

## Jaina Aspect of Voluntary Death

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### Abstract-

*The practice of euthanasia is not new, and there has been intellectual discussion about it for a very long time. Euthanasia was a common practice in Greek and Roman antiquity, although its nature and methods differed from those of today. In Indian tradition, voluntary death is nearly the same as euthanasia in Western culture. Voluntary death was highly valued in spiritual practice. In Jainism, there are various forms of voluntary death, some of which are highly esteemed. The Jaina Canon's ascetic act of starving was a ritualized, voluntary death. This kind of death was practiced by the Tirthankaras. With specific reference to Jainism, the article seeks to investigate the connection between voluntary dying and euthanasia.*

### Main Discussion

The word "euthanasia" is derived from the Greek words "eu" and "thanatos." *Eu* denotes simplicity and ease, while *thanatos* represents death. Thus, in that sense, the word refers to a straightforward and compassionate demise. Euthanasia is considered a peaceful and simple end to life when it is performed by a doctor with the patient's approval or disapproval. It is meant for people with conditions that are either intolerable or incurable from a medical or psychological standpoint. In Western thought, euthanasia was seen as a disgusting, wicked, and sinful practice. In a process known as the Hippocratic Oath, the physician Hippocrates opposed euthanasia in the fifth century B.C. Hippocrates says, "I will not give a drug that is deadly to any one if asked (for it), nor will I suggest the way to such a counsel."<sup>1</sup>

Euthanasia was common in various Western societies. Under the pretense of euthanasia, the state killed sick and deformed people in ancient Greece and Rome. Zeno, the ancient Greek philosopher, discovered a means to end his life by getting rid of

excruciating agony in his leg. “.....the stoic founder, Zeno, committed suicide in his old age prompted the agonizing pain of a foot injury.”<sup>2</sup>

Euthanasia was firmly defended by stoic philosophers like Socrates and Plato. Hitler, the German Chancellor, undermined the Second World War in the name of euthanasia. Nonetheless, it is currently permitted by law in a few nations, including Australia, Belgium, and the Netherlands.

We may quickly summarize the definition of euthanasia and its use in the West based on the debate above. Let's now discuss how the term "euthanasia" is used in India. We ought to make an effort to ascertain whether euthanasia, or a homogenous form of it, was ever common in the ancient Indian tradition. Although the term "euthanasia" is not directly used in Indian culture, references to euthanasia or other forms of death and their application can be found. This type of death is documented as self-inflicted. Therefore, we ought to attempt to place the term "euthanasia" inside the framework of Indian ideology.

Let's now discuss the connection between voluntary dying and the term "euthanasia." The argument in favor of euthanasia extends beyond the issue of voluntary death. Euthanasia can be carried out either with the patient's agreement or against their will, however when it comes to voluntary death, the patient's will usually comes first.

In Indian terms, we see several aspects of voluntary death, including *Atmaghata* or *Atmahatya* (death by suicide), *Sahamarana* or *Sahagamana* or *Anvarohana* (the burning of a widow on the death of her husband), *Virgati* (heroic death at war), *Ichhamrtya* or *Ichchamarana* (death at will), *Mahaprasthan* (embracing death through final journey), *Prayopavesa* (death by solemn fast), *Samadhimarana* (death while in meditation or in a yogic posture), *Sallekhana* (death through wilfull fasting).

A brief overview of Indian ideas and culture can be found in the numerous facets of death outlined above. In that sense, we ought to unite our community, particularly for the sake of Jainism. Let's discuss the many techniques used in Jainism for voluntary death.

In Jainism, there are several types of voluntary death. Nonviolence is the cornerstone of Jainism. There is no place for animosity or causing sorrow. The renowned Jain messenger *Mahavira* starved himself to death while in a state of meditation. This type of death is referred to as *sallekhana* in Jainism. *Sallekhana* is a commendable (*satyric*) procedure that emasculates the body. The act of removing the body in order to maintain the soul is another explanation for *sallekhana-tapah*, or the askesis that results in the preservation of the body. *Dravya-sallekhana* (external cleansing process of repentance) and *abhyantra-sallekhana* (interior cleansing process of repentance) are two names for the *sallekhana* ritual, which involves flagellating the body to achieve control over emotions and passions. Travel, worship, service, scripture study, meditation, and other practices comprise the internal austerity known as *bhava-sallekhana*, which cleanses the soul of rage and desire, hatred and passion, fear and sorrow.<sup>3</sup>

*Sallekhana* deaths occur in *Ratna-Karandaka-Sravakacara* and *Acarang*. It states that a wise man becomes conscious of his final breath. Additionally, *sallekhana* is accepted by religious rite by a person who is aging or has a painful ailment. In order to uphold the

discipline of the faith, *Sallaekhana* is advised in *Ratna-Karandaka-Sravakar* when confronted with an impending disaster, a severe drought, old age, or an incurable sickness.<sup>4</sup>

In *Acaranga*, we find, “when the courageous self-disciplined and wise monks come to know that the right time for undertaking the fast unto death (*anasana*) known as *anupurvi vimoksa* or *avyaghata marana*, which is the last stage of uninterrupted process of *sadhana* (i.e. ascetic practices), has come, they should acquaint themselves with the code of the three types of *anasana* viz. *Bhakta-pratyakhyana*, *imgini marana* and *prayopagamana* which are quite different from *balamarana*.”<sup>5</sup> Four types of death are described in the *Acaranga*. *Bhaktapratyakhyana* (the monk lies on a bed of straw, abstains from food and drink, and waits for death even without moving his limbs); *Ingitamarana* (the monk lies on a bare piece of ground and abstains from food and drink, although he can move according to the *gupti* and *samiti* rules); *Padopagamana* (the monk stands motionless like a tree until death comes); and *Sallekhana* (a planned scheme of fasting and mortification, with a minimum of six months and a maximum of twelve years).<sup>6</sup>

In Jainism, death by fasting is therefore highly valued. However, not everyone is permitted to do so. This is only permitted for ascetics who have attained the pinnacle of perfection. It basically entails giving up begging and lying down in a suitable location to wait for death by thirst and famine, or *sallekhana*.<sup>7</sup> This type of death was practiced by *Tirthankaras*, *Parsa*, *Aristanemi*, Monk *Khandaga*, and layman *Ambada*.

Despite being accepted as a willful death, *sallekhana* has several restrictions on its application. The *sallekhana* can be accepted by *sangha* members who are able to fast for death in a disciplined manner through meditation. In this way, *sallekhana* is one kind of voluntary death that the general public also accepts. However, a person's crippling sickness cannot be cured by this Jaina *sallekhana*. Therefore, there is no doubt about using drugs or getting help from someone else to expedite death.

*Mulachala*, on the other hand, describes three different kinds of death: *Pandita Marana* (the death of the enlightened based on correct knowledge), *Bala Marana* (the death of the ignorant or the pointless process of facing death), and *Bala Pandita Marana* (the death of a disciple or worldly householder who could not abandon his earthly duties even in the last moments of this life).<sup>8</sup>

Jainism classified voluntary death into distinct methods – (1) *Sallekhanā*— The practice of self-willed death or voluntary death by self-starvation (*sallekhanā*) as a way to eliminate the residual consequences of previous karma once an individual is ascetically purified was originally accepted and legitimized by the Jains. The Jaina writings emphasize that while *sallekhanā* must be voluntary, not everyone can participate and that there are particular precautions to avoid misuse. Only those who have joined the monastery (*saṅgha*) and spent years fasting and meditating are allowed to execute the last fast until death. *Sallekhanā*'s effectiveness is destroyed by five factors: the desire to live longer, the desire to die in order to prevent pain, the longing for friends, memories of former bliss, and the hope for happiness in the next life.<sup>9</sup> (2) *Sānthārā*; the death bed -- the proper arrangement and setting in which the practitioner dies. (3) *Samādhimarāṇa*— The methods used to pass away while remaining calm.<sup>10</sup> The first of these three requires particular attention because it is a reality in the lives of ordinary people. The Jainas believe that one should prepare for

samādhi far in advance of being initiated into the vow of Samādhimaraṇa (self-mortification-unto-death). The principles of Gōikṣāvratas make this mental and physical training accessible to both laypeople and monks.<sup>11</sup> 4) *Nisidhi -Maraṇa* (Right Postures and Death)— This phrase refers to the location and stance that the self-mortifying monk chooses. According to the Bhagavatī Ārādhana, nisīhiya refers to the funeral site, which is often situated outside the community, where the humiliated person's body is disposed of.<sup>12</sup> 5) *Sanyasana-Maraṇa*—“*Sanyasana* means renunciation of worldly commitments and attachments. A ritual-guided death without such detachment is bound to be defective. In its simplest form, it is a state of houselessness, an outcome of *Pāvvaṃjā*, or a departure from a householder’s life to the state of homelessness (*agārāo aṇagariyaṃ*).”<sup>13</sup> 6) *Pippāṇasa-Maraṇa* or *Viprāṇasa-Maraṇa*— The death that results from this procedure is called *Viprāna* because the aspirant gradually controls and ultimately stops breathing (*prāna*). The Agmas advise individuals who find it to maintain their spiritual life to do this.<sup>14</sup> “Famines, oppressive conditions caused by wicked rulers, loneliness, isolation, being lost in the woods, or being faced with a threat to one’s *cāritra*, or being subjected to extreme pain and frustration, or conditions which preclude one from finding a solution to such problems, may lead the pious to cut off his breath.”<sup>15</sup> 7) *Grddhapraṣṭha-Maraṇa*— *Viprāṇasa-maraṇa* is referred to as *gīddhapraṣṭha-maraṇa* if it is achieved via physical harm. *Praṣṭha* denotes the back or hind part, while *Gāddha* signifies vulture. A bird with a sharp beak or lethal weapons could cause the fatal injury. Either way, it’s an unnatural death caused by a sharp weapon or a bird.<sup>16</sup> 8) *Prāyopagamana-maraṇa* (fasting unto deathdenying even self-help)— Even *Imṅini-muraṇa* is inferior to the (*prāyopagamaṇa*) *anasaṇa*. When a monk embraces it, his entire body may stiffen, but he does not alter his position in the slightest.<sup>17</sup> This is the highest kind of Dharma. The norms of conduct outlined in the context of *Imṅinī Maraṇa* and *Bhaktapratyākhyāṇa* are also included. It is typified by complete immobility.<sup>18</sup> 8) *Imṅinī-maraṇa* is fasting unto death with only self-help— “This (*Imṅinī-muraṇa* fast) is of a higher order (than *bhakta-pratyākhyāṇa*). Only the very learned (who have the knowledge of at least nine *pūrvas*) and self-disciplined monks embrace it.”<sup>19</sup> The code of *Imṅinī Maraṇa* fast is different from that of *Bhaktapratyākhyāṇa*, according to Bhagavān Mahāvira (Nātaputta). 9) *Bhaktapratyākhyāṇa- Maraṇa* denotes the practice of voluntarily abstaining from food until death occurs, all while being provided with total support and supervision from caregivers. Śivakotyācārya identifies two different kinds of *bhaktapartyākhyāṇa-death*: (a) *savicāra-bhaktapratyākhyāṇa*, representing the dying experience of a robust, thoughtful, and dedicated individual who approaches death in the context of standard religious practices; and (b) *avicāra-bhaktapratyākhyāṇa*— A spiritually and physically weak individual, revered for their holiness, passed away unexpectedly and without any prior indication, in somewhat peculiar conditions.<sup>20</sup> 10) *Paṇḍita-maraṇa* (death with wisdom)—the one that is executed with deliberate deliberation.<sup>21</sup> *Paṇḍita-marantha*, which translates to noble death, refers to the passing of an enlightened being that occurs through proper comprehension.<sup>22</sup> The passing of an individual who has achieved the state of complete *cāritra* and has given up all earthly attachments is referred to as *paṇhitra-maratha*. Prior to death, one engages in ritual practices including physical cleansing through fasting and spiritual cleansing through

meditation and devotion. 11) *Bāla-maraṇa* (foolish death)— A suicide driven by illogical desires. Bajla-maraṇa is the death of the ignorant or the stupid way of facing death.<sup>23</sup> 12) *Kevali-Maraṇa*— The Omniscient's death.

Taking the vow of Sallekhanā requires the certainty of impending death. Ācārya Samantabhadra, suffering from an incurable disease, sought permission from his guru for the vow. However, the guru, recognizing that the Ācārya still had significant contributions to make to Jaina philosophy, refused, indicating that an accurate assessment of life expectancy is crucial before altering fasting practices.<sup>24</sup>

Sāgāra Dharmāmtāta of Āśādhara highlights the necessity of protecting the body to support Right Faith, Right Knowledge, and Right Conduct. The body is temporary, but sacrificing one's religion for it results in the loss of spiritual purity. In the face of impending death from natural causes or calamities, it is acceptable to undertake vows of fasting and meditation as part of religious practice.<sup>25</sup>

One of Sāgāra Dharmāmtāt's verses is vehemently opposed to “He who becomes indifferent to his own body owing to his disability to keep up his vow will not be committing suicide; but who puts an end to his life, when he is in the grip of passion like anger etc., by means of poison and other things will be guilty of suicide.(Na cātmadhātoasti vṛṣakṣatau vapurupekṣituḥ/Kaṣāyāvaiśataḥ prāṇān viśāddhairhisataḥ sa hi—*Sāgāra-Dharmaāmṛta*, Canto-VIII, Verse-8)”<sup>26</sup> Puruṣārtha-Siddhyupāya opposes the idea that “He who puts an end to his life by suffocating himself in water or by fire, poison or weapons, being actuated by passions, is certainly guilty of suicide.(Yohikaṣāyāviṣṭaḥkumbhajaladhūmaketuviśaśastraiḥ/vyaparopayat i prāṇān tasya syātsma ātmavadhaḥ— Puruṣārtha-Siddhyupāya, Vol-IV)”<sup>27</sup>

The debate above makes it evident that Jainism approved of voluntary death or self-sacrificing death. The most crucial thing to keep in mind, though, is that only those who reached extreme ascetic strength and lived life to the utmost were permitted to end their own lives voluntarily. This right was typically denied to others who lacked the necessary attributes. Despite being in excellent condition, a monk in Ahmedabad starved himself to death in 1912 following a forty-one-day fast. A Rajkot nun who had earlier been weakened by abstinence passed away in two or three days in 1913.<sup>28</sup> These days, voluntary suicide and similar behaviors are virtually nonexistent.

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