

EVERYTHING YOU NEED FOR A HINDU FUNERAL INSIDE A BOX

Online business Sarvapooja is one of a growing number
of start-ups revolutionising funerals in India

For Hindus needing to find the wide-ranging and many materials required to carry out a funeral – often in a hurry – dashing from shop to shop at a time of grief can be a difficult and stressful situation.

It certainly was for cousins Nitesh Mehta and Hiten Dhruv when they were helping organise a friend's funeral a couple of years ago. The search for Gangajal – holy water from the Ganges – took them an entire evening.

They are not alone, and it gave them an idea. Two years later, Sarvapooja (translated “prayers for all”) was created, selling what claims to be the world's first complete funeral-in-a-box kit.

The Antim Kriya (funeral rites) kit contains the 38 items needed to complete a Hindu last rites and funeral, with the idea being that you can buy everything you need in one box and take the strain out of shopping around.

The kit includes earthen pots, Gangajal, incense sticks, black sesame seeds and dried cow dung. It even contains a 6ft-long collapsible bamboo stretcher, as many Hindus prefer not to carry the dead using anything plastic or metal.

Hindu funerals are complex affairs and typically involve anointing the body with sandalwood paste, the burning of cow dung and the breaking of coconuts.

The kit is currently only on sale in India, direct, via resellers and online at Amazon, but Mehta, an ex-hardware designer and Dhruv, a former banker and management consultant, are keen to expand.

“Most crematoria only provide wood. Our idea is to help families bid goodbye to the departed in a dignified and stress-free manner,” Mehta, 52, told *The Hindustan Times*.

“The stretcher can carry a person weighing up to 150kg, and is assembled in segments. The technology is currently patent-pending.”

He said that, during their research, they “met with a number of priests to ensure the box didn't miss anything vital”, adding: “Each item is labelled in English and Hindi. It can be used by most Hindu communities, including Gujaratis and Jains, and can also be used by Sikhs, whose rituals are similar.”



The cousins aim to add a personal touch by also including items specific to local rituals depending on where Sarvapooja is sold. It currently costs 2,950 Rupees (£23.70). It is being stocked by ambulance service providers and crematoria and offers same-day home delivery. Mehta said they had sold around 2,000 kits since launching the website just under a year ago.

Meanwhile Mehta said Sarvapooja is also considering launching funeral arrangements for Muslims. “Death is inevitable and we want to help everyone bid farewell to their loved ones with dignity,” he said.

Branded “The world's first all-inclusive Final Rites Kit (Antim Kriya) for Hindus, Jains, Sikhs”, the box contains: stretcher, tripod, white cloth, shawl, mat, garland, two Pots, Earthen diya, camphor, cotton piece, cotton batti, incense sticks, Vibhuti, Gaumutra, perfume, rose water, Gangajal, honey, matchbox, rope, white thread, Janoi, Nada chhadi, Black Tal, Jav (Barley), Black abil, White abil, Kumkum, Gulaal, Haldi, cow dung, Chandan powder, Chandan lakdi, Kurmure, Chawal, Oti che saman, Beetlenut, blade.

Sarpapooja is one of a number of businesses that have started up in India to support the population's changing needs at the end of life – many of them inspired by personal experience, a trend also seen in the UK.

Ahmedabad-based Mokshshil is a one-stop solution that provides personalised and professional end-to-end funeral management services as per the requirements of the deceased family members with authentic rituals performed by priests. Founder Bilva Desai lost her mother in 2012 and her family was in shock. Her precious time went in searching, sourcing and arranging the funeral, organ donation, after-death ceremonies, paperwork and performing the last rites. She realised she did not have the time to even cry and say her final goodbye – and that there are so many like her in the country facing the same problems. It is this personal experience that led to Mokshshil.

Initially, Mokshshil started with Hindu cremation by providing funeral services with the help of telephone number wherein anyone could call them and book the services. She now has a mobile-optimised website and active social media presence, and her range of services has grown to include booking a vehicle, finding hospitals, priests, prayers halls, cremation centres, organ donation centres – all available at the click of a button.

Speaking to *The Straits Times*, Desai said: “As more and more people migrate within the country, nuclear families increase. With a population of 1.3 billion and an average death of 13,000 people every day, this will become one of the basic services in the country. The services offered by these online start-ups usually attract nuclear families and professionals who have migrated within the country and are looking for more organised options during difficult times.”