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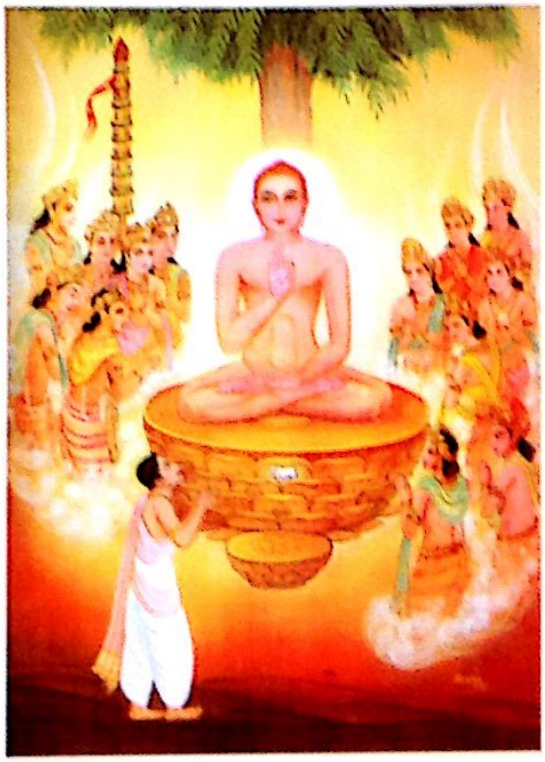

यः संस्तुतः सकल-वाङ्मय-तत्त्व-बोधाद्-उद्भूत-बुद्धिपटुभिः सुरलोकनाथैः।
स्तोत्रैर्जगत्त्रितय चित्त-हरैरुदारैः स्तोष्ये किलाहमपि तं प्रथमं जिनेन्द्रम् ।। 2।।

भक्तामरस्तोत्र-2

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CONCEPT OF SANTHĀRĀ (SAMĀDHIMARAṆA) IN JAINISM

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Santhārā is a Jaina technical word which means the voluntary, step by step termination of body with full awareness, wisdom and insight. The 24th Tīrthaṅkara Mahāvīra was great religious preacher who not only paved the path of leading an artistic life by implementing the great and small vows but also showed us the path of ending the life journey very artistically through the process of *Santhārā*. The basic concept underlying the vow of *Santhārā* is that a man who is the master of his own destiny should resolve himself/herself to follow the best method of leaving the body. *Santhārā* is considered as the king of all the vows and it is the highest spiritual vow rather than the ritual. On 10.8.2015 the Rajasthan High Court banned *Santhārā* and declared that it is illegal like suicide, *Satī-prathā* and euthanasia. The research paper is an attempt to do a comparative study of *Santhārā* and Suicide. The paper is divided into three sections. The first section deals with the introduction of *Santhārā*, its procedure and how it is a pure spiritual practice of dispassionate state of mind and soul, is discussed in brief. The second section deals with the concept of Suicide and *Satī-prathā* and Euthanasia in brief and the third section deals with the comparative study between the Jaina concept of *Santhārā* and the Suicide in general parlance.

Section I

Meaning and Definition of Saṁlekhanā

The term *Saṁlekhanā* is derived from the two words- *Sam* and *lekhanā*. *Sam* means praiseworthy, *lekhanā* means emasculation of the body and passions, so *Saṁlekhanā* means a praiseworthy process of emasculating the body and passions,.appears to have been at the root of the meaning of *Santhārā*.[1] *Santhārā* (Peaceful death through fasting) is facing death (by an ascetic or a householder) voluntarily when he/she is nearing his/ her end and when normal life according

to religion seems to be impossible due to old age, incurable disease, severe famine etc. *Santhārā* is nothing but the subjugation of all passions and abandonment of all worldly attachments, by observance of austerities and by gradual withdrawal of food and water, and by simultaneous meditation on the real nature of the self until the soul parts from the body.[2] The basic concept underlying this vow of *Santhārā* is that man who is the master of his own destiny should face death in such a way as to prevent the influx of new *karmas* even at the last moment of his life and at the same time liberate the soul from the bondage of new *karmas* that may be clinging to it from beginningless past.

Ancient Evidences of Practice of Santhārā by Ascetics and Householders

It is a well experienced fact that the last thought in our mind before falling asleep will be the first thought when we awaken, so also will the last impression in our mind come to us in the next life as the first impression. There are so many āgamic and ancient evidences of practice of *Santhārā* undertaken by ascetics and householders in this regard as asked by the High Court Authority. Jainism is known for many a unique spiritual practice and accomplishment since it is propounded by the first Lord Prophet Ṛṣabhadeva, centuries ago at the beginning of time cycle. The antiquity of Jaina religion and *Santhārā* is unquestionably proven by its mention in the ancient scriptures. It is equally modern and rational in its philosophy and approach. It is modern in the sense that spiritual aspirants, in the pursuit of immortality, undertake this practice. It is rational in the sense that the very purpose of human existence in its spiritual evolution to perfection and to overcome all impediments that hinder its progress towards this noble goal. Here it is relevant to quote the reference of the book entitled '*Sallekhanā is not Suicide*' by Justice T.K.Tukol. In this book, his studies on the relevant inscriptions on *Saṁlekhanā* undertaken by Viśākha Muni,[3] by Candragupta Maurya[4] so on and so forth. Numerous ascetics both monks and nuns and lay

followers who adopted the vow of *Samlekhanā* is mentioned by him in his book and in the same inscriptions comprising of 8 volumes.[5]

Tīrthaṅkara Kunthunātha, Aranātha, Malli Prabhu, Munisuvrata, Neminātha, Pārśva and Ariṣṭanemi undertook the vow of *Santhārā* and realized *nirvāṇa* after a month long period of *Santhārā*.[6] The *Antakṛddasā* canonical text highlights the several instances of monks and nuns who observed *Santhārā* and attained the realm of heaven and after three to nine births, they achieved the ultimate goal of liberation. Among those instances, few persons are Gajasukumāla, Atimuktaka Kumāra, Mudgarapāni, eight queens of Lord Kṛṣṇa etc.[7] The canonical text, *Uvāsagadasāo* cites the life history of ten house holders who culminated their life by undertaking *Santhārā*.[8] In *Uttarādhyayanasūtra*, also we find the essence of *Santhārā* in the fifth chapter i.e. *Ārāhiyāduveloye* i.e., 'the one who undertakes *Santhārā* enjoys life here and hereafter in the next birth also.'[9] Along with that then prevailing *Santhārā* practice can be seen in many manuscripts of Jaina Vishva Bharati Institute library. Seventeen volumes of *Śāsana Samudra* book of Muni Navaratanmalji highlights the brief life sketch of *Santhārā* observed by monks and nuns of Terāpantha Sect from the past near about 200 years. Thus the canonical evidences and the stories highlighting the *Santhārā* being undertaken is the living proof of traditional ancient religious practice of the vow of *Santhārā* in vogue.

Canonical Reasons for undertaking Santhārā

According to Samantabhadra, *Santhārā* is a vow to be adopted for seeking liberation of soul from the body as a religious duty during a calamity, severe famine, old age or illness from which there is no escape or against which there is no remedy.[10] Akalaṅka in his *Tattvārtha-rājavārtika*, suggests the conditions that are required to undertake *Santhārā*, is,old age, disease, deterioration of power of sense organs, loss of physical strength and six essential duties (Ṣaḍāvaśyaka) seems to be in-observable, *Santhārā* can be undertaken.[11] This signifies that the process of *Santhārā* is to be

adopted either in special circumstances when the religious observances are being endangered on account of unavoidable bodily infirmities and the like, or on the occasion when the time of natural death has been known in all probability.

No doubt, the body which is the medium of the upliftment of the soul is to be properly nourished and cared for and the diseases are to be seriously met with, without any treat. But if the body refused to respond to our earnest endeavours, we should not falter to forsake it like a villain in the interest of saving the peace of mind.[12] Thus if one is encountered with the causes of the termination of duration of the present life, one should resort to the performance of the process of *Santhārā* which is not only other than the spiritual welcome to death, but a way of meeting the challenge of death undauntedly. This happy embracement of death has been calculated to carry the spiritual dispositions to the next birth. Now, it is essential to explain various types of *Samādhimaraṇa*.

Types of Samādhimaraṇa in Jainism

Santhārā is of two kinds; internal and external. Internal *Santhārā* consists in emaciating the passions while the external one consists in emaciating the body.[13] The eighth chapter of *Ācārāṅga-sūtra* has explained three forms of death. They are *bhaktapratyākhyāna-maraṇa*, *iṅgini-maraṇa* and *pādopagamana-maraṇa*.[14] The last two are distinguished by restriction of the movement of the person and the motion of his limbs.

1. Bhaktapratyākhyāna-maraṇa

The first one is prescribed for a well-controlled and instructed monk. We should desist from doing, causing or allowing to be done any movement of the body, speech and mind. This type of *maraṇa* permits attendance and service of both kinds, i.e. by oneself and by others.

2. Iṅgini-maraṇa

The second one which is still more difficult requires the monk not to stir from ones place and check all motions of the body. It admits

of one's attending on one's self but forbids receiving help or assistance from others.

3. Pādopagamana-maraṇa

The third one is still more difficult. In this sort of *maraṇa*, the person neither attends his own body nor insists others to look after him. The monk should examine the ground most carefully and lie down wholly unmindful of his body, putting up with all kinds of mortification of the flesh. He should seek the enlightenment in the soul without any delusions of life. A monk or a pious layman should reach the end of his life without any attraction to external objects after having patiently chosen any one of the three methods of death for attainment of liberation.

Ācārya Kundakunda has referred to this vow of *Santhārā* and stated that death is of three kinds: *Bālamaraṇa*, *Bālapaṇḍitamaraṇa* and *Paṇḍitamaraṇa*.[15] *Bālamaraṇa* is the death of an individual who has right faith but does not possess full self-control. The second is a kind of death which is faced by a householder who has reached the fifth stage of his spiritual progress and who is unable to abstain from the *hiṁsā*/violence of one-sensed being and is still indecisive in the matter of self-restraint. *Paṇḍitamaraṇa* is the death of an ascetic who has attained pure knowledge about his own self. The death of *Tīrthaṅkaras* or *Gaṇadharas* or of monks is of this kind.

The procedure of Santhārā

Santhārā is to be performed at the last phase of a regular religious career. Both the levels of persons householders and houseless monks/nuns may perform this vow according to one's capacity. A householder is advised to first perform eleven *pratimās* (special kind of advance spiritual practices), in which he practically leads the life like an ascetic. At the end of this practice, he is to give up food and drink and wait for death. The procedure of abstinence from food for fasting unto death is explained in detail in *Ācārāṅga-sūtra*.[16] 'Having abstained from food, he should lay peacefully, and untouched by

hardships like hunger, oppressed by the favourable and unfavourable man made troubles, he should not transgress his undertaking.'

A Jaina monk is required to prepare himself to pursue a course of gradual fasting which may last for years together. In *Pravacana-sāroddhāra* there is a specific methodology of observing *Santhārā* on the basis of difference of time limitation. Minimum time limit of *Santhārā* is six months. The medium time limit of it is twelve months and the maximum time limit of it is twelve years which ends with death.[17]

It is very often seen that the self has more attachment with one's own body; he cares for it with all hooks and crooks. But during *Santhārā* period, the practitioner realizes that body and passions are the main causes of inflow of *karmas*. So prior to the adoption of the vow, one is required to give up all feelings of love, hatred companionship and worldly attachments with a pure and calm mind. He should obtain forgiveness of one's kinsmen and of others with all humanity at the same time forgiving them sincerely. Only when he has confessed without any concealment all his transgressions,[18] *kṛta*, *kārita* or *anumata*, he is fit to assume the *mahāvratas* in their entirety for as long as his life lasts.

The *Dravya Santhāra* last for twelve years. According to the *Uttarādhyayana-sūtra* (36.25. 255), the order in which food can be curtailed is as follows:

The first four years are done by either *vikṛtiparityāga* (i.e. abandonment of rich foods) or *ācāmla* (i.e. eating only a single item of food). The next four years - special penance such as fasting for a day, for two days, for three days etc. and taking appropriate breakfast. During the 9th and 10th year fasting on alternate days is practiced and *ācāmla* in breakfast. The first half of the 11th year fasting for one day and two days is practiced. Then in the second half of the 11th year severe penance of fasting is increased to three or more days. During the whole of the 11th year, the *ācāmla* in breakfast is practiced. In the first six months reduced diet on the day of *ācāmla*

and a full diet on such occasions is permissible during the next six months of the 11th year.

During the 12th year, *ācāmla* coupled with another penance, i.e. either continuous *ācāmla* with another penance alternately. At the end of the 12th year fasting for a fortnight or a whole month or *bhaktapratyākhyāna* etc. is taken.

In the *Ratnakaraṇḍa-śrāvakācāra*, we get the order of curtailment in diet as follows. First, cereals are given up, one practices to take only mild. Then, mild is also given up and only buttermilk or hot water is taken. Then, according to one's capacity, gradually fasting is taken up and water is also given up.[19] According to the *Niśīthacūrṇi* taking food is reduced in such a way that complete abandonment of food and death coincide. During the last four months of this year, the mouth is kept oiled so that the speech organs do not cease to function and there is no difficulty in reciting the *namaskāramantra* etc.[20] These are the different methods for undertaking *Santhārā* according to ones capacity.

Spiritual Activities undertaken during the Santhārā

A Jaina resolving to undergo *Santhārā* knows it well that he has eaten a lot of food to sustain his body during this life and voluntarily gives up the food. It is very essential for a man who drives a car to have knowledge of giving break to the car. If he learns merely driving but never learns to give a break, this driving will be very harmful for the driver if he meets with a severe accident, likewise the person having the knowledge of how to lead an artistic life must have the knowledge of giving up the body artistically, happily through the gradual process of *Santhārā*.

The mental attitude of the person who has adopted the vow of *Santhārā* should be pure in thoughts and must have severed all connections, having forgiven everybody and asked everybody's pardon in sweet words. A person with Right-faith and Right-knowledge would always believe that being born as a human being is itself a rare chance for

annihilation of all *karmas* and that increased attachments to relatives and friends, business and occupations, and accumulation of property of any kind would only entangle the soul with new *karmas* of different kinds of varying intensity. These ties are all due to the *karmas*. Every kind of relationship and attachment perishes with the body. Such thought will create a sense of detachment and free the mind from passions of every kind like love, anger, pride, deceit and greed. The person concerned should make a frank and full confession of his actions and thoughts before his preceptor. He should discuss with his spiritual *guru* whatever sins he might have committed by himself and by others consent till that date without hesitation or sense of secrecy. One should be aware while undergoing *Santhārā* that he/she should remain free from the five transgressions.

Five Aticāras (Transgressions) of Saṁlekhanā (Santhārā)

1. *Ihalokākāṅkṣā*: undertaken with the desire or motive to acquire wealth, family etc., i.e. pleasures of this world.
2. *Paralokākāṅkṣā* : here the motive is to acquire pleasures of heaven etc. in the next birth.
3. *Jīvitākāṅkṣā* : undertaken with the desire for life.
4. *Maraṇākāṅkṣā* : To desire instant death because of unbearable pain or miseries.
5. *Kāmabhogāśaṁsā* : undertaken for acquiring desired but unfulfilled sexual and other-worldly pleasures.

Aticāra or transgression means committing any blunder or mistake due to carelessness or ignorance even after observing reasonable vigilance during *Santhārā*. A *sādhaka* should try to protect himself from these blemishes otherwise may again bind new more *karmas*.

Section II

Concept of the Suicide

Human nature being the same everywhere, the causes of suicide have been universally identical all over the world. Suicide is killing oneself by means employed by oneself. The corresponding word in

Sanskrit is *ātmaghāta* or *ātmahatyā* (self-destruction). It is normally a misfortune of one's own making. A victim of suicide is either a victim of his/her mental weaknesses or of external circumstances, which he is not able to circumvent. In modern times mental and ethical strength has been deteriorating fast, whether it be an individual or in any social group. Present scenario has brought with it a large number of psychological problems which an individual without courage can hardly solve.

Sociologists have put forward numerous explanations in their suicide notes, abnormal grief accruing from the loss of the loved one, mutual jealousy, mental difficulties, infidelity, family discord, anger, pride, remorse and shame are all symptoms of difficulty in personal adjustment. The forces of fear and anxiety, feeling of inferiority, hatred, aggressiveness, revenge, guilt, and other mental disorders are such that they prevent people from attaining emotional maturity. This emotional immaturity has been the most powerful factor compelling a man to choose suicide as the only solution to seemingly insurmountable difficulties.[21]

The main psychological and physical features of suicide are: (1) the victim is under an emotional stress; (2) he or she is overpowered with a feeling of disgrace, fear, disgust or hatred at the time when suicide is resorted to; (3) the main intention of committing suicide is to escape from the consequences of certain acts or events; disgrace, agony, punishment, social stigma or tyranny of treatment etc. (4) the kind is far away from religious or spiritual considerations; (5) the means employed to bring about the death are weapons of offence or death: (6) the death is sudden in most cases unless the victim is rescued earlier; (7) the act is committed in secrecy (8) it causes misery or bereavement to the kith and kin.

In *Samavāyāṅga-sūtra* and *Bhagavatī-ārādhanā* [22] text seventeen types of deaths are discussed in brief. Here we find the references of deaths occurring due to common methods adopted for committing suicide like jumping from heights, jumping into wells, having poison

etc. In *Puruṣāratha-siddhyupāya* text of Amṛtacandra has given reasons for *ātmahatyā* like a person out of passions, calls death by stopping one's breath or by hanging oneself, by falling in water, poisoning by use of drugs, burning oneself with the use of fuel and by using weapons etc.[23]and on the other hand three types of pious and peaceful ways of attaining death is adopted in the *Santhārā*.

Sati-prathā

The practice of Satī, that is, self-immolation by the wife on the funeral pyre of the husband in the ancient history. The *Mahābhārata*, the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* contain examples of such immolation. Dr. Thakur quotes from *Mitākṣarā* on Yājñavalkya (1.86) to show that the object behind the practice was religious merit. She who follows her husband in death dwells in Heaven for many years as there are hairs on the human body, viz. three and half-a-crores of years. According to Harita: 'that a women who follows her husband in death purifies three families, viz. of her mother, of her father, of her husband.' But there are old commentators who are opposed to this custom.[24] The opposition seems to have been voiced from time to time to such practices on the ground that self-destruction was most horrible.

Another practice which was glorified in India is the practice of *Jauhara*. Whenever the Rājpūtas lost in a battle or their city was captured by their enemies, every female in a family or the whole tribe as necessary, had recourse to immolation by burning themselves in fire in order to escape from the threatened dishonour. It is difficult to assess at this distance of time whether all such deaths were voluntary or were forced on unwilling women by fear of social stigma or fear of religious punishment. We have records of cases where women running back from the pyres were driven back or subjected to tyranny of horrible character.[25] The *Santhārā* is no different and it is also a process to commit suicide in the name of religion as in the case of Satī. There is absolutely no need to protect the practice of *Santhārā* by the State. This is the statement made by the Rajasthan state government.

This is not the case in Jaina concept of *Santhārā*. In *Satī-prathā*, the women has attachment towards his husband and she cannot imagine the life without him. In such a condition, she voluntarily or out of respect for their cultural tradition, jumps on to the funeral pyre of the husband and ends her life. On the other hand, a person abide by the vow of *Santhārā*, dispassionately gives up body for attaining the higher purpose, i.e. emancipation from the cycle of birth and death whereas the women dying out of emotional attachment wanders in the world. Moreover, in *Satī-prathā*, only women are indulged, no men are bothered to ever follow such type of social culture. But in *Santhārā*, both men and women voluntarily participate in this spiritual vow for shedding off one's *karmas* and thereby purifying the self. It seems that due to cognition of one-sided truth, the court has arrived at such a judgment, so it needs further verification as both the practices are radically different in nature and the purpose behind the actual undertaking such action .

Concept of Euthanasia

This modern concept is a debatable issue, as few consider it as a kind of murder, few consider it as physician assisted suicide, and for few, it is a merciful method of death. The problem of euthanasia is related with both the animals and human beings. Here point of consideration is for human euthanasia.

The euthanasia is of two types; active and passive. The active euthanasia entails the use of lethal substances or forces to kill a person. The passive euthanasia entails withholding of medical treatment for continuance of life, withholding of antibiotics where without giving it, a patient is likely to die, or removing the heart lung machine, from a patient in coma. It entails the withholding of common treatments (such as antibiotics, pain relief medications, morphine or surgery) knowing that it may also result in death (principle of double effect). Both the methods are illegal without legislature, provided certain conditions and safeguards are maintained. Passive euthanasia is the most accepted form and it is a common practice in most hospitals.

Generally, the euthanasia may be voluntary and non-voluntary. The voluntary euthanasia is, where the consent is taken from the patient, whereas non-voluntary euthanasia is conducted without an individual's specifically given acquiescence and relatives give their consent to take lifesaving treatment and in the opinion of some this equates to murder. It is not a crime, but whether not taking food consciously and voluntarily with the aim of ending one's life is a crime under section 309 IPC is a question, which need not be decided here. After considering the question of non-voluntary, passive euthanasia, the Supreme Court laid down certain guidelines for the procedure for permitting death, under certain conditions. The Supreme Court laid down a procedure detailing the conditions for such action till the Act is enacted by the Parliament. The procedure provides for a decision to be taken by the patients to discontinue life support or the spouse or other close relatives and in their absence by a person next or by the doctors attending the patient. The Committee of three reputed doctors after consulting such medical authorities/ medical practitioners, preferably comprising of a Neurologist, Psychiatrist and Physician passive euthanasia can be permitted. Voluntary euthanasia has often been rejected as a violation of the sanctity of human life. Specifically, some Christians argue that human life ultimately belongs to God, so that humans should not be the one to make the choice to end life. Christians view as quoted in *Bible*, 'The god giveth and the god taketh'; no one else has a right to intervene in the divine process of life and death. The man cannot give life, so he must not take life, voluntarily or otherwise. Orthodox Judaism takes basically the same approach. Even Jains would never allow this kind of act of euthanasia, as Jaina aphorisms of canons claim that life is dear to everyone, no one wants to die.[26] In such a situation, euthanasia is an immoral act, inhuman behaviour as per Jaina view. It is also illegal in most of the countries. Jainism, as it is basically a non-violent religion, is in opposition with this kind of mercy killing or death through euthanasia.

Section III

Santhārā is not a Suicide:

Those who have not understood the correct meaning of the *Santhārā* misinterpret it as suicide. But in depth study proves that both are entirely different. In the *Ācārāṅgasūtra*, we find an aphorism, *kasāye payaṇue kiccā appāhāro titikkhāye.*[27] In this *sūtra*, the thinning of the passion and the reduction of the diet have been propounded as a twofold austerity. The mere reduction of diet without thinning the passions cannot achieve the end. Therefore the internal austerity of thinning the passions and the external austerity of reducing the diet, both are accepted as penance by the followers of the Jina. So such an auspicious way of achieving death can never be compared with the irreligious act of suicide.

A Jaina resolving to undergo *Santhārā* knows it well that he has eaten a lot of food to sustain his body during his life. Now, when the body does not cooperate to help in living meaningfully any more, the person should resolve for *Santhārā*. As per the Jaina religion, the body is called a boat, the soul is a boats man, the worldly existence is an ocean which the great sages cross over through the pious practice of *Santhārā*.[28] But in suicide, the body is healthy, all the organs of the body are well functional and some unfovorable situation which he/she feels to be incapable of facing it courageously, ends one's life merely to elope from the life situations.

Santhārā is undertaken with positive thinking and perfect understanding of the purpose of human life. During the period of *Santhārā*, all the relatives, if available, monk or nun try to sing inspirational songs and motivate the observer to stay in equanimity and embrace the death happily. While suicide is the result of negative thinking and deluded world view towards the purpose of human life.

In many cases of *Santhārā*, many mysterious incidents occur. The observer achieves extra sensory knowledge and foretells that I am

either due to heredity or other hidden causes, public disgrace or dishonour of one's self or the family, an unexpected shock due to failure to realize an ambition and many other unusual factors may be regarded, either individually or cumulatively, are causes driving an individual to commit suicide.

Practice of *Santhārā* is based on the Double-effect theory. The death is exactly an incidental product that accompanies the spiritual purity through the elimination of *karmas* exactly as chaff is an incidental growth accompanying the corn which is the essential product of the seed. But suicide is not based on such theory but it is a sort of pessimistic thought process leading towards the painful death. This dreadful act of human being is condemned by each and every religions and not only by Jains.

In *Īśāvāsyopaniṣad*, it is clearly written that one who commits suicide goes to the dreadful infernal realm.[32] It is said that the person who commits suicide out of anger, fear, pride, *kleśa* have to take the next birth in infernal realm for 60,000 years and have to repent for the misdeed committed by oneself.[33] Even in the Jaina canonical literature of *Uttarādhyayanasūtra*, it is said that the person who commits suicide spoils this life and the next life where as *Santhārā* is nothing but a way of facing death artistically, it is considered that if a monk leaves his body in *Samādhimaraṇa*, he surely attains the heaven.

It is said in *Samaṇa Suttaṁ* text that a wise person who is free from anxiety dies a peaceful death once; by such a death, he immediately puts an end to an infinite number of deaths.[34] Suicide is the cause of worldly wanderings whereas *Samādhimaraṇa* is the cause of eliminating *karmas*, and thereby limiting the circle of life and death.

Justice T. K. Tukol says, in his book, '*Santhārā is not Suicide*' that Jaina philosophy is a philosophy of non-violence. In the case of suicide, a death with passion is nothing but violence whereas Jaina *Santhārā* is observed thoughtfully in an impassionate state without craving for materialistic pleasures and takes the oath of abstaining from food, water entirely willingly and even resolves not to harm

oneself or any other member of the society at large. So it is incomparable with the suicide which is committed in a passionate and abnormal state.

In the text, *The History of Suicide in India*, p. 107 Upendranath Thakur writes that why Jaina *samlekhanā* is considered as suicide is that very crude methods have been employed in it, like complete giving up of all kinds of food and water. So it should be clearly kept in mind, that since the milk of a cow and milk taken out of the particular plant '*dhatūrā*/cactus' seems equal, but one is nectar i.e. nourishes the body, the other is poison which destroys the body i.e. takes away the life. Likewise there is a great difference between suicide and *samlekhanā*.

Amṛtacandra Sūri has defined suicide with such precision that his definition can stand the scrutiny for any modern Jurist: He, who actuated by passions, puts an end to his life by stopping breath or by water, fire, poison or weapons is certainly guilty of suicide. In *Santhārā*, all desires and passions are subjugated and mind remains in bliss and peace. [15]

Importance of Santhārā

It is a religious fast unto death on the pretext that when all purpose of life has been served, or when the body is unable to serve any purpose of life. *Mṛtyu-Mahotsava*, a book from unknown author having Hindi commentary by Sada Sukha Das highlights the essence of *Santhārā* with the following *sūtra:*

taptasya tapaścāpi pālitasya vratasya ca/
paṭhitasya śrutasyāpi phalaṁmṛtyuṁ samādhinā//[16]

It means all religious observances, fastings and austerities would be unavailing, if at the last moment of life, at the time of approaching death, if one does not undertake *Santhārā*. It is not only the spiritual welcome to death, but also a way of meeting the challenge of death undauntedly. This,happy embracement of death has been calculated to carry the spiritual dispositions to the next birth. Such a kind of

peaceful spiritual death cannot be regarded as the suicide at any cost because here we have a logic and spiritual reason behind the acceptance of *Santhārā*. It is very often seen that the self has more attachment with one's own body; he cares for it with all hooks and crooks. But during *Santhārā* period, the practitioner realizes that body and passions are the main causes of inflow of *karmas*. So prior to the acceptance of the vow, one is required to give up all feelings of hatred, companionship and worldly attachments with a pure and calm mind. He/she should obtain permission from the *guru* and householders from their nearest relatives and ask forgiveness from one's kinsmen and from others with all humanity at the same time forgiving them sincerely. Death by *Santhārā* according to scriptural rules is the victory of the soul over *karmas* and other infirmities of the mind and body.

This systematic process of *Samādhimaraṇa* influenced even Vinoba Bhave to such an extent that once he commented, I wish to die according to the Jaina system of peaceful death. So *Santhārā* is a Jaina religious injunction essential for shedding off *karmas* and purification of soul. So such an auspicious death can never be compared with suicide. Sri Ravi Shankar comments that those people who are not familiar to Jaina vows, views, various practices and rituals claim that *Santhārā* is suicide. A man of less intellect only commits suicide to get rid of one's physical diseases, mental disorders and other unfavourable situation that is why, it is rightly said that "Suicide is the temporary solution to the permanent problem." While a man of intellect observes *Santhārā* to get rid of *bhavavyādhi* i.e. wandering disease which is material cause of all the problems. There is thus difference between suicide and *Santhārā* as regards intention, situation, means adopted and the consequences of death.

Conclusion

Thus the basic concept of undertaking the vow of *Santhārā* as *Samādhimaraṇa* is that a man who is the master of his own destiny

should resolve himself to follow the best method of leaving the body happily, peacefully and artistically. It is a well-planned spiritual death inspired by the highest ideal of self-realization to ward off further entanglement in the bondage of *karmas*. Hundreds of instances of *Santhārā* have been recorded in the inscriptions found in different parts of the State of Karnataka and collected in twelve volumes of *Ephigraphia Carnatica* published by the state government and many scriptural and documental evidences are authentic to prove logically the age old ancient tradition of *Santhārā* being practiced.

It is emphatically denied that *Santhārā* is a voluntary suicide. *Saṁlekhanā* (Santhārā) is arbitrarily equated with the offence of suicide or Satī or euthanasia by IPC. It is submitted that a voluntary fast unto death is an act of self-destruction, which amounts to "suicide", which is a criminal offence and is punishable under section 309 by Rajasthan Court. But there is a radical difference between the *Santhārā* and suicide, *Satī-prathā* and Euthanasia, so it cannot be equated in any way with the above mentioned concepts philosophically, conceptually and conventionally.

Moreover, the tradition of *Satī-prathā* is radically different from *Santhārā* from all angles of human understanding. The emerging concept of euthanasia needs to be further studied as few Western and Eastern scholars both relate it with the passive euthanasia but it is not so because the intention behind the vow of *Santhārā*, the situation, means adopted and the consequences of death everything must be taken into the consideration before arriving at final judgment. So the need of the hour is to reinvestigate the entire procedure of pious death of *Santhārā* comprehensively. Moreover the case history study of the persons who have undergone such a practice of pure meditation and self-introspection with Supreme forgiveness towards one and all must be taken into consideration for better clarification of the fact. *Saṁlekhanā* is a retreat to peace in true sense, to be yourself entirely free from all distractions for pure contemplation and introspection. It can be finally concluded that it is a noblest way to die in the pursuit of immortality.

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