

Let's peep into the Fascinating world of Royal Funerals or 'carnival of grief'!

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Oh,

hell! Death! It shocks and numbs! It rudely upsets the furniture of people's mind! All of us suffer from Thanatophobia - fear of the Grim Reaper! In fact, humanity had a scary tryst with the rising pillar of death counts during the COVID period. It was so grotesquely traumatic that a large swathe of death counts went without even a semblance of ceremonial funeral owing to the lockdowns! In this backdrop, the demise of the British Queen, followed by a sprawling protocol of funerary rites came almost like a Latin American carnival of grief! It began with the petrifying news of Elizabeth II's death, lying-in-state, movement of the cortege from Edinburg to London, religious service, committal service and then private burial - hundreds of thousands of Britons and others filing past the coffin adorned by the diamond-studded crown and a wand - all these culminated into the final journey which was joined by over 500 heads of state including 100 royals! A stupendous challenge for the diplomatic corp and the London Police, indeed! Shh! Keep your voice down! The sombre mood still prevails across the country!

Let me now dive into the history of grandiose demonstration of grief and parse into a raft of substantive reasons governing the elaborate funeral processions. For the Romans, there were five parts of a funeral - A procession, cremation and burial, eulogy, feast and commemoration. Procession and noise were directly proportionate to the economic status of the deceased.

The wealthier the deceased was, the noisier and flashier used to be the funeral procession.

There used to be professional mourners consisting of largely women folks (like 'Rudaali' in Rajasthan). If the sum of fee paid was hefty, they used to wail loudly and even scratch their faces in mourning. The size of the army of professional mourners used to signify that the deceased was a wealthy and powerful individual! Similar to Hindus, the Romans used to worship ancestors and had strong beliefs about afterlife! Incidentally, we are in the midst of on-going **Pitru Paksha** (time period to pay tributes to ancestors for better afterlife) period in India.

For cremation, the dead body used to be palanquined to the necropolis (the city of the dead) and put upon a funeral pyre. In fact, cremation used to be a widely followed time-hallowed cultural trait from the formation of Rome to the mid-second century AD, when burial eventually took over as the preferred option. The body used to be bundled in a coffin, known as sarcophagus, which used to be ornately decorated. If the deceased was a powerful nattering nabob and known for waxing lyrical about his political status, the family and others used to offer eulogy at the funeral. The ritual of rich feast was an integral part of the funerary rites. Then used to come the last phase of funeral - the commemoration. The Roman State used to earmark certain days each year to remember the loved ones to honour the ancestors. In case of an emperor, the burial used to be done within the city area unlike others. And commemoration used to be profusely elaborate and large monuments used to be built. Trajan's Column is a live example in Rome. Sometimes the political elite used to organise public feasts, games and entertainments after funerals. The Roman gladiator game used to be hosted as funeral gift for the deceased!

Since most European kings and Queens trace their ancestral trees backdating to the Romans, many of their extravagant conventions relating to the funerary rites were canoed through the river of time to the modern age. Since the 18th century, all British monarchs were buried at Windsor Palace and funeral ceremonies used to take place within the confines of the castle. Things changed with the death of Queen Victoria in 1901 when the royals decided to enrich the popularity of the monarchy and demonstrate its ability to represent the whole nation. What nudged such a tectonic shift in the density of their thoughts was the rising tsunami of Republicanism.

A good number of Britons demanded Republican status for their country and wanted the shambolic leadership of the monarchy to crumble! No wiggle room for privileged institutions! This triggered the thought of democratising the funeral of the monarchs as a viable rampart against the ascending and darkening clouds of republicanism! And it began in recognition of Queen Victoria's long reign of 63 years. The day of her funeral was notified as a day of national mourning - a new addition to the elaborate funeral protocols. Memorial church and chapel services were organised throughout the country. A pompous procession was carried through the streets of London.

When Edward VII died in 1910, a public lying-in-state was mooted at Westminster Hall. His son, George V, called for further democratisation of access to the public and more than three lakh commoners filed past the coffin. He also insisted that prayers of commemoration should be timed simultaneously throughout the country. When George V died in 1936, the tradition of one-day of mourning was substituted by a national

two-minute silence. It was the era of economic depression and the rationale was not to lose any working day! His lying-in-state was attended by over seven lakh people.

What transformed the configuration of the funeral into a carnival was the advent of modern communication advancements.

Radio broadcasts and television pulled masses out of their homes and dacha. When the King George VI died in 1952, two new features were added for the commemoration as he had earned colossal public prominence during the WW-II. After the funeral at Windsor, a special remembrance service was held at St Paul's Cathedral. It was attended by the members of the parliament, government and other global leaders. The funeral procession in London was the first royal event to be broadcast live by the television and radio.

During the long reign of Elizabeth II, the civil servants and Buckingham Palace chamberlain further upscaled the protocols to make it more pompous to arrest the possible decline in the popularity of the monarchy and dubbed it as "Operation London Bridge". So, when the Queen Elizabeth II died on September 8, 2022,

the icing on the cake was her presence in Scotland which proved to be a mega windfall gain for the organisers.

And it became a sumptuous content for all the TV channels across the world, in particular in the UK. The televised last journey slithered through various communities. And additional lying-in-state was planned at Edinburg. It was made more accessible and visible to play on the sentiments of the commoners. A revival of the national day of mourning enabled huge audiences to watch the televised funeral through screening points in London. Thus returned the state funerals to Westminster Abbey, which was the venue until 1760.

It is now hoped that the reign of King Charles III will put the future of the Union, particularly its harmonious integrity, at the epicentre of its coordination with the limbs of the sovereign. However, the grimmest risk I am able to see clear-eyed is that the generation to which the Queen belonged to is fast turning extinct - partly, thanks to COVID. Their real-life experiences are also tumbling over the Niagara of living memory! And the present generations do not have very fond memories of King Charles III, particularly after the Diana episode! The rising groundswell against the institution of monarchy in several Commonwealth countries is another bellwether of the endgame which may consume a decade but is definitely predictable! The era of condescending clan is vapourising! The present crop of monarchs does not enjoy the macho appeal! New -isms may warrant rearrangement of furniture of people's minds! Holy cat! Let's kowtow for the last time so that the phoenixes of royalty and monarchy do not rise again!