

SALLEKHANA and SANTHARA OR SAMADHIMARANA

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Abstract

Birth and death are realities of life. Death is inevitable and should be accepted as a truth and a necessary event in the life of a living being. *Sallekhana* and *santhara* or *samadhimaran* is way of peaceful death and is a part of Jaina code of conduct which advocates for wise decision, and not ignorance, in embracing the death. According to Bhagwan Mahaveera a wise death reduces the karmic load of *jiva* brightening his future.

Jain canonical literature describes the purpose, practice and procedure of *sallekhana* and *santhara* in great detail. Many *acharyas* have written on this subject; the details vary from one author to another but the core message is common. We do not survey the writings of different *acharyas* in this paper but broadly focus on the main theme of the subject as described in two major traditions, Svetambara and Digambara. We first describe various kinds of deaths and then the major points of views on *sallekhana* and *santhara* in *Ardhamagadhi* and *Saurseni* canonical works which are the languages largely used by Svetambara and Digambara traditions respectively. Besides this, some texts are also available in Sanskrit. We also briefly describe the concepts of *samadhimaram* in Hindu tradition and views on death in other religions. A case study of *sallekhana* and *santhara* is given as an example.

Euthanasia and suicide are other ways of death and these have received considerable attention in the present times particularly in the West. We compare the concepts of *sallekhana* and *santhara* with these two methods of death and show that *sallekhana* and *santhara* is quite different from euthanasia and suicide, the former reduces the karmic load whereas the later increases it. Lastly we review the legal aspect of the practice of *sallekhana* and *santhara* in the light of Indian Constitution, which provides freedom of religious practices to the followers of different religions.

Keywords: Sallekhana, Santhara, Samadhimaran, Euthanasia, Suicide.

1.0 Introduction

The eternal truth about life and death is that one who is born dies too. Death though inevitable, evokes highly diverse reactions amongst different sets of people. *Sallekhana* (Weakening physically while remaining active mentally and spiritually),

Santhara (Death bed) or *Samadhimarana* (Transcendental death) can be termed as voluntary peaceful death, enjoys an important and prestigious place in the hierarchy of Jaina code of conduct. The most remarkable feature of *Samadhimarana* is that it is voluntary and in this practice the aspirant practitioner becomes the master of his own destiny and feels that he rules over death. While in involuntary death, which visits everyone that takes birth, the death rules over the dying person, who invariably suffers from fear and pangs of death. One is death of the wise (*Pandita marana*), while the other is the death of the ignorant, foolish sufferer (*Bala marana*). One who is afraid of death becomes a victim of death while the unafraid one proceeds towards immortality. This was, in nut shell, the message of Bhagawan Mahaveera to his followers on the matter of death, and he encouraged them to become detached from their bodies and embrace death when it visited them, as it does to everyone everywhere, every time.

Shrimad Bhagvadgita says, - "The ones that are born certainly die, and the ones that die are certainly re-born" [1]. Though death is such a natural phenomenon for every creature, no one takes it so naturally.

It has been the endeavour of all the great and noble saints and prophets down the ages to find a way to free the living being in general and the humanity in particular from this pain, sorrow and misery of death. The very fear of death is enough to make any living being, however strong, feel miserable when death approaches him at the end of his life.

The Jaina Preceptors have thought of a unique way of overcoming this fear and, thereby, to overcome the attendant misery. They have made this inevitable event welcome by developing a state of mental equanimity at the time of death and actually approaching death voluntarily in such a state of equanimity. Thereby they have been able to associate voluntary death in a state of mental equanimity with shedding of Karma-matter associated with the soul and thus, projecting it as a means to achieve spiritual emancipation and final deliverance. This concept is unique to the Jaina creed and is popularly known as *Samadhimarana* or Peaceful death.

2.0 Jaina Canonical Literature and *Samadhimarana*

The Jaina faith is rooted in right conduct (*samayka charitra* or *vinaya*). Great emphases is laid on the observance of right conduct by its followers-ordained ascetics (*sramanas*, male ascetics, and *sramanis*, female ascetics) or lay followers (*sravakas*, male followers, and *sravikas*, female followers). As the faith ultimately aims at the attainment of spiritual emancipation and final liberation, the Jaina ethics prescribes a way to attain freedom from the worldly bondage and accomplish liberation. To this end it lays down a liberating path (*moksa-marga*) comprising the

right vision (*samyaka darshana*), right knowledge (*samyaka jnana* or *gyana*) and right - conduct (*samyaka charitra*) [2].

The concept of *samadhimarana* is an outcome of a serious thought given by seers (prophets) and thinkers, down the ages, to the matter of life and death. They concluded that everyone loves life and fears death. Everyone wants to live and none wants to die. After centuries of deep and profound thought they concluded that the fear of death could be overcome only if one accepted its inevitability and faced it squarely.

Spiritually speaking, when the body becomes so weak, due either to extreme old age or incurable disease, that it can no longer perform the duties expected of it, it becomes a burden. Then, there comes a time when the enlightened aspirant must realize that it is best for him to accept death as a natural corollary to life rather than to hang on to the slender thread of life. It is then that an enlightened aspirant meets death at its face value and gives up life support systems such as food, treatment etc., waits for death rather than death stalking him. It is then that he adopts a disposition of equanimity and does not get perturbed by the imminent death. Actually, he prepares for this inevitable happening even during his life time so that he is not caught unawares when the event arrives. This preparation is called *sallekhana* and embracing the death voluntarily in a state of peace and equanimity of mind is *santhara* or *samadhimarana*.

2.1 Various kinds of deaths

The Jaina canonical literature divides death in two main categories (i) The voluntary death (*sakaam marana*) and. (ii) In-voluntary death (*akaam marana*) as well as (a) Ignorant death (*bala-marana*) and (b) Enlightened death (*pandita-marana*).

Vyakhyaprajnapati Sutra [3] describes 12 types of ignorant death and two types of the enlightened deaths. Samavayanga Sutra [4] mentions ten types of ignorant and six of the latter and one of the mixed types of death. They are as under:

Vyakhyaprajnapati Sutra :

- (A) Ignorant Death (*Bala-marana*)
 - (1) *Valaya marana* (Death of hunger or due to effects of vows taken)
 - (2) *Vasarta marna* (Death due to over enjoyment)
 - (3) *Attosalla marana*
 - (4) *Tadbhav marana* (Death in current life)

Samavayanga Sutra :

- (A) Ignorant Death (*Bala-marana*)
 - (1) *Avici marana* (Continuous death)
 - (2) *Avadhi marana* (Successively similar death)
 - (3) *Atyantika marana* (Death such that the jiiva is not reborn in the same class)
 - (4) *Valaya marana*

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| (5) <i>Giripadan amarana</i> (Death by falling off cliff) | (5) <i>Vasarta marana</i> |
| (6) <i>Tarupadana marana</i> | (6) <i>Antahshlyya marana</i> (Death by arms or by shame of misdeeds) |
| (7) <i>Jalappavesa marana</i> (Death by drowning) | (7) <i>Tadbhav marana</i> |
| (8) <i>Jalanappavesa marana</i> | (8) <i>Bala marana</i> (Ignorant death) |
| (9) <i>Visabhakkhana marana</i> | (9) <i>Vaihayasa marana</i> (Death by hanging) |
| (10) <i>Satthovadana marana</i> | (10) <i>Griddhaprista marana</i> (Death by eating away of body by carrion birds) |
| (11) <i>Vehanasa marana</i> | (B) Enlightened Death (<i>Pandita marana</i>) |
| (12) <i>Giddhapitha marana</i> | (11) <i>Pandita marana</i> |
| (B)- Enlightened Death (<i>Pandita marana</i>) | (12) <i>Chadmastha marana</i> (Death in pre-omniscient state) |
| (13) <i>Pavrovagamana marana</i> | (13) <i>Kevali marana</i> (Death in omniscient state) |
| (14) <i>Bhattapacckhana marana</i> | (14) <i>Bhaktpratyakhyana marana.</i> |
| | (15) <i>Ingini-marana</i> |
| | (16) <i>Padapopagamna marana.</i> |
| | (C) Mixed Death (<i>Misra Marana</i>) |
| | (17) <i>Bala-pandita- marana.</i> |

Sallekhana is the preparatory penance, while *smadhimarana* or *santhara* is the practice of voluntary peaceful death. '*Santhara*' is of three types, namely (1) *Bhakta-pratyakhyana marana* (voluntary death by renouncing food for life), (2) *Ingini marana* (Embracing voluntary peaceful death under the conditions of spiritual stability and accepting restrictions of activities, movements and service according to one's capacity) (3) *Padapopagamana-marana* (In this practice the aspirant practitioner gives up all activities and he neither takes care of himself nor does he allow anyone else to serve him).

Voluntary peaceful death in the form of *Bhaktapratyakhyana* and *Ingini marana* can be either with movements or without movements. The Uttaradhyana Vritti [5] terms the former as *Savicara-marana* (with due thought) and the latter as *Avicara-Marana* (without due thought).

Sallekhana and *santhara* (*samadhimarana*) are although, commonly employed synonymously, they differ in finer details. *Sallekhana* is the activity by which body is gradually weakened and passions are reduced. Acharya Pujyapad in his commentary on Tattvarthasutra and Acharya Shruti Sagar emphasize that *sallekhana* is continuing practice aimed at weakening of the body externally and the passions

internally. An open ended *sallekhana* is, actually, a preparatory penance that prepares the aspirant for the final end practice of *santhara* or *smadhimarana*. The very fact that the *sallekhana* that is aimed to end in the death of the aspirant is qualified by the adjective '*maranatiki* (ending in death)' sets it apart from *santhara*, which is essentially a practice, meant to end in death of the practitioner. Here, also, the fixing of specific period for this practice like twelve years, twelve month or twelve fortnights proves that it is an open-ended penance, which is not always meant to end in death.

The Acaranga [6] is categorical in stating that a monk must gradually, reduce his food intake and weaken his body in order to prepare for the end practice of *santhara*. According to Acharya Samantabhadra [7], *Antima Maranantika* or *sallekhana* must be practised in the case of acute afflictions like long famines, extreme old age and incurable disease that cannot be treated or cured. *Santhara* on the other hand, is the end practice that the aspirant undertakes in order to embrace voluntary death that ends in the death of the practitioner. All three types of fasts unto death (*Bhaktapratyayhana*, *Ingni* and *padapopagamana*) belong to this category. One who dies peaceful death devoid of despondent and angered thoughts certainly gains noble human or heavenly rebirth. According to Tattavaarthasutra even the householders are eligible to undertake this practice of voluntary peaceful death.

However, some Acharyas such as Umaswami, Samantabhadra and Sivarya [8] do not distinguish between *sallekhana* and *santhara* and take them as synonyms. A detailed survey of the practice of *sallekhana* and *santhara* in Jaina canonical literature has been made by D.S. Baya [9]. Here we focus on the main theme of this subject as described in Ardhmagadhi and Saurseni works, largely used by Svetambara and Digambara traditions respectively.

3.0 *Sallekhana* and *Santhara* Practices in Ardhmagadhi Canonical Works

3.1 *Sallekhana*

(A) The Acaranga mentions twelve years long *sallekhana* with different regimens for the period of first four years, the next four years, the next two years, the first and second half of eleventh year and the twelfth year. These are as follows:-

- a) Observance of fasts of different durations in the first four years,
- b) Fasts of different durations coupled with giving up of nutritious foods during the next four year.
- c) Fasting on alternate days for the next two years and breaking the fasts with the observance of *acamla*-penance in which only one meal devoid of all taste and that too of little nutrition.

- d) Observance of fasts of one or two days at a time during the first six months of eleventh year.
- e) Observing the fasts of longer durations during the second half of eleventh year and breaking the fast with *acamla* penance coupled with reduced diet penance.
- f) Observing continuous *acamla* penance during twelfth year and gradually reducing the food intake so that by the end of the year the practitioner takes only a grain of food and a drop of water.

(B) According to Uttaradhyana Sutra [10] the longest *sallekhana* is of twelve years, the medium one is of twelve months, and the shortest *sallekhana* is of twelve fortnights (six months) duration. The details of 12 years *sallekhana* are as under:-

- a) The aspirants undertaking the longest *sallekhana* of 12 years, must practise fasts of varying duration, give up all highly nourishing foods like milk, curd, ghee (clarified butter), sweets, etc., and practice various kinds of external and internal penance for first four years.
- b) He must undertake various kinds of penance of fasting for one, two, three days duration at a time for the next four years.
- c) Then, for the next two years, he must practice the penance of fasts on the alternate days and eat only one meal devoid of taste and high nourishment (*acamla*)
- d) In the first half of the eleventh year he must not take any severe penance. However, the fasts are broken by observing *acamla* coupled with reduced diet penance.
- e) For the next six month of eleventh year he must undertake severe penance and open up his fast by taking only one dry, tasteless meal (*acamla*).
- f) Then, again, for the twelfth year the aspirant must practice *acamla* continuously and, finally, undertake fast of the duration of a fortnight or a month.

(C) The Prakirnakas (Maransamadhi) [11] mention 2 kinds of *sallekhana* the external and internal penances for weakening of the body and the passions. For weakening the passions, however, it mentions that the practice of forgiveness for overcoming anger, humility for overcoming pride, simplicity and straight forwardness for overcoming deceit and contentment for wining over the greed.

(D) Vyavahara bhasya [12] also states these three categories, long, medium and short term, of *sallekhana* practice. Accordingly in twelfth year the aspirant must

gradually reduce his meals (food and water) intake in such a way that at the end of the year taking only a grain of food and drop of water. Thus we see that at the end of twelfth year *sallekhana* the aspirant is ready to undertake vow of voluntary peaceful death by one of three ways.

3.2 Santhara - Samadhimarana

Santhara is practised after the preparatory practice of *sallekhana*. Pravacana-saroddhara [13] mentions that after 12 years long preparatory penance *sallekhana* - one must retire to the mountain recess; hill or cave and finding a flawless place undertake one of the three forms of *smadhimarana*. The *santhara* or the vow of giving up food and water while ascending the bed of grass is of two type (i) emergent (conditional) *santhara* (ii) unconditional *santhara*. Emergent *santhara* can be of two types temporary or permanent, depending upon the gravity of the circumstances. Unconditional *santhara* the aspirant takes the vows of death, of his own volition, and his vow ends in his death only [14].

The temporary conditional *santhara* is accepted by the faithful follower either in an emergent circumstance endangering his life or daily while retiring to bed in order to safeguard his spiritual interest in case something untoward happens during the sleep or at night. He observes *kayotsarga* (transcending the body sense) of four *logassa* (a spiritual mantra) and then reciting the text - "If I come to any fatal harm such as being bitten by a snake, burning in a fire, drowning in a flood, fatal attack by an enemy, or death due to the thread of life coming to an end, or in case of my death due to any other un-foreseen circumstance, I renounce the attachment towards my body, give up eighteen sinful activities, four types of foods and accept the vow of peaceful death. However, if I rise unharmed, I shall be free to resume my normal life of present.

On coming out unscathed from the danger or on rising from sleep unharmed the practitioner of temporary conditional *santhara*, once again observes a *kayotsarga* of four *logassa* and then recites the text - "I have, to the best of my ability and intention, observed the vow of conditional *santhara* properly. If any flaws in the observance have occurred or not touching the spirit of the vow and in not acting according to the provisions of this observance, as laid down by the Lords Jina, may my misdeeds become false and fruitless [15]." This in nutshell is the procedure for the observance of temporary and conditional *santhara*.

In Permanent unconditional *santhara* the spiritual aspirant practitioner who can interpret the signs of death after predictable period of time also undertakes *santhara* by one of the three ways of *Bhaktapratyakhyana*, *Ingni* or *Padapopagamana*, depending on the rigour with which he wishes to practice it.

3.3 Procedure for Santhara or Samadhimarana

According to the Ardhmagadhi canonical works the procedure for this end practice of voluntary peaceful death is as follows [16]:

- a) First of all the practitioner must forsake all attachment towards all the relatives and near and dear ones and seek their forgiveness while he, too, must forgive them with a clear heart.
- b) Then he must criticise and repent for all his done, got done and approved sinful acts, accept the five great vows (in case of a house-holder) aspirants till the end of his life, he must overcome his grief fear, sorrowing depressed state of mind, foulness of disposition and ineptitude that cause timidity and pain and whole heartedly engage himself in the forthcoming practice and devote his time in scriptural pursuits only.
- c) Then the practitioner must spread his bed of grass in a well-swept place that is free from micro-life infestation.
- d) Then he must sit facing east or north and say "O' Lord! Now I gladly and willingly accept irrevocable vow of fasting unto death".
- e) Then he must recite the *Namaskar Mahamantra* thrice.
- f) Then he must bow to the Lord and his Guru, recite the "*Icchakarenam*" (a spiritual mantra) text, the '*Tassauttari Karanenam*' (a spiritual mantra) text and the *Logassa* text, in this order.
- g) Then he must declare in the name of Lord Tirthankara as to whether he is accepting temporary conditional *santhara* or the permanent unconditional one.
- h) He must then renounce all four types of foods according to his intended practice.
- i) He must renounce all eighteen types of sinful activities of his body, mind and speech.
- j) He must transcend the attachment towards his body which he has protected so far against various diseases, hardships and afflictions and adopt a detached disposition. To this end he declares, "This body that has been desired by me, that was dear to me, that was pleasurable for me, that was attractive, that was stable, that was reliable, that was respectable, that was desirable, that was considered good by me in spite of its flaws, that was protected by me like the jewellery box, that was treated like the chest of gems, that was taken care of so that it was not exposed to cold, heat, hunger, thirst, insect bite, theft and even the mosquito bites, that it might not suffer

the maladies of gout, bile and cough sputum, delirium as well as inconvenience due to various hardships and afflictions, I now renounce any attachment towards it and go about my practice without desiring an early death.

Thus, it is clear from this discussion that though usually the end-practice of *santhara* or *smadhimarana* is to be undertaken after the preparatory penance of *sallekhana*, in emergent case when the death become imminent due to some reason it could be undertaken directly, without undertaking such rigorous preparatory penance of *sallekhana*.

3.4 Desirable mental disposition for *Sallekhana* and *Santhara*

An aspirant practitioner who has set himself out on the path of *sallekhana* and *smadhimarana* must deliberately develop a psychic disposition that may steadfastly keep him on the path even when the pangs of hunger and death torment him. The following lines of thought help him in cultivating such a mental and psychic disposition [17]:

- a) The soul is all powerful and capable of liberation.
- b) The all powerful soul must not fear the death of the perishable and decaying body that houses many a disease and worms.
- c) 'O' learned soul! Why do you fear death? It is a way to gain a new body by which to perform all the worldly and spiritual duties afresh.
- d) Death is the means to gain the heavenly pleasures or the external bliss of liberation as a result of lifelong pieties and penance. Then, why should one fear such friendly death.
- e) Without the help of kind death, the soul caught in the miseries of the confinement of the body cannot be released.
- f) Should the living being not rejoice the coming of death, which gives him a new body, full of vitality, instead of his old and decayed one?
- g) It is the soul which feels pleasures and the pain as well as fear. As the soul has nothing to lose by the death of the body, but only to gain. Why, then, should it be afraid of death?
- h) It is only the ignorant souls that are deeply attached to the mundane pleasures, fear death. The enlightened ones, indifferent towards the world do not.

- i) When the soul, king of the body – town, departs on a journey to the world hereafter, the city walls of the town, cannot stop him.
- j) The pains and aches of the decayed and diseased body and the pangs of death only help the learned soul to achieve detachment from the physical being just as a nobleman of cultured origin feels repelled from the squalor of the slums.
- k) The worldly souls are generally fond of new things. Then why do they fear death that gives them a new and useful body for their old and useless one!

Alternatively, the twelve pious contemplations (*Baraha Bhawana*) that help a great deal in maintaining equanimity of mind and intellect in spite of the hardship suffered during this critical practice are (1) The transitory nature of existence (*Anitya Bhawana*). (2) Helplessness against the inevitability of death (*Asarana Bhawana*). (3) The miserable nature of worldly existence (*Samsara Bhawana*). (4) Unitary character of the soul (*Ekatva Bhawana*). (5) The feeling of separation from everything else (*Anyatva Bhawana*). (6) The foulness of the body constituents (*Asuchi Bhawana*). (7) Thinking of the means of continuous inflow of karmic influx (*Asrava Bhawana*). (8) Thinking of the means of stoppage of karmic influx (*Samvara Bhawana*). (9) Thinking of the means of karmic separation (*Nirjara Bhawana*). (10) Thinking of the form and functioning of the universe (*Loka Bhawana*). (11) Thinking of one's own spiritual duties (*Dharma Bhawana*) and (12) Thinking of the rarity of the enlightened (*Bodhi-Bhawana* or *Bodhi-Durlabh Bhawana*).

3.5 Flaws of *Santhara*

Like any other spiritual practice, the practice of voluntary peaceful death (*samadhimarana*) is also fraught with the possibility of certain flaws. More so, because it is the most difficult practice to undertake and also it may last for a considerably long period. The flaws mentioned in Svetambara literature are as under:

- (A)** Upasakadasanga [18] (5 flaws) - (a) *Ihalokasamsa prayoga* (This worldly desire), (b) *Paralokasamsa prayoga* (The other worldly desire) (c) *Jivitasamsa prayoga* (The desire to live on), (d) *Maranasamsa prayoga* (The desire to die quickly), (e) *Kamabhogasamsa prayoga* (The desire for sensory pleasure).
- (B)** Tattvarthsutra (5 flaws) - (a) *Jivitasamsa prayoga* (The desire to live on), (b) *Maranasamsa prayoga* (The desire to die quickly), (c) *Mitranuraga* (Affection for the dear ones), (d) *Sukhanuabandha* (Attachment to the previously enjoyed pleasures), (e) *Nidanakarana* (Making a binding wish)

Four out of the five flaws mentioned by Tattvarthsutra are essentially the same as mentioned in the Upasakadasanga as they refer to the desires that ultimately bind the aspirant to mundane existence. All these flaws must be guarded against so that the aspirant practitioner may attain his goal of spiritual emancipation and liberation unhindered.

3.6 The Results of *Santhara*

It is the noblest form of death. It being the welcome non-violent form of death in a state of equanimity of mind, it results in spiritual purification and depending upon the purity of the soul achieved, it results in a rebirth in higher heaven or spiritual emancipation and final liberation from the mundane existence itself either in the same birth or in a maximum of seven to eight noble rebirths in higher heavens like the *Anuttara vimanas*.

The practice of *sallekhana* and *santhara* was considered to be of such great importance and spiritual benefit that it was dealt with by almost all canonical works. The subject of spirit purifying penance in Ardhamagadhi canonical works covers the subject of *sallekhana* and *santhara* most comprehensively and in all possible details.

4.0 The Concept of *Samadhimarana* in Sauraseni Canonical Works

Sauraseni Prakrit Literature of Digambara tradition deals with the precept and practice of *sallekhana -samadhimarana*, in all its aspects and forms, comprehensively.

The entire development of the concept of *sallekhana- samadhimarana* in Sauraseni Prakrit Literature is based on the following works:-

1. Mulachara by Vattakera [19].
2. Mularadhana or Bhagawati Aradhana by Sivarya, and
3. Gommatasara (Karmakanda) by Acharya Nemichandra Siddhanta-chakravarti, [20],

Beside these Sauraseni prakrit works, the following Sanskrit works also throw significant light on this subject:-

1. Tattvarthsutra by Vacaka Umasvami.
2. Samadhi maranotasava-dipika by Acharya Sakalakirti Gani [21].
3. Sagar Dharmamrita by Pandit Ashadhar [22].
4. Ratnakaranda Sravakacara by Acharya Samantabhadra, and

5. Vasunandi Sravakacara by Acharya Vasunandi [23].

Various flaws of this practice mentioned in both the Jaina traditions are mainly, nine –(1) Desire to enjoy worldly pleasures as a result of this practice, (2) Desire to enjoy heavenly pleasure as a result of this practice, (3) Desire to live on to enjoy the praise and adulation that generally comes the way of aspirant practitioner, (4) Desire to die quickly to end the pain and misery that must accompany the long drawn fasts unto death, (5) Desire to enjoy sensory pleasure as a result of this practice, (6) Affection for the kith and kin, (7) Recalling pleasure enjoyed here and desire to experience them again hereafter, (8) Making a binding wish to be fulfilled as a result of this practice, and (9) Fear of pain and misery during the prolonged fasting unto death. When we examine these flaws carefully, we realize that all of them are actuated by worldly attachment. The fear flaw is the same as the fear of being deprived of pleasure of this life and that of not gaining the worldly or heavenly pleasures in the following birth.

5.0 A Case Study of Sallekhana

Muni Yatindra sagarji (father of the first author) was initiated into monkhood on 11th November, 1967 at the age of 67 at Udaipur under the Digambara Acharya Shivsagarji. After four years at the age of 71 he became very weak due to Parkinsonism and begged his Guru Acharya Dharamsagarji to grant him permission for *Niyam Sallekhana* in May 1971 and requested him to supervise the practice. This was done but due to demise of Acharya Dharamsagarji and the next senior Acharya Shisutsagarji the responsibility of supervision was ultimately carried by Acharya Ajitsagarji and other monks in the *Sangha* (religious order). In the ensuing 12 years period Muni Yatindrasagarji constantly maintained peaceful disposition and devoted his time to spiritual pursuits, contemplation and prayers besides meeting with the visitors, which is a normal practice for all Jain monks.

In the first four years period the *ksapak* Muni kept fast on alternate days. In the next four year period he continuously observed repeated cycles of three days consisting of fasting for two days and taking one meal on the third day, and restricting the type of food to one or two varieties. He gradually exercised restrain on the taste of food by limiting the types of grain intake. In the following two years he observed the cycles of four days, fasting for three days and taking limited amount of tasteless meal on the fourth day. In the eleventh year cycles he took only rice on the fourth day after fasting for three days. In the twelfth year he renounced taking solid diet and took only liquid diet in the form of juice and water on the fourth day after every three days fasting. Finally, at the end of twelfth year in December 1981 he restricted to taking only sips of water and stopped taking even water on 25th December. Then the last rites of this pious practice were started. The *ksapak* Muni confessed before his Niyapaka Acharya Ajitsagarji and other monks for any flaws that were committed during the long practice of *sallekhana*. He forgave all and begged

forgiveness of all and stopped taking even water, and took vow of *Yama Sallekhana, Samadhimaran*.

On 11th January, 1982 the *ksapak* Muni became little restless at about 9 pm and started irregular shallow breathing. At this time the Niyapaka Acharya, other monks and the family members present drew close to him. After 2-3 minutes his respiration became normal and he told the Niyapaka Acharya that his end shall come at 6 am next morning, and so all monks can take rest till then. On 12th January the *ksapak* Muni woke up from sleep at 5.50 am and requested the Niyapaka Acharya to make him sit in padamasana mode for the last prayers. He bowed to his Guru and other monks and aryikas for last Namostu and silently reciting Namokara Mahamantra left the body peacefully and cheerfully. The author and other family members were witness to this peaceful event of death with equanimity and the grand departure.

The mortal remains of the body were carried in decorated palanquins in a ceremonial procession, attended by more than a lac of devotees and citizens who were chanting holy hymns and slogans, and were consigned to flames. This was not an occasion of death but a *Mritu-mahotsava*, a ceremony of soul happily departing for onward journey leaving the mortal body behind.



Muni Yatindra Sagarji on 11th January, 1982

6.0 Other Religious Deaths, Euthanasia and Suicide

Among the voluntary deaths, there are deaths by personal choice under widely varying circumstances and those that are part of religious rituals or practices. Amidst this line of thought, there are quite a few religions that consider voluntary death, embraced under suitable frame of mind, as soul liberating and recommend it to their followers. Euthanasia and suicide are other methods of death. Both these practices may be voluntary or involuntary but they are widely different from the practice of *sallekhana* and *santhara*. We briefly consider these kinds of deaths and compare them with *sallekhana* and *santhara*.

6.1 Other Religious Deaths

Besides Jainism, all other Indian spiritualist religious traditions that believe in existence of soul distinct from the body, also view death as separation of the soul

from the confines of the body and worldly transmigration from one body to the other as painful and endeavour to seek liberation from mundane existence as the goal of their spiritual practices. They, too, hold karma responsible for such worldly misery and aim at freeing the soul from the clutches of karma in some way or the other. Voluntary death being the most arduous and exacting of all spiritual practices, it is considered to be the most soul-purifying and is recommended for the aspirants who seeks an early end to their worldly misery and liberate.

6.1.1 Voluntary death in Hindu Tradition

Hindu Vedic and Brahmin traditions condemn suicide unequivocally, but prescribe voluntary death (Samadhi) in a number of peaceful non-violent manners and not so peaceful and at times quick violent ways too. The methods employed for embracing death are as follows:-

- a) By self immolation (*Agni-pravesha*) by entering fire, with due rituals, the soul liberates from the worldly existence and is not reborn (Tirtha-vivecana Kandam, Matsya Purana, Shiva Purana, Manusmriti etc., uphold this view.).
- b) By drowning in river or ponds (*Jala pravesha*) as in the cases of Lakasmana, and Lord Rama accompanied by Bharat, Satrugna, and subordinates and citizens of Ayodhya, by drowning in holy river. Holy books that support this view of death are Raghuvamsa, Agani purana, Matsya purana, Manusmriti and Gangeya episode mentioned in the Epigraphica Indica (Vol. XII).
- c) By fasting unto death (*Anasana*) as mentioned in Mahabharata, Adi purana etc.
- d) By jumping off mountain top (*Giripatana*, Ibid).
- e) By going to places of pilgrimage and dying there by various means like in case of Kasi Karavat (Matsya purana).
- f) By embracing voluntary death on the banks of holy rivers. According to Tirtha Vivecana Kandam one who embraces voluntary death on the banks of holy rivers: Manadakini (Yamuna) and or Saraswati, goes to heaven and or gets re-birth as a king of Jambudivipa.
- g) By taking poison (*Visha bhaksana*) (Samadhimarana)
- h) By disembowelling the use of weapon (*Shastraghat*)
- i) By proceeding on an irrevocable last Great Journey (Maha-prasthana).
- j) By taking the vow of Prayopavesana, the sacred death (Raghuvamsa).

We see that the Hindu tradition also advocates embracing of voluntary death as a means of seeking spiritual emancipation or noble rebirth. Two of these forms,

namely *Maha prasthana* and *Prayopavesana*, also admit of non-violent means. These two come close to the concept of voluntary peaceful death as enshrined in the Jaina canon.

6.1.2 The Christian Tradition. In accordance with the commandment - Thou shalt not kill, neither thyself nor another", the Christianity forbids suicide or voluntary death of any kind.

6.1.3 The Islamic Tradition. The Holy Koran Says that only Allah is empowered to permit the souls to die and anyone who kills himself flouts the will of Allah. Thus Islam is against any form of voluntary death and forbids them altogether.

6.1.4 The Buddhist philosophy does not approve of voluntary deaths. However, Pali literature of the Buddhists mentions the voluntary deaths of monks and householders who have generally used violent means of embracing death. Under circumstances of incurable diseases and extreme forms of misery Lord Buddha had approved of their voluntary deaths and pronounced their deaths as noble and yielding the ultimate spiritual benefit of nirvana.

It is found that all religious traditions have, in one way or the other approved of voluntary death for the reasons of (1) spiritual emancipation, (2) for defending the faith, (3) for defending one's righteousness, moral values or virtues, and (4) personal, ethical or national honour. It stands to logic that non-violent means of embracing voluntary deaths are more conducive to peace and equanimity of mind at the time of death and are so much the better for this quality.

6.2 Euthanasia

Painless, peaceful and dignified death to the incurably diseased and imminently suffering is what is intended of euthanasia, which means good death or dying well. Euthanasia is simply defined as to be able to die with dignity at a moment when life is devoid of it [24]. It is a purely voluntary choice, both on the part of the owner of this life or patient and on the part of the doctor. When the gift of death is made, with all good intentions, at the sufferer's own request it is referred to as 'Voluntary Euthanasia' or 'active euthanasia' (also known as 'mercy killing'). Active euthanasia entails the use of legal substances or forces, such as administering a lethal injection. Thus, it is intended to ease the suffering of those sufferers, such as the mind-dead victim of accidents, physically deformed and mentally incapacitated babies and others, who are not in a position to make a request. Passive euthanasia entails the withholding common treatment, such as antibiotics, necessary for continuance of life,

The question of the right of the humans to decide for themselves as to when and how to die has been debated ever since they suffered intolerable and incurable

maladies and wanted no more of it. However, the advocates of euthanasia (or gift of death) to the suffering and terminally ill peoples to mitigate their misery considered the human life as a personal affair, and disregards its religious and socio-cultural aspects. All these aspects and his obligations except the emotional one taken care with due planning and there must come a time when even his near and dear ones and the society must feel that he has suffered enough and call a halt to it by allowing him to get a gift of painless, peaceful and dignified death. Not notwithstanding all the arguments, this is not as simple as it looks, we compare the practice of euthanasia and *Sallekhana- Samadhimarana*.

- a) Euthanasia is practiced from purely personal and medical point of view while *sallekhana-samadhimarana* from that of spiritual emancipation point of view.
- b) In euthanasia the person surrenders to the pain and suffering and wishes to die, while in the practice of *sallekhana -samadhimarana* he braves the suffering while patiently waiting the death to visit him.
- c) The seeker of euthanasia is not at all calm and composed while that of *sallekhana-samadhimarana* is in a state of peace and equanimity of mind.
- d) Euthanasia is pure desire to die while *sallekhana-samadhimarana* is the practice of immortality.
- e) The practice of euthanasia is aided by the doctor who simply administers the lethal dose of chemical to ease life out, while the practice of *sallekhana - samadhimarana* is aided and assisted by the *Niryapakas* (Guru or supervisor) who constantly endeavour to maintain the practitioner's peace of mind.
- f) The practice of Euthanasia is attended by despondence and anger (*Arta dhyana* and *Raudra dhyana*) while that of *sallekhana- samadhimarana* is attended by pious thoughts (*Dharma dhyana*).
- g) The result of euthanasia is spiritually unrewarding death while that of *sallekhana-samadhimarana* in spiritually rewarding one.
- h) The practice of euthanasia is sought by the cowards that cannot bear the fruits of their karma while that of *sallekhana-samadhimarana* by those brave and patient aspirants who bear them with courage and fortitude.
- i) In case of passive euthanasia the subject cannot make a decision for himself. He is simply killed, albeit mercifully, while the practice of *sallekhana-samadhimarana*, cannot proceed without the voluntary consent of the aspirant practitioner.

- j) The practitioner of *sallekhana-samadhimarana* sets his sight on the ultimate goal of achieving 'nirvana' or immortality while euthanasia aims at a very narrow concept of painless death.
- k) The concept of euthanasia is only about dying well while that of *sallekhana-samadhimarana* is about living well. "One who lives a pious life, dies a peaceful death", it proclaims.
- l) The practice of euthanasia is fraught with legal complications while that of *sallekhana-samadhimarana* is not.
- m) Killing how-so-ever painlessly is a violent activity so euthanasia may look merciful at the surface but is violent in nature; *sallekhana-samadhimarana* is non violent from the beginning to the end.
- n) The practice of euthanasia does nothing to improve the quality of life of the subject by way of de-addiction, psychological strengthening, prayers etc., while these are part of the practice of *sallekhana-samadhimarana*.

Thus, we see that there is nothing in common between the practice of euthanasia and *sallekhana-santhara*, except that both may be voluntary. No Spiritual benefit can ensure from the practice of euthanasia.

6.3 Suicide

Suicide is the ultimate act of self destruction (*Atmaghat*) in a state of extreme desperation to take away one's own life by one's own means. According to dictionary-meaning suicides is self-murder or self-destruction and or intentional, self inflicted death. Acharya Amritachandra [25], defines suicide as "One really commits suicide when severs one's vitality (*Prana*), under the influence of passions, with fatal practices like stopping to breath, drowning, burning in fire, by taking poison and or with the help of weapons". We compare here suicide and *sallakhana-santhara*.

- a) According to Pt. Asadhar "It is not suicide when an aspirant practitioner leaves his body by observing the ritual of *Bhakta pratyakhyana* (*sallekhana-samadhimarana*) on account of the emergence of such factors that can destroy his very righteous conduct, but suicide is committed when the life forces (*Prana*) are severed with the lethal means like taking poison, piercing weapons, drowning or entering fire".
- b) Both suicide and *sallekhana* are voluntary deaths. However, body is killed in suicide whereas it is respectfully and peacefully left in *sallekhana-samadhi marana*.

- c) In suicide a person suffers from the feeling of hopelessness or helplessness, futility and inadequacy to handle problems, whereas the *ksapaka* (practitioner of *sallekhana-santhara*) suffers no such problems and he has subdued his passions and desires and is constantly hopeful of spiritual emancipation, which is sole goal of undertaking this practice.
- d) The suicidal person suffers from a feeling of either physical or psychological exhaustion, as well as unfounded anxiety, tension or depression, the *ksapaka* may be physically weak but psychologically he is at peace with himself and in a state of equanimity of mind.
- e) In suicide a person suffers from feeling of chaos and disorganisation with inability to restore order, whereas the *ksapaka* is perfectly orderly in his practice.
- f) The suicidal person suffers from mood swings from agitation to apathy or withdrawal, the *ksapaka* is ever alert and under supervision to avoid any such possibility.
- g) The suicidal person loses interest in usual worldly activities; the *ksapaka* already has no such distractions.
- h) The suicidal person suffers from physical distress such as insomnia, anorexia, psychosthenia and psychosomatic symptoms, the *ksapaka* maintain his peace of mind by constantly contemplating desirable reflections (*Subh-Bhawana*).

We can conclude this exposition on suicide and *sallekhana-samadhimarana* on the note that there is nothing-common between the two except that the voluntary death occurs in both. In the first case the death is in a highly passionate and emotionally disturbed state and is brought about by highly violent and objectionable means while in other it is in a state of complete mental equanimity, peace and calmness and is brought about by peaceful and non-violent means.

7.0 Legal Aspects of *Sallekhana* and *Santhara*

Justice T.K. Tukol [26] has opined that omission to take food is not an offence under section 309 of the I.P.C. that deals with suicide and that it is not an offence, because it doesn't influence others. According to Justice T.K. Tukot, "Calmness, patience and mind undisturbed by emotions of joy or fear will conduce to purgation of karma. It is mental peace that will lead to liberation from the Karmas of life, so at death, one should have equanimity of mind. Jainism prescribes *sallekhana* as the first step for further liberation from the bondage of Karma even in the hour of death and in the manner of dying.

Even the Supreme Court had rejected a petition to stop a Jain Monk from understanding a fast unto death and maintained that *santhara samadhimarana* is not suicide (The supreme Court judgement dated 26-04-1994- Article 25 and Sec. 309).

8.0 Conclusions

Practice of voluntary peaceful death has been practised by Jaina ascetics and lay followers since the time of Bhagawan Rishabhadeva to the present age. Jaina scriptures, rock-inscriptions and media reports amply bear evidence to this fact.

Jaina canonical literature describes various kinds of deaths. *Sallekhana* is the preparatory form of penance, while *santhara* or *samadhimaran* is the practice of voluntary peaceful death in a state of equanimity of mind. It results in shedding of karma and spiritual purification leading to final liberation. The practice of *sallekhana* and *santhara* is of such a great importance that it is dealt with in a large number of canonical texts of both the Svetambara and Digambara traditions.

Sallekhana and *samadhimarana*, other religious deaths, euthanasia and suicide though come in the category of voluntary deaths; spiritually speaking they do not belong to same class. *Sallekhana-samadhimarana* with its well defined spiritual and non-violent character holds the promise of a spiritually rewarding form of voluntary death. The Jaina way of voluntary peaceful death is the only answer for the seekers of spiritual emancipation and final liberation from karma and miserable mundane existence.

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