

TRADITIONAL HINDU FUNERAL PYRE: CONSTRUCTIONAL ASPECTS

Today the rite of cremation on a funeral pyre is most widely represented in India. One of its most important practical aspects is the construction of the pyre. This depends on various factors, the most significant of which are the type of fuel, the environmental conditions and the ethno-confessional specifics of the funeral rite. This work aims to study the variations in the construction of Hindu funeral pyres. Data were collected at the Tajganj cremation center in Agra, India, during the Russian-Indian anthropological expedition of the Paleoethnological Research Center and the State Biology Museum named after K.A. Timiryazev in 2018, 2019, and 2022. Research methods included visual observation and description of the pyre-building process, sketching the pyre construction, and conducting unstructured interviews with participants in the funeral rite. A total of 166 observations of cremations and 19 sketches of the pyre construction were made, and 6 unstructured interviews were conducted. The author identified three types of funeral pyre: wood, dung and mixed. All of them have a rectangular shape and a common construction plan. The basis of each pyre is a three-layer bed on which the body of the deceased lies in a supine position, covered by layers of fuel. The relative sizes of the pyre, the methods used to fix the limbs and the covering layer of fuel are related to the position of the body on the bed. The results of the study can be used as comparative data in archaeological research.

Keywords: cremation, body burning, Hindu funeral rites, Hinduism, Agra, India

Author Info: Alekseev, Yuri A. — Senior Research Fellow, the State Biology Museum named after K. A. Timiryazev (Moscow, Russian Federation). E-mail: alekseev@gbmt.ru ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8375-5377>

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