

Critique of Perception of life and death in Japan

Dr. Nitasha Sharma*

Abstract

Whenever one talks about the perception towards life or death of a community, society or a race of people it is generally related to the religion or philosophy of that particular group. Japan is such a country which is often associated with death whether it is in form of its ritual suicides in the form of harakiri and kamikaze or large number of deaths which occurred in the atomic bombing during the World War II or contemporarily number of deaths occurring due to the natural calamities in the form of earthquakes, typhoons or tsunami. But when it comes to the question as to how do the Japanese perceive the life and death issues, surprisingly it is believed that an average Japanese does not think deeply about such issues. How can a society which faces death so closely due to their traditional and geographical conditions remain so aloof of such problems? This was a question which gave rise to an interest as to what actually is the perception of the Japanese towards life and death and what are the factors which influence such perceptions. This paper looks into these factors namely, religion, traditions and social factors. Then we study chronologically the perceptions of life and death in Japan in the various historical periods and in the end we look into the modern perspectives and the rise of the life and death studies in the twentieth and twenty first century in Japan.

Introduction

Human beings are the only species on this earth who have capability of thinking and perceiving the mysteries regarding life and death. Of course 'death' is feared by all living organisms. It is a basic animal instinct that whenever one faces death, be it an animal or a human, the first reaction is to try to escape it. But in case of human beings, it is something more than that. A whole lot of emotions are related to death. Besides fear, there is anxiety for the unknown, sorrow due to separation, fear for pain, suffering and in some cases, it could also be a feeling of relief to get rid of the sufferings of this life.

But the question which arises here is when does one start thinking about death? Though the inevitability of death is known by all but when one thinks about one's own death, it seems to be a remote reality. In most of the cases, when an individual is young and healthy, he does not think about his own death, he sees it as a reality which he has to face 'someday' not in the near future. In most cases it is the old people or people suffering from a terminal, incurable disease, or else people related to such professions as medicine, psychology, religion and so on who think about death as a reality which is close to each one of us, irrespective of our physical and mental state.

According to Ebine Rie, it is this denial of death, which is responsible for the modern day problems which man is facing. According to him, "definitely death has a negative image as it arouses such feelings as extinction of one's existence, fear of unknown etc." But at the same time there are also opinions like, "One of the reasons why man is leading an empty aimless life is because he denies death, by learning to be conscious about death the human beings can reach the final stage of growth." (Elisabeth Kubler Ross, 1975)

* Assistant Professor, Department of Japanese Studies, Delhi University Delhi

When we talk about the problems related to life and death, the first one as mentioned above, is how does one face death and deal with it? As Philippe Aries in his book, "The hour of death" deduces that in the ancient times death was not feared by man, but with the rise in the sense of individuality, death began to be related to destruction of the 'self' and there was growing fear of the after-life too. Thus according to Aries, in the modern times the biggest problem of mankind is "How to face death".

But besides this there are many other issues related to death and life ethics in the modern times. One of them is the debate concerning 'brain death'. The issue, whether an individual whose brain has stopped functioning but his other body organs are still functioning should be considered to be dead or not, has arisen in the modern times due to advancement in medical science. One more such issue is whether organ transplant of such a person whose brain is dead should be considered to be ethical or not. Though such problems are directly related to the field of medical science, but they are indirectly related to law, religion sociology, ethics and a whole lot of other fields of learning too.

Needless to say, all these problems have a direct relation to the perception of life and death. In the ancient times, if not the only one, the major factor influencing people's perception of life and death was religion. All the major processes in human life, whether it is his birth, coming of age ceremony, marriage or death, were related to and influenced by religion. But with the advancement of science, owing to the development of rational and scientific thinking and secondly moving away from religion, there arose many dilemmas regarding life and death. Things which were unquestioningly accepted till now came to be looked upon skeptically and it also gave rise to a lot of dissatisfaction and anxiety.

This phenomenon can be considered to be more conspicuous in Japan, where there was a sudden surge of scientific knowledge after its opening to the world after almost two centuries of alienation. This hunger for modern scientific knowledge seemed to affect the religious sensibilities too. Thus it is believed that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Japan was so engrossed in absorbing the modern scientific knowledge of the West that it started moving away from religion. Consequently a whole lot of social problems arose. These problems became aggravated by the economic depression after the 'bubble bust'. The general dissatisfaction with life leads people to think more about life and death. It is at this time, that the life and death studies started as an academic field in Japan and was nurtured through deliberate efforts.

Factors Affecting Perceptions of Life and Death

At the outset we need to answer the simple question that what does one mean by the term, "Perception of life and death?" Though human beings have been interested in the concept of 'death' since times immemorial but it was a mere curiosity and was not considered as a formal subject of research until quite recently. The so called, "Life and death studies" is a very recent research topic but is gaining a lot of impetus in the modern world. The interest of human beings in 'death' is actually the curiosity about "the unknown". The most fundamental question here being whether death is the ultimate end of life or is it just exiting from this life and moving on to some other life. Since ancient time religion, superstitious beliefs and traditions are providing us with some solutions to these queries, but none of them are totally convincing. Not only that, in the recent years some such attempts have been made by other fields of learning too like science and medicine, philosophy, psychology and so on. But whether we have been able to procure convincing solutions to such queries regarding death is questionable.

The term, "Thanatology" which means study of death and its surrounding circumstances arose in 1835-45. But the term "Perception of life and death" is a recent one, where one does not consider

death in alienation but as a continuity of life. Life and death are considered to be the two sides of the same coin, and one cannot be studied without the other. Here life does not merely mean physiological life but as Shimazono Susumu has mentioned, “it includes individual's pains, feeling of heaven and hell, purity, god, good and evil, love, sorrow, eternity and a whole lot of other emotions” Thus now when we talk about “Perception of life and death” in spite of our main interest and concern being in the concept of death, we have to understand it in relation to life.

As mentioned earlier too, though religion is the main factor in influencing the perception of life and death, there are other factors too which directly or indirectly affect it. In this section it will be discussed how these factors work towards developing such perceptions particularly in case of Japan.

Religion

The most ancient and indigenous religion of Japan is *Shintō*, though some scholars argue that *Shintō* is not a religion in the true sense. Neither does it have any religious scriptures nor does it have any fixed doctrine, and so it is more like a way of life which asserts on nature worship. Nevertheless it was the only belief in Japan before transmission of Buddhism in the 6th century AD. With the coming of Buddhism there was a change in the perception regarding the issue of life and death. *Shintō* was a religion which laid more emphasis on this world, considering death to be the ultimate end; Buddhism emphasized more on cycle of birth and rebirth and also has a deep belief in existence of the other world. Besides *Shintō* and Buddhism, the third major religion which entered Japan from the West in 18th century was Christianity. So basically when we consider religion as a factor affecting the perception of life and death in Japan, we have to study regarding these three religions. Let us study about the doctrines of these three religions regarding the same.

Shintō (神道)

When we say that *Shintō* is the only indigenous religion or belief of ancient Japan, we see that many traditional Japanese beliefs and practices hark back to prehistoric customs, and most of these form the core of *Shintō*. Most of these local myths, customs and traditions were unified in the 8th century under a single belief, named *Shintō* which literally means 'the way of God'. It was during this period when under the command of the Emperor the two most ancient Chronicles, *Kojiki* (古事記) (712AD, Record of ancient matters) and *Nihonshoki* (日本書紀) (720AD, Chronicles of Japan) were written. These are very important ancient Japanese chronicles which give an insight into the customs, traditions and beliefs of that period.

If we talk about the major features of *Shintō* as a religious belief, it emphasizes on nature worship, i.e. all natural things and phenomena are considered to have a direct influence on human life and are thus to be worshiped. Besides nature, the relationship between man and the sacred (*kami*) (神) is very close. The meaning of the term *Kami*, which is often referred to as 'god', 'deity' or 'divinity' is unclear. The *Shintō* pantheon consists of the '*yaoyorazu no kami*', (八百万の神) literally, '800 myriads of divinities'. The natural phenomena- wind, sun, moon, water, mountains trees etc. are *kami*. Certain *kami* are divinized ancestors or great figures of the past, and until 1945 the Emperor too was regarded as divine. Each family had a clan *kami* too called the *ujigami*. (氏神)

Another major feature of this traditional Japanese belief is the notion of purity and impurity (*kegare*, 穢れ) and procedures of ritual purification (*harae* 禊 ; *misogi* 禊) The traditional Japanese religion does not conceptualize 'sin' in the form that it is a violation of divine commandments, as it is in Christianity, but there is definitely the concept of impurity or defilement which separates the human beings from animals. Thus before entering a *Shintō* shrine people observe the traditional custom of rinsing ones hands and mouth which is symbolic of purifying oneself before

coming in contact with *kami*.

If we talk about perception towards life and death in *Shintō*, as mentioned earlier too, it is a religion which lays more emphasis on this world and this life and in this respect it differs from Buddhism. The philosophy of life in this world as explained by *Shintō* is the existence of *tama* (靈) and *tamashii*. (魂) *Tama* is the efficient force which is endowed upon each *kami*; it is the object of religious activity and may be seen as violent (*aramitama*、荒御靈) or peaceful (*nigimitama*、和御靈). This *tama*, the force that supports all life, dwells in human beings as *tamashii* and departs at the time of death. The *tama* of a *kami* is invited at all ceremonies and offered, made to listen to the praises of the community and then sent back. During the ceremony the *tama* of a divinity is thought to invest itself in the sacred tree or stone, root, branch, sword, mirror or any other objects that are kept out of sight in a shrine.

The main sources of information of the ancient perceptions of life and death in Japan are *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki*. It is from these chronicles that Jean Herbert has listed four worlds: *takama-no-hara* (高天原) the high plane of heaven, the residence of the *kami*; *Yomi-no-kuni*, (黄泉の国) the low and far away land, the world of evil and suffering, also referred to as the world to which the dead go; *Utsushi-yo*, (現世) literally it is the shifting world, it is the world in which we all live but have to leave it one day; and finally *Kakuri-yo*, (隠世) the hidden or the invisible world, the world of gods, also interpreted as the world after death. Thus if we take Herbert's account into consideration we can deduce that firstly except for *Utsushi yo*, which is the world in which all living beings exist, the other three are worlds which no living being has seen. Secondly, two of these worlds, i.e. *Yomi-no-kuni* and *kakuri-yo*, can be interpreted to be the world of the dead. Further, *Takama-no-hara* and *Yomi-no-kuni* can be comparable to the Christian concept of Heaven and Hell.

Regarding the problem of where a soul goes after death, there are different theories and interpretations given by various scholars. The most common *Shintō* belief is that the soul goes to the *Yomi-nokuni* after death. The basis of this belief is the account of death of *Izanami* (伊邪那美命) given in *Kojiki*, who goes there after her death and then is followed by her lover *Izanagi* (伊邪那岐) who goes there to look for her.

“At this time, *Izanagi-no-mikoto*, wishing to meet again his spouse
Izanami-no-mikoto, went after her to the land of *Yomi*.”

According to the translator, chapter 9 is one of the most interesting chapters in the *Kojiki* because it gives us our most concrete information on the ancient Japanese ideas about death and afterlife. Reading this chapter, one gets a mental picture of the *Yomi*; it has houses as is clear from the following line, “she came forth out of the door of the hall to greet him...” Its inhabitants were conscious, moved about and ate food, as is clear from the following lines of *Izanami*:

“How I regret that you did not come sooner. I have eaten at the hearth of *Yomi*.”

According to Motoori Norinaga, the fire of *Yomi* was considered to be impure and as *Izanami* had eaten food made in that impure fire, she could not go back to the land of mortals. He believed in the concept of pure and impure fires, as given in the following words,

“...it is impossible to fathom why is it that there is pure fire and polluted fire; but to deny that there is so is to disbelieve the Divine words and to rely perversely on one's own mind.”

But Matsumura counter argues this saying, “Although there may have been such recollections of impurity imparted by eating food cooked over an impure fire in the mind of the *Kojiki* compiler, the

original meaning of the passage was that *Izanami*, by partaking the food of the land of *Yomi*, had become a person of that land.” The idea that partaking of the food of the dead magically disqualifies one from returning to his native land occurs also in the Greek myth of *Persephone*, in the *Kalevala*, among the *Maoris* in China, and in the Ryukyus; the idea that one may not return home if he has eaten the food of any other world or society- such as world of the spirits, fairies, or gods-was also widespread. In primitive thought, eating or drinking together brings about a magical relationship, and Matsumura concludes that this myth merely reflects a belief in the magical cohesive force inherent in eating food in common.”

Though such a picture of the land of *Yomi* or the place where the soul departs after death has been provided in the *Kojiki*, but as Matsumura has concluded, in comparison with other ancient people, the Japanese were almost completely indifferent to the details of the afterlife. “The mental image of the land of *Yomi* is simple to the point of being astonishing” (*Nihon Shinwa no Kenkyū*, II, 415) The optimistic this-worldliness of the Japanese, living in their mild and sunny islands, made them indifferent to anything as uncertain and morbid as the life after death.

Buddhism

Buddhism, a religion which originated in India and from there was transmitted to Japan through China and Korea is such a vast religion with so many different sects and their doctrines that it is not within the scope of this paper to discuss regarding all its thoughts and ideologies. So restricting to the original Buddhist teachings, it is worthwhile to see how Buddhism deals with life and death.

Basically Buddhism believes in the cycle of life and death and reincarnation. Death according to Buddhism is not the ultimate end rather it is just the end of the physical body, the spirit continues to exist and is reborn in one of the six realms- which are heaven, human beings, *asura*, hungry ghost, animal and hell. Where one takes birth is decided by the sum total of the positive and negative actions and the resultant karma. This cycle of birth and rebirth continues till one attains *Nirvana* or enlightenment. *Nirvana* literally means blowing out or extinguishing, thus according to Buddhism when one extinguishes the fire of attachment, aversion and ignorance the sufferings come to an end and one is released from the cycle of reincarnations and this is the state of nirvana. Thus the basic aim of all human beings who take birth on this earth should be to attain *nirvana*. This according to Buddhism can be attained by following the four noble truths, which according to Mac-Milan Encyclopaedia of Buddhism are: 1) The noble truth that is suffering; 2) The noble truth that is the arising of suffering; 3) the noble truth that is end of suffering and 4) The noble truth that is the way leading to the end of suffering.

As mentioned earlier too, *Shintō* does not assert much on the concept of death and afterlife. So till the coming of Buddhism into Japan, people did not ponder much upon the problems of life and death. It was during the Kamakura period (1185-1333) that people started thinking about it and perception of life and death came to be related to religion. As Prof Shimazono has pointed out, “the perception of life and death without any religious character does not have any value in the history of mankind” According to him “during the Kamakura period, the perception of life and death of the Japanese people was completed and it moved towards two direction, one moved through the common people and the other, through Samurai class”.

In the modern times the Japanese term for perception of life and death used is '*Shiseikan*' (死生観) but the original Buddhist term used was not '*Shisei*' (死生) but '*Shōji*' (生死). The former has the Chinese character (*kanji*) of 'death' (死) before the character of 'life', (生) whereas in the

Buddhist term, “*Shōji*”, (生死) the character for 'life'(生) comes before the character of 'death' (死) and the way it is read also changes accordingly. The original Buddhist term '*Shōji*' is related to “*Shutsuri Shōji*” (出離生死) i.e. to get rid of the cycle of birth and death and enter the world of enlightenment. Further, it is related to “*Shōji soku Nehan*” (生死即涅槃) i.e. even the world where we repeatedly take birth is a part of the absolute world of *Nirvana*. Thus we can say that this term, “*Shōjikan*” which is the original Buddhist term has different connotations than the term “*Shiseikan*” which was used for the first time by Katō Totsudō in his book with the same title. The term '*Shiseikan*' actually deals with the problems of life and death directly and aims to tackle such contemporary issues like, 'How does one face death?' and “Is there life after death?’ The reason why this term was not used earlier and came to be used conspicuously at the time and after World War II was precisely because during that time people started pondering over such questions related to death and after life.

Another very important doctrine of Buddhism, related to the perception of life and death is the concept of '*Ku*' (空; *Sunya* in Sanskrit). This concept can be explained as the nature of impermanence of all matter on this earth, which includes human beings too. The other important metaphysical concept is that of '*Enki*' (緣起) which says that all the things which have no fixed matter and no fixed form are continuously changing due to mutual relationship with each other. Thus we can say that '*Ku*' and '*Enki*' are mutually interdependent. And both these basic doctrines explain the meaning of life and death as explained by Buddhism.

In Christianity and the Western thought influenced by it, the existence of a human being has been explained by the presence of a fixed personality, which is considered to be a substantial entity and without which the 'dignity of human' ceases to exist. In contrast to this, Buddhism originally professes the principles of '*Ku*' (impermanence) and '*Muga*' (無我) (Selflessness). This is a viewpoint which does not acknowledge the existence of a substantial *Atman* which can be called the essence of the self. Moreover according to Buddhist thought all human beings are made up of five elements- materialistic existence, sensations, *sansara* or potential and emotional existence, *Vijnana* or discriminating power, *Samjna* or expressing things which one receives. Further, human beings are nothing more than a combination of four elements namely, earth, water, fire and air. Thus one cannot assume the existence of a substantial thing called personality in human beings.

Therefore the theory put forward by Christian ideology that when body and personality combine, a human being is created does not hold good in Buddhism. Not only that, here even the viewpoint of considering life as something substantial does not exist. It is not that originally the thing called 'life' can exist independently being separated from the body, it is also not that life has any kind of concrete shape or form. Life has the existence of '*Ku*' or impermanence. At this point it is very different from the Christian theory which says that the origin of human life was reduced to a concrete 'thing' i.e. the breath of god.

It won't be an exaggeration to say that 'life' does not exist in Buddhism. What is there is, just a fact that one human is 'living' or else a fact that human exists accompanying life phenomenon. Human beings use the expression that, “there is life” metaphorically for explaining this fact for the time being. Consequently this figure of speech is misleading and this assertion of the existence of life substantially can be said to be deviating from the basic viewpoint of Buddhism. The same thing can be said about 'death' too. The word 'death' is a figure of speech used for explaining the loss of phenomenon of life from body. Of course there exist different states like a certain person 'is dying', 'dead body' who has lost the phenomenon of life, or else 'death' as a result of medical examination of the body. But as in the case of 'life', 'death' too cannot have an independent existence away from the body of the human or

does not possess a concrete shape.

Thus in Buddhist thinking, both 'life' and 'death' are not substantial entities which can exist independently. Due to this it is impossible to separate life and death. Rather, life and death are united and it is the continuous process of change in an individual.

Christianity

Besides *Shintō* and Buddhism, the third religion which has influenced the life of the Japanese is Christianity, which was introduced into Japan in the middle of the sixteenth century. But then during the Tokugawa period (1603-1867) it was proscribed and its adherents were persecuted. Then during the middle of the nineteenth century, it was reintroduced and has continued to exist in Japan since then.

According to traditional catholic belief, human beings after their death either get redeemed and go to heaven, or get condemned and go to hell. The latter is a place which is purgatory, an intermediate state of purification for those who still have sins to atone before going to heaven. The traditional catholic thought emphasizes on the otherworldliness after death. But reincarnation is not accepted in the traditional catholic doctrine. However, nowadays a lot of research is being done on reincarnation all over the world and therefore in the western world too, the trends of a belief in reincarnation and transmigration of souls are increasing.

Ernest Valea, in his paper titled, "Reincarnation Its meaning and consequences" asserts that the evidence of the belief in reincarnation can be found in the Bible and it was accepted by early church. In the paper a number of Biblical texts which show sufficient proof of this belief have been given and discussed by the author. Secondly, there is also a hypothesis that Bible contained many passages teaching reincarnation in an alleged initial form, but they were suppressed by the clergy at the 5th ecumenical council held in Constantinople in the year AD 553. However, there is no proof that such a 'purification' of Biblical text has ever occurred. On the other hand, there are other passages in the bible that clearly contradict the idea of reincarnation explicitly or implicitly.

The idea of reincarnation has never been accepted by Christianity because it undermines its basic tenets, compromises God's sovereignty over creation. Secondly, belief in reincarnation may affect ones understanding of morality and motivation for moral living. Thirdly, reincarnation represents a threat to the very essence of Christianity, the need for Christ's redemptive sacrifice for our sins.

Irrespective of all these debates, though the major Christian denominations reject the concept of reincarnation, a large number of Christians profess the belief. In a survey by the Pew Forum, in 2009, 24% of American Christians expressed a belief in reincarnation.

In the contemporary times all these three religions are being followed by Japanese in some or the other form. And it will not be an exaggeration to say that there has been a great influence of all these three religions in whatever perception of life and death, the Japanese have today.

Development of Life and Death Studies in Japan

The term, '*Shiseigaku*' or 'Life and Death studies' is a recent term which is being used since last twenty years or so. Initially the Japanese word, '*Shiseigaku*' was used as a translation of the English word, 'Thanatology' which literally means 'study of death.' In Japan, it was Alfons Deekan³³, who was the pioneer in establishing life and death studies; he convened a "Seminar on life and death" in 1982. This was the starting point for establishment of life and death studies in Japan and in 1983 the 'Japanese Association of Death Education and Grief Counselling' (生と死を考える会) was set up. The association's three main goals were to promote death education; to improve terminal care in hospitals

and develop more hospice programs; and to establish mutual support groups for grieving people who have lost a loved one.³⁴

The modern research related to life and death issues can be mainly segregated into two types, first being the research regarding the structure of the perception of life and death and the second is the criteria used for measuring psychology related to death. When we talk about the structure of the perception of life and death we are mainly concerned with the attitude towards death. Hirai Ya (平井他), who developed a criterion for measuring the perception towards life and death, infers that there are three main structural elements. 1) World after death. 2) Fear and anxiety regarding death. 3) Death as emancipation. Tange, (丹下) has tried to investigate the structure of perception towards life and death by classifying words associated with death according to the KJ method³⁵. As a result of this research what is obtained is, firstly concrete types of death, secondly emotional reactions towards death based on culture and belief. The words which are associated with concrete death types are accident, calamity, happening, suicide etc which are external causes of death. This reflects that rather than focusing on the internal causes of death more weight age is given to these external causes which is given a lot of media hype too. Further regarding the emotional reaction towards death despite the fact that most of the reactions are negative, presence of some percentage of positive attitudes too cannot be denied and this according to Tange should be encouraged.

Then there is a study which attempts to clarify the structure of perception towards life and death of a particular generation. For instance in 1996, Kawa I. carried out research on finding out the old people's attitude towards death and found out that compared to various other countries, the elderly in Japan are more scared or anxious about death. Rather than death itself, they are more anxious about the pain caused at the time of death. Further, he also investigated that rather than assessing the world after death positively, they have a tendency of accepting death as an avoidance of this world.

Similarly, Tange (1999, 2004) and Nakamura (1994) carried out independent researches on the attitudes of children and adolescents towards life and death. Nakamura interviewed about 205 children of the age group 3-13, both boys and girls. The conclusions he reached by their responses were, that the children in their infancy are indifferent towards life and death, they are not even aware of the difference between reality and fiction. Then in their early childhood, i.e. toddler stage they start understanding the universality and irreversibility of death and they start fantasizing and imagining about life after death. As they keep growing older, their ideas about the concept of rebirth increase and become conspicuous. Tange, on the other hand carried out most of his research on adolescents in their early and late stages. According to his findings in the middle and late adolescence there is a change in the attitude towards life and death, as along with a positivity towards death there develops a certain amount of negativity towards life. This according to Tange is a characteristic of adolescence, which during later stages of adulthood reaches its final stage when attitude towards both life and death becomes positive.

Further, there is a research which investigates the perception towards life and death of a particular group of people. Most commonly studied group is nurses and nursing students, medical and Para-medical professionals. Most of these studies reveal that in spite of being exposed to death and sufferings all the time these professionals too are not immune to it and think quite emotionally about death, after-life and rebirth issues. (Watanabe, 2001; Shinmi, 2002; Ōyama, 2003)

Finally there has been research work which deals with the relation between perception of life and death and other psychological elements. Takui (2001) tried to analyze the perception of life and death of contemporary Japan by finding out a relationship between modern man's image of death as received by mass media and the historical change of Japanese society and social structure. Similarly

Nakamura (2001) positioned people's perception of life and death as a factor influencing their psychological sense of well-being and investigated what kind of influence it has on one's way of life. As a result he found out that denial of religious acts is a factor which keeps a person away from a life style which is colorful, cooperative and full of effort. And having a positive image of life as well as death increases one's consciousness of well-being.

While carrying out research on psychology related to death and perception towards life and death, for grasping its structure (formation) furthermore for grasping various factors which influence its changes and procedures, till now a large number of criteria (yardstick) have been created. As a criteria used for measuring death psychology, firstly Templar's DAS (1970) which focuses on emotions, and secondly, Wong's Death Attitude Profile- revised (DAP-R) which deals not only with emotions but also with acceptance (activities or acknowledgement) of death, are being used all over the world and are now also being used in Japan.

Templar's DAS is a criterion which is used to measure fear or anxiety of death and it can be said that it focuses on the negative aspects of the psychology. If we talk about the Wong's DAP-R, it does not only have a single aspect of fear or anxiety of death, but has specific characteristics of grasping from four aspects- 1) Approach oriented death acceptance. 2) Fear of death. 3) Escape oriented death acceptance. 4) Neutral death acceptance. But one cannot deny the fact that provisions in such aspects like death acceptance are restricted within a particular religious backdrop (e.g. Christianity). Thus as a criteria for measuring the death psychology of Japanese people, it might seem a bit biased. To overcome this problem there are methods like DAS, DAP which have been specifically revised for usage by Japanese. Another criterion which tries to grasp the multi-dimensionality of the perception towards life and death peculiar to Japan is Tange's criteria. Besides this there were also criteria formed by Hirai and Sakaguchi (2000), Fujimoto and Honda (2003).

If we make a general view of the existing criteria, we can say that the movement of viewing death in a multi-faceted way continued. Even if we consider from the education point of view, not only heeding to the negative feelings regarding death like fear and anxiety, it is also necessary to grasp the multi-faceted dimension of the psychology regarding death and it is natural to see such kind of change in the criteria.

Besides the two points regarding life and death studies mentioned above, i.e. the structural aspect, and the criteria for measuring perception of life and death, one more aspect which was considered to be very essential at this point of time was nurturing of the perception towards life and death. For this it was considered that one has to pay a lot of attention as to what kind of education is provided to the children so that they nurture their own perception towards life and death, which makes them think about living and dying, about how to live to ones best till the end, as all of us have to face death one day.

Following this awareness of the importance of life and death studies, in Japan since 1980 starting with medical and nursing science, religion studies etc, death education too is being imparted. But in recent years death education is not only a part of life long education or adult education, some educationists are also trying to experiment with starting such education at the school level also. Till 1980s firstly, people of only a limited group- old or terminally ill people, people concerned with the medical profession like nurses and doctors- were considered to be the main objects of such life and death studies. Secondly only the negative aspects of death were focused upon. But then scholars like Deekan asserted upon the necessity of grasping the multi-faceted aspect of death. Thus in the recent years not only the nomenclature has been changed with the word, 'life' being added to it, but also it is

being imparted with positivity.

Conclusion

Death which is the ultimate truth of all living beings has been perceived differently in different periods of time, by different populations in different parts of the world. There have been various factors which affects the perceptions towards life and death. If in the past religion and traditional rituals were the main factors which influenced people's perceptions, with the modernization and scientific advancement on the one hand the influence of religion became lesser but at the same time science too has attributed to the development of life and death studies.

Whether it was the ancient and medieval ages when people were greatly influenced by religious and traditional values or in the contemporary period when it is science and technology which reigns over the reasoning powers of an individual, it can be said that as far as perceptions towards life and death are concerned, there are three main perceptions towards death. The first perception holds that death is the ultimate end when there is complete annihilation of the being. This thinking is in conformation with the ancient Japanese religion-*Shintō* thought. The believers of this perception consider this world to be the only world and this life to be the only truth; they feel that there is nothing beyond death.

As an anti thesis of this belief is the perception that there is life beyond death too. This belief can be further classified into two, first one is the existence of afterlife in the form of another world where people go after death and the second is the belief of reincarnation according to which at the time of death it is only the body which dies, the consciousness which can be called the soul or the spirit continues to live and takes birth again in this world. If we talk about the religions which support these beliefs Christianity believes in the former and Hinduism and Buddhism in the latter.

Another factor regarding the perceptions towards life and death is the acceptability of the truth of death. How naturally and with ease an individual accepts the death- of oneself and others. The readiness with which we accept death depends upon how subjectively or objectively we look at the concept. Death of a stranger is quite easily acceptable, whereas death of an acquaintance is accepted with difficulty; more intimate the relation more difficult is the acceptance. Finally when one thinks of one's own death, even though we know about the inevitability of the fact, it seems to be a remote possibility, unless one terminally ill or very old.

Further, there are a number of emotions related to death. When one is facing death, whether it is one's own death or death of one's close relative, he can feel such emotions as fear, anxiety, sorrow, loneliness and others. How one is able manage all these emotions determine whether his attitude towards death is positive or negative. Till the medieval period it was the religion and traditional rituals which helped man face death and console him in his bereavement. In the contemporary world, when man is moving away from religion it is the endeavor of the life and death studies to help man tackle such problems.

When we specifically talk about Japan, both the dominant religions, *Shintō* and Buddhism have been instrumental towards influencing the perception towards life and death. Further there have also been a few traditional rituals and customs which affected people's perspectives. But it can be said that without any one dominant ideology towards this aspect, the Japanese do not have a very rigid or fixed idea about how they see life after death. Particularly in the present age when major part of the population comes under non believers, religion does not play a major role in these perceptions. It can be said that dominant factor affecting the perception towards life and death of the Japanese is modern

science and technology on the one hand and western influence on the other.

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