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Facing Missiological Challenges by Understanding Hinduism's Approach to Ancestors

The Seventh-day Adventist Church's doctrine regarding the state of the dead denies the continuation of the deceased's soul or spirit in any form. The doctrine describes death as an unconscious state until the day of the resurrection. Many Hindus teach that the soul endures after physical death; therefore, special attention is given to one's departed ancestors. The Hindu teaching concerning ancestors is complex and is closely associated with many other teachings. To develop a comprehensive picture of the status of an ancestor and the relationship between ancestors and the living it is necessary to look at a few other Hindu teachings. The belief in ancestors compliments *Advaita* philosophy and supports a fundamental Hindu social structure and identity-development process. *Advaita* is the philosophical teaching of non-duality of the Supreme Reality found in the *Upanishads*, one segment of the *Vedas*.

This study is divided into five sections. The first section describes Hindus from socio-legal and scriptural perspectives, in order to explain the connection between a family and their ancestors. The second section examines death, the continuation of the soul after death, and describes the elevation of an individual from a living being to an ancestor. The third part of the study explores the rites and rituals performed for the dead in order to explain the connection between the ancestors and the living. The fourth section reports on a pilot study done among a few practicing Indian Hindus to better understand their view of death and ancestors. Finally, the last section discusses the missiological challenges related to Hindu teachings on ancestors.

Hindu Identity: Social and Legal

Hindus develop their ancestry through family lines. The simplest definition of ancestors, according to Hinduism, are the members from the family line who are no more and by extension all those who have departed. The family line should match the identity of an individual through his/her same caste and *gotra*. It is only Hindus who carry the caste and *gotra* identity. The discussion in this section is to establish the identity of a Hindu from a socio-legal perspective and then move on to a discussion on caste and *gotra* to establish the link between the three to help understand the connection between the living and the ancestors.

Who is a Hindu? It is very difficult to define Hinduism or a Hindu because the scriptures of the faith itself do not provide a definition. The word *Hindu* has geographical and social connotations. The name was attributed by foreigners around the 7th-8th century AD to the people who lived across the River Sindh, which is currently in Pakistan. Since the foreigners could not pronounce Sindh, they replaced the S with H, and it became Hind. The land slowly became known as Hindustan, and the people of the land were called Hindus (Nirvedananda 2011). Prior to this, the indigenous faith did not carry any specific name. Looking back, scholars identify this faith as the Vedic Arya Brahminical religion (Sunder Raj 1998). Currently, Sanatan Dharma refers to the indigenous faith which existed before the foreign invasion and continues to the present day. To most Hindus, *Sanatan Dharma* and Hinduism are synonymous. Any individual contributing to *Sanatan Dharma* is a Hindu.

Under Great Britain's rule of India, it became necessary to identify the population of India (Hindustan) based on their faith. The Census Commission of 1910 identified Vedic Arya Dharma followers with the following characteristics (Sunder Raj 1998):

1. Accept the supremacy of the Brahmins
2. Receive mantras from a Brahmin or another recognized Hindu guru
3. Accept the authorities of the Vedas
4. Worship Hindu gods
5. Are served by good Brahmins as family priests
6. Have access to the interior of the Hindu temple
7. Do not cause pollution by touch
8. Cremate their dead
9. Do not eat beef

Justice Venkatachala,¹ in his 1986 verdict on the petition of Bramachari Sidheswar Shai & others versus State of West Bengal in the Supreme Court of India, identified the following as salient features of Hinduism:

1. Acceptance of the Vedas with reverence as the highest authority in religious and philosophic matters and acceptance with reverence of Vedas by Hindu thinkers and philosophers as the sole foundation of Hindu philosophy.
2. Maintain a spirit of tolerance and willingness to understand and appreciate the opponent's point of view based on the realization that truth was many-sided.
3. Acceptance of great world rhythm, vast periods of creation, maintenance, and dissolution that follow each other in endless succession, by all six systems of Hindu philosophy.
4. Acceptance by all systems of Hindu philosophy the belief in rebirth and pre-existence.
5. Recognition of the fact that the means or ways to salvation are many.
6. Realization of the truth that the gods to be worshipped may be many, yet there are Hindus who do not believe in the worshipping of idols.
7. Unlike other religions or religious creeds, the Hindu religion is not tied-down to any definite set of philosophic concepts or beliefs.

The constitution of India does not define the term *Hindu*. However, Hindu Personal Laws identify² the following categories of people as Hindus: (1) any person who is not a Muslim, Christian, Parsi, or Jew unless it is proved that the person does not participate in Hindu customs, rites, and rituals; (2) any person who is a Buddhist, Sikh, or Jain; and (3) any person belonging to any form of Hinduism such as Brahmo, Prarthana, Arya Samaj, Virashiva, or Lingaya, etc.

Schedule castes and Schedule tribes³ are not included in the list of Hindus unless the Central Government of India officially states that a specific tribe among the schedule tribes is Hindu.⁴

The religio-socio-political identity of Hindus is very wide-ranging. Hinduism “embraces an eclectic range of doctrines and practices, from pantheism to agnosticism and from faith in reincarnation to belief in the caste system. But none of these constitutes an obligatory credo for a Hindu” (Tharoor 2018:4). Therefore, people with very different faith practices and ideologies identify as Hindus. Even though different Hindu groups vary in their faith practices they all contribute in practicing caste and *gotra* identity and belong to a cast and *gotra* inherited from the ancestors.

While the Hindu scriptures do not define a Hindu, they provide some guidelines. There are two important identities that a Hindu maintains throughout his or her life—caste (*jati*) and *gotra*. These two identities are important during religious occasions as well as for social identification. Following are two pivotal texts that led to the development of the caste system among Hindus. In the creation chapter of the *Rig-Veda*, it says,

“When they divided Purus how many portions did they make? What do they call his mouth, his arms? What do they call his thighs and feet? The *Brahman* was his mouth, of both his arms was the *Rajanya* made. His thighs became the *Vaisya*, from his feet the *Sudra* was produced” (*Rig-Veda* 10:90:11-12).⁵

Four different groups of people are mentioned: *Brahmana*, *Rajanya* (*Kshatriyas*), *Vaishya*, and *Sudra*. Though the duties of these groups are not mentioned in this text, over time *Brahmanas* were identified as priests, *Rajanya* as kings/warriors, *Vaishya* as traders/businesspersons, and *Sudra* as farmers and other tradespersons. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Sri Krishna encouraged Arjuna to do his caste duty as a king because Arjuna belonged to the *Rajanya* caste. In his discourse, Krishna told Arjuna, “The four orders of society are created by Me, classifying them according to *gunas* predominant in each and apportioning corresponding duties to them; though the originator of this creation, Know Me, the Immortal Lord, to be a non-doer” (*Bhagavad Gita* 4:13).

These texts have been interpreted as categorizing society according to divisions of labor. In a family of four brothers, four different castes should exist. However, this is not the reality. The caste system became a social structure in which all Hindus are born into an inherited caste. Kuruvachira (n.d.) points out that because the *Rig-Veda* describes the origin of the four castes, it was taken as a divine command and became the foundation of Hindu society. “A strong caste identity could provide feelings of belongingness and self-esteem, thereby relying on some caste norms. Particularly, it is known that high caste individuals see caste identity as a more stable construct wherein this identity is inherited at birth” (Sankaran, Sekerdej, and von Hecker 2017: para. 4). Caste identity cannot be adopted or conferred on anyone. Therefore, “caste identity is one of the most salient identities in the Indian context. That is with whom your future and the future of your children and grand-children are bound” (Hoefler 2001:230). Tharoor comments along the same lines stating, “India is a land of multiple identities, and one of the key identities, inescapably, is caste” (2018:76).

Along with caste, *gotra* is also an identity marker that is decided at birth. According to the *Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, “A *gotra* is an exogamous kinship division within a *jati* (caste)” (Jones and Ryan 2007:170). The word “is formed from the two Sanskrit words *Gau* (meaning Cow) and *Trahi* (meaning Shed)” (Gurudev 2011). In ancient times, people of the same kinship group used to keep their cows in the same place, and thus the terminology was coined. “This system was started among Brahmins, with a purpose to classify and identify the families in the community” (Indi-aDivine.org 2015). Originally, seven sacred saints and one more *Rishi* were

known as *Gotrakarin*, the originators of all Brahminical *gotras*. Later other castes also developed their own *gotra* systems.

The primary purpose of the *gotra* system is “to prevent marriages within the same *Gotra*” (Sakshi 2017:1053). This is done “to keep the *gotra* free from inherited blemishes and also to broaden the influence of a particular *gotra* by wider alliances with other powerful lineages” (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. “Gotra”). Both male and female children of the family are endowed with the father’s *gotra* at their birth. Girls belong to the *gotra* of their father prior to their marriage. They are adopted into the *gotra* of their husbands after marriage. The *gotra* of a male member of the family never changes.

Both the caste and the *gotra* of a Hindu child are inherited and, therefore, integral and unchangeable. These two identities connect Hindus with their ancestors. This relationship binds, for eternity, a Hindu child to an extended family, living or dead. This chain of connection becomes very evident when a Hindu goes to worship. Offerings are made to the divine by mentioning the name of the worshipper and preferably three previous male ancestors along with caste and *gotra* identity. If a person converts to another faith, it is as if they have walked away from two identities—their families and their ancestors. Furthermore, they have brought disrespect and shame on their families.

Death

Unlike Christians, Hindus do not view death as a consequence of sin. According to popular Hindu belief at death *Yamaraj* visits the individual and takes the person’s *atma* (soul) either to hell or heaven, depending upon the person’s karma. Death signifies the soul’s departure from the body allowing it to make its onward journey. According to *Gita* 2:18, one of the popular scriptures of Hinduism says a person’s soul is eternal. A soul does not die but transmigrate from one body to another until it achieves salvation. Death involves only the body.

According to Hindus, a living being has two components, the perishable and imperishable. Hinduism has identified these two identities as body and soul. The soul is the true eternally existing imperishable entity, whereas the body is simply a perishable vehicle. In the battlefield of Kurukshetra Arjun refused to fight against the Kauravas because he would have to kill his friends, relatives, and teachers. At that time, Sri Krishna, the incarnated eternal Brahman (*Gita* 10:12, 13). In chapter 11 Krishna had shown his cosmic form to Arjuna as eternal, gave a discourse to Arjun explaining that Arjun would destroy only the body, which is a temporary dwelling place for the eternal soul. He said, “But know that

by whom this entire body is pervaded, is indestructible. No one is able to cause the destruction of the imperishable soul. The embodied soul is eternal in existence, indestructible and infinite, only the material body is factually perishable, therefore, fight O Arjuna" (*Bhagavad Gita* 2:17-18).

Sri Krishna continued by clarifying that the eternal soul cannot be destroyed by any means: "Anyone who thinks that the soul is a slayer and anyone who thinks that the soul is slain both of them are ignorant, the soul never slays nor is slain. The soul never takes birth and never dies at any time nor does it come into being again when the body is created. The soul is birthless, eternal, imperishable and timeless and is never destroyed when the body is destroyed" (*Bhagavad Gita* 2:19-20). Sri Krishna illustrates this further, "As a man shedding worn-out garments, takes other new ones, likewise, the embodied soul, casting off worn-out bodies, enters into others that are new. Weapons cannot cut it, nor can fire burn it; water cannot wet it, nor can wind dry it" (*Bhagavad Gita* 2:22-23). Therefore, according to the *Bhagavad Gita*, death is one of many events in the journey of the imperishable soul toward the ultimate goal—*moksha* (salvation). Swami Sivananda explains this phenomenon by saying, "Death is separation of the soul from a physical body. Death becomes the starting point of a new better life. Death does not end your personality and self-consciousness. It merely opens the door to a higher form of life. Death is only the gateway to a fuller life" (Sivananda 2015:34).

Death becomes an important event because it opens the door for the next stage of the soul's journey. In this process, the soul may spend some time in heaven or hell, depending upon the accumulated karma, but the journey continues until *moksha* (salvation) is attained. At death, the individual becomes an ancestor, whose body is subject to decay and whose soul moves forward. The progeny of the deceased is expected to help the soul journey successfully. Several rituals are prescribed in Hindu scriptures to help the soul along that journey; however, the details of the rituals vary according to the context and the divisions/sects of Hinduism, while the basic structure is more or less the same.

Rituals for the Ancestors

According to Hindu teachings, a person's primary ancestors are one's father, grandfather, and great-grandfather. Next in importance are all others in the family who have died, and all from the same *gorta* and caste. Ancestors on both the father's side and mother's side, as well as unnamed souls, are included (Ghosh 2002:83).

It is believed that those who die from natural causes become *preta*,⁶ and preferably the son (or in the absence of a son, some other male member of

the family) should perform the rituals for the *preta* to have a safe journey to the next world. The *Rig-Veda* suggests three primary rituals to perform after the death of an individual: *pitr-yajna*, *pinda-pitr-yajna*, and *pinda-dana*. The *pitr-yajna* is an important moment in the culmination of the cremation rite. This is when the ancestor receives the first offering. *Pinda-pitr-yajna* is the offering made to the ancestors 30 days after death. Brahmins (priests) play an important role in all these activities since they are considered the mediators between the household and their ancestors (Sayers 2015).

In current times there are a number of activities identified with the veneration of ancestors. The first ritual is the preparation of the cremation, followed by *sraddha*, annual veneration (*Batsarik*), *pinda-daan* (food offered to the ancestors), and *tarpan* (a ritual to satisfy the ancestors). Hindu religious works of literature describe the rituals to be performed during cremation. The body must be washed and laid on a cot. One of the important steps of preparation is the spreading of an unbleached and uncut sheet of cloth with its four corners hanging out. This is performed by a son, brother, close relative, or another person assigned to perform that duty. The individual must recite, "Give up thy old clothing and dress up in a new suit" (Ghosh 2002:143). In the past, the body was usually cremated in an open crematorium, but in many places today, electric crematoriums are used.

Following the cremation, the period of *asauch* (period of defilement) occurs. Usually, the chief mourner and the sons of the family wear seamless clothing, go barefoot, do not style their hair, do not clip their nails, sit on a particular type of mat, and eat a simple vegetarian meal once a day. In modern times, many of these practices are simplified and are not observed as meticulously as in the past. These signs of mourning are continually performed until the next landmark ritual, the *sraddha*.

The word *sraddha* originates from Sanskrit and means respect. This rite is an expression of respect for the deceased. The religious texts guide the next generation to express their respect by fulfilling the responsibility of helping the soul continue on the next leg of its journey. "So long as the mortal elements of the deceased do not turn into a higher body, he wanders day and night in the ethereal form seeking sustenance" (*Garuda Puran* 3:16). Usually, the *sraddha* ceremony takes place on the eleventh day after the cremation, but it may vary according to caste, family tradition, and extenuating circumstances. The *sraddha* primarily involves offering food and other items to the deceased as a form of worship. The most significant offering is rice balls, which are given to crows. It is believed that the soul of the deceased comes in the form of a crow. The *Sraddha* is performed with the help of a Brahmin (priest). A minimum of three Brahmins must be invited, along with other friends and family members. Usually, a feast

is held. During the religious performances of the *sraddha*, the chief mourners, along with other mourners from the family, take a ritualistic bath, shave their heads, and clip their nails. Once the *sraddha* is completed, the mourners return to regular life.

The next form of *sraddha* is *parvana sraddha*, a monthly ritual where food, in the form of rice balls, is offered to the person who recently died. The third form of *sraddha* is *ekoddista sraddha*, which takes place one year after the death. Once again, rice balls are offered to the deceased. Most Hindu families do not celebrate any festivals in their homes during this year. The whole year is considered to be an *asauch* period. The final *sraddha* is *sapindakarma sraddha*, which is performed any time after the first annual rite. It is advised that *sapindakarma sraddha* be performed in a holy place, if possible. By performing this rite, the son helps the deceased to be elevated to the level of the three primary ancestors—the father, grandfather, and great-grandfather (Sayers 2015). The great-great-grandfather is now elevated to the pantheon of the anonymous, though not ignored. Among some Hindu communities, the annual rite needs to be continued until the last rite, *sapindakarma sraddha*, is performed. The rituals are also a form of consolation to the family by assuring them that they have helped the deceased journey to the next world.

The *tarpan* is another ritual performed in honor of ancestors. The word *tarpan* is the combination of two Sanskrit words, *tript* and *on*. *Tript* means to satisfy, while *on* is the suffix according to the Sanskrit grammar to provide the verb form of *tript*. Therefore, *tarpan* means to satisfy or appease the ancestors. This is done primarily with water although other items are also included in the ritual. The most preferable location for the ritual is on the bank of the River Ganges. If this is not possible another body of water may be utilized. It is expected that the person doing *tarpan* stand in deep water, up to his or her belly button. In the past these rituals were only performed by men; however, over time some women have also begun to perform the rituals, though this is rare. Since this is a rite to be performed on specific days, according to a Hindu almanac, *tarpan* is also considered to be a daily duty. It is to be performed every day while bathing. The *grihi* (the man of the family) may use a shortened form of the *tarpan* chant, “Father is heaven, father is Dharma, and father is indeed the greatest form of austerity. When the gratification of this father has been gained, all gods (automatically) get gratified” (Ghosh 2002:153). The most auspicious *tarpan* is *mahalaya tarpan*, which announces the closing of *Pitar Paksha*. *Pitar Paksha* is a fifteen-day rite during which the household (*grihi*) is expected to make an offering to the ancestors.

Other than these rites and rituals, Hindus remember their ancestors during almost every major rite, such as marriage, *upanayana* (sacred thread

ceremony), and so on. Every time Hindus perform a major rite, they are asked the names of their caste, *gotra*, and three ancestors. All these activities are ways to remember, pay respect, connect, and bind both the living and the dead.

Reality Check

I have observed that often what is written in Hindu texts and what is practiced do not always agree. To better understand how Hindus today interact with their ancestors, I engaged in a dialogue with twenty-three educated, mostly middle aged, practicing Indian Hindus belonging to three upper castes. This is just a pilot study and does not represent all Hindus. I had a few questions in my mind and I asked those questions in the process of dialogue. Following are the responses received from the participants.

1. Do you observe the *pitar paksha*?

All of the participants, except two, observe the *pitar paksha*. Three of them do so in a very orthodox way. During the *pita paksha* they eat a vegetarian diet and perform the appropriate rituals. Others believe in it but perform the rituals only on the last day, the *mahalaya tarpan* rather than every day. Mr. Hari⁷ does not observe the *pitar paksha* because he does “not believe in rituals.” Mr. Prakash said, “The soul of the ancestor has gone either to take another body or has attained moksha. How will I [my] observing *pitar paksha* benefit the soul? I do not know. It may even be I.” By this he wanted to say that the soul which had the body of one of his ancestors might have taken his current body. There is no way to substantiate nor deny the claim. This is his justification for not observing *pitar paksha*.

2. Did you or will you perform all the *sraddhas* if there is a death in the family?

Everybody agreed that they have performed or will perform all the *sraddhas* in case of a death in the family. They believe this is a requirement of their faith and a requirement of their society. They also believe the *sraddha* is required for the soul to achieve peaceful rest. Most importantly, the mourning period and the *sraddhas* are an expression of gratitude to the departed ancestors. Naresh said, “It is on their foundation we are standing today. How can we deny them?” All of them agreed that the ancestors bless their progeny.

3. Do you believe in *swarga* (heaven) and *narak* (hell)?⁸

None of the interviewees had a clear idea about heaven or hell. Purva stated very emphatically, "Heaven and hell, all are here on earth. [The soul does] not need to go anywhere." Arun said, "We have heard about it but never thought seriously about it." Karuna added, "[They] may exist, but I am concerned about this life. If this goes well, I am happy." Some of the interviewees do not believe in the existence of heaven or hell. Yet most of them observe the rites and perform the required rituals. This appears to be a contradiction yet they are comfortable with that. Five of the interviewees do not believe in the transmigration of souls, and so the issue of the continuation of the soul to some destination does not matter to them.

4. Do the ancestors become gods, like other gods in heaven, after they become ancestors?

Most of my interviewees were not sure what to answer for this question. They strongly believe that the blessings of the ancestor have power but are not sure about them becoming gods. They all seek the blessings of the ancestors and believe that the ancestors, especially their parents, bless them whether they perform the rituals or not.

As I analyzed the responses of the Hindu interviewees, the following themes emerged.

A. A sense of attachment: People perform the rituals because they are attached to their ancestors. This attachment develops because of two factors. First, the participants respect their ancestors and acknowledge their contribution in their lives, and they believe that they can retrieve additional blessings from them. Second, they have been taught, through examples and words, to maintain the link with their ancestors through various rituals. The simple reminder of their caste and *gotra* and through the rituals, reinforces their connection to the long chain of ancestors.

B. Religious requirements: Hinduism is rich in rites and rituals. Individuals may believe or may not believe in a ritual, may understand the activities of a ritual or may not understand it, yet they perform the action in faith, believing that the ritual itself will have its effect. Very few refuse to participate. The efficacy of the rituals cannot be justified logically. In the same way, participating in a ritual without believing in it cannot be logically explained. Every individual has her/his own explanation. Some may say it was the desire of their parent and some may justify it as fulfilling social requirements.

C. *Social requirements*: Hindus generally form tight-knit communities. Many of their actions are to fulfill a social requirement. All of my participants agreed that either they have performed or will perform last rites for their parents. In the process of discussion, it also emerged that they do this not only because of religious requirements but also because of social requirements.

D. *The expectation of blessings from the ancestors*: Blessings from parents is a common theme in Hindu communities, which was also endorsed by the participants. They believe it is immaterial whether the ancestors become gods or not; the ancestors still have the ability to bless.

E. *A peaceful coexistence of contradictions*: Contradictions are evident in the answers of the participants, yet they are not disturbed with that. People may not consent to the theory behind a ritual, yet they may perform the ritual for several reasons. They may not believe in certain teachings yet continue to claim to be Hindus because Hinduism does not provide a set of dogma like Christianity or Islam for their adherents to follow. Thus, Hinduism is an all-encompassing faith.

Missiological Challenges

Issue of Identity

Ancestors play an important role in shaping the identity of Hindus. They are remembered during major religious events, by name, caste, and *gotra*. Remembering ancestors at different family ceremonies is a means of bonding within an extended family. It is a matter of honor for the family and is a known fact that in a Hindu community, shame and honor play an important role.

Usually, when a Hindu accepts Jesus Christ, the individual is disowned by the family for several reasons. One reason is losing the caste identity, and therefore the *gotra* identity as well. If people no longer belong to the Hindu fold they cannot hold a caste identity. Theoretically speaking, caste identity is exclusively for Hindus. Some Christians continue to hold their caste identity after their conversion experience, which is not validated by the Hindu community. Thus, the new Christian becomes an orphan in the sight of the community, without any identity to hold on to. The question is whether or not the church really and truly can provide a new family identity as the family of God?

Grieving Process

The yearlong religious requirements for the peaceful and safe passage of the deceased soul helps the family through the grieving process. The last ritual, *sapindakarma sraddha*, is consoling for the family. They develop a sense of satisfaction—they have done enough to help the departed soul on its journey, and thus they are comforted. The yearlong grieving period, with several rituals, is a process of slow separation of the grieving family from the departed individual. How does the church help in this separation process? Some denominations have developed functional substitutes, like memorial services after ten and / or forty days, with another memorial service at the end of the first year. Many Seventh-day Adventists also follow the same practices. The church has played a neutral role allowing the local practices to be continued. The Anglican Church celebrates All Souls' Day. People visit their ancestors' gravesites on the anniversary of their deaths. I once visited the gravesite of a very dear relative. As I stood by the grave, the wife of the deceased told me, "I know there is nothing in this grave, but I have my everything in it." I am not suggesting that we blindly follow the models used by others, but could the church think of creating functional substitutes as a coping mechanism for grieving families?

Presentation of the Doctrine

The Seventh-day Adventist Church's doctrine of the state of the dead teaches that death is a state of unconscious nothingness. It is a discontinuation of the dead person in any form until the second coming of Jesus Christ. Hindus believe in the existence of an individual in a different conscious form after death. The teaching of unconscious nothingness creates a void in the Hindu mind. Many Hindus possibly could recite the names of their ancestors from the last six or more generations. It is difficult for them to accept such a void. Many years ago, a non-Adventist friend asked me, "Why do you teach the annihilation of the dead?" Hindus look at our doctrine of the state of the dead in the same way. This is a challenge for the church because if the doctrine is not communicated successfully, ancestor veneration will continue to be practiced by the recent disciples of Jesus Christ from Hindu communities.

It is challenging to remove ancestors from the minds of the Hindu converts. Disrespecting ancestors will also send the wrong signal to the non-Christian neighborhoods and will act as an obstacle for mission. My lifelong interaction with the Hindu community teaches me the reason behind remembering ancestors is to hold onto a legacy in which people can take pride. Ancestors are the reminder of the origin and belongingness of an individual to one's family and community. The church needs to address the issue and provide a Bible-based response for new converts.

Endnotes

¹ To read the details of this case, visit <https://www.hinduismtoday.com/modules/smartsection/item.php?itemid=5047>.

² “The Hindu law is one of the most ancient and primitive laws that are still prevalent in today’s era and also known to the world at large. It is governed by the Hindu Succession Act of 1956, it is a codified law passed by the Parliament of India” <https://blog.ipleaders.in/hindu-law/>.

³ Schedule castes and tribes are those Indians who do not belong to the four Castes of Hinduism. They are considered as the Avarna (non-caste people) and considered as untouchables. Currently they are called Dalits.

⁴ Constitution of India Article 341 and 342

⁵ *Rig-Veda* texts are quoted from the translation by Ralph T. H Griffith, <http://www.sanskritweb.net/rigveda/griffith-p.pdf>.

⁶ Typically English translations of this word are *ghost*, which does not reveal the true sense of the word. It can simply be described as the soul, which is not yet released from its earthly bindings.

⁷ All names are changed to maintain the participant’s anonymity.

⁸ I asked this question to find how much people know about heaven or hell.

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