

Learning to Die : The Jain Ritual ‘Sallekhanâ’—An Insight into the Historical Experiments of the Termination of Life

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Abstract :

As the legendary mystic yogi, Milarepa of Tibet said in a short sentence-‘Learn Death’; so is the bare fact pounding upon the face of human life, says, every person pretends to be very clever, cautious and cunning regarding worldly affairs. But they are awkwardly caught unaware by sudden death. They are befooled by death, when they plan to survive and rejoice for the next summers and so on. The wise on the other hand, prepare psychically—physically to accept the inevitable with a hearty smile. They know their ‘birth’ was beyond their ephemeral power, but ‘death’ (not suicide) after a well led ethical life can attest the completion of a journey, where the penance and physical mortification according to ancient Jaina texts, brings the ultimate laurels of mundane life, while shifting towards the transmudane. No other religion apart from Jainism delves such deep into the philosophy and practice of voluntary terminating one’s life, both as a specific diasporical genre and traditionally cited textual inference, socio-historically and spiritually. The paper deals with the very specific ritual observed by the Jain monks, nuns and laymen of ancient period till today citing the historical texts as well as the religious canons. The paper specifically deals with the Digambara Jaina lineage of Shravan Belagolâ, Karnataka, and the saints related to its glorious ritual deaths, which are a part of Jaina monasticism and are termed as a type of social celebrations.

Key Words : Jainism, Sallekhanâ, Paramâtmâ, Âgamas, Antarâtmân, Tapasyâ.

Almost all the religions of the world, especially the ones sprouting in India, have deeply delved to speculate the mystery of death. But, on deeper inspection, we find that Jainism in both its diasporical blend, canonical-textual purview and meticulous development, dichotomically (theoretically as well as practically) studied it with an unflinching attitude of inner quest. They have been the celebrated ones, the best of the toughest pilgrims on their voluntary termination of life. Termed as a celebrated ‘death inviting’ ritual, maintained through the monastic lineages for thousands of years and also by laymen and women of the local diaspora, kings and queens of different dynasties, everybody hailed the total manner of pursuing death through absolute peace, tranquility and non-violence in its vibrant mannerism.

The Variance of Ritual Deaths : The Jaina Purview

Death, has been a subject of minute speculation for the Jaina monks, both in its practical and textual purview. To accept death in a welcoming gesture, pertaining the code of conduct as laid in ancient norms and traditional monasticism has maintained itself to be the acid test of Jaina path of hardship and monastic proficiency. These ritual deaths are of a variety of terms and each one is highly distinctive in its process of ‘death pursue’ than the other.¹ The ultimate goal of this rigorous penance attaining the ever peaceful realm of death is to become ‘swayambhu’ or ‘paramâtmân’. The three guiding jewels (Triratna) of ‘Right Faith’, ‘Right Knowledge’ and ‘Right Conduct’ dazzle in one’s mundane realm, liberating the soul from the cycle of rebirth.

The Right-Faith takes one to the realization of the purity of the soul tracing its way out from the cycle of rebirth. The understanding of the Jain Âgamas (religious canonical texts) and its ritual based spiritual objectives can be termed as the Right Knowledge. All these coagulate into the code of conduct. The Right Conduct which secures perfect equanimity, destroying through penance, the Karmans accumulated over many births,² is the outer shell of these three ethical values.

A. The Philosophical Backdrop : Theorizing to Die

The Jaina Negation : Studying the Innate Pessimism.

Of all the other religions of the world, Jainism is a religion which directly and unperturbably deals simultaneously and dichotomically with the ‘liberation of one’s soul’ and to denounce the body for its libidinous and sensual enslavement. The Jaina philosophy of life motivates itself to a much higher degree whereby specific references of body (kâyâ),

soul (âtâmâ), meditation (samâdhi) and siddhatva (realization) is being mentioned as a tool to attain the 'Absolute Identity'. The celebrated Jaina text of mysticism named 'Paramâtma Prakâsha' written in Apabhramsha by Yogindudeva (6th century A.D) serves as a guide to understand these developments.

(i) Kâyâ (Body) : Jainism has always been negative towards ephemerality. To formulate the ultramundane existence according to the final state of attainment (as Kevali or Siddha) in different ethereal layers (heavens) of transmundane upper zones (in terms of rebirth), mannerisms³, the negation of the 'Kâyâ (body) and its traits have always been held up by Jainism. The Jains-regard the body as a miserable abode, which is perishable, and thereby, should be condemned. It is the most transitionally wasted and filth filled pot which becomes ash when burnt, dust when buried. The Jaina Âgamas state that the kâyâ deserves condemnation.⁴ The very insight of negativity in Jainism is derived from the canonical notion, that the physicality always remains demanding—for food to met up with hunger, for water, to quench one's thirst, for dress-to cover and make or show the filth filled pot as desirable to another, let alone, the libidinous and other inherent psychic traits of the psyche which are invariably nauseating. The fools anoint, decorate and nourish the body, knowing not the decadent and disdainful fate that awaits them. For attaining the highest limit, the zenith, where mundane cognites with the transmundane, one should never oblige the physical entity, neither anoint, decorate or nourish it.⁵

The Jaina conceptual discourse maintains that, it is the body that drives one into the 'pentamorphic mundane ephemerality' called 'samsâra'. It (the samsâra) is a quicksand although it seems sensually tickling and alluring. As one sinks more into this poisonous quicksand, the encrustation of the 'karmas' on the ethereal layers of the soul are more hardened, more ensnared in its inherent character. The wise, they who are awake and alert know that the soul embodies its previous Karmas, basically it is eternally independent. He flaunts his sensual indulgence preferring the negativity than to a life of hard penance. He mistakes the body for the soul and becomes ignorant of the inner substantiality of the spiritual elements.

The scriptures and canons reiterate the fact between the wise and the foolish that 'the ignorant forgets the true nature of his body and soul. The wise is aware of the soul's independence. The attachment to the pupils and scriptures on behalf of a monk is condemnable'.⁶ One must not remain attached to the paraphernalia. Even though the Digambara Jaina lessens the burden of his daily routine, the Digambara Jaina monastic person never attaches himself to his basic elements—the mat (Âsana) the water bowl (Kamandal), the peacock feathered broom (Pichhi) and disciples. Quite a few times the pious is distracted from his pursuit, due to these psychic cognition. To prove the severance from the so called paraphernalia it is not necessary to wear and demonstrate the emblem of the great Jinas neither to show the deepest adherents to the tenets of asceticism.⁷

(ii) The Indestructible One : The Matrix of the Soul

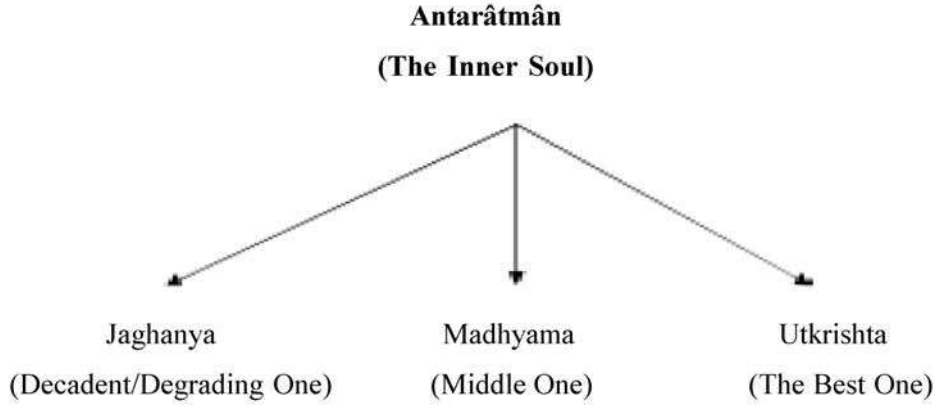
Regarding 'Âtmân', the scriptures from prehistoric remnants, along with Jaina codifications speak that the soul dwells in this transitory and ephemeral entity termed as body. This dwelling of the Âtmân or Soul is absolutely independent of its mundane presence. As the soul is eternal the Jaina canons specify its indestructibility and ever tranquil vibrance. In no case, there can be no cognitional unification between an eternal element and a transitory being. While the body along with its existential physicality identifies itself with birth, death, gender, caste and colour, the soul is totally out of this similarity of cognitive existences.⁸ The presence of the soul is because of its Karmas. 'By releasing the soul from the trammels of samsâra, the wise cleanses it of the Karmic encrustations.'⁹ All pious pursuits of penance and mortification lead to this ultimate goal.

The Jaina lineages portray trilineal characters of soul. The external or bahirâtâmân, the internal or antarâtâmân and the supreme or paramâtâmân.¹⁰ The supreme soul can be realized when the internal soul acts as a medium or vent to the supreme one, only when the destruction of the outer soul, the bahirâtâmân is accomplished.¹¹ The philosophy of the negation which circumambulates the Jaina theoretical discourse relates the negation with this bahirâtâmân as the soul which is sunk in the quagmire of this mundane, transitory world. It is embedded in the filthy physical pot of sensory attributes, which we term as the body. The body should be dispensed with, otherwise we won't reach the indispensable inner ethereal ambits of the soul.

The 'bahirâtâmân' (outer soul) is clinging to the body and the body itself is blended with negation according to Jaina conceptuality. As the body longs for pleasure, fame and wealth, thuswise the 'bahirâtâmân' (literally the body itself)

dreads from its inherent ephemerality, insecurity and fear due to the existential transitoriness of physicality. As the result of penance coinciding with mortification, the self becomes converted, where it verily realizes the shallow substance of the 'bahirâtmân'.

The inner core of the matrix of the soul, the 'antarâtmân' is also trilineal¹² as shown below—



The Jaina discourse which specifies the 'antarâtmân' also cites that it is absolutely free from family, wealth and material possessions-which cognites to form an elemental 'Samsâra'. The advancement towards dharma is the principal journey with the 'atman' itself. As the transformation continues, the converted self is free from pride is aware of the transitory physicality and wages a relentless war with the 'Karmas' (the deeds virtues or vices collected through the previous births and ethereally projected upon this life.) This psychic battle continues till the absolute victory is achieved by the internal self. The 'antarâtmân' becomes the 'paramâtmân'. Since the body is not signified with the soul, the soul when becomes absolutely free from the shackles of past deeds or Karmas becomes the supreme self. This state of the soul is irreversible and eternal (soul).

The physical format with its imminent ephemerality is identified as the most dispensable element.¹³ The 'bahirâtmân' or the so called body with its continuous affliction with the deeds or Karman leans towards the sensual libidinous character of the mundane realm. The soul receives the brunt of the sword being terribly afflicted with the deeds or Karma. Its position is like a lame man, helpless and traumatized by the amorous indulgence of sensual pleasures by the physical entity. As the soul remains 'Jada' or dormant it can neither drive the body to activity nor can stop its activity. Prof. Settar clarifies it by specifying the Karmas as—'The Karmas are subtle atoms of matter and they stick into the space-points of the souls that are infatuated with and tainted by sense, pleasures and passions.'¹⁴

The goal of the wise mendicants in Jainism has always been to burn down the Karmas through meditative penance thereby securing the freedom for the soul. Until and unless the Karmas are pacified and whittled down by the trilineal royal path of Right Faith, Right Knowledge and Right Conduct, the transformation of 'Âtmân' will not change into Paramâtmân'. The cleansing process of meditation wiping and sweeping out all attachments, will clean the dirt on the mirror. A 'dead set' penance based on meditation gradually helps the seeker to get beyond the transitory doldrums of the mundane matrix, thereby perceiving 'paramâtmân', the supreme self with the precognition of canonical knowledge.¹⁵

(iii) Samâdhi : Meditating on the Self and Beyond

The encrustation of Karmas needs to be cracked and melted resulting in the realization of the self. The mortification of the physical self is necessary to realize the 'paramâtmân.' The canons praise a state as specifically known as 'Parama Samâdhi' (The Great Meditation) whereby the meditators' psychic veracity elevates him to a spiritual realm, far away from the elemental negativities and distractions.¹⁶ The 'parama-samâdhi' is like a bonfire (Aggiya) in which the Karmas are burnt. Collected over several cycles of births and deaths, the filthy coating or layers of the Karmans are thuswise evaded and as one penetrates them they are gradually evanescent leaving the âtmâ at ease and peace. It also completely annihilates the Karmic influx through meditative processes.

The Parama Samâdhi is dichotomic in nature. One where the texts refer to the destruction of the four ghâti-karmans

and the second one where all Karmans are destroyed resulting the soul's gaining Infinite faith, Infinite knowledge, Happiness and Power. All extrications of the extraneous things are the goal of the prime meditation. Through the way of the canons we find that the process of deep meditation leads the seeker to a state where he concentrates his mind on the ever expansive sky (akâsha) encompassing the super-physical space, whereby his delusions diminish and wash away. They are destroyed, leaving his entity merge into ever blissful and divine omniscience. In meditation, this is what he thinks and becomes as being himself a 'paramâtmân'. None other but his own eternal self is the embodiment of the ultimate knowledge. Understanding and feeling the difference between the body and the soul, the seeker understands that the soul can be transformed into the 'paramâtmân'. When the Karmans subside, the soul is free, thereby the Jaina becomes the Siddha.

(iv) Siddhatva : The Penultimate Realm

The Siddhas according to Jainism are the infinite and liberated self realized souls. They have become the soul supreme, the pinnacle of spiritual glory has been attained by them. Being eternal, stainless and unassailable, they dwell at the summit of the three worlds. Representing infinite vision, knowledge, power and bliss, the Siddha embodies the quadrispectral entities, of Brahman, Parabrahman, Shiva and Shânta. As Prof. Settar says—'With their Karmans destroyed, rebirths overcome and vision and bliss gained, they become paramâtmâns. They are however different from the Arihantas, who are not liberated, but having conquered the karmans, are close to attaining liberation.

We must keep it in mind that Jaina Codes allow a soul to attain the ultimate 'Siddhatva' without going through the 'Arihanta' stage. An Arhat (Arihanta) is bound to become a Siddha, but a Siddha need not be an Arihanta primarily. The Siddha becomes the supreme God, but neither he, nor the Arhat creates, supports or destroys the Universe. Neither they offer boons, nor curses. Their invocation by aspirants is due to their iconic role model entity on the rugged terrain of realizing eternal bliss and peace, of realizing one's soul.

All the liberated souls, dwell in the equanimous realm above of the siddhas. It is the realm where birth and death ceases, Moksha is attained, and perpetual bliss prevails.

(v) The Soul : Beyond the Physical Entity

The importance of meditation in Jainism, entwined with mortification through multifarious forms of penance, is an example of their attitude towards the body. The mortification therein is emphasized to clarify the basic schism and interrelation between body and soul, which looks illusory. The Karmans in collusion with the body, do a lot of harm to the soul. The soul's incarceration within the body is afflicted with the Karmans. Once the soul is freed from eight types of Karmans, it becomes bodiless. This physical entity is a helping tool in the way towards mortification and higher-deeper meditative realms. To attain Siddhatva, the body after fulfilling the penance has no importance, whatsoever.

To cut the shackles of Karman and realize one's own eternal self one has to defy and deny the 'para-dravya' (object-external) being the body and gain the 'sva-dravya' (object-internal). One is required to abstain from all kinds of external activities thereby engaging in meditating on the true nature of the self. To pursue death is an ultimate blissful step when the realized self disturbs no one, has peace prevailing both internally and externally, Leaving everybody at peace and showing the royal road to 'Learn Death' and prove the immortality of the soul, while 'consciously' departing from one's own physical entity. This is the path for the 'wisest of the wise', obviously for the 'bravest of the brave'.

(B) To Invite Death : The Paths of Physical Annihilation

(i) Identification of Death : The Jaina Purview

Scores of Jaina canonical texts and religious treatises highlight the different ways, death has been pursued, as a meticulously drawn process, suffering unimaginable mortifications with a divine smile on the face. The Jaina Digambara Muni thuswise portrays the living embodiment of immortality by peacefully shedding off their mortal frames through long monastic traditions passing misty ages of yore, till today. Categorized as the toughest religion of the world by the religious experts according to the codes of conduct and rightly so, the Jaina path of penance is blended with a diehard attitude towards attaining its goal of self realization. Through ages, thousands of years before the Christian era, the Jainas as a diasporical entity pondered very deeply on the different ways, ritualistic practices to attain self realization

by pursuing and 'inviting death'. Death as a process of shedding the mortal frame is a friend embraced by oneself to rejoice self realization as well as the ethical codes to die a 'conscious' death. Masters, the wisest of the wise who took up the same vow and same path, like them the mortified, penance delved seeker the initiated Jaina monks or nuns even in this 21st Century also thwarts away all negativities and embraces death in the peaceful possible way. Death has been termed in Jainism as a process whereby the matter (pudgala) termed as 'anubhūyamāna' separates from the soul (âtâmâ) and perishes.

The Jaina canonical texts (Âgamas) state that just loss of breath (Jîva) or body (Sharîra) cannot complete the process of ethical death. This specific typicality of liberating oneself relates with promoting oneself from the lowest rung of the existential realm, known as 'Udurtane'. It is related with 'Kâla' meaning an escape from the ordinary world purview and 'chyûta' which means a release from the world of demigods.

The Jaina texts name forty-eight types of deaths enlisting them under specific heads. The succinct and meaningful lists can be found in two texts, the 'Bhagabatî Sûtra' and 'Bhagabatî Âradhanâ'. Thuswise, the 'Sûtra' Text names fourteen types (of death) and the 'Âradhanâ' text lists seventeen types of death under five specific heads. Comparing Abhayadeva's 'Bhagabatî Sûtra' and Shivârya's 'Bhagabatî Âradhanâ' we find the latter to be more specific and encompassing.

Hereby a brief note on the seventeen types of death is given below.

(a) Âvichi-Marana : Called also as 'nitya' Marana or perpetual death it specifies the death that takes place every second in every life. The life we have is but a period limited to some specific years comprising of a specific time, taking us more nearer to the end. So we live through death or the process itself becomes a gradual journey to death. The perpetual advancement towards death is called as 'âvichi-Marana'.

(b) Tadbhava-Marana : Experienced by every person, known to everybody which signifies the last breath, (after being released) the body is gradually destroyed. Apart from the wisest of the wise deaths or 'pandita-pandita' Marana', all the other types of deaths constitute rebirth and resumption of another body and come within the periphery of tadbhava-Marana.

(c) Avadhi-Marana : 'Avadhi' literally means a span of time and space. In this specific type, the experience and environment of the present state is reflected and repeated in subsequent deaths. It is of a dichotomic character, one type of Avadhi Marana is known as 'Sarvâvadhi', where Sarva (all) elements like natural conditions, time, experience and environment identically recur in subsequent deaths. The second type is termed Deshâvadhi where only space or physical environment or ambience recur.

(d) Âdi-Antya Marana : When the conditions of the dying process including the ambience thereof, differs in life, both in the present and future, it is called as 'Âdi-Antya Marana'. The 'Âdi Marana' points to the existing life and death in subsequent lives is termed as 'Antya-Marana'.

(e) Bâla-Marana : Death in an ignorant, foolish manner is called as Bâla-Marana. Bâla signifies undeveloped, incoherence in psychic stability along with gross immaturity in handling situations or the self.

There are five phases of Bâla Marana.

(i) Avyakta Bâla Marana : Like the death in infancy where the baby existentially is unable to perform or understand piety (Dharma), wealth (Artha) and sex (Kâma).

(ii) Vyavahâra Bâla-Marana : Like the death of a person who is totally ignorant or has only the slightest of knowledge about the universe or Ihaloka, the scriptures or the Vedas and religion or the Dharma also called samaya.

(iii) Gyâna-Bâla-Marana : It is the death of one, who is incapable of comprehending moral implications of the ethical code.

(iv) Darshana-Bâla-Marana : It is the death of one, who has a false understanding (mithyâ-drishti) of the creed.

The death of an ignorant fool, being immature, termed in Jainism as 'Bâla Marana' is divided into two parts—one the 'Icchhâpravritta Bâla Marana', the other being 'Anicchhâpravritta Bala Marana'. The first one, sees idiots terminating

their lives through fire, smoke, poison, water, rope, suffocation or disagreeable food. It refers to death through high climatic exposures of heat, cold, thirst or hunger, or by falling from a mountain. The famous Jaina Canonical Text, Achârânga Sûtra, highly disapproves the termination of one's life by exposing the body to the vultures (giddha patthe), falling or jumping from a mountain or a tree (termed as giripadana), swallowing poison (vishabhakkhana), drowning (jalapravesha) by hanging oneself (vehanasa), piercing oneself with a weapon (termed Satthovadane) or either entering into fire (jalana). All these forms of self-inflictions leading to suicides and suicidal tendencies, resulting in annihilation of the physical entity or death is highly condemned and considered extremely condemnable for monks and nuns. Even to think of suicide or such mental tendencies is a grave sin on the part of the Jaina monk. In Jainism, 'death' is not to shy away or flee from one stage or take asylum into another realm of existence. Fearing the suffering, pain, becomes the sole factor of sorrow, not only to himself, while writhing with agony, but also brings tension, sorrow, grief and insecurity to all around the person and those who are attached with this incoherent, intolerant personality.

Death is the best friend of a person, whereby fulfilling each and every duty, whether being a monk or a householder, one has to end his or her life in a befitting manner. Heartily embracing death with absolute faith in the light of sayings and doings of the Masters, their diehard dedication, ethical depth and every bit of act or inactivity aspires them to touch the pinnacle of penance by the same glorifying conduct of shedding the mortal shell blended with total non-violence, equanimity and peacefully passing through the mortifications of penance. In this context, it is needless to say that each and every attempt or type of suicide is just a resultant effect of distress, shock, despair, depression, vehemence, rage and every type of psychic and physical instability. Primarily, these are condemned and outrightly rejected by the Jaina monks and nuns.

There are also some more types of deaths, which are outrightly condemned by Jaina saints and savants. Vardhamâna Mahâvira (599BC.-527BC) has highly condemned the two types of death as mentioned and referred in Sthânânga and Samavâyânga Sûtras. These are death due to impact of negative irritations or parishahas and death due to sensual urges (yesatta). Another one type of death is dying with the need to gain worldly glory.

The death which comes near, but the person hesitates to die, desires to prolong life or is unwilling to submit to it at the appropriate or inappropriate time or moment is termed as undesired or unwilling death. It is termed as 'Andhâ Marana'.

(e) Pandita Marana : The wise persons who die a death enlightened in the light of Right Knowledge is termed as Sublime Death or 'Pandita Marana'. The specificity of this death lies in the fact that the enlightened renounces the body through the Jiva(soul), while in the bâla-Marana, the ignorant renounces the soul (Jiva) through the mortal body. One who is a pandita, is highly knowledgeable and aware about the sheer futility of prolonging one's life when all the physical faculties start crumbling and failing. The torment of diseases and other elements regularly disturb and degenerate the body. The wise or pandita Marana can be gained by those who have gained control over the fourfold passions or kashâyas. These are anger, pride, deceit and greed. The mendicant should be free from mamatva (attachment), nidâna (worldly gains) ahankâra (pride) and other emotional bondages. In this case the pursuer attacks the sensory pulsations and overcomes them (Jitendriya). Hence, he is crowned with the right knowledge or Samyaka Gyana.

The pursuer for 'Pandita Marana' (Sublime Death) should gain proficiency in knowledge, especially of the canonical texts (vyavahâra), the right belief which helps to destroy the Karmas and control them (Samyaktva). 'Kshayopashamikâ' (known as the destruction-cum-subsidence of the Karmas), 'Aupashamika' (delaying the Karmans for a while), 'gyâna' (proficiency in five kinds of knowledge which includes the mastery over mind) and 'sâmâyika' (meaning submerging of the trilineal activities of mind body and speech) in the spiritual silence of the âtmâ. It also includes Charitra (which denotes mastery over the five elements). Textual rules also point towards commanding 'Chhedopasthâpanâ' (abandonment of sins cognizing with repentance for moral violation), 'Parihâravishuddhi' (which includes physical activities fully freed from injury and violence, Sukshmasamparga (that is shedding all passions thereby destroying the greed that hides in the tenth 'gunasthâna' and disturbs the soul)

(f) Bâla Pandita Marana : It signifies the death of a householder who is unable to relinquish his commitments at the final moment of existence. In such cases there is partial awareness without the physical torments and mortifications involved in Sallekhanâ. He dies without fasting which is the centrifugal part of Sallekhanâ. Either

because of his own personal existence or because of family and pressure of friends, he dies with his own eagerness to prolong his mundane existence. As he has been able to annihilate the passions (Kashya-Sallekhanâ) to quite an extent, thereby freeing himself from the Kashâyas. Finally, engaged in self-counseling, he breaths his last. Because of not going through the totality of the vows, but partially completing them, before death, as he is aware of his spiritual conversion, his death is considered as different.

The Three Sections Leading to Sublime Death

Accordingly directed by the ancient Jaina texts and systematizing these extreme codes of conduct through hundreds and hundreds of years the Jaina monastic community has directed a ritualistic precedence of mortification for the pursuer, to cleanse himself through meditation, constant worship and penance. They are named as 'Bhaktapratyâkhyâna', 'Ingini' and 'Prâyopagamana'.

g. (i) The Bhaktapratyâkhyâna Marana :

'Bhakta' terms to intake of food and drink and 'Pratyâkhyâna' terms to refrain from all these laying total emphasis on fasting. In any case, no amount of mortification is minimized.

The famous Jaina canonical text 'Achârânga Sûtra', states that one who aspires for the 'Bhaktapratyakhyana' death should lie down at the chosen place. The toughness of character is seen and thereafter he passes through the acid test on the next phase. The monk (pursuer of death) should bear the attacks of insects and other creatures which crawl on the rocks. It may happen that these crawling creatures may cause extreme pain, bleeding and unbearable gore. If the creatures feed on flesh and blood, thereby destroying his body, he should in no case will harm them. Neither should he rub the wounds or try anything to evade or pacify the pain, even change his posture and position to gain any type of physical comfort.

(ii) Ingini-Marana :

The Achârânga Sûtra emphasizes 'Ingini-Marana' as the death after realizing the meaning (ingita) of the soul, (that is 'ingitam-âtmano'). A pursuer achieves the desired end (sva-abhiprâyânusârena-sthitvâ-pravatyamanam). The Achârânga Sutrâ identifies it as 'Stvara-Marana' or 'Ingita-Marana'. The way to attain this is codified below.

'On a bare ground, one rests with a peaceful mind, without food. He lies in a rigid posture, like a lifeless object. However, one is allowed to move from side to side. He is also allowed to stretch out one's limbs or walk within a prescribed area.'

The distinguishing factors that form a dichotomic view of the two Maranas are

(i) The Ingini Marana pursuer does not seek help from others and (ii) he adheres to the aparikarma, that is lying without the slightest movement of the body.

(iii) Prâyopagamana :

The mortifier in the prâyopagamana does not feel the need to move one's bowels. The celebrated text 'Bhagawatî Sûtra' codifies two kinds of 'Prâyopagamana'. They are 'Nihârîna' or death followed by funeral rites, which also includes the disposition of the body.

The second kind is the 'Anihârîna', which means death not followed by any funerary rites, thereby exposing the body to nature, insects and animals and birds.

Among all these multifarious types of deaths, the 'pandita-pandita Marana' (the wisest of the wise deaths) is the sublime end leading to omniscience. Freed from the mundane axis of birth and death, as the soul escapes from the chains of rebirth, it lands in the abode of permanence.

The termination of life through mortifications, ending in a peaceful and brave manner, with unshakable faith and ultimate tolerance reflects the climax of the Jaina asceticism. The hardcore code was lessened in the latter period to some extent, for the lay Jaina diaspora to equally participate, partially or totally in the process of terminating life themselves.

But in all conceptuality, anything physically or psychically nearer to suicide was absolutely condemned by the Jaina

asceticism and it was undoubtedly true about the stages of penance. The smiling choice to die was ultimately the win of human will, dedication, years of preparation, perseverance and a grand lineage of previous great masters, ascetics both male and female who have laid their mortal lives to eternally inspire the forthcoming generation of monks.

Sallekhanâ : Inviting Death in a Soulful State

(i) The One Word : Sallekhanâ as a Conceptual Element

Among all the processes of terminating one's life, found in Jaina texts, lineage, historicity and penance, the 'Sallekhanâ' is the most sought after process, practiced to fulfillment in Jaina diaspora both for ascetics and laymen. The ritualistic speciality lies in a process of emasculating the body, which is highly praiseworthy in Jaina scriptures. The root meaning of 'Sallekhanâ' is based on two epistemological derivations. One is 'Sat' or praiseworthy and the other is 'lekhanâ', which means emasculation or enervation. This praised process is also prescribed for householders or Shrâvakas. They have to observe this ritual at the final phase of their lives. This is called 'Maranântikamsallekhanâmjoshitâ' which truly ensures a passionless, peaceful and pleasant end of life. This is what the Jaina scriptures call 'Sallekhanâ Tapah'.

There are quite a number of religious texts which highly hail 'Sallekhana' as one of the most coveted and systematic ways of terminating one's own life.

All great scholars of the Digambara Jaina tradition, like Kondakundâcharya (better known as Kundakunda), Vasunandi, Kârîkeya, Samantabhadra and Umâswâtî including Ashâdhara; every person has fully endorsed 'Sallekhanâ' as one of the celebrated vows that a sâdhaka (truth seaker) can opt for.

The Jaina diaspora which basically concentrated on the basic codes of conduct has been revolving around this ritual of 'inviting death' after a contented non-violent life lived according to the ethics of Jaina canons. As a case report of poets from Karnataka, we find quite a number of eminent saint-poets who have deal with Sallekhanâ in their poetic sojourn. The two most important of them are— Shivakotyâchârya in Prakrit and Samantabhadra in Sanskrit. Almost all Kannada poets refer to 'Sallekhana' in their writings. Bandhuvarma, the celebrated poet and author of 'Harivamshabhyudaya' gave a vivid description of 'Sallekhanâ' in its various stages.

All the thematic concentration on 'Sallekhanâ' speak out of one basic thought. That 'Death' by 'Sallekhanâ' means becoming one with the soul. To subjugate the senses or indriyas and purification of the self from mire and matter (mala vinasha and karma kalanka)

(ii) The Process of Psychic Cleansing : The Sallekhanâ as a Process

To observe the vow of sallekhanâ is to go through a process of equanimity, maintain a balance between fulfilling social duties and family responsibilities (if there remains to be any small part of it, yet to be fulfilled) and then pass out to the endless, peaceful horizon of self consciousness. The whole process is a constant continuity of withdrawal. It primarily starts with the realization of the shallow ephemerality of the world and life. It also ushers the gradual withdrawal from all commitments to family and society and repentance for sins and boastful behaviour of oneself. The behaviour of withdrawal is cognited with calmness and peace, which helps enormously to maintain the social order.

Advice has been given by various Jaina texts as to what is to be said and done. The withdrawal of a king is successful only after he has selected his successor and familiarised him with his responsibilities. An instance is given from the dialogues of Panduraja—

'Do not cause distress. Be courteous to the learned. Frighten not the relatives. Pacify the ruffled. Address brothers and sisters in a befitting manner. Look upon your subjects with love. Dispense justice impartially. Listen to the wise counsellors with an open mind. Balance enjoyment, piety and prosperity, but waver not to uproot the enemy.'

(iii) Initiation by the Guru : Entering the Arch of Sallekhanâ

The initiation is the most important part after gradual withdrawal from family. The entry into the ritualistic realm of 'Sallekhanâ' is started by the 'dikshâ' or initiation by the Master. It is a rigorous exercise to cultivate one's will power. The Master has to be assured that he gradually but surely purifies the mind of the renouncer and his will has to be strengthened by faith in the law of the Jina. The Guru mentally prepares him by conducting him through severe

ascetic exercises and helping him to discard all the luxuries of life. Ensuring these, the Master or Guru preaches to him the fundamentals of the 'Mahāvratas' or the great observances.

(iv) Travels of the Initiated : Post-Initiation Duties

As the initiation helps the renouncer to enter the world of piety and penance, he enters into a new enlightened life of a truth seeking mendicant of the extreme type. The stages to come gradually become cohesive with the daily life of the monk. To observe aparigraha, he pulls off (lunchana) his hair, beard and moustache. He takes to nudity and wanders into far flung meditating in different areas. He spends his time by deeply studying the Jaina canonical texts known as Agamas.

The seeker wanders unclothed in far away wilderness. All the while, his main concentration is to restrain himself. Getting separated from his Master, the renouncer ascetic solitary wanders along the remote countryside. He develops a liking for the dense woods and selects a spot. It can be a hilltop, a ravine or a cavern. There, he engages in meditation and his physical mortification starts. He denies all types of sustenance, intensifies the process of mortification. This intensity dehydrates the physical element, body, which transforms his body into a frame of bones and ribs. The renunciate stands erect and in a rigid posture, maintains the equanimity of mind, thereby stringently observing the 'Bhaktapratyākhyāna'. He worships the three jewels of the Āradhāna text, extricating himself from all useless chaos and confusion of the mundane. His goal is also a realm of no-gain, because ancient texts certify of a certain Madhubinga, who could not attain the pinnacle of perfection because he had an inherent desire to acquire a specific gain (nidāna).

Sallekhanā : The Justification of Termination

Quite a few ancient Jaina texts and canons like 'Bhagawatī Ārādhānā', 'Ratnakaranda Srāvakāchāra' and Purānas, deal and debate the various circumstances under which a monk or householder attempts the termination of life. Yashastilaka Champū emphasizes on the unwise destruction of the body. If and when the body is still fit, do not attempt to destroy it. The pursuer is cautioned by the ancient texts about the intrinsic importance of the body.

When the body is strong and stable, one must fully allow it to make progress. For the Shrāvakas, the householders, when afflicted with diseases, they must treat, tend and try to swerve the decaying physique to the road of recovery. But when it reaches the terminal state, then the termination of body is advised.

The realization of ephemerality makes us understand that the life we live is itself momentary. When it is time, just dissociate from your physical entity as 'You dissociate from the company of crooks.' So, we understand that the body has a typical role in attaining the three jewels (tri-ratnas). One must not solely run towards its destruction. But on the contrary, its limited use, inevitable destruction and remote relevance to the ultimate welfare of the soul should not be forgotten.

A time span of twelve years at the most is taken to perform the true Sallekhanā. The vow otherwise is a gradual but stringent withdrawal from the known ambience, attachments and other cognitive resources.

The training of Sallekhanā is quite a lifetime preparation while observing the prescribed vows. The 'āchamlavardhana' vow cites monks involving alternate days of fasting for as long as fifteen years. It is like a trained warrior who prepares to face a fierce enemy. Hence, his success is inevitable, if he quells the enemy and emerges victorious.

Sallekhanā : The Dichotomical Path to the End

Death should be faced with detachment and determination before it overwhelms the mind and body. Kondakundāchārya says, 'Truly, nothing is more calamitous than death for the pious'. That is the primary base behind accepting the great vow. The enlightened should provide no second chance for it to prevail, by cutting off the chains of births.'

The ritual of Sallekhanā falls into two parts—

- (1) The external punishment of the body or 'Bāhya Sallekhanā' and
- (2) The internal purification of the Mind or 'Ābhyantara-Sallekhanā.'

The self flagellating process of terrible external penance aims at subjugating the physical urges. The shrewd enemy

is the emotion (Samvega) cognized with attachment (râga). The ultimate Sallekhanâ is the proper fruit of a series of rigorous penances practiced throughout one's lifetime. It is not a hasty and impulsive attempt to gain a quick reward.

The weapon of attack is fasting. The process of fasting within Sallekhanâ thuswise consists of some specific inner processes and stages. The 'Tatvârthasûtra' of Umâsvâti cites the three main constituents of intake : (a) Consuming less than what is needed (b) conditional acceptance for food and (c) rejection of some or all nutrition (these include ghee, milk, curd, sugar, salt and oil). The cultivation of these austerities, the pursuer should meditate in isolated places, mortify the body which undertaken by dint of his will power. This physical flagellation is also known as 'Dravya-Sallekhanâ'.

The internal passions are curbed step by step thuswise approving the process of mortification. The internal austerities consist of severance, service, study and concentration. As it is said in holy scriptures, that the soul is cleansed of anger and desire, hatred and love, fear and misery. This is pure psychic cleansing and Sallekhanâ on the psychic state. Scripturally it is termed as Bhâva Sallekhanâ'.

The wise people first destroy the passions before attempting to destroy the physical entity (body). The famous text of 'Bhagawatî Âradhanâ', guides us in the same path.

The Psyche of Pure Departure

The seeker in the royal path to death, confesses his inner layers of anguish and pain, as he reflects his feelings of vices, as and when they arose in the minds of the person. He begs everyone to pardon him for the wrongs he may have done (in the past) thereby freeing himself from all types of love and hate (raga and dvesha). Recalling and cleansing of the sins in which he was directly involved or was instrumental or of sins committed under his consent every bit of it has to be confessed with a pure heart, before the final departure.

The Hymn to 'Welcome Death', the 'Long Awaiting Friend'

The famous hymn, written by Âchârya Samantabhadra is a celebrated welcome song for death, the long awaiting death. The hymn comprising of eighteen stanzas is a must to recite for sallekhanâ aspirants, who have almost reached the borderline area of mortal existence, maintaining the fervour of penance and sacrifice.

From the celebrated Ratnakaranda Shrâvakachâra, by Âchârya Samantabhadra, the special set of hymns with understanding, devotion and faith is read by the seeker while taking the valiant oath of Sallekhanâ. We lay down those very special lines, whereby they are the responsive pulsations of the oath of oaths. It's a warm welcome to a deathless transmundane obituary, the long awaited friend.

The Celebrated Hymns : Homage to the Deathless Death

'I am stepping on the highway of Death. O Lord Vîtarâga, I pray to you to make comfortable my journey to the city of Freedom. I shall endure the journey, gaining strength through 'samâdhi'.

- O' the soul, the abode of knowledge, shudder not at this withering physicality (mortal frame) which is infested with worms.
- O' the enlightened, celebrate death like you celebrate a great festival. The soul will depart from the humble hut of the mortal frame to find independent residence in a body mansion in the Great City. As such, why fear death ?
- Death begets the noblest of rewards—the most joyous experience in heaven ! Why should pious pursuer fear it ? Thus have our great seers of the past advised us.
- The soul is incarcerated in the cage, the human body, by the enemy, the Karmas and is oppressed by miseries. Who but the Lord of Death can release the soul from this cage of misery ?
- By the grace of comrade Death, the enlightened shall unlock the cage of misery, the body and secure for it, the comfort of Eternal Joy.
- One who refuses to gain the greatest of benefits, harvesting the 'Wish Tree' of Death, shall struggle throughout life dying a Perpetual Death. What would he achieve by it ?

- The enlightened shall rejoice in death. Why not ? For death would destroy the perishable body to procure a new and better one, being unperishable.
- The soul is stationed in the body and it is fully aware of the joy and the sorrow (of the journey) ; as it can sail on its own to the other world, would it be scared of the passage ?
- Only the benighted who is overwhelmed by earthly existence called Samsâra, fears Death. One who has escaped Samsâra and acquired true knowledge will rejoice at its approach.
Which of the five elements that constitute the body shall incarcerate the soul and steal its inner merit ?
- Because of the accumulated Karma, diseases rise in the body. But they also rise to help lessen attachments to it and secure the 'Blissful comforts' (shiva-sukhâya).

Just as only the kiln-burnt urn can hold water, not the unburnt, one who has the 'Right knowledge' alone can obtain the nectar of release, while others wallow in deep distress. Like the urn that has passed the fire of death to attain freedom.

Only the noble ones complete fearful and exacting rites to reap the final fruit ; they achieve the auspicious 'Samâdhi' through self-mortifications and meditation.

One who dies peacefully, attains the supreme position which reverberates with perpetual bliss and peace. The ancient Jaina texts highlight on the fact that a cleansed mind is extremely necessary for the peaceful and tranquil departure. It must be without sorrow, fear, worry, attachments, emotions, hatred, parinatî or the craving for excellence and arati.¹⁷

The Fasting Process : Stairways to Freedom

On a maximum period of twelve years span, the aspirant systematically and gradually reduces and continues to renounce solid foods, which come to the phase of nutritive liquids. Lastly, during the latter period of the vow, he declines almost everything living only on warm water. Then he even gives up the warm water (Prâsuk Jal) and solely concentrate on the 'Pañchanamaskâr Hymns'.¹⁸ Passing this stage leads him to be free from the very desire to live or even die. The person psychically stays in equanimity counseled by the selected band of associate munis, headed by one experienced Muni, termed as the 'Niryâpakâchârya'.

A total of forty eight Âchâryas, the supervision, counseling and protection of the 'kshapaka' or the aspirant is continuously maintained so that he can embrace peaceful, serene and sublime death. The duties are divided into Âchâryas in the following manner—

- Four take charge of the food.
- Four supervise his drink,
- Four control and regulate the swelling crowd who flock in thousands to witness the ascension of the 'Vîra Samsthâra' (Heroic Seat) by the aspirant or 'Kshapaka'.
- A team of four each is stationed at the four directions of the outer garden to help and guide the pilgrims and discipline their movements.
- Four munis are asked to narrate pious parables.
- Four of the Munis stand at the outer assembly hall to restrain the heretics advancing with their counterarguments and debates.
- Four stand guarding the door of the self-mortifier.
- Four more are appointed to guard, nurse, clean and assist the aspirant with his peacock-fan, pot etc. and also to assist him to concentrate on the 'shubhadhyâna', by narrating parables with illustrations.

Sallekhana : A Historical Incident in Lower Deccan

Although the celebrated ritual and its experiments regarding the 'Sallekhana Death' covered the major part of the

country, the epigraphic records at Sravana-Belagolâ, situated near Mysore refer about this ritual from about the middle of the eleventh century.¹⁸

The Social Stratification of the Ritual¹⁹

Studying the epigraphs and other primary sources, one comes to the point that monks outnumber lay people regarding terminating life through observing the strict Sallekhanâ ritual. Records at Sravana Belagolâ show Sallekhanâ deaths from about the middle of the 11th century.¹⁹ Among them the celebrated and revered monks were—

1. Nemichandrâchârya : Disciple of Shridharadeva, related to the Pânasoge branch of the Kondakundânvaya-Desigana and Pustakagacchha.²⁰
2. Shrinandi and Bhâskaranandi of Saurâshtragana.
3. Bhanukirtideva : Disciple of Bâlachandradeva, related to Nûlasamgha-Desigagana-Pustakagacchha.
4. Vâsupûjyadeva : Disciple of Pushpanandideva of Nandisangha.
5. Mallisena of Mûlasamgha-Desigagana Pustakagacchha.
6. Shrutamuni of the Ingulesvara lineage of Jain conglomeration of Nandisamgha, who died at Sravana Belagolâ.²²

Contrast to this, the sallekhanâ deaths of one laywoman and two laymen have been found through epigraphs. They are Pochikabbe, mother of Gangarâja, dying in Sravana Belagolâ (1120 A.D.)²³ ; Pâyanna, son of Mallappâ died in Humchâ (1398 A.D.) and Chennarâja, a Mahâmandaleshwara (died in Mûdabhatkal, 1429).²⁴ Prof. Settar found 'the ratio of death of monks, laymen and laywomen is 8 : 2 : 1.

Chronologically. Sallekhanâ's greater popularity is seen in the twelfth century and then in the fifteenth century.²⁵

TESTIMONY OF A GLORIOUS DEATH

(A Historical Testimony in Lower Deccan)

Historical observances of Sallekhanâ deaths at Sravana Belagola can be seen on the ancient Epigraphs. The commemorative pillar (Nishidhi) states the death of Saint Mânikasena, who was the spiritual Guru of Mahâmandaleshvar Sanghabhûvara, the ruler of Hire Bastin Hâduvalli (included within the Bhatkal. Taluk of Karwar district).²⁶

The epigraph praises Mâniksena who was the epitome of quite a few qualities. He readily embraced the great vows, endowed with a mind free of all coverings (he was a nirgrantha, a sky clad digambara monk). His head was cleared of hair, he never brushed his teeth, never ate more than observing the ten tenets of piety (dasha dharmalakshana). He had adopted the five branches of conduct (panchâchâras) exercised total control over body and mind, speech and physicality (known as 'Trigupti') and exercised himself in external (bâhya) and internal (âbhyantara) austerities. He was the one who had attained the equanimity of mind.²⁷

A vivid description of the sallekhanâ ritual taken by the great ascetic âchârya Mâniksena is chiseled on the epigraph thereto. It goes as under—

'Prostrating before his teacher, Jayasena, the brave Mâniksena expressed his desire to acquire the bliss of this pentamorphic, ephemeral transmigration. Thus wise he expresses to embrace the Sallekhanâ vow.

Mâniksena then turned towards Haivanpa and Manga- Mahîpati and says— "It is binding on those, who command time and space and who are endowed with a virtuous character, to observe the path of piety, leading to salvation or nirvâna. To successfully observe the vow, which is the fountain of all bliss, I seek your guidance.

Sangabhûpa submits his question with due respect towards Mânikesena—

"It seems appropriate that an ascetic should take to severe penances and the life of a wanderer ; it is equally appropriate for him to gain spotless conduct and the knowledge of the 'Absolute Truth' (tattva-gyâna). It will be highly commendable for the ascetic to gain freedom from passions and possessions. Generally, the Âgamic texts reiterate the fact that 'Sallekhanâ vow is taken up by an ascetic when one is facing insurmountable calamities (upasarga), unbearable old age (dusta-jare), incurable disease (ruje). The general law has been of this type hence is it appropriate for your holiness to take up the toughest part of asceticism, the path of inviting and celebrating one's own death ?

In his reply Mâniksena emphasizes on the points of stark realistic attitude, blended with the deepest apathy towards the ephemeral world and its inherent futility. He says—

“The brains, bones and blood, urine, excreta, phlegm and pus are covered with skin. Such a hideous body appeared perfect and beautiful to me all these days because of my blind attachment towards it. Trusting this body, I have travelled, so long, so far. O Sanghabhûpa, hugging on to the fleeting life, that is as ephemeral as the rainbow and a lighted wick held against a stormy wind, should I ignore the path that assures supreme salvation ?”²⁸

Sanghabhûpâla was convinced of the determination of the ascetic. He makes proper arrangements for his daily worship and takes leave of him.

Now its the time of the final departure and its essential rituals. Worshipping the lord, on an auspicious day, guided by the senior âchârya, he begins his ultimate path of this life’s journey living on four types of liquids—rice porridge, sugar cane juice, mango juice and warm water. He went on consuming them at regulated intervals of fifteen, twelve and six days, in the prescribed ratio.

Gradually he went on observing the vow of Sanyâsana. He starts his meditation firmly concentrating on Arihanta and the other Great Teachers. He never, for once had a breath of despair, nor did he pine for food. He became a living embodiment of devotion and detachment, as he lies down without moving any of his limbs even when irked by tiredness. The epigraph states that—‘Âchârya Mânikasena becomes immersed in deep auspicious thoughts, nursing no pity for his disintegrating body. Foreseeing his end, thereby fasting relentlessly for thirty three days, he begins to chant the Pañchapadas and when too tired to utter them himself, he listens to the chanting of the ascetics around him. Likewise, with total tranquility, peace and inner joy, he entered the ocean of salvation through the sanyâsana rite on Saturday, 2nd July 1429.’²⁹

Thus, Sallekhanâ as a ritual, as a vow, marks the distinct typicality of the pro-penance lineage of the Jaina community, which is flowing unperturbed through the Indian subcontinent through thousands of years.

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2. Settar, S., ‘Pursuing Death’ (Revised Edition), Primus Books. Delhi, 2017, p. 3. Sri Yogindudeva (Joindu) remarks regarding the mortification and attainment that— ‘To reach the other end of Samsâra, one should meditate purely on the divine spirit, without minding, whether the body is cut, pierced or destroyed’. (Paramâtma-yoga, p. 12) and Settar, S., Pursuing Death, p. 16.
3. For a detailed account see—Kundakunda (Kondakundacharya), ‘Pravachansâra’, ed. by Adinath Upadhye, I, Bombay, 1935 ; Yogindudeva, Paramâtmaprakâsha’ and ‘Yogasâra’, ed. by Adinath Upadhye, Bombay, 1937 pp. 9 ff ; Umâswâtî, Tattvârthâdhigama Sûtra IV, Arraha, 1920. For more speculative insights ; see Sogani, Kamal Chand, ‘Ethical Doctrines in Jainism, J. C. Series, Sholapur, 1967. Also see Malvaniya, Dalsukhbhai, ‘The concept of the Deity (in ‘Aspects of Jain Art and Architecture), ed. by U. P. Shah and M. A. Dhaky, Ahmedabad, 1975, p. 4.
4. See ‘Paramâtma-Yoga’ II (summarised by Adinath Upadhye) pp. 151-153, 182.
5. see, the ‘Narakagriha’ (ruined abode in hell) section and ‘attractive yet abominable’ and ‘the body is a tree, the skin covering it is the bark’, see Ibid, pp 147-148, 147-151, p. 133.
6. ‘Flaunting his indulgence, in preference to a life of penance because of his ignorance of the true nature of body and soul’— see Settar, S., Pursuing Death (Revised Edition), ‘Philosophy and Practice of Voluntary Termination of Life,’ Primus Books, Delhi, 2017, Introduction, p. 4. see also, ‘Samâdhimaranotsâhadeepak’ by Acharya Sakalkirti (ed. by Dr. J. N. Venkatesh), Introduction, Arihant Publications, Sangli, Maharashtra, 1971, p. 8 to p. 19. dealing with the inherent problems of attachment in Jaina monachism.

7. Yogindudeva exclaims—‘He who returns to worldly glory and ritual paraphernalia after renouncing them is like reswallowing his vomit’, — Paramâtma Yoga, pp. 86. He also says ‘the great Jinas abdicated their thrones to attain liberation, how is it that persons maintaining themselves by begging should not achieve their spiritual goal’ Paramatma Yoga III, Settar, Pursuing Death, p. 4
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12. Ibid, Intro-, p. 5. and Srivastava, K. S. and Chris Maccormick, ‘Medieval Jaina Monachism and Ethics’ : The Codes of the Eternal Soul,’ Jinabhawna research journal, p. 283-89
13. Upadhye, Adinath, Paramatma Yoga, p. 31
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17. See ‘Ratnakaranda Srâvakachâra’ by Samantabhadra, verses 122 and beyond. Also see Settar, S, Pursuing Death, p. 151-152.
18. Settar, S., ‘Inviting Death’, App. II, p. p. 243-244
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