

11. INDIAN SOCIETY AND CULTURE

India is a fascinating country where people of different communities and religions live together in unity. Indian Population is polygenetic and is an amazing amalgamation of various races and cultures.

It is impossible to find out the exact origin of Indian People. The species known as Ramapithecus was found in the Siwalik foothills of north western Himalayas. The species believed to be the first in the line of hominids (Human Family) lived some 14 million years ago. Researchers have found that a species resembling the Australopithecus lived in India some 2 million years ago. Even this discovery leaves an evolutionary gap of as much as 12 million years since Ramapithecus,

There are diverse ethnic groups among the people of India. The 6 main ethnic groups are as follows:

1. Negritog
2. Proto-Australoids or Austriacs
3. Mongoloids
4. Mediterraneans or Dravidians
5. Western Brachycephals
6. Nordic Aryans

Negritos: The Negritos or the Brachycephalic (broad headed) from Africa were the earliest people to have come to India. They have survived in their original habitat in Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The Jarawas, Onges, Sentinelese and the Great Andamanese are some of the examples. Some hill tribes like Irulas, Kodars, Paniyans and Kurumbas are found in some patches in southern part of mainland India.

Pro-Australoids or Austriacs: These groups were the next to come to India after the Negritos. They are people with wavy hair lavishly distributed all over their brown bodies, long headed with low foreheads and prominent eye ridges, noses with low and broad roots, thick jaws, large palates and teeth and small chins. The Austriacs of India represent a race of medium height, dark complexion with long heads and rather flat noses but otherwise of regular features. Miscegenation with the earlier Negroids may be the reason for the dark or black pigmentation of the skin and flat noses.

The Austriacs laid the foundation of Indian civilisation.

They cultivated rice and vegetables and made sugar from sugarcane. Now these people are found in some parts of India, Myanmar and the islands of South East Asia. Their languages have survived in the Central and Eastern India.

Mongoloids: These people are found in the northeastern part of India in the states of Assam, Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Tripura. They

are also found in northern parts of West Bengal, Sikkim and Ladakh. Generally they are people with yellow complexion, oblique eyes, high cheekbones, sparse hair and medium height.

Dravidians: These are the people of South India. They have been believed to come before the Aryans. They have different subgroups like the Paleo-Mediterranean, the true Mediterranean and the Oriental Mediterranean. They appear to be people of the same stock as the peoples of Asia Minor and Crete and pre-Hellenic Aegean's of Greece. They are reputed to have built up the city civilisation of the Indus Valley, whose remains have been found at Mohenjodaro and Harappa and other Indus cities.

Western Brachycephals: These include the Alpinoids, Dinarics and Armenoids. The Parsis and Kodavas also fall in this category. They are the broad-headed people living mainly on the western side of the country such as the Ganga Valley and the delta, parts of Kashmir, Kathiawar, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.

Nordics or the Indo-Aryans: This group was the last one to immigrate to India. They came to India somewhere between 2000 and 1500 B.C. They are now mainly found in the northern and central part of India.

FOOD HABIT

Indian food is different from rest of the world not only in taste but also in cooking methods. It reflects a perfect blend of various cultures and ages. Just like Indian culture, food in India has also been influenced by various civilisations, which have contributed their share in its overall development and the present form.

Foods of India are better known for its spiciness. Throughout India, be it North India or South India, spices are used generously in food. But one must not forget that every single spice used in Indian dishes carries some or the other nutritional as well as medicinal properties.

North Indian Food: Food in the North India, to begin with, Kashmiri cuisines reflect strong Central Asian influences. In Kashmir, mostly all the dishes are prepared around the main course of rice found abundantly in the beautiful valley. Another delicious item cooked here is the 'Saag' that is prepared with a green leafy vegetable known as the 'Hak'.

But on the other hand states like the Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh show high consumption of chapatis as staple food. Again, these chapattis are prepared with a variety of flours such as wheat, rice, maize, besan, etc. Besides chapattis other closely related breads baked in these regions include Tandoori, Rumaali and Naan, etc. However, in the northern region impact of Mughlai food is quite obvious.

West Indian Food: In western India, the desert cuisine is famous for its unique taste and varieties of food. Rajasthan and Gujarat are the states that represent the dessert flavour of Indian food. Here an immense variety of dais and acharas (pickles/preserves) is used that simply substitutes the relative lack of fresh vegetables in these areas.

In the states like Maharashtra, the food is usually a mix of both north as well as south cooking styles. Here people use both the rice and the wheat with same interest. Along the coastline of Mumbai a wide variety of fishes is available. Some of the delicious preparations include dishes like the Bombay Prawn and Pomfret.

In Goa, that is further down towards south, one can notice Portuguese influence in the cooking style as well as in the dishes. Some of the mtyor dishes of this region are the sweet and sour Vindaloo, duck baffad, sorpotel and egg molie, etc.

East Indian Food: In the eastern India, the Bengali and Assamese styles of cooking are noticeable. The staple food of Bengalis is the yummy combination of rice and fish. Usually the Bengalis love eating varieties of fishes. A special way of preparing the delicacy known as 'Hilsa' is by wrapping it in the pumpkin leaf and then cooking it. Another unusual ingredient that is commonly used in the Bengali cooking is the 'Bamboo Shoot'. Various sweets prepared in this region, by using milk include the 'Roshogollas', 'Sandesh', 'Cham-cham' and many more.

South Indian Food: In the southern India, the states make great use of spices, fishes and coconuts, as most of them have coastal kitchens. In the foods of Tamil Nadu use of tamarind is frequently made in order to impart sourness to the dishes. It simply distinguishes the Tamil Food from other cuisines.

The cooking style of Andhra Pradesh is supposed to make excessive use of chilies, which is obviously to improve the taste of the dishes.

In Kerala, some of the delicious dishes are the lamb stew and appams, Malabar fried prawns, Idlis, Dosas, fish molie and rice puttu. Another famous item of this region is the sweetened coconut milk. Yet another dish is Puttu, which is glutinous rice powder steamed like a pudding in a bamboo shoot.

Indian food is as varied as anything else in that country; there is no easy definition of an "Indian meal". Indian food is often thought of as very spicy, but there are some simple breads, sweet desserts and milder 'one-pot dishes' that defy the norm.

Many Indians are vegetarian, but then, some are not. There are regional specialties, different ways to serve the meal and staple ingredients in each state. This combines to create a diverse cuisine that never becomes boring.

Breakfast: Chapatti/Roti, Dosa, Idli, Poori.

Indian's Meat Dishes

- o Kashmiri Gustaba
- o Sag Paneer
- o Fish Korma
- o Tikya Kebab
- o Prawn Curry
- o Mughlai Chicken
- o Malai Chicken
- o Nargisi Kofta
- o Pork Curry
- o Mutton Curry
- o Kashmiri Chicken
- o Bombay Duck
- o Mulligatawny
- o Creamy Prawn Soup
- o Cauliflower Chicken
- o Chicken Makhani
- o Chicken Pullao
- o Coriander Fish
- o Chicken Curry

North Indian Style

- o Chicken Murga
- o Tandoori Chicken
- o Lamb Vindaloo
- o Indian Lamb with Spinach
- o Prawns in Tomato Sauce

Indian Veggie Dishes

- o Not strict veggie...some recipes have eggs, milk and cheese products
- o Eggs in Spicy Almond Sauce
- o Chick Pea Pancakes
- o Dal Kofta Curry
- o Bengali Eggplant

With Mustard Seeds

- o Indian Chickpeas
- o Gobi Aloo
- o Masaledar Sem
- o Vegetable Kurma
- o Vegetable Curry
- o Green Pepper Curry
- o Sookha Aloo
- o Nedar and Haaq in Yakni
- o Alur Khosha Bhaja
- o Samosas
- o Bandhakopir Ghanto

- o Vegetable Biryani
- o Begun Pora
- o Farashi Beaner Chochori
- o Geela Kitchuri
- o Tofu Cutlets

With Pineapple-Ginger

- o Bengali Zucchini Curry
- o Bengali Potatoes

Indian Desserts

- o Kheer
- o Besan Burfi
- o Sewian
- o Mango Ice Cream
- o Carrot Halwa
- o Shrikhand
- o Benrie Biscuit
- o Rice Flour Pudding
- o Gulab Janiuns
- o Rasgobla
- o Sheera
- o Seviyan
- o Kala Jamoon
- o Spicy Coconut Custard

Indian Sauces

- o Garam Masala
- o Bengali Garam Masala
- o Coconut Chutney

North Indian

- o Coconut Chutney (Thengai Thigayal) South Indian
- o Tamarind Chutney
- o Tomato Chutney
- o Cashew Nut Chutney
- o Cilantro Chutney
- o Malabar, Curry Powder
- o Chile Mustard Relish

Bengali Kasundi

- o Mango Chutney Gorom Chatni
- o Mint and Coriander Chutney
- o Spiced Fruit Chutney
- o Ambarella and Raisin Chutney
- o Anchovy Relish

Eating Styles: Indian food is often eaten with the hands, however, this custom is guided by some basic rules. For instance, it is considered impolite to allow the food to-pass

the first joint of the fingers. The fingers should never touch the mouth directly. In addition, only the right hand may be used in eating.

Since most Indian meals include a kind of flatbread that is traditionally used to scoop or roll vegetables or rice. A spoon is provided for soup, but the bread may even be used to eat that. Meat, if served, may be eaten with a knife and fork, but it will more often be served pre-cut, so it may be easily managed by the fingers.

Indians usually eat their largest meal at mid-day, preferring to end with a light evening meal. People either bring their mid-day meal to work or use a lunch packing service called "tiffin" that delivers traditional hot meals to their workplace. If possible, many Indians like to come home for the mid-day meal.

Regional Food

Punjabi : Possibly the most famous Punjabi contribution to Indian food is the tandoori style of cooking. This method uses large earthen ovens that are heated to high temperatures using coal fires. Once hot, many types of meat, breads or vegetable dishes may be cooked inside. This method gives food a distinctive flavour and seals in the aroma of the item.

Many people in Punjab eat some meat. Thus, the state has developed many chicken and lamb dishes that are coated in spicy onion and mustard or sweet cream sauces. This is thought to be an influence of the Mughals during their time in India. Milk products such as yoghurt lassis and fresh cheeses are also an important part of the Punjabi diet, as are pulses and wheat.

Gujarati: Gujarati food is mainly vegetarian. The staple grain of the area is millet, with wheat as a secondary grain. Other products include peanuts, sesame and many types of vegetables. Pulses are very important in this region as a source of protein, whether as a side dish or made into soups called dahls, as the majority of the population does not eat meat.

Gujarati food is usually served as a "thali" meal, meaning that all items are served at once on a large plate. A traditional thali includes two vegetables cooked with spices, dahl, a flatbread, rice, pulses and a sweet. There are also simple meals of mild rice and lentils known as "khichdi", served with a lightly spiced buttermilk or yoghurt soup called "kadhi".

Maharashtrian: In contrast to the mainly vegetarian Gujarati food, Maharashtrians enjoy eating meat and fish with their meals. Fish may be stuffed or lightly fried and meat is braised and spiced with sweet and sour ingredients. Peanuts and cashew nuts are widely used, as is the distinctive kokum berry, a sweet deep purple item with a slightly tangy taste.

On the coast, people eat crab, prawns and shellfish,

Maharashtrians also popularised fried rice-flour balls called "vada" (now eaten throughout the country) and a type of thin pancake called amboli made of semolina, urad dal and fermented rice. A common sweet dish is puran poli, a flatbread stuffed with gram flour, brown sugar and honey.

Bengali: Bengal is known for its fish and its sweets. Located on the eastern coast of India, fish has become a staple of the Bengali diet. It may be sauted in yoghurt or, marinated in Bengal's famous spice mixture. This region uses five basic spices, known collectively as "pachphoron". They are: aniseed, cumin seed, black cumin seed, mustard and fenugreek. Even the oil that is used is mustard oil.

Many sweets eaten all over India originated in Bengal. Most are milk or cottage cheese based, including rasgolla, gulab jamun and sundesh. Bengali sweets are often served with a sticky sweet syrup and may even be found ending a traditional Gujarati or Goan meal.

Kerala, Karnataka and the South: Kerala food, from southern India, is traditionally served on a large banana leaf. The method is still used for feasts today. The staple food of southern India is rice. Different preparations of the grain may even be eaten for breakfast. The other staple is the coconut. Coconut is made into chutney, served as a refreshing dessert and incorporated into vegetable or fish dishes as a flavouring. This often gives Kerala food a very different refreshing flavour that mixes sweetness with spices.

One can see the uses of these ingredients in many of the famous dishes of the south. For example, rice flour and urad flour are made into a batter and steamed to form rice cakes called "idli", eaten with a type of stew made of pulses and vegetables called "sambhar". Another dish, "appam", is a thin crepe made with rice flour and the sap of the coconut palm. It is eaten with the "sambhar" mentioned above.

Snack Food: Indian snacks may be salty, spicy or sweet. Street vendors sell many different kinds, including warm dishes. Sometimes, they are substantial enough to serve as a light meal. The "pav bhaji" is a patty made of mixed vegetables that have been mashed and shallow fried and then served on a slice of bread. Another popular snack throughout the country is "bhel", a mixture of puffed rice, crunchy chickpea flour chips, onions, tomato, green peppers and tamarind chutney.

"Pani puri" is small, hollow breads stuffed with a bit of potato, onion or chickpea and topped with a "pani" of seasoned water. Nuts are another common choice, but they are roasted with a hot spice blend of turmeric, paprika and cumin powder. Often a little lemon juice is squeezed on top.

Drinks: The most common drink in India is tea. This is prepared with milk, sugar and a blend of ginger, nutmeg, cinnamon, cloves and cardamom. Most people will drink this tea, called "chai" with breakfast and in the late afternoon. In fact, it may be served at any time and is a popular refreshment for guests.

An example of a common cold Indian drink is "lassi", which is a yoghurt or buttermilk drink that is sweetened and flavoured with rose, mango or served plain.

INDIAN COSTUMES

India is a land of colour and diverse cultures, so obvious in the varied dresses that adorn its people. Indian dressing styles are marked by many variations, both religious and regional with a wide choice of textures and styles. The many hued saris draped gracefully in different styles, brightly mirrored cholis, colourful lehengas and the traditional salwar-kameez have all fascinated the traveller to India.

The sari, simple, understated yet supremely elegant is increasingly becoming a fashion statement in urban India.

One of the most commonly worn traditional dresses, it is essentially a rectangular cloth measuring about 6 yards, though in Maharashtra, women wear the nine yard sari which is passed through the legs and tucked in at the back. The sari comes in a profusion of colours, textures and designs, determined largely by the region. There are several ways of draping a sari, which is first wound around the waist, before being pleated seven or eight times at the centre and tucked into the waistband. These pleats are called the patli. The remaining sari, called the pallu is then pleated again and draped across the left shoulder to fall gracefully behind. There are regional variations, like in Gujarat, the pallu comes from the back and drapes across the front over the right shoulder. The sari is worn with a tight-fitting choli or blouse. The style and length of the choli varies according to fashion trends and from region to region.

The traditional dress for women in Rajasthan and Gujarat is the lehenga choli or ghagra choli. These cholis are brightly embroidered, waist-length bare-backed blouses. Ghagras or lehengas are gathered ankle-length skirts secured around the waist. The attire is completed by a veil-cloth called odhni or dupatta draped across the neck or over the head. The lehenga-choli or ghagra choli is extremely colourful, adding verve and colour to the surrounding landscapes. Tribal women in these areas bedeck themselves from head to toe with chunky silver jewellery.

Young girls in south India wear a half saree, somewhat similar to a lehenga choli. The only difference is that the dupatta is wound across the waist and draped across the left shoulder like the saree pallu.

A popular, comfortable and convenient dress is the salwar kameez or churidar kurta. This was traditionally the dress worn in Punjab, but is now worn almost everywhere, particularly among the younger generations. The kameez or the kurta is a knee-length flowing tunic worn over a salwar or churidar. A salwar is a pyjama-like trouser which tapers slightly towards the ankles, while the churidar is a tight-fitting trouser which gathers at the ankles. These gathers at the ankles look like bangles (churis) and hence the name. A dupatta generally completes the ensemble.

Western dressing styles are increasingly gaining popularity among the urban youth of both sexes, but women largely restrict themselves to fashion trends within Indian dressing mores. Young girls wear skirts and dresses, particularly to schools. After adolescence and almost certainly after marriage, women are expected to wear traditional Indian clothing. This trend is changing with more women entering the urban work force, but this is confined to sections of society that are highly exposed to international lifestyles. Men are considerably less traditional when it comes to dressing.

In India, as elsewhere, accessories are an integral part of the ritual of dressing. The world over, Indian women are associated with the 'dot' in the middle of their forehead, called Kum Kum or bindi. Traditionally round, the bindi is now available in various colours, shapes and sizes. A bindi was traditionally a sign of marriage or in some states, was worn as soon as a girl reached young adulthood. Today, it is for the most part an adornment. Vermilion or sindoor applied at the parting of the hair indicates a married woman.

A traditional Indian woman is rarely seen without jewellery. A mangal-sutra, a necklace made with black and gold beads is considered sacred and in many areas is always worn by a married woman. Many women, particularly in the rural areas of Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Gujarat wear ornately crafted nose-rings. Gold, silver or colourful glass bangles are another favourite, dating from the tradition of never having your hands bare. Women in Rajasthan wear bangles that go all the way to their shoulders. Indian women generally have their ears pierced and commonly sport ear-rings.

Men are considerably less traditional when it comes to dressing. In urban areas, they have adapted to a western style of dressing. In villages men generally wear kurtas, a knee length shirt-styled tunic, with lungis, dhotis or pyjamas. The lungi originated in the south but is now worn all over India. It is a piece of cloth wrapped around the waist. A dhoti is longer than a lungi, has sari style pleats and is draped through the legs.

In states like Rajasthan, Gujarat, Punjab and Maharashtra men wear a safa or turban on their heads. Elsewhere too, various kinds of topis are it is a long scarf which is wound round the head in different ways. The Pathani suit is very similar to the salwar-kameez and is generally worn by men in north India. The Achkan is a long collarless jacket worn over a churidar for formal occasions.

THE FAMILY.CUSTOMS

Family is important in India and is what their life is centred around. It is common for several generations to live in the same house as an extended family.

When a woman marries, she leaves her birth family, many times without seeing them again and goes to her husband's village and becomes part of his family.

There is significant discrimination toward girls and women. While young girls are expected to help with the women's work (which consists of fetching water, preparing meals, cleaning and caring for animals) as well as care for their younger siblings, boys have it much easier. They may be required to herd goats and other animals to and from the fields, but in general have it much easier than their female counterparts and this discrimination doesn't end with adulthood.

A simple draped cloth is still the basic attire for many Indians. The women wear a sari, which is worn with a blouse underneath, with the material ranging from cotton to silk. Men generally wear a dhoti, which can be worn full length or as "pants" depending on the region. In northern India, western clothing has replaced that of the traditional for men, while women still wear saris or other Indian styles of dress. In rare cases women will wear slacks and blouses, but that is generally among the elite.

Clothing: One of the powerful attractions in India is the colourful and diversified attire of its people. The silk saris, brightly mirrored cholis, colourful lehengas and the traditional salwar-kameez have fascinated many a traveller over the centuries.

Attire for Women: For a single length of material, the sari must be the most versatile garment in existence. It is only one of the many traditional garments worn by women, yet it has somehow become the national dress of Indian women. A sari is a rectangular piece of cloth which is five to six yards in length. The style, colour and texture of this cloth vary and it might be made from cotton, silk or one of the several man-made materials. The sari has an ageless charm since it is not cut or tailored for a particular size. This garment can fit any size and if worn properly can accentuate or conceal. This supremely graceful attire can also be worn in several ways and its manner of wearing as well as its colour and texture are indicative of the status, age, occupation, region and religion of a woman.

The tightly fitted, short blouse worn under a sari is a choli. The choli evolved as a form of clothing in 10th. century AD and the first cholis were only front covering; the back was always bare. Bodices of this type are still common in the state of Rajasthan.

Apart from the choli, women in Rajasthan wear a form of pleated skirt known as the ghagra or lehenga. This skirt is secured at the waist and leaves the back and midriff bare. The heads are however covered by a length of fine cotton known as orhni or dupatta.

Another popular attire of women in India is the salwar-kameez. This dress evolved as a comfortable and respectable garment for women in Kashmir and Punjab, but is now immensely popular in all regions of India. Salwars are pyjama-like trousers drawn tightly in at the waist and the ankles. Over the salwars, women wear a long and loose tu-

nic known as a kameez. One might occasionally come across women wearing a churidar instead of a salwar. A churidar is similar to the salwar but is tighter fitting at the hips, thighs and ankles. Over this, one might wear a collarless or mandarin-collar tunic called a kurta.

Attire for Men: Though the majority of Indian women wear traditional costumes, the men in India can be found in more conventional western-clothing. Shirts and trousers are worn by men from, all regions in India. However, men in villages are still more comfortable in traditional attire like kurtas, lungis, dhotis and pyjamas.

The traditional lungi originated in the south and today it is worn by men and women alike. It is simply a short length of material worn around the thighs rather like a sarong. A dhoti is a longer lungi but with an additional length of material pulled up between the legs. Pyjama-like trousers worn by the villagers.

Indian dressing styles are marked by many variations, both religious and regional and one is likely to witness a plethora of colours, textures and styles in garments worn by the Indians.

VARNA SYSTEM IN HINDU RELIGION

The Hindus have Varna System. It is not at all caste-equivalent. It simply indicates a social division based on Gunas. There exists all over the world one sort of division or the other in a society, which is so inevitable for social growth and prosperity. Each individual is possessed of a particular ability by nature. One may well perform a physical labour, another may be more of a thinker and some may be artistic, some inclined to technology, music. Medicine, trade, industry or any other material or spiritual activity. The Lord speaking on action and inaction in Geeta (IV-13) says, 'the four Varnas have been created by Him according to differentiation of Gunas and Karmas.' These Varnas are 1-Brahman; 2-Kshatriya; 3-Vaishya; and 4-Sudra.

Varna means different shades of texture or colour. They represent mental temper. There are three Gunas- Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. Sattva is white, Rajas red and Tamas black. These in combination of various proportions constitute the group or class of people all over the world with temperamental differences.

The above classification is based on this assumption. In continuation, Veda Vyasa says in the same couplet, 'by the differentiation of the mental quality and physical action of the people.' It is clear that the type of one's action, the quality of ego, the colour of knowledge, the texture of one's understanding, the temper of fortitude and the brilliance of one's happiness defines one's Varna. Not by birth a man becomes Brahman but by cultivating noble thoughts and good intentions of service alone, one can ever aspire to Brahmanhood.

The Brahman is generally Sattvik. Sama and Dama are

his valuable assets. He is serene and self-controlled and is possessed of the quality of austerity. (Tapas) He has purity, uprightness and forbearance. He has a will to acquire knowledge (Gyan), Vigyan (Wisdom) and faith.

The Kshatriya is a warrior class, powerful of physique and might. They are possessed of more of Rajas Guna with base of Sattva. They have a duty to protect the Dharma and the people. They are bold, alert and full of fortitude, generosity, discipline and modesty along with masterly behaviour mingled with Ishvar Bhava (Love of God).

The Vaishya class is a trader class and prefers business of all kinds. It is possessed of Raj Guna mixed with Tamas. They deal with wealth and gold and strive for material prosperity of the self as well as of the people in general. The Sudras are working class people, artisans and craftsmen. They are physically strong and hard working. They are possessed of Tamas with a base of Rajas. Really speaking, Sudra class is indispensable to society as they are like a spiral chord on which rests the social structure.

Thus it is clear that the whole Varna System stood on the basis of Gunas and karmas of the individual. It has nothing to do with birth. To quote Mahabharata, the serpent god asked Yudhisthir to tell him the virtues of the caste. He says that those Brahmans who were fond of personal pleasures, prone to violence, had forsaken their duties and were red limbo, fell into the category of Kshatriya. Those Brahmans who derived their livelihood from kine, who were yellow and sub-divided by agriculture and who neglected to practice their duties, fell into the category of Vaishyas. Those Brahmans who were addicted to mischief and falsehood and were covetous, lived by all kinds of works and fell from purity and were black went to the condition of Sudra. As a conclusion, the serpent god says that the man in which the marks of a Sudra are not found is no Sudra, whereas while a Brahman who acts so is not a Brahman and may be called a Sudra. It is clear that the world being the projection of Brahma is therefore Brahma-roopa and these castes came up later as a creation of man in society. Therefore it stands for modification and change according to times.

The Intent of Varna System

The various stratification of Varna system was meant to settle the Hindu life and regulate the society for a united action. Every society in the world has some form of groups that works for the common cause of social progress and general prosperity. In the various spheres of life, cultural, spiritual, religious, economic, political and social, medical, science and technology and even unskilled workers, there are groups united differently to work for the social cause of all the people. In Hinduism, this division is called Varna System. Each Varna has its social purpose, its own code, norms of behaviour and keeps its independent identity. Still each part remains an integral part of the whole. The whole is always present in the part and the part is ever a part of the

whole. This is the spirit behind the creation of Varna System. The four Varnas represented the people of wisdom, of action, of compassion and loving feelings and of service to people. It was not intended to be hereditary and connected with birth and therefore free interchange and intermixing was liberally permitted.

It is indeed unfortunate that the Varna System came to be connected with the Caste System. We cannot know how and why and when it so happened. It grew up with a sort of spiritual monopoly of a certain group bent upon its material prosperity. It established the class of Brahman by birth to safeguard their posterity. It is they who created and developed the ideas of inferiority and superiority among the people. This led to discrimination and distinction between various groups of occupations and the degradation of society began and reached so far as there came out people such as untouchables and pariahs. Thus the Varna turned Caste System brought about social degradation and downfall dividing people as low and high and the lowest. The Varna System, so sound and healthy and perfect came to such a pitiable state. It needs a reconstitution at this stage.

Conclusion: India is a developing nation. It has a responsibility to safeguard the rights of people as enshrined in the Constitution, irrespective of considerations of caste, creed, colour or sex. It is the need of the day that the Hindu scriptures be thrown open to all people of caste and sex so that they may have right understanding of their faith. It may lead to the fall of the man-made caste system like a sand hill. When the boundaries of the world are vanishing and there is open mixing of people and ideas, there has to be a ready flow of crossovers among the people as in the past. The watertight compartments only stink. The Hindu society has to be wellknit for the good of the world.

It is a fact that the Buddhists discarded the Vedas to preach against Caste System; Rabir followed the same path of denouncing the Hindu scriptures while opposing the caste system. A proper understanding of scriptures can remove the ignorance and illusion. Gandhi and Aurobindo favoured Varna System though opposed Caste System, Swami Dayananda jvith authority on Vedas declared that Vedas do not mention about Caste System and opposed caste system tooth and nail while defending the scriptures. There is nothing in the scriptures to justify the caste division, only the Varna System exists as an integral part of the whole society. It is not the Caste System at all.

There are people in large majority who realise that the most oppressed people today called as Sudra were really a great adherent of Hinduism. In the Buddhist dominated era, they did not change their religion though the call was in their favour. During the terror rule of Islam for conversion, they did not convert and suffered from the rulers as well as from their own people who called them by many abusive names such as Sudra, Chamar, Bhangi, Harijan. Achuta or untouchables and even today remain bracketed in schedule

castes and schedule tribes. They had opportunity to convert and be saved from humiliations and insults but they preferred to stay as Hindus and suffer as Hindus.

BODY LANGUAGE

All Hindus know that "Life is meant to be lived' joyously" 'All is God and God is everywhere and in all things/ This understanding and appreciation is exemplified in every aspect of Hindu deportment.

1. **Kindly Words and Countenance:** Hindus strive to keep a pleasant expression on their face, a gentle smile and a kind word for everyone they meet through the day. They know in their heart of hearts that God is everywhere and that all in the universe is perfect at every point in time. This knowledge gives them strength and courage to face their daily karmas positively and graciously.
2. **Refined Gestures:** Hindus know that every movement of the body, the face, hands, eyes, mouth, head, etc., has a meaning. Youth are taught to be sensitive to the thoughts and feelings of Others in their body language.
3. **Eyes:** Eyes are also a primary means of communicating and the meanings are fairly straightforward. They usually indicate degrees of interest in what the speaker is saying. Smiling with your eyes as well as your mouth conveys sincerity. There are three levels of smiling (and infinite shades and degrees in between). Having the eyes open only slightly indicates mild interest. Eyes more open and a bigger smile indicates more interest and enthusiasm. Having the eyes open wide with a big smile or nod, possibly accompanied by some verbal expression, indicates greater interest or great happiness.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN INDIAN LIFE

In traditional Hindu culture, women are held in the highest regard - far more respected, in truth, than in the West. But this does not imply the kind of equality or participation in public interactions that are common in the West. The qualities traditionally most admired in a Hindu woman are 'modesty of manner, shyness and self-effacement. Self-assertive or bold tendencies are regarded with circumspection. Feminine refinements are expressed and protected in many customs, including the following:

1. **Womanly Reserve:** In mixed company especially in the presence of strangers, a Hindu woman will keep modestly in the background and not participate freely in conversation. This, of course, does not apply to situations among family and close associates,
2. **Walking Behind One's Husband:** The wife walks a step or two behind her husband or if walking 'by his side, a step or two back, always giving him the lead. In the West, the reverse of this is often true.
3. **Serving at Meals:** At meals women follow the custom of serving the men first before enjoying their own meal.

4. **Chaperoning:** It is customary for a woman to always be accompanied when she leaves the home. Living alone, too, is unusual.
5. **Women in Public:** Generally it is improper for women to speak with strangers on the street and especially to strike up a casual conversation. Similarly, drinking alcohol or smoking in public, no matter how innocent, are interpreted as a sign of moral laxity and are not acceptable.

Hindu Women and Religion

In ancient India, women occupied a very important position. In fact, a superior position, to men. "Shakti" a feminine term means "power" and "strength". All male power comes from the feminine. Literary evidence suggests that kings and towns were destroyed because the rulers troubled a single woman.

For example, Valmiki Ramayana teaches us that Ravana and his entire kingdom were wiped out because he abducted Sita. Veda Vyasa's Mahabharata teaches us that all the Kauravas were killed because they humiliated Draupadi in public. Elango Adigal's Sillapathigaram teaches -us Madurai, the capital of the Pandyas was burnt because Pandyan Nedunchezhiyan mistakenly did harm to Kannaki.

In Vedic times women and men were equal in many aspects. Women participated in the public sacrifices alongside men. One script mentions a female rishi Visvara. Some Vedic hymns, are attributed to women such as Apala, the daughter of Atri, Ghosa, the daughter of Kaksivant or Indrani, the wife of Indra.

Apparently in early Vedic times women also received the sacred thread and could study the Vedas. The Haritasmriti mentions a class of women called brahmavadinis who remained unmarried and spent their lives in study and ritual. Panini's distinction between acharya (a preceptor) and acharyani (a lady teacher or a preceptor's wife) and upadhyay (a preceptor) and upadhyayani (a lady teacher or a preceptor's wife) indicates that women at that time could not only be students but also the teachers of sacred Vedas.

There were several noteworthy women scholars of the past such as Kathi, Kalapi and Bahvici. The Upanishads refer to several women philosophers, who disputed with their male colleagues such as Vacaknavi, who challenged Yajnavalkya. The Rig Veda also refers to women engaged in warfare. One queen Bispala is mentioned and even as late a witness as Megasthenes (5th century B.C.) mentions heavily armed women guards protecting Chandragupta's palace.

Hindu religion has been occasionally criticised as encouraging inequality between men and women, towards the detriment of Hindu women. This presumption is inaccurate. In the Vedic period, we come across female scholars like Ghosa, Lopamudra, Romasha and Indrani. In the Upanishad

period, names of women philosophers like Sulabha, Maitreyi, Gargi are encountered.

In religious matters, Hindus have elevated women to the level of divinity. One of the things most misconstrued about India and Hinduism is that it's a male dominated society and "religion and the truth is that it is not so.

It is a religion that has attributed the words for the strength and power to feminine. "Shakti" means "power" and "strength". All male power comes from the feminine. The Trimurti (Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva) are all-powerless without their female counterparts.

Devi is the Great Goddess.

This echoes Devi-Mahatmyam prayer:

By you this universe is borne, by you this world is created;

By you it is protected,

By you it is consumed at the end,

O Devi! You are the Supreme Knowledge, as well as intellect and contemplation...

Women were held in higher respect in India than in other ancient countries and the Epics and old literature of India assign a higher position to them than the epics and literature of other religions.

Hindu women enjoyed rights of property from the Vedic Age, took a share in social and religious rites and were sometimes distinguished by their learning. There was no seclusion of women in India in ancient times.

Professor H.H. Wilson says: "And it may be confidently asserted that in no nation of antiquity were women held in so much esteem as amongst the Hindus."

In Ancient India, however, Hindu women not only possessed equality of opportunities with men, but enjoyed certain rights and privileges not claimed by the male sex. The chivalrous treatment of women by Hindus is well known to all who know anything of Hindu society.

Knowledge, intelligence, rhythm and harmony are all essential ingredients for any creative activity. These aspects are personified in Saraswati, the Goddess of Learning, Music and Fine Arts. Without the grace of Saraswati or Saraswati Kataksham, as it is called, Brahma cannot do a worthwhile job as the Creator. Any maintenance activity needs plenty of resources, mainly fiscal resources. So Lakshmi; the Goddess of Wealth, is an essential companion to Vishnu. Shiva, as Destroyer, derives power and energy from Parvati or Durga as she is called Shakti. It is only the Hindu tradition, which provides, even at the conceptual level, the picture of the male and female principles working together, hand in hand, as equal partners in the universe. This concept is carried further to its logical climax in the form of Ardhanariswara, formed by the fusion of Shiva and Shakti in one body, each occupying one half of the body, denoting that one is incomplete without the other.

Just the sloka that is commonly recited during daily prayers is enough to show the status of the Goddesses. A sloka on Devi contains the following line: Yaa Brahma Achyuta Sankara Prabhrudibihi Devaissadaa Poojithaa, which means, 'O Devi! Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva and other Gods' always adore you.

In Hinduism, all power, Shakti, is female. Shakti is the fundamental strength of the feminine that infuses all life. Sakti is the divine feminine power found in everything.. She is the Goddess. So that, actually, in India, Kali is the great divinity.

Hindus hold rivers in great reverence. The rivers are female divinities, food and life bestowing mothers. As such, they are prominent among the popular divinities represented in the works of art of the classical period. The most holy of rivers, the best known and most honoured, is the Ganga or Ganges. She is personified as Goddess Ganga. The river rises from an ice bed, 13,800 feet above the sea level in the Garhwal Himalayas. The river Saraswati is regarded as the mother god.

One of the most important of all Vedic hymns, the Devisukta, is addressed to Vak '(speech, revelation), the goddess who is described as the instrument that makes ritual efficacious: "I am the queen, the gatherer-up of treasures..." It is not unimportant, that Earth (prithivi) is considered female and the goddess who bears the mountains and who brings forth food that feed all.

Education for girls was regarded as quite important. While Bramhavadani girls were taught Vedic wisdom, girls of the Ksatriya girls were taught the use of the bow and arrow. Patanjali mentions the spear bearers (saktikis). Megasthenes speaks of Chandragupta's bodyguard of zonian women. Kautilya mentions women archers striganaih dhanvibhih).

Similarly, Kautilya in his Arthashastra which is also taken to be a document of Mauryan history, refers to women soldiers armed with bows and arrows. Buddhism up the traditions of Brahmanical religion in according o womanhood an honoured place in social life. Women were made eligible for admission to what was known as the Bhikshuni-Sangha, the Order of Nuns, which opened to them avenues of culture and social service and, ample opportunities for public life.

In Gurukulas, the ancient Universities of India, boys and girls were educated together. Atreyi studied under Valmiki along with Lava and Kusa, the sons of Rama. Fine arts like music, dancing and painting was especially encouraged in the case of girls.

Girls had Upanayana performed for them and earned out the Sandhya rites. A young daughter who has observed brahmacharya should be married to a bridegroom who is learned like her. (Yajur Veda -VIII.I). Seclusion of women was unknown in the Vedic times.

The Atharva Veda refers to daughters remaining with their parents until the end 'Of their lives. A part of the ancestral property is given to them as dowry, which becomes their own property and is called stridhana in later writings. "Home is not what is made of wood and stone; but where a wife is, there is the home." (Sanskrit: Na grham kasthapasanair dayita yatra tad grham-Nitimanjari, 68)

It is significant to note that only Hindus worship God in the form of Divine Mother. In Hinduism, the deities for knowledge, learning and material wealth are female and not male. The past social inconsistencies and injustices that did not arise from Hindu scriptures, but from humans who failed to correctly incorporate the teachings of the scriptures, such as the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita, -into their social philosophy.

This concept of the spiritual equality of souls naturally influenced the status of women on an individual and social level. Secularists make the predictable allegation that Hinduism as represented by Manu is anti-woman. Actually on reading this text one would realise that neither dowry (dahej) nor self-immolation of widows (sati) figure in it.

"Where women are honoured there the gods are pleased; but where they are not honoured no sacred rite yields rewards," declares Manu Smriti (111.56) a text on social conduct.

"Women must be honoured and adorned by their fathers; brothers, husbands and brothers-in-law, who desire their own welfare." (Manu Smriti III, 55)

"Where the female relations live in grief, the family soon wholly perishes; but that family where they are not unhappy ever prospers." (Manu Smriti 111,57).

"The houses, on which female relations, not being duly honoured, pronounce a curse, perish completely as if destroyed by magic." (Manu" SmritiIII, 58)

"Hence men, who seek their pwn welfare, should . always honour women on holidays and festivals with gifts of ornaments, clothes and dainty food." (Manu Smriti III, 59)

In an old Shakti hymn it is said - Striyah devah, Striyah pranah "Women are Devas, women are life itself."

"If a husband dies, a wife may many another husband.

"If a husband deserts his wife, she may marry another." (Manu, chapter IX, verse 77).

"A woman's body," says Manu the law-giver, "must not be struck hard, even with a flower, because it is sacred." It is for this reason that the Hindus do not allow capital punishment for women.

In the Vedas, she is invited into the family 'as a river enters the sea' and 'to rule there along with her husband, as a queen, over the other members of the family.'

The idea of equality was most forcibly expressed in the Rig Veda (Book 5, hymn 61. verse 8). The commentator explains this passage thus: "The wife and husband, being

the equal halves of one substance, are equal in every respect; therefore both should join and take equal parts in all work; religious and secular," No other Scripture of the world have ever given to the woman such equality with the man as the Vedas of the Hindus.

A Hindu woman whose name was Romastia revealed the 126th hymn of the first book of the Rig Veda; the 179 hymn of the same book was by Lopamudra, another inspired Hindu woman. There are a dozen names of woman revealers of the Vedic wisdom, such as Visvavara, Shashvati, Gargi, Maitreyi, Apala, Ghosha and Aditi, who instructed Indra, one of the Devas, in the higher knowledge of Brajiman, the Universal Spirit. Every one of them lived the ideal life of spirituality, being untouched by the things of the world. They are called in Sanskrit Brahmadhinis, the speakers and revealers of Brahman.

When Sankaracharya; the great commentator of the Vedanta, was discussing philosophy with another philosopher, a Hindu lady, well versed in all the Scriptures, was requested to act as a judge.

It is the special injunction of the Vedas that no married man shall perform any-religious rite, ceremony or sacrifice without being joined in by his wife; the wife is considered a partaker and partner in the spiritual life of her husband; she is called, in Sanskrit, Sahadharini, "spiritual helpmate."

In the whole religious history of the world a second Sita will not be found. Her life was unique.. She is worshipped as an incarnation of God. India is the only country where prevails a belief that God incarnates in the form of a woman as well as in that of a man.

In the Mahabharata we read the account of Sulabha, the great woman Yogini, who came to the court of King Janaka and showed wonderful powers and wisdom, which she had acquired through the practice of Yoga. This shows that women were allowed to practice Yoga.

As in religion, Hindu woman of ancient times enjoyed equal rights and privileges with men, so in secular matters she had equal share and equal power with them. From the Vedic age women in India have had the same right as men and they could go to the courts of justice, plead their own cases and ask for the protection of the law.

Those who have read the famous Hindu drama called Shakuntala know that Shakuntala pleaded her own case and claimed her rights in the court of King Dushyanta. Similar instance are mentioned in the 10th book of the Rig Veda. As early as 2000 B.C. Hindu women were allowed to go to the battlefields to fight against enemies. Her husband in search of robbers sent Sarama, one of the most powerful women of her day. She discovered their hiding place and then destroyed them.

Regarding this as the highest dharma of all four castes, husbands, though weak, must strive to protect their wives. His own offspring, character, family, self and dharma pro-

tect when he protects his wife scrupulously. The husband should engage his wife in dharma, the collection and expenditure of his wealth, in cooking food for the family and in looking after the necessities of the household.

A father protects his daughter in childhood, a husband protects his wife in youth and the sons protect their mother in old age. The father who does not give away his daughter in marriage at the proper time is censurable; censurable is the husband who does not approach his wife in due season; and after the husband is dead, the son, verily is censurable, who does not protect his mother. Even against the slightest provocations should women be particularly guarded; for unguarded they would bring grief to both the families.

Motherhood is considered the greatest glory of Hindu women. The Taittiriya Upanishad teaches, "Matridevo bhava" - "Let your mother be the god to you."

Hindu tradition recognises mother and motherhood as even superior to heaven. The epic Mahabharata says, "While a father is superior to ten learned priests well-versed in the Vedas, a mother is superior to ten such fathers or the entire world."

Hinduism offers some intriguing and unique examples of strong women in the form of Goddesses. Two thousand years ago Saint Trivajvular observed: "What does a man lack if his wife is worthy? And what does he possess if she is lacking worth?" There is more respect in the Hinduism for women and for their role in society.

In many philosophical texts God is referred to as Tat, meaning it that God is beyond gender. The names of Gargi and Maitreyi are too well known as great scholars of Vedic scriptures. We have statements like; "This hymn must be recited by the wife," in the Srautasutras, which clearly endorse the eligibility of women to the study of the Vedas. The Ramayana describes the performance of Sandhya and Havana by Kausalya and Sita. The wife was a regular participant in the sacrificial offerings of the husband. (Rig Veda 1-122-2; 131-3; 111-53-4-6; X-86-10 etc.). Gobhila Gruhya Sutras state that the wife should be educated to be able to take part in sacrifices.

Woman in the role of wife occupies a position of pre-eminence in ancient Hindu tradition. The Hindus from the Vedic times believed in dual worship Shiva with Shakti, Vishnu with Lakshmi, Rama with Sita and so on.

In this dual worship, the names of Radha and Sita get precedence over the names of their companions Krishna and Rama. This happens to be true of Goddess Saraswati and her husband Lord Brahma.

Lord Shiva appears united in a single body with Shakti, his spouse; he at the right side and she at the left, in a manifestation known as Ardhanariswara, the half-man, half-woman incarnation of God. Each of the three principal Gods Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Protector and Shiva the Destroyer in the Hindu pantheon, is accompanied by a Shakti.

The Rig Veda too places woman on a high pedestal of sublimity: Yatr nariyastu poojayante ramarite tatr devah where woman is worshipped, Gods reside there.

Women must be honoured and adorned by their father, brothers, husbands and brother-in-law who desire great good fortune. Where women, verily are honoured, there the gods rejoice; where, however, they are not honoured, there all sacred rites prove fruitless. Where the female relations live in grief, that family soon perishes completely; where, however, they do not suffer from any grievance that family always prospers.

It is, therefore, no wonder that the wife enjoyed with her husband full religious rights and regularly participated in religious ceremonies with him. In fact, the performance of such ceremonies would be invalid without the wife joining her husband as his full partner. Some grammatical passages show that women had other careers open to [them apart from a, mere literary career.

INDIAN CUSTOMS AND RITUALS

Hindu Customs and Rituals

The Sixteen Hindu Samskaras (Sacraments): Man making is a science. Like a gardener, parents and teachers work on a person so that the best can flower out from him or her. The whole thrust is to help bring about greater awareness and love in the mind and canalise the interest and energies into positive fields. The whole 'work' is on the mind alone and is comparable to the work of a genetic engineer. The only difference is that while a genetic engineer plays and transforms with the basic structure, a teacher works to manifest the basic inherent beauty, freedom and potential which facilitates to carve out a dynamic, creative, intelligent and magnanimous personality.

Interest is a very subjective thing and has to come out from within. It can never be imposed. Interests are created by impressions and knowledge. That is what ad agencies too do. They create impressions and this 'works' on the mind of the person to bring about the interest in him in the desired field. Once the interest has been manifested we can just sit back and see the person work [for his or her field of interest in a dynamic way. While the Experts of the advertisement world are generally seen to use this 'knowledge of impressing minds' for their selfish and commercial ends, the Vedic Masters used this knowledge to help bring out a positive and dynamic personality. While the former conditions the mind to the extent that the very thinking process of their target crowd is conditioned in their favour, but the Rishis saw to it that the very power to think and question daringly, independently and creatively grew. Thus we have all our scriptures in the form of question and answers.

These deliberate and positive impressions which help create a deep and lasting impressions on the mind of a person-so as to generate interest in him about the Truth and Dharma, help bring out a positive personality and free the

mind of its negativities are called 'Samskaras'. No one while living in the world remains free of the conditionings of his or her environs and teachings, so the question is not whether we can stop all conditionings but to see to it that a person is looked after like a plant and help his or her potentials bloom. To a question whether Samskaras are deliberate positive conditionings, well the answer is that, the objective of the entire exercise is to help a person [awake to a state which is free from all conditionings, so while impressions are certainly put effectively and [deliberately yet they are the Very antithesis of what is implied by the word conditionings. This is one of the nest and blessed science and has been perfected here as an art form too.

Samskaras are the turning points of life and need to be celebrated. Celebrations are very important ingredients of Samskaras. They directly or indirectly involve our respected elders, scholars, near and dear ones. Everyone gets together to convey their best wishes and blessings to the person concerned and thus there is social and religious sanction for the act and ceremony. Samskaras are great, time-tested tools in our traditional systems which help carve out a great personality. Apart from scriptural validation, history also proves to us the great effectiveness of these methods. When Vedic Masters had their way, India was on top of the world. The people of the far off land prayed that they will one day see this great land of plenty, prosperity and righteousness.

In this section we shall present an introduction to these famous sixteen Samskaras of Hindus which cover the entire life span of a person and take him to the door steps to Truth.

1. Garbhadan: The first coming together of the husband and wife for bringing about conception.
2. Pumsvan: Ceremony performed when the first signs of conception are seen and "is to be performed when someone desires a male child,
3. Seemantonayan: A ceremony of parting of the hairs of the expectant mother to keep her spirits high and positive. Special music is arranged for her.
4. Jatakarma: After the birth of the child, the child is given a secret name, he is given taste of honey and ghee, mother starts the first breast-feeding after chanting of a mantra..
5. Nama-kamna: In this ceremony the child is given a formal name. Performed on the 11th day,
6. Nishkratnana: In this the formal darshan of sun and moon is done for the child.
7. **Annaprashana:** This ceremony is performed, when the child is given solid food (anna) for the first time.
8. **Chudakarana:** Cuda means the 'lock or tuft of hair' kept after the remaining part is shaved off.
9. **Karna-vedha:** Done in 7th or 8th month. Piercing of the ears.
10. **Upanayan and Vedarambha:** The thread ceremony. The child is thereafter authorised to perform all rituals. Studies of Vedas begins with the Guru.

11. Keshanta: Hairs are cut, guru dakshina is given
12. Samayartan: Returning to the house
13. Vivaha: Marriage ceremony
14. Vanaprastha: As old age approaches, the person retires for a life of tapas and studies.
15. Sanyas: Before leaving the body a Hindu sheds all sense of responsibility and relationships to awake and revel in the timeless truth.
16. Antyeshthi: The last rites done after the death.

The Stages of Life Systems

There are four stages of life, viz.. Brahmacharya (student), Grihastha (Householder), Vanaprastha (forest dweller or Hermit in semi retirement), Sannyasi (the renounced one in full retirement) and the Dharma of each is different. The four stages may be said to represent periods of Preparation, Production, Service and Retirement.

Brahmacharya (Celibate)

Brahmacharya means Student, usually between 12 and 24 years of age. The duty of a student is to study. On initiation into Brahmacharya by means of the Upanayana rites, he becomes a 'Dvija' (a twice born). 'Upanayana' means 'bringing near', the disciple is brought near the Guru for receiving the initiation of mantras.

For the Brahmachari, celibacy is his forte, discipline is his norm, devotion to his Guru is his duty and concentration in studies is his vocation.

Grihastha Ashrama

Grihastha means House-holder usually between 24 and 48 years of age. After the 'Gurukula Vasa' he graduates himself into the mundane world, taking a wife to assist him in his performance of Dharmic duties.

All Sastras proclaim the importance of the Grihastha Ashrama as the fulcrum of all other Ashramas. People in the other three Ashramas. heavily lean on the Grihastha for support and sustenance required to carry out their respective duties. The Grihastha earns his livelihood by whatever a vocation befitting his being a member of his group, raising children, supporting his own family, kith and kin besides the persons performing their duties in the other three Ashramas.

The life of a Grihastha is therefore, considered a 'Jivayagna'-a lifelong saga of self-sacrifice for the benefit of others in society.

Vanaprastha Ashrama (The Anchorite)

Vanaprastha is the third stage of life usually between 48 and 72 years of age. A stage comes when business, family, secular life like the beauties and hopes of youth have exhausted themselves and need to be left behind. The person retires usually from worldly attachments to lead a life of contemplation and meditation alone or with his wife.

What life holds beyond middle age depends in the end not on fancy and imagination but on the realities of the values of life we regard as inviolable. Vanaprastha may be termed as the beginning of a person's real 'adult education' to evaluate his performance thus far as Grihastha and reorder his life in such a way as to discover who he is and what life is all about.

Sannyasa Ashrama (The Renounced)

Sannyasi is the fourth stage of an Ascetic-Solitaire-usually beyond 72 years of age. This means 'Samyak Nyasa'-'Total detachment' from worldly pleasures including the bare necessities to subsist. This is the last 'Ashrama'. He does not aspire to be recognised as somebody who matters-he wish of the Sannyasi is just to be a 'persona non grata'-one who exists almost without giving any thought to his being-with no desire for name, or fame or recognition.

PURUSHARTHAS

Purusha means human being and artha means object or objective. Purusharthas means objectives of man. According to Hindu way of life, a man should strive to achieve four chief objectives (Purusharthas) in his life. They are:

1. dharma (righteousness),
2. artha (material wealth),
3. kama (desire) and
4. moksha (salvation).

Every individual in a society is expected to achieve these four objectives and seek fulfilment in his life before departing from here. The concept of Purusharthas clearly establishes the fact that Hinduism does not advocate a life of self negation and hardship, but a life of balance, achievement and fulfilment.

Dharma: Dharma is a very complicated word, for which there is no equivalent word in any other language, including English. Dharma actually means that which upholds this entire creation. It is a Divine law that is inherent and invisible, but responsible for all existence. Dharma exists in all planes, in all aspects and at all levels of creation. In the context of human life, dharma consists of all that an individual undertakes in harmony with Divine expectations and his own inner spiritual aspirations, actions that would ensure order and harmony within himself and in the environment in which he lives. Since this world is deluded, a human being may not know what is right and what is wrong or what is dharma and what is adharma. Hence he should rely upon the scriptures and adhere to the injunctions contained therein. In short, dharma for a human being means developing divine virtues and performing actions that are in harmony with the divine laws.

Dharma is considered to be the first cardinal aim because it is at the root of everything and upholds everything. For example see what happens when a person amasses -

wealth without observing dharma or indulges in sexual passion against the social norms or established moral values. Any action performed without observing dharma is bound to bring misery and suffering and delay one's salvation. Hinduism therefore considers it rightly as the first cardinal aim of life.

In ancient India dharmaśāstras (law books) provided guidance to people in their day to day lives and helped them to adhere to dharma. These law-books were written for a particular time frame and are no more relevant to the modern world. The best way to know what is dharma and what is adharma, is to follow the religious scriptures such as the Bhagavad Gita and the Upanishads or any other scripture that contains the words of God.

Artha: Artha means wealth. Hinduism recognises the importance of material wealth for the overall happiness and well being of an individual. A householder requires wealth, because he has to perform many duties to uphold dharma and ensure the welfare and progress of his family and society. A person may have the intention to uphold the dharma, but if he has no money he would not be able to perform his duties and fulfil his dharma.

Hinduism therefore rightly places material wealth as the second most important objective in human life. Lord Vishnu is the best example for any householder who wants to lead a life of luxury and still be on the side of God doing his duties. As the preserver of the universe, Lord Vishnu lives in Vaikunth amid pomp and glory, with the goddess of wealth herself by his side and yet helps the poor and the needy, protects the weak, upholds the dharma and sometimes leaving everything aside rushes to the earth as an incarnation to uphold dharma.

Hinduism advocates austerity, simplicity and detachment, but does not glorify poverty. Hinduism also emphasises the need to observe dharma while amassing the wealth. Poverty has become a grotesque reality in present day Hindu society. Hindus have become so poverty conscious that if a saint or a sage leads a comfortable life, they scoff at him, saying that he is not a true yogi. They have to remind themselves of the simple fact that none of the Hindu gods and goddesses are really poor.

Hinduism believes that both spiritualism and materialism are important for the salvation of human beings. It is unfortunate that Hinduism came to be associated more with spiritualism, probably because of the influence of Buddhism, whereas in truth Hinduism does not exclude either of them. As Swami Vivekananda rightly said religion is not for the empty stomachs. Religion is not for those whose main concern from morning till evening is how to make both ends meet. Poverty crushes the spirit of man and renders him an easy prey to wicked forces.

In ancient India Artha Śāstras (scriptures on wealth) provided necessary guidance to people on the finer aspects

of managing their wealth. Kautilya's Arthashastra, which is probably a compilation of many independent works, gives us a glimpse of how money matters were handled in ancient India.

Kama: Kama in a wider sense means desire and in a narrow sense, sexual desire. Hinduism prescribes fulfilment of sexual passions for the householders and abstinence from it for the students and ascetics who are engaged in the study of the scriptures and in the pursuit of Brahman.

The Bhagavad Gita informs us that desire is an aspect of delusion and one has to be wary of its various movements and manifestations. The best way to deal with desires is to develop detachment and perform desireless actions without seeking the fruit of one's actions and making an offering of all the actions to God. This way our actions would not bind us to the cycle of births and deaths.

Hinduism permits sexual freedom so long as it is not in conflict with the first aim, i.e. dharma. Hindu scriptures emphasise that the purpose of sex is procreation and perpetuation of family and society, while the purpose of dharma is to ensure order in the institution of family and society. A householder has the permission to indulge in sex, but also has the responsibility to pursue it in accordance with the laws of dharma. Marriage is a recognised social institution and marriage for the purpose of producing children is legitimate and in line with the aims of dharma.

One of the important sects of Hinduism is Tantricism, It recognises the importance of sexual freedom in the liberation of soul. The Tantrics accept sex as an important means to experience the blissful nature of God and the best way to experience God in physical form. They also refer to the concept of Purusharthas to justify their doctrines. They believe that sexual energy is divine energy and it can be transformed into spiritual energy through controlled expression of sex. (

Just as the Dharmaśāstras were written for the sake of dharma and Arthaśāstras for artha, Kamaśāstras were composed in ancient India for providing guidance in matters of sex. We have lost many of them because of the extreme secrecy and social disapproval associated with the subject.

Moksha : If dharma guides the life of a human, being from below acting as the earth, showing him the way from above like a star studded mysterious sky is Moksha, Dharma constitutes the legs of a Purusha that walk upon the earth; both artha and kama constitute his two limbs active in the middle region; while Moksha constitutes the head that rests in the heaven.

Human life is very precious because of all the beings in all the worlds, only human beings have the best opportunity to realise the Higher self. It is also precious because it is attained after many hundreds and thousands of lives. Rightly, salvation should be its ultimate aim.

Moksha actually means absence of moha or delusion. Delusion is caused by the interplay of the triple gunas. When

a person overcomes these gunas, he attains liberation. The gunas can be overcome by detachment, self control, surrender to god and offering ones actions to God.

If dharma is the centre of the wheel of human life, artha and kama are the two spokes and Moksha is its circumference. If dharma is at the centre of human life, beyond Moksha there is no human life, but only a life divine.

The four Purusharmas are also like the four wheels of a chariot called human life. They collectively uphold it and lead it. Each influences the movement of the other three and in the absence of any one of them, the chariot comes to a halt.

Ritual of Death

Many people believe that after death, they will continue to live on in new and different bodies. The theory of Karma and rebirth says that the mental qualities that we possess carry on from one birth to the next. But does this mean our memories are accurate? People believe they have memories of reincarnation. Some people, upon experiencing *deja vu*, feel that the experience is a proof of existence of former lives. Some think the truth comes out under hypnosis while others believe just from their memory. But is this good evidence to back up the belief of life after death?

The doctrine of karma says that one experiences *dejavu* because of reincarnation. But how accurate is this statement? These people have the sense of having visited a place before. Many people argue that this sort of experience is vague in its "nature". It might have many possible explanations. Since *deja vu* is a feeling, perhaps the feeling arose from something else. Something else in the environment could have caused one to feel like they've been here before. These explanations can be based on childhood memories that are "similar" but not identical. Maybe they saw a place that resembles the place they are claiming to have lived in before. It is also possible they saw a photograph of it. They might feel it is *dejavu* when in fact they may have forgotten that they have been there before. Another explanation could be the possession of a disorder. Memories of former lives could be the result of an illness they might be suffering from. It can even be a memory disorder and the things they are claiming to be past memories might only be bits and pieces of former memories from their "present" life. Many people claim to have spontaneous or recovered memories of past births.

But how do we know this isn't a mere hallucination? They might be seeing things or imagining them. Maybe this is a matter of wishful thinking. The person "wishes" they were reincarnated. Their obsession with it probably drove them to believe it. Fraud can also play a role in such cases. How do we know the person isn't lying?

Alleged memories of past lives are usually obtained by a procedure called hypnotic regression. Subjects are asked to recall experiences they had from present to past. They

are then asked to recall events that happened before they were born. This produces memories of past reincarnations. But how do we know this is correct? The subjects could have invented such stories out of a natural desire to please the hypnotist or perhaps they don't know they are lying. People can also have false memories of past births/events because of the hypnotist himself. A hypnotist can instill false beliefs in easily affected subjects. It is possible that a hypnotist could induce the mind to generate a general type of fantasy that "feels" real. The hypnotist could make you believe you had a previous life. Thus, you can't fully believe that under hypnotic regression, the recalled memories are true.

But now, let us suppose the story of a past life seems to be accurate. How do we know it is really accurate? What proof do we have? The subject must have obtained the details either consciously or subconsciously. He may have obtained it from books, documents or other historical material. You need proof in order to say that an argument for life after death is based on memories of former lives. Critics might say that you don't need proof in order for something to exist. But until there isn't proof that these memories are real, you can't say that life after death can be based on memories. Let's suppose the subject's account of experiences in a past life is demonstrated to be 100 per cent accurate and they couldn't have obtained details and facts about them. Then how can we be sure that this person is the same person whose experiences have been recalled? They could be memories of someone else's former life. This, then, shouldn't be used to prove the existence of life after death. Without proofs that what the subject believes is true from a former life, you don't have to believe it. One might believe that maybe it's possible that no one knows about this small detail which a subject has recalled as a past memory. But the subject still, could be making it all up. It is also possible that he might be making it all up for attention.

One might remember having no talents in a past life. And now that in this life they are born with extraordinary talents, they are sure they have been reincarnated. They believe they did good deeds in their former lives and as a result, they have extraordinary talents in life. This can, though, be due to their environment or maybe it just happened. It can be a matter of coincidence too. Maybe believers of the theory of life after death feel that if they meditate and think about their past lives, they will remember.

The theory of karma and rebirth says that qualities from our mental character continue on from one birth to the next. These qualities include talents, likes and dislikes, emotions and, etc. If this is true, then what about the people who claim to remember having certain qualities in their former life, but don't have these qualities in their present life? What about these subjects who claim to remember liking and disliking certain things, yet in this life, these likes and dislikes aren't the same? If these qualities change, then what is the

proof that the subject is the same person as who he claims to be? People may recall dying of an illness, accident of other diseases. Such things as -accidents, drugs, surgery, shock treatments, strokes, tumours and, etc., might have destroyed parts of their brains. If so, then how do we measure the accuracy of what they are presently saying? It is possible to lose memory, talents, likes and dislikes and many others because of head injuries. There is no need, then, to have faith on their memories if there are possibilities that parts of their brains might have been severely damaged.

Although people may claim to remember things from their past lives, people need not believe them. Without proof that the past even occurred, we don't have to believe it happened. If there is no way to distinguish the statements of memory from the statements from imagination, then there is no reason to believe that there is a life after death.

After Life

The Buddhism belief of death and after death is very different from any I have ever heard of. They consider the after death just as important as the person's time on earth. Buddhist believe that in your lifetime, nothing that you possess other than your "karma" follows you after death. In saying this, Buddhist people believe that if you live your life honestly and positive, then good thing will follow for you in your "resurrection" which may be the result of coming back to life as God or something very beautiful. Contrary to that, if you cheat people out and live a dishonest and .negative life, you may resurrect into the "hells" or come back as a deformed and .ugly person or animal.

The Jainism view life as an endless reincarnation, as the Buddha's do they are born, live their lives as long as they are given and then they are born again. Jains base their religion around karma and if you have good karma then you will be given a good life and when you die you will receive a good fortune in your second life or as they call it the Circle of Births. I think that if everyone based his or her life around having good karma we would be living in a pretty good world. I like this approach to life, what you practice in your life results in your outcome after to die.

Christianity again, is something again very different from the above after life beliefs. Within this religion, it is believed that when one person dies, depending on how honest and truthfully your life was lived, you will go to either "heaven" or "hell". Heaven is said to be "up in the clouds" where your soul raises and where all bad becomes good. This is where you may "achieve your eternal happiness". Hell on the other hand, is stereotyped as a place where the "devil" is. It's a place where you will be "burned" in the devil's fire.

Mourning Practices

Mourning practices for the Buddhism religion comes across to me as being very extraordinary. They want to

ensure that the, persons after life is secure and they are ready to move on. They diseased body is cremated after eight days, following that, Buddhist people pray for the diseased person for forty-nine days after they die, in preparation for that person's death and also to allow that person to seek the best possible after life that is possible. They spend several weeks after a person's death talking to them and reading from their holy scriptures. The way they take forty-nine days to make sure the person is ready for their new life is very difficult for me to understand.

Jainism look at life as there are two things: "Soul and Matter, they say that soul is life and how you value your life. If you value your life and other living creatures then you have good soul. They say that matter is lifeless and is not good. Matter is evil and is what results in a bad outcome from the circle of births. If a person has bad karma or bad matter it goes and affects the soul.

Christianity follows the mourning system that many of us are probably used to, A person dies and within a couple of days their death is celebrated for family and friends by having a "wake" and a "funeral". At these ceremonies the diseased loved ones get their final chance to see them. After this, the person is either buried or cremated (depending on choice) and then put underground in, a graveyard, with a gravestone. Many times loved ones will visit the gravestone to pray and leave flowers..

Traditions and Other Beliefs

There is a famous book that the people of the Buddhist culture study. The book is called Bardo Thodol, meaning \ the book of the dead. This book even dates back to having pre-Buddhist teachings in it. It preaches that the human soul abides for forty-nine days in a dream like state. This state is called Bardo. In this book they explain that this little device that is actually called a pray wheel. This wheel is carried around by many Tibetan monks and is said to contain written prayers that are activated by movement.

Another interesting aspect of the Buddhist religion is that these teachings were carried into China soon after they became popular in India. I had no idea that this religion was carried to other countries. Our group would have never guessed that it would spread across several different countries.

People of the Jainism religion can be "released from the circle of births", to do this which is considered a bad thing and will not receive any prayer or worship. It occurs from not believing in the religion or going against the . religion such as bad karma or killing innocent or affecting others.- The Jains are very pro life, they even will not harm a living creature, as they think it might go against their karma, they care so much about animals and will not eat meat if it has to be cooked,

Christianity began when communication was slow and authority was rather decentralised, they were looked upon

for guidance and authority. Some of the beliefs that Christianity followed were as follows: "we believe in only one God, the Father Almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the son of God, begotten of the Father, the only-begotten; that is, of the essence of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, Begotten not made, being of one essence with the Father; by whom all things were made, both in heaven and on earth; who for us men and for our salvation, came down and was incarnate and was made a man."

Some of the traditions of the Christian faith are that they celebrate the Eucharist on Sundays and prey the word of the Lord. Take the body of Christ and reflect to your self-kneeling by your seat. You give a sign of peace through a handshake and rejoice with everyone around you.

When you walk into a Christian church you will become overwhelmed with great art work and beautiful music and hymns of rhythm. These are the visual components of attending mass combined with prayer. In my opinion I believe in this faith because that is the faith that I have been brought up to believe, therefore I will support all notions and practice all of their traditions.

Hindu Death Rituals and Beliefs

There is one thing that is certain in this lifetime: eventually we all must die. A belief in the cyclical reincarnation of the soul is one of the foundations of the Hindu religion. Death is viewed as a natural aspect of life and there are numerous epic tales, sacred scriptures and Vedic guidance that describe the reason for death's existence, the rituals that should be performed surrounding it and the many possible destinations of the soul after departure from its earthly existence. While the ultimate goal is to transcend the need to return to life on earth, all Hindus believe they will be reborn into a future that is based primarily on their past thoughts and actions.

The first mortal to meet his 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 call him 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, include the restoration of a sick body, the maintaining of family relations and the highly desired apotheosis". Yama is aided by two killer guide dogs that are described as the "four-eyed keepers of the path, who watch over men." These "two dark messengers of Yama with flaring nostrils wander among men, thirsting for the breath of life". Yet, once they have secured their prey, they lead them back to their heavenly realm, where Yama directs them to their destiny.

Cremation is a ritual designed to do much more than dispose of the body; it is intended to release the soul from its earthly existence. "Hindus believe that cremation (com-

pared to burial or outside disintegration) is most spiritually beneficial to the departed soul." This is based on the belief that the "astral body" will linger "as long as the physical body remains visible." If the body is not cremated, "the soul remains nearby for days or months" The only bodies that are not generally burned are unnamed babies and the lowest of castes, which are returned to the earth. The standard cremation ceremony begins with the ritual cleansing, dressing and adorning of the body. The body is then carried to the cremation ground as prayers are chanted to Yama, invoking his aid.

It is the chief mourner, usually the eldest son, who takes the twigs of holy kusha grass, flaming, from the Doms' (the untouchable caste who tend funeral pyres) eternal fire to the pyre upon which the dead has been laid. He circumambulates the pyre counterclockwise-for everything is backward at the time of death. As he walks round the pyre, his sacred thread, which usually hangs from the left shoulder, has been reversed to hang from the right. He lights the pyre. The dead, now, is an offering to Agni, the fire. Here, as in the most ancient Vedic times, the fire conveys the offering to heaven.

After the corpse is almost completely burned, the chief mourner performs the rite called kapalakriya, the 'rite of the skull,' cracking the skull with a long bamboo stick, thus releasing the soul from entrapment in the body. After the cremation, the ashes are thrown into a river, ideally the Ganges river and the mourners walk away without looking back.

The death ritual does not end with the elimination of the body. There is still the safety of the Soul to look after. To ensure the passage during its voyage to the Other world, an eleven-day ritual called shraddh is performed. It consists of daily offerings of rice balls, called pindas, which provide a symbolic, transitional body for the dead.

During these days, the dead person makes the journey to the heavens or the world of the ancestors or the 'far shore.' "On the twelfth day, the departed soul is said to reach its destination and be joined with its ancestors, a fact expressed symbolically by joining a small pinda to a much larger one," Without these rites, the soul may never find its way to Yama's realm.

Those who have been "meritorious," but have not quite attained liberation through self-knowledge, are sent to a heavenly realm to await their fate. "There the Gandharvas (demigods of fertility) sing to them and the bevy of celestial nymphs dance for them." Since there is no need for punishment, "they go forth immediately on very high divine carriages. And when they get down from those carriages, they are born in the families of kings and other noble people." There they "maintain and protect their 'good conduct' and live out their days before they are reborn enjoying 'the very best of pleasures'".

The fate for those who have participated in less

honourable thoughts or actions is far less pleasant. The Arthashastra, a Hindu textbook from the second century BCE, offers a detailed description of some of the more frightening realms. Yet before reaching these dangerous destinations, one must first endure a miserable journey. "The hard-hearted men of Yama, terrifying, foul-smelling, with hammers and maces in their hands" come to get the deceased, who tremble and begin to scream. Filled with terror and pain, the soul leaves the body. "Preceded by his vital wind, he takes on another body of the same form, a body born of his own karma in order for him to be tortured."

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 Untouchables. When there is none of his evil left and he is filled with merit, then he starts climbing up to higher castes, Sudra, Vaishya, Kshatriya and so forth, sometimes eventually reaching the stage of Brahman or king of men. With so many unpleasant possibilities, it is easy to understand why reincarnation is not the only goal of every Hindu.

Those who lead a life of austerity, meditation and grace can look forward to the possibility of reaching Brahmaloka. This is the "highest among the heavenly planes" and the dwelling place of Brahma himself. "This is a place of intensely Spiritual atmosphere, whose inhabitants live, free from disease, old age and death, enjoying uninterrupted bliss in the companionship of the Deity." There is no need for them to return to earth because they have freed themselves "from all material desires." While they do experience a sense of individuality, they also experience a oneness with Brahma. This is the realm of immortality.

There is one other way to achieve liberation from samsara. This is to die within the city of Banaras, on the Ganges. "Death, which elsewhere is feared, here is welcomed as a long-expected guest." A city of many names, it was known in ancient time as Kashi, the city of light and the Mahabharata refers to it as Varanasi. The funeral pyres, which are located on the river, burn nonstop. "Death, which elsewhere is polluting, is here holy and auspicious." People travel from around the country and the planet to spend their last days in Banaras because, "Death, the most natural, unavoidable and certain of human realities, is, here the sure gate to Moksha, the rarest, most precious, most difficult to achieve of spiritual goals".

For those, who are unable to die in Banaras, cremation on the banks of the Ganges or the spreading of the ashes in her waters is the next best thing. Referred to as the "River of Heaven" or the "goddess and mother," she is considered to be sacred from her source in the Himalayas, all the way to the sea in the Bay of Bengal. Her power 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".

Mourning, Burial at Sea: It must be understood that while this information was furnished by reliable sources, there are many different opinions between those of Hindu faith and any Hindu contemplating cremation or burial at sea must seek the advice of a trusted priest.

Hindu death rituals in all traditions follow a fairly uniform pattern drawn from the Vedas, with variations according to sect, region, caste and family tradition. Most rites are fulfilled by the family, all of whom participate, including the children, who need not be shielded from the death. Certain rites are traditionally performed by a priest but may also be performed by the family if no priest is available. Here is a simple outline of rites that can be performed by Hindus in any locality. Variations are noted and suggestions made for Hindus in Western countries.

As Death Approaches: Traditionally, a Hindu dies at home. Nowadays the dying are increasingly kept in hospitals, even when recovery is clearly not possible. Knowing the merits of dying at home among loved ones, Hindus bring the ill home. When death is imminent, kindred are notified. The person is placed in his room or in the entry way of the house, with the head facing east. A lamp is lit near his head and he is urged to concentrate on his mantra. Kindred keep vigil until the great departure, singing hymns, praying and reading scripture. If he cannot come home, this happens at the hospital, regardless of institutional objections.

The Moment of Death: If the dying person is unconscious at departure, a family member chants the mantra softly in the right ear. If none is known, "Aum Namo Narayana" or "Aum Namo Sivaya" is intoned. (This is also, done for sudden death victims, such as on a battlefield or in a car accident.) Holy ash or sandal paste is applied to the forehead, Vedic verses are chanted and a few drops of milk, Ganga or other holy water are trickled into the mouth. After death, the body is laid in the home's entryway, with the head facing south, on a cot or the ground-reflecting a return to the lap of Mother Earth. The lamp is kept lit near the head and incense burned. A cloth is tied under the chin and over the top of the head. The thumbs are tied together, as are the big toes. In a hospital, the family has the death certificate signed immediately, and transports the body home. Under no circumstances should the body be embalmed or organs removed for use by others. Religious pictures are turned to the wall and in some traditions mirrors are covered. Relatives are beckoned to bid farewell and sing sacred songs at the side of the body.

The Homa Fire Ritual: If available, a special funeral priest is called. In a shelter built by the family, a fire ritual (homa) is performed to bless nine brass kumbhas (water pots) and one clay pot. Lacking the shelter, an appropriate fire is made in the home. The "chief mourner" leads the rites. He

is the eldest son in the case of the father's death and the youngest son in the case of the mother's. In some traditions, the eldest son serves for both or the wife, son-in-law or nearest male relative.

Preparing the Body: The chief mourner now performs Aarti, passing an oil lamp over the remains, then offering flowers. The male (or female, depending on the gender of the deceased) relatives carry the body to the back porch, remove the clothes and drape it with a white cloth. (If there is no porch, the body can be sponge bathed and prepared where it is.) Each applies sesame oil to the head and the body is bathed with water from the nine kumbhas, dressed, placed in a coffin (or on a palanquin) and carried to the homa shelter. The young children, holding small lighted sticks, encircle the body, singing hymns. The women then walk around the body and offer puffed rice into the mouth to nourish the deceased for the journey ahead. A widow will place her tali (wedding pendant) around her husband's neck, signifying her enduring tie to him. The coffin is then closed. If unable to bring the body home, the family arranges to clean and dress it at the mortuary rather than leave these duties to strangers. The ritual homa fire can be made at home or kindled at the crematorium.

Cremation: Only men go to the cremation site, led by the chief mourner. Two pots are carried: the clay kumbha and another containing burning embers from the homa. The body is carried three times counterclockwise around the pyre, then placed upon it. All circumambulating and some Aarti, in the rites is counterclockwise. If a coffin is used, the cover is now removed. The men offer puffed rice as the women did earlier, cover the body with wood and offer incense and ghee. With the clay pot on his left shoulder, the chief mourner circles the pyre while holding a fire brand behind his back. At each turn around the pyre, 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 lights the pyre and leaves the cremation grounds. The others follow: At a gas-fueled crematorium, sacred wood and ghee are placed inside the coffin with the body. Where permitted, the body is carried around the chamber and a small fire is lit in the coffin before it is consigned to the flames. The cremation switch then is engaged by the chief mourner.

Return Home; Ritual Impurity: Returning home, all bathe and share in cleaning the house. A lamp and water pot are set where the body lay in state. The water is changed daily and pictures remain turned to the wall. The shrine room is closed, with white cloth draping all icons. During these days of ritual impurity, family and close relatives do not visit others' homes, though neighbours and relatives bring daily meals to relieve the burdens during mourning. Neither do they attend festivals and temples, visit swamis, nor take part in marriage arrangements. Some observe this period up to one year. For the death of friends, teachers or students,

observances are optional. While mourning is never suppressed or denied, scriptures admonish against excessive lamentation and encourage joyous release. The departed soul is acutely conscious of emotional forces directed at him. Prolonged grieving can hold him in earthly consciousness, inhibiting full transition to the heaven worlds. In Hindu Bali, it is shameful to cry for the dead.

Bone-Gathering Ceremony: About 12 hours after cremation, family men return to collect the remains. Water is sprinkled on the ash; the remains are collected on a large tray. At crematoriums the family can arrange to personally gather the remains: ashes and small pieces of white bone called "flowers." In crematoriums these are ground to dust and arrangements must be made to preserve them. Ashes are carried or sent to India for deposition in the Ganges or placed them in an auspicious river or the ocean, along with garlands and flowers.

First Memorial: On the 3rd, 7th or 9th, 11th and 12th day, relatives gather for a meal of the deceased's favourite foods. A portion is offered before his photo and later ceremonially left at an abandoned place, along with some lit camphor. Customs for this period are varied. Some offer pinda (rice balls)-daily for nine days. Others combine all these offerings with the following sapindikarana rituals for a few days or one day of ceremonies. (Now, it is not some everywhere).

31st-Day Memorial: On the 31st day, a memorial service is held. In some traditions it is a repetition of the funeral rites. At home, all thoroughly clean the house. A priest purifies the home and performs the sapindikarana, making one large pinda (representing the deceased) and three small, representing the father, grandfather and greatgrandfather. The large ball is cut in three pieces and joined with the small pindas to ritually unite the soul with the ancestors in the next world.

The pindas are fed to the crows, to a cow or thrown in a river for the fish. Some perform this rite on the 11th day after cremation. Others perform it twice: on the 31st day or (11th, 15th, etc.) and after one year. Once the first sapindikarana is completed, the ritual impurity ends. Monthly repetition is also common for one year.

One-Year Memorial: At the yearly anniversary of the death (according to the moon calendar), a priest conducts the shraddh rites in the home, offering pinda to the ancestors. This ceremony is done yearly as long as the sons of the deceased are alive (or for a specified period). It is now common in India to observe shraddh for ancestors just prior to the yearly Navaratri festival. This time is also appropriate for cases where the day of death is unknown.

Hindu funeral rites can be simple or exceedingly complex. These ten steps, devotedly completed according to the customs, means and ability of the family, will properly conclude one earthly sojourn of any Hindu soul.

Religions such as Hinduism offer our own immortal souls satisfying answers to questions of life and death. Their ancient mythic texts provide real reasons for our existence here on earth. They also demonstrate that death is something that can be prepared for instead of being feared. In addition, they offer the possibility of something to look forward to, so we need not dread our last days on this planet. A true Hindu shall love death as he loves this life.

Customs and Rituals in Other Indigenous Religions

India is the birthplace of many religions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism are all progeny of this part of pur globe. But they are not the only religions that exist here. Adherents of Christianity, Islam, Zoroastrianism and Judaism also to be found in India.

Over countless generations there has been significant exchange of customs, traditions, beliefs, rituals, etc., between these different religions. Such an exchange is not peculiar to India and has been occurring the world over throughout the past. In India though, the existence of many religions in the same social environment created a situation favourable for such an interchange of customs and rituals.

The other fact that some religions existing in India are offspring of the amalgam of beliefs that coexisted under the heading Hinduism. This has also led to the presence of many features of the parent religion in the offspring religions. At times this has blurred the line dividing Hinduism from the offspring religions leading occasionally to tension of the offspring religions with their parent.

One instance of this is the ire against the constitution of India wherein the term 'Hindu' includes Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs.

But interchange of customs and rituals has taken place even between religions originating in India and those brought into India from other parts of our globe. This interchange has also been a massive one for the reason that apart from the fusion of customs as a result of coexistence of different forms of worship, the adherents of religions originating in other parts of the globe like Christianity and Islam are largely converts from Hinduism. This does not apply in the case of Zoroastrianism and Judaism as these two religions have tended to be insular and have jealously guarded against the entry of members of other faiths by way of conversion. But even then they display many traits which they have absorbed from other religions especially Hinduism.

Although this interchange has been quite substantial, it has not succeeded in bringing about identity in many important respects. Communal riots are still not a thing of the past, sectarian feelings are still very much with as and there normally run counter to the spirit of nationalism and secularism. The result of this is perhaps India's having the dubious distinction of being a Secular society without a common civil code. For an appraisal of contemporary' Indian society to be complete we ought to examine the nature and

genesis of the different religions that exist around us and also the extent to which they have influenced each other. To obtain an insight into every religion, we shall briefly state the history of every religion since its inception, what it has borrowed from other faiths and what it has lent to it.

We start with the religion which is not only professed by a vast majority in India, but has also been the birthplace for many customs found in other religious communities in India.

JAIN RITUALS

Birth-Priyodhbhav Sanskar: This ritual takes place after the birth of a child. Ten days of cleansing or Sutak are observed after delivery. During this period no rituals are performed. But in the temple the priest recites mantras and receives offerings on behalf of the newborn.

Namkaran Sanskar: This is the naming ceremony. It is done on the eleventh, thirteenth or twenty-ninth day after the birth of a child. For Namkaran the name is selected from the 1008 Jinasahasranam for the boys and names of the girls are selected from famous women of the Puranas. The priest, chanting mantras declares the name and then the child is blessed.

Death: The Jains cremate the dead as soon as possible. First the body is rubbed with a wet cloth. The corpse is then clothed and placed in a bier and covered with a kafan. The body, is tied to the bier and taken to the crematorium: A suitable place without any living organisms like grass or insects is selected so as not to harm them. There a platform of wood is erected. The body is taken from the bier and placed on the platform with logs of wood over it. Ghee, camphor and sandalwood powder are sprinkled all over the body and the eldest son of the deceased does the last rites.

The son goes round the pyre three times sprinkling water all over the body. Chanting the Namokar Mantra, he lights up the pyre. Then after sometime they pour milk over the .placed The remains are collected in bags and the place is thoroughly cleansed. The remains are not immersed in rivers as they can pollute the water. Instead they dig a hole in the earth and put the remains ,and sprinkle salt all over, so that it dissolves easily.

The Jains believe that the dead soul would be reborn immediately. So for them death is a festival or Mahotsav. Loud wailing and observing anniversaries are not part of "the Jain Tradition.

Jainism and the Puja Ritual

The central objects of veneration in a Jain temple are statues of human figures in marble, stone or metal. These austere and rigid figures, always sharply sculpted and finely polished, sit with their hands folded on their lap or stand bolt upright in meditation. They are the Jinas or Tirthankars, the twenty-four divine ascetic renouncers who have founded and re-founded the Jain religion. Although there are many

other idols and sacred representations in Jain temples, it is essentially to the Tirthankars that the puja is addressed. Each temple is named after its one main Tirthankar, but statues of others gleam from every wall and dark corner and it is as though, going into the temple, one enters a space which is already peopled by a crowd of silent identical predecessors.

In the case of the puja these responses range from devoted participation to outright rejection. Since such reactions emerge in specific historical and social contexts, we describe the present socio-economic position of the Jains and we also provide a short history of the reforms and debates about ritual in the Khartar Gacch, the Jain tradition to which most of our friends in Jaipur belong.

Jain Wedding: Jainism advocates the peaceful coexistence and interaction of two different living organisms in mutual beneficence or mutual dependence. Life is regarded as a gift to be shared together, helping each other to exist and grow. Jains have this wonderful prayer in their hearts always for forgiveness for all living beings also seeking and receiving the forgiveness of all beings. Also prayer craving for the friendship of all beings. Jains regard marriage as more or less a worldly affair. Marriage and family raising are recommended to all the Jain Shravakas. Because children born of the wed-lock would follow the Jain dharma only.

Marriage through the Ages

The Jain marriage custom is governed by the traditional practices which of course vary from community to community. Some rituals are of course common to all Jain marriages. For the Jains, marriage means a public declaration of a man and a woman's intention to be together for the entire life. The community gives support to the couple by being a part of it. The Jain community assemblies on various occasions have condemned the practice of negotiating a dowry before marriage. Jains believe that there should be no waste of money or time. Nevertheless, marriage is an once-in-lifetime occasion that has to be celebrated properly and grandly. Jain marriages are mostly conducted by the Jain pundits only.

Match Making: Jains believe in marrying within the community only. They feel that the children thus born would also become Jains only. They mostly find partners for their eligible boy or girl by word of mouth. They intimate their willingness to get their children married to the other known people in their community. Modern day advertising through newspapers and engaging marriage bureaus are also in vogue these days.

Costumes

Bridal Wear: The Jain brides wear sarees only. The preferred colour is red or any other bright colour.

Groom's Attire: The Jain grooms wear the traditional Kurta Pyajama or the Dhoti Kurta.

Rituals before Marriage: In Laghana Lekhan, the marriage is fixed. On this occasion, pooja is held at the girl's house and relatives are invited. The lagna, also known as the mahurat is determined, by the priest. At the end of the rituals, the lagna patrika or a letter telling you about the time of marriage, is sent to the boy's house. It is also customary to send 3A kg of sweets, especially laddoos at the time of engagement or sagai. The sweets could also be sent in an auspicious time.

Lagna Patrika Vachan: The Lagna Patrika Vachan is read out 'in the' boy's house. This is done either on the engagement day or any other auspicious moment. After this the priest reads the letter after the groom has performed the Vinayakyantra Pooja.

Sagai: Engagement or sagai ceremony is held at the groom's house. The groom would wear the traditional Jain headgear, wash his hands and do the Vinayakyantra. After the Vinayakyantra pooja, the bride's brother applies tilak on the groom's forehead and gifts him a gold chain, a ring, clothes, coconut, sweets and money. The groom is then presented the lagna patrika. The priest reads out the patrika and the groom seeks the blessings of the elders.

Mada-mandap : After Sagai, the next most important ceremony is Mada-mandap, which is held a day or two before marriage. This ceremony is celebrated both at the groom's as well as the bride's places. The hour for the occasion is a predetermined auspicious hour. The priest would perform all the rituals.

Barati: The barati is a ritual that takes place at the girl's place. It is upon arrival of the barat or the groom's procession that the bride's brother receives the groom and applies tika on his forehead. He is also presented with coconut, money, sweet and clothes. In return, the groom also apply tika on the forehead of the bride's brother and presents him a coconut.

Aarti: After receiving the groom with all honour, it's time when the married women do an aarti of the groom. They also sing the Mangala Geet.

Phere: There is perhaps the most important ceremony in Indian marriages; For the Phere also an auspicious time is being decided. For this, the groom and the bride would be taken to the mandap and made them seated. The girl sits to the right of the groom, the groom and the bride changing position after taking the seven vows.

Kanyavaran or Kanyadan: Also known as the kanyapradan ceremony, it has the parents or the uncle of the bride keeping one rupee and twenty-five paise and rice on the right hand of the bride. And then the presentation of the bride to the groom takes place. The father would publicly proclaim this formal presentation of the bride in front of all the assembled guests. The groom thus receives the bride. This occasion is marked with the priest pouring water on the hands of the bride and groom chanting the mantra three times. '

Havan: The havan starts after the Phera. During the havan, a series of mantras are chanted those of the Peethika, Atha Gathu, Atha Nistarak, Atha Surendra, Atha Parmarajadi and Atha Paramesthi are recited and offerings are made. At the end of these mantras, the Shanti mantra is chanted nine times.

Granthi Bandhan: Granthi Bandhan takes place after the havan. In this a married woman- takes the corner of the pallu of the bride's sari and then ties it to the shawl of the groom. A mantra is also recited in this occasion. Following which the couple takes four rounds of the fire. In this the bride leads while taking the first round. Then they exchange positions and take another three parikramas around the havankund. There takes place the recitation of Mahaveerakshak stoot in the background." The women also start singing the mangal geet at this time. A muhurta (auspicious moment) has been already decided previously. After the phera, the groom and the bride exchange the seven vows separately. When both of them have accepted the seven vows, the priest makes the bride sit on to the left of the groom. After this the bride will be called vamangi, which means she is the left half of the body. This follows with the couple exchanging garlands. Ultimately, the havan ends with the Shantipath and Visarjan.

Rituals after Marriage: Once the marriage is over, parents and relatives bless the couple. Alongwith the priest also blesses the newly weds and chants a mantra. As in all marriages, a wedding feast for the assembled guests follow this. Now the remaining ritual is left and that of sending the bride to the groom's house. The Jains believe in giving away alms in Jain temples as a thanksgiving to the god.

Celebrations

Music & Dance: When the women receive the groom : at the reception, they do the Aarti and also sing the Mangala Geet.

Cuisine: Jains are strictly vegetarians. The usual wedding menu consists of the specialties of the localities. The Gujaratis would arrange traditional vegetarian dishes and other may go for the Marwari vegetarian fare. Still others may go for the vegetarian Punjabi dishes.

Some Strange Customs: Ghudhchadi is a ritual that takes place before on the marriage day before the barat or the groom's procession leaves for the bride's place. The Ghudhchadi ritual has the groom given his headgear and his mother and all the relatives apply tika on his forehead. After this the groom rides the horse and then he goes visiting a temple.

SIKH RITUALS

The religion of the Sikhs called Sikhism is not an ethnic religion and anyone can join its fold. The Sikhs believe in the omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence and formlessness of one God called Wahe Guru. They believe that com-

munity worship and community service, are related to Godliness.

The Sikh symbols are called Panch Piyara and they include the five K's: Kanga or Comb, Kaccha or shorts, Kada or bangle, Kesha or hair and Kirpan or dagger. Every Sikh is supposed to carry these five symbols on his self all the time.

Birth: There are no particular rituals connected with the birth of a child in the Sikh community. Some sections of the Sikhs recite the five verses of the Morning Prayer, Japji Sahib into the ears of the newborn child.

Gurthi: A respected, intelligent and favourite member of the family gives a drop of honey to the newborn child so as to give his characters later in life, to the newborn child. This is not a ritual and it mostly takes place in the hospital itself.

Shushak: When a child is born into the Sikh fold, the maternal grandparents gift him a package called Shushak, which consists of clothes for the child and his family, a spoon, glass and a bowl for the child, money and gold ornaments for the child according to their financial status.

Death: In the Sikh community after the death of a person, the Kirtan Solah is read. Loud lamenting and breast-beating are strictly forbidden among the Sikhs. People gather around the body and recite the morning prayers. The corpse is bathed and dressed along with the five K's. The Sikhs cremate their dead like the Hindus and they do it before sunset.

The eldest son of the deceased lights the funeral pyre. The priest sings the holy hymns. After the cremation, people go to the Gurudwara where some texts from the Granth Sahib are read. Prasad, which is cooked with coarsely ground atta, water, sugar and Desi ghee is served to the people.

On the third day after the cremation, the relatives go to the cremation ground, take the bones of the dead and wash them in unboiled milk. Then they collect the bones and the ashes in a bag and immerse it in the Beas River or in the river flowing near their Gurudwara.

They don't observe Shraddh or Anniversary for their dead. The period of mourning for the dead can go up to 10 days, until which the holy texts from the Granth Sahib are read daily in the house.

ZOROASTRIAN RITUALS

Birth: After the birth of a child in a Zoroastrian family, the new mother is normally confined to the house for 40 days. This is to prevent her and her child from any disease. A lamp is lit on the day of birth and is kept in the room for about 40 days to ward off any evil elements. Some families observe the Pachori on the fifth day while some observe Dasori on the tenth day of the child.

On the fortieth day, the new mother is given a ceremonial bath with consecrated water being administered by the

head priest. This is done to cleanse her so that she can interact with other people.

Para Haoma: The event of giving the first drink to the newborn is called Para Haoma. It is consecrated Haoma juice and it is supposed to make the child healthy. But these days a sweet drink made of molasses or sugar is also administered.

Navjote: The formal admission of a child into the Zoroastrian fold is called Navjote. It is done between the seventh and the eleventh year of the child.

First the child takes a special bath called Nahn and then he is given a purifying drink. Then the child stands in a raised platform and his mother performs the Achoo Michoo ceremony where certain Hems are rotated over the head of the child seven times. This is done to invoke the blessings of the seven Amesha Spentas on the child.

Then certain prescribed texts are read and the Kushti is, worn round the waist of the child. Then a long prayer is held when the child declares that he will be a true Zoroastrian and follow the rules and regulations.

Both the Parsi boys and girls are given this privilege. Finally the priest recites the Doa Tandorosoti Prayer, which calls for the well being of the child, his parents and the community in particular.

Marriage: The marriage involves the groom going to the bride's house along with his relatives and friends. The priest heads the assembly and women carry the Vami- the gifts meant for the bride. Music bands accompany them.

The bride's house is usually decorated with strings of flowers. When the groom arrives the bride's mother welcomes him by applying Kumkum on his forehead and sprays rice grains over him.

During the ceremony the couple shower rice over each other and the priest also throws rice grains over them as a mark of blessing. A coconut is taken round the head of the groom three times, then it is broken and the water is applied at the feet of the groom. The bridegroom is made to sit on the hand of the bride. Both of them face the eastern direction. One person with a burning flame is allowed to stand near the couple as a reverence to their God of fire. A candle is also placed on both the sides and it burns for the whole ceremony.

The priest gets the consent of the couple and then joins their hands and showers rice grains over them. Then the couple is seated facing each other, with a curtain between them. The couple is made to hold each other's right hand and a piece of cloth is passed round the chairs so as to enclose them. The ends of the cloth are tied symbolising the marriage knot. Then the writings of the Yatha Ahuvaiyo are read.

Finally the curtain is dropped and the couple shower rice grains on each other. The relatives and friends then clap approving the marriage. Then a grand feast is given.

Death: According to the Zoroastrians, if the soul has left the body then it should be disposed off with minimum harm to those living. The Zoroastrians have strict ideals of sanitation, segregation, purification and cleanliness. The part of the house where the body was kept before the funeral will be washed and cleansed thoroughly.

When death of a person is imminent, two head priests are called. They recite the Patet-the prayer for repentance. A few drops of the Haoma juice are administered to the dying person. Nowadays pomegranate juice is also given.

BUDDHIST RITUALS

The essence of Buddhism lies in the four Noble truths: (Sanketas) e.g. suffering; its cause; its cessation and the path leading to the cessation of suffering. The eight-fold path leading to the removal of suffering consists of right conduct, right motive, right resolve, right speech, right livelihood, right attention, right effort and right meditation. Following this path one can conquer his cravings for worldly things. The Buddha held that, the 'mind' is the nerve centre of every human activity. In Buddhism, therefore, Vipasana, (meditation) is more important than the prayer and various abstinences which border upon asceticism. By controlling his mind and conquering his cravings, one can hope to attain 'Nirvana'; the state of complete peace.

The three characteristics of Buddhism are: Anicca (transiency), Dukkha (sorrow) and Anatta (soullessness). In other words, life is constantly changing and all conditioned things are transient. Whatever is transient, is painful and where change and sorrow prevail, the question of a permanent immortal soul does not arise. He did not accept that there was an immortal entity which survived the death of the body and was born in other forms through a series of incarnation. Nevertheless the principle of Sansara wandering (rebirth) was accepted by the Buddha.

A Buddhist is a person who reveres the Buddha, as the highest spiritual guide and strives to live according to his teachings. A person taking refuge in the Triple-Gem (Tri-Ratana) not only reveres the Buddha but also undertakes to practice Dhamma in his daily life and to support the Bhikkhu-Sangha. Three refuges are followed by the five Mpral precepts (Pancha Sila) which form the bed rock of the Buddhist way of life. They are, to abstain from killing, stealing, adultery, lying and intoxications. The refuge-cum-precepts formula is recited in Pali by the devout Buddhists daily in the morning as well as in the evening and at all religious ceremonies and social functions.

The Buddhists are divided into two classes i.e. the Upasakas and the monks. The term Upasaka is a lay devotee or a lay follower who has taken refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma and the Sangha. Those who renounce the life of a recluse by joining the Sangha are known as monies (bhikkhus). In Buddhism, there are four classes on the basis of the observance of the ethical precepts they are: Opasakas

observing five precept's; Upasakas observing eight precepts, Srenners observing ten precept and Bhikkhus observing 227 precepts.

The Buddhists have four sacred days in a month which are observed as days of fasting. These days are the new moon, full moon and the two quarter moon days, they are called Uposatha (Roya in Sri Lanka) i.e. fast day. On the uposatha days, the devout Buddhist follow the eight precepts (Atthanga Sila) and abstain from worldly pleasures. They visit viharas and offer Dana to the Bhikkhus.

The most sacred and the most important festival for all the Buddhist is Vaisaka Purnima, known in India as Buddha Purnima or Buddha Jayanti. It is fixed by the full-moon day of Vaisakha which falls in May. This day is the Thrice^ Blessed day as Lord Buddha was born, attained enlightenment and entered into Mahaparinirvana on this day.

Buddhist Marriage Ceremony: Although wedding ceremonies have always been regarded as secular affairs in Buddhist countries, the parties concerned have nevertheless obtained the blessing from monks at the local temple after the civil registration formalities have been completed.

In view of the traditional importance that the marriage ceremony has in the West, moreover, local and especially isolated Buddhists without access to a temple or a monk might well adopt the following service that could be performed by relatives and friends of the bride and groom.

TRIBAL CUSTOMS AND RITUALS

Adivasi (Tribes) Contributions to Indian Culture and Civilisation: Adivasi traditions and practices pervade all aspects of Indian culture and civilisation, yet this awareness is often lacking in popular consciousness and the extent and import of Adivasi contributions to Indian philosophy, language and custom have often gone unrecognised or been underrated by historians and social scientists.

Although popular myths about Buddhism have obscured the original source and inspiration for it's humanist doctrine, it is to India's ancient tribal (or Adivasi) societies that Gautam Buddha looked for a model for the kind of society he wished to advocate. Repulsed by how greed for private property was instrumental in causing poverty, social exploitation and unending warfare-he saw hope for human society in the tribal republics that had not yet come under the sway of authoritarian rule and caste discrimination. The early Buddhist Sanghas were modelled on the tribal pattern of social interaction that stressed gender equality and respect for all members. Members of the Sanghas sought to emulate their egalitarian outlook and democratic functioning.

At that time, the tribal republics retained many aspects of social equality that can still be found in some Adivasi societies that have somehow escaped the ill-effects of commercial plunder and exploitation. Adivasi society was built on a foundation of equality with respect for all life forms

including plants and trees. There was a deep recognition of mutual dependence in nature and human society. People were given respect and status according to their contribution to social needs but only while they were performing that particular function. A priest could be treated with great respect during a religious ceremony or a doctor revered during a medical consultation, but once such duties had been performed, the priest or doctor became equal to everyone else. The possession of highly valued skills or knowledge did not lead to a permanent rise in status. This meant that no individual or small group could engage in overlordship of any kind pr enjoy hereditary rights.

Such a value-system was sustainable as long as the Adivasi community was non-acquisitive and all the products of society were shared. Although division of labour did take place, the work of society was performed on 'a cooperative and co-equal basis-without prejudice or disrespect for any form of work.

It was the simplicity, the love of nature, the absence of coveting the goods and wealth of others and the social harmony of tribal society that attracted Gautam Buddha and had a profound impact on the* ethical core of ms teachings:

To this day, sharing is a vital and integral part of the philosophy of the Mullakurumba Adivasis of South India. When the Mullakurumbas go hunting a share is given to every family in the village, even those who may be absent, sick or cannot participate for any other reason. An extra portion is added for any guest in the village and even a non-tribal passersby will be offered a share. Not sharing is something they find difficult to comprehend.

Nevertheless, tribal societies were under constant pressure as the money economy grew and made traditional . forms of barter less difficult to sustain. In-matters of trade, the Adivasis followed a highly evolved system of honour. All agreements that they entered into were honoured, i often the entire tribe chipping in to honour an agreement made by an individual member of the tribe. Individual dishonesty or deceit were punished severely by the tribe. An individual who acted in a manner that violated the honour of the tribe faced potential banishment and family. members lost the right to participate in community events during the period of punishment. But;often, tribal integrity was undermined because the noh-tribals who traded with the Adivasis rene-ged on their promises and took advantage of the sincerity and honesty of most members of the tribe.

Tribal societies came under stress due to several factors. The extension of commerce, military incursions on tribal land and the resettling of Brahmins amidst tribal populations had an impact, as did ideological coercion or persuasion to attract key members of the tribe into "mainstream" Hindu society. This led to many tribal communities becoming integrated into Hindu society as jatis (or castes) while others who resisted were pushed into the hilly or forested

areas or remote tracks that had not yet been settled. In the worst case, defeated Adivasi tribes were pushed to the margins of settled society and became discriminated as outcasts and "untouchables".

But spontaneous differentiation within tribal societies also took place over time, which propelled these now unequal tribal communities into integrating Hindu society without external violence or coercion. In Central India, ruling dynasties emerged from within the ranks of tribal society.

In any case, the end result was that throughout India, tribal deities and customs, creation myths and a variety of religious rites and ceremonies came to be absorbed into the broad stream of "Hindu" society. In the Adivasi traditions, ancestor worship, worship of fertility gods and goddesses (as well as male and female fertility symbols), totemic worship--all played a role. And they all found their way into the practice of what is now considered Hinduism. The widespread Indian practice of keeping 'vratas', i.e. fasting for wish-fulfilment or -moral cleansing also has Adivasi origins.

Mahashweta Devi has shown that both Shiva and Kali have tribal origins as do Krishna and Ganesh. In the 8th century, the tribal forest goddess or harvest goddess was absorbed and adapted as Siva's wife. Ganesh owes its origins to a powerful tribe of elephant trainers whose incorporation into Hindu society was achieved through the deification of their elephant totem. In his study of Brahmin lineages in Maharashtra, Kosambi points to how many Brahmin gotras (such as Kashyapa) arose from tribal totems such as Kachhapa (tortoise). In Rajasthan, Rajput rulers recognised the Adivasi Bhil- chiefs as allies and Bhils acquired a central role in some Rajput coronation ceremonies.

India's regional languages such as Oriya, Marathi or Bengali developed as a result of the fusion of tribal languages with Sanskrit or Pali and virtually all the Indian languages have incorporated words from the vocabulary of Adivasi languages.

Adivasis who developed an intimate knowledge of various plants and their medicinal uses played an invaluable role in the development of Ayurvedic medicines. In a recent study, the All India Coordinated Research Project credits Adivasi communities with the knowledge of 9000 plant species-7500 used for human healing and veterinary health care. Dental care products like damru, roots and condiments like turmeric used in cooking and ointments are also Adivasi discoveries, as are many fruit trees and vines. Ayurvedic cures for arthritis and night blindness owe their origin to Adivasi knowledge.

Adivasis also played an important role in the development of agricultural practices-such as rotational cropping, fertility maintenance through alternating the cultivation of grains with leaving land fallow or using it for pasture. Adivasis of Orissa were instrumental in developing a variety of strains of rice.

Adivasi musical instruments such as the bansuri (flute) and dhol (drum), folk-tales, dances and seasonal celebrations also found their way into Indian traditions as did their art and metallurgical skills.

In India's central belt, Adivasi communities rose to considerable prominence and developed their own ruling clans. The earliest Gond kingdom appears to date from the 10th century and the Gond Rajas were able to maintain a relatively independent existence until the 18th century., although they were compelled to offer nominal allegiance to the Mughal empire. The Garha-Mandla kingdom in the north extended control over most of the upper Narmada valley and the adjacent forest areas. The Deogarh-Nagpur kingdom dominated much of the upper Wainganga valley, while Chanda-Sirpur in the south consisted of territory around Wardha and the confluences of the Wainganga with the Penganga.

Jabalpur was one of the major centres of the Garha-Mandla kingdom and like other major dynastic capitals had a large fort and palace. Temples and palaces with extremely fine carvings and erotic sculptures came up throughout the Gond kingdoms. The Gond ruling clans enjoyed close ties with the Chandella ruling clans and both dynasties attempted to maintain their independence from Mughal rule through tactical alliances. Rani Durgavati of Jabalpur (of Chandella-Gond heritage) acquired a reputation of legendary proportions when she died in battle defending against Mughal incursions. The city of Nagpur was founded by a Gond Raja in the early 18th century.

Marriage System of Tribals

Among the social institutions, marriage appears to be the most important one. It is practiced almost universally by tribal people, the only exception being the Kolhan. The extreme cupidity of fathers of Kolhan brides and their high sense of family dignity have made them to demand an unusually high price for the hands of their daughter in marriage.

Maiden aged 40 to 50 years are a common sight in Kolhan villages. However, recently young men and women began to arrange for their own unions without the knowledge of their parents and went through the operations of mock capture of the bride. The father of the bride in such cases demanded a higher price but not with the hope receiving any-payment.

The tribals of India have more advanced views regarding the age of marriage of the young people than their advanced neighbours. The practice has come under the influence of Hindu culture. Among the Gonds, Kulis and Bhumias in Orissa, child marriage was said to be common, because of the influence of Hindu culture.

This practice has yielded place to marriage of adults. The Souras, Koyas, Kondhs, Gadabas and Bondas of Koraput district marry at a fair age and infant marriages are

unknown among them. The groom is generally older than the bride in the tribal area.

There is enough opportunity for the satisfaction of sex impulses outside marriage among the tribes of India. Pre-marital sexual chastity is not very rigidly insisted upon in a large number of tribes. Among the Murias of Madhya Pradesh, for instance, it is a custom on certain days of the week, for those boys and girls of dormitories who are perfects to spend the nights with each other and have sexual relations. Half a century ago each oraon bachelor had a sweetheart in the spinsters house. If the girl refused to accept a lover, she was cut off by the older girls who refused to dance with her till she accepted a paramour. Before marriage love affairs and even intimate relationships are permitted and widely practiced among the Bondas, Koyas, Gadabas and Souras women in Koraput region.

Even after marriage on some festive post-maritallicity is also found among Hos and Oranos, during important festivals, when men and women freely indulge in sex relations. However, sex activity is not the only objective of marriage. Economic cooperation as found in the division of labour between husband and wife seems to be another important consideration for marital union among tribals.

The selection of mate is an important affair even in primitive tribal society. The rules of endogamy, exogamy, hypergamy, preferential mating and prohibited degrees operative simultaneously and thereby considerably restrict the freedom of choice. Among the koyas and kondhs marriage with the maternal uncles daughter is prevalent and is preferred to marriage with others. However, among Bondas this custom is absent. Marriage within the clan and certain brother clan is strictly prohibited among the tribes in Orissa. Generally marriage also does not occur within the same village. The ways and means of acquiring a mate in tribal society are varied and interesting. Eight important ways of acquiring a mate may be listed for Indian tribes. They are:

1. Probationary marriage
2. Marriage by captures
3. Marriage by trial
4. Marriage by service
5. Marriage by purchase
6. Marriage by exchange
7. Marriage by mutual consent and elopement
- & Marriage by intrusion.

Marriage by purchase and marriage by service are accepted way of finding a bride. The amount of bride price varies according to the economic conditions of tribe. Bhumias, Oraons, Saftaras, Juangs, Santals, Hos, Nagas, Bhils and many other tribes pay for their brides as a general rule, A Kondha of Koraput who is not able to pay the bride price is asked to work under the father-in-law's house till his final payment.

Probationary- marriages by trial and intrusion marriages are found in limited cases of tribes in India.

Marriages among the Bonda tribe are arranged in an extraordinary manner. About two months before Dashara festival each village Naikdig a hole of about 8 square and nine feet deep and roofed with logs and mud so arranged as to leave one "small opening. In this all unmarried girls of the village have to sleep. Any youth desirous of matrimony joins them there a night and next morning leaves his brass bracelet with the girl of his choice.

The pair afterwards goes together to the girl's people and explain matters. Ultimately with relatives on both the side, they repair to jungles, where a fire is lit and the girl applies it to the boy's buttocks. If he cries out in pain the girl refuses him, but if he makes no sound the couple are considered to be man and wife. The system has the advantages of giving both parties a choice in the matter.

The marriage customs and rituals among the tribals are elaborate and vary from tribe to tribe. It affects the economic life of a person, who gets a wife, to a great extent. It is necessary to discuss in brief the marriage customs and rituals, which is generally found among the tribes.

The parents of the bridegroom initiate marriages amongst the Souras. They visit the girl's parents bearing with them a present of a pot containing palm wine. The reason for their visit is not immediately made plain. However, sooner or later, the name of the girl is mentioned and she is informed by her parent of the proposal. If she consents, they accept the pot of wine and ceremonially drink it before several witnesses. After several such visits the bride price is finalised. The presentation of an arrow and its acceptance by the bride's family is equivalent of an engagement. About a year after the engagement the bride is brought to the bridegroom's house and made to the ancestors by a shaman.

Each tribal marriage is accompanied by a lot of eating and dancing. These are done at the bridegroom's house at his cost. Marriage of a tribal boy becomes very expensive as it becomes a source of exploration by the moneylenders and land grabbers, who are ready to advance money to the tribals at the time of marriage and charge very high rate of interest.

Mortuary Customs

Among the Bauris the dead are either burnt or buried. The corpse is borne in the hands or on a bier, by four men. Soon after the village boundary is crossed, the widow of the deceased throws rice over the eyes of corpse and also a little fire, after taking it three times round.

Among the Bhumias the dead are burnt and pollution lasts for nine days. On the tenth day a ceremonial bath is taken and a feast with copious supplies of liquor is held.

The Bhottadas burn their dead and observe pollution for ten days during which no agricultural work is done and no food is cooked in the Vasma if the deceased which is fed by

some relatives. On the tenth day on which bath is taken some fried rice and new pot are carried to the burning ground and left there.

Among Chitra-Ghasis the dead are burnt and death pollution is observed for three days during which the caste occupation is not carried on. On the third day the ashes are collected together and a fowl is killed. The ashes are then buried or thrown into running water.

When a Koya dies, a cow or bullock is slaughtered and the tail is cut off and put in the dead man's hand. The liver is said to be put in his mouth. It is customary among the more prosperous families to put a few rupees into the mouth of a corpse before the funeral pyre is lighted. The money is made to represent the value of the animal sacrificed.

Among the Gadava males, as a rule are burnt but if a person dies in the night or on a rainy day, the corpse is sometimes buried. Women and children are usually buried presumably because they are not thought worth the fuel necessary for cremation". Only relations are permitted touch a corpse. Death pollution is observed for three days, during which the caste occupations must not be engaged in. Stone slabs are erected to the memory of the dead and sacrifices are offered to them now and again.

Saora death is an embarrassment, as every death in a family adds a new danger from the other world. But it is not a separation. After death the corpse is laid on its back across the mortar in the central room of the house and is covered with a cloth. Women carry the corpse out of the house and lay in on a plank of wood in the street outside. They remove most of the ornaments, bathe the body and comb the hair.

RITUALS OF WEDDING

India is known for its rich cultural heritage and diverse customs and rituals of different religions. Each religion has its own traditions be it Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Parsi or Christian everybody has their own wedding customs. Indian wedding is mainly associated with the Hindu marriage ceremony, which is quite an elaborate celebration lasting for several days. And every region has its own unique way of celebrating their wedding functions. Most of the weddings rituals are based on their regional traditions but the common tie among the weddings of all the religions is the fun and excitement part. It involves a large gathering of friends and relatives.

The Hindu marriage is held in a big marquee, either in the bride's home yard or in a rented wedding hall, Rituals are traditional in a Hindu wedding ceremony, but they may vary from one community to another. Different rituals are held pre-marriage, on the main day and post-marriage. Customs like Ganesh puja, which is done before the ceremony for his blessings. Then there are rituals like Tilak, the sacred mark on forehead, mehendi (henna), sangeet (song and dance), barat (procession), jai mala garland exchange),

vivah, (the main wedding ceremony), kanya daan and vidaii, which are the most important Hindu wedding rituals,

Marriage in Hindu

In Hindu dharma, marriage is viewed as a Sacrament and not a contract. Hindu marriage is a life-long commitment of one wife and one husband and is the strongest social bond that takes place between a man and a woman. Grahastha Ashram (the householder stage), the second of the four stages of life begins when a man and a woman marry and start a household.

Now let us consider the elaborate process of the marriage according to the Veda and its scientific significance. A day before the wedding the palm and feet of the bride are decorated with "Mehendi". A canopy or mandapa decorated with flowers is erected at the place of wedding.

On the wedding morning, various ablutinary rituals are performed on both the bride, and the groom in their own homes. Their bodies are anointed with turmeric, sandalwood paste and oils, which cleanse the body, soften the skin and make it aromatic. They are then bathed to the chanting of Vedic mantras.

Though there may be variations in the sequence of the performance of the different parts and though they are called by different names in the respective colloquials, the Vedic Marriage consists of:

1. Nandi-getting started
2. Nischitartha-confirming the alliance
3. Ankurapana-creation of the alliance by lighting the yagna fire
4. Laja Homa-yagna
5. Snathakam-graduation ceremony
6. Upanayanam-thread marriage
7. K'asi Yatra-the indecisive journey of the groom to Kasi for the sanyasa and bringing him back to the house by the parents of the bride for the marriage.
8. Kanya Danam-offering of the daughter for the marriage.
9. Pani Grahnam, Saptha Padhi, Mangalasuthra Dharana or Veekshariam-the seeing of each other, touching of each other and walking together and tying the knot of the marriage.
10. Talambralu-other performances-acquaintance of each other.
11. Arundhathi Darshanam-showing of the arundhathi star
12. Grihapravesam-taking the bride to the in-laws house
13. Appaginthalu-handing over the daughter to the groom
14. Dharmva Darshana
15. Sobhanatnu-nuptials
16. Garbhadanam-the act of creation of the foetus.

One important point to be noted is that in the Vedic Age the school going is both for the boy and the girl. And the

Upanayana is to be performed for both of them. At the time of the marriage the women starts wearing the ornaments and the man is tied with the sacred thread.

The points like why women wear ornaments and keep bindi are beyond the purview of this discourse.

So when both complete the Education (comprehensive education for the development of the individual and the society) the parents used to find the match by comparing the Horoscopes of the probable matches and in confirming the alliance by Horoscopes matching, Yoni matching is one of the matching that is mainly looked into. Yoni matching signifies the classification of the genital organs of bride and groom as per shastra and it ensures a happy life between the couple. Gana matching signifies a particular set of mental traits and for any marriage at least 24 ganas should match, i.e. should of the same count for the boy and girl.

There are so many Daans or Dhanas advocated by the Hindu scriptures and of these Kanya Daan is stated to be the supreme daan. Hindu Dharma says one who is bestowed with the act of Kanya Daan or One who has the opportunity of making a Kanya Daan in his life is the beloved child of the Lord and he will never have rebirth.

Kanya Daan is an important part of the marriage ceremony in which the bride's parents give her away to the groom by entrusting her to the bridegroom. The officiating priest chants appropriate verses in Sanskrit. The people in the audience (the public) is now notified that the parents have willingly expressed their wish and consent by requesting the groom to accept their daughter as his bride. As soon as the groom indicates his acceptance the marriage ceremony begins. The parents now bestow their blessings on both the bride and the groom and pray to the Lord to shower His choicest blessings on them.

From then the Veekshana is the right time for the bride and the groom to see each other. The parents of the bride now hands over their daughter to the parents of the groom by stating that "I have nurtured this child till this age and am handing over to you for the progeny and prosperity of your family. Consider her as your daughter and be the guide and philosopher for her till she lives with you".

The Grasping of the Hand. The process of the first physical contact between the bride and the groom starts.

The bride facing the East while the groom faces the West, the bridegroom takes the bride's hand...and says

"O Saraswati, gracious one, rich in offspring, you whom we hymn first of all the Gods, may you prosper this marriage." "I seize your hand."

The Circumambulation of the fire: All solemn rites and ceremonies commence with the performance of Homa (sacred fire ceremony) among the followers of Vedic religion. The idea is to begin all auspicious undertakings in an atmosphere of purity and spirituality. This atmosphere is created by the burning of fragrant herbs and ghee and by the recitation of suitable Mantras.

Now comes the Mangala Sutra Dharana that is the tying of the thread containing the marks of the Vishnu or Shiva in the neck of the bride by the groom. The Mangala Vadya is played at this time with vigour and bliss. Holy akshatha, the unbroken rice mixed with turmeric powder, is poured on the heads of the groom and bride by all the visitors gathered at the marriage as a mark of their blessings and well wishes for the bride and groom to begin their new married life

Asmarohana (The Treading on the Stone): The bridegroom says the words while she stands up: "Come, beautiful one." And he lets her put the tip of the right foot on the stone, saying: "Come, step on the stone; be strong like a stone. Resist the enemies; overcome those who attack you."

Lajahtiina (The Oblation of Parched Grain): The bridegroom pours some parched grain into the bride's joined palms:

"This grain I spill. May it bring to me well-being and unite you to me. May Agni hear us."

He then causes the bride to spill the grain into the fire, saying:

"This woman scattering grain into the fire, prays: Blessings on my husband. May my relatives be prosperous. 'Swaha!'

Saptapadi (The Seven Steps): The Saptapadi or the walking; of seven, steps around the Agni signifies that the bride and groom go together in all the seven planes of consciousness in performing the dharma. The seven planes of the Consciousness are signified by the seven Vyahritis of the Gayatri Mantra. Actually the union of bride and groom takes place only at the stage of Saptapadi and the process of the bride and groom becoming as the wife and husband is immediately begun from that time.

Then they walk around the fire, the bridegroom repeating:

"First now they bring to you in bridal procession this Surya, guiding her steps in circular motion. Return her now, O Agni, to her husband as rightful wife, with hope of children to come."

While the bride takes the seven steps to the northeast, the bridegroom sings the following verses:

"One step for Vigour, Two steps for Vitality, Three steps for Prosperity, Four steps for Happiness, Five steps for Cattle (Wealth), Six steps for Seasons, Seven steps for Friendship. To me be devoted."

After the seventh step he makes her remain where she is and says:

"With seven steps we become friends. Let me reach your friendship. Let me not be severed from your friendship. Let your friendship not be severed from me,"

Then the entire rite is repeated twice more, beginning with the rite of the fried grain. At the fourth round she pours into the fire all the fried grain from the mouth of the winnowing basket saying: "To Bhaga swaha!"

Dhruvadarsana (Looking at the Polestar); Dhruvadarsana or Arundhathi Darshanam is the showing of the Saptha Rishi Mandala and the star Arundhathi underneath the star of VasMstha. The significance is to remind the pair about their cosmic responsibilities they have to perform in the coming walks of life. These seven sages and their families are the originators of the Vedic Lore of the Hindus. In memoriam of these great sages we named the seven stars in the Great Bear constellation after o their names. It is the Darshan of these Great Sages will remind the couple the heritage they have to carry and the Debt of the sages to be performed.

The groom shows her the polar star to the bride. The bride says that:

"You are firm and I see you. Be firm with me, O flourishing one! Brhaspati has given you to me, so live with me a hundred years bearing children by me, your husband."

Grihapravesam is the taking of "the bride and the groom to the house of the groom. Sobhanamu is the Nuptials arranged-by the parents of the bride in their residence first and in the residence of the groom next. This is the starting of the enjoyment of the joy of the sex as learned in the Guruktila by reading the Kama Sastra and implementing it in a socially acceptable way for the" Eoy and the bliss and for the progeny of the race.

"Gharbhadanam is the act of sex for the progeny. This is set on the day that is neutral from the cosmic influences like the moons gravity and the suns gravity or other disturbances to create the foetus for the Jiva to enter into Ifte Womb of the mother to take the birth to perform his cycle of karma and to make the parents to fulfil the cycle of the karma.

Scientific Observations from the Ceremony: The dress pattern on all the Vedic Marriages is in conformity with the modern day scientific non infection dressing. The decoration with mango leaves or the performance of the home is in a way more advanced systems of the pollution control at a group level. The wearing of the ornaments at the ceremony of the marriage is in conformity with the Advanced Magnetic Resonance Preventive Medicine of the Present day Medical world.:

This is the wisdom taught by Hindu dharms and is dedicated to the lotus feet of all Sages who found the Dharma and this scssnce of the marriage. "

Muslim Wedding

Muslim wedding are celebrated on, a grand scale in India. The wedding custom and rituals has come down from the Mughal rulers in the medieval India. Muslim families in India follow- the traditional way of wedding. Indian Muslims mostly follow the same customs and rituals in Nikah, as followed by the Middle Eastern Muslims. Just like Hindu religion Muslim wedding is also divided jnto three parts the pre-wedding-"celebration, main day celebration and post-wedding -celebration. And each celebration has its own significance-and importance.

Pre-wedding Ceremonies

Mekendi Ceremony: The Mehendi ceremony is mainly held at the bride's place on the eve of the wedding ceremony or a few days before the wedding. It is rftainly a ladies function where female friends, famiJy members and relatives of the bride come together to apply turmeric paste to the bride to bring out the glow in her complexion, A mehendiwali or a relative applies rneheedi on the hands and feet of the bride. .While she applies rfiehendi to the bride the woman folk sings traditional song and dance to the tune of those songs. 'The event gives a festive touch to the celebration. On this occasion the bride 'wears light colour clothes and dresses soberly. According to the custom the bride should not step out of the house for the next few days till her marriage. On mehendi function the bride's cousins applies a dot of mehendi on the palm of the groom. Other than the mehendi celebration there are some other ceremonies in both the bride and groom's house.

Minn Etay Ceremony: The wedding is normally held in the bride's place if not than it is celebrated at a common venue. On tbjg main day the groom arrives with his family and friends at.the wedding venue. This ritual is known as -welcoming the baraat. And his guests are called baraati. A band of musicians also accompanies the baraati and the groom. The groom shares a drink of sherbet with the bride's brother. The bride's sisters play pranks and slap the guests playfully with batons made of flowers.

Nikah: The main wedding ceremony is called Nikah in Muslim religion. The wedding ceremony is normally conducted at the bride's place or at any common venue. A Maulvi or priest in me presence of close family members, friends and relatives, conducts the wedding rituals. In orthodox families the men and women are seated separately, The'Walis' (the father of the bride and of the bridegroom) play a vital role in the wedding ceremony. The MswSvi reads selected verses from the Qaran and the Nikah if complete after the Ijab-e-Qubul (proposal and acceptance),

The groom's side prpposes and the bride's side conveys her consent. The mutual consent of the bride and groom is of very importance for the marriage to be legal. The Mehar is a compulsory amount of money given by the groom's family to the j bride on the day of the" wedding. It is a custom according to the rules laid down in Islam. The Nikahnaama is a document in which the marriage contract is registered, it contains a set of terms and conditions that must be followed by both the families, it also gives the bride the right to divorce her husband. The contract is legal only when the bridegroom, the bride, the Walis and the Maulvi duly sign it. After the wedding ceremony is over the newly wedded bride and groom receives blessingsjrom the elders and older women of the family and the guests pray for their happy married life.

Dinner, Prayers and Aarsimasitaf: After the wedding

a dinner party is organised for the guests and relatives. After the dinner, the newly wedded couple sits together for the first time. The Quran is placed between the couple and they are allowed to see each other only through mirrors.

Post-wedding Ceremonies

In the post-wedding rituals there are the function of Rukshat where the bride's family bids farewell to her as she leaves her father's house and goes to her husband's house. It is a very emotional moment for the bride's family. The bride's father gives her hand to her husband and tells him to take care of her.

Welcoming the Bride: After the bride reaches her husband's house her mother-in-law welcomes her. The groom's mother holds the Quran above the head of her new daughter-in-law as she enters her new home for the first time after the wedding;

Chauthi: On Chauthi the bride visits her parent's home. It is the fourth day after the wedding, when she visits the home of her parents. She receives a grand welcome from her family members.

Valimah or Reception Ceremony: It is the reception given by the groom's family. The Valimah is a grand reception hosted by the groom's family after the Nikah. It is a fun and joyous occasion that brings together the two families. It is the good time to meet the friends and relatives of both the families. It builds a new bond and relation between the two families.

Christian Wedding

Normally all Christian weddings are celebrated in a Church. The friends and family members of the bride and the bridegroom attend the wedding celebration. Just like any other wedding in other religion Christian wedding is also celebrated over a couple of days. As there are pre-wedding, wedding and post wedding rituals. An Anglo-Indian Christian bride traditionally wears a white gown in western style and the groom wears a suit. The wedding rituals are conducted along with the holy mass. Like in all Indian matrimonial rituals, this community too, has an interesting lecture with an emphasis on the sanctity of marriage given by the priest. Christian wedding rituals and customs are simple and easy to follow.

Among the main pre-wedding rituals there are functions like bridal shower, which is an informal henparty hosted by the bride's female friends. It is mainly a female get together to celebrate the occasion. It is a fun filled function where games are played, they sing and dance the whole night. The friends and relatives shower gifts upon the bride. The bride serves a pink cake with a thimble hidden inside. According to tradition, the girl who gets the slice of cake with the thimble in it will be the next to marry.

Just like the bridal shower, which is an all girl's party a bachelor's party is also celebrated by the groom and his male friends. Its from the Bible. The priest then delivers the hom-

ily, with an emphasis on the sanctity of marriage. The next ritual is the blessing and the exchange of the wedding rings. The ceremony comes to an end with the final blessing of the priest. The guests, towards the end, shower their blessings on the newly-wedded couple. The last formality is the couple then signs the register and walk down aisle, arm in arm.

In the post-wedding rituals like weddings in all Indian community Catholic weddings is followed by a reception for celebration the reception party is a grand affair where the newly-weds enter the venue and are welcomed by all with a shower of confetti. They cut the wedding cake and feed each a bite of the first slice. The Toastmaster proposes a toast in honour of the couple. The reception is mostly celebrated with dance and dinner party. In many functions a live band performs and everybody dances to the tune of the band. This is how most Christian weddings are celebrated.

Parsi Wedding

Pre-Wedding Rituals: Just like wedding rituals and customs of different communities, Parsi wedding traditions are spread over a couple of days. In Parsi wedding also the wedding celebration is divided into three parts pre wedding rituals, wedding day rituals and post-wedding rituals. Among the pre-wedding rituals or customs we have Madhavsaro, which is celebrated four days before the lagan, the families of the bride and groom each plant a young tree in a pot, amidst recitation of prayers by the family priest and place this at the entrance of their homes. This is generally a mango plant and is treated as a symbol of fertility. The plant is watered every morning till the eighth day after the wedding and then transplanted elsewhere.

Adarni is the third day before the lagan and it is celebrated as a day for gift exchanging. On this day the groom's family visits the bride's home to present her with all kinds of gifts like clothes, jewellery, etc. This is ritual of gifting the bride is known as Adarni. The relatives, neighbours and friends are invited for a traditional meal of sev and dahi, boiled eggs and bananas. The day before the wedding is called Supra nu Murat it is more like the mehendi and haldi ceremony of the Hindus. In this ritual four married women are given a supra each, containing paan, supari, haldi, dates and a piece of coconut. While singing traditional songs, these supras are exchanged seven times among the women cross-wise, length-wise and breadth-wise. A fifth lady sits in the middle with a khalbatto and dry turmeric. Then a paste of it is applied by all to the groom and bride along with a showering of blessings.

Wedding Day Rituals: Nahan is the day of the lagan, on this day the staircase, doorway and gate is decorated with beautiful decorative designs of Rangoli. According to the Zoroastrians the time immediately after sunset or very early in the morning is considered auspicious for marriage. For the marriage ceremony the bride dresses in her madhavate the white, ornate wedding saree given by her parents, while

the groom wears the traditional Parsi dagli and feta a white kurta like garment and a black cap.

The Parsi lagan is called Achumichu, which takes place either at a baug or at an agiary (the fire temple). A stage is build up for the couple and before they step on it, the groom first, a ritual called achumichu is performed. The bride's mother takes a tray with a raw egg, supari, rice, coconut, dates and water and begins the ceremony with her son-in-law to be. In Ara antar ceremony the couple is made to sit facing each other, with a cloth held between them, so they cannot see the other. Among the other main day rituals are chero bandhvanu, haath borvanu, etc.

Post-Wedding Rituals: In the post-wedding rituals the reception is held in a grand manner with varied menu of food, drink and music. The party is a whole night affair where all the guests have a lovely time. The menu mainly comprises of traditional Parsi dishes like Parsi bhonu like sarya (crisps), achaar-rotli (pickle and rotis), patra ni macchi steamed fish), salli margi (chicken with potato crisps), lagan nu custard, pulao-dal and ice cream. The wedding ceremony ends with the couple being accompanied home by the bride's family and the achumichu being performed once again by the groom's mother for the well being of the couple.

Sikh Wedding

In a Sikh Indian wedding, the wedding ambiance is set a week before the wedding. There are various rituals, which are followed before and after the wedding. Shagiin or engagement is the first ceremony to mark the beginning of the wedding celebration. On this occasion, the two families exchange gifts to conform the engagement. Among the pre-wedding rituals engagement is the occasion where both the families meet and the bride's father takes care of all the ceremonial activities on this day. Various auspicious items are required on this day that includes coconut, dry dates, sugar and money and these are sent to the groom's family:

It is also called the Tilak ceremony, which is performed by a bhaiji or preacher from the Gurudwara who first reads the hymn, offers a date to the groom and applies tilak on his forehead, marking the engagement. After the tilak ceremony, the groom's father sends gifts of clothes, sugar, coconut, rice, jewellery and henna to the bride. Similarly the bride's father also offers gifts to the groom and his family members. Another important pre-wedding ritual involves the bangle ceremony or the choora ceremony, which is held at the bride's place where the maternal uncle and aunt of the bride put white and red bangles -on the bride's wrists. Light ornaments of beaten silver and gold called kalira are tied to the bangles.

Maiy'a is a pre-wedding Sikh custom followed by the bride and the groom where both are not allowed to leave their house for few days before the wedding, pana is, another such ritual where an auspicious red thread is tied to the right wrist of the groom and the left wrist-of the bride. It is regarded as a good omen for the bride and the groom and it protects them from ill omen. Vatna is a ritual celebrated a few days before the wedding ceremony where vatna a scented powder consisting of barley flour, turmeric and mustard oil is applied to their bodies? to be followed by a ritual bath.

On the eve of the wedding, mehendi ceremony is celebrated when henna is applied on the hands and feet of the bride. Gharoli is another such pre-wedding ritual, which is celebrated in the morning of the wedding day at groom's place in which the groom's sister-in-law accompanied by other female relatives go to a nearby well or Gurudwara to fill an earthen pitcher or gharbli with water which is later used to bath the bridegroom.

The main day wedding ritual or ceremony includes: Milni ceremony, which is celebrated at the groom's place where his sisters tie a sehera or floral veil to the boy's forehead and a garland of currency notes adorn his neck. On reaching the bride's house the milni ceremony is held with the elders of both families embracing and wishing each other. Shabads are sung and the ardaas recited as the procession enters the Gurudwara breakfast is served to the guests.

On the main wedding function the bride and the groom sit together to attend the Guru Granth Sahib Kirtan. The groom drapes a chunni draped by the bride's father one end held by groom, which is usually red, pink and orange in colour around his neck, the other end of which is held by the bride throughout the ceremony. The bhaiji of the Gurudwara recites the hymns from the Guru Granth Sahib, which are then sung and the bride and groom circle the Guru Granth Sahib. The bridegroom walks ahead of the bride with a sword in his hand. Relatives and friends garland the newly wedded couple and the marriage ceremony concludes with a grand feast.

Among the post-wedding rituals the vidaai or doli ceremony marks the end of the wedding celebration. It is a very emotional affair for the bride's family as she departs from her-parent's house she throwp back handful of rice over her shoulder, thereby wishing prosperity for her parents and family she leaves behind to start a new life with new dreams and aspirations.

