

Contemporary Issue of Santhārā (Samādhimarāṇa) in Jainism

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Abstract

Santhārā is a Jaina technical word which means the voluntary, step by step termination of body with full awareness, wisdom and insight. The 24th Tīrthāṅkara Mahāvīrā 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 spiritualvow 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's 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 Definiton of Samlekhanā

The term *Samlekhanā* is derived from the two words, *Sam* and *lekhanā*. *Sam* means praiseworthy, *lekhanā* means emasculation of the body and passions, so *Samlekhanā* 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

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