A Bibliography of Death and Dying in Ancient Indian Religions

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I compiled this bibliography while preparing to teach a class entitled Death and Dying in Indian Religions. In this course, I sought to introduce undergraduates to the basic concepts relevant to life and death, and the process of dying and rebirth. I included surveys on death and dying related to several cultures. My dissertation, at the time of its genesis, involved comparing Buddhist and Hindu notions of the afterlife, and I had a keen interest in commemoration of the dead, the śrāddha ritual, and the city of Gayā. These areas in particular, and ancient Hinduism and Buddhism in general, are well-represented here.

This bibliography will be most useful to people interested in a cross-cultural perspective on issues related to death. Additionally, I have included sources which reflect a variety of disciplinary approaches to the issue of death, including anthropology, literature, and medicine. Of these, Humphreys, Huntington and Metcalf, and Reynolds and Earle stand out as excellent anthologies. I have also included several books on general issues of Hinduism—such as the Purāṇas and rituals—to compliment more detailed studies. These will be most useful to those seeking to familiarize themselves with general trends in Hinduism or to introduce students to the basic concepts needed to understand responses to death in Hinduism.

Sources related to my research present a more focused approach. My interest lay in comparing Hindu and Buddhist ideas and practices in dealing with death. I chose to focus on two cities, Gayā and Bodh Gayā, in order to compare two cities that are geographically close to one another, but are associated with different traditions. Several books address how these two traditions influenced one another; Barua’s Gayā and Bodh-gayā: Early History of the Holy Land offers a good starting point. Because both cities are popular pilgrimage sites, I have included several general sources on pilgrimage, a few on death and pilgrimage, and a handful on these two particular pilgrimages.
Few scholars have written on the śrāddha ritual exclusively. It is mentioned in sources on religious ritual or death, but works on the ritual itself are scarce. Kane’s History of Dharmaśāstra includes some details necessary for exploring śrāddha, but the most useful resource are the primary sources. I have included those Purāṇas which address śrāddha in the greatest detail.

Another important topic is the commemoration of the dead. I have included sources on commemoration through literature, architectural memorials, and ritual traditions that keep the memory of the deceased alive. Each of these has been placed in a separate sub-heading below. Settar and Sontheimer’s Memorial Stones is an invaluable resource on hero-stones, an understudied phenomenon in South Asia.

Turning to physical monuments, I recognize the significance of the stūpa as a symbol of death, life, and the conquering of death. Here I include many sources on the role of the stūpa in early Buddhism. For further resources on Buddhism, Strong’s comprehensive bibliography is an excellent resource.

Archaeological works from ancient India are frequently overlooked, but they are the only physical evidence available to scholars of religious practice to determine what ancient Indians—Buddhist or Hindu—actually did. Inscriptions are likewise an invaluable resource and reveal a surprising amount of material on the thoughts of the donee about the afterlife and how one should commemorate the dead.

The popularity and fame of the Tibetan Book of the Dead led to my inclusion of sources on Tibetan Buddhism. I have not listed the various translations of the book, since these are easily located; instead, the sources I include illuminate many aspects of the Tibetan practices concerning death.

Because my course involved introductory material, the sources included below which do not deal with my dissertation topic are, for the most part, introductory. I excluded some topics altogether. For example, although the issue of satī is a major topic of interest in death and dying, I have only given a few related sources here.
1. Primary Sources
2. Archaeology and Epigraphy
3. General Death and Dying
4 Vedic and Brahanical Hinduism
   4.1. General Background
   4.2. Purāñic Studies
   4.3. Pilgrimage
   4.4. Aging and Dying
   4.5. Death
   4.6. Death – Ritual and Funeral
   4.7. Commemoration of the Dead – Ancestor Worship
   4.8. Commemoration of the Dead – Memorials
   4.9. Gayā
5 Buddhism
   5.1. General Background
   5.2. Death
   5.3. Relics
   5.4. The Stūpa
   5.5. Bodh Gayā
   5.6. Tibetan Buddhism

1. PRIMARY SOURCES


2. ARCHAEOLOGY AND EPIGRAPHY


### 3. GENERAL DEATH AND DYING


4. VEDIC AND BRAHMANICAL HINDUISM

4.1. General Background


### 4.2. Purāṇic Studies


4.3. Pilgrimage


4.4. Aging and Dying


4.5. Death


### 4.6. Death – Ritual and Funeral


4.7. *Commemoration of the Dead – Ancestor Worship*


4.8. Commemoration of the Dead – Memorials


4.9. Gayā


Monier-Williams, Monier. 1876. “Srāddha Ceremonies at Gayā.” Indian Antiquary 5: 200–204.


5. BUDDHISM

5.1. General Background


5.2. Death


### 5.3. Relics

5.4. The Stūpa


5.5. Bodh Gayā


5.6. *Tibetan Buddhism*


