



Article

Death, Defilement, and the Sacred: Navigating the Pollution–Purity Dichotomy in Ancient Indian Funerary Rites

Ratnpriya 

Woxen University, India

Correspondence: ratnpriya.singh@woxsen.edu.in

Abstract

This article looks at ritual purity, pollution, death, and varna within Hinduism, especially regarding how these ideas were codified, contested, and ritualized within normative Sanskrit texts. This research portrays death as both a physical event and a metaphysical transition that creates a fundamental crisis for ritual and sociocultural order. The secondary scholarly sources of Dharmaśāstra literature, Gr̥hyasūtras, and Purāṇas capture a complex set of rules regulating impurity (aśaucam) and mourning and post-funerary observances related to death. Importantly, death creates not just bodily and spatial pollution but pollution so substantial that custom dictates it warrants long, complex rites of re-integration so the individual or family can start to rejoin a normative social and cosmic order. This study further brackets how impurity, normatively related to death, is differentially regulated based on one's varna (social category) and gender and links the deeply relational and embedded hierarchies in ritual ideals. The intent here was to begin to show, through tightly engaged textual reading and secondary scholarship, that it was important to see the regulation of death and its impurities as more than a religious phenomenon. Death and the realities of its impurities were more than a religious practice; they were a mechanism for establishing and enforcing social boundaries and the structured delineation of principles outlined in varna-based categorizations. By situating death within the discourse of purity and pollution, the paper contributes to understanding how ritual and social hierarchies were constructed and sustained in early Indian society.

Keywords: Aśaucam, Death, Hinduism, Ritual Purity, Varna

Suggested citation:

Ratnpriya. (2025). Death, Defilement, and the Sacred: Navigating the Pollution–Purity Dichotomy in Ancient Indian Funerary Rites. *International Journal on Culture, History, and Religion*, 7(1), 112-123. <https://doi.org/10.63931/ijchr.v7i1.102>

Publisher's Note: IJCHR stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



Copyright: © 2025 by the authors. Submitted for open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license

(<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Introduction

Death is not just a moment of rupture at the individual and the family level but of social and cultural importance. In the Brahmanical tradition, death does not simply equate with the cessation of biological life; rather, it initiates a liminal phase - a transient and ambiguous state - which a range of ritual codes must mediate. The rituals are not just metaphysical responses to the experience of death as delineated in the *Dharmaśāstra* and *smṛti* literature. They are institutional devices of social regulation and vehicles for ethical and moral judgments. By invoking categories such as *aśauca* (impurity) and then reinstating a state of *śuddhi* (purity), these rites mark the restoration of a disturbed social order and depict hierarchy, especially in terms of *varṇa* and *āśrama*.

At the heart of these practices, we find *aśauca* (impurity) and *śuddhi* (purity), which mark the limits of ritual pollution and how it is eventually purified. This is not just about spiritual purity; this process also articulates social norms and collective values. The mourning, abstinence, and social exclusion rites that the bereaved abide by serve to train expressions of kin and caste group behavior and reinforce claims of collective responsibility regarding death pollution. These codes are also heavily gendered and stratified, with more emphasis on women and lower castes, and they reinforce the hierarchy embedded in the social order. In addition, the rites play double duty: they prepare and purify the dead as they transition to taboos in the ancestral realm (*pitṛloka*) through *śrāddha* (ceremonies for the dead) and *piṇḍa* (offerings in the shape of rice balls) while at the same time allowing the living to reclaim their rightful cosmic and social order. They represent symbolic re-entry processes; most basically, they convert death into an occasion for social regeneration.

Additionally, as we scrutinize the rituals, we appreciate some of the larger cultural anxieties around death and the afterlife. While we have highlighted the fact that these codes are aimed at helping a return to normalcy, we have also shown the inherent instability of social boundaries and that it is also a practice of reaffirmation. Andreas Bendlin's hemispherical analysis of Greek ritual practices provides a comparative perspective. Bendlin suggests that the antithesis of pollution is not purity but normalcy- a restoration of the social order post-death (Bendlin, 2007). This understanding reinforces the broader anthropological argument that rituals are less about the quest for spiritual purity and more about reconstructing the social order disrupted by untimely loss.

In this context, this study seeks to address a critical gap in the current scholarship on death and ritual pollution in Brahmanical texts. Much has been written about the theological implications of these rituals. However, the way they act as social

instruments of social control, as well as their influence on the performance of gender and caste hierarchies, is still an under-researched area. Our framework examines how metatheory, social ethics, and ritual employments come together to show how these texts truly reflect and shape group cultural norms, helping to construct a more social-constructivist model of death as another phenomenological experience and not simply as an end to the biological aspects of life.

Methodology

This research employs a multidisciplinary textual and interpretive strategy, using historical, gender, and symbolic anthropology to investigate the ritual construction of death, impurity, and social hierarchy in the Brahmanical tradition. This research is primarily based upon a critical reading of prescriptive Sanskrit texts, specifically, the *Dharmaśāstra*, *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, and an assortment of *smṛti* texts, which also constitute the pivotal sources for the study of the ideological models that form the basis of death rituals in early India. Stated simply, the methods for the study reflect a careful philological and hermeneutic investigation of the key Sanskrit terms *aśauca* (impurity), *śuddhi* (purity), *sūtaka* (birth impurity), and *piṇḍa* (ancestral offerings), focusing on their referential range and ritual meanings across Brahmanical texts. The goal is to analyze these central terms as categories that do not simply exist as prescriptive doctrines but as constructed cultural categories that conform to social hierarchies. In constructing its theoretical framework, the study also draws on theoretical insights from symbolic anthropology and positions it with authors such as Mary Douglas, Louis Dumont, Victor Turner, and Margaret Trawick in addition to South Asianists like Patrick Olivelle and L.M. Mines. The theoretical background positions the ritual codes of Brahmanical traditions in a coordinated fashion with the social and cultural regulation of caste, gender, and morality, suggesting that ritual performance contributes to maintaining the Brahmanical view of human mobilities. The focus is on seeing these texts as cultural artifacts that encode disciplinary norms and moral hierarchies, not prescriptive codes of conduct. This permits a more nuanced understanding of death-linked rituals within their superstructure of social ethics, purity, and cosmological order.

Findings

Hierarchy and Impurity: Ritual, Gender and Liminality

In the context of death, the departure of the *jīva* (life force) from the body marks the beginning of a temporary state of ritual impurity (*aśauca*) for the kin of the deceased. During this time, the grieving is subject to certain prohibitions or restrictions

concerning cooking salted food, personal grooming, and sexual activity. This stage of isolation and rejection is sometimes considered a type of ritual incapacitation (Mines, 1989). The Garuḍa Purāṇa also designates this period *sūtaka* in multiple passages. Notably, the lexicon related to impurity bears strong family resemblances to other life-cycle events. For example, *śūtikā* identifies a woman who has just given birth, while *rajasvalā* identifies a woman who is currently menstruating—again, ritually impure within Brahmanical paradigms. In terms of menstruation, in particular, a woman regains ritual purity typically by taking a purificatory bath, after which she may resume her daily ritual activities. During menstruation, however, she has been excluded from various ritual and domestic activities—with the understanding that this impurity is temporary but socially relevant. The ritual exclusions are thereby reinforcing a patriarchal sacrality in locating impurity (and therefore social vulnerability) within the female body and reproductive functions.

The conceptual linkage between menstrual impurity, miscarriage, and death impurity is significant. Other cultural contexts also show this symbolic linkage between bodily states and liminality. These states share an underlying symbolic logic that connects them to the liminal space between life and death. Drawing on the theoretical insights of Mary Douglas (1966), particularly her engagement with Lévy-Bruhl's notion of "primitive mentality," one finds that impurity is often attributed to transitional or indeterminate states. For example, the Maori of New Zealand regarded menstrual blood as a form of unrealized potential life—what Lévy-Bruhl described as a "human being manqué." In this view, menstrual blood embodies a paradox like that of the deceased, who has left the living world but has not yet been ritually reintegrated through death rites. Thus, death-related impurity renders those associated with the deceased as marginal beings, temporarily removed from normative social and ritual life. In the aftermath of Douglas' argument that "dirt is just a matter of disorder," death is an event at which both social and cosmological orders are impeded and require rituals to reorder and reintegrate both the body and society. Rituals of death restore their purity and reintegrate them into the social fabric. Therefore, they indicate closure as people move from a state of being sequestered back to the rhythms of everyday life.

Hierarchy and Impurity: Varṇa, Guṇas, and Social Regulation

The period of primary pollution (*aśauca*) following a death is not uniformly observed across social groups; rather, it varies according to varṇa (caste), place of residence, and the mourner's relationship to the deceased. Even if people only encounter the body or the family of the deceased, they may also experience a somewhat minor form of ritual impurity that simple acts can purify. The nature and condition of the deceased person at the time of death can also change the extent and

duration of the pollution experienced by the survivors. Within Brahmanical texts, those most affected by the pollution associated with death are typically the *sāpiṇḍas*—relatives connected through seven generations on the paternal side or five on the maternal line. The period of pollution was differentiated according to *varṇa*, with *brāhmaṇas* said to observe ten days of impurity, *kṣatriyas* twelve days, *vaiśyas* fifteen days, and *śūdras* a full month (Garuḍa Purāṇa II.36.64–65). This gradation in the duration of ritual impurity has been subject to diverse interpretations. Dumont (1970) argues that the shorter pollution period for *brāhmaṇas* reflects a form of social privilege in which those responsible for codifying ritual norms reduced their own burdens. His perspective has been supported by scholars such as Tambiah (1973) and Marglin (1985), who suggest that the abbreviated duration of impurity for *brāhmaṇas* may reflect a self-serving minimization of austerities. In contrast, Kane (1941) proposes that *brāhmaṇas*, due to their essential ritual duties—such as daily rites and Vedic study—were encouraged by dharmashāstric texts to reduce the duration of *āśauca*, lest prolonged impurity promote neglect or "laziness" in fulfilling their spiritual responsibilities.

Orenstein (1970) offers a more systematic framework that links the concept of pollution to proximity with organic life. According to his analysis, caste hierarchy is structured around differing degrees of 'normal impurity': lower castes are viewed as being more intrinsically involved with biological processes, while upper castes are symbolically aligned with spiritual purity. Orenstein's argument draws heavily from Stevenson's (1954) interpretation of Hindu notions of pollution, which emphasizes ritual impropriety as a critical negative standard for regulating social status and behavior. Similarly, Dumont (1970) and Pocock (1972) assert that the caste system rests on a priestly, hierarchical opposition between the "pure" and the "impure," with the former associated with spiritual transcendence and the latter with the worldly and biological. In this schema, impurity arises from contact with organic processes of life and death, whereas purity is achieved through symbolic and physical separation from such contact.

In contrast to earlier interpretations that conceptualize ritual impurity in terms of contact with organic life (Orenstein, 1970), Mines (1989) has proposed an ethno-social model that reframes the concept of death-related pollution within the framework of *guṇic* qualities. Her approach offers a counterpoint to the Western philosophical tendency to valorize "pure spirit" over "impure flesh," which, she argues, has unduly influenced the analysis of Hindu death pollution. By categorizing *varṇas* according to their predominant *guṇas*—*sāttvic*, *rājasic*, and *tāmasic*—Mines suggests that the duration of impurity corresponds to a *varṇa*'s intrinsic constitution. According to this model, *brāhmaṇas*, deemed to possess a high degree of *sattva* and minimal *tamas*, undergo a ten-day period of pollution. *Kṣatriyas*, who are slightly lower in

sattva and exhibit a stronger presence of rajas, are impure for twelve days. Vaiśyas, classified as more *tāmasic* and less *sāttvic*, observe fifteen days of pollution; however, their participation in purificatory rituals, like the higher varṇas, places them in an intermediary position. Śūdras, identified with predominantly *tāmasic* qualities and lacking access to ritual refinement, are assigned the longest period of impurity—one month (Mines, 1989; Garuḍa Purāṇa, II.36.64–65).

Deviant Deaths and Truncated Rites

Notably, the prescriptive texts extend beyond the guṇa-based and organic frameworks to encompass moral and social deviations. Cases of untimely or "bad" deaths often result in reduced or entirely absent impurity periods. Such deaths—interpreted as consequences of moral transgressions in either the present or past lives—render the deceased unworthy of traditional mourning. For instance, women who died under stigmatized circumstances (e.g., adulterous wives or remarried individuals) triggered a mere three-day pollution period for their kin. Similarly, those who transgressed the varṇa order—such as individuals with illegitimate familial ties or women who died post-marriage—elicited abbreviated impurity durations, often two days and one night, with ritual duties like *tarpana* (water libation) divided between the natal and marital families. These textual prescriptions reveal a dual meaning behind the allotment of impurity periods. On the one hand, they reinforce varṇic hierarchy, where diminished durations signal elevated spiritual status. On the other hand, truncated observance may serve as a moral indictment, reflecting perceived social deviance and unfulfilled duties. Individuals whose conduct was deemed sinful were symbolically excluded from the ritual structure. Their impurity periods curtailed as a mark of disgrace not just upon themselves but upon their *sāpiṇḍas* as well. Hence, pollution becomes both a tool of social regulation and a mechanism for reinforcing normative order.

Beyond its function in upholding moral order, lineage also played a critical role in determining ritual purity and pollution. In cases of both birth and death, matrilineal ties did not typically result in significant ritual impurity. For instance, only a ritual bath was prescribed upon the death of certain maternal relatives such as a son-in-law, daughter's son, sister's son, maternal uncles and their wives, or brother-in-law and his son. This exclusion is rooted in the śāstric conception of the *sāpiṇḍa* group, where a woman, upon marriage, was understood to become wholly incorporated into the gotra and *sāpiṇḍa* lineage of her husband. Consequently, she no longer generated ritual pollution for her natal kin upon death, nor did she observe it for them (Kane, 1941). A

similar detachment from kinship-based pollution applied to ascetics and student-celibates (*brahmacārins*), who were considered ritually exempt from both birth- and death-related impurity. Due to their adherence to a life of renunciation and celibacy, ascetics were believed to have transcended the cycle of birth and rebirth. Their bodies were considered sacred, and no ritual pollution was thought to arise from their death (Orenstein, 1970). In fact, śāstric texts emphasize that if a king were to mishandle the corpse of an ascetic, it could result in the destruction of his kingdom. Similarly, villages could suffer distress or misfortune if the funeral rites for ascetics were neglected or improperly conducted (Parry, 1994).

However, the denial of pollution in such cases did not imply a complete avoidance of funeral rites; these were still performed, though they did not entail the same ritual consequences for the *sāpiṇḍa* group. The exceptional purity attributed to ascetics effectively dissolved conventional kinship obligations. Their kinsmen were not required to observe the usual period of pollution, and any residual impurity was considered insignificant. Nonetheless, this exemption was conditional: it applied only if the ascetic remained faithful to their *svadharma* (personal religious duty). Deviation from this prescribed way of life reinstated their ritual vulnerability, subjecting them to the norms of pollution once again. These exceptions underscore the dynamic nature of ritual purity in Brahmanical discourse. Factors such as kinship ties, social ranking, gender, and adherence to prescribed roles influenced the observance or denial of pollution. Thus, ritual impurity cannot be understood solely in biological or genealogical terms; it must also be situated within broader social and religious frameworks that govern identity and moral conduct.

Exceptions and Exemptions: Ascetics, Women and Ritual Boundaries

While primary death-related pollution affected individuals differently across the *varṇas*, the rules surrounding the interaction with *sāpiṇḍas*—kin typically defined through patrilineal descent—offered further insight into the graded structure of ritual impurity. After the completion of one-third of the total period of pollution, or upon the collection of the deceased's bones, *sāpiṇḍas* could be touched again. This threshold varied according to *varṇa*: for *brāhmaṇas*, it was the third day, for *kṣatriyas* the fourth, for *vaiśyas* the fifth, and for *śūdras* the tenth day (Garuḍa Purāṇa II.36.64–65). During this period, not only the *sāpiṇḍas* but their households were considered entirely inauspicious, reflecting what may be understood as "external pollution," a concept that denotes impurity transmitted through physical contact with a ritually defiling substance or individual (Dumont, 1980). This notion of physical contagion was tightly bound to social norms and hierarchy. The corpse of a *śūdra* was considered more polluting than that of a *brāhmaṇa*, reinforcing notions of ritual hierarchy. Nonetheless,

the act of a *śūdra* carrying the corpse of a *brāhmaṇa* (or vice versa) was marked as sinful unless the deceased was an orphaned *brāhmaṇa*, in which case such an act was valorized and considered spiritually elevating (Kane, 1941).

Participation in funerary rites or even exposure to the smoke emitted from the burning of a corpse required immediate purification through bathing. This applied not only to kin but also to ascetics, *brahmacārins*, and kings who took part in the cremation rituals. These individuals were deemed purified by touching fire and consuming clarified butter (*ghṛta*). However, if a non-*sāpiṇḍa* individual consumed food in the house of the deceased, they incurred a ten-day period of pollution. Likewise, if a *brāhmaṇa* officiated or participated in the death rites of another *brāhmaṇa*, he observed a ten-day impurity period. When the deceased was a *kṣatriya*, *vaiśya*, or *śūdra*, the respective duration was six, three, and one day, illustrating the hierarchical scale of pollution (Parry, 1994). It is worth noting that these explicit influences of hierarchically defined separate class statuses were not present for the other three *varṇas*, which further illustrates the heightened ritual status of *brāhmaṇas*, who nominally had responsibility for ritual purity and managing its transmission to others.

The hierarchy did not merely stop with the sin of death, as the same pollution patterns extended to what he claimed were the separate cases of "attached pollution" or "external pollution" in cases of social hierarchy. So, if the deceased died a higher status than the servant or disciple, the latter would have to observe the same period of pollution as the master or teacher. In effect, contamination was symbolically transferred. In this system, social rank produced did not work reciprocally, i.e., the death of a slave or disciple did not contaminate the master or teacher at all in any way (Firth, 1970). Hence, there is a directed asymmetrical flow of impurity, or pollution, depending on how social statuses and rank scale up. A particularly revealing case is that of a *śūdra* woman dying in the household of another. Her death rendered the house impure, necessitating that the premises be swept with water on the third day and that all household vessels she had touched be discarded. No other rituals were mandated. This instance further illustrates how lower-caste individuals, especially women performing domestic labor, were perceived as carriers of impurity. However, the pollution incurred was not equal to that of a master's death, demonstrating a stratified view of ritual obligations even within the broader *varṇa* system. In sum, the system of death-related impurity was deeply intertwined with notions of social hierarchy, ritual agency, and bodily pollution. The regulation of such pollution served as a post-mortem protocol and a reflection of the living social order. It reinforced *varṇa* distinctions, gender roles, and social responsibilities, functioning simultaneously as a codification of the dead and an instructional blueprint for the living.

Discussion

This research shows that Brahmanical death practices serve as an effective structural process (through the codes of purity (*śuddhi*) and impurity (*aśauca*) of social order. Death rites do not merely respond to death in some metaphysical sense; they are more properly concerned with stratifying social order based on *varṇa* (caste) and gender. Additionally, it emphasizes that there was a hierarchy, or stratification, of the duration and gravity of death impurity, dependent on caste status, the relationship to the deceased, and the implications of gender in the ritual practice. As an illustration of this stratified complexity, the Brahmanas were prescribed a much less severe mourning period than other caste groups. Although this can be taken to mean that their shorter period was a pragmatic response to surviving ritual obligations, it is also reflective of their higher status in the social order. In this regard, the shorter death impurity period of Brahmanas contributed further to their authority and highlighted the ideological role of death rites in maintaining the logic of caste privilege. In these diverse cases, death rites logically followed a cultural practice which, in this case, used codes of purity and impurity to maintain social boundaries and the Brahmanical disposition of normal.

The research also indicates that death impurity is not merely a biological or emotional reaction to death but a managed symbolic state that has a functional role in achieving social cohesion. It draws from symbolic anthropology, specifically the work of Mary Douglas and the work of Victor Turner in tracking *aśauca* as a liminal state that creates social and cosmological disarray. In fact, the effluence of death pollution requires a ritual to contain, a ritual that, if uncontained, would make society and the cosmos disintegrate. The *śrāddha* (ancestor rites) and *piṇḍa* rites are conceptualized as ritual mechanisms of re-integration, returning both the deceased and relations back into the order of normative society or re-establishing the place of the person within the cosmic cycle.

In a particularly significant finding, death impurity is shown to overlap with other ritual pollutants, such as pollution rules around menstruation and childbirth. The analysis demonstrates that the status of women is an observable or visible example of concerns about the pollution of the female body, which is much more often ritually dealt with as a "threatened" or "at risk" ritual state. In this case, the rationality of Brahmanical culture pervades, where the female body is ritually ordered and disciplined to generate social stability, lest purity and pollution run amok. The layering of pollution codes showcases a multifaceted system of control, mediated by gender and caste, to evoke different ritual provocations for women and lower caste individuals. In addition, this study complicates the existing binary of pure and impure

as moral absolutes regulated within a transactional process of restoring normative functionality in the Brahmanical universe. Impurity in the rituals described in this study does not mean that established and recognized sites of impurity are a specific moral state but that they exist as ritual provocations designed to call people back to a "normal" state. This finding aligns with the broader anthropological perspective that rituals are not merely symbolic performances but critical acts of social maintenance, where the metaphysical intersects with social bodies' material and moral regulation.

Lastly, this research has argued that death rites framed as sites of action are also dynamic and sites of stratification, exposing ways to act out death-as-social-regulation, which include metaphysical beliefs, that degree of communion, and connection with social life. In examining the semantic, prescriptive, and symbolic nature of the death rituals in this study, I hope to have shown a much wider example of how death-as-personal-loss and death-as-social-regulation can offer a much better analytic understanding of death in the Brahmanical tradition.

Conclusions

This study shows that the Brahmanical idea of pollution is not a mere assortment of ritual prescriptions but rather a highly intricate sociocultural system that reflects profound structures of social hierarchy, kinship, and moral order in ancient India's historically defined social assemblages. The analysis of *sāpiṇḍa* relations, moral violation, and the codes of impurity circulating around death demonstrates how purity and pollution are conceptually linked and become important regulatory structures that uphold the distinctions between *varṇa*, enforce social action and create ritual boundaries, all of which sustain the Brahmanical cosmology. An emergent theme is that purity and pollution are not fixed or absolute categories but are contextualized conditions according to lineage, caste, gender, and the specifics of the death. Pollution constitutes a physical condition and a symbolic expression of social and cosmic disorder, which can be passed through blood or social affiliations. Purity is restored either by participation in rituals, association, or proximity to people with ritual superiority, mainly the *brāhmaṇas*. This reinforces a hierarchy where restoring a person's purity is an important marker of status and authority, given that restorative power is concentrated in Brahminical forms. Additionally, the work also indicates the gendered nature of these codes, namely through the disproportionately high ritual burden shouldered by women and lower castes (who are positioned lower on the hierarchical order) because of their marginal and less preferred positionality in relation to the masculine ideal. This context prompts observations regarding the broader cultural rationality which values and constant regulation of the female body, often

considered ostensibly at ritual risk, and notes that this analysis allows one to affirm gender and caste as both key sites of social stratification but also highlights how certain kinds of ritual impurity substantiate and duplicate these distinctions. In the end, the work claims that death is not simply a moment of personal loss or transitive metaphysical shift; it is a socially important zone of reaffirmation and control. By placing death rites within socio-political contexts, this study furthers our understanding of Brahmanical death codes perpetuating cultural continuities, establishing normative boundaries, and handling the mundane aspects of death and afterlife considerations. It goes beyond this to contribute to a larger understanding of how ancient Indian society demarcated ritual hierarchically prioritized moral order. It also provides useful insights for ongoing Investigation in the anthropology of religion, ideas of power, and forms of social organization.

Conflicts of Interests

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

References

- [1] Bendlin, A. (2007). Purity and pollution. In D. Ogden (Ed.), *A companion to Greek religion* (p. 178). Blackwell Publishing.
- [2] Bhattacharyya, N. N. (1990). *Ancient Indian rituals and their social contents*. Manohar.
- [3] Bodewitz, H. W. (1999). *The daily evening and morning offering (Agnihotra) according to the Brāhmaṇas*. Brill.
- [4] Das, S. K. (2003). *The religious life of India: Hindu rites of passage*. Munshiram Manoharlal.
- [5] Dumont, L. (1970). *Homo hierarchicus: The caste system and its implications*. University of Chicago Press.
- [6] Dutt, M. N. (Trans.). (1968). *Garuḍa Mahāpurāṇam*. Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office.
- [7] Freeman, J. R. (2011). *Untouchable bodies, resistance, and liberation*. Fortress Press.
- [8] Gonda, J. (1965). *Change and continuity in Indian religion*. Mouton.
- [9] Jamison, S. (1996). Ritual impurity and women in the Dharmasūtras. In *Studies in early Indian gender relations*.
- [10] Jarow, R. E. (2003). *Tales for the dying: The death narrative of the Bhāgavata-Purāṇa*. State University of New York Press.
- [11] Kane, P. V. (1941). *History of Dharmaśāstra* (Vol. 4). Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute.
- [12] Knipe, D. M. (2015). *Vedic voices: Intimate narratives of a living Andhra tradition*. Oxford University Press.

- [13] Larson, G. J. (1995). The issue of death and dying in Indian thought: An introductory essay. *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 23(1), 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01092594>
- [14] Marglin, F. A. (1985). *Wives of the God-King: The rituals of the Devadasis of Puri*. Oxford University Press.
- [15] Mines, D. P. (1989). Hindu periods of death 'impurity'. *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 23(1), 103–130. <https://doi.org/10.1177/006996689023001005>
- [16] Olivelle, P. (1993). *The āśrama system: The history and hermeneutics of a religious institution*. Oxford University Press.
- [17] Orenstein, H. (1970a). The classification of caste: A study in ritual pollution. *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 4(1), 35–57.
- [18] Orenstein, H. (1970b). The social dimensions of death in Hindu society. *Anthropological Quarterly*, 43(2), 134–142. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3316832>
- [19] Pandey, R. B. (1969). *Hindu saṁskāras: Socio-religious study of the Hindu sacraments*. Motilal Banarsidass.
- [20] Parry, J. (1994). *Death in Banaras*. Cambridge University Press.
- [21] Pocock, D. F. (1972). *Mind, body and wealth: A study of belief and practice in an Indian village*. Blackwell.
- [22] Rocher, L. (1986). *The Purāṇas*. Otto Harrassowitz Verlag.
- [23] Smith, B. K. (1986). Purity, pollutions and power: The interpretive possibilities of the Hindu concept of śuddhi. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 54(4), 637–647. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/54.4.637>
- [24] Stevenson, R. (1954). *The rites of the twice-born*. Oxford University Press.
- [25] Tambiah, S. J. (1973). The magical power of words. *Man*, 3(2), 175–208. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2800285>