Chapter - 7

CONCLUSION
7. CONCLUSION

In the Introduction of this thesis, I have shown how the concept of sallekhanā is either partially dealt with, merely descriptively stated ignoring its religious and philosophical aspects or patently misunderstood in its comparison with phenomena like suicide, euthanasia, prāyopaveśana, etc.

My effort in this thesis has been to rescue the concept of sallekhanā from many misunderstandings, and explain it in terms of Jaina metaphysics. One central concept of Jaina metaphysics is the concept of jīva, which is of two kinds – saṃsārī jīva and mukta jīva. It is the manusya gati of saṃsārī jīva that we consider when we think of human existence in this world. The saṃsārī jīva is subject to the karmic bondage. Since the aim of all Indian religious philosophical thought is to attain mokṣa or nirvāṇa (liberation). Jaina metaphysics has also thought over the mokṣa mārga for this saṃsārī jīva. A person who wants to attain mokṣa or liberation must be free himself from two kinds of karmic bondage viz. karma cetanā and karma-phal-cetanā (production of things and their enjoyment). Then again, according to Jainism, real right conduct involves repentance, renunciation and confession. In Indian religious philosophy this world and the life in this world is not the reality. The utmost good attainable for man is to seek release from the bondage of the cycle of life and death, which is mokṣa. One can achieve it by purifying one's soul which is sullied and impure on account of one's karma, desire for possession and passions. If at the time of death, one wishes to attain mokṣa, one must achieve the ideal of real right conduct by renouncing everything.
And the procedure of *sallekhana*, (which I have given in detail in chapter No. 1, 2 and 3), is precisely about how to renounce everything and free oneself from the *karmic* bondage.

Secondly, Jaina metaphysics is about relation between life and death and the conquest of the fear of death. Death is an inevitable and natural phenomenon. It is intrinsically related to life. Hegel, the German philosopher, has shown how the growth of an organism consists in a process of dying in order to live – a combination of two opposite processes united and integrated in the life of an organism. A seed must bury itself in the ground for a plant to sprout. This dialectical relationship of life and death is crucial to the understanding of Jaina metaphysics about the concept of *sallekhanā*.

I have outlined in my thesis how the procedure of *sallkehanā* methodically purifies the soul of a *kṣapaka*. The *kṣapaka* undergoing *sallekhanā* learns to live according to the principles embodied in *ratnatraya*. He gradually renounces everything – his worldly possessions, his desires and passions, and his love of his own body. His mind is rescued gradually from the temptations of this world, and the life in this world. This process of weaning him away is spread over a period of time and there is an elaborate religious ritual connected with it.

In my thesis I have given the details of this ritual and its spiritual significance. The *kṣapaka*, who embraces *sallekhanā* conquers the fear of death and perceives it as a part of life; because he knows from his religious knowledge that his *jīva* is immortal, and it is only his *saṃsārī jīva* that is
undergoing this process of purification. It is only the satnsāri jīva that is subject to death.

Since sallekhaṇā is about death, its comparison with the concepts like suicide, euthanasia and prāyopaveśana is inevitable. I have discussed these concepts in comparison with sallekhaṇā. It is my conclusion that there is no element of spirituality in the death by suicide etc. In some cases there is not even the conscious acceptance of death, specially when the patient is incapable of taking any decision.

Kṣapaka undergoing sallekhaṇā is deeply engrossed in religious procedure. He is not subjecting himself to violent death, nor is he going to use a particular medicine or injection to die. Sallekhaṇā procedure is also very meticulous about avoiding pain, because it is against the principle of Ahimsā to cause pain. Conquest of passions and the conquest of the fear of death, while one is yet fully conscious and following spiritual course of life cannot be called suicide or euthanasia.

Besides, in this thesis I have discussed various kinds of sallekhaṇā and their characteristic conditions and procedures. There is elaborate procedure laid down for each kind. One cannot embrace sallekhaṇā without proper guidance and permission from the religious authorities. The procedure for bhaktapratyākhyaṇa type of sallekhaṇā prescribes a religious guide, his duties and responsibilities and the way he must help the kṣapaka during the period of sallekhaṇā. This guide has thorough knowledge of the anatomy of
the human body, and remedies for various physical pains. However, the role of niryapakācārya is not required in ingiṇī and prayopagamana maraṇa.

In my thesis I have also discussed social attitude to sallekhanā. Sallekhanā is treated as mahotsva by the Jaina community. It is a great religious occasion. Kṣapaka, who embraces sallekhanā is a holy being, and hundreds of people come to attend religious preaching going on at the place of sallekhanā. We must note that suicide etc. cannot evoke such religious and spiritual feeling. Suicide is a ghastly death, which is really a result of great frustration and disappointment in the worldly life. Sallekhanā is exactly opposite of it. There is no question of disappointment because there is renunciation of all worldly things. There is forgiveness and also honest confession of one's wrong-doings. This is really a way of life of a good man according to any religion.

Finally, I must state that, according to Jaina metaphysics, Jina is the one who conquers the five senses, destroys all the karmas, and attains omniscience. Omniscience is the knowledge of the Self and the 'cetan' and 'acetan' world around us and its relation to the Self. The procedure of sallekhanā involves imparting proper understanding of the Self. It is a part of spiritual education of the kṣapaka, who finally comes to understand the futility of the worldly life and necessity of liberation of the saṃsārī jīva.