

Investigating The Matter Of Euthanasia: Insights From Buddhist And Jain Perspectives

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ABSTRACT:

The problem of euthanasia has been a thoroughly discussed problem in the contemporary world. It is a controversial issue for the reason that it involves the intentional killing of a human life. Euthanasia may be defined as an action in which a person is intentionally killed or allowed to die because it is believed that the individual would be better if dead. For example, in the case of an irreversible coma, or the vegetative state or the brain dead state where there is no chance of revival. Etymologically the word euthanasia is derived from two Greek words eu which means 'well' or 'good', and thanatos which means 'death'. When it comes to make questions like whether euthanasia is ever justified, Buddhism in fact does not really have a standard set of answers. The Buddhist approach to ethics is to say that what we need to do is to develop our virtues. In Jainism, the concept euthanasia is related to the ethical code of conduct Sallekhana, which is also known as samlehna, santhara, samadhi-marana or sanyasana-marana, it is a supplementary vow to the ethical code of conduct of Jainism.

KEYWORDS: Euthanasia, Controversial, Intentional, Death, Sallekhana

INTRODUCTION:

Euthanasia means good death or dying well. In short, it means to purposely or intentionally bring a life to an end in order to release it from pain or suffering. It is also termed as mercy killing, because it is seen as a call to mercy for terminally ill patients. Buddhist approach to ethics is to say that we need to develop our virtues,

our intelligence, our ability to engage with the difficult situations that life throws up and to do so with intelligence and kindness. So when it comes to something like euthanasia, every buddhist would have to make that decision for themselves. First of all, the appreciation to the sanctity of life that every individual's life is really important, but then there is also an appreciation that what is important is the quality of life and the ability to sustain a state of mind that is healthy and helps in human flourishing and happiness.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The main objective of the study is to trace the ethical issues and complications related to the act of euthanasia. Similarly, the study also deals with the approach of Buddhism and Jainism toward the problem of euthanasia.

METHODOLOGY:

The paper is qualitative and descriptive in nature as it intends to study the problem of euthanasia in Ancient India with Special Reference to Buddhism and Jainism from a philosophical perspective in terms of its real world relevancy. Qualitative research provides the flexibility to gather culturally specific insights into moral values, opinions, behaviors, and social contexts of specific populations, making it advantageous. The paper is based on secondary data in the form of books, articles etc. dealing with the ethical issues related to euthanasia.

ANALYSIS:

Euthanasia is killing a terminally ill patient for the sake of mercy to alleviate him from great suffering, or killing someone who is in an irreversible coma. Hastening the death of a terminally ill patient who is affected by an incurable and painful disease, either by killing him with a lethal injection, or by withdrawing medical procedures that prolong his life, is usually known as euthanasia or mercy killing. The word euthanasia originates from Ancient Greek language; it is based on a combination of the terms eu, which means "well" and thanatos meaning "death". "Euthanasia is thus the act of seeking to provide a good death for a person who otherwise might be faced with a much more unpleasant death — hence the term "mercy killing".¹ Thus euthanasia is like mercy killing.

An essential aspect of euthanasia is that it involves taking a human life, either one's own, or that of another. The person whose

life is taken must be someone who is believed to be affected by some incurable disease, or injury from which recovery can't be reasonably possible. One more important aspect of euthanasia is that the action is deliberate and intentional. Damien Keown and John Keown state that "By 'euthanasia' we mean the intentional killing of a patient by act or omission as part of his or her medical care. We are not concerned, therefore, with either the administration of palliative drugs, or the withdrawal of futile or excessively burdensome treatment, which may, as a foreseen side-effect, hasten death."² Those that seek euthanasia do so because of unbearable pain and the essential intention of the doctor involved in cases of euthanasia is not to gain some personal benefit, but to alleviate the patient from acute pain and suffering.

There are two types of distinctions that are prominent in discussions of euthanasia. The first distinction is between active and passive euthanasia, and the second distinction is between voluntary and involuntary euthanasia. Active euthanasia means taking a direct action to kill the terminally ill patient. giving him a lethal injection prescribed by the doctor. Passive euthanasia means allowing the terminally ill patient to die by withholding treatment, or by withdrawing life-saving devices. Voluntary euthanasia is mercy killing of a terminally ill patient with his or her consent. For example, a patient suffering from very painful and terminally ill cancer may ask to be killed with a fatal injection of morphine to relieve him or her from acute pain and suffering. Involuntary euthanasia is mercy killing without the consent of a terminally ill patient because the person is incapable of giving his or her consent. For example, the possibility of involuntary euthanasia arises in cases of comatose adults, or in cases of severely defective new-borns. However, in case of involuntary euthanasia, the consent of the patient's family members or relatives can be obtained. When the voluntary and involuntary distinction is combined with the active and passive distinction, it results in four types of euthanasia: Active voluntary euthanasia, Passive voluntary euthanasia, Active involuntary euthanasia, Passive involuntary euthanasia. Of these four types of euthanasia, voluntary passive euthanasia seems to be the easiest to justify, and involuntary active euthanasia is the most difficult to justify. Voluntary euthanasia, both active and passive, can be justified if it can be shown that there is a fundamental moral right of the terminally ill patient to determine his or her own destiny when life becomes worthless, painful and miserable.

Buddhism does not have a special injunction against euthanasia because sometimes the greater good is for a life to end than for it to continue. Having said that, any buddhist would consider taking life which is a breach of the buddhist precept of not taking life. Buddhist discourse on bioethical issues is notably lacking in explicit content, so it becomes difficult to make a general discussion on euthanasia. "Accordingly, most of the burgeoning secondary literature in this area is reconstructive or speculative to varying degrees. Secondly, there are many schools of Buddhism and no central authority on matters of precept or practice."³ If there is a case for euthanasia, then this would have to be done after great thought and it would be very serious thing to do. Euthanasia is basically a good death, what we might do with somebody who is near to death and in a very difficult situation with a pain or other kind of suffering and so we may hasten death for this individual being, because we think that is the way to make death better.

Euthanasia is a very controversial and complicated issue within Buddhism, since it emphasized on the principle of the sacredness of life and followed by the concept of Ahimsa which is the practice of non-violence and not harming. "Buddhism's approach to medical ethics is informed by its belief in the sanctity of life. This pan-Indian belief finds ethical expression among the major religious traditions in the form of the principle of non harming (ahimsa). In the case of Buddhism, which is atheistic, respect for life is grounded not in its divine origin but in its spiritual destiny, namely the state of final perfection known as nirvana."⁴ All persons in the world are subject to pleasure and to pain as they go from birth to death. Birth, aging, illness and death are natural phenomena that no one can avoid. When one is ill, it can last a long time and can be extremely painful and the problem we have nowadays is that due to the development of medical science and the aid of medical treatment the rate of natural death is brought down. Natural death has been slowed down and because of this there are certain illnesses from which one should actually die quickly, but this ends in slow, protected death or no death at all. They give oxygen, intravenous glucose drops, injections and all types of medicines, which make the patient die slowly. So all these things are relative. If a person can just die naturally that is ideal. No human intervention to bring him to death.

There are cases where a person should just die but because of oxygen or some other human intervention, like using a pump to help him breathe so he is unable to die. So, here the question

arises: can we just remove that oxygen mask? Can we take the pump away? Does taking it away we are helping him to die? or that we are providing euthanasia. Ideally a person's death should be natural. If someone is already going to die, and we are making him keep on breathing and not stop, we use artificial ways to keep him breathing. It is not necessary to do this because first of all we do not keep someone alive on purpose, we do just to extend a life, and make him suffer all the more. That amounts to a sort of cruelty.

Regarding euthanasia, the most common position of Buddhism is that voluntary euthanasia is wrong, because it indicates that one's mind is in a bad state and that one has allowed physical suffering to cause mental suffering. Buddhism put a great emphasis on non-violence or non-harm, and on avoiding the ending of life. Intentional ending of life seems against Buddhist teaching and therefore, voluntary euthanasia should be forbidden.

The followers of Jainism are called Jains, which is derived from the sanskrit word 'Jina', meaning victor and referring to the many saviors who were successful in leaving the cycle of rebirths and have made a path for others to follow. Jains follow an ethical code of conduct with fundamental vows required for both monks and householders. These five vows are Ahimsa or non-violence, Satya or truth, Asteya or non-stealing, Brahmacharya Or chastity and Aparigraha or non-possession. The Jainas follow the principle of Karma with souls being reborn in various realms of existence according to their past and present action.

Scholars argue that Sallekhana, which is also known as samlehna, santhara, samadhi-marana or sanyasana- marana, is a supplementary vow to the ethical code of conduct of Jainism, is signify the problem of euthanasia. Sallekhana is an intense penance that is taken by someone during the last moments of his life. Sallekhana is an ethical choice of a person to live with dignity until death. It is a religious practice to voluntarily fast to death by gradually reducing the intake of food and other liquid. It is a way of thinning all human passions and the body. It is another way of destroying rebirth, influencing karmas or impressions by withdrawing from all physical and mental activities. Therefore, it can be called voluntary death or passionless death.

Sallekhana should not be confused with suicide and one should stope using the same for different phenomena. Sallekhana is religious practice that results in the end of one's life, but Jains refused to equate it with suicide. The Jaina philosophy

differentiates suicide and Sallekhana on the basis of violence because they consider suicide to be an act of violence toward the body, on the other hand Sallekhana is considered as the ultimate act of non-violence. Suicide results from passion and desires, whereas in the case of Sallekhana, passions are subjugated. "The systematic methodology of Sallekhana takes the life span of twelve years of gradual limitation of food, water etc. whereas the common methods adopted for committing suicide are jumping from heights, jumping in wells or deep water jumping or lying down before a running train, shooting, hanging, poisoning by use insecticide or other drugs, burning oneself with the use of kerosene or petrol or the use of electrical wires (live) etc."⁵ As regards results or consequences, in Sallekhana there is definitely gain, because it is means to self realization, while in suicide there is loss.

CONCLUSION:

Life is divine light. Death cannot be separated from life. It is a part of living. It gives life intensity, life is fleeting, so every moment becomes precious. Delay of death by machines destroys respect. Life is God's gift, living happily is life, but when life is surrounded by incurable diseases and the disease becomes incurable, then a respectable death is better than such a bad life. There is a worldwide debate on euthanasia that when a person has the right to life then why he does not have the right to die. The demand for this law is increasing all over the world, but the demand for euthanasia is a very sensitive issue. On March 9, 2018, the Supreme Court of India has approved the right to euthanasia ie passive euthanasia with certain conditions. The Supreme Court has said that 'the fundamental right to live includes the right to die with dignity'. The Supreme Court of India's decision to grant the right to euthanasia will be written in golden letters in the history of India and has put an end to the long-standing debate on euthanasia in India.

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