

next life. This belief is supported by religious mythology. In order to facilitate the spiritual progress of the soul of one's relative, a Hindu has the duty to perform **Shradaha** (a religious ceremony). He arranges to feed a specific number of Brahmins (a particular caste) and/or relatives at least once a year.

Practical Aspects Following Death

In tropical countries a dead body decays very quickly, hence immediate disposal is preferred. In Hinduism hygiene is combined with religious belief. Hindus believe that a dead body is unholy, and should be removed from the house as soon as possible. In India the funeral is often organised within a couple of hours of death. A dead body is always cremated since fire is a holy element. In the funeral pyre other holy substances are used. It is the duty of the youngest son to set light to the funeral pyre. (It is generally believed that the youngest son is overattached to his parents and if he sets light to the funeral pyre he is facing the reality.) The funeral pyre takes several hours to burn out, and generally all the male relatives and friends wait until the fire has finished burning. In my experience those few hours are very painful but enormously helpful for the psychological process. In Britain an appointment has to be made for cremation which means that sometimes there is a delay of several days to a couple of weeks before the funeral can be arranged. This is often difficult for a religious Hindu family. Cremation in Britain is impersonal and probably fails to offer reality confrontation.

Maybe eventually special crematorium facilities for Hindus, possibly with an open fire, will be provided in areas with a high Hindu population. On the other hand, Hinduism is not a dogmatic religion, and Hindus are gradually adapting both their attitudes and their family arrangements to the British facilities, especially in the second generation.

A great deal of attention is paid to food in both social customs and religious ceremonies. Relatives stay with the bereaved family until the thirteenth day after death, when the religious ceremonies are finished.

Relatives, friends and acquaintances visit the bereaved family and share their grief. Such meetings are arranged several times in a day, for the first seven or eight days, and serve a useful purpose in catharsis, mourning and providing support. An isolated Hindu family in Britain may not be able to obtain the required social support for successful mourning.

Special Problems

As a son bears the family name, he has an important place in the Hindu family structure. Death of a son, especially an only son, is extremely devastating. It is not only the death of a son; it is also the loss or end of the family name. The souls of the family members will not get help through **Shradaha** without the son. Often depression is severe following such a death.

Traditionally a young widow is not supposed to marry again, and her bereavement produces enormous sympathy and support. Often the extended family attempts to find a new role for her in the family. Occasionally the opposite may be true. The bereaved 'in-laws' may blame the young widow for the loss of their son, and make her life horrific by becoming extremely punitive. Her guilt about her loss and the bereaved parents' punitive behaviour make her a silent sufferer. It may require some skill to identify such a sufferer and help her to get out of it. For the younger generation remarriage may be acceptable, but it may produce conflict with the older generations.

A child's death may also produce conflict between generations, since a young couple may feel that the pragmatic approach of the older generations is insensitive and unfeeling. They may fail to appreciate that their parent's generation might have been brought up in a large family and experienced many children's deaths.

Migration and Bereavement

In order to have a meaningful death, a Hindu should die in the city named Kashi, should have cremation on the banks of the river Ganges and his ashes should be scattered into the same river. If Hindus cannot go to Kashi to die, many would like to retire to India. This desire is not only in response to religious obligation but is also a basis of ethnic identity. If someone has not come to terms with migration, death in Britain can be experienced as a failure to meet a basic obligation and becomes a source of guilt.

An Alien Culture

It is always difficult to come and live in a new culture. Initially, there is a threat to one's personal sense of identity, which is often compensated with increased cultural or ethnic sense of identity. It is quite common for migrants to show a stronger religious attitude or overvaluation of their own cultural attitudes. Any criticisms of their values or unkind comparisons are experienced and opposed violently, and any one from the host culture may be seen as potentially dangerous. It is not unusual for a Hindu family to see health workers with some suspicion, and it may take some time before a health worker breaks through this cultural suspicion.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Catherine Rosevear and Miss Christine Kilsby for their help.

FORTHCOMING CONFERENCE

There will be an International Symposium on Grief and Bereavement in Jerusalem between 11th and 14th November, 1985. It is organised by the Division of Rehabilitation, Israel Ministry of Defence, and the Israel Rehabilitation Society. Main topics will include: Bereavement (in Childhood, of Parents, after Violence), Cultural Factors in Grief, the Nature of the Mourning Process, Crisis Intervention, Counselling (the Bereaved, Friends of the Bereaved), Training of Counsellors, the Rehabilitation Approach, Religion & Bereavement, the Therapeutic Approach to Prolonged Mourning, Social Rehabilitation of the Widowed, Long-Term Effects, the Impact of Bereavement on Family Dynamics.

The conference is open to health care workers, funeral directors, social workers, sociologists, religious and community leaders. Participants wishing to present a paper should submit an abstract of not more than 200 words to the Secretariat before 1st May, 1985. Their address is: International Symposium on Grief and Bereavement, PO Box 50006, Tel Aviv 61500, Israel.