A Comparative Study on Death in Buddhism and the West

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Death is still, for most people, an uncomfortable subject that many do not care to think about much, even though it is no longer a taboo topic that it once was. Yet, if there is one thing that is certain in life it is that we shall all die, sooner or later, whether we like it or not. The life of human kind is short, and death is inevitable for what is born. We all know it, but we may try to forget the fact. This avoidance and fear of death contribute toward making death a social problem.

There are many different attitudes to death, and two main ones predominate: the Traditional Christian View and the Modern Secular View. The Traditional Christian View asserts the reality of an after-life, which the Modern Secular View denies or at the very least calls strongly into question. Besides, the Stage theory of Dying has proposed that persons aware of their impending death pass through five psychological stages in preparation for it: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.

On death and dying, Buddhism denies two extremes - eternalism (sassatavāda) and annihilationism (ucchedavāda). According to Buddhism, there are two kinds of death: timely death (kāla-maraṇa) and untimely death (akāla-maraṇa). Beings are born along with ageing and death. Fear of death (maraṇa-bhaya) is an unworthy state of mind. For this reason, Buddhism gives a remedy. There should always be mindfulness, a sense of urgency, and knowledge through recollection of death in eight ways. One devoted to mindfulness of death (maraṇassatīkathā) is constantly diligent. Then “access-concentration” may be gained, and this is the basis for the arising of Insight (vipassanā). The more ready we shall be to die, the further we shall get along the path that leads to the “Deathless” (amataṁ).

Keywords: Attitude toward Death, Fear of Death, Eight ways of Recollecting Death, Mindfulness of Death, The Stage theory of Dying

Methods followed by Modern Grammarians in Presenting Pali Grammar

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This paper examines the methods followed by modern grammarians in presenting Pali grammar. Methodology for the study is based on a literary survey. Modern Pali grammars; ’Pali Literature and Language’ written by Wilhelm Geiger and ‘Introduction to Pali’ composed by A.K Warder are primarily referred in this connection. It appears that there are no exact methods followed by Geiger or Warder. Nevertheless, their books are very important in the aspect of how they present grammar. It is necessary to study the question of whether modern grammarians refused traditional ways used by ancient teachers. The answer is no, but they present grammar in other ways which differ from traditional grammars. Some of the methods used by the authors have been mentioned by them. In examining these, it is very clear that they have composed Pali grammars in the light of linguistics. They are not restricted to only Pali and in addition, Pali is comparatively studied with other Indo Aryan languages. This has been done in an interesting way by Geiger in his book which gives the formations of the Pali words in comparison with Sanskrit. The importance of studying the historical development of the language is emphasized by the use of his knowledge in historical and comparative linguistics.

The methods followed by A. K. Warder are rather different from Geiger’s work. Warder does not make attempt to reveal the gradual development of the language. What he does is only introducing the grammatical functions of the language. His method is based on syntax that is considered a major aspect in linguistics. Warder always quotes phrases and sentences from the canonical texts (Dīgha-nikāya). This feature really motivates those who study Pali as they understand Pali Suttās while they are learning the language. He thus provides a Pali grammar in its ancient phase within the framework of graded lesions and exercises. When considering these modern grammarians, it appears that while Geiger paid attention to phonological and morphological features of the Pali language using historical linguistics, Warder gave priority to syntax in Pali. According to these, modern grammarians have used different kinds of methods in presenting Pali grammar.

Keywords: Pali, Grammar, Modern, Wilhelm Geiger, A.K. Warder, Linguistics

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