Funeral Rites of Oraon Buddhist Community in Bangladesh: A Case Study

Shantu Barua*

バングラデシュのオラオン部族仏教徒コミュニティにおける
葬送儀礼：事例研究

シャントゥ・バルア

バングラデシュはイスラム教徒、ヒンドゥー教徒、仏教徒、キリスト教徒、およびその他多数の精霊信仰的土着宗教から構成される、文化的民族の多様性に富んだ国である。けれども、仏教がこの国の始まりの時代から導入されており、特に7世紀から12世紀までの間は多くの仏教王朝により庇護された国家的宗教であったことは注目に値する。その結果、仏教はバングラデシュの文化を豊かにするために極めて重要な役割を果たした。12世紀以降は、さまざまな政治的逆境のために仏教徒はその栄光を失い少数派宗教への道をたどった。仏教の衰退にともない他の仏教徒少数民族は自らの宗教のアイデンティティを失い、精霊信仰と共に先住民（アーディヴァーチー）としてのアイデンティティを受容することとなった。オラオン族はそのなかでも注目すべき存在である。オラオンは、かつてはクルクとも称されていた、バングラデシュの最も古い土着民族である。ドラヴィダ族に属し、黒色の皮膚、低鼻、黒く縮れた毛髪、短頭、中背といった特徴をもつ。オラオン社会は多くの部族に分かれて、年間を通じて多様な民間儀礼・儀式を行っている。彼らは豊かな歌謡、伝統舞踊、民間伝承、また伝統的楽器を有しており、男女とも巧みな踊り手である。オラオンの伝承によれば、先祖は密教的仏教の信者であったという。しかし時とともに全ての仏教的儀礼・儀式は忘れられた。
1. Introduction

Funeral is a customary and obligatory social ritual of the Oraons of Bangladesh. Like other communities, they also observe many socio-religious rites and rituals regarding funeral ceremony. In this paper I will introduce various funeral rites and rituals of Oraon Buddhist community of Bangladesh. After introducing these, I will consider their belief and understanding regarding the rituals, and identify the differences from other communities. Moreover, I will point out the ways in which the funeral rites are specific to the Oraon.

2. A Brief Introduction to Oraon and Importance of the Study

The Oraons are one of the oldest indigenous communities in Bangladesh. They are identified in recent law Khudra Nri-gosthi...
Funeral Rites of Oraon Buddhist Community in Bangladesh

Sanskritik Pratisthan Ain 2010 (The Small Ethnic Groups Cultural Institution Act 2010) as Khudra-Nrigosthi (small ethnic groups). They also introduced in different terms, such Upajati (tribal) and Adibasi (indigenous people). They have dark complexion. Their noses are flat and their hair is black and almost curled, and their skull shape is round and of medium height. The Oraon community is divided into many clans. Anthropologically and linguistically Oraons belong to Dravidian group and constitute a patriarchal society. Their original settlement was at Karush, the south-eastern bank of Ganges, presently known as district of Sahabad, India. However, they came to Bangladesh from various parts of India, especially from Orissa, Choto Nagpur, Ranchi, Bihar and the Rajmahal Hill Tracts. They started to come here during the period of Mughal (1526–1707 A.D.) but most of them came as workers during the British period (1757–1947 A.D.). In Bangladesh they mainly live in Bogra, Dinajpur, Naogaon, Rangpur, Rajshahi, Pubna, Sirajgonj, Thakurgaon, Panchagarh, Joypurhat, Natore, Gaibandha, Chapai Nawabganj, Khulna, Gazipur, and Sylhet districts. According to the Bangladesh census report of 1991 the Oraons are 11,296 in Number. But a survey of the Oraon community and published by the Oraon Youth Foundation Program in 1997 claims that the total number of Oraons of Bangladesh is 85,041. Previously the Oraons were the followers of animism but have been counted as lower caste Hindu in Bangladesh. Nowadays they follow several religions. Many of them have been converted into Theravada Buddhism and Christianity. It is mention worth that they have been taking refuge in Buddhism from 1994. Buddhism was first introduced to them by the Barua Buddhist community of Bangladesh. Since then they have been guided mostly by the monks from Barua community. But The Oraons who took refuge in Buddhism claim that their forefathers were the original inhabitants of present-day Bangladesh and were followers of Tantric Buddhism. With the passage of time, they forget all the Buddhist rites and rituals and started to follow a highly syncretic popular culture. Historical evidences suggest that Buddhism was introduced
in Bangladesh from the time of its inception, and from the 7th century to the 12th century Buddhism enjoyed the status of state religion patronized by many Buddhist dynasties. At that time, Tantric Buddhism played a vital role in the religious sphere of Bangladesh. So the people of Bangladesh share a colorful common popular culture along with their respective religious rites and rituals. After the 12th century, due to various adverse socio-political developments Buddhism lost its glory and was reduced to a minority religion. With the decline of Buddhism many Buddhist ethnic minority groups lost their religious identity and adopted animism and syncretic popular beliefs with the identity of Adibasi or aborigine. Considering this fact, the Oraons believe that they are one of them. However, debates are continuing regarding their claim. During my fieldwork conducted between the times of July 2013 to March 2014 I have found 1156 Oraon families follow Buddhism, and the total number of Oraons Buddhists was 5,909. Though they follow the Theravada Buddhism, their popular culture runs counter to Buddhist ethics to some extent. For example, still they indulge in sacrificing animal, hunting, drinking home brewed wine etc. Like other religious communities or ethnic groups they have their own language, folk belief or tradition, social norms and customs.

The popular culture of Oraons is of particular interest because it represents a minority culture that has been surviving for many centuries in a multi-cultural, multi-religious context shared with Muslims, Hindus and Christians and some animist groups. It may have vital lesson to offer other religious traditions in South and South-East Asia, where growing fundamentalism and intolerance are serious problems. Besides a detailed and comprehensive study of popular culture (popular rites and rituals) of Oraon Buddhist community of Bangladesh will facilitate an understanding of how syncretic popular culture may help religious communities maintain their distinctive identities.
3. Traditions regarding funeral ceremony

In Bangladesh funeral ceremony is observed in two ways, i.e., burial and cremation. The Muslim and Christian communities bury the dead body of all ages. On the other hand Buddhist and Hindu communities burn the dead body, but they bury it if the deceased is less than seven years of age. All the religious communities observe the funeral ceremony in a ceremonious and socially accepted attractive manner. The Buddhists burn the dead body in the view that Buddha’s dead body was burnt (Dīgha Nikāya [DN] II. 161). The Oraon community observes this obligatory ritual with due religious fervor and in a socially accepted manner. Both burial and cremation customs exist in the Oraon community. Though they follow both the systems, they observe some customs that are not found in other communities. For example, if anybody dies during āśaṅga (June-July), shrāban (July-August), bhādra (August-September), āśvin (September-October) months of Bengali calendar then the dead body is buried. For the remaining eight months cremation is followed (Khalkho 2009: 50). It is noted here that they only burn the dead body of married persons, and bury the dead body of unmarried persons, whatever the month of death. The dead body is called murdhā and the place of funeral is called Mārshaṭā in Oraon language. Further, traditionally Oraons consider death in two ways (Khalkho 2009: 49): a) natural death and b) accidental death.

a) Natural Death: When someone dies affected by disease it is considered as natural death. The dead body is cremated or buried in a particular place socially allocated for funerals observing all socio-religious rituals.

b) Accidental Death: Death caused by suicide, taking poison, snake bite, attack by tiger, drowning, fall from a tree, burn, and vehicle accident is considered as accidental death by Oraon. If anybody dies under these circumstances, the deceased is not buried or cremated in a graveyard or cremation ground that is socially allocated, and socio-
religious rituals are not observed. Regarding the accidental death they believe following popular notion:

"Isa/ida jānāmati nānnār tārti bābcakāsh hikdāsh. Isa/ida purkhāra gāne mālā mēsaroasa āoṅge dharmes isina/idina chindiāsa tāra kuutī nānjēsa". (Trans.) The person has come from another clan since birth. That person could not mingle with the ancestors and that's why the god has separated him from the others through accident.

They also believe that the souls of people who die accidental death could not mingle with their ancestor's souls in the eternal world. So, the souls roam around the village in great pain. As a result, the Oraons are very much afraid of these souls and firmly believing they turn into ghosts or witches and come to harm them. But after taking refuge in Buddhism and with the influence of Buddhist culture, the Oraons at present gave up these sorts of popular beliefs and they perform the funeral ceremony for all sorts of death.

4. Popular Notions

According to Hindu scripture, the human soul is eternal and reincarnates to suffer the consequences of the previous life (Pandey 1982: 234). Islam does not believe in reincarnation, but during the day of keyāmat or the Day of Judgment everybody will be revived and according to the consequence of their works the person will be placed in heaven or hell (Ahmed 1974: 212). The Christians believe same tradition as Muslims. Buddhists also believe in reincarnation and eternal world. Before converting to Buddhism, Oraons had their own beliefs regarding the eternal world (Singh 1982: 48). According to their traditional belief, the departed soul roams and influences the future life. It can do both- harms and good. For this reason, they take caution regarding the soul of a dead person. Oraons have a long tradition of worshiping the souls of their ancestors. The Oraons
believe that if a person dies, the soul will enter into new world leaving behind the present universe and live together along with their ancestors souls. They firmly believe that the people of their own clan carry the same blood. They think that if a person of their own clan dies, his or her soul will meet with the souls of their clan in the eternal world. So, they worship the departed soul for the welfare of family and society. Hence, the Oraon community worships the soul of dead persons by offering food in their various festivals. Moreover, they keep some rice from their everyday meal and some drops of hāriā (home brewed wine) while drinking it in order to satisfy the souls (Roy 1972: 137, Khalkho 2009: 49, Singh 1982: 48).

5. Social Duties and Notions

If anybody dies at night then they guard the dead body whole night. It is done so the soul never feels lonely. Buddhist devotional songs are sung during the wake. They believe that due to the power of devotional songs departed souls cannot harm or evil spirits cannot enter into the house of the deceased. Where a death occurs in an Oraon family it is made known to the village by the loud lamentation of the women, who loosen their hair, a demonstration of grief which appears to prevail in all countries, and cry vigorously (Dalton 1872: 261). On hearing the news of death, the villagers gather at the house yard of the deceased and engage themselves to arrange the funeral rites. They consider it their social responsibility and a virtuous deed. At first, they light candles and burn incenses near the head of the dead person. Then some of them convey the news to relatives who are living far away. Some go to invite monks from different monasteries. A few of them busy themselves with preparing the cremation. Generally the funeral ceremony is performed after mid-day in order to give an opportunity for well-wishers and relatives to arrive from distant places. Cooking is forbidden at the dead person's house. But they give a last symbolic meal to the deceased with food cooked in another family.
6. Customary bath or Ritual for washing Death Body

Washing the dead body is a customary rite for all the religious communities in Bangladesh. They consider it as a virtuous deed. All religious communities have their own tradition for washing the dead body. Usually the dead body of a male person is washed by males and female person by females. The Oraons wash the dead body in a colorful traditional way. First, a cot is made with green bamboo to carry the death body. After preparing the cot, it is decorated with flowers and colored papers. After that the dead body is kept on the cot and placed in a corner of the courtyard which is surrounded by cloth. Generally, some relatives and aged experienced people perform the ritual. Before bath, valuable ornaments and cloths from dead person are removed. Then the body is washed by pouring water. It is mentioned in Buddhists literature that the body of the Buddha was wrapped up in new clothes and placed it in an oil trough made of iron. The funeral pyre of the Buddha was prepared with all scented materials (Jayawickrama 1971: 32, Law 2000: 572). So, like other Buddhist communities, the Oraon Buddhists also wash the dead body with scented water and rub the body with turmeric and oil after bathing. Then the dead body is dressed with Dhuty (in case of male) or Sharee (in case of female), and the whole body is covered with white cloth. After completing the bath, the dead body is brought to the courtyard and put on the cot. Then, vermilion is put on the forehead of the deceased. If the deceased is married then his wife puts some vermilion with the fingers of her left hand. If the deceased is a woman then her husband puts vermilion with his right hand. But this custom is not followed in the case of unmarried persons (Khalkho 2009: 50).
Funeral Rites of Oraon Buddhist Community in Bangladesh

Pic. 1. A widow pasting vermillion on the forehead of her deceased husband.

Pic. 2. Dead body is placed on cot and a candle is lit beside the head.

After that candles and incenses are burnt continuously by the head of the deceased and scented water and fragrance are scattered on the body. It is customary that if the deceased is male then bangles and ornaments are unlocked from the hand of his wife, and vermillion is wiped from her forehead. From the day of her husband's death, the widow wears only white Sharee until her death. According to social custom, the widow is not allowed to wear luxurious cloths and ornaments. This custom also prevails in Hindu and other Buddhist ethnic communities of Indo-Bangladesh subcontinent (Chaudhuri 1982: 76). However these sorts or rules are not found in religious scriptures.

Pic. 3. Dress of a widow.

Pic. 4. Dress when husband is alive
7. Ritual to help Children Overcome Fear of Death

A ritual is held for children in the deceased’s family to overcome their fear of death. The ritual is held just after bathing ritual. If the deceased has children or grandchild then they are gathered beside the dead body. Then- the children have to jump over the body thrice, one after another. At the time of jumping over the dead body an aged person utters ‘āmbuk hādiyāraā nā hādiyāya hauka’ that means don’t be afraid, don’t be scared. The main objective of the ritual is to make free the children from fear and grief of a close relative’s death. This kind of ritual is not found in other ethnic Buddhist communities and Hindu communities of Bangladesh. So- this is a special feature of the Oraon community.

8. Religious Ritual

When relatives and neighbors are gathered at the courtyard of the deceased’s house, usually in the afternoon, bhikkhus perform the religious rituals. This is the main part of the funeral ceremony of Oraon Buddhists. This ritual is only performed by the Oraon who took refuge in Buddhism. Most of the people bring some rice and money when participating in the funeral ceremony. They put the rice and money on a winnowing-fan placed
beside the cot made to carry the body. In the case of Bengali Buddhist community, the grandson of the deceased presents must buy and place an umbrella and a walking stick next to the body in the funeral ceremony, later which are donated to the bhikkhus in saṅghadāna ceremony. Then an aged person of the village asks all present in the ceremony whether the deceased person is indebted to anybody or not. If anybody claims that the deceased is indebted to him or her, then it is assured in front of everyone that his demand will be fulfilled immediately after the funeral ceremony. Then-the main part of the religious ritual begins.

The Buddhist monks who have come from various places take seats beside the deceased. The close relatives sit surrounding the body. At first, the people present in the ceremony take refuge in tisaraṇa and five precepts (pañcasīla). Then Buddhist monks collectively utter the following verse, which is uttered by the god Sakka after the Buddha’s passing away (DN II. 157):

\begin{align*}
\text{aniccā vata saṅkhārā uppāda-vaya-dhammino,} \\
\text{uppajjītvā nirujjhanti tesam viśvasamo sukho”ti.}
\end{align*}

(Trans.) Impermanent are conditioned things! It is their nature to arise and fall.

Having arisen, they cease. Their stilling is happy. (Gethin 2008: 90)
The monks then recite various verses and *suttas* from Holy *Tipiṭaka* which are related to *Paritta* ritual and acclaim the importance of human life. Next, some monks and neighbors eulogize the activities of the deceased in his or her life. After this, the body is taken to the pyre accompanied by devotional songs.

9. Customary Rituals for Cremation or Burial

9.1. Cremation System

Generally, four close relatives who are married carry the body to the pyre. Usually, the body is carried by the son, niece, nephew, son-in-law of the deceased. Before taking it to the pyre, the cot along with the body is touched thrice to the ceiling of the house. The symbolic meaning is that the deceased is embracing the house for the last time and departing from the house for ever. It is customary that a pitcher with water, some paddy on a plate made out of leaf, some cooked rice mixed with bean, wine, betel leaf, cigarettes, some utensils used by the deceased and 7–8 tooth brushes made of nim tree (*meliaindica*) and some money are taken to the pyre with the death body (Xalxo 2007: 53).

![Image](image1.png)

*Pic. 9. The death body is touched to the ceiling of the house before leaving for the cremation ground.*

![Image](image2.png)

*Pic. 10. Pyre is prepared with the branch of trees and death body is carried to the pyre.*

After reaching the pyre, a chance is given to all to see the face of
the deceased for the last time. Then, according to social custom some rice is given into the mouth of the deceased (Koonathan 1999: 155). This rice provides a symbolic last meal. First the family members, then closer relatives and lastly the neighbors touch the rice to the mouth of death person thrice. Then they give some betel leaf, betel nut and cigarettes at the pyre in a belief that s/he can enjoy it during his journey to the afterlife. They also give some cash money with the death body and say, ‘andā kaṭe kaṛem ghāt kāṭtake’ which means the money is given for crossing the river from here to the next life. After that they ask the deceased as follows: Please don’t come to want anything from today. Let us live without disturbance. Don’t be angry with us. Don’t show any sort of malice toward us’ (Roy 1972: 126).

The custom of feeding the deceased for the last time is also practiced among Bengali Buddhists. However the system of feeding food is different from the Oraons. In the case of Bengali Buddhists, the elder son of the deceased carries cooked food and water for his dead father or mother. Usually, the technique of feeding is quite opposite to our practice in normal life. The rice and other foods are touched to the lips of the deceased five to seven times.

After this ritual, the cot along with body is placed on the wooden pyre. Some logs are placed on top of the body. Every near relatives of the deceased puts two piece or more into its mouth. The son of the deceased
sets fire to the pyre by lighting some straw thatch taken from the house of the deceased (Roy 1915: 364). The members of the clan present each throw some fuel or logs on the pyre as their ceremonial duty on behalf of the clan. Usually near relatives, even from other villages, bring one or more pieces of wood for this purpose. It is noteworthy that during lighting the pyre the son keeps the face opposite to the pyre. The symbolic meaning is that he does not like to see the burning of his father or mother. The lighting of the pyre is called āigamukha in Oraon language.

In case the deceased does not have a son, the right to light the fire will devolve in the following order: 1. father, 2. brother, 3. agnates and 4. men of the clan. The wife can never light the fire, as she never accompanies the funeral (Singha 2002: 170). After the fire is extinguished, the relics and ashes of the deceased are collected and place these on a new earthen-pan and it is kept in a hole on the bank of a river or tank.\(^{(1)}\)

The pyre lighting practices of Bengali Buddhists and Hindus are different from the Oraons. It is observed that among the Hindus and Bengali Buddhists of Bangladesh, the person lighting the pyre hold the torch behind his back with both hands and goes around the pyre seven times. At every round he bows down his head at the feet of the deceased. After seven times, the torch is held near the mouth of the deceased. This lighting of the pyre is called mukhāgni by the Bengali Buddhists and Hindus (Mukherjee & Bandyopadhyay 2013: 13).

### 9.2. Burial system

It is mentioned earlier that the Oraon community use both cremation and burial. It is known that due to scarcity of wood they started burying some of the dead (Ali 2008: 164). Usually the grave is dug by elderly people. The size of the grave is three and half yards long and two and quarter yards deep facing north to south. Bamboo logs are spread at the bottom of the grave.

After bringing the body to the grave, the bearers carry the body around
the grave three times. Then they place it, on the ground near the grave. Like the cremation ceremony, the face of the deceased is shown to all for the last time. Then, rice and wine are touched to the mouth of the deceased. After it, some money is put in the grave to help the deceased cross the river to the world of the here-after. Then, the body is placed in the grave with the head pointing to the north. I asked some aged persons of Oraon community why the head is laid to the north. They replied, as the Bhava River (the river that makes a link between here and the after-world) flows from north to south, water might go in to the nose if the body were placed with the head to the south. I did not find any scientific basis for this hypothesis.

The Hindus and Bengali Buddhists also place the head of the deceased towards the north. Bengali Buddhists do it as the Buddha died in this position (Davids 1910: pp. 149 ff.). Hindus do it following the instruction of holy book named Purohit Darpan. The book instructed that the head of the dead person should be placed to the north. In contrast, in Bangladesh, Muslims place the head of the deceased towards west, because the holy place Mecca is situated to the west of Bangladesh. In conclusion, in my view, the Oraons place the head of the deceased to the north because of the influence of Hindu mythology and as Buddha died with his head to the north.

After placing the body in the grave, a pile of bamboo is placed on the body to protect it from animals that might eat it. Then, a slender bamboo is placed vertically straight down from the top beside the head of the deceased. The family members and the nearest relatives first throw each a handful of earth into the grave with his or her left hand, then others presents similarly throw handfuls of earth with their left hands, so as to fill up the grave. Then, by pouring water the grave is pasted with clay and some flower plants are planted on the grave.

Finally, the bamboo pole is taken off. As a result, a hole is made in the grave. The symbolic meaning is that the hole is the only path-way for the deceased. He can leave the grave through this path-way to take foods
offered near the grave until the \textit{ek-mañkhnā} (entering shadow) ritual is performed\(^{(14)}\). It is noteworthy that rice, water, home brewed wine and tooth brushes made of \textit{nim} (\textit{dātun}) are offered every evening on a banana leaf until the \textit{ek-mañkhnā} ritual is performed. They believe that until the observance of \textit{ek-mañkhnā} ritual, the soul of the deceased cannot mingle with their ancestors. As a result, it roams around the houses and disturbs the people of the village. Again, they believe that the soul comes out through the path-way of the grave when it is hungry, so they offer the above mentioned refreshments.

After cremation or burial everybody who participated in the ceremony bathes and returns to the house of the deceased. Then a purity ritual is performed. Reaching the house they rub the smoke of incense and sprinkle turmeric mixed with water on their bodies. In three places of the courtyard of the deceased's house, incenses are burnt continuously from the time of death. Through this ritual purity is reestablished. The Oraon believe that during the cremation or burial ghosts or evil spirits possess them and can harm the people of the village. They believe that through purification rituals they can drive away the evil spirits. After the ritual, all who take part in the cremation are entertained with home brewed wine called \textit{hāriā}, but the family members of the deceased do not drink at this time because they abstain from enjoyment while they are mourning.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.4\textwidth]{pic13}
\includegraphics[width=0.4\textwidth]{pic14}
\caption{Pic. 13. A graveyard
Pic. 14. A stupa is built upon the cremation place}
\end{figure}
10. Conclusion

Funeral is an obligatory ritual for all religious communities of Bangladesh, but the method of observation differs from one community to another. As the Bengali Buddhists propagate Buddhism in the Oraon society their practices have cast great influences over the Oraons. So, like Barua community they observe same religious rituals regarding death. But differences are seen in the socio-popular rituals that are observed as death ritual. For example, the ritual for eliminating fear among children and ritual for shadow entrance are not observed in other communities except the Oraons. So, even after embracing Buddhism they follow their traditional practices and beliefs, and through these practices they keep their distinction as an individual community from other Buddhist communities.

Notes

(1) The Buddhist community of Bangladesh comprises various ethnic groups. Mainly they are Chakma, Tanchangya, Chak, Mru, Marma, Rakhain, Kheyang, Barua and Oraon, all of whom at present follow Theravada Buddhism and reside in different areas. Their languages, scripts, dress, foods, lifestyles and popular beliefs and culture are distinct from each other. Through these they keep their identity as a distinct ethnic community.

(2) Regarding the number of 1991 census report, Uttam Kumar Das and Debendra Nath Oraon said, “It should be noted that the name Oraon has been misspelled as Urang in the 1991 census report. Urua mentioned as a separate ethnic community is also presumed to be Oraon. So the Oraon population size mentioned above as a government figure is a combined figure of the Urang and Urua. Several sources highlight that government census statistics are erroneous. These discrepancies suggest that statistics provided by publication from non-government organizations probably provide more accurate data about the Oraon population.” (Gain 2011: 228–229)

(3) Three kinds of Mārshaṇā or funeral places are seen in the Oraons society. They are: Social, family and clan. In the Social funeral place all classes of people, for example, rich and poor are cremated or buried. The rich people have their own family funeral
place and only his family members are cremated or buried in it. In the clan funeral place only the people of same clan are cremated or buried.

(4) This opinion is collected from the aged women of Harirampur Chatnipara village of Nababgang (sub-district) of Dinajpur district.

(5) This trend is common to all religious communities in Bangladesh.

(6) When I asked some aged persons of Chatnipara of Dinajpur District why cooking is forbidden, they replied that eating and drinking are part of enjoyment. As death is a matter of mourning, the family members abstain from cooking and they show honor to the deceased person by abstaining from taking food on the day of death.

(7) Those who are economically solvent arrange a wooden box instead of bamboo and gorgeously decorate it with flowers and colored paper.

(8) A long cloth used by men as a lower garment

(9) Lower garment used by women.

(10) Paritta is a Pali word, derived from the Sanskrit word Paritāna - means protection. Paritta is a very popular religious ritual to all Buddhist communities of Bangladesh. It is held for various purposes, for example, birth, marriage, death, entering a new house, giving pabbajjā to a member of the family, naming a new born child, and starting a new business and general welfare. But the recitation of parittas is a must when a person dies. The ultimate goal of this ritual is seeking protection against evil spirits.

(11) The Oraon Buddhists perform another ritual called hāraborā (Ritual for floating ashes and relics) within 7–13 days after death. On the day of the ceremony the ashes and relics of the deceased are floated on the river in a ceremonious way.

(12) Hindus also have a myth cited as reason to place the deceased's head to the north. According to the myth "Goddess Durga requested her brother Sani to come to see her new-born child Ganesha. Sani replied that misfortune would happen if he went to see his nephew Ganesha. Nevertheless, Durga asked Sani again and again to come to her house to see Ganesha. When Sani finally came to Durga's house and saw the face of Ganesha, then and there the baby's head became separated from his neck. Then a head of an elephant was collected from the north and placed on Ganesha's neck. As result, he was able to live, and his face looks like an elephant." - This story is collected from the aged persons of Shilak and Padua villages of Chittagong district and few lecturers of the University of Dhaka also told the same story. A similar story but slightly deviated is found in Myths of the Hindus and Buddhists, written by Ananda K. Coomaraswamy and Sister Nivedita, published by Dover Publications, Inc. New York, 1967, pp. 381–382.

(13) I asked some people of Surjapur village of Joypurhat district why the left hand is
used. They replied that the right hand is used to do all wholesome work. Moreover, death is an unexpected thing. Nobody likes to welcome it. So, we use the left hand to mean that we are doing this against our will and we do not expect this kind of occurrence again. It also shows our unwillingness to lose a family member.

(14) This ritual is done only for the deceased who are buried. This is also observed on an odd day after seven to thirteen days of burial. Through this ritual the soul or shadow of the deceased is welcomed into the house and the soul is given final deliberation.

References


* Ph.D. Candidate, Graduate School of Letters, Ryukoku University, Kyoto, Japan & Assistant Professor, Department of Pali and Buddhist Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh.