DEATH
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A Major Issue In Mauritius

Mauritian Hindus are very religious. They are devoted to the ancient traditions and culture. Yet, many non-Hindu practices have found their way into the local Hindu way of life. What happens, for instance, when a person dies in the local community?

Though many Hindus believe in cremation, it is quite a normal for the Hindus of Mauritius to have the corpses of their family buried in cemeteries. Burying corpses in coffins is a purely Christian practice. This is done because Christians believe that on Doomsday all the dead will be brought to life from the graveyards. According to the Biblical beliefs, the deeds of the "dead" would at this time be weighed on a scale. If the good deeds outweighed the bad ones, the soul would go to Heaven. If the bad ones are heavier, the soul would go to Hell. That is why Christians are so anxious to have their dead buried in graveyards. But why do the Hindus also do this? Do Hindu scriptures recommend funerals in graveyards? Do the Vedas, Agamas, Tirumantiram or Bhagavat Gita lay stress on funerals in graveyards? No. Yet, Hindus have come to follow this misleading practice.

But not all Hindus follow this pattern, despite the western influence. Many are following the traditional path of Hinduism and consider orthodox Hindu rituals and cremation a must. Many cremation grounds have been built for Hindus with both private and state help. Such grounds are scattered all over the island.

Something worth noting about Hindus who practice the burying of the dead is their participation in the "All Soul's Day" observance. On the first of November of each year parents, friends and relatives go to the cemetery to gather at the tombs of their cherished dear. Many Hindus also go to the cemetery on this day to pay

homage to their dead. They bring with them bouquets of flowers to be placed on the tombs.

When asked why he was observing this practice, one Hindu told Hinduism Today, "My cherished parent won't weep if I offer him flowers on this day. He is expecting us to bring flowers to him. So, we must do it to keep him happy."

What does Hinduism prescribe here? Hindus believe in the cremation of the body upon death. We believe in reincarnation, that the soul has not merely one birth on the earth but many through which it matures and evolves until all karmas are resolved. Still, there are instances where many Hindus drift away from the Hindu path due to Christian influences. Is there a solution to remedy this situation? Hindus have to be taught basic Hindu laws. Everything starts from a basis. If a basis is strong, the superstructure can be strong.

In Mauritius, though we have many orthodox Hindus, some Hindu intellectuals find Hinduism ordinary. Many of these intellectuals are products of western universities. They are just Hindu by appearance. They interpret Hinduism in the light of their western education which is primarily opinionated knowledge. Even those who have attended well established secondary schools behave in the same way. They look down upon Hindu beliefs.

One can only interpret, teach or write about Hinduism when one lives like a Hindu. One cannot interpret this age-old philosophy if one is attached to western beliefs and values. Hindus in Mauritius should be really proud of their Hindu heritage. It is only then that they can lead others to understand and respect it.