

sometimes said that it was good to 'get it out of your system'. However, with one exception, I noted restraint among educated Hindus. Young Hindus informants were often critical of expectations to show grief for distant relatives. They felt that grief got 'switched off and on' artificially, and some of the visitors were hypocritical. Grieving may be complicated by previous losses and issues of identity when familiar family members die in an alien milieu. Continuity is maintained by strong social support where it exists, although social and economic mobility leads to some family fragmentation. Eisenbruch notes that many immigrants to the USA have to be seen to grieve, and show extremes of emotion: 'Yet Anglo-American hospital staff may feel bewildered, threatened, hostile or derisive when faced by these behaviours, which are often treated by them as pathological'<sup>4</sup>.

The loss of children is particularly distressing, especially a son on whom one's material, emotional and spiritual future depends (see below). There is little public mourning for infants, who are not considered to be social beings<sup>5, 8</sup>, and thus can leave the mother without a sense of completion. One mother has taken the unusual step of arranging for annual prayers at the temple for her daughter, who died as an infant.

### Women's roles

In India gender roles are clearly demarcated in religious activities. Only male priests officiate at Sanskritic life-cycle rites and an eldest or youngest son, grandson or brother of the deceased normally acts as chief mourner, the wife or daughters assisting with the required materials. Some texts allow a woman to act for a husband or father if there are no male heirs<sup>20, 5, 8</sup>. This is linked to patrilineage and inheritance. Daughters are given away on marriage, joining their husbands' lineage, whereas sons traditionally inherit the property, guaranteeing their parents' security in old age and salvation by performing funeral and ancestral rites. At her death a woman's husband, son or grandson performs her rites.

In Britain some pandits allow daughters to perform their father's rites if there is no heir or if they insist on participating, seeing no scriptural reason to exclude them. Other pandits insist this is inappropriate. Women have to negotiate with the formidable combination of the pandit, relatives and elders. In one Gujarati family with no sons, the dying father insisted that the daughters acted as chief mourners, as they were to inherit the property and should have equal rights with men. The relatives were outraged, but they could do nothing about it because his preference was stated in his

will. His widow was blamed for 'leading him on and twisting him around her little finger', and also blamed for not having had sons. Some relatives boycotted the funeral, and for years afterwards treated the wife coolly. She has now made the same provision in her will.

On the whole, Hindus are pragmatic about the alterations to the funerals. The entire family is more involved and delays allow overseas relatives to come. The purpose of the rituals is shifting towards the consolation of the mourners in this world, rather than the welfare of the dead in the next. One pandit explained that the funeral prayer should be directed towards two things: the elements making up the physical body, which now return to their origins, and those making up the spiritual body. As rituals such as the procession, pot breaking and skull-breaking disappear, the accompanying beliefs may also change. Individual pandits are adapting rituals appropriate to the circumstances, but whether there is eventually a standardised form or a variety, as at present, remains to be seen. **BC**

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## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editors

I was fascinated to read Dora Black's article on Pat Barker's novel, *The Eye in the Door* (Winter 2002 issue of *Bereavement Care*). The novel features real-life psychiatrist, Dr Rivers, who is treating, amongst others, the fictional WW1 officer, Billy Prior, for 'shell-shock'. Dora Black reveals that Prior is actually suffering from what is now known as dissociative identity disorder. She then reviews Prior's behaviour and Rivers' treatment (as described in the novel) within the context of that diagnosis. This insight and an explanation confirms yet again Pat Barker's ability to interweave fact and fiction into a convincing and brilliant recreation of people and events of that time.

I warmed to Rivers, a worthy role model for counsellors. He is the non-judgemental, caring male, described by Prior as a 'strip of empathetic wallpaper', who gets patients to confront their traumas and know themselves. On the other hand, Prior is the hard man, working class, enthusiastically bi-sexual, clever, angry, whose aggression so nearly unsettles Rivers. And yet these encounters lead to an ambiguous, mutual affection. This despite the fact that all of Rivers' skills and application are deployed in patching up these officers and returning them to the Front to die. A final irony?

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