

RESEARCH ARTICLE

INTERCULTURAL STUDIES: LIFE AFTER DEATH FROM THE VIEWPOINTS OF DIFFERENT RELIGIONS

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ABSTRACT

Humans are concerned about different issues most of their lifetime; these concerns range from providing the family with necessary facilities, to raising children, to health, to marriage, to life and life style, and death. Death and what happens to us is an issue that scares most people. As nobody has ever returned from the other world or worlds, this phenomenon has remained a vague mystery leading humanity to speculate about it. Death is an issue recognized by all religions and their followers, a great point of discussion among religions, scholars, clergymen, and men of wisdom, poets and ordinary people. Yet, there is another issue worthy of attention: life after death and what happens to our body and our soul. Life after death is also a mentality raised in this direction. However, each religion has a different view on this issue. This paper attempts at investigating the differences and similarities in the views of different religions about death and life after death. This research was done through library method and by investigating written and reliable sources. The result of the research shows that all divine religions believe in resurrection, paradise and hell, each with its specific promises although their heaven and hell are different. Non-divine religions also believe in reincarnation.

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1. Introduction

As life and different aspects of it have been a concern for mankind (Alnajm, 2020), death is also one of the concerns of philosophers, historians, and all sociologists who have sought to unravel it in the last few decades and have tried to propose new and efficient ways and methods to understand, act, and live next to death (Walter, 1994). In recent decades, understanding the nature of the issue of death and coping with it has been influenced by radio, television, virtual space, and media advertisements, as well as studies conducted by thinkers and sociologists known as death studies (Yakobsen, 2013, in Mousavi and Jahangiri, 2016).

Even in prehistoric times, i.e. in the era when there was no such thing as an established religion, there was attention and concern about the issue of death (Bergman in Eliasi, 2008), and among all religions, death is like a great tension, more important and valuable than all other issues (Malinowski, 1954). In different religions, death is the subject of the alive. The dead do not have any conflict or preoccupation. Among the creatures on earth, man is the only one who knows that his body is perishable. In fact, what makes death an important and special issue is not death, but awareness and thinking about death (Elias, 1982).

Each society and each religion and ritual presents a unique interpretation of death to the nation and its followers (Mousavi and Jahangiri, 2016). Some religions believe that the death of people brings them one step closer to the right path (Bergman in Eliasi, 2008). In this paper, the issue of life after death and its various aspects will be discussed and investigated from the perspective of different divine and non-divine religions.

2. Review of Literature

Javaheri and Yazdani (2015) in a paper investigated the attitude towards death based on the five dimensions of natural acceptance of death, relief from problems, apocalyptic beliefs, avoidance and fear of death, and then the role of three factors

of religious adherence, trust in medicine and social support on people's view on death with the help of 390 elderly people from Tehran. The result of the research showed that most of the elderly believe that death is a natural event and most of them saw the occurrence of death as a way to get rid of life. The highest degree of difference in attitudes was found among people regarding the avoidance and fear of death.

Akbari and Makwandi (2017) conducted descriptive-analytical research with the aim of examining and comparing death from the perspective of the Qur'an and psychology. The research showed that the science of psychology and the holy book of Muslims agree on many issues. Both point to man's fear of mortality and his desire for immortality and emphasize that the type of emotional reactions of people when facing death and accepting it are influenced by various factors such as the behavior and personality structure of a person and his ability to deal with past issues and problems. However, there are also differences between the attitude of psychology and the Qur'an towards the subject of death. One of these differences is the belief or lack of belief in life after death.

In an article, Hosseini (2018) tried to compare resurrection and reincarnation, which are two dynamic beliefs regarding life after death and the return of the soul. The belief in reincarnation originated from Hinduism and resurrection from Islam. Reincarnation means that the human soul is trapped in a cycle of repeated worldly births and deaths until it reaches the absolute truth. But the principle of resurrection is based on the belief that when the human soul is transferred to purgatory after death, it returns to its earthly and revived body. The rationale behind reincarnation is not perfect and without flaws, and the mystical intuition of reincarnation cannot be a valid reason either. There are no sufficient and convincing reasons to accept reincarnation, but there are many valid narrative and rational reasons for believing in the resurrection.

Mohammadi (2019) has examined the issue of death from the perspective of mystic poets. The result is that Persian-speaking poets have more of a mystical view of death, although many of them have paid attention to the issue of death from psychological and social points of view the factors that cause human fear of death, and the psychological states that arise from the thought of death and the effect of people's social status on thinking about death.

Barati, KurdiArdakani, and Shahgoli (1400) have investigated the concept of death according to the great philosopher, Mullah Sadra's theories and modern medicine. Death in modern medical science is based on physical symptoms such as

breathing stop, heartbeat stop, and lack of blood flow in the body. MullaSadra's view is that natural death is the result of the perfection of the soul so that the soul of a person absorbs perfections as a result of an intrinsic movement and when it reaches its deserved perfections through the body, it leaves the body and at that moment death occurs, which is a different analysis of death.

3. Different Religions, Different Views

3.1. Zoroastrianism

The name of Zoroastrianism is derived from the name of a prophet from ancient Iran, Zoroaster, who had very important and vast parts of the ancient world in his territory (Razi, 2002). Zoroaster was chosen as a prophet at the age of thirty and was killed by the Turanians at the age of seventy-seven in Balkh, Afghanistan. Zoroastrianism believes in one God whose name is Ahura Mazda. Zoroastrians consider death to be an evil thing, but believing in the judgment of humans based on their actions and deeds causes them to accept life after death; for them, the end of material life means transition to another world (DevaniBehran, BahramiKohishnejad and Azari, 2017).

In the religion of Zoroastrianism, the soul is alone in the life after death until the resurrection, and there is no mention of the body. In other words, the human soul continues its life after death until the day of resurrection and the body and soul are present together as the material and non-material dimensions of a human being. From the point of view of Zoroastrianism, the soul has a desire for permanence and immortality. Because of this, religious ceremonies are held for the spirits of the dead and fathers and ancestors. From Zoroastrians' point of view, time is divided into three periods: the original and eternal time, in which only goodness prevailed over everything, the present time, in which filth and demonic power have entered and tried hard to contaminate all pure and righteous creatures, and the future time, when goodness and the good prevail over everything again (Bagheri, 2019).

Evidence shows that Zoroastrianism, which is the first religion of the world, discussed the issue of previous lives and the issue of resurrection and raised the issue of apocalypse in a complete way. According to the teachings of Zoroaster, the Iranian prophet, when the universe comes to an end, the world will be resurrected. On the Day of Resurrection, good deeds and bad deeds will be calculated, and a fire will be lit for the wicked and wrongdoers and they will be thrown into it. However, in the

book of Gatha, it is not clear whether the evil soul itself remains in the fire of hell forever or comes out and goes to purgatory. From the study of Zoroastrian texts, it can be concluded that every soul, both good and bad, will pass over ČinvatPeretum (Sarat Bridge), i.e. the separating bridge, on the Day of Judgment. Ahura Mazda is the main judge and referee and there are assistants, just as Soroush, Rashan, and Mehr also have the same responsibility (Amouzgar and Tafazoli, 2001).

3.2. Judaism

Judaism is also a name to introduce the beliefs, lifestyle, and ideas from the religious point of view of the Jewish people. Judaism, with all its special rules and principles, is one of the first Abraham religions. There is monotheism in the Abraham religions, of which the Jewish religion is one. The holy book of Judaism is called the Torah, and all the views and principles are extracted from this book.

Judaism has a different view of death. Ceremonies related to the spirit of the deceased and burial methods are indications of the importance of life after death in this religion. Jews believe that what is taken by God at the time of death will not disappear or be destroyed and will be accounted for in another world. This belief is clearly seen in the Jewish prayer: "O my God, the soul and spirit that you have given me is pure, you are its creator, you are its image-creator; you have breathed it into me and you will take it from me, but on the next day you will return it to me again." This prayer shows that life existed before the body and is given to the body, which is a gift from its creator, and of course, its return will be by God. For this purpose, some of the Jewish customs are as the following (Hosseini, 2010):

- *The presence of the family next to the dead person*
- *Reading the last part of "Mishna" (part of Talmud) beside the bed of the dead person*
- *Accompanying the body to the grave and burying it*
- *Shivah (ceremony of the seventh day)*
- *The anniversary ceremony*

By understanding the concept of the soul before the body in Judaism, one can understand the existence of resurrection in this religion. After the judgment, there are two different fates before every human being. First, he will reach eternal life and second, he will enter Sheol with the punishment of eternal death. These show their belief in the resurrection, but there is a difference regarding its time and place, and by whom this judgment will be done (Shahangian, 2009).

Enoch texts, whose authorship probably dates back to three centuries BC, are a sign of belief in resurrection. On a journey, Enoch, along with several angels named Raphael, Gabriel, Uriel, and Michael who are his guides, first visits the world of Sheol and sees souls waiting for the judgment day (Shahangian, 2009; DevaniBehran et al., 2017).

3.3. *Christianity*

In the Christian religion, the presence of Jesus Christ is considered the most important sign of resurrection. They praise Jesus Christ as God incarnated and in human form, who came to earth to bear the burden of people and reduce their pain and suffering and was always with people, and they believe that Jesus is a means to save sinners from punishment by God.

According to the followers of this religion, Jesus had a trial and was sentenced to death after the Last Supper. His body died after suffering a lot of pain by being dragged to the cross. A faithful Jew brought down the body of the prophet and after wrapping it in a shroud, put it in a grave on the hillside. The women who came from Galilee also went after the body and found out about the place where the prophet was buried. Three days after the death of Jesus Christ, when the women came to the grave, they noticed the grave was empty. Then they saw two white men in front of them who said to them: Why are you looking for a living person in this grave? Jesus is here, alive. Don't you remember his speech in Galilee? He said that he should be surrendered to the wicked people and be killed by them and would rise on the third day. According to the Bible, sometime after rising from the grave, Jesus left the earth, ascended to heaven, and rested with God.

The four gospels describe the resurrection and rebirth of Jesus Christ with strong evidence and signs and consider it the main example of the resurrection of the dead before the coming of the Day of Judgment, an event seen by many witnesses and watchful eyes. But the resurrection before the Day of Judgment does not end here and we can point to the miracle of Jesus in giving life to the dead as another example of rebirth before the resurrection of everyone (Rahimpour, 2010).

Christianity says that Judgment Day will start with the advent of Jesus and these two events take place simultaneously. On that day, all the dead will return to life, the living will be transformed, and the divine court will be set up with the judgment of Jesus Christ. All the people of the earth will be divided into two groups of sheep and goats on this special day. Sheep are the kind and benevolent people who

have tried to do good things and help their fellows during their lifetime. And the goats are those who acted contrary to the previous group and set their world and hereafter on fire and will suffer in eternal fire (Ashtiani, 2008). Hell is like a fiery pit and like Sheol, an underground world into which the dead fall, but only the wicked are the ones who have no way to escape and go underground (Vahidi and Bashirinia, 2015). Catholic Christians believe that after the death of pure people, their souls will enter heaven and rest with God, but the souls of oppressors and sinners stop in a place near hell, which is purgatory, also called the counter of hell (Ashtiani, 1368).).

3. 4. Islam

One of the primary reflections and ideas of human life is resurrection, belief in the next world and judgment of human actions (VahidiMehrdardi, 2013). In fact, belief in the principle of resurrection is one of the most basic and, in fact, one of the main beliefs of religions (Peterson, 1991). Qur'an deals with the aspects of life after death more than any other topic and has examined it from all aspects. It should be mentioned that this divine book contains about two thousand verses about resurrection, which are found in all chapters except for a few (Tabatabai, 14th century AH), among which the following verses can be mentioned:

- *Ya-Sin: 51: "And the trumpet will be blown, then they will come hastening from their graves to their Lord."*
- *Al-Infitar: 4-5: "And when the graves are cultivated and made upside down, let every soul know what it sent forward and what it left behind."*
- *Al-Isra: 49-51: "And they said: When we become bones and dust, will we be resurrected [again] to a new creation? Say: Being a stone, or iron, or a creature of which you think high, [you will be resurrected again]"*.

In some verses of the Qur'an and traditions, the word Maad is talked about in its literal meaning, i. e., the place or time of return, for example, the verse "He who made Qur'an an obligation for you, will certainly bring you back to the place of returning." In this verse the word "resurrection" is used to refer to the place of returning (here Mecca), but in other cases the word "resurrection" in its idiomatic meaning refers to the return to life after death (Ibn Manzoor, 1988); it can also be interpreted as the act of rousing people in order to attend the court of divine justice to answer and be held responsible for their actions (Tarihi, 1989). So, Islam sees the death of a person as the beginning of entering another world and his eternal life. Some believe that resurrection is only possible for humans, and others believe that resurrection is not specific to humans, and animals are also included in resurrection.

As Qur'an says: "And the day when wild animals will be gathered together" (VahidiMehrpardi, 2013).

Qur'an has offered rational and strong reasons to prove the Resurrection and the Day of Judgment, including the absolute ownership of God over everything and everyone, the Lordship of God, the sovereignty and ownership of God over the creation of things and all the worlds, and the idea of "Everything has a principle, positive or negative." (Tajabadi, 2016). AllamehMajlisi believes the actual concept of physical resurrection is this: The mortal bodies of the worlds will return on the Day of Judgment and relevant souls will go to them again (VahidiMehrpardi, 2011).

3. 5. Hinduism

Diversity can be seen best in India, a country of multiculturalism (Ahmed and Tiwari, 2023). One of the most important religions of India is Hinduism but unlike other religions, Hinduism, which is six thousand years old, does not have a specific founder. Hindus believe that everything and everyone in the world is connected and that this world is governed by certain laws. All beings considering their family and age have their own important duties, which are called dharma. One of the main and oldest beliefs of the Hindu religion is the theory of reincarnation or samsara, which is considered as a rival to the theory of resurrection in Islam (Bahrami and Gohari, 2017).

The word "reincarnation" has its roots in the word "Naskh" meaning "extermination" and "transition" (Sajadi, 1379). Annihilation, metamorphosis, resakh and rescission are definitions in reincarnation, whose meanings are, respectively, the transfer of a human soul to another human body, the transfer of a human soul to an animal body, the transfer of a human soul to a plant body, and the transfer of a human soul to the body of objects. Reincarnation has long been accepted by many people from different sects and ethnic groups. All Indian religions and sects believe in reincarnation, except for the materialistic school of Charvaka (Shahrestani, in Bahrami et al., 2017: Eliasi, 2018).

Hinduism, as the third largest religion in the world, is one of the main origins of the theory of reincarnation. Hindus believe that after death, the soul enters and transfers from the dead body to a new body, and this repetition of birth and death is called "reincarnation", which will continue until the soul is completely cleansed of impurities and ignorance. Good deeds can make a good life and a peaceful birth for a person, and bad deeds will make life and birth difficult for a person. According to this religion, everything that is born will one day die and be born again, and this cycle

is also called samsara. These births and deaths are done in a circle and most people try to get rid of it. This avoidance of people from rebirth is called Moksha (Ilyasi, 2008).

3. 6. Buddhism

In Sanskrit, the word Buddha means a person who has attained enlightenment. It is believed that Buddha lived around the 4th to 6th century BC (Shaygan, 1362) and like many other religions, Buddhism includes legends and myths in addition to reality (Jahangiri and Mousavi, 1396).

Buddhist texts say that the Buddha decided to leave his wife and child at the age of twenty-nine, and after shaving his hair and wearing the clothes of Hindu monks, he spent six years of asceticism, and at the end, he reached enlightenment under a tree that is now known as the Buddha tree (Shaygan, 1362). Buddha was able to reach nirvana, that is, to have complete control over his mind and remove evil feelings such as greed and hatred. Nirvana means extinguishing the fire, and the extinguishing of all troubles and worries was the Buddha's intention. Buddha decided to share his learnings and experiences with other people in order to reduce their suffering and pain. In order for all people to reach Nirvana, he shared his learnings with them in the form of four undeniable truths (Mardani, 1401).

The four outstanding truths of Buddhism are as follows: every creature that opens its eyes in this world is condemned to suffer and the origin of all these pains is birth; So all of us should try to stop this cycle of life and death, and to reach absolute freedom or Nirvana we should go through eight steps; These stages include correct understanding, correct thinking, correct speech, correct actions, correct life, correct effort, correct intentions and correct attention or meditation, a concept close to extremes in austerity and self-worship (Shaygan, 2012). Samsara is an interwoven cycle in which each stage is dependent on the other stage, and Buddhists believe that this entire cycle is in the hands of Yama, or the Lord of Death. Buddha also says that human death is not the end of this cycle, but a stage of it. Buddhism has identified six realms for the rebirth of our soul (Rosen, 2008).

The six realms for rebirth are humans, heavenly beings, animals, hell, hungry spirits, and domestic beings. Every human being will be born in one of the realms after death depending on karmic inheritance. But among all the realms, the two realms of heaven and hell are more important. The hell realm has eight burning hells and sixteen mild hells. In the realm of heaven, there are six heavens according to

people's wishes, and entering these realms is determined according to a person's karmic balance. Also, Tusita is in the realm of heavenly beings, where according to Buddhists, other world Buddhas live along with some high-ranking earthly Buddhas. Death is only an indicator of crossing one realm and entering another realm (Jahangiri et al., 2016).

4. Discussion and conclusion

Belief in life after death has ancient roots, and belief in the immortality of the human soul and life after death is embedded in human nature. All divine and non-divine religions agree on the issue of life after death, but there are differences regarding the events after death. The belief of divine religions such as Islam, Judaism, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism is based on the theory of "Resurrection" and these religions believe that on the Day of Judgment, all people will be judged. Believers and people who have done righteous deeds will enjoy various blessings in heaven, and unbelievers and wrongdoers will suffer in hell.

Non-divine religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism believe in reincarnation and believe that humans are caught in a cycle of multiple lives and deaths. The event that awaits us after death is rebirth. Reincarnation is based on the principle of karma and believes that our rewards and punishments are not determined by a supernatural entity and that it is we ourselves who will determine the course of our future lives with our actions. People who have done good deeds during their lives will ensure an easy and happy rebirth, and those who have done wrong to their fellows and done bad deeds will experience a difficult and restless rebirth.

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