human life. Subsequently there are different time lags for getting the new bodies in the same or different species. The souls going to the lower incarnations or species take birth immediately or early as quoted in *Chhandogya Upnishada* 5/10/7, *Yajur Veda* 40/3, *Atharva Veda* 20/132, *Brahad Aryanka Upnishada* 4/4/3; and those going to be reborn as human beings have a recess of some time in the cosmos varying from a few days to long periods of solar years, but ordinarily they take birth within 12 days (*Yajur Veda* 34/6) according to their desires and

deeds in their previous life.

The souls of wise, learned people who have performed exceptionally well during the previous human life will be reborn after a long period in the homes of wise and wealthy persons in compensation for their good deeds (*Gita 6/41*).

The origins of ancestor worship did not begin with any specific religion but can be traced to many ethnic faiths as a natural expression of the innate human reverence for the forebears. Although there are many variations in the practices related to ancestor worship, some phenomena are common insofar as the ceremonies and customs for establishing ties with the ancestors.

According to the Encarta encyclopaedia (2005), the cult of ancestors is common, although not universal. It has been extensively documented in West African societies (the Bantu and the Shona), in Polynesia and Melanesia (the Dobu and the Manus), among several Indo-European peoples (the ancient Scandinavians, Romans, and Germans), and especially in China and Japan. In general, ancestors are believed to wield great authority, having special powers to influence the course of events or to control the well-being of their living relatives. Protection of the family is one of their main concerns. They are considered intermediaries between the supreme god, or the gods, and the people, and can communicate with the living through dreams and by possession. The attitude toward them is one of mixed fear and reverence. If neglected, the ancestors may cause disease and other misfortunes. Propitiation, supplication, prayer, and sacrifice are various ways in which the living can communicate with their ancestors.

Ancestor worship is a strong indication of the value placed on the household and of the strong ties that exist between the past and the present. The beliefs and practices connected with the cult help to integrate the family, to sanction the traditional political structure, and to encourage respect for living elders. Some scholars have also interpreted it as a source of individual well-being and of social harmony and stability. Because it is practiced by family groups, ancestor worship excludes proselytizing and rarely involves a separate priesthood. It has no formal doctrines and is ordinarily an aspect of some larger religious system.

The very existence of the living depends on ancestral ties. We are here because of our parents, just as they derived life from theirs. When we die we join the ranks of our ancestors, ties with whom extend from the past, through the present, and into the future. In addition to our very close loved ones our ancestors include many other personalities from the distant past. All of them play an important role in our day to day activities. Many of us enjoy our positions in society and material benefits associated with it because of the achievements of our ancestors. It is for this reason that many societies revere the ancestors with great respect.

According to Filippi (1996:167), the transformation of the soul into an ancestor has been compared to the gestation period.

... right after the death of the body, the soul appears as a subtle seed. With the first offering of *śrāddha*, an embryonic psychic 'body' begins to develop, becoming a *preta*. In a year's time, thanks to the nutrition which the living sends him through the umbilical cord of rites, the dead one completes his subtle body and is born as a *pitr*. This symbolism is very ancient and faithfully adheres to the *Śrauta* conceptions.

The Hindus revere the ancestors in many ways. There are variations according to geographical

location, caste differences, linguistic differences and other social factors.

## 10.2 Ancestral rites performed by the North Indian community

### 10.2.1 The Sraddha ritual

The rites associated with the ancestors are known as *Sraddha*. According to Burde (2004),

A *sraddha* – is the rite of commemorating ancestors, at which *Pindas* (rice balls) are offered. Sons, grandsons and great – grandsons participate in the ceremony in an attempt to create a link between the living and the dead of the same family.

- *Masika Sraddha* is performed every month for sixteen months after the death.
- *Samvastarika Sraddha* – once every year on the death anniversary of the deceased.
- *Mahayajna Sraddha* – for the benefit of all manes (deceased ancestors) once a year on the day of the new moon in a certain month.
- *Tirtha Sraddha* – is a *Sraddha* performed in memory of ancestors at a holy place of pilgrimage.

- *Aksayatriya Sraddha* – performed for the benefit of manes on a certain day of the *Vaisakha* month of the Hindu calendar.



Fig.39 The *sraddha* rites being performed as part of the regular rituals at pilgrimage places, in this case the River Ganges in Varanasi and the River Kavery in Madikeri. The researcher is the performer, the man with a shirt a local pilgrimage priest, and in the stainless steel tray and leaf you see some of the items used in the ritual.

Reference: Govender: 2007

In the *Garudapuran*<sup>1</sup> it is said that when the *Sraddha* is performed to the satisfaction, the deceased bless successors with age, a son, fame, salvation, heaven, glory, stability, strength, prosperity, cattle, happiness, money, growth, and eternal blessings.

In South Africa, the main differences of ritual and prayer are attributed to linguistic differences. The most common ancestral observance *Pitra Paksha* or *Mahalay Patchim* which is the time to express our gratitude to our deceased elders. This observance also plays an important role in instilling reverence for the elders in the minds of the younger generation.

Although there may be variations in the observances the main purpose for the various rituals associated with ancestor worship is that the survivors in the living world are distressed by the

<sup>1</sup> *Garuda Purana* is in the form of instructions by *Vishnu* to his carrier, *Garuda*. The latter half of this *Purana* deals with life after death. The Hindus of India generally read this *Purana* while cremating the bodies of the dead.

idea that their ancestors may inhabit a world of suffering. Therefore they make oblations to the priesthood to convert their ancestors' sufferings into happiness.

### 10.2.2 Pitra Paksha

The Hindus set aside sixteen days in the year for observing *Pitrapaksha* or *Kanagat*. *Pitra Paksha* is combination of two Sanskrit words. *Pitr* means ancestors and *Paksh* means phase of the moon (16 days).

It is also called *Kanagat* because during this period the sun moves into Virgo (*Kanya*) and 'gat' means gone (Chaturvedi 2001:141). This period usually falls around the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> week of September and the sixteen days, which include the tithes of death are *Poornima*, *Pratipada*, *Dwiteeya*, *Triteeya*, *Chaturthi*, *Panchami*, *Shasthi*, *Saptami*, *Asthami*, *Navami*, *Dashmi*, *Edadashi*, *Dwadashi*, *Triyodashi*, *Chaturdashi*, and *Amavasi*. Some add another day after *Amavasi*, which is called *Pratipada* and this day, is reserved for *Shraddh* (ceremony) to be performed by relatives of the deceased's maternal family.

According to Maharaj (2006: pc) the annual 15 day fast of *Pitra Paksha* is devoted to the ancestors. Majority of the people regard *Pitra Paksha* as a prayer to the dead which is a total misconception. The Gita says the soul cannot be cut, cannot be burnt, nor can it be drowned by water. The purpose of the prayer is to determine the whereabouts of the ancestors. Are they still dead or have they taken rebirth? *Pitra Paksha* is a memorial service to our ancestors, where we remember them and it is a prayer to the Lord to look after them wherever they have taken birth.

According to Maharaj (2006:pc), the scriptures state that when you are on this earth you obtain merits for doing good deeds while by doing bad deeds you obtain demerits. At the end of your life *Chitragoot* who is the accountant of the Lord, weigh your merits and demerits and deals with that accordingly. If you have lots of merits, you will spend much time with the divine Lord, and when your merits run out then you will take rebirth. It is not guaranteed that you will take human birth all the time, which is why in during the *Pitr Paksha* six *pindas* are offered while praying to the Lord for the souls to take human form.

Sri V Krishnan in a discourse published in *The Hindu*, 11 October 2007, said that it was essential to develop the outlook that human life was an opportunity given to every individual instead of as a challenge or one full of sorrows. The previous births were also such opportunities but we do not know how well we utilized them for what they were intended. Hence he says, it is all the more imperative that this life at least must not be frittered away without realizing the purpose for which it is intended.

According to *India times festival* (2004:1) the rituals performed during this fortnight hold great religious merit. During this period, the ancestors are worshipped and every effort is made to satisfy their wishes so that they rest in peace for the rest of the year.

The human form is regarded as the foremost on the evolutionary scale and it is written that human beings possess superior intelligence capable of obtaining the 'superior destination' and escaping this perpetual cycle of birth and death. We owe this great honour of human birth to our ancestry and therefore during this 15 days when *Pitr Paksh* is observed we show our

appreciation to our ancestors by acknowledging them through a structured and dedicated prayer observance which takes the form of certain rituals. Therefore, this day is also called 'Naan-parva' which means observing *Shraddh* for *Nana* (maternal grandfather). The *Shraddh* rituals performed during *Pitr Paksha* are not funeral ceremonies but rather a worship of the ancestral deities.

According to India Times (2004:1) it is believed that the departed spirits who may be dwelling in heaven or hell as well as those who may have reborn as humans or as any other form of life, all benefit from the oblations offered during the *shraddh* rituals. It is believed that without these rites the soul may never find its way to *Yama's* realm. According to Strong (2004:4) the *Shraddh* ritual is performed to ensure the safe passage of the soul to the Outer world. It is also believed that these rituals must be offered with faith, devotion and reverence. According to Hindu scriptures, a son who does not perform *Shraddh* for his ancestors is an ungrateful son. The scriptures condemn such a person to a life of misery and poverty.

### **10.2.3 The process of showing gratitude to the ancestors according to Hindu tradition through the *tarpan* ritual.**

Offerings of water (*tarpan*)<sup>2</sup> in memory of the ancestors are made daily for the 15 days. Oblations are first made to God, then to the Saints and finally to the Ancestors. According to Maharaj (2006: pc) the *dharbar*, milk, water, sugar, honey are nutritious elements that are

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<sup>2</sup> The word *tarpana* is derived from the Sanskrit root *trp* which means to please or to gratify. *Tarpana* is the act of pleasing (*trpyanti pitaro yena*). Specifically, *tarpana* is the act of pouring water through the hands with the use of sacred grass called *kuśa* as a symbolic gesture of recognition, thanking and pleasing three classes of beings: gods, sages, and fathers.

offered to the Lord in compensation for taking care of the ancestors.

By abstaining from meat, alcohol and other intoxicants the devotees purify themselves both internally and externally.

Various vegetarian dishes are prepared and offered to Lord Vishnu, who acts as a medium to ensure that the deceased relatives perpetually receive sustenance. Three or four curries are prepared; special sweet meats are prepared or purchased, milk and fruit are offered. According to Maharaj (2006: pc) offering anything *unsatvic* (impure) is a scriptural violation). Chaturvedi (2001:142) states that the food offered to the ancestors must be simple. No *haldi* (turmeric), garlic, onion, tomato or carrot is used. Instead reddish, ginger, green chillies and root vegetables are preferred. Furthermore two or three kinds of ‘dry’ vegetables, a ‘wet’ vegetable like potatoes, and a raita<sup>3</sup> such as pumpkin can also be prepared.

Maharaj (2006: pc) also describes two schools of thought regarding the offering of food. One school advocates that food should be offered into the fire. Reference is made to the Shrimad Bhagavatam (Canto 3 Chapter 6), text 30) – *Agni devata* is the mouth of the Lord and if food is offered into the fire then the Lord consumes the food first and then that food becomes *prasadam*<sup>4</sup> which serves as an antiseptic to ward off the difficulties of the *Kali Yuga* (period that mankind is presently living in).

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<sup>3</sup> *Raita* or *pachadi* is a South Asian/Indian condiment based on yogurt (*dahi*) and used as a sauce or dip. The yogurt is seasoned with coriander, cumin, mint, cayenne pepper, and other herbs and spices. Vegetables such as cucumber and onions are mixed in.

<sup>4</sup> Is both a mental condition of generosity, as well as a material substance that is first offered to a deity (in Hinduism) and then consumed.

The other school of thought advocates the placing of food outside the home. According to the *Bhagavath Gita*, *butha yajna* is an important part of charity and if placed outside, ants, insects, dogs and birds enjoy eating this food. It is extremely auspicious if any of the life forms in the 8 400 000 species consume the *prasadam*.

A common practice in India is to first serve food to a Brahman after morsels of food are offered to birds (*Kaagaur*) or cows (*gau*-grass). It is believed that the Brahman/priest represents the deceased person and should therefore be fed to his hearts content. According to Indiatimes Festival (2004:1), the birds more especially crows are considered to be the connection between the world of living and the world of the dead. Thereafter, all the other relatives partake in the meals which are called '*Ashta-prahari bhojan*' – food for the entire day – for since the food is very rich and heavy there is no need for a second meal that day. Chaturvedi (2001)

Maharaj (2006: pc) outlines the following procedure to be adopted for the oblations:

- a dish is half filled with water. Milk, sugar, honey, flower petals, *chandan*<sup>5</sup>, scent, *thil* and *jav* are added to the water and mixed well.
- a few blades of *Kusa* grass is knotted at one end.
- a prayer to God, the Saints and the Ancestors is offered with love and devotion asking them to accept the oblations as acknowledgement for their contribution towards human birth.

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<sup>5</sup> In Hindu rituals *chandan* paste, prepared from the wood of the *chandan* tree, has occupied an important position of puja materials since antiquity. On the forehead, a *tilaka* (mark) of *Chandan* paste is applied during pujas. Deities representing violent attributes are often smeared with *chandan* paste to cool them down.

The different types of tarpans are outlined below:

**a) *Deva Tarpana* (Oblations to God, air, surya, agni, moon, and energy)**

By placing a *Janew* or a white towel on the left shoulder the devotee faces the east and offer oblations to God. The knotted *Kusa* grass is kept across both palms forming a cup and the mantra, *Aum Namo Bhagavate Vasudeva*, is chanted 5 times while offering an oblation of water for each chant.

**b) *Rishi Tarpana* - Oblations to the *Rishis* (Saints like Narad, Charak, Vyas, Ddhichi, Sushrut, Vashistha, Yagvalkya, Vishwamitra, Atri, Katyayen, Panini, and others)**

The devotee faces North and offer oblations of water to honour the *Rishis* and *Munies*. This time the *janew* or towel is worn around the neck. The following mantra is chanted while offering an oblation of water after each chant:

*Aum Marachi Rishi tripyatam*  
*Aum Atri Rishi tripyatam*  
*Aum Angari Rishi tripyatam*  
*Aum Pulastya Rishi tripyatam*  
*Aum Puhala Rishi tripyatam*  
*Aum Kratu Rishi tripyatam*  
*Aum Birju Rishi tripyatam*  
*Aum Vasista Rishi tripyatam*  
*Aum Daksha Rishi tripyatam*  
*Aum Narad Rishi tripyatam*

**c) *Pitir Tarpana* (Oblations to the Ancestors)**

Facing south the devotees wear the *janew* or towel on the right shoulder and offer 3 oblations of water while chanting the following mantra. This chant is more personalized as it includes the name of the deceased ancestor in each mantra and differs from family to family. In this way all the ancestors are acknowledged and remembered in prayer.

Scriptures ordain that a person must offer *śrāddhā* (last rites /faith and devotion) to his three generations of ancestors (*Mata / Pita* – Mother / Father), (*Matamahi / Pitamaha* – Grandmother / Grandfather), and (*Pramatamahi / Prapitamaha* – great grandmother / great grandfather) (Chaturvedi 2001).

Klostermaier (1998:40) states that according to ancient Vedic tradition the departed male of an upper caste would join his forefathers, after the proper performance of the *śrāddhā* and enjoy afterlife on the cool moon. He further states that there is place on the ancestor lists for only three generations: once the great grand son of an ancestor dies, the ancestor is eliminated from the list and ceases to receive oblations.

The rituals associated with the *śrāddhā*, conducted at a specific time after death, enables the spirit of the departed to become an ancestor one year later. Without the *śrāddhā*, the spirit is believed to have no living connections.

*Asmat Pita* (father's name) *Tripyatam*

*Asmat Pitamaho* (paternal grandfather's name) *Tripyatam*

*Asmat Prapitamaha* (paternal great grandfather's name) *Tripyatam*

*Asmat Matha* (mother's name) *devi Tripyatam*

*Asmat Pitamahi* (paternal grandmother's name) *devi Tripyatam*

*Asmat Prapitamahi* (paternal great grandmother's name) *devi Tripyatam*

*Asmat Matamaho*(maternal grandfather's name) *Tripyatam*

*Asmat Pramatomaho* (maternal great gandfather's name) *Tripyatam*

*Asmat Vridha Pramatomaho* (maternal great great grandfather's name) *Tripyatam*

*Asmat Matamahi* (maternal grandmother's name) *devi Tripyata*

*Asmat Pramatomahi* (maternal great grandmother's name) *devi Tripyatam*

*Asmat Vridh Pramatomahi* (maternal great great grandmother's name) *devi Tripyatam*

According to Maharaj (2006: pc) during *Pitra Paksha* many devotees frequent temples and chant the holy names of the Lord. They also reach out to the poor by offering food, and other basic necessities needed for survival. In this way the ancestors undoubtedly derives pious merits.

According to Chaturvedi (2001), there is a story in the Mahabharata of Karna who was renowned for his charity and large heartedness. He was the unrecognized son of the Pandava's mother, Kunti. He did not know of his parents and when he did find out he did not acknowledge them. When he died, he was shocked to find himself in hell as opposed to him being in heaven for his righteous living. Upon querying for the reason for this, his soul learnt of the bitter fact that he paid no attention to his parents / ancestors whilst a mortal (*pitra-rina*) which resulted in him

going to hell. He beckoned with the Lord of Death (*Yamaraj*) to allow him to return to earth to pay his debt to his ancestors. *Yamaraj* gave him only a fortnight in which to achieve this. The word '*Kanagat*' also refers to *Karnas* arrival (*Karna – Aagat*).

Apart from the above oblations some Hindus also make the following offerings (Maharaj 2006: pc).

- d) **Divyamanav tarpan** – offerings to all who sacrificed for the welfare of mankind – *Pandavas, King Harrichandra, Janak, Shivagi, Tilak, Gandhi, etc.*
- e) **Yam tarpan** – offerings to *Yama* (Lord of death) and accepting the principle of birth and death.
- f) **Manushyapitra tarpan** –offerings to all related to the family, friends, and teachers.

### 10.3 Ancestral rites performed by the South Indian community

#### 10.3.1 Maligai Patcham

There are some variations in the South Indian community when it comes to observing prayers and rituals which are aimed at ancestor veneration.

According to Moonsamy (2006:pc), after the 16<sup>th</sup> day ceremony following the death of a person

the photograph from the ceremony, goes to the prayer room or the place where we keep the *kamatchee villukku* (god lamp) or any deity. A garland is made and placed around the photo as a reminder that the person was the head of the house or mother of the family. It is expected from the living members of the family to regularly pray to the deceased for guidance and support.

According to Kisten (2006: pc) it is believed that the souls are left free during the period of *Maligai Patcham* to visit family members. It is therefore important to offer prayers in order to remember them.

During *Maligai Pacham* which is a prayer for all the ancestors, families get together and offer prayer to the ancestors. Favourite food items of the departed person are specially prepared and offered after performing a special prayer involving all members of the family. This takes the form of preparing a number of vegetarian dishes (3, 5 or 7) always an odd number, and savouries. According to Guru Sharma (2006: pc), vegetarian meals prepared with jackfruit, *podulinkai* (snake gourd), *pavakai* (bitter gourd) and *moorinkeerai* (herbs) are recommended. According to Naidoo (2006: pc) life is a concoction of emotions, and the emotions are reflected in the food we offer for example *pavakai* which is bitter reminds a person of the bitterness of life.

A special altar is created where the photographs of the deceased are placed. The food together with 3 kinds of fruit and milk is placed before the photograph. According to Govender (2006: po) three settings are prepared and placed on a banana leaf for three generations.



Fig.40 Offerings of food during *Maligai Pacham* (ancestor prayer) (Reference: Govender, 2006)

According to Moonsamy (2006: pc) some family members have a tendency of also putting non-vegetarian meals as well as liquor and cigarettes in front of the altar. According to him this is an unacceptable practice.

### 10.3.2 Other South Indian ancestral observations

Before a traditional wedding ceremony or any other important occasion, the ancestors are consulted to seek their blessing. About three days before the marriage ceremony, a special prayer is arranged for the close family members, where the clothes in which the couple will be getting married in, will be placed in front of the photographs of the close ancestors, to seek their permission and blessing for a successful marriage ceremony. Sometimes a service group will be invited to render '*bhajans*', or devotional songs in praise of the different deities, also seeking their blessings. The family deities and ancestors are worshipped. They will be invoked to be present at the wedding and give their blessing to the married couple for a successful union. The prayer is conducted at the respective homes of the bridal couple. During this prayer offerings are made to the ancestors in the form of cooked food, fruit, and beverages. (Govender, 2002:326)



Fig.41 Blessing of clothes by the ancestors. (Govender: 2006)

The worship of the ancestors was practiced in many parts of Tamil Nadu. This ceremony is called *Vira kudimakkadam*. The bridegroom has to prostrate before the bricks that represent the ancestral heroes. In former times, a sheep was sacrificed during the ritual.

#### **10.4 The importance of memorial offerings**

Offerings to the dead are made during this auspicious period. Offerings are important because by commemorating only the good thoughts and deeds of the departed, they remind us that essential human nature partakes of the spiritual nature and is therefore intrinsically good. Repeated offerings to the dead manifests thoughts of purity and other good elements in our minds. In this way we assist our ancestors to find peace and perfect wisdom (enlightenment).

It is believed that people who die after a fulfilled and regret free life immediately assume a relatively good state characterized by peace and calm which is appealing to the ancestors. However the spirits of people killed in accidents or having experienced a long and painful illness have difficulty to break free from the living world and therefore wander in pain and misery. It is therefore necessary for family and relatives to relieve the soul from this turmoil by making

repeated memorial offerings during death anniversaries and auspicious times so that the soul can be liberated from this pain and suffering.

Memorial offerings are a very good and sincere way of compensating the dead for the favours they have done during their period of living. It is incorrect to make offerings for the purpose of receiving rewards ourselves. This is a selfish act and does not benefit the dead. In order for the process of making offerings to be truly effective it must be sincerely and piously dedicated to the interests of those who have died. It must always be remembered that we too will have to undergo the process of death which will eventually unite us with our ancestors. The loved ones that we leave behind will have to make offerings for our well being in the ancestral world.

According to Padayachee (2006: pc) it is believed that offerings to the dead should not be directed only to our own relations or direct ancestors, but to all spirits, including those that are not related to us. In other words we must extend a welcoming hand to the spirits of all living things.

Incense sticks with a therapeutic aroma are burnt. It is believed that apart from purifying the environment, the smoke rises upwards reaching the realm of the departed.

In the Vedic tradition ancestor veneration is seen in a different light. According to Behadur and Rambilas (2006: pc) Ancestor veneration is actually revering or saluting the elders. And if one looks at their ancestors, reference is made to one's great grand parents, grandfathers, grandmothers, their brothers and sisters and the brothers and sisters of your father, who actually constitute the extended family that existed at one time but they are no longer surviving any more.

Veneration is also respect for both the deceased and the living elders.

According to Behadur and Rambilas (2006: pc) a prayer is conducted – which is known as *Pitri Yaj*. *Pitri Yaj* is a *yajna* – a huge prayer, which is conducted for the purpose of offering all that can be possibly offered to our parents whilst they are alive. The prayer is also considered to be a counseling session which emphasizes the importance of taking care and paying respect to our elders. It is during this period in their lives that they need assistance as they are generally frail and weak, and are no longer in the state of body as they were when they were in the prime of life.

It is just like creation, preservation and dissolution. It is therefore the duty of the existing younger members of family who are in the prime of life to care for these people who were at one time in that position. It is the same people whom are honoured through prayer for giving birth to the existing generation, educating them and providing all the necessary comforts to live a healthy and prosperous life.

According to Behadar (2006: pc)

Now our care is a practical one, whereby we, during this particular time, of their old age, offer to them, every possible help, in the way of providing them with nutritional food, with the kind of comfort that they wish to enjoy by having a restful sleep at night. Take away the responsibilities from their hands so that we can now substitute and do the work that they at one time did for the running of the family. And in that way, as days go by, as they become more aged in the sense of having lived their life through the challenges that they have undertaken for the survival of the family, in a noble manner.

In the light of what has already been done for parents during their life, this particular *yajna* is performed specifically for the purposes of acknowledging all that the elders have done and contributed to the existing family in a spiritually gratifying way. In this way appreciation is shown by the younger members of the family.

It is therefore clear that according to Vedic philosophy as practiced by members of the Arya Prathinithi Sabha, reverence is actually given to the living members of the family and not the ancestors as practiced by other sectors of Hindu society.

According to Behadur (2006: pc), members of the Arya Pratinithi Sabha believe in the philosophy of what is referred to as *Punarjanma* – that is one of the pillars of Hinduism. ‘*Punar*’ means again, ‘*janma*’ means to be born. This belief in life is based on the fact that when a person dies, that soul from that person leaves the body of that particular deceased person, and goes to another abode. It is said that death is the beginning of another life, and that comes from this philosophy which is referred to as *Punarjanma*.

Behadur (2006: pc) further elaborates that this philosophy is based on the ‘Five Ps’ which are the pillars in life, and *Punarjanma* is one of them. The first P that we believe in is *Paramatma* – the Lord – and we talk of our prayer – the communion that we have with *Paramatma*. Then we refer to the duties that we perform – the *Purushastha* – which is the effort that we make in the four stages of life – and the compassion that we have – compassion is *Pranidaya* – all these that we are referring to is the principles upon which Hinduism is based – and *Punarjanma* is one of the pillars on which our faith is based.

It is therefore clear from the above explanation that according to Vedic beliefs that more reverence is given to the elders while they are living rather than when they are dead. However according to Satgur (2006: pc) after the death of a person a simple *havan* is performed, not for the dead person but rather to provide comfort for the living members of the family. He further states that there is no scriptural authority which dictates and specifies time frames for these ceremonies to be conducted. It is a matter of personal preference and may differ from family to family.

### **10.5 Recapitulation**

This final chapter pertaining to the Hindu rituals and practices focused on various ways of remembering the ancestors in the North and South Indian communities. Although there are many similarities there are certain practices that have caste, and regional peculiarities. The Vedic practices are also discussed which show reverence to the elders that are living rather than to the deceased. This is a reformist approach to religious observations.

## SECTION E

### CHAPTER 11

#### SIMILARITIES IN ZULU AND HINDU DEATH RITUALS AND ANCESTOR VENERATION

##### 11.1 Introduction

After discussing different theories, such as diffusionism and acculturation, that account for similarities in practices of cultural communities worldwide, this chapter showcases and accounts for some of the similarities in the rituals and practices of Hindu and Zulu community in South Africa with the focus on funeral rituals and ancestor veneration.

Observations of traditional Hindu and Zulu funerals in South Africa have shown many similarities in the rituals and practices. Although some of these similarities have been outlined below it does not in any way exhaust all other similarities that may exist between these two traditional cultures. Furthermore, I have not made any attempt to outline any differences between the rituals and practices of The Zulus and Hindus in a special chapter. Most of the differences feature in the respective chapters which focus specifically on the rituals associated with death and ancestor veneration of both the Zulus and Hindus as separate cultural entities.

Ethnologists had a special interest in why people living in different parts of the world sometimes have similar beliefs and practices. In addressing this question, ethnologists in the 19th century

were divided into two schools of thought. Some, like Grafton Elliot Smith, argued that different groups must somehow have learned from one another, however indirectly; in other words, they argued that cultural traits spread from one place to another, or "diffused". Other ethnologists argued that different groups had the capability of inventing similar beliefs and practices independently. Some of those who advocated "independent invention", like Lewis Henry Morgan, additionally supposed that similarities meant that different groups had passed through the same stages of cultural evolution (Wikipedia 2006).

Geographical research has shown that the whole of the Indian Ocean was a mass of land which connected Africa and South India., extending up to Australia, the entire area being designated as Lemūria (Dejagow 1995:278). Perhaps the Dravidians are the fusion of Austro-Asiatic people and the indigenous groups of Africa. According to Dejagow as quoted from D H Gordon, there are considerable similarities between the tools from India and those from East and South Africa. There are also many similarities in the folk arts. The rhythm and music and some of the folk dances have great resemblances.

According to Dejagow,

Any South Indian traveler who makes a hurried trip to African countries, even with his superficial observation cannot help being impressed with the linguistic similarities in both the African and South Indian languages....some of the folk arts and customs of tribal Africa correspond exactly with those of South India. (1995:316).

In a research undertaken by Professor Phyllis Zungu, of the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, it was found that Indians and Zulus resemble each other in their traditional rituals attached to the events

of birth, death and marriage. Her research was based on the continental drift theory, which states that Africa, Asia and Australia, including India, together once formed a continent called Gondwanaland. According to her,

Indian culture has a lot in common with African culture because these people both led a life based on the principle of maintaining a harmonious relationship with their environment. Both cultures respect their elders and even indulge in ancestral veneration (2003:1).

Evidence of similarities can be found in agricultural implements, ceramics, pottery, musical instruments etc.

In an article based on the work by Prof Wilmot James, Head of the African Genome Project, University of Cape Town, which appeared in *The Independent* on Saturday, 18 August 2007, reference, is made of the origins of man. With new scientific techniques being used in modern anthropology, it is now being shown that Man most likely originated somewhere in the middle of the African continent. It would seem that South Africa was not populated at the beginnings of mankind. Man originated in the middle of Africa, as modern anthropologists would suggest, then migrated northwards to Northern Africa, Europe, and Asia etc.

In a letter to the editor, *The Independent* on Saturday, 15 September 2007, Dr Singh responded by saying that with genetic testing, it would suggest that all of humankind has mixed genes, originating from a common source, which it would appear, started in the middle of Africa. The reason that different population groups in different continents look different or look alike in particular areas of the world is because genes obviously were modified by climate, food, and environment and so on and with further inbreeding various population groups then began to look

very similar in different parts of the world. This can partly explain why there are so many similarities in customs and traditions among between different groups in different parts of the globe including the Hindus and Zulus of South Africa.

An analysis of traditional Hindu and Zulu ceremonies has shown a number of similarities in respect of practices and procedures in the performance of certain death rituals pertaining to ceremonies for and ancestor veneration. According to Vadivelu (2000:pc), these two cultural groups lived side-by-side for a number of years until the Group Areas Act (Act No. 41 of 1950) put an end to this remarkable and close communal relationship where there was a continuous exchange of social and cultural values and systems. This is in line with the process of ‘acculturation’, which is defined by Papini (1994:29) as,

A process wherein exchange of cultural traits between two societies living in continuous first-hand contact produces a hybrid having elements of both, represented in various proportions. One could certainly speak of South African history as having been – in spite of apartheid – these kinds of situation and process.

Acculturation, then, is the process of systematic cultural change of a particular society carried out by an alien, dominant society (Winthrop 1991: 82-83). This change is brought about under conditions of direct contact between individuals of each society (Winthrop 1991:3). Individuals of a foreign or minority culture learn the language, habits, and values of a standard or dominant culture, through the process of acculturation.

Papini (1994:28) also found that material culture studies have contributed to the knowledge of the historical process of selective adoption of traits, and their analysis of past borrowings

between adjacent traditions. However he cautioned that this must not fall between the theories of Diffusionism and Parallel Evolution, as they are unable to do justice to the process of change in colonized cultures of the nineteenth century.

## **11.2 Examples of similarities between the Zulus and Hindus with the focus on death rituals and ancestor veneration.**

### **11.2.1 The Role of the Ancestors.**

Ancestors play a very important role in both the Zulu and Hindu cultures. They bridge the chasm between the ancestral world and the living world. In Zulu culture, they are consulted regularly through slaughtering and ritual communication while in Hindu culture regular offerings are made in front of photographs of the deceased and many rituals are performed to communicate certain important events.

According to Zungu (2003:8), ancestors are always invoked before celebrations such as weddings, funerals, graduation ceremonies, wars, hunting, departure from home on obtaining a job, and various other thanksgiving ceremonies.

In recognizing the importance of the ancestral spirits offerings and sacrifices, are often made to these spirits for protection, health, and happiness. These offerings are made to show the ancestors that they are not forgotten. An example is when at family festivals and other social events organized by the Zulu community where a little beer is poured on the ground for the dead

before the people drink it. It is believed that if the ancestors are forgotten, they will be unhappy and will reveal themselves through some misfortune that will be inflicted on the guilty members of the family. Similarly, it is a common practice amongst Indian social drinkers to offer a capful of alcohol to the ancestors before partaking in the drinking session.

In a traditional Hindu social or religious ceremony, the ancestors are consulted to seek their blessings. A special prayer is arranged for the close family members, where the clothes in which the couple will be getting married in, will be placed in front of the photographs of the close ancestors, to seek their permission and blessing for a successful marriage ceremony. This normally takes place about three days before the marriage ceremony. Sometimes a service group will be invited to render '*bhajans*', or devotional songs in praise of the different deities, also seeking their blessings. The family deities and ancestors are worshipped. They will be invoked to be present at the wedding and give their blessing to the married couple for a successful union. The prayer is conducted at the respective homes of the bridal couple. During this prayer, offerings are made to the ancestors in the form of cooked food, fruit, and beverages.

The veneration of the ancestors is practiced by many Hindus in many parts of the world. During the month of October, ceremonies in honour of the ancestors known as *Pitr Paksha* or *Maligay Patcham* is observed with a great deal of respect.

In a Zulu homestead a special section in a hut (*umsamo*) is reserved for the ancestors. It is here that the head of the family communicates with the ancestors. It is also here that important decisions are negotiated. In urban areas where families live mostly in single dwellings or semi-

detached houses a small area of the house is set aside for the ancestors where imphepho is lit and communication with the ancestors is undertaken. According to traditional Zulu customs the corpse is also laid out on a new reed mat in the inside of the hut, before the funeral ceremony.

In most Hindu societies a special ancestral home is build adjacent to the main living quarters. Traditionally at most South Indian homes, the interior courtyard is called *valavu waasal* which is the ancestral home, the *Coorgs* in the Kodava District, Karnataka, call this the *iron mada*. This is the place where most ceremonial functions take place. It is also the place where the corpse of a dead family member is placed on a new mat in order to allow the surviving members of the family to conduct the rituals. In recent times due to the lack of space, a small area in the main house is set aside to worship the different deities and ancestors. It is also common in South Africa for a special room to be built for the purpose of worship.

In both the Hindu and Zulu culture, the ancestors are actively involved in the daily activities of the living. They are particularly involved in the affairs of their families e.g. health, fertility, marriage, harvesting etc. For instance, when the crops increase, and women and livestock are fertile; these are seen as the blessings of the ancestors. In Zulu culture, these blessings manifest themselves through *Nomkhubulwane*, the rain goddess. It is for this reason that the Zulus celebrate the *Nomkhubulwane* ceremony. The Hindus on the other hand, celebrate various harvest festivals such as *Pongal*, *Onam* and *Holi*. During this time offerings are made to the ancestors for the good crops.

On the other hand, infertility, drought and disease are seen as reflections of the anger of the ancestors. The mediums (*izangoma*) are approached to find out why the (ancestors) are angry and what remedial measures need to be undertaken (Nxumalo 1980). Similarly, among the Hindu community it is common practice to consult spiritual healers and trances<sup>1</sup> who communicate with the spirit world to find answers to some of the problems being experienced by the living.

Magwaza (1993:45) states that belief in the ancestor's role in the success of their descendants makes some people put their first salary for at least a day at the *umsamo*, where the ancestors are believed to reside. This they do, also burning the incense *impepho*, thanking the ancestors for the good they have done for them. Similarly, according to Hindu custom, many people place their salaries at the *Kamachee Vilaku* (lamp), in the prayer room, to seek divine blessings as well as the blessings of their ancestors. In some cases, I have been told, a small thanksgiving prayer is held whereby fruit, milk or sweetmeats or sweet rice is offered to the ancestors and the Divine Being. This is called *Prasad*, which is a sacred offering to the Lord. After offering them to the Lord they are shared among the members of the household. In India, rice is considered an auspicious food as it symbolizes health, wealth and happiness (O'Connell, 2007:29).

It must be noted that according to Hindu belief, the soul does not become a *pitr* (ancestor) immediately after death, but enters an intermediate stage of life called a *preta*. This *preta* being could only become a *pitr* after certain rituals called *ekoddista-sraddhas* have been performed by the living relatives for the sole benefit of the deceased soul and not for the ancestors in general. This usually takes about a year to complete. Similarly, according to traditional Zulu culture the

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<sup>1</sup> It is a state of mind, awareness and consciousness. which may be consciously and intentionally induced, or they may occur involuntarily and unbidden.

*ukubuyisa* ceremony is performed a year after the funeral. Before the *ukubuyiswa* ritual, it is believed that the person who has died is not a part of the *amadlozi* (ancestors) since he/she is away from home. After the *ukubuyisa* ritual, the one who died is then regarded as *idlozi* who is duty bound to safeguard the family against all the evils of the earth. The main purpose of the *ukubuyisa* (bringing home) is to unite the deceased with the ancestors.

### 11.2.2 The significance of water

Water has an important role to play in the practices and beliefs of many religions for two main reasons. Firstly, water is used for physical and spiritual cleansing purposes and secondly, it is a primary building block of life. The significance of water manifests itself differently in different religions and beliefs but it is these two qualities of water that underlie its place in many cultures and faiths including the Hindu and Zulu. The role that water plays in shaping the lives of people can be seen in the huge variety of water-related religious practices, spiritual beliefs, myths and legends. These different religious and cultural aspects of water reflect how the Hindu and Zulu have made water an important element in their practices. According to Emoto (2005:1),

The various events that unfold throughout a person's life are events reflected in water. The individual and society make up one enormous ocean; by adding our individual drops to this ocean, we participate in the formation of society.

Both the Hindu and Zulu cultures believe that the ancestors dwell in the water. As a result, water, particularly river water is not brought into the household after sunset. According to Zungu (2003:7) there is a belief that it would provoke the spirits living in water and would also bring home unwanted spirits who would cause bad luck to the members of the family.

In many cultures, water is used not only to purify the dead body for the afterlife (often, this process is also a symbol of rebirth), but also to cleanse those who have come in contact with the body, an equally important rebirth into the land of the living after contact with the land of the dead (World Water Day: 2006).

During Zulu ceremonies, water is used in many of the rituals. Most African religions believe that spirits live in and control rivers, lakes and oceans. These water spirits are also very important since they are believed to control the fish that live in the waters. Still other religious traditions believe that important ancestral spirits inhabit rocks, mountains, and trees.

As is the case with ancestral spirits, nature spirits are held to be good since they help to protect people and to provide people with essential items like water and food. In order to guarantee the good will of these spirits, African religions practice rituals and ceremonies that honor these spirits.

A typical ritual performed at Zulu funerals is *ukugeza* which means cleansing. An earthenware pot filled with water is placed next to the corpse. Water that has been used to wash the body of the dead person is poured into the grave including other things that have been used to prepare for the burying of the dead. There is a belief that people that practice witchcraft use certain harmful elements to bewitch family members of the deceased. If by mistake those things are found by the wrong person, the said family will always have bad luck and nothing will work out for them. Sometimes they even die in quick succession so that their surname is obliterated. In order to prevent that from happening, anything that could expose the said family to this situation must be

carefully taken care of during this time of their lives.

In the past, when a person died of chronic chest disease or some unnatural causes, he was never buried at home but was taken to some distant stream where he was buried, so that his chest complaint might 'go off with the water' (*isifuba sakhé simuke namanzi*). The Zulus believe that the ancestors reside in the water. Bile and *umswani* (dung) mixed with water in a container is used by people who have been to the funeral to wash their hands before they leave. The washing of the hands with ashes or with *iNtolwane* mixed with water (*ukuhlambisa*) is meant to get rid of the *umnyama* (bad luck).

Similarly, in Hindu ceremonies, water has a special place because it is believed to have spiritually cleansing powers. It is believed that by putting water from the Ganges in a dying person's mouth, secures a speedy entrance into heaven and unites the soul with the ancestors. Therefore it is common practice for many Hindus to offer prayers at a river or at the sea on a regular basis for the purpose of appeasing the ancestors and to bring about good health to the remaining members of the family.

During the funeral ceremony, water is spilled on the head of the chief mourner and other family members with a small tuft of *dharbar* grass during the cleansing ceremony.

Before the hearse leaves the home of the deceased, water is thrown at the bottom of the hearse from a brass container which puts off the light of a burning camphor as a sign to show that the soul is now prepared for release from the material world. The use of a brass container is

significant because brass has a muted yellow color, somewhat similar to gold. It is relatively resistant to tarnishing, and is often used in Hindu rituals. Similarly, at the crematorium, the chief mourner carries a clay vessel filled with water and circumnavigates the coffin three times. Three is a significant number in Hinduism as it represents the Trinity of *Brahma*, *Vishnu* and *Shiva*. At each turn around the coffin, a relative knocks a hole in the pot with a knife, letting water out, signifying life's leaving its vessel. The dripping water forms a limiting line to prevent the soul from escaping back into the earth as a ghost (Abrams, 2000/1:2).

When the corpse is reduced to ash, the mourners bathe in the river and return home. If this is not possible, they sprinkle water on their heads, before entering the home of the deceased. This tells the members of the family that the last rites of the deceased have been performed and is a signal of renewed expressions of grief. The water is sprinkled to avoid any evil vibration or bad spirit or bad wind that may follow the mourner from the cemetery or crematorium. Among the Zulus mourners go to the extent of leaving the cemetery early so that they are not the last ones to leave the grave for the same reasons.

After the cremation, the final funeral rites are performed at the riverside or sea. The ashes are collected and following some simple rituals it is disposed in the water for incorporation with the rest of the ancestors. The water containing phosphate irrigates the banks of the rivers and introduces new life. The belief of the elements going back to nature when the person dies is prevalent here.

Thereafter, offerings of water (*tarpan*) in memory of the ancestors are made daily for the 15 days and on the death anniversary of the deceased. On the 10<sup>th</sup> day or 16<sup>th</sup> day after the person's death, the lamp which has been lit in the house is carried to the sea or river, where it is released together with the other offerings. The immersion of the lamp in the water is to inform the spirit that now he should truly break attachment with the former life, and start his progress in the world beyond in the ancestral world.

### 11.2.3 The significance of incense

In many of the Hindu rituals, the burning of *agarbathy* (incense) plays an important role in seeking divine intervention. The sweet smelling odour obliterates all unsavory odours creating a sacred atmosphere for the important rituals. The incense also acts as a disinfectant. According to the Divine Life Society (1985:197), the lighting of incense, which is also known as *dhoop*, denotes that the Lord is all pervading and fills the whole universe with his presence. The burning of incense is an ancient ritual act of consecration, the smoke often symbolizing the soul's journey heavenwards. It is also the flight path for prayers and communion with the Gods (O'Connell et al. 2007:25).

In traditional Zulu ceremonies, *impepho* (incense) is burnt before the commencement of any major undertaking. The incense used in Zulu culture is made out of a special grass, which has a distinctive odour. The incense is used as a medium of communication with the ancestors for certain blessings or when conducting ceremonies. According to Khumalo (2007: pc), by burning incense, an invitation is being extended to the ancestors to take part in the planned activity. If a

family is going through a difficult period it is common in traditional society for the family to communicate with the ancestors to call off that situation, *ukuthetha idlozi* (shouting at them to stop the bad situation). In olden times the incense was burnt on hot coals but in modern times it is common to use matches to burn the incense (Mkhwanazi 2007: pc).

#### 11.2.4 The symbol of light

The lighting of a candle or a clay lamp as soon as death is confirmed in both the Zulu and Hindu culture is an attempt to protect the living from the spirits. The lighting of candles or lamps has been a symbol of hope and remembrance. The flame of the candle is a potent symbol of the flame of life that once burned brightly and illumined the lives of loved ones who mourn the loss. Both the candles in Zulu funerals and lamps in Hindu funeral ceremonies are tools to link the living with the Divine and ancestral world. Candles or lamps serves as a conduit between people, the Divine, and the deceased. They are symbolic in many ways. For example, by lighting them in the name of the deceased, you are saying a prayer for them. Furthermore, lighted candles or lamps can be symbolic of life, in that the flame shows the vibrancy of the soul (*History of candles*, www.angelfire.com:2007).

The lamp is kept lit near the head of the deceased or near the mat where the deceased belongings are kept and incense burned. A *diva* (clay lamp), is generally a must in any Hindu religious occasion and forms an integral part in many social rites. It is a strong symbol of enlightenment and prosperity.

### 11.2.5 Removal of obstacles /warding off the evil eye

In both traditional Zulu and Hindu ceremonies, rituals are performed to remove obstacles that may be in the way of the ceremony. The aim is to conclude the ceremony without any disturbances. Some rituals are also performed to remove the evil eye that may affect the envisaged proceedings.

In Hindu funerals and memorial ceremonies, there are a number of procedures that are undertaken to remove obstacles or to ward off the evil eye. Before the commencement of any ceremony, a prayer is offered to Lord *Ganesh*, who is considered as the remover of obstacles. According to Kanitkar et al (1995:31), *Ganesh* is considered and widely worshipped as a god of good luck, a remover of difficulties and obstacles, a god of wisdom and a patron of learning. When prayers are offered, a coconut is also broken into two pieces. The coconut is used extensively in Hindu rituals. It is sacrificed as a replica for a human head and is also associated with Shiva, because its three “eyes” symbolize the eyes of Shiva. It is also associated with fertility. However unlike normal ceremonies, for a funeral ceremony the end of the coconut is not removed. This is also symbolic of removing obstacles, so that the rituals or procedures will be a success. In order to obviate the evil eye, the *alum* (lime and turmeric mixed in water), which turns into blood red, is waved around coffin in a brass vessel, to prevent any misfortune, in the funeral proceedings or in the journey of the deceased to the spirit world. This is performed when the coffin arrives at the home of the deceased or when the corpse leaves the home for cremation or burial. The turning of the *alum* is also undertaken after the completion of any ritual or activity.

According to Zulu custom, two dishes are placed at the entrance to the homestead, one with water mixed with *umswani* (inside contents of goat) and the other with water mixed with *isiqunga* grass. In some cases *intelezi* (traditional mixture of herbs and roots) is also used. Death is always associated with *isinyama* (misfortune). It is believed that by washing their hands with this mixture, all forms of misfortune will be repelled and it is also a means of warding off evil spirits.

#### **11.2.6 Clothing for the deceased**

When a Zulu person dies he is buried together with some of his clothes. It is usually the responsibility of an old woman to select the clothes that will be put into the grave. Not all of the person's clothes are buried with him. Some clothes are left to be used by relevant family members after some time after the death of a person. The clothes that the deceased loved to wear, is folded and placed on a grass mat. In some cases the clothing of the deceased, were all removed and burned to prevent the evil spirits from hovering in the vicinity. However in most cases the clothing is distributed to the needy.

Similarly when a Hindu person dies, some of the clothes are placed next to a photograph of the deceased at a designated altar until the completion of the 11<sup>th</sup> day or 15<sup>th</sup> day memorial service. Thereafter the clothes and other belongings of the deceased are distributed among close family members or friends or given to the poor. The clothes that are worn by the chief mourner during the funeral and memorial rituals are thrown away as it is regarded as polluted.

### 11.2.7 Mourning dress

Among the Zulu people, the culture of wearing the mourning dress is very much an integral part of death ritual. According to Ndimande (2005:7) following the death of a spouse, a widow or widower must acknowledge through both emotional expressions and public show by a change in clothing and appearance. There are many variations in the dress code for mourning. In many cases black clothing is worn as a symbol of mourning. However it is also common for navy, blue, green and white dress to be worn. Other women wear a dress made up of a certain German cloth called *isijalimane* or *isishweshwe*. In the olden days a woman wore a special type of grass known as *imizi ephothiwe* around her neck as a symbol of grief.

In traditional Hindu society the grieving widow wears a white sari as an expression of mourning. According to Buchanan- Brown as quoted by Ndimande (2005:10) to wear white as a sign of mourning has something Messianic about it. It shows a loss that will be filled and marks a temporary void. It is the colour of passage in the sense in which the word is used in “rites of passage” and it is rightly the preferred colour for those rites through which changes in existence takes place on the classic pattern through death and rebirth which is a characteristic of Hinduism (Ndimande, 2005:10).

In both the Zulu and Hindu culture, dress for the widow is associated with stigmatization and mutilation, which is not the case with the widower. The widower does not wear anything to distinguish himself from the rest of the men that he is widowed, although in some instances Zulu men wear a black strip to illustrate their grief about the death of his wife (Ndimande, 2005:8). In

India, it is common for grieving men to wear a white *dothi*<sup>2</sup>. However, in South Africa there is no real mourning dress for men.

### 11.2.8 Removal of hair

The shaving of the hair is a symbol of separation, showing that a family member has been separated from them. The re-growth of hair is a symbol of the continuity of life in another form. Among the Zulu community, family members have to undergo *ukugundwa kwamakhanda* (the removal of the hair from the head). The existing hair on the heads of the family members are associated with misfortune, so the growth of new hair after the removal of the old, marks the new stage which follows after death. Shaving of the hair signifies that the brooding of ancestors have ceased and that a new start in life is about to begin.. In this way, they remove the defilement of death and purify themselves before partaking in the sacrificial roast meat, which is meant to bring a new spirit into communion with the ancestors. (*Introduction to the Ngoni Spiritual World*: [www.kungoni.org](http://www.kungoni.org), November 2007). According to traditional Zulu culture, the hair is buried by an old person. It is never thrown away lest the birds pick them up and make their nests out of it. It is believed that the owner suffers from sever headaches if that should happen.

In the Hindu community, the day after the 16<sup>th</sup> day memorial ceremony, the chief mourner and other members of the family (if desired) remove their hair following a ritual at the river or seaside. In many places members of the immediate family have their hair shaved off, and some of their normal activities are suspended until all the funeral rites have been performed. The main

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<sup>2</sup> Is the traditional garment of men's wear in South Asia, especially India. It is a rectangular piece of unstitched cloth, usually around 5 yards long, wrapped about the waist and the legs, and knotted at the waist.

reasons for shaving the hair is as a gesture of surrender, respect and humility. A shaved head can also indicate sacrifice or submission. (O'Connell et al., 2007:164). The ordeal of shaving and bathing is also for the benefit of the souls of the departed. It is a means of eliminating some of the sins of the deceased (*Hindu Tonsure*: 1908).

### 11.2.9 Feasting

The feasting that follows after the funeral rites is partly to comfort the bereaved family and to bring life back to normal, and partly to thank those who have officiated at the funeral rites. The purpose of the feasting according to Van Gennep is to reunite all the surviving members of the group and serves as a means of incorporation as described in Gennep's, *Rites of Passage* (1909)

Following the funeral of a Zulu person, a big feast is held for family members and close friends. There is an abundance of beer and a beast is slaughtered as an accompaniment and also to inform the ancestors that the family is preparing to end the period of mourning. Beer and sacrificial meat is also offered to the deceased. It is believed that the ancestors will partake in these food and beverage offerings. The beast killed on this occasion is known as *inkomo yokumphelzela* (a beast of accompaniment), which is taken from the estate of the deceased.

Feasting also takes place after the mourning period of a Hindu funeral. In most cases this is held after the 16<sup>th</sup> day ceremony when family members partake in non-vegetarian meals. Before partaking in any meals, the prepared food is offered to the deceased and other ancestors for blessing. The celebration marks the end of the *ásauca* (mourning) and the family returns to its

normal state (*rtviya*).

#### **11.2.10 Impurity associated with a funeral and the associated rituals**

In the Zulu custom, there is a belief that a person who participates in funeral rituals is regarded as 'unholy' or unclean. Immediately after death, all the normal activities of the kraal are curtailed and a number of strict taboos are observed. People also stop working as a sign of mourning. There is no tilling of the land or interference with the cattle. However, in modern times this custom is difficult to practice as it is difficult to stay away from work for a lengthy period. In some instances, sexual intercourse is also not permitted during the mourning period. It is a way of showing respect to the family as a whole and also to pay respect to the deceased. Any form of entertainment such as parties, discos, cinema, television etc. is prohibited during the mourning period. Since sexual intercourse which is regarded as a form of entertainment, it is not allowed during this period of pain. Doing away with it is the way of dealing with pain during the mourning period which usually lasts for three months.

Similarly, in traditional Hindu culture, family members who have experienced the loss of a loved one are also regarded as unclean (*thirta*). The family members should do no work nor cause it to be done by anyone else for three days (in other words for these three days family members should focus on spirituality by chanting from the scriptures, while at the same time coming to terms with their loss).

Personal adornment and enjoyment should be avoided - this includes activities like bathing for pleasure, shaving, wearing fancy clothes, applying perfume, oiling the body or hair, having

massage, looking in the mirror, watching T.V and videos, and wearing jewellery and garlands or putting flowers in the hair (*Guide to spiritual impurity*, www.hknet.org.nz : September 2007).

The grieving families are not allowed to attend any religious ceremonies and marriages especially at temples for a period of one year until the memorial ceremony is over. According to Vedic scripture, if someone dies in the family the whole family becomes contaminated for some time. Marriages or other activities cannot take place; the members of the family are not allowed to participate in the annual *purtassi* fast and related prayers as they are considered to be ritually impure and are polluted by the death of a close family member.

A Zulu woman whose husband has died has to undergo *ukuzila* (mourning) and is subjected to certain social restrictions as is explained in the main text. The *iHlambo* (washing) ceremony marks the end of the mourning period for a Zulu widow and a re-integration into society. Similarly the Hindu widow also has to undergo a period of morning for at least a year and also have to forego certain social privileges. The completion of the one year memorial ceremony with the associated rituals allows the Hindu person to be re-integrated into society.

#### **11.2.11 Food taboos during mourning**

*Maas* (curd milk) is not allowed to be eaten, the reason being it was not permitted to milk the cows during the mourning period as a sign of respect. This practice still continues in modern times notwithstanding the fact that *maas* is purchased from shops.

It is customary for Zulus to eat bitter herbs to drive away or kill spirits that may have already invaded their bodies. Likewise the Hindus eat *pavakai* (bitter gourd), *moorenkerai* (drumstick herbs) and any other bitter herbs during ancestor veneration ceremonies. An offering is first made to the ancestors before it is consumed.

Many rituals in both the Zulu and Hindu culture include the use of magical herbs against witchcraft. The rituals directed to the ancestors, like prayer, are used to obtain trans-human assistance, protection or to give thanks to such powers. Medicinal/magical plants are used in conjunction with spiritual and ritual treatments to neutralise the believed sources of misfortune, and restore balance and health. (*Indigenous healing in South Africa*, [www.wits.ac.za](http://www.wits.ac.za):2007).

In both Zulu and Hindu culture, no food is to be prepared at the home of the deceased until the funeral is over. According to traditional Hindu and Zulu culture, no meals are to be offered or received by any of those coming to mourn or express their condolences for the first three days. It is common for neighbours and friends to prepare meals for the bereaved family. The diet of the people of North Indian origin is restricted to boiled vegetables without salt and grain during the first three days after the death of a family member. Generally the close relatives should partake only in vegetarian meals until the 11<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup> day memorial ceremony is completed. It is only after the completion of the rituals at the river or sea on the 16<sup>th</sup> day that family members are permitted to eat non-vegetarian food.

### 11.2.12 Ritual Ingredients

Various ingredients are used by both the Zulu and Hindu community to fulfill certain ritual obligations. The reasons for using these elements are almost similar.

*Insizi* (a strong black substance) is used in Zulu custom to smear the corpse or inserted in a cut made on the corpse. Sometimes *insizi* is also placed in the closed fist of the dead person as a weapon to protect him against wizards. In some cases the corpse is sprinkled with goat's bile before being transferred to the coffin (Nyawose: 2000). *Umuti* (traditional medicine) is also used to repel evil spirits from entering the body. According to Hindu tradition, before the corpse is placed in the incinerator, *havan samagari* (mixture of seeds, weeds and other natural elements) are deposited on the corpse while the priest recites some mantras. This is meant to protect the corpse from any evil forces.

In Zulu tradition, the *umhlankosi* or *umphafa*, (*Ziziphus mucronata*) plays a very significant role in many customs associated with burials rites and ancestor veneration. It is commonly known as the buffalo-thorn tree. It is believed that if a twig of the tree is carried by the chief mourner, it will enable him to connect the deceased with the surviving members of the family and to integrate them with other deceased members in the ancestral kingdom. A twig is also used to attract and carry the spirit of the deceased from the place of death to the new resting place. In earlier times, when a person died far from home (often in battle), the elders of the family would send a party to 'fetch the spirit' of that person and the party would carry a branch from the *umphafa* tree. At the place where the person had died, they would call out his name and

announce that they had come to take his spirit home. Similarly, it is said that if another person was with the deceased at the time of death, he should carry a branch of the *umphafa* home from that place, to take the spirit of the dead person home to rest. It was once customary that when a Zulu chief died, the tree was planted on his grave as a reminder or symbol of where the chief lies. Hence the name *umlahlankosi or umphafa* — that which buries the chief (Young et al., 2004).

Similarly Hindus use sandalwood to protect the corpse from any negative forces. The sandalwood is considered to be a very important kind of wood because the root is used for its medicinal values; the bark is also used for its medicinal value. Then chief mourner, without turning to face the body places a piece of sacred sandalwood or a mango stick dipped in ghee into the coffin. He is followed by other members of the family. After placing the stick in the coffin the mourners never turn back and look at the pyre, they always went forward to prevent any spirits from following them.

Another natural ingredient that is commonly used in Hindu rituals, including funeral rites is the *dharbar* grass (holy grass used in Hindu rituals). The *dharbar* also known as *khusa*, acts as a means of amplification for the *mantras* and connect the living world with the spiritual and ancestral world. *Darbha* Grass is identified with Lord Vishnu and is believed to possess the power to purify anything. It is used to make *Pavitra* rings for wearing during *puja* (prayer) in order to connect the participant of the ritual with the divine being. Many Hindus throughout the world use *dharba* grass to mitigate the ill effects of the eclipse. In Vedic times, the grass was known as a powerful protector (Selva, 2007:1).

According to Zulu culture, ash is placed in the water together with a coin. The members of the family, especially married daughters (*amadodakazi*) will use this mixture to wash their hands. The purpose of washing the hands in the mixture of ash and water is to eliminate the dark shadow that has befallen the grieving family. In Hindu tradition ash or *vibhuthi* is used extensively in many rituals. After a prayer it is also used as a dot on the forehead to symbolize the third eye of Lord Shiva and to protect the individual from any bad elements.

In funerals, the corpse will be smeared with the holy ash. The ash is normally made from the dung of a new born calf, the cow has a lot of uric acid so when you burn this it becomes rough, but the calf does not have so much of uric acid content, and when burnt it is much smoother, and then they add perfumes. It is believed that Lord Shiva sanctified the calf and therefore the cow dung has certain spiritual powers.

### **11.2.13 The significance of the fowl**

It is typical for Zulus to place a fowl or chicken in the coffin of a deceased family member in order to get rid of any evil spell that the death may have brought. (Nyawose: 2000). In most cases the rituals are supposed to be the last rites granted to a dead person, but others may be carried out to appease the dead person's soul and to stop him from returning as a ghost or as an evil spirit. Sometimes the family members release two doves as the coffin descends into the grave, to fly away as a symbol of releasing the soul.

Similarly, at some Hindu funerals, a live chicken will be released when the person dies unnaturally or when the person dies on an inauspicious day. The chicken or goat in Zulu will be offered in place of the life that should not have died. The life had a future, and a span, and was robbed of it, so a chicken was sacrificed in place of the life. In some cases the chicken was buried in order to enable the soul to be in a peaceful state. The soul won't be held responsible for dying before its time; instead the chicken would be responsible.

#### **11.2.14 The importance of inversions in Zulu and Hindu death rituals**

In both the Hindu and Zulu community certain activities pertaining to funerals are performed in the opposite manner than would be performed in a ceremony not associated with death. According to Berglund (1976:365), everything is said to be upside down and reversed. He provides a number of examples of this practice in Zulu rituals, which he termed funeral inversions. Speech is reversed (saying yes when meaning no); clothing is sometimes worn inside out, a leader of a Zionist church in Durban reversed his collar from back to front on occasions when he conducted funeral services, while widows sometimes turned their skirts inside out during the funeral of their husbands, objects are also turned in different directions; it is recorded that on a number of occasions, when a polygamous man was being buried, his *iqadi* (right hand side wife) carried her husband on the left hand side while the *ikhohlwa* wife (left hand side wife) carried on the right hand side when the body was transported to the grave, thereby reversing the traditional positions in the family.

There are many examples that have been recorded. There are certain *imikhuba* (custom) which are family specific, like the one mentioned above, which is not Zulu specific.

Berglund (1976:367) suggests that these funeral inversions are to help the new ancestral spirit to feel comfortable in their new environment. For this reason those diviners often do things in reverse. The risk of not doing things in reverse will be that the spirit of the deceased will be troubled and this will affect the living.

The acts of funeral inversions serve as a shock which the living must experience when they become aware of the deceased. They therefore show their feelings in a negative way by doing things in reversal.

In Hindu rituals, reversal of procedures during funerals is also common. When circumnavigating the corpse during the performance of the final rites, the chief mourner performs this task in an anti-clockwise direction. When a coconut is broken after performing a prayer, the end part of the coconut is not removed unlike during a normal ceremony when the end is removed and thrown away. In normal circumstances a bell is rung to compliment a prayer ceremony, however during a funeral prayer this is not done to avoid any confusion. However, according to Sankaran (2007: pc), it is common in Brahmin funerals for the officiating priest to hit on his thighs to invoke some noise as a means of communicating with the deceased. In Hindu homes, the *kamatchee villaka* (brass lamp) is lit daily to evoke divine blessing for the family. However, when a family member dies, a clay lamp is lit in addition to the normal brass lamp. This lamp burns for 16 days continuously to prevent the spirit of the deceased from troubling family members (Raman, 2007:

pc). In Zulu custom candles are lit continuously until the coffin leaves the house for burial.

#### **11.2.15 Burial position**

Before the introduction of cremation as a means of disposal, burial was practiced by many Hindus especially those that are of South Indian origin. According to Filippi (1996:115), many archaeological excavations have revealed the popular custom of burying the dead, especially under the domestic floor, near one's fireplace. Most of the people were buried in the embryonic position, in order to facilitate their rebirth. This burial position was accorded possibly in the belief that as a man came out of his mother's womb, so shall he return whence he came i.e. to Mother Earth. Similarly, in Zulu culture the corpse was placed in a hollowed out corner (*igumbi*). The legs of the deceased are folded so that the corpse takes a position similar to that of a foetus inside the mother's womb.

#### **11.2.16 Other similarities**

In both the Zulu and Hindu culture the following practices are observed during a funeral; period of mourning or during ancestor veneration observances:

- At the home of the deceased religious pictures or photographs are turned to the wall and in some cases mirrors, television sets or other entertainment mediums are covered until the funeral or period of mourning is over.

- The home is also transformed like a temple or sanctified religious area in order to prepare the soul for its onward journey.
- In many cases the photograph of religious icons or saints are placed at an altar depending on the belief of the family.
- In some cases, a cup of tea, coffee, fruit or any other favourite food items of the deceased are kept at the altar.
- It is common practice for friends and relatives to remain at the home of the deceased as a vigil. During this time devotional songs and hymns are rendered which assists in the transformation of the soul. The vigil also acts as a precaution to prevent any evil force to interfere in the process.
- During the funeral period, food is not prepared on the stove at the home of the deceased. Simple meals are brought in by the neighbours or relatives.
- The position of the corpse and the way it is removed from the home is also very significant. According to scriptures the head is supposed to face north. When the body is removed it is moved with the feet first.
- Petals of flower are offered into the coffin as a symbol of respect for the deceased.
- During the course of the funeral, appropriate messages, eulogies, and speeches are rendered by family and friends about the character of the deceased and how he/she

interacted with the community.

- The youngest son acts as chief mourner in the case of his mother's death and performs all the necessary rituals.
- After the burial, cremation or disposal of ashes, the mourners walk away without looking back. This is done to make detachment easier and to prevent the soul from lingering on the earthly plane.

### **11.3 Recapitulation**

The above are just some of the similarities between Hindu and Zulu practices associated with funerals and ancestor worship. It must be noted that most of these practices are also typical of other traditional cultures and are not necessarily limited to the investigated cultures.

In this chapter some theories that highlight the reasons for similarities in cultural practices are introduced. This is used to explain the reasons for some of the similarities in the funeral rituals and ceremonies related to ancestor veneration between the Hindus and Zulus in South Africa. However, I have not attempted to highlight any differences as this falls outside the scope of this research undertaking.

## CHAPTER 12

### CONCLUSION

#### 12.1 Introduction

In the conclusion to this thesis I provide a concise summary of the major findings of my observations of the research on Hindu and Zulu death rituals and ancestor veneration. I also address matters relating to memory, transmission and oral tradition. The implications of my research towards nation-building are also considered. In this regard, I contemplate the potential insight of my research for improving race relations because of a clearer understanding of the peculiar needs of the Hindu and Zulu community in so far as death rituals are concerned.

In the foregoing chapters, an attempt has been made to put into perspective the rituals and worship among the Hindus and Zulus of South Africa with the focus being on death rituals and ancestor veneration. The study reveals that most of these practices have been transmitted orally with very little written evidence. This can be attributed to the fact that both the Zulus and Hindus are an oral society when it comes to rituals and traditional practices. Furthermore, the study has also shown that there are many similarities between the Zulus and Hindus and this can be attributed to various reasons as outlined in the previous chapter.

My research has shown that the death in a family (an external event) is stimulating a whole series of events in a person's gut by telling him or her what needs to be done, in order to give a person a dignified last rites; whether that person is a Zulu or a Hindu, it is a natural series of events that evolve from inside, anthropologically, that prompts you to do something. One is left with a feeling of something unfulfilled if these things are not done.

This is not something we do to satisfy the society, it is something we do to satisfy our deepest, oldest, inner urges. There is scientific evidence in that; it is not a psychological phenomenon; its origin is in this gut memory. It is not a theological framework, but an under pinning explanation of why people go to so much trouble; spend so much of time, energy and money to bury their dead.

A person's death represents a considerable transition, for both the deceased and the living members of the family and the community around them. Funeral rites and the associated ceremonies ritually prepares the individual to move on, possibly as part of a journey into another world and the processes associated with mourning are performed to express and channel the emotions involved in losing a loved one.

In both the Hindu and Zulu community, the position of the ancestors is indeed powerful. Subsequently, the burial or cremation rites become very important to ensure that the deceased find a rightful place in the ancestral kingdom. The feeling among most informants was that incorrect procedures will have a negative effect on the survivors,

who will be constantly troubled by the spirits of the deceased. As a consequence of this, the funerals are long, complex and expensive. Despite this, both the Hindu and Zulu funerals investigated, demonstrate that the surviving families will rather go through all the expense and the time to ensure that the dead is given the appropriate last rites. As a result of this, it was found in the investigation of the Hindu and Zulu death rituals and ceremonies that several customs had to be observed when a person was on his/her death bed, the preparation of a body for burial or cremation, the actual burial or cremation and finally the post death ceremonies associated with ancestor veneration.

It is apparent to a person who reflects on the existential realities of life that He who is responsible for the entire creation must have created human beings also. It is then necessary to consider why we are born in this world, what the purpose of our existence is, and where we are heading to.

This research is aimed at finding answers to the question that deals with where we are heading to when we die and what type of send off is necessary to make our journey fruitful and meaningful irrespective of what cultural group we belong to.

The aim of this research is also to look at various practices, *anthropologically*, at how Hindus and Zulus as a species observe death and ancestor veneration in order to find commonalities; *ethnologically* as how Zulus and Hindus have passed on their tradition from one generation to the next; and then within the sub groups, individuals who have

done things differently because of changes, transforming or personal choice and that becomes *autological*.

In this regard, the following aims have been formulated to the answer the questions.

- to examine Hindu and Zulu death rituals and ceremonies in order to establish the extent to which the mnemonic structural laws discovered by Marcel Jousse and outlined in the *Anthropology of Geste and Rhythm* (2000) can be identified and demonstrated. The researcher has undertaken to demonstrate how the Mnemonic Laws and Mnemotechnical devices discovered by Marcel Jousse can be applied to the rhythm-melodic gestual-visual/oral-aural performance of selected Hindu and Zulu ceremonies by ‘putting performance on the page’. I have also described the practices and processes involved in Hindu and Zulu death rituals and ancestor veneration, based on the theories of Marcel Jousse in the *Anthropology of Geste and Rhythm* and Van Gennep’s theory of Rites of Passage.
- to identify the incidence and degree of fossilization of meaning in the performance of selected Hindu and Zulu death rituals. This is to assist all participants to a better understanding of the rituals and ceremonies associated with Hindu and Zulu deaths and ancestor veneration.
- to determine the similarities and differences in the performance of selected Hindu and Zulu rituals and ceremonies and how these can be accounted for traditionally

and historically.

- to investigate and analyze the death rituals and ceremonies as practiced by the Hindu and Zulu communities.
- to investigate the extent of ancestor worship among the Hindu and Zulu community and how it influences the death rituals and ceremonies.

The research is based on the assumption that the Hindu and Zulu death rituals and ceremonies to venerate the ancestors are still to this day, characterized by oral tradition and are likely to remain so for many more decades. Although some changes have occurred to the performance of Hindu and Zulu death rituals, which can be attributed to regional and other differences, the impact of Christianity on the Zulus and the great distance from the motherland in respect of the Hindus, have not had a great influence on traditional rituals and practices of the Hindu and Zulu.

This study takes into account the fact that it is extremely difficult to capture the three dimensional effect of dynamic performance and record it on the page as there is no one way of performing any human ceremony.

The processes used to carry out the investigation included; observations of Hindu and Zulu funerals and ceremonies to venerate the ancestors; observation and analysis of video recordings, tape recordings and photographs; participation in Hindu ceremonies related to

ancestor veneration; interviews, and analysis and interpretation of data.

As the world is becoming smaller and as it becomes increasingly necessary for its various peoples to understand each other and get along together, it becomes more imperative that the information we receive about each other be both correct and sensitively conveyed (Banton 1966:87).

This new understanding will obviate many problems that may arise out of traditional practices such as *lobola*, circumcision, traditional healing, virginity testing etc.

The importance of heritage has been given top priority in South Africa since 1994. In this regard, Heritage Day has been included as one of the national public holidays to be celebrated annually on 24 September. The importance of Heritage Day is described as a time for quiet contemplation about where we come from, where we are going to, about the country we live in, and the country we hope to share with our children and the generations to follow. As we do so, we may profitably envisage the past as a vast repository of historical experiences and pre-historical events that have respectively shaped the society and the environment in which we live (*The Star*, 2007:8).

But it is not enough to remember the past. We need to think of the future and to fulfill our responsibilities to the generations to come. South Africa is a beautiful country with a rich cultural diversity. It is our duty to preserve them for future generations.

Indian and Zulu culture have withstood the test of time over thousands of years, the onslaughts of dictatorial and colonial powers, both foreign and local. Various attempts to subjugate the local indigenous population of Africa and to stem the spread of Indian language and culture over the length and breadth of India and the Indian Diaspora countries have certainly failed. However in the wake of technology and other disturbing elements, the beauty and relevance of the myriad of interesting practices of traditional oral societies will be forgotten if precautionary measures to resuscitate them are not taken in time.

I am hoping that my research which is based on Orality will help in the understanding of some of the practices of the Hindu and Zulu community. As Ruth Finnegan (1990:131) states,

Perhaps the most immediate one to come to mind is the part it has played in widening our percepts of the works of human literary imagination. It has helped to alert us to new material to study and appreciate. New doors into the appreciation of human culture have thus been opened for us by scholars working with the concept of orality.

Research outputs such as this which show the richness of the language and culture of oral societies will astound not only the academics but all sectors of society, including politicians in a decision-making position.

It is in the interest of the so called oral societies that the observation, collection, analysis and the publication of material, should be undertaken. In this way, the glorious cultural wealth of the different societies such as the Zulu and Hindu will be known and appreciated. The output of such research should not remain on the shelves of academic`

institutions, but must be made readily available to show the repository of cultural wealth in South Africa which is surely an indicator of the intellectual and emotional fertility of the people it represents. In the past, we have always depended on western scientists, sociologists and anthropologists for many theories and conclusions in many fields of intellectual activity. In many instances, we will accept anything that emanate from the mouth and writings of the western world who we consider to be superior in all respects. We will not even test the findings against what comes out from the minds and hearts of our oral people.

The history of the continent of Africa has not been properly written. All sectors of the academic world, the scientist, the anthropologist, the linguist and many others, will have to work even harder for many more decades before an authentic history of the African continent could be reconstructed. But it is clear from recent research undertakings by many academics and scholars that the work has already begun. We need to keep the momentum going. We need to prove to the outside world that Africa is not a backward country whose people practice paganistic rituals and make cruel animal sacrifices, but, it is part of the great ancient civilizations of the world whose people practice oral traditions which is meaningful and relevant to them in their context. We need not view Africa through the lens of the so called superior societies of the world.

Man creates culture, and he passes it on to his children; but in the same way, culture shapes man. Human beings behave and think and feel in a cultural world, and each group of people lives in a somewhat different cultural world. To understand mankind it is

necessary to understand these different cultures and how they have come about. This is the task anthropologists have set for themselves (Edgerton 1974:1).

Through my research on marriage ceremonies of the Zulu and Hindu community for my Masters Degree and the current research on death rituals as practiced by these cultural groups, I also hope to make a contribution to anthropological studies of oral societies in the global context.

I have been observing over the years, as a Hindu, the various death rituals and ancestor worship, and it fascinated me that very close here in South Africa; the Zulu community have also given deep relevance to Death Rituals and Ancestor worship. There is very little documented information about the South African Hindu perspective of death rituals and ancestor worship.

I believe that as a contribution to society, I can put together on paper, through observation and interviews with different people, belonging to the Zulu and Hindu community, the manner in which they perform rituals and the reasons why they do it, and how they venerate their ancestors.

Both Zulu and Indian culture with their unique characteristics, constitute a nourishing diet for the people of South Africa and serve as vitamins to the heart and mind of a nation that is striving for 'unity and diversity' through the principle of 'Ubuntu'.

I am compelled to think that the cultural practices of traditional societies like the Zulu and Hindu symbolize the expression of the dreams and aspirations of a group of people whose contributions towards the preservation of a culture that is steeped in tradition is indeed praiseworthy.

Death is not the extinction of life; it rather opens a horizon for new journey on this planet or the other. If a person elevates himself and immensely contributes to society, he gets perpetuated and becomes immortal (Saraswathi, 2005).

## SECTION E

### Chapter 13

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## SCHEDULE OF INTERVIEWS (HINDU INFORMANTS)

NAME OF PARTICIPANT	ORGANISATION	TYPE	AGE	DATE	TIME	VENUE
Mr Monappa	Cultural Expert on Coorg	Coorg/Hindu	68	11/12/05	16h00 to 17h30	Madikeri
Dr B Rambilas	Arya Prathaniti Sabha/ Westville Hindu School Cultural and Religious Leader	Hindu/ Vedic	Unknown	14/09/06	10h00 to 11h00	Westville
Pundit Roy Maharaj & congregation Of 60 devotees	Queensburgh Radhakrishna Satsangh Society	Hindu/Puranic	Various	11/10/06	19h00 to 20h30	Queensburgh
Pundit B Behadur	Aryan Pathanithi Sabha	Hindu/Vedic	64	11/10/06	9h00 to 10h00	Carlise St. Durban
Dr. T P Naidoo	Indian Academy of South Africa. Researcher, Cultural leader, Publisher,	Hindu /General	75	16/10/06	17h00 to 19h00	
Guru Sankaran	South Indian Brahmin/ Spiritual Advisor	Hindu/Tamil	43	16/10/06	14h00 to 15h30	Parasakthi Temple, Merebank
Dr Krish Nair	Medical Doctor Director: Chatsworth Hospice	General	48	18/10/06	18h00 to 18h30	Umhlatuzana

NAME OF PARTICIPANT	ORGANISATION	TYPE	AGE	DATE	TIME	VENUE
Mr. Moorgas Moonsamy	Hindu Priest/Ret. Educator	Hindu/Tamil	68	18/10/06	16h30 to 17h30	Prieska, Str. Actonville
Dr V G Padayachee	Hindu Priest, Researcher, Tamil Scholar	Hindu/Tamil	85	18/10/06	15h00 to 16h15	Chetty Str. Actonville
Mr. John Kisten	Stanigar – Chatsworth Magazine Barracks Shree Vishnu Temple, Congregation Leader	Hindu /Tamil	73	26/10/06	16h00 to 18h00	Malvern
Mr. Scotty Naidoo	Hindu Priest	Hindu/Tamil & Telegu	79	26/10/06	16h00 to 18h00	Malvern
Dr. Jayprakash	Academic, Tamil Scholar	Hindu/Tamil	32	26/10/06	18h00 to 20h00	Musgrave
Prof. Joan Connolly	Academic, Researcher	Theory of Anthropology				Malvern
Guru Krishna	Rylands Siva Alayam	Hindu/Tamil/Telegu/Hindi	42	18/12/06	19h00 to 20h00	Rylands, CapeTown
Mr. D Swain	Researcher	Hindu	32	30/09/07	19h00 to 20h00	Hyderabad University
Prof. Baidyanathi Saraswathi	Retired Anthropologist	Hindu	80	3/10/07	12h00 to 13h30	Bara Gambhi Singh Road, Varanasi
Mr. Appana	Cultural Expert	Hindu/Coorg	75	5/10/07	16h00 to 17h30	Kushal Nagar. Madikeri

NAME OF PARTICIPANT	ORGANISATION	TYPE	AGE	DATE	TIME	VENUE
Prof. G P Shivaram	Mangalore University, Academic	Hindu/Kannada	54	8/10/07	17h00 to 18h00	Mangalore University
Dr.Chinnappa Gowda	Mangalore University Dept. of Kannada	Hindu/Tulu	48	9/10/07	10h30 to 11h30	Mangalore University
Dr B R Raghavan	Mangalore University Academic	Hindu/Kannada	47	10/10/07	14h00 to 15h30	Mangalore University
Dr. B Udaya	Mangalore University Dept. of History	Hindu/Kannada	42	13/10/07	11h30 to 12h00	Mangalore University
Dr S Sumathi	University of Madras Senior Lecturer – Dept. Of Anthropology	South Indian Tribal and Theory of Anthropology	-	16/10/2007	11h00 to 12h00	Madras University
Prof. Abdul Kalam	University of Madras Head of Anthropology Dept.	South Indian Tribal and Theory of Anthropology	-	19/10/2007	14h30 to 15h30	Madras University
Prof. Venkata Rao	University of Hyderabad Head of Anthropology Dept.	Theory of Anthropology	-	23/10/2007	10h00 to 11h40	Hyderabad University

## SCHEDULE OF INTERVIEWS (ZULU INFORMANTS)

NAME OF PARTICIPANT	ORGANISATION	AGE	DATE	TIME	VENUE
Ma Sigebengu Gumede	Community informant	61	24/06/05	10h00	KwaLuthuli Section
Moses Gumede	Community informant	60	12/06/05	14h00	KwaQwabe Section
Ma Gumede	Community informant	67	16/06/05	12h00	KwaLuthuli Section
Tholakele Mthethwa	Community informant	65	12/06/05	09h00	KwaQwabe Section
MaMxoveni Khoza	Community informant	55	18/06/05	13h00	KwaLuthuli Section
Mandla Khoza	Community informant	23	26/06/05	14h30	KwaLuthuli Section
Ngiba Mavudla	Community informant	57	03/07/05	11h00	KwaQwabe Section
Mdudisi Mthethwa	Community informant	28	05/07/05	14h00	KwaLuthuli Section
M Chili	Community informant	66	15/06/05	15h00	KwaLuthuli Section

Lucky Chili	Community informant	40	19/06/05	16h00	KwaQwabe Section
Mzuyabonga Gumede	Research Scholar	33	14/06/05	18h00	KwaQwabe Section
Prof P Zungu	Academic, Researcher	-	05/12/06	10h00	Doc. Centre
Dr Reggie Khumalo	Academic, Cultural Commentator	-	09/03/07	14h00	Seaboard Hotel
Mr Z Ndimande	Arts Administrator	-	09/03/07	10h00	Loop Str. PmBurg
Fikile Makwanazi	Arts Administrator	-	12/11/07	15h00	Loop Str. PmBurg
B V Zulu	Cultural Administrator and member of the Royal family	-	2/12/2007	17h00	Durban

15-2-46.

Dear Kathleen a family;

well - I am writing this very late today  
 to tell you all what must be done with  
 - I am glad. In the past I have written  
 - it is time, my body must be taken  
 to the meeting this evening, then after  
 you the family in 10 weeks - one by  
 - I have, the community will be in a stable  
 - then we in the meeting the same  
 - I hope - I am leaving today also  
 - I have after the meeting must be done by  
 - the family, Ray must not carry the load  
 - only in person with the day. I hope.  
 - I hope of children must not carry the  
 - I hope, just go around with the family  
 - when I recall to the - construction  
 - done.  
 - Ray the back side of the upper line Paul  
 - and with the Pauline and - the family  
 - and the same other.  
 - Don the - the upper my Sisters  
 - and Paul & the - the family, please,  
 - and I hope - the family - Mrs  
 - I hope and crying.  
 - after the family so please ask the  
 - I hope to - work and find the the  
 - I hope at the house, nothing to be  
 - I hope you must stay the  
 - I hope - must go the the family  
 - I hope.

and - as the family - I am the  
 - I hope they all the family  
 - I hope with all the family  
 - I hope 3 - the family - and not  
 - I hope the family for the family  
 - I hope & everything - you all know  
 - I hope I like my - I hope.  
 - I hope after you all I hope you  
 - I hope do not speak back & I hope  
 - I hope I hope Paul in your own  
 - I hope.

I hope hope you all understand  
 my words - at the moment I am  
 such and my hand writing is  
 not good.

after some years in small things  
 do be done at home.  
 Hope you all believe my wishes

Good & Rays & good luck.  
 Mrs. Pauline Godwin

## TRANSCRIPT OF APPENDIX 3

15-2-96

Dear Children & Family

Well I am writing this very letter today to tell you all what must be done when I am dead. In the first place when I die at home, my body must be taken to the mortuary the same time, then after give the family in Durban one day chance. From the mortuary, must be taken to the community hall in Actonville. Dress me in the mortuary, the same clothes I am leaving, nothing else. Thereafter the prayers must be done by the priest. Raj must not carry the lamp. Only go around with the clay lamp. Grandchildren must not carry the sticks; just go around with the families. Than proceed to the crematorium, that [alone].

By the head side of the coffin two red and white bunches and two lamps and the Sivan statue. On the coffin, my saris and red and white garlands – three and three Tholsie garlands. No screaming and crying. After the funeral is gone ask the ladies to cook and feed the people at the hall. Nothing to be done on the seventh day. After one month must go to the temple and do the prayers. On the sixteenth day call the priest at home and do the prayers. Just three kinds of curries and a few baked things, and not forgetting the services for the funeral & ceremony. You all know that I like my service. Please after you all break your fast do not keep flesh and pray. Just break fast in your own homes. Please hope you all understood my words. At the moment I am sick and my handwriting is not good. After one year a small prayer do be done at home.

Hope you all follow my instructions.

Good bye & good luck

Mrs. Patchiamma Govender

## LIST OF SONGS AND MANTRAS

**ANTYESHTI PRARTHANA (ARYAN PRAYER)**

*Twamādi devah purusah puranāna – twamasya viśvasya  
param nidhānam. Vettā'si vedyam ca param ca  
dhāma, tvayā tatam visvam ananta rūpa*

Almighty God! Who has been since the beginning (of time); Who has been in Man since man was (created); Who is the Supreme Treasure of this vast universe. You are the knower, the knowledge and the final resting place for all beings. You are the infinite Presence in Whom all things are. By You is the universe pervaded. We seek courage, fortitude and shelter in You!

*Vāsānsi jīrnāni yathā vihāya, navāni grhnāti  
naro' parāni. Tathā śarīrāni vihāya jīrnānyanyāni  
sanyāti navāni dehī.*

Just as a person leaves an old garment and puts on one that is new, the soul Of a person leaves the body at death and takes on a new one. The soul Does not perish with the body. O Lord, may we take courage from this truth.

*Na jāyate mriyate vā kadācin, nāyam bhūtwā bhavitā  
vā na bhūyah. Ajo nityah śāśvato'yam purāno, na  
hanyate hanyamāne śarīre.*

The soul is never born and it never dies. It is in eternity, it is for ever and  
Ever. Never born and eternal, beyond times gone by or yet to come, the soul  
Does not die when the body dies. May we understand this truth, O God!

*Nainam chindanti śāstrāni nainam dahati pāva kah.*

*Na cāiman kledayāntyāntyāpo na śosayati mārutah*

Weapons cannot hurt the spirit and fire can never burn it. Waters cannot wet  
It and winds cannot dry it. May we find comfort in these truths, O God!

*Jātasya hi dhruvo mrtyurdhruvam janma mrtasya ca.*

*Tasmādāparihārye 'rthe na twam śocitumarhasi.*

All things born in truth must die, and out of death in truth comes life.  
Knowing this we must cease from sorrow. May we we have the strength to do  
So, Almighty God!

*Avyaktāḍini bhūtāni vyakta madhyāni bhārata.*

*Avyakta nidhanānyeva tatra kā pari devānā.*

All things are invisible before birth. They are invisible again after death. We  
See only the mortal being in the existing life span. O God! Grant us the  
wisdom to accept this truth.

*Om vedāhametam purusam mahāntam, āḍitya varnam*

*tamasah parastāt. Twameva viditwāti mrtyumeti,*

*nānyah panthā vidyate 'yanāya.*

The Supreme absolute God is full of splendour, like the sun untainted by darkness. There is no other path to salvation and eternal bliss than by getting to know God. May we be blessed with the wisdom to know Him.

*Om ya ātmadā baladā yasya viswa upāsate prasāsam  
yasya devāh yasya chāyā'mrtam mṛtyuh kasmai  
devāya havisā vidhema.*

In this hour of distress we need You, O God! Who alone can give us physical vigour and spiritual strength. All-blissful Divinity! Whose praises are sung by all enlightened persons. We entreat You to lessen our sorrow.

*Om sūryam caksur gacchatu vātamātmā, dyāñca  
gaccha pṛthivim ca dharmanā. Apo vā gaccha yadi  
tatra te, hitamosadhisu pratitisthā śarirai.*

O Supreme Lord! May all the components of this body merged into the five elements of this universe. May its vision be absorbed in the sun: its breath into the atmosphere; and its other parts into the appropriate elements. May the soul, according to the meritorious deeds performed here, dwell in a body worthy of such merit.

*Om śamagne paścat tapa śam purastāccham  
uttarāccham adharāt tapainam. Ekastredhā vihito  
jātavedah samyagenam dhehi sukrāmu loke.*

O God, Who is self-luminous, Who dispenses justice even-handedly, and

Who rewards everyone justly! May the soul of this body find peace in every direction – in the west, north, east south and in every other direction. O Omniscient and all-illuminating Lord, the Creator, Sustainer and Dissolver of this universe! May this soul be given a worthy abode.

*Om sangacchasva pitbhih samyamenestāpūrtena  
parame vyoman. Hitwāyāvadyam punarastamehi  
sangacchatām tanwā suvarcāh*

O God! May this soul by its austerity, enlightenment and good deeds attain a suitable state like its forebears. may it be free from all blemishes and once again inherit an enlightened body full of luster and return to this world to perform noble deeds.

*Om vāyuranilam amrtam athedam bhasmāntam  
śariram. Om krato smara krtam smara, krato smara  
krtam smara.*

Almighty God! This soul is immortal. It is not made of the five elements. The mortal body will be reduced to ashes and will be disposed of suitably. O all merciful Heavenly Father! May the soul obtain salvation in accordance with its past deeds.

*Om eka eva suhrd dharmo nidhanepyanuyāti yah.  
Śarirena saman naśam sarvamanyaaddhi gacchati.*

Almighty God! all material links perish with the death of the body. It is only one's good deeds – Dharma – that remains with the soul after one's death. May this Dharma never be allowed to perish.

Om asato mā sad gamaya. Tamaso mā jyotir  
gamaya. Mrtyor mā' mrtam gamaya.

O Supreme Spirit! Lead us from untruth to truth, from darkness to light and from death to  
immortal bliss.

### **Shanti Path (Hymn of peace)**

Prayer sung before the body is taken away.

*Om Dyauh śāntirantariksam śāntih prthivī śāntirapah  
śāntirosadhayah śāntih. Vanaspatayah śāntir  
viśwedeṽh śāntirbrahma śāntih sarvam śāntih  
śāntireṽ śāntih sā mā śāntiredhi*

*Om Śāntih Śāntih Śāntih*

May there be peace in the heavenly region and the atmosphere; may  
peace reign on the earth; let there be coolness in the water; may the  
medicinal herbs be healing; the plants be peace-giving; may there be  
harmony in the celestial objects and perfection in eternal knowledge;  
may everything in the universe be peaceful; let peace pervade  
everywhere. May that peace abide in me.

May there be peace, peace, peace!

## LIST OF SONGS SUNG AT SOUTH INDIAN FUNERALS AND CEREMONIES

***Mandhiram avadhu neeru***

*Mandhiram avadhu neeru*  
*Vanavar maladhu neeru*  
*Sundharam avadhu neeru*  
*Thudhikkap paduvadhu neeru*  
*Thandhiram avadhu neeru*  
*Samayathil ulladhu neeru*  
*Sendhuvar vay umaipangan*  
*Thiru alavayan thiruneera*

Trans: The Sacred ash of the Lord at *Thiru-Alavai* [Madurai] with the red-lipped *Uma*, on one side of his form stands as a mystic word; is seen on the bodies of the *Devas*; is beautiful; is praised by the high; is the substance of the *Agamas*; and is the emblem for the holy path.

*Atral adal vidai erum*  
*Aavayan thiru neetraip*  
*Potrip pugali nilavum*  
*Boosuran gnana sambandhan*  
*Thetrith thennan udal utra*  
*Theppini ayina theerach*  
*Satriya padalgal pathum*  
*Vallavar nallavar thame*

Trans: The devotees - who are capable of understanding the decad of songs composed by *Thirugnanasambandar*, a Brahmin dwelling in *Srikazhi*, for recovery of the *Pandyan* from affliction of heat – disease on his body, praising the potentialities of the sacred ash of the Lord of *Thiru Alavai* riding on the robust bull and extolling its worth for others to imbibe – are certain to be benefited with all good.

### *Masil veenaiyum*

*Masil veenaiyum malai madhiyamum*  
*Veesu thenralum veengila vanilum*  
*Moosu vandarai poygaiyum ponradha*  
*Eesan endhai inaiyadi neezhala*

Trans: The shelter of the feet of the Lord Father would be sweet as the musical tone of flawless *Veena*, [a musical instrument]; as the coolness of a moon rising in the evening; as the pleasant wind flowing from the south and as the cordial and intensive summer.

*Namachi vayava gnanamum kalviyum*  
*Namachi vayava naari vichaiyum*  
*Namachi vayava na navinru athuma*  
*Namachi vayava nanneri kattuma*

Trans: The mystic spell is the five letters, which depict knowledge, culture and arts I have learnt; the tongue practices it alone in worshipping and it shows the path of God.

*Viragil theeyinan palil padu neypol*  
*Maraiya ninrulan mamani chodhiyan*  
*Uravu kol nattu unarvu kayitrinal*  
*Muruga vangik kadaiya mun nirkuma*

Trans: The Lord stands unseen as fire in wood; as the ghee contained in milk; and as the splendor in a brightest gem. He would stand in front of us and bestow grace on us who, placing a stick of knowledge, churn with the rope of wisdom.

## ***Parodu vinnayp***

*Parodu vinnayp parandha embarana  
Patru nan matru ilan kanday  
Seerodu polivay sivapurath tharasa  
Thirupperum dhuraiyurai sivana  
Yarodu nogan arkkeduthu uraikkan  
Anda nee arulilai yanai  
Varkadal ulagil vazhgilan kanday  
Varuga enru arul puriyaya*

Trans: Oh! Transcendent One extending through both earth and heaven! Ever bright with glory! The King of *Sivaloka*! The Lord Siva presiding at *Thiruperunthurai*! I do not have a prop other than you. Having adopted me as your bond – slave, You have not conferred Your grace on me. To whom shall I appeal about this? To whom shall I intimate my grievances? I shall not live on this earth apart from you. Be therefore gracious to bid me to go to you.

*Pazhudhil thol pugazhal panga nee allal  
Patru nan matru ilan kanday  
Sezhumadhi anindhay sivaburath tharasa  
Thirupperum dhuraiyurai sivana  
Thozhuvano pirarai thudhippano enakkor  
Thunai ena ninaivano sollay  
Mazha vidaiyana vazhgilan kanday  
Varuga enru arul puriyaya*

Trans: Oh! Partner of *Umadevi*, spotless and old renowned! The wearer of crescent moon on the braided hair! The King of *Sivaloka*! The Lord Siva presiding in the shrine at *Thiruperunthurai*! The possessor of the young bull! I have no support other than you. I shall not therefore bow down to others; praise them; and consider them as my aid. Speak Thou. I shall not pull on my life in this world seceding from you even for a moment, Be therefore gracious and bid me to go to you.

## ***Namachivaya vaazhga***

*Namachivaya vaazhga! Nadhan thal vazhga!  
Imaipozhudhum ennenjil neengadhan thalvazhga!  
Kogazhi yanda gurumani than thal vazhga!  
Agama magi ninru annippan thal vazhga!  
Agan anagan iraivan adi vazhga!*

Trans: Long live “*Na Ma Si Va Ya*” the mystic five letters! Long live the Feet of the Lord! Long live the Feet of Him who does not leave my mind even for a little time! Long live the Feet of the gem-like Preceptor of *Gokazhi*! Long live the Feet of Him who tastes sweet, standing as the One expounded by the Agamas! Long live the Feet of Him who is the One, the Many and the Lord.

*Eesan adipotri! Endhi adi potri!  
Dhasan adi potri! Sivan savadi potri!  
Nayatha ninra nimalan adi potri!  
Mayap priapparukkum mannan adi potri!  
Seerar perundhurai nam dhavan adi potri!  
Aradha inbam arulu malai potri!*

Trans: Hail Foot of Lord! Hail Foot of my Heavenly Father! Hail Foot of the Famous one! Hail Foot of the Lustrous One! Hail roseate Feet of Siva! Hail Foot of Flawless One who stood in love! Hail Foot of the king who severs illusive birth! Hail Foot of our Lord of glorious *Perunthurai*! Hail Foot of the Mountain [Lord] that affords bliss that wane not.

## ***Vaazhvaavadhu Maayam***

*Vaazhvaavadhu maayam idhu mannaavadhu thinnam  
Paazh povadhu pirravik kadal pasinoy seydhā parridhaan  
thaazhaadhu arram seymin thadam kannnaan malaronum  
keezhmel urra nindraan thiruk kedhaaram eneere.*

Life is illusive; this body will become earth indeed. You should get rid of the ocean of birth. After all the body has a bag which gives forth appetite – a disease indeed. Do virtuous deeds at once. The big-eyed *Thirumaal* and Brahma born in the flower dug deep

and flew up in the sky to find out the Feet and Head of the Lord.

The Lord's abode is *Tirukkeddaaram*; chant it.

*Naavin misaiaraiyan nodu thamizh gnaana sambandhan*

*Yaaver sivan adiyargalluku adiyaan adiththonndan*

*Dhevan thirukedhaaraththai uran seyda*

*Paavin thamizh vallaar para logaththu iruppaare.*

*Thirunaavukkarasar* and *Thirugnaana Sambandhar* are the Devotees of Siva. With them, whosoever be the devotees, he is the bondsmen of all of them. He is *uran (Thiru Aaruran) Sundaran*. He has sung sweet Tamil verses on *Thirukedaaram*. Those who are well versed in them will be seated in Heaven.

### ***Puvaar malarkonndu***

Puvaar malarkonndu adiyaar thozuvaar pugazhvaar vannorgall

Muvaar purangall eriththa andru muvarkku arull seydaar

Thumaa mazhai nindru adhira veruvith thorruvin nirrai odum

Aamaam pinnai vandhu annaiyum saaral annaamalaiyaare.

The devotees worship the Lord with a bunch of flowers.  
The celestials adore Him. On burning the three fortresses of the foes, the Lord bestowed grace on those three. the pure clouds shower rain with thunder and the hinds fearing run towards the slope of Thiru Annamalai.

*Al aadu aravam iyangum saaral Annaamalaiyaarai*

*Nallaar paravap paduvaan kaazhi Gnaana Sambandan*

*Sollaal malindha paadal aana paththum ivai katru*

*vallaar ellaam vaanor vannanga manni vaazhvaare.*

At the slopes of *Annamalai* the snakes dance in the nights.  
*Gnanasambandar*, adored the virtuous song on the lord of *Thiru Annamalai*. Those who are well versed in those ten verses will be seated in Heaven worshipped by the celestials.

### ***Katravargall Unnum***

*Katravargall unnum kaniye potri  
kazhal adaindhaarsellum gadhiye potri  
Atravargatku aaramudham aanaay potri  
allal arruththu adiyneai aannahaay potri  
Matroruvar oppillaa maindhaa potri  
Vaanavargall potrum marundhe potri  
Setravardham puram eriththa sivane potri  
thirumulat taanane potri potri.*

Oh fruit tasted by the wise, Hail!

Oh beautitude attained by those who worship Your feet Hail!

Oh Ambrosia obtainable by those who have renounced the World, Hail!

Oh Lord who served (the fruits of) good and evil deeds and blessed me, Hail!

Oh strong One without an equal, Hail!

Oh Siva who burnt the fortresses of the inimical Hail!

Oh Lord of the Sanctum Sanctorum at *Thiru Arur*, Hail! Hail!

### ***Mathithavarku Mathiyaatharku***

*Mathithavarku mathiyaatharku pathiyai ninra Sivameh  
Vithiyaal petra vudalaal nontha jeevam thuyar theepai  
Pathiyeh nee yal-laa vehrohr theyva naanini kaangilehn  
Mathiyoh dunnay pathiyeh adaynthu adiyehnaiyaandarulleh*

Oh! Siva, You stand as the Supreme Being

To those who revere You and to those who don't revere You

Through our Karmic deeds we have taken this perishable body

You will destroy the affliction of the Soul

Besides You, there's none so Supreme

I am yet to see another Supreme Power

## ***Muthineri ariyadha***

*Muthineri ariyadha mookkkarodu muyalvanai*  
*Pathineri arivithup pazhavinaigal parumvannam*  
*Sithamalam aruvithu chivamakki enaiyanda*  
*Athan enakku aruliyavaru arperuvar achove*

Trans: Oh! Wonder! My Lord has taken, into his service, me, who does not know which is the road to salvation and thus bound down to ruin by performing evil deeds; has installed in me the means of pious love; has released me from the *Anavamala* after putting to an end all fruits of my old deeds; and has transformed me as his own self. Who else can have kind of benediction bestowed on me?

*Neriyalla neridhannai neriyaga ninaivanai*  
*Sirunerigal sarama thiruvavula sarumvannam*  
*Kuriyonrum illadha koothanthan koothai enakku*  
*Ariyum vannam aruliyavaru arperuvar achova*

Trans: Oh! Wonder! The Lord Dancer, who has neither form, nor name, nor other things, as prevented from treading in the meaner ways, deeming them to be sacred and thus damned, and has side-tracked me to attain His Sacred Bliss. He has further bestowed on me grace to experience distinctly all ways and means of how devotees are taken into His fold. Who else can have this kind of benediction bestowed on me?

*Semmainalam ariyadha sidhadarodum thirivanai*  
*Mummainalam aruithu mudhalaya mudhalvanthal*  
*Nammaiyumor porulakki naysivigai atruvitha*  
*Ammal enakku aruliyavaru arperuvar achova*

Trans: Oh! Wonder! The Lord Siva, who is the Primal God over others and is like a great Mother, bestowed grace on me, corrupted in association with those who are not enlightened with the good of the Sacred Bliss, released me from the threefold innate impurities, and transformed me as a worthy bond-slave like a dog heightened by being placed in a palanquin.

## IsiZulu Clan Songs

This song is sung by the Amabutho, before going to battle.

The Leader: *okaNdaba angalidl'izwe lonke izinkomo zamadoda.*

Chorus: *Hhiya! Ehh! Hhiya! Eh! Kheth'amagwala*

The Leader: *Hho! Ehh*

Chorus: *Hhiya eh hhiya eh! Khethamagwala.*

### Translation

The Leader: His Majesty (The Son of Ndaba) can conquer their land and take all their cattle.

Chorus: Hhiya! Ehh! Hhiya! Eh! Select the cowards.

The Leader: Hho! Ehh

Chorus: Hhiya! Ehh! Hhiya! Eh! Select the cowards.

## SONG 2

This song is sung by members of the Buthelezi Clan in Mahlabathini, during family events.

The Leader: *Sesal'emaweni eh he eyawoShenge*

Chorus: *Naniba – ntu nxa sesal'emnyango*

The Leader: *Sesal'emnyango*

Chorus: *Hhiya eh anazi ukuthi thina sathol'emandulo*

The Leader: *Sesasal'emandulo*

Chorus: *Nani Bantu sesal'emnyango*

### Translation

The Leader: The Shenges were left in the valleys.

Chorus: You are human if we were left by the door

The Leader: We were left by the door

Chorus: Ei you don't know that we were found in ages.

The Leader: We were left in ages.

Chorus: You are human we were left by the door

### SONG 3

This song, in praise of the King, is sung at a traditional ceremony hosted during family events.

The Leader: *Zidl'izwe lonke okaNdaba ngakho-ke uzithulele bayamqal'okaNdaba.*

Chorus: *Hho! Hho! Hho!*

The Leader: *wona ngokuzithulela*

Chorus: *Hho! Hho! Hho!*

The Leader: *usinik'abafo sidedele siminye*

*Bam'qala okaNdaba engaqali muntu.*

*Eya ehh!*

*Hho! Hho!*

*Wazidl'izwelonke okaNdaba*

Chorus: *Hho! Hho! Hho!*

#### **Translation**

The Leader: His Majesty have conquered all the land and provoked him.

Chorus: Hho! Hho! Hho!

The Leader: They exploit his generosity.

Chorus: Hho! Hho! Hho!

The Leader: He is giving us our enemies let's finish them.

They provoke His Majesty whilst he does not provoke anybody. Ei ehh! Hho!  
Hho! He conquered all the land His Majesty or the Son of Ndaba.

Chorus: Hho! Hho! Hho!

FUNERALS *Sunday 3.00pm*



**MOODLEY  
MOGAMBRY  
(MOGIE)**

Funeral Service of late Mogambry (Mogie) will place on (Monday - 2007). Beloved and of Daisy. Loving of Poooven, Kumand Desigan, Father of Vani and Anjani, d-father of Kasmee-d Mayur. Brother of Moodley brothers sisters. His body will state at the Verulam ara Centre from 1:30 until 4:00 pm thereafter proceeding to Veru- am. Crematorium. Sady missed by ving family, friends a host of relatives.

14/01/2007 *Sunday 11.00am*



**MURUGAN  
(MOODLEY)**

The Funeral Service of Minatohi Murugan (Ammal) beloved mother of Sags (Cenadal) George (Unique Exhaust) and Krish, mother in-law of Kogis and Navie, grand-mother of Vivan and ravin, Ugashnie, Sylvester and Panache, sister of Peter, Aroo, Sapadiven, Paru and Anard and the late Sobagrum and Manormanie, sisters-in-law, nieces and nephews, will take place at Montford Community Hall on 15 Jan, 2007 at 11h00. The body will lie in state at the residence, 24 Rd 710 Montford, Chatsworth from 10h00 - 11h00 thereafter proceeding to the Mobeeni Heights Crema- torium from 1 - 2pm Tel: 4048257.

*150613207*

**ZAMA  
MANTOMBI  
MAVIS (MRS)**  
19.06.1959 - 25.11.2007  
Uzofihlwa Kwa-Dweshu-  
la (Port Shepstone) nge-  
sonto zing 2.12.2007  
emva kwenkonzo ezoqa-  
la ngo 9 ekuseni ekhaya.

*150613207*

**ZAMASWAZI  
SMANGELE  
SHABALALA**  
12.12.1980 - 27.11.2007  
Inkonzo yomngcwabo iz-  
okuba seLamontville,  
UCCSA ngo 10 am ngo  
Mgqibelo 01/12/2007.  
Uzofihlwa eStellawood  
cemetery. Imining-  
wane: 072 281 6859  
/076 175 6064

*150613207*

**LATCHIGADU**  
5 11th Day Memorial  
vice of the late Kenny,  
nniah. Latchigadu,  
es place this  
NDAY, February 19 at  
Shri Vishnu Temple  
ll in Havanside at 5pm.  
nnny leaves behind an  
ended family, his  
ePusphe, Varikumari  
nniah, and children  
dric, Neville, Emil-  
iri, Popay and Yvonne.  
issa accept this as a  
ersonal invitation.

*Sunday 11.00am*

**AUM SAI RAM**

**RADHA HERALAL  
BEEKHA**  
In loving memory of my  
darling Murn who was  
called to rest on the 18/  
01/2002. 5 years have  
gone but it seems like  
only yesterday that you  
left us, Mum. Even in  
death you have not for-  
saken us for I feel your  
spirit guiding and pro-  
tecting us. I am so proud  
to be your youngest  
daughter and to carry on  
your legacy.

*150613207*

**AMMANA  
NAIDOO**  
The Yearly Memorial  
Service of our dearest  
mother, wife of the late  
Freddie Naidoo (former-  
ly of Stella Hill) will take  
place on 11th Feb at the  
Arens Park Regional Hall  
at 11am.  
Please accept this as a  
personal invitation from  
the Naidoo Family.  
Sady missed by your  
sons, daughters, son-in-  
law, daughters-in-law,  
grandchildren, great  
grandchildren, brother,  
family and friends.  
We will always love &  
treasure you in our  
hearts. Thanks for being  
a wonderful mother.

*150613207*

**MR P.G.  
GOVENDER  
(GANAS)**  
The 16th Day Memorial  
Service of the late Ganas  
Govender will be held:  
Venue: Isipingo Shree  
Sobramoniar Temple,  
21 Joorna Road, Isipingo  
Rail.  
Date: 14 January 2007  
Time: 15h00 to 16h00  
Supper will be served  
from 16h30. Family and  
friends are requested to  
accept this as a personal  
invitation. We would like  
to thank family and  
friends for the loving  
support and assistance in  
our time of bereavement.  
The Govender family

**MEMORIAL SERVICES**  
*lost 21/02/2007*

**AUM NAMA  
SIVAYA**  
**KOSLAN (KOSIE)  
NAIDOO**  
The 12th Day Memorial  
Service of the late Koslan  
Naidoo will be held on  
23/02/07 continued on  
the 24/02/07 at 24 Baton-  
more Crescent, Sten-  
more, Phoenix com-  
mencing at 19h00.  
The Naidoo family ex-  
tends their heartfelt  
thanks to family and  
friends for their support  
during their time of be-  
ravement.  
Supper will be served at  
17h00. Please accept this  
as a personal invitation.  
Sady missed by parents  
Mr & Mrs K M Naidoo  
brothers Kevin, Suga-  
n and sister Savuri, rela-  
tives and friends.  
Inserted by the Naidoo  
Family.

*lost 12/01/07*

**RAMDEV GANPATH**  
05/12/31 - 19/03/06  
THE YEARLY MEMORIAL SERVICE OF THE LATE MR RAMDEV  
GANPATH, WILL BE HELD ON SUNDAY, 4 MARCH 2007 AT  
PESCO HALL, SUNFORD DRIVE, PHOENIX, AT 10h00. CONTACT



The Chairperson/ Religious Head

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Dear Sir/Madam

**PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH: PhD IN isiZULU PROGRAMME**

The study examines the similarities between Zulu and Hindu rituals and customs in Kwa-Zulu Natal, as a nation-building exercise.

My topic is:

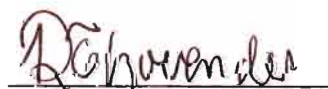
*“A Comparative Ethnography of rituals and worship among Hindus and Zulus in South Africa (with special reference to death rituals and ancestor veneration).”*

I have registered the above topic with the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal. In order to research the above topic, I need to conduct recorded interviews with individuals from religious and cultural organizations in various parts of Kwa-Zulu Natal. Permission is hereby sought to conduct an oral interview with representatives from your organization. In support of my application I undertake the following:

- That information will be obtained through recorded (audio and visual) means.
- That all information gathered will be strictly for the purpose of this study and will remain confidential.
- The recordings will not interfere with the religious or cultural programmes of your institution.
- No individual will be forced to participate in my study.
- Access to the individuals to be used in the recordings will be negotiated with the Head of your organization.
- The normal religious and cultural programmes of the organizations will not be disrupted.
- A copy of the findings will be lodged with your organization on completion of the study.
- All recordings will be stored for reference purposes and will not be made available to anyone.

I look forward to working with the cultural and religious leaders of your organization. Their help will be duly acknowledged.

Yours faithfully

  
 R T Govender

Postal Address:

Telephone:

Facsimile:

Email:

Website: [www.ukzn.ac](http://www.ukzn.ac)

Learning Campuses:

 Edgewood

 Howard College

 Medical School

 Pietermaritzburg



Faculty of Humanities  
School of Languages – Department of IsiZulu

## Consent Form

**Title of research project:**

A Comparative Ethnography of Rituals and Worship among Hindus and Zulus in South Africa.  
(With special reference to death rituals and ancestor veneration)

**Name of researcher:** Rajendran T Govender

**Address:** 1 Gumtree Road, Malvern 4093, Kwa-Zulu Natal, South Africa

**Telephone:** 031 4642710 (h) 083 3078979 (mobile)

**Email:** rajeng@telkomsa.net

**Name of participant:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Nature of the research:**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Participant's involvement:**

*What's involved?* \_\_\_\_\_

*Risks:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Benefits:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Costs:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Payment:* \_\_\_\_\_

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**TERMS OF AGREEMENT**

- I agree to participate in this research project.
- I have read this consent form and the information it contains and had the opportunity to ask questions about them.
- I agree to my responses being used for education and research on condition my privacy is respected, subject to the following:
  - I understand that my personal details may be included in the research / will be used in aggregate form only, so that I will not be personally identifiable  
*(delete as applicable.)*
- I understand that I am under no obligation to take part in this project.
- I understand I have the right to withdraw from this project at any stage.

Name of Participant / Guardian: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant / Guardian (if under 18): \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_