Requiems and Pyres: a morbid cross-cultural comparison

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Anthropology attempts to make other groups intelligible to a secular, humanistic academic audience. To a person without faith, who does not accept religious dogma, the rituals of other communities can seem arbitrary and without significance. Investigating the anthropology of religion, based on the perspective of Clifford Geertz (1973), I have found a language and body of literature that makes the rituals I've witnessed in India and Brazil intelligible. I will argue that ritual creates a cosmic framework for Catholic and Hindu communities, which corresponds to their personal experience. Religion gives meaning to people's bodies, impulses, and social roles by incorporating individual experience into eternal time. I believe that the sacrifices individuals' make for communal stability serves a similar function to sacrifices for Gods. Pollution or sin can be understood as estranging the individual from the social group. The separation between the physical world and the social world is most evident when an individual dies. Mortuary customs are the strongest case of humans trying to impose their agency on the cosmos. Through the investigation of mortuary customs the symbolic worlds of religion become intelligible to a secular humanist.

I will argue for a correlation between the cosmic time and the individual's conception of their own lifespan. I agree with Emile Durkhem and Victor Turner that "God is the social', and argue that God or the Brahman is the symbolization of social authority. These religious orders esteem communal peace and stability through rituals, which communicate the eternal qualities of societal authority. While sacrifices are a type of communing, sin and pollution are individuating. The method by which society imparts its eternal qualities is by controlling the way community members experience their bodies and correlating it to cosmology. Aligning these aspects of human life and cosmic life is

a motivation for ritual. Symbols give people a meaning in their own singular temporary experience. In the case of Catholics, Hindus, and many if not most other religions, sacrifice is the primary tool of humans to gain favor in eternal and social judgment.

When a death occurs the symbols many societies have historically used to communicate meaning to a member are crystallized. Death is a crisis because the physical world has permanently altered the social fabric. The reaction of a group towards death communicates the value of membership in society. Exploration into the methods for social communication of the value of life, flesh, lifespan, relationships, and memory in other societies can make their customs and worldview intelligible, while allowing us to understand how people have traditionally managed death.

Through ritual, society guides people through the stages of their lives while incorporating them into a cosmic structure. Cosmological and personal experience is aligned during funerary rituals. Importantly, I believe that conceptions about the end of time are convincingly imparted to members in a community during funeral rituals, as is the case of Hinduism and Catholicism. Hindu Brahmans are usually aware of the correspondence of mortuary customs paralleling end of time predictions. Catholics too have a correlation, although it has not been widely recognized or studied. Rather than simply being articles of faith, the cosmology of both Hinduism and Catholicism corresponds and shapes how community members view their lives, bodies, and the value of membership in society. Death in particular is the point in which the social being is thought to separate from the physical being, making death ideal for an investigation into how communities understand the difference between the physical and metaphysical.

Victor Turner, in “The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage” (Turner 1974), develops the idea of ‘liminal’ space: a transitional stage in social life that strips a person of their previous social role and reincorporates them into society in a new role. In liminal space, the laws of society are suspended, and members of society are guided and recognized through the liminal period with ritual, such as the duration of funerary customs. Turner also develops the idea that society mediates the relationship between people’s perceptions of their body and cosmic structure. Societal formation of ideas and beliefs fundamentally condition how people think of their own bodies and selves, in ways congruent with how they conceive of the cosmos. Turner’s theory is particularly applicable to mortuary customs. Between the point of death and the final ritual, the family and community are somewhat estranged from the normal functioning of society. During this liminal period, the dead individual’s social role is transformed into that of an ancestor, the family is reincorporated into the community, and the continuance and security of society is firmly established.

Funerary practices are the only liminal passage where the individual being transitioned is not present; the ritual is entirely for the emotional benefit of the surviving group. Reconciliation of death as expressed in mortuary customs readjusts social relationships to accommodate physical loss. By reconstituting the relationship of the dead and affected members of society, ritual acts to reinforce the social structure. Furthermore, the way people conceive of the afterlife governs heavily their belief in moral responsibility and penalties of transgression. The relationship between the social image and body is split by death; thereby death is the most severe marker between the physical and social within the individual.

Death is a breaking point, which presents a crisis for living society. While it is difficult to prove the significant of death to all societies, it is clear that death is the major turning point in Hindu and Catholic communities. Merh and Babb, in their ethnographies on North Indian Hinduism, agree that "death, the great crossing over, [is] the ultimate turning point" (Merh 1996; 54) and "that the individual undergoes a truly radical change of status, from one mode of existence to another" (Babb 1975; 98). In the Judeo-Christian traditions, death is the point when the individual is divided. The will, which mediates between worldly desires and spiritual concerns, ends with the death of the individual. Free will ends with death because a person is " split into two parts: a body that experienced pleasure or pain and an immortal soul that was released by death" (Aries 1981; 606). Mortuary customs are the means by which "all try to reestablish the order that was sharply interrupted by death" (Catedra 1992; 238), and thereby a major event in establishment of social control.

I have chosen to use descriptions of burial from Jonathan Parry's ethnography Death in Bananas (1994) and Maria Catedra's ethnography This World, Other World (1992), and will primarily draw on their ethnographic research. Parry and Catedra agree that transition through ritual allows for the creation of ancestors. In the minds of survivors, this period provides time for them to adjust their relationship with the individual dead. A time interval eases mourning by moving the community through stages of grief and granting closure. During this process, society is enforced and survivors internalize cosmic time. In the Catholic and Hindu case studies addressed, conceptions of the end of time are symbolized in mortuary ritual.

It is important to note that sacrifice is a holy act and godly virtue in Hinduism and Catholicism. Sacrificing impulses in favor of one's social role is highly esteemed in both religions. In Hinduism, one of the four goals of human existence is *dharma*, which is moral and religious duty. In this case, "morality is represented by social codes demanding external conformity" and "teaches that one should progress from the 'must-consciousness' to the 'ought-consciousness' "(Crawford 1986; 144). Dharma is most widely understood as the fulfillment of social obligation. The caste system, engendered roles, and parental relations are all governed by dharma. Catholicism also values social sacrifices. While motherhood and other specific roles are held in high regard, in the Catholic case, humbling one's self to serve the community is the most important sacrifice. During the Last Supper, Jesus humbles himself to his disciples even through they are less spiritually pure. Serving orphans, widows and the poor is tantamount to serving Jesus in Catholicism. The communal focus on serving those who are less socially advantaged is similar to Jesus serving those who are less spiritually advantaged. In both Hinduism and Catholicism, serving others through self-sacrificial acts is commensurate with moral and religious value.

Catholic and Hindu communities both participate in ritualized sacrifice for God, or Gods, but they fundamentally differ because Hindu Gods are at slightly lesser a level in cosmic construction then God is deemed in the Judeo-Christian tradition. The Catholics perform rituals in Mass, which include giving money to the church and the consumption of bread and wine. For Catholics, this process is a type of atonement. However, Hindu Gods do not directly intervene in human affairs unless called upon. Neither Vishnu nor any other judge human lives. There is a process of judgment, but it

works on its own through *karma*. The Gods do not control karma, although prayers and ritual can improve karma by 'burning' the mind so one can see through *maya*, or illusion of the physical. Nevertheless, the Gods often carry out necessary functions for people; for instance Mrtyu is the god of death, but only carries out the function of karma and has no agency over the duration of human life. The Gods have powers within the cosmic illusion, and so people make sacrifices for them to gain favor. However, the Gods themselves are a product of maya. The only constant is the Brahman; karma is the measure of unity between self and the Brahman. In Hinduism, the ultimate goal of the individual is to unite with Brahman. *Moksha* is the soul's unification with the Brahman and break from the cycles of birth. Catholic devotions to patron Saints, similar to the individual worship of Gods in Hinduism, intercede with God.

The following section describes the cosmological structures in Hinduism and Catholicism. These are general descriptions, with some reference to religious texts. I have personally interviewed Catholic and Hindu believers on their interpretation of cosmic creation and destruction. Through these texts and dialogues I have synthesized a general overview of both religious traditions. There is a wide range of theology concerning cosmology, but I have included only the elements common to many interpretations. The texts cited are English translations of the Catholic Bible and two sections of the Vedas. The Catholic Bible cited is the Douay-Rheims Bible; an English translation of the Latin Vulgate complied by Saint Jerome. The Catholic Church used the Latin Vulgate for over a thousand years and during Catholicism most influential period. The English translation of the Hindu RigVeda and Purana, the two scriptures dealing with cosmic time, are by

Swami Madhavananda. His composition and translation is based on the most widely regarded philosophical tradition in Hinduism, the Vivarana School.

According to Catholic belief, the origin of man begins in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve are created by God, in his image, and favored over the rest of creation. The couple is completely connected with God in their initial phase. They live peacefully, but God commanded that from "the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat. For in what day soever thou shall eat from it shall die the death" (Genesis 2:17). However, Satan beguiles Eve, telling her that the couple will not die if they eat from the tree of good and evil. The couple is fooled, and relinquishes their relationship with God. The couple are then cast out of paradise, and become subject to death, sin, and suffering. The couple's culpability translates to their decedents: all people born on Earth.

The doctrine of original sin dictates that from conception a person is distanced from the grace of God. An explanation of this given by Aries is that "In the beginning there was only one evil that had various aspects: suffering, sin, and death. Christianity explained all of these aspects at once by the doctrine of original sin…the recognition of an evil inseparable from man" (Aries 1996; 605). Their doctrine of original sin is an explanation for the justice of human death, incurred through their own folly. When a person is born they too are necessarily under the burden of original sin as evidenced by their inevitable death.

The first major change in the relationship with God and man after the fall from grace also takes place in the Book of Genesis, with Abraham. God tells Abraham that they will have an agreement between them: a covenant. God sets out commands and

Abraham follows them. God establishes a covenant with the decedents of Abraham's child Isaac. This group of people is the Jews. Before the birth of Christ, the Jews lived under the law set out by God. Through sacrifice people mediated their relationship with God. However, in Catholic interpretation no one was able to enter Heaven before Christ founded the Kingdom of Heaven.

With the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ the relationship between people and God changed permanently. The crucifixion took place at only one moment in time, indicating that each moment on Earth has a distinct before and after; the Catholic interpretation of time is linear. The gift of Jesus from God was an act of sacrifice committed out of love. Catholics believe that the crucifixion of Jesus is the pivotal sacrifice in the history of the world. Through Jesus' willing sacrifice he is transformed into Christ, which refers to his capacity to redeem. Christ redeems people of their sins in the eyes of God directly after death, if only these individuals have faith in Christ in life. "For the wages of sin is death. But the grace of God, life everlasting, in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). Christ's sacrifice opened the possibly for the reunion of God and people's souls.

In Catholic belief the death of Christ made it possible for people to reside in Heaven. Mass is a reflection of Christ's sacrifice. Through the Catholic Church, one can receive the necessary sacraments for redemption. Sacraments are rituals conducted during all major customary liminal periods, such as birth, coming of age, marriage, and death for people of Catholic faith. Mass is a sacrament as well, and active believers usually attend Church on Sunday to receive communion during the Eucharist. The Eucharist is believed

to transubstantiate bread and wine into the blood and body of Christ. Believers in the Catholic faith take the sacrifice of Jesus inside their bodies in a materialized ritual.

God's unmerited love towards people, through the gift of Jesus' presence in the physical world, changed the possibility of salvation for Catholics. The message brought by Jesus is that God is love. Love they neighbor, Jesus, virtue, but lest love should become love of self, like pride or vanity, Jesus' lesson is that love requires sacrifice and is unselfish. Jesus loves humanity, evidenced by his taking the place of the sacrificial lamb during the Jewish Passover holiday. Passover commemorates God's patronage of the Jewish people through a covenant by which they received the Ten Commandments. Jesus is called the Lamb of God because his blood redeems all of humanity.

The Last Judgment is considered the end of earthly time. It is the occasion when Christ will come to Earth again and destroy all evil. The event is elaborated in the third Book of John, which carries the title "The Apocalypse" in the Latin Vulgate. There is some debate over the authorship of the text; however, dominant Church authorities have sanctified the text as written by the Apostle John. In the Latin Vulgate, there are numerous references to the Apocalypse even in the Old Testament, such as: "For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and in the last day I shall rise out of the earth. And I shall be clothed again with my skin, and in my flesh I shall see my God. Whom I myself shall see, and my eyes shall behold, and not another: this my hope is laid up in my bosom" (Job 19 25-27).

The emphasis on the physical resurrection of the dead in the Catholic Church has ebbed and waned in popularity throughout the ages. St. Paul is a fervent supporter of the notion (1 Letters To the Corinthians 15:12), although there is less clear textual support

within the four main gospels describing Jesus' living teachings (Mark, Luke, Matthew, the first two books of John). The belief is simply: the dead will rise to life during the Last Judgment. During this period everyone will be judged according to his or her merits in life, and those who still cannot receive the grace of God will be cast into a pool of fire. The language used is immensely rich in negative imagery, such as "And hell and death were cast into the pool of fire. This is the second death" (The Apocalypse 20:14). The notion of death itself 'dying' or being cast into oblivion carries into eternity the separation of people from God described in Genesis.

For Catholics, the Last Judgment is not exclusively God's judgment, because each person has already been judged upon death. Instead, all the souls in Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory will be placed back in their bodies and all people who have ever lived will know their sins. Because God has already judged each person at death, the Last Judgment is more specifically referring to the judgment of society as a whole. God's initial decision is final, but the end of time represents the prospect of the whole of humanity knowing one's ill deeds. Hence, the significance of the Last Judgment has to do more with the judgment of society and history then with the judgment of individual souls.

Hindu cosmology and sense of time is more cyclical then Catholic cosmology. There is a critical separation of time with the differentiation between Brahma and Brahman. The Brahman exists outside of time and is called "the One without a second" (Madhavananda 1942;136). There are many stories dealing with the beginning of time, but popular belief in Northern India stresses the importance of Vishnu. Vishnu is lying on

a bed of cobras. A lotus flower grows from Vishnu's navel on which Brahma is resting. The movement of time on our level depends on Brahma's life cycle. Brahma lives for one hundred of his years. At the beginning of each day Brahma creates the universe and at the end of each day the universe is absorbed into him. Each day of Brahma is one Kelpa, and there are fourteen Maunus within a Kelpa, seventy-one Chatur-Yugas in a Manu, and four Yugapadas in a Manu. A Manu is created in every new world and begins humanity. We are currently in Kali Yug, the final Yupapada of this cycle. Each Yupapadas gets progressively less ideal as humanity incurs differentiation. The character named Manu from this cycle began current humanity and is known as the Law Giver. Manu gave ten universal duties to mankind in the *Sadharana-dharmas*. The end of this age will ensue in two phases. Shiva as Rudra will dance over the Earth creating a great fire. Then Vishnu as Narayana will bring a tremendous flood. Shiva is the God most worshiped in the south of India; he is the Destroyer. Shiva is also the male god of fertility, as rebirth is considered a necessary consequence of destruction.

The texts on the exact action of creation differ. However the *RigVeda* describes a war between the Gods and the Demons. The Gods presented Vishnu as a sacrifice to the Demons. Vishnu meditated for an extraordinary long time standing on one leg, with his eyes closed and hands in the air. The Demon king was impressed by Vishnu and granted to the Gods all the territory Vishnu could claim in three steps. Vishnu then expanded and created the worlds. The three steps of Vishnu are the three worlds: the Earth, the Heavens (where Gods live), and the Kingdom of the Fathers (which became Yama's Kingdom after Yama was the first being to die). The land of the dead is Yamraj's Kingdom, located in the south. This Kingdom is where individual human souls go after death. Created by

Vishnu during his sacrifice: “The highest step of Vishnu is represented as his abode and is also connected with the ideas concerning the life after death.” (Merh 1996; 41). Interpretations vary concerning Vishnu’s primary importance in creation, instead crediting Indra. However, Vishnu is the primary figure of mediation between the Gods and people for North Indians. Vishnu takes the form of many avatars, which assist and teach humanity in times of need. An avatar of primary importance is Rama, when Vishnu is incarnated as a human.

The rebirth of the individual, as with the cycles of cosmic rebirth, directly depends on the previous form of maya. Differentiation from the Brahman is considered degradation; pollution is differentiation between the individual and the Brahman. The entire cycle of rebirth in the cosmos is considered the result of differentiation. The Brahman is the unity of all things. The Brahman is without attribute, which is not even quite correct, because the term itself is an attribute. The Brahman is total unity, and those who reach moksha are completely united with the Brahman.

The differentiation between the Brahman and maya occurred through no human folly, but human entrapment in this cosmic cycle is considered part of their own impropriety. People mistakenly identify themselves as bodies and individuals, which prevents them from seeing the lack of divine differentiation.

Furthermore, people’s entrapment is considered a reflection of their pollution from a previous life. Before birth, in Hindu belief, the fetus undergoes a Purgatory-like state in uterus. The fetus is surrounded by pollution in tight confines, which is considered torture. During this time the soul is tormented by the evil deeds of the past life. Before birth the person, after having endured many months of torment, forgets the events of the

past life. The person moves into the world with no memory of previous events. However, their social position, family, personal fate, marriage, and time of death are already determined by the ill deeds of the previous life. Should a person be without previous pollution they would have not been born.

Further evidence of innate pollution is that very few people live to the proper lifespan in this time period. In the Hindu conception of pollution, the world is increasingly degrading. With this degradation people live for significantly shorter periods of time. In this age people may live to only 125 years, where as in previous ages life spans were many thousands of years. This points to a close relationship between the Catholic notion of original sin, and the Hindu notion that people are already born with pollution, which causes the death and rebirth of the individual.

Catholic and Hindu cosmology both have a strong concern over how death entered into the world, what the death of an individual implies, and the inevitable end of death through cosmic destruction. Separation from God, or the Brahman, is considered the primary reason for death and suffering. In Hinduism, life on earth is not exclusively understood as a punishment like Catholicism, but their similarities are striking. In the Catholic and Hindu view, the world is on a downward spiral as people accumulate sin and pollution, which brings a heightening of suffering and death until the end of this world. In Hinduism, which is closely aligned with Buddhism, there is a belief that we are all fellow sufferers. In the Catholic view suffering is also the primary element in human experience.

Furthermore, in both Hinduism and Catholicism there is a distant entity which controls cosmic matters, and also intermediary characters who help people alleviate

suffering through communication with higher powers. The central character of worship in both Hinduism and Catholicism serves as the intermediary between God, or the world of Gods. In Christian belief, Jesus is the medium between people and God. Having been human himself, he acts as a conductor of God's grace. In North Indian Hinduism Vishnu serves a similar function as Jesus, coming to the Earth in times of need, sometimes as a human being. Vishnu is considered an accessible God and two of Vishnu's avatars are human, Buddha and Rama. Many of the lesser gods associated with him like Guruda and Hanuman are part animal because they have a closer tie to the physical world. In Hinduism and Catholicism, Vishnu and Christ act in ways favorable to humans. Although there are large differences between Jesus and Vishnu, because Jesus is considered on par with God, they are both the method by which the cosmic and divine intervenes in human affairs. The act of a God moving among the people to their benefit is considered a willing self-sacrifice in both Hinduism and Catholicism.

The sacrifices of Christ in Catholicism and the sacrifices of Vishnu in Hinduism both create a "kingdom' for the dead. The sacrifices of Christ on the Cross, created the "Kingdom of Heaven" in which dead people could reside. The sacrifice of Vishnu, his meditation in Banaras and three steps, created the "Kingdom of Yama". In both cases, great spiritual purity combined with willing sacrifices ruptures time and create a new existence. Christ's immense spiritual purity, born as the Son of God, without original sin, and the rejection of Satan in the desert, give his sacrifice supernatural properties. In the case of Vishnu, his acquisition of purity through meditation was a sacrifice in itself. Presenting himself as the sacrificial offering to the Demon king was his action of willingness. In both cases, human sin or pollution creates a world in which death is

inevitable and the willing sacrifice of a God is the method by which people may continue to live after death.

Humans too may participate in willing sacrifices to gain favor from the divine. As we will investigate in the next section, mortuary customs symbolically reflect end of time beliefs and the importance of willing sacrifices to gain eternal life. Because mortuary customs are varied, I will present singular accounts observed and recorded by contemporary anthropologists.

The following description of a Catholic funeral in the western part of Asturias, Spain, is derived from Maria Catedra's ethnography This World, Other World (1994). Catedra studied with the Vaqueiros, and her book aims to explain the high suicide rates in the community. Spanish Catholicism is particularly faithful to the prescriptions of the Catholic Church in the way of burial, although all Catholic groups have slightly, sometime drastically, differing mortuary customs. We will see how the final rites given by the Church during funerary customs symbolically associate the Last Judgment with death itself. Thereby, the community experience with death is shaped by a segmentation of time and sequence concurrent with the cosmological schema. The correlation between the conceptions of individual death is given coherence and meaning because it mirrors the eschatological history of humanity on Earth.

Among the Vaqueiros, the last breath is considered the moment of death. After an individual is determined to be dead by the family, preparation of the body immediately ensues. While some members of the family are attending the body, others are busy

themselves with killing an animal. An animal sacrifice on behalf of the dead individual is always performed when a human dies.

Quickly following the death, one close relative goes to retrieve the priest while other family members stay with the dead body. Amortajar, means, “to lay out,” and describes the process of making the corpse presentable for communal viewing. The corpse is dressed in its formal attire. These garments are the finest the person owned, and would have been worn in life only occasionally for important social functions. Once the corpse is dignified in appearance, it is placed in an area accessible to members of the community. News is circulated of the death, and family members, friends and neighbors begin to visit the family house. Neighbors will help the family with chores to free them for grieving. At night the vigil, called the wake, begins in earnest. At least one member of every family in the community goes to be with the dead and grieving. There are usually large numbers of people attending, ranging from one hundred to four hundred.

The body stays in the house for about two days after the death, and during this time the community visits the body and shares grief with the family. *Velorio* means to spend the night with the dead, and neither the body nor family are to be left alone. Velorio at times becomes synonymous with prayer. As the entire community prays, they share in the sorrow of loss. One person who is particularly talented at communal prayer leads the group. The decorum is solemn, but soon people begin to discuss unrelated topics along with memories of the dead. When relatives arrive and are struck by the sight of the body, the group resumes its solemn attitude. However, anything may be discussed at the wake, such as farming, gossip, and family news.

In the past a full meal was served at the wake. All food provided during the funerary rituals are provided by the family of the dead. In recent practice, only soup, coffee, chocolate, bread, wine, and liquors are served. The bread served, called carito, is split into equal pieces and a piece is given to all neighbors and relatives. The carito is considered charity given on behalf of the dead.

After two days of morning, the funeral procession begins. The priest is the leader of this ritual function, and controls the movement of the crowd as they accompany the dead on their trip to the graveyard. Money is collected and given to the priest during this time; people are encouraged to give as much as possible for the betterment of the dead person. The moment when the corpse leaves the family home is particularly painful for the family. The family and community express their grief with many tears and gestures of bereavement at this moment. Those in the throws of sorrow, usually women, are advised to stay home and not accompany the body.

Male relatives who were the closest with the deceased initially carry the coffin. As the groups moves along towards the graveyard the precession stops at path crossings, and members of the community take turns relieving the men of their burden. The priest presides over this interchange and recites appropriate prayers of call and response. When the priest signals a change in carriers, members of the community give money to the priest based on their degree of relation to the dead. This continues until the group reaches the church.

Inside the church the funeral is performed. In earlier times the funeral service corresponded to varying degrees of economic position, but today there is a uniform service for all. However, the number of flowers and priests still varies according to

income. During this period each house is required to pay their respects to the dead while prayers are conducted. Following the funeral, the procession continues to the graveyard. When the coffin is lowered into the grave, those in attendance throw handfuls of dirt on the top of the casket. The family then invites all those in attendance to a dinner.

The dinner held on the night of burial is given at the home or a public food-serving establishment. The night of burial begins the *novina*. The novina is nine-day period of prayer in which the community comes to visit the family and pray for the dead. During the novena bread and wine are served, while members of the community talk about daily affairs and commiserate with the family. After the novina, the first funeral is complete.

The second funeral often occurs on the first anniversary of the death. The second funeral is held for everyone in some respect, but large gatherings are only held if people believe they are being commanded through visions by the dead. The deceased is believed to contact followers when there are unresolved tensions that disturb the rest of the dead. The survivors may be instructed to give a large feast and often when a householder dies the family provids food for the community, especially the poor. During the second funeral all members of the community are invited and treated with respect. Any tensions in the community or family are reconciled by the obligatory meal. In even small gatherings, the poor and hungry of the village are given food on behalf of the deceased. After a Mass and copulas prayers, a celebration begins. Once the meal is over, the period of mourning ends. People then dance, talk and enjoy the company of their community.

The sacrificial elements in this Catholic funeral are materialized in the form of food, money, and blood. In this community, the family sacrifices an animal to help atone

for the sins of the dead individual. This is not a traditional practice in the Church, but it demonstrates belief in the power of blood as the primary medium through which to communicate with God. The alms given through out the ritual process are believed to help the soul out of Purgatory. The amount of money given to the Catholic Church is considered directly proportional to the soul's ability to reach Heaven. The sacrifice of the affected family in the form of food for the community shows that through sacrifices they may be reincorporated into the social fabric. Particularly, charity to the poor during the second funeral is considered a sacrifice on behalf of the dead. All the prayers conducted during the mourning processes are given over to the merits of the dead, and they help the deceased individual attain closeness with God.

The Hindu description of burial below is derived from Jonathan Parry's ethnography about the city of Banaras (Parry 1994). The consultation of several other texts including Alan Babb (Babb 1997) was necessary to illustrate key moments in the ritual period. The burial described took place in Banaras, the most sacred place in Hindu cosmology and the primary site of mortuary customs in India.

In Hinduism, physical death, called *dehant*, usually does not mean the expulsion of the soul from the body. The soul remains in the 'gross body' until ritual offers a controlled release. A son of the deceased is necessary for the soul to attain release. The son is responsible for the father's favorable rebirth, and he attains his father's vacated social position. Their son acts in the funeral in order to change the malevolent ghost of his parent into an ancestor. The period of mourning begins at the moment of death, and for most castes, lasts until the tenth day after death.

From the moment of death until the funeral procession, the corpse is laid in the open air with its feet pointing south, towards Yamraj's Kingdom. Women surround the corpse and weep violently. Neighbors and relatives come to the house to show their bereavement. The women in particular make loud noises and violent gesturing as they address the sprit of the dead person directly. When people approach the house they walk in bare feet so as not to defile the area. Relatives may bring shrouds by which to wrap the corpse.

Preparation for the funeral processions begins and each group has its own task. Women wail and weep. Close family members of the same gender wash the corpse. Older men build a wooden bed by which to carry the corpse, called the dari. This bier is colored with red paint, flowers, fruits, and other types of decorative materials. Two bands hired to lead the funeral procession play in the street. The younger men go out into the street and dance in a sexually suggestive manor with each other. Then younger men smear red coloring on each other's faces. Six pindis, small rice-balls, are made to use as offerings to spirits of the dead.

The corpse, after careful washing, is wrapped in a white shroud and placed on the bed. Pieces of gold or basil leaves are placed on the seven openings of the body. Then the colorful shrouds brought by the community are draped over the body on the bed. Red and gold saris are attached to the bier. The corpse's face is smeared with white Abir, a powder used during festival for celebration. Cremation should ideally take place on the day of the death.

The point in which the corpse leaves the house is particularly powerful. A pindi is placed at the doorway. The Women again burst into violent wails. The men cry "Har,

Har, Mahadev" a greeting to Shiva. The entire group then follows the bands, carrying the corpse, on route to the cremation ghat. The corpse is carried head first towards the cremation ghat, which a Brahman informant believes is meant to symbolize the process of rebirth.

At the first crossroad they encounter, the women break a pitcher filled with water, and a pundi is placed at the spot of breakage. At the edge of the neighborhood, the women reluctantly depart. The women go back to the house of the grieving family and clean up, and then bathe. After their bath, they are served sweets and water. The female visitors then return home.

Meanwhile, the men continue the procession down to the cremation ghat. The procession often halts for dancing and signing. The men chant, "*Ram nam satya hai*" (The name of Ram is the truth). As the procession moves through the streets, onlookers throw rice patties, mustard seeds and coins over the bier.

Once the cremation ghat is reached, the corpse is placed in the water and bathed before it is placed on the pyre. All in attendance, ranging from 5 to 100 people, each pour five handfuls of water onto the face of the corpse. A Brahman priest may or not attend the cremation, usually depending on the income of the family. (Babb 1975; 93)

The corpse is placed on the pyre facing up with its feet facing south. The pyre consists of an odd number of wood pieces. In the pyre there are at least four types of wood, though often in small quantities due to expence. Ghee and basil leaves are also sprinkled over the pyre.

Wearing a thread indicating him as a sacrificer, the chief mourner moves around the pyre five times clockwise. He touches the unlit firebrand to the mouth of the corpse

each time he moves around the pyre. The chief mourner then lights the fire. At a point during the cremation, the chief mourner performs kapal kriya. Kapal kriva is the action of cracking open the skull of the deceased with a piece of unburned wood from the pyre. The kapal kriva is believed to be the moment when the soul leaves the body. Ghee and basil are again offered to the pyre.

The final act of the chief mourner during cremation is breaking a large pot filled with water. The chief mourner holds the pot on his shoulder and faces away from the pyre. He lets the pot fall behind him and then immediately leaves the ghat without looking back. The group attending the cremation follows him. After the cremation, the men wash themselves in a different ghat from the one in which the cremation took place, and are served black pepper and sweets.

Thus ensues the period of mourning after the expulsion of the soul from the body. Its goal is purification and prayer. On the third day after the death the family returns to the site of cremation to collect the remains and immerses the bones in water, which is the last action conducted on the body. Pindis are offered every day between the third day and the tenth (Babb 1975; 90).

On the final day of mourning, the tenth day after death, the men closest to the deceased have their heads shaven. The chief mourner must have his head completely shaved. The final day is also marked with a feast given by the family. The family is thereby reincorporated into the social fabric by their ability to offer hospitality (Babb 1975; 97).

Until the final tenth-day ritual, the ghost of the dead is believed to be wandering around its old living space. Completion of the ritual called sapindikaran is the point in

which the dead become ancestors. After this ritual it's strictly prohibited to refer to the dead by name, caste or kin term. (Parry 1994; 175)

The need for communal mourning and the ritualized actions are important for the incorporation of the dead individual into the role of ancestor. The importance of offerings and small sacrifices like ghee, money, fabric, and basil on behalf of the dead communicates the importance of personal sacrifices for other members of society. The dead body itself is considered a sacrifice, and its dressing is an attempt to improve its sacrificial merit. The disposal of the body mirrors the destruction of the world, first through fire and then flood. The pyre is considered a fire sacrifice in itself; the chief mourner wears a thread with symbolizes him as the sacrificer. Furthermore, the most sacred and desired spot of cremation is the ghat in Banaras where Vishnu's cosmic sacrifices was performed. The chanting of Rama's name is of particular importance. Although Shiva is considered the god of destruction, the name of Vishnu's human incarnation is invoked during the procession. This communicates the importance of Vishnu's sacrifices in both creating the world and becoming human to aid human beings. During this liminal period, the time between the death and the final ritual is mediated by sacrifices, as are cosmic affairs.

Through the ritual of burial, the disruption of the social order is alleviated on several levels in both the Catholic and Hindu examples. Through ritual the family of the dead are incorporated into society, sometimes in different roles like that of the householder or widow. The dead individual's social personality is incorporated into

society through the process of becoming an ancestor. And the community in its entirety is reestablished as life continues.

The disruption of death affects the surviving family in both Catholic and Hindu descriptions. In Catedra's description, the family is held separate from the community, depending on the stage of the ritual. Only after the completion of the second funeral are relationships between the family and community totally normalized. Although mourning in Catholic practices is very dependent on community beliefs, in Spain, the wife of the deceased may be obligated to dress in mourning for the rest of her life. In comparison, Hindu beliefs about pollution are very specific and detailed in the scriptures. Hennery Orenstien in "Death and Kinship in Hinduism: Structural and Functional Interpretations" (1970) details passages of scripture and their interpretation by Brahman priests. The family is most polluted because the deceased is described as sharing part of their body with their family. The chief mourner takes the majority of the pollution, but other mourners take some part in proportion to their relation to the deceased. The duration of pollution is dependent on caste, but nearly all women are considered completely defiled at the death of their husbands.

Sin and pollution are reason for the changing natural world. The coherent explanation for the transitory nature of the world and human beings is given in Catholic and Hindu religious practices as estrangement from the social order. There are strong similarities between the Catholic understanding of sin and the Hindu understanding of pollution. Hindu pollution functions of three levels of similarity to sin: the passage of time results from pollution and sin; the passing of time is correlated with an accumulation of pollution and sin: death is incurred by pollution and original sin. In both these large

religions seemingly drastic difference in practice and belief, actually revolve around similar foci. The foci are the separation from society in pollution or sin as an affect of physical existence, and the communing affect of sacrifice, which binds and strengthens society.

Time itself is understood in both religions as a process of sin or pollution, understood as a differentiation between God or the Brahman. Human experience on Earth is considered inherently a suffering existence. The suffering is incurred through the decaying of the body. The social order needs legitimacy in the minds of people, and so it is considered eternal, while the physical world is passing. In the case of Catholics, the passage of time is a result of the differentiation created between people and God by Adam. In the case of Hindus, the passage of time is the result of differentiation from the Brahman due to maya. The deterioration of the body during the life of a person is similar to the Catholic and Hindu notions of pollution and sin incurring through out time. Pollution and sin are the difference between this world and the eternal world of Gods, which makes existence seem transitory.

The pollution, or sin, of the individual's soul at the time of death largely determines their next type of existence in both Catholic and Hindu beliefs. However, both traditions believe the community can help the soul reach a slightly higher form of existence in the next life through mortuary ritual. In Hindu traditions, the mortuary customs surrounding the preparation of the dead is a form of cleaning and purification. Reducing the pollution of the person's body makes the body a better sacrifice on the pyre, thereby helping the soul. The soul does not leave the body until the skull is cracked, and so posthumous cleansing rituals are thought to help the purity of the dead soul.

Furthermore, the prayers offered during the days after cremation help the soul incorporate into a new phase. In the Catholic tradition, the soul is immediately judged the moment it leaves the body. However, if the soul goes to Purgatory, living people may offer penance and prayers to enhance the merit of the dead. Although the tradition of giving to the church for dead relatives has declined in focus, it has traditionally been of importance because it may alleviate the terrible suffering of a loved one in Purgatory.

In both Hindu and Catholic mortuary customs, the burden of grief is carried by the entire community. The family acutely experiences grief and mourning but the primary purpose of community involvement is to share the burden of grief. In both cases, the community at large visits the house and helps the family prepare the body for removal from the house. The community commiserates with the family from the time of physical death and throughout the mourning period. Through this sharing of grief and obligation to the dead, the community is unified. The group participation in mortuary practices serves to unify the community in sorrow, but also reaffirms social ties. Both funerals discussed end with the reaffirmation of life and situating the family back into the community. In the Catholic case, all members of the community throw handfuls of earth on the coffin signifying the social ties between the dead, family and community. In the Hindu case, the group pours handfuls of water on the face of the dead directly before cremations, also signifying that the community as a whole is relinquishing the dead and sharing the loss. The larger community is at the family house during the entire mourning ritual in both cases. The community is with the dead and mourning family throughout the entire process indicating that society as whole is responsible for the transition through the liminal period.

The drastic difference between the Hindu destruction of the body and the Catholic preservation of the body illustrates a similar idea and its application to the goals of the deceased. The similar idea is that flesh serves as the keeper of identity. However Catholics wish to preserve the keeper of identity, while the Hindus believe its best to dispense with the flesh and individuality.

Similarly, in the Catholic view, as demonstrated in the section on cosmology, a belief in the resurrection of the body is primary. The tomb is considered a 'new house' where the person's body rests until the Last Judgment. They believe that the person will be resurrected and their flesh and soul will be reunited. The focus is preservation of individual bodies and this illustrates the Catholic understanding of the unique identity of individuals. A person's soul only resides on Earth once, in their body and both the soul and the body create identity. Although the body has been ravaged by sin, as evidenced by death. At the end of time, the tensions division of people between body and soul will end and the reunification of the body and soul will occur.

In contrast, the Hindu conception of the relation of the body to the soul is one of entrapment. The body is a shell for the soul, which incurs pollution through normal physiological functioning. The Hindu intention for cremation is to free the soul from the body. With the disposal of the body, the soul is able to move out of this world. Should the body stay intact, the soul would be kept on earth and inflict harm as a ghost. The cremation is conducted because the body is the keeper of the soul; a tie, which needs to be severed to complete the process of destruction, began by death. Destruction is necessary for rebirth in Hinduism, making it important for the fertility of the community as a whole to completely destroy the physical remains of their dead relations.

The split between soul and body is a social construction. The notion splits the social and spiritual person from the person as animal, concluding that the social identity is more important because it is eternal. In the Catholic case, the will in life mediates the relationship between the soul and body and at death there is a separation of the two. During the Last Judgment the social identity is reunited with the body to become a whole. Thereby, individuals are in total communion with God because they are not subject to a separation of soul and body, which resulted from in sin and death. In the Hindu case, the difference between body and soul is the entire reason for suffering. Maya entraps the soul and confuses people into identifying themselves with their bodies. At death, the soul is no longer bound to the body, but may still falsely associate itself with the body and remain on Earth. The total destruction of the body mirrors the total destruction of the world; they are both necessary to clear and reset the cycles of maya. The belief in a soul is a sanctified recognition of the person as a conscious, social being. The estrangement of the soul from the body reflects identity tensions between the natural and social person.

In keeping with these beliefs, the clothing of the corpse in Catholic burial differ from the Hindu practice. The Catholic corpse is dressed in its most socialized clothing for burial. The clothing is usually already owned by the individual and serves to reinforce their physical adherence to social identity. The Hindu corpse is dressed primarily in a white shroud, although group offered colorful shrouds might be placed on top of the corpse. The white shroud is uniform for all members of society in death and so the removal of social identity from the corpse is what is stressed.

In both traditions, sacrifice is essential for the family and community in funerary customs. The sacrifices offered for perceived betterment of the dead in both burials

constitute the major events of the ritual. All the prayers offered are believed to help the transition between life and death for the person. The families in both burials must provide food and hospitality to the community. The families make these sacrifices so they can be reincorporated into society, which stress sacrifice in both cosmic and ordinary life.

Indeed the primary goal of society is to convince its members to sacrifice themselves for the social whole. Through societal rules and obligations a person is expected to control their impulse and direct their energy toward socially useful tasks. In this way, society requires continuous sacrifice from its members. Thus, a primary part of both Hindu and Catholic faith is the importance of sacrifice. Blood and flesh are the medium of communication between people and God or Gods, as the case may be. In both Hindu and Catholic communities, personal commitment to one's social role and responsibilities is considered a sacrifice. For instance, both motherhood and wifedom are considered a sacrifice on the part of the individual, which counts towards their favor after death.

In the Hindu case, perfect dharma is conforming completely to one's social role. For instance, with the dharma of wifehood, there is a story that if a husband says there is no Sun the wife will act as if she cannot see; with perfect dharma, she actually would not see the Sun. Conforming to one's social role can work to the merit of an Untouchable or courtesan and bring them power. Another story tells of the perfect courtesan who told the Ganga to 'get back' and the waters changed course. It would ordinarily be considered immoral to be a courtesan because of her unmarried status, but because she fulfills her social role as the perfect pleasure-giving creature, she gains the power of the Gods. In

this way, sacrifice is not necessary adhering to an admirable position in society but how the person can conform to fit the social position as dictated by their ancestry.

In the Catholic case, willing self-sacrifice is the highest goal of humans. The Saints are nearly all martyrs, but also they are all individuals who are perceived as making important sacrifices to others and God in life. The good works of the Saints and their ability to perform miracles is closely tied. Through strict adherence to Jesus' teachings, helping the poor and being kind to one's neighbor, they gain supernatural powers. For instance, Saint Catherine of Siena attended the sick by sucking their boils and performing other gruesome acts. She was granted miraculous healing powers because of her extraordinary sacrifice. Through sacrifices to the society, individuals are perceived as possessing power on grace of God.

Moreover, sacrifices are intensely communal because "every sacrifice requires not only a victim—in this case a self-chosen victim—but also a sacrificer. That is, we are always dealing not with solitary individuals but with systems of social relations" (Turner 1969; 69). The community immediately esteems sacrificing in one's social role, but for this demand to be felt as compelling the idea of sacrifice must be internalized by individuals and represented as reflecting the sacred order of the cosmos.

Thus in both Hinduism and Catholicism the cosmological structures and funeral practices communicate the dependence of society on willing sacrifices and the belief that physical conditions are transcended by an eternal social order. For secular humanists, it may be difficult to understand how people accept not just gods, but imaginative and detailed stories of cosmic events. I believe that society convinces people of these stories

by synchronizing them with social identity and social processes. The strong inner coherence of Hindu and Catholic worldviews compels people to accept ancient tales with faith, by mirroring the phases of the entire world with the tensions between the individual and the social whole. The coherent worldviews are imparted through ritual and symbolization. The cosmic structure and lifespan of the world mirrors the socially constructed personal conception of individuality and society. The adjustment of social order in response to the death of a community member showcases through ritual the relations between cosmic belief, social necessity, and individual experience.

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