

## **Euthanasia, a Dignified Death: Because Surviving is Not Living**

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On November, 1973, Aruna Shanbaug, a junior nurse at Mumbai's KEM Hospital, was brutally assaulted and sodomised by a ward boy working in the same hospital who first choked her with a dog chain to subjugate her. Aruna's brain was severely damaged in the attack, leaving her in a partly conscious and never ending vegetative state. Aruna finally died on the morning of May 18, 2015 four decades later.

Aruna is no more today. However, her death has left countless arguable questions for us to brood over. First is our legal system. For decades, Aruna remained the callous face of rape in India. The offender was convicted for seven years but it was Aruna who served the punishment for her whole life. A case only of robbery and attempted murder was registered against the convict. Ostensibly in an attempt not to stigmatise Aruna's life, the fact about the sodomy was kept hidden. Moreover in 1973 a non vaginal penetration was not considered as a rape. Hence the perpetrator was tried only for assault and robbery, neither for rape or sexual molestation, nor for the "unnatural sexual offence".

The amount of pain and suffering Aruna has gone through these years is terrifying. Aruna was forced to continue with her torturous life only because the law did not permit her to depart peaceably. In 2010, finally one of Aruna's well-wisher and author of a book on the plight of Aruna, Pinki Virani, filed a mercy killing appeal in the Supreme Court, asking consent to end her agonising life. There was at this time no law on euthanasia in India. The case produced a revolutionary verdict in 2011, in which the Supreme Court legalised passive Euthanasia but overruled the appeal for mercy killing.

Passive euthanasia involves removing or withholding the required treatment which would let a patient to die in due course. However euthanasia, or mercy killing, involves purposely dismissing the life of an individual through some action on the wish of that individual. The term euthanasia means "easy death" in Greek. It is also acknowledged as supported suicide as it is performed with the support of another individual, usually a medical professional. The concept is to provide a painless death of one who is in unbearable pain, is incurably ill and has no chance of being cured.

The topic has been generated fiery debate throughout the globe, with the protagonists advising that it is humanitarian to allow a terminally ill, irremediable person to take his or her last breath without any pain, peacefully and with dignity if the individual requests to do so. But the people against euthanasia believe that it is the responsibility and the commitment of a society to protect the lives of innocent people. According to them deliberately supporting people to do so, is not ethically right and that physician assisted suicide is unjust death. They also argue that there is a risk of misuse of this

right. Supporters of euthanasia on the other hand continue to believe that it is an option only for the incurably ill, anguished by their pain.

Euthanasia remains a subject of bio-ethical dilemma in India. The Indian Constitution provides us the fundamental rights which guarantee the right to enjoy freedom of choice and choice of peace. So if a person wishes to die peacefully without any pain rather than going through excruciating pain why does it become unethical and morally wrong? Choosing a death with dignity is surely more compassionate than a life which is full of pain and suffering.

In some countries of the world they have acknowledged the significance of a dignified life and made euthanasia legal. Euthanasia is allowed in Belgium, Netherlands, and Luxembourg. Euthanasia is also permitted in some states of the US.

After the case of Aruna Shanbaug, passive euthanasia is legal in India now. With the approval of the physician, a knowledgeable adult patient can refuse to medical treatment sustained by artificial life-supporting system. And if the patient is in permanent coma or an enduring vegetative state, and is not capable of giving his or her consent, the appeal for the passive euthanasia can be made by the patient's family members, friends or the physician.

In July 2014, the Supreme Court of India asked for a general discussion on the legitimacy of euthanasia in the country. But till date there is no noteworthy progress. Active euthanasia is still recognised as inappropriate.

With the advancement of science, we are now in a position to cure and treat diseases which were once considered to be deadly. But lowering the human anguish is of great importance. Today improved science and medicine have facilitated us to protect more lives but we should also give more importance to the quality of life. Because surviving is not that all matters... a healthy life with choice and dignity is what that counts at the end of the day.