

More than Death: The Importance of *Sallekhanā* in the Jain Community

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Articles 25 and 26 of the Indian Constitution state that freedom of conscience and the right to practice religion is granted to all individuals, in which the State of India cannot regulate or restrict “any economic, financial, political or other secular activity which may be associated with religious practice,” nor favor any religion over another; and furthermore grants each religion the ability to act as an agent to the law, in charge of their own property and must abide by all other laws.<sup>1</sup> In 2006, a public interest case was opened by Nikhil Soni in India over the legality of *sallekhanā*, otherwise known as *santhara*<sup>2</sup>, stating that this religious fasting to death is akin to suicide. On August 10 of 2015, after nearly a decade of appeals through the lower courts, the Rajasthan High Court ruled that *santhara* should be criminalized under sections 306 and 309 of the Indian Penal Code (“IPC”), wherein suicide is punishable up to ten years and a fine of undisclosed amount, only if intention can be determined.<sup>3</sup> T.K. Tukol, a judge of the High Court of Mysore and highly respected for his scholarship on Jainism, argued back in 1976 that *sallekhanā* is not suicide on the grounds that the psychological underpinnings of suicide are not present in practitioners of *santhara*,<sup>4</sup> anticipating this public interest case. The Rajasthan High Court ruled in favor of Soni, declaring that although it may not be suicide *per se*, the right to life does not include the right to death, in addition to claiming that *santhara* has not been established as a tenet of the Jain religion<sup>5</sup>. With *sallekhanā* being determined suicide because there is no doctrine forcing *sallekhanā* upon any Jain, the Indian government has essentially determined the border of Jainism

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<sup>1</sup> Constitution of India art. 25, §1, art. 26.

<sup>2</sup> I will use both phrases, as well as others, interchangeably. *Sallekhanā* and *santhara* are more commonly used today, while throughout history other terms such as *samādhi-maran* have been popular.

<sup>3</sup> Nikhil Soni vs Union of India & Ors, 7414/2006 India (2015); sections 306 and 309 of the Indian Penal Code deal specifically with the intent to commit suicide and the act of committing suicide.

<sup>4</sup> TK Tukol, *Sallekhanā is not Suicide* (Ahmedabad: Swati Printing Press, 1976), 86 and 95.

<sup>5</sup> Soni vs Union of India & Ors (2015). See also: LiveLaw India News Network, specifically “Rajasthan HC outlaws the Jain of fasting unto death” (10 Aug 2015) and “Members of Jain community move SC challenging Rajasthan HC verdict banning Santhara” (25 Aug 2015); and Soutik Biswas, “Should India’s Jains be given the choice to die?” BBC News Network, 21 Aug 2015.

– and, like with the court cases banning *sati* for the same reason, other religions – to be anything included in the canon and not necessarily practiced as is. Political scientist Pratap Bhanu Mehta, president of the Centre for Policy research in New Delhi, India, adds that it is not up to the State to determine or otherwise “colonize the various ways in which death can be interpreted, and life be given meaning.”<sup>6</sup> However, Christian martyrdom, particularly early Christian martyrdom, was not canonized in most cases, plays a large role in the communal identity of Christians, and still occurs.<sup>7</sup> More has also been written in English on early Christian martyrdom than on Jain *sallekhanā*, especially regarding the communal role of *sallekhanā* and similarities between *sallekhanā* and martyrdom. It is important to realize the communal aspect of Jainism in general, as well as the communal functioning of *sallekhanā*, which can be further investigated using martyr theories and concepts common to both martyrdom and *sallekhanā*. Comportment and intention set examples for how martyrdom and *sallekhanā* should be practiced and therefore allow for exemplary people to exist to base oneself on. In doing so, a single entity encapsulates the communal identity, and a “body” can be used as a placeholder. Embodiment, engenderment, and suffering and pain of the body further describe and define the communal identity through the physical use of bodies and the practitioners as they exist in spatial temporality, allowing the practitioner to see themselves in the communal identity. Theories on martyrdom - such as the transference of power from one to another through suffering, and faith being a step towards comportment – can be reconfigured to further understand the framework of *sallekhanā*.

The paper is organized in to three main sections: the first section focuses on the important background philosophies of Jainism, as it differs significantly enough from Buddhism and

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<sup>6</sup> Centre for Policy Research, Chanyakapuri, New Delhi, India, accessed March 10, 2017, <http://www.cprindia.org/people/pratap-bhanu-mehta>; Biswas, “Should India’s Jains...?” 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Morning Star News, “Martyrdom of Christians in India Obscured by Under-reporting,” *The Christian Post* (January 28, 2013), accessed March 10, 2017.

Hinduism as to be misunderstood in Judeo-Christian countries; the second section focuses on the theories and concepts of early Christian martyrdom through examples of important martyrs; and the third section focuses on *sallekhanā* and Jainism using examples from literature and contemporary practitioners located in India.

## **Background.**

*Sallekhanā* has been practiced for centuries, with written accounts going back to the Epigraphia Karnataka<sup>8</sup> and even further in their literature, at least to 100 CE<sup>9</sup>. Some non-canonical texts that are still revered by Jains were written based on previous canons which are thought to be lost to time, however the theological texts can be traced back to at least 360 BCE<sup>10</sup>. These books mentioned *sallekhanā* usually as *samādhi-maran*, which means “death in meditation;” *sallekhanā* involves fasting to death, but requires dying while meditating for effectiveness and to be considered as a proper death. Many of these books are important and claimed by both major sects of Jainism, distinguishing the practice of *sallekhanā* as universal.<sup>11</sup> One book in particular, the *Tattvartha Sūtra*, written sometime between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries, is usually translated in

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<sup>8</sup> The Epigraphia Carnatica (or Karnatika) is a book of translated/transliterated set of books on copper plates and inscriptions on lithic surfaces of the Old Mysore region in India by Benjamin Lewis Rice. The plates were originally written between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries CE. The epigraphias are thought to be from different ruling dynasties of the region, and span multiple different languages.

<sup>9</sup> Depending on the sect, the literature could be further back than 100 CE; however both Digambaras and Svetambaras recognize the literature to begin at least in 100 CE, with the Svetambara literature stretching back further. I do not want to go into a particular sect, however, so I am using the oldest common book to talk about both sects.

<sup>10</sup> Most notably this can be seen with Bhadrubahu, who lived and is thought to have memorized the original, now extinct *agamas* or canonical texts. See Britannica Encyclopedia on Jain literature, Jaini (1979) and von Glasenapp (1999).

<sup>11</sup> *Sallekhanā* being notable in both major sects reinforces its role in the Jain community at large, as Digambaras distinguish themselves as the “more ascetic” of the two sects; the fact that Svetambaras, who wear clothing and recognize that women can be liberated as women, also recognize *santhara* as a common practice furthers its role in bringing all Jains together as one community. See Jaini (1979) for a discussion on the major split between the two sects.

English as “That Which Is” or “scripture describing the path to Liberation” (*mokṣa-śāstra*), and describes other characteristics of Jainism which are important to its functioning, such as the five major vows and the workings of karma, and the liberation of the soul (*mokṣa*).

Five vows are taken by all Jains/Jainas to ensure following the three jewels (right faith, understanding and conduct) toward liberation: non-violence (*ahiṃsa*), truthfulness (*satya*), non-thieving (*asteya*), celibacy (*brahmacarya*; this is followed always by monks and after householder duties are done for laypeople); and non-possessiveness (*aparigraha*).<sup>12</sup> Laypeople are also held to restricting their movement in different directions (“self-imposition” or *digvrata*); restriction of luxury goods (to encourage self-restraint; *bhogopabhogaparimāṇa*); and restrictions on occupation to those that do not break the other vows (*anartha-daṇḍaviraṃaṇa*). Although these vows are not exhaustive, they give a general idea of how ascetic Jainism is at its core, if one were to follow all the vows “religiously.”<sup>13</sup>

Beyond the vows are the theories surrounding the concept of *karma*. Tukol writes, “Karma is the direct result of the mental, verbal and physical activities of the soul” which “acts as a veil to the real powers of the soul;” four varieties of karma “cause the destruction of the powers of the soul” and “act as brakes in achieving [spiritual] success in different fields of human activities.”<sup>14</sup> An important aspect of karma is that they are caused by one’s own thoughts, words and actions, and one must live through one’s own karmic consequences; that is, no one else can remove karma

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<sup>12</sup> TK Tukol, *Sallekhanā is not Suicide* (Ahmedabad: Swati Printing Press, 1976), 9.

<sup>13</sup> I did not myself find examples of Jains who did not follow all the vows listed – or more – but it isn’t impossible to imagine Jains who do not follow all the vows written in the doctrine, just as it is not hard to find Christians, for example, who do not avoid the cardinal sins.

<sup>14</sup> Tukol, *Sallekhanā is not Suicide*, 1.

other than themselves. In order to reach liberation (*moksa*), we must first stop inflow of new karma (*Samvara*), followed by removing the karmic matter already attached to our soul (*nirjarā*).<sup>15</sup>

Returning to the importance of *sallekhanā*,<sup>16</sup> the vow is taken as the “supreme vow of all vows,”<sup>17</sup> taken up to twelve years before the final fast begins.<sup>18,19</sup> The ultimate goal of *santhara* is to remove all karma from the soul, releasing the soul either into a liberated state, or allowing it to reach a better rebirth or to avoid a worse rebirth. The word *sallekhanā* derives its meaning from *sat*, “praiseworthy,” and *lekhanā* or “emasculat[i]on or enervation of the body,” therefore gaining respect as an exemplary way to emasculate the body through starvation.<sup>20</sup> Most literature lauds *sallekhanā* as exemplary and expected, as do most communities.<sup>21</sup> To fully appreciate *sallekhanā* and, in turn, Jainism, one must reinterpret the practice through its communal effects analyzed via martyrdom theories involving embodiment, suffering, and comportment.

### **Martyrdom and Christianity.**

Although there are various ways to understand martyrdom, one way to interpret what is occurring is through the concept of comportment. There are certain ways in which a martyr must act or comport oneself to be immortalized and be part of the larger Christian community. Clement

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

<sup>16</sup> *Sallekhanā* can also be called *samādhi-maran*, as mentioned previously, as well as *santhara*, the preferred term in the contemporary Indian government.

<sup>17</sup> According to S Settar, *sallekhanā* can also be one of the vows “insur[ing] and “promot[ing] renunciation.” See: S Settar, “Sallekhanā: Scratching Out Body to Save Soul” in *Pursuing Death: Philosophy and Practice of Voluntary Termination of Life* (Dharwad: Karnatak University Press, 1990), 177.

<sup>18</sup> Possibly longer, but most literature mentions 12 years in advance usually.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 5-6.

<sup>20</sup> Settar, *Pursuing Death*, 177; Also, please see “*Sallekhanā* and Jainism” for more on the sexuality/engenderment of the body.

<sup>21</sup> See “*Sallekhanā* and Jainism”.

of Alexandria, leader of the Alexandrian Christian community and killed as a martyr between 211 and 215 CE, wrote of the difference between good and bad deaths.<sup>22</sup> He likened martyrs to warriors dying in war. Indeed as Moss wrote, the distinction between the “natural man” and the “heroic man” is that the heroic man takes on the pain and suffering while the natural man “rejects” it<sup>23</sup>; comparing the heroic man to the warrior, only a heroic man would rush toward death the way a warrior does. Additionally martyrdom is “perfection” because it is done out of love for God, in which the martyr is persecuted because he (or she) refuses to call himself anything other than a Christian.<sup>24</sup> They are, in a sense, rushing towards death because of their refusal to see themselves as anything but Christians. They must purport themselves, comport themselves in a manner as to accept death without suffering or being “in a state of effeminacy and desiring to live” after death becomes imminent.<sup>25</sup> By “d[ying] in battle with their lusts,” one no longer dies effectively but with desire.<sup>26</sup> No longer having “their lusts like weights of lead” weighing down their soul as they die, to Clement, is the only way to die.<sup>27</sup> These lusts are akin to *karma* in Jainism, and perform the same role in tying the soul back to the body and thus not allowing the practitioner to die an effective death that illustrates their comportment in life and in death. As Mehta had said previously, the government cannot or should not have the power to determine the proper way to live or die in any religious community; however the community can determine such open-ended questions, and make examples of those who have died a proper death or lived a proper life, *et cetera*.

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<sup>22</sup> Linwood Frederickson, “Saint Clement of Alexandria: Christian Theologian,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online* (updated June 20, 1998, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Clement-of-Alexandria>), accessed March 11, 2017; Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata, or Miscellanies* book IV, website ed Peter Kirby, last modified March 10, 2017, accessed March 10, 2017, <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/clement-stromata-book4.html>; chapter IV.

<sup>23</sup> Candida R Moss, *Ancient Christian Martyrdom* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 29.

<sup>24</sup> There may be other reasons for being a martyr, but I am focusing solely on those who are persecuted for their beliefs; Clement, *Stromata*, IV.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, IV.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*.

Another of those examples comes from Perpetua, a young mother of a provincial family in Carthage who died a martyr in 203. Her diary journal was highly regarded and read for centuries in Carthage.<sup>28</sup> Perpetua was sent to prison to await her trial with many other martyrs, and recorded this exchange with her father:

“Father,” said I [Perpetua], “do you see this vase here, for example, or waterpot or whatever?” “Yes, I do,” said he. And I told him: “Could it be called by any other name...?” And he said: “No.” “Well, so too I cannot be called anything other than what I am, a Christian.”<sup>29</sup>

Perpetua identifies unapologetically as a Christian, as one should if they are to be a proper Christian. As Moss writes, Perpetua “resists” social expectations by viewing herself as a male in her dreams, and defining herself with a Christian identity; further, her image as a Christian lives on in the communal Christian identity in her passion, and even two centuries later Augustine felt the need to laud her comportment and bravery in facing death.<sup>30</sup> What sets Perpetua apart from other martyrs is that she is a woman, and sets the gender hierarchy on its head even though she imagines herself as a man in some of her dreams.<sup>31</sup>

Not only are there examples of properly comported martyrs, but also those who did not comport themselves properly. One such example is that of Quintus, a Phrygian who, “when he saw

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<sup>28</sup> Joyce Ellen Salisbury, “Perpetua: Christian Martyr,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online* (last updated November 10, 1999, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Perpetua-Christian-martyr>), accessed March 11, 2017.

<sup>29</sup> Tertullian, *The Martyrdom of Saints Perpetua and Felicitas in The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, tr. Herbert Musurillo (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 109, 3.1.

<sup>30</sup> Candida R Moss, *Ancient Christian Martyrs* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2012), 140; Judith Perkins, *The Suffering Self: Pain and Narrative Representation in the Early Christian Era* (New York: Routledge Printing, 1995), 200-201; Salisbury, “Perpetua”.

<sup>31</sup> Perkins, *The Suffering Self*, 104-105; the idea of gender identity is explored later at the end of “*Sallekhanā* and Jainism.”

the wild animals... turned cowardly,” and had persuaded others to become martyrs along with him.<sup>32</sup> As the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* states, “this is the reason...that we do not approve of those who come forward of themselves; this is not the teaching of the Gospel.” Quintus was persuaded by the governor to give up his title as Christian and offer sacrifices to the gods in exchange for his life. Written in between the lines of this text is how one should comport oneself at the hour of death: without cowardice, but with bravery; not giving oneself up for the sake of giving oneself up, but for the sake of love for God and for calling oneself Christian. Quintus, therefore, acts as the scapegoat for the Apostolic Fathers for the example one *should not* follow if one is a true Christian. Comportment for martyrdom, therefore, requires preparation and intention in order to be considered a true martyr and Christian.

Polycarp, the main character of the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* and therefore the prime example of a martyr, himself talks of intention and comportment in his *Letter to the Philippians*. Polycarp, Polycarp was the Bishop of Smyrna and a leading 2<sup>nd</sup> Century CE Christian figure in Roman Asia, with possible direct ties to the Apostolic Fathers.<sup>33</sup> Polycarp mentions that, “we should walk in a manner worthy of [God’s] commandment and glory,” which includes the preparatory work for martyrdom.<sup>34</sup> He continues in this vein when he writes, “...if we conducted ourselves worthily of [H]im, we would also rule together with [H]im – so long as we believe...”<sup>35</sup> Through comportment “worth[y] of Him,” Polycarp speaks directly to how one should act not only on a daily basis – through the faith and tenets – but also of how one should comport oneself all the

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<sup>32</sup> *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, in *Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, tr. Herbert Musurillo (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 5, 1.4.

<sup>33</sup> “Saint Polycarp: Greek Bishop,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online* (updated June 20, 1998, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Polycarp>), accessed March 11, 2017; Herbert Musurillo, “Introduction” of *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, xiii-xiv.

<sup>34</sup> Polycarp, *Letter to the Philippians* (Loeb Classical Library translation), accessed March 10, 2017, 5.1.

<sup>35</sup> Polycarp, *Letter*, 5.2.

way to the end – for death is just as important as life in how one approaches it. Judith Perkins, in her controversial work *The Suffering Self*, remarks how Christians, although believing that death is not the end of life, launched into death with readiness to meet God.<sup>36</sup> Death was as much a theatrical performance of Christian faith as life was: “Peregrinus”<sup>37</sup> imprisonment provided a cultural performance of [Christian] beliefs for the whole community. Christians clustered around...[while] Peregrinus performed his Christian faith...”<sup>38</sup> According to Epictetus, having disregard for death is simply part of the Christian life and faith, and therefore part of the Christian identity.<sup>39</sup> And although Peregrinus never died a martyr, he reflected a general Christian identity through his intent and comportment, to the point that his captor – the governor of Syria, according to Lucian, who wrote the satire of Peregrinus as a Syrian pagan – released him. Despite the satirical nature of this work, Peregrinus reflects what pagans thought of Christians, and if anything only reinforced through exaggeration the generally accepted narrative of great martyr acts in the Christian community. Thus the comportment, and intention, is to go towards death without cowardice, opposite of what Quintus did, and with love for God as the intention.

The intention, also, may have been to suffer through or transcend the pain of the act while remaining brave in the face of death. Polycarp again establishes the precedence for martyrs. When he first hears that people want him arrested, “he was not disturbed and even decided to stay in Smyrna [his town];” however, many people wanted him to leave, so he did under their advice.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Perkins, *The Suffering Self*, 20-21.

<sup>37</sup> Peregrinus Proteus was a Greek philosopher-Cynic and died in 165 CE by immolating himself on the fires of the 165 Olympic Games. See: “Peregrinus Proteus: Greek Philosopher,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online* (updated June 20, 1998, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Peregrinus-Proteus>), accessed March 13, 2017.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 21. Unfortunately for Peregrinus, in *The Passing of Peregrinus* by Lucian, he was released as his captors realized that his death is exactly what he wanted and would have fueled the fire of the Christian martyrs. See: “Peregrinus Proteus: Greek Philosopher;” and R. Bracht Branham, “Lucian (c. AD 120-80),” *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (doi: 10.4324/9780415249126-A066-1) accessed March 13, 2017.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 21.

<sup>40</sup> *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, 1.5.

He spent the next three nights praying for those around him, and declared that he was to be burnt alive.<sup>41</sup> His hiding place is given away by two slaves, and two guards come to collect him; they allow him to pray for two hours – despite only granting him to pray for one – before asking him to repent his God and pray to the pagan gods. And when he refuses, the guards grab him and scrape his shin; “but taking no notice, as though nothing had happened, he walked on eagerly and quickly... [and he heard a voice from Heaven say] ‘*Be strong, Polycarp, and have courage.*’”<sup>42</sup> The governor threatens Polycarp with beasts, to which Polycarp responds, “God and call for them [the beasts]! Repentance from a better state to one that is worse is impossible for us [Christians].”<sup>43</sup> When the governor realized that Polycarp was not afraid of the beasts, he changes his sentence to death by fire, to which Polycarp again responds with no fear: “The fire you threaten me with burns merely for a time and is soon extinguished... Why then do you hesitate [in starting the fire]? Come, do what you will.”<sup>44</sup> Polycarp certainly remained brave in the face of death, and even asks for death to come faster to him. It is said that when he was burned, “[there was] perceived such a delightful fragrance as though it were smoking incense or some other costly perfume [and not flesh burning].”<sup>45</sup> He did not flinch nor show any signs of pain while being burned alive: he transcended the pain.

Perpetua, too, as a model example of martyrdom, demonstrates how a martyr should treat pain and suffering. She is tossed into the air and “fell on her back” by a cow, and instead of focusing on her pain she “think[s] more of her modesty than of her pain,” transcending the suffering she actually feels and covering it up in the same way she covers up her body.<sup>46</sup> Her

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, 1.5.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, 1.8-9.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 1.11.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 1.11.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 1.15.

<sup>46</sup> Tertullian, *Perpetua and Felicitas*, 6.3.

transcendence of the pain and suffering also is acknowledged through her putting her hair up, “lest she might seem to be mourning in her *hour of triumph*.”<sup>47</sup> Perpetua views her suffering as her most important moment of her life, also helping her to transcend any pain. These intentions and compartments transcending suffering are used to glorify Perpetua and others post-death, in order that others may see their commitment to the cause of Christianity as beautiful and moving, bringing the community together in their shared experience of Perpetua’s martyrdom. Her suffering and pain are to be transcended but still connect the greater Christian community to Jesus and the fathers of the religion. The role of suffering, according to Perkins, also allows others to recognize the power gained through Perpetua’s suffering.<sup>48</sup> The recognition of power through pain in the community reunites it, especially the Christian community who claim Perpetua as one of their own.

Not only was suffering and pain transcended by the martyr; it was glorified by the community through their embodiment of such pain. In the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, graphic imagery of the martyrs’ bodies show that they were lashed so severely, the veins, arteries, and “inward mechanism of their flesh were visible,” depicting not only the severity of the wounds but the very natural bodies these martyrs had.<sup>49</sup> At the same time, though, “these noblest of Christ’s witnesses were not present in the flesh,” suggesting a transcendence above their own bodies, before claiming, “that the Lord was there present holding converse with them,” leaving the martyrs within their own tortured bodies but placing their souls in conversation with Jesus on the Earth, changing the narrative from one in Heaven to one achievable in the here and now of Earth.<sup>50</sup> And, as Perkins

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 6.3; emphasis mine.

<sup>48</sup> Perkins, *The Suffering Self*, 109.

<sup>49</sup> *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, in *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, tr. Herbert Musurillo (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 3, 1.2.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, 1.2.

writes, “the body seen [broken]...had its analogue in the body reformed and resurrected.”<sup>51</sup> By breaking the body in martyrdom, it can be reimagined and “resurrected” in Heaven. Jains, through the new form of their body, are seen to be transcended into a new realm of liberation.<sup>52</sup> Further, this conversing with the Lord indicates a community built with Jesus, attainable immediately for those who become “martyrs of Christ.” The embodiment contrasts sharply with the pain and suffering, as suffering does not enter the minds of those who are embodied in that suffering, as power given to those who suffer may be the power of transcendence and forming a community with Jesus immediately upon suffering on His behalf.

Part of the embodiment of both Christians and Jains deals directly with faith and comportment. Clement admired the Stoics, “who say that the soul is not affected by the body...” and Job, “through exceeding continence, and excellence of faith...is depicted as a good example, putting the Tempter to shame, blessing his Creator; bearing what came second, as the first, and most clearly teaching that it is possible for the gnostic to make an excellent use of all circumstances.”<sup>53</sup> Clement recognized the importance of faith first and circumstances to practice second; for to Clement, first and foremost, faith demonstrated the correct Christian, who would then act in accordance with his faith properly. Such a comportment underlies the intentions set forth, namely that love of God should lead one’s actions. As Boyarin quotes from Frend, Clement is the first Christian who “placed the ascetic ideal on the same level as that of the martyr.”<sup>54</sup> Thus to be embodied correctly, one must submit to the faith and comply with the proper way to worship God, which can include martyrdom. As Moss claims, “A willingness to die proved the purity of

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<sup>51</sup> Perkins, *The Suffering Self*, 120.

<sup>52</sup> There are 14 different stages of soul liberation and development; *sallekhanā* can help the Jain move from one stage to another. For more, see: Nathmal Tatia, “Appendix 4: The Doctrine of the Fourteen Stages of Spiritual Development” in *That Which Is* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 279-285.

<sup>53</sup> Clement, *Stromata*, chapter V.

<sup>54</sup> Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 62.

one's intentions and served as a guarantor of the veracity of one's claims."<sup>55</sup> Even as claims of faith may demonstrate intentions, truly submitting oneself to the best comportment did not allow backing out of said claims. In doing so, there is and can be a communal identity based on how one comports and embodies oneself, with the motive being a community recognized in their actions as well as their ideals. In the same way that very few female martyrs exist historically, few *Tirthankaras*<sup>56</sup> exist in female form as exemplars for *sallekhanā* and other ways to be a good Jain.

Moss's theory on the "heroic" versus the "natural" man plays a role in *sallekhanā* especially when nearing death. Perkins's recognition of death as a theatrical performance and similar to a rite of passage holds true for practitioners of *sallekhanā*, as well as her insistence on others gaining power through recognizing another's power gained through suffering. Finally Moss's theory on faith being reflected in action and comportment directly speaks to the three jewels of Jainism and a major reason for the existence of *sallekhanā* on both an individual and communal level. In addition to these theories, engenderment also exists and parallels the narrative of Perpetua in one of the 24 *Tirthankaras* and the majority of those who practice long, meditative fasting and *sallekhanā*.

### ***Sallekhanā* and Jainism.**

As mentioned above, multiple theories relating to early Christian martyrdom can be applied to the framework of *sallekhanā* to evaluate the purpose of *sallekhanā* within the Jain communal identity. Comportment, embodiment, intention, suffering and engenderment still play major roles

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<sup>55</sup> Moss, *Ancient Christian Martyrdom*, 47.

<sup>56</sup> *Tirthankaras* are Jains who have reached enlightenment and also taught Jainism or otherwise kept the faith alive. The most well-known of the 24 recognized is Mahāvīra, a contemporary of the Buddha and the most recent to reach enlightenment. For more, see Jaini (1979).

in the construction of *sallekhanā* and are discussed within the context of multiple contemporary and historical narratives.

Comportment of the individual practicing *sallekhanā* is substantive in how to understand the Jain communal identity. James Laidlaw, a professor of social anthropology at King's College, Cambridge, outlines the case of Amarchand-ji.<sup>57</sup> Amarchand-ji Nahar of Jaipur was famous for being a “real Jain,” although he was and died a layman. He retired early as a successful businessman, and, despite owning a “splendid urban mansion” for his family's comfort, resided in a tiny, windowless room with a bare mattress, a wooden bowl, a clock and a calendar.<sup>58</sup> By pious Jains, Amarchand-ji was known as an “expert on fasting,” as fasting can lead to inopportune death if not followed well.<sup>59</sup> When Amarchand-ji finally finished his final fast<sup>60</sup>, “he was sitting up and saying his *samayik* (meditational prayer) under his breath,” and knew exactly when he would die. Amarchand-ji was brave in the face of death: he did not fear it, but rather embraced it fully as part of his journey as a Jain in his worldview. Had Amarchand-ji not followed a pious, ascetic life, and had he not fasted as often and as long as he did, it is likely that he would not be remembered the way he is today by his daughter,<sup>61</sup> who prides herself in the way in which her father died. After all, “people came from all around to see him” die, and before, “people came to him for advice before embarking on a fast, and even more commonly they came to him at the end, to take their first food from his hands”.<sup>62</sup> As Braun writes, “... [*Sallekhanā*] is so entrenched in the culture and

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<sup>57</sup> Laidlaw, “A life worth leaving,” 179-181; King's College, Cambridge website, accessed March 14, 2017, <http://www.kings.cam.ac.uk/research/fellows/james-laidlaw.html>.

<sup>58</sup> Clocks and calendars, it seems, are used now by very ascetic laymen to regulate prayer, confession, meditation, and fasting.

<sup>59</sup> Similar to what

<sup>60</sup> This included no water for 24 days, and no food for the last 36. Most people do not last longer than 3 days, but it varies depending on environment. David Ingram PharmD, in phone interview with author, March 10, 2017.

<sup>61</sup> Or other Jains in the community

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, 180.

is practiced on ... a consistent basis. Not every Jain takes the vow of *sallekhanā*, but all Jains have the option available to them.”<sup>63</sup> Thus, *sallekhanā* and other religious deaths are “entrenched in the culture” and therefore the correct comportment at the end of life. Without the comportment of the practitioner, the communal identity could not exist as a single entity; rather the communal identity would be a conglomeration of identities with only doctrine to connect one practitioner to another. However, as I discuss later, Jainism could be defined through its asceticism and also its emphasis on community and societal expectations.

Additionally, Amarchand-ji’s moment of death is representative of a “heroic” man as Moss would claim. Being brave in the face of death, showing no fear, and otherwise being calm about his journey towards death allows Amarchand-ji to approach death heroically, as opposed to being a “natural” man like Quintus, fearing the moment of death. Amarchand-ji, should he have died with fear, would not be revered nor would he reach a better rebirth or his ultimate goal for having practiced *sallekhanā*.<sup>64</sup>

Amarchand-ji is not the only one to be considered a heroic man. Each example could be pulled to demonstrate the heroic nature of each person to complete the vow of *sallekhanā*, however the nun Kirin stands out for her courage facing death and her own demons.

Kirin was a twenty-something Jain nun within her first year at her monastery in Rajasthan, India when she began complaining about being “tormented by what she claimed was the spirit of her love from a past life;” the spirit haunted her with increasing frequency throughout the months.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Braun, “Sallekhanā,” 915.

<sup>64</sup> Amarchand-ji seems to have made great spiritual progress in his last birth – the one which was witnessed within this generation – and may have reached enlightenment and liberation, which could explain his theatrical death – more on that later. And although *sallekhanā* should not, at the end, have an “ultimate goal,” it is irrelevant to the argument I’m making, which is that he approached death with calm as a heroic man.

<sup>65</sup> Whitney Braun, “Sallekhanā: The Ethicality and Legality of Religious Suicide by Starvation in the Jain Religious Community,” *Medicine and Law* 27(2008): 915-917, accessed June 10, 2016, ISSN: 0723-1393. Kirin’s biography

As the other nuns were praying one day, they heard a scream come from her room: her ponytail had been pulled out and her scalp was bleeding profusely.<sup>66</sup> Kirin stated that the spirit was that of her husband from a previous life, and he revealed to Kirin that she had killed him; he was back to kill Kirin and reunite.<sup>67</sup> Kirin presented with signs of physical abuse, and claimed the pain she suffered from was calmed through meditation and fasting; “she believed that if she died before becoming an ascetic or sadvhi [a step closer to becoming fully liberated], she would be linked with the man’s spirit for eternity. She felt her only choice was *sallekhanā*, which would free her of the spirit in the next life,” when she was reborn.<sup>68</sup> After Kirin was given permission to take the vow and began practicing, “she grew weak and became unable to speak,” and “on her deathbed she was initiated as a sadvhi.” Kirin’s ability to look towards death as a start to a new life, in Jain terms, would be equivalent to her being heroic. In a sense, by facing death, she is tackling head-on her spirit-husband and figuratively going directly into battle to fight his spirit. Instead of running away, Kirin finds death more enjoyable and worthwhile than waiting for her spirit-husband to kill her. Although it may seem that death would be inviting for Kirin, she realized that, without death, she would be unable to practice her vows satisfactorily for herself or her fellow sisters.

Both Amarchand-ji and Kirin, in addition to being “heroic men,” illustrate Perkins’s theory of death as a theatrical performance. When Amarchand-ji died, Laidlaw states, “...people said there was rain of saffron and inside there was a sound of cracking and a wound appeared in his head.”<sup>69</sup> This moment of magical realism illustrates how Jains view death, but also how people

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comes from Anne Vallely’s ethnographic work within the monastery sometime between 1990, when she graduated from undergraduate, and 2002 when the book was published. Please see: Anne Vallely, *Guardians of the Transcendent: An Ethnography of a Jain Ascetic Community* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002).

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, 916.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, 917.

<sup>69</sup> Laidlaw, “A life worth leaving,” 181.

can agree on a moment that realistically may not have actually occurred. It is a moment of celebration to go into the next rebirth via *sallekhanā*, something that may be written about but until recently has not been caught on camera. The narrative of Marajee, of Gurgaon, India, focuses on her intense training and the four weeks leading up to her death, as well as the ceremonial ending of her life.<sup>70</sup>

According to Marajee's daughter, "She did [*sallekhanā*] to take control and honor the rules [vows] she adopted. She did it to follow her own decision to reach her destiny."<sup>71</sup> Marajee said four weeks before her death, "I'm very happy with the decision I made, and I feel deep inside that I'll truly receive the rewards that will make my life worthy." At no point did she smile or make any visual indication that she felt happy; only her words reflect her emotional state. Her funeral pyre was decorated with bright, beautiful flowers and the funeral procession itself included all of the monks and nuns of her temple, as well as a large gathering of laymen who traveled from around the country to watch her death and accompanying death rites. She was regarded as a "living saint" and highly respected and "lauded" by those surrounding her. The theatrical performance celebrating her death included a marching band consisting mainly of trumpeters and trombonists, playing in a major key and at a relatively high tempo, indicating the celebratory nature of Marajee's death. Marajee's death may be the most recent one recorded on camera<sup>72</sup> but it is not the only one with a theatrical piece to it.

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<sup>70</sup> Susan Burchill, "Bizarre Burials" (*Taboo*, season 9 episode 17), produced for *National Geographic*, first aired October 30, 2012; accessed March 1, 2017 via Youtube user MsFrogger21, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kGMHbNIVgUw>.

<sup>71</sup> Burchill, "Bizarre Burials."

<sup>72</sup> In English.

83-year-old Badni Devi Daga, of Gangashahar, India, decided she wanted to take the vow of *sallekhanā* and so stopped using her nebulizer to help her breathe.<sup>73</sup> Her sons thought she was only going to fast for one day, until by day five she stated she wanted to take the vow of *santhara*.<sup>74</sup> Her family tried to dissuade her for reasons unknown, but consult the spiritual leader of the sect they belonged to; the guru, who was currently in Nepal, told the family to get permission from everyone in the community but allow it to occur if everyone agreed.<sup>75</sup> As everyone agreed, Daga's fast continued for 50 days until she died surrounded by family, and other Jains who made her house a part of their pilgrimage – regardless of their relationship to her.<sup>76</sup> Despite the lack of details in the article,<sup>77</sup> there have been no cases of *santhara* without at least some sort of pilgrimage to perform *darṣan* from the surrounding Jain community. The theatrical importance of *darṣan*, literally meaning “seeing,” or otherwise beholding and being beheld by a revered or sacred object,<sup>78</sup> allows for all Jains to revere and gain power from the image they behold.

Judith Perkins's theory – that outsiders recognize the power granted to the sufferer – can be expanded on in the case of Jainism. Not only do the outsiders recognize this power in the undertaker of the vow of *sallekhanā*, for example by performing a pilgrimage to someone in the final stages of *santhara*, they themselves gain power through the *darṣan*. Strictly speaking no direct karmic influence is granted to them<sup>79</sup> through watching the final moments of the dying, but

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<sup>73</sup> Rakesh Goswami, “Bikaner: Believers flock to Jain woman on santhara fast,” *Hindustan Times*, India section, updated September 3, 2015. Accessed March 13, 2017, <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india/bikaner-believers-flock-to-jain-woman-on-santhara-fast/story-AJIYIU3bPZVRoAMoWTcTO.html>.

<sup>74</sup> Another term for *sallekhanā*, more commonly used in India.

<sup>75</sup> Goswami, “Bikaner.”

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> The *Hindustan Times* is pro-Hindu majority in India, and may therefore have a bias against Jains and other religious groups, lessening their interest in reporting accurately and to their fullest extent.

<sup>78</sup> “Darshan: Hinduism,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, last updated July 24, 2015, accessed March 13, 2017, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/darshan>. *Darṣan* can be spelled multiple ways and applies more broadly to Indian religions and philosophies rather than just Hinduism.

<sup>79</sup> So says Banks. See: Banks, “Representing the Bodies,” 223.

I am under the impression that those viewing *sallekhanā* in action think good thoughts and in turn this is reflected in their behavior, which is influenced directly through watching *sallekhanā*, in addition to revering the practitioner for their example.<sup>80</sup> The power is reflected generally in the Jain's agency to act in accordance within the vows undertaken, and also the communal acceptance and expectance<sup>81</sup> to take the final vow of *sallekhanā* if their previous conduct and comportment reflects their ability to take the vow. Thus the communal identity surrounding the ability of each Jain to watch and perform *darṣan* on their neighboring Jains – even those across the country – is reified in their understanding of the suffering of the body.

The suffering of the body is not a new concept, as I've already demonstrated through martyrdom, but can be remade in *sallekhanā*. Of course there is written history of *sallekhanā* and other types of religious death in the canon that speak directly to the role suffering plays in life. The *Akarāṅga Sūtra*, written originally around the 500-400 BCE and edited in 454 CE by Kṣamaśraman Devardhigani at the Valabhi council, states:

When it occurs to a blessed mendicant that he suffers pain, and cannot bear the influence of cold, he should not try to obviate these trials, but stand fast in his own self which is endowed with all knowledge. 'For it is better for an ascetic that he should take poison.' Even thus he will in due time put an end to existence. This (way to escape trials) has been adopted by many who were free from

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<sup>80</sup> For example, T.K. Tukol describes his meeting Ācārya Śantisāgar for the last time in April 1955 as his "last memorable privilege of having *his darṣana*," demonstrating that Tukol finds meaning and respect in being looked upon by this man before he died via *sallekhanā*.

<sup>81</sup> My guess is that, if Daga's family really did not want her to take the vow of *sallekhanā* – assuming that the reporter is not misrepresenting the case – it was due to her being mainly healthy and able to complete her vows without much assistance and not because they did not believe in *sallekhanā*; Daga was not the first one in the extended family to take the vow.

delusion; it is good, wholesome, proper, beautifying, meritorious.

Thus I say.<sup>82</sup>

When the narrator (presumably Mahavira himself) speaks of the “blessed mendicant<sup>83</sup>” he uses the word “vasumam,” which Jacobi related to mean “rich (in control),” or in other words that the mendicant is trained well as an ascetic, who is careful of his actions affecting pain on other living creatures. In this case, the text allows for ascetics – trained well first – to “take poison” or otherwise commit suicide before he break vows to make himself more comfortable. Even though *sallekhanā* does not use poison to end one’s life, the uncomfortableness of the mendicant requires that death be imminent. “...Standing fast in his own self which is endowed with all knowledge” speaks directly to the concept of “standing fast” to the vows the monk took, which are numerous but include compassion and non-violence for all beings, thus not putting oneself first in comfort but ensuring that no beings feel pain or suffering. By not breaking their vows and instead committing suicide, Jacobi notes that “suicide only puts off the last struggle for *nirvana*; but it is better than breaking the vow.”<sup>84</sup> A possible justification for the suicide is that it is better to suffer and come back in another round of rebirth, where the ascetic already has a great chance of ending *samsāra* in the following life, than to let karma build up from harming and causing suffering to another being when trying to make oneself more comfortable. For Jains, the community is brought together through the shared experiences of suffering. The body itself is also recognized as temporary, creating a new framework in which Jains can understand themselves and their embodiment.

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<sup>82</sup> *Akarāṅga Sūtra*, in “Jaina Sutras part 1” of *The Sacred Books of the East*, tr. Hermann Jacobi and ed. F Max Müller (New York: Dover Publications, 1968), 68-69, 1:7.4.2.

<sup>83</sup> “Mendicant” and “ascetic” are used interchangeably but refer more specifically to monks and nuns in this case; however, householders who have taken up more vows may also be referred to as “ascetic.”

<sup>84</sup> Jacobi, *Jaina Sutras*, 68n.

As is evident in *itvara*<sup>85</sup> but also in *sallekhanā* and other forms of religious death, comportment and preparation for the actual death is necessary. Here, he can “accomplish” or go towards death without fear by following the tenets of Jainism, “leaving this frail body” through ignorance of its needs and “overcoming all sorts of pains and troubles through trust in this (religion)” or correct faith. Not only does this support proper comportment but also the transitory state of the body. The sentence “even thus he will in due time put an end to existence” refers to the transitory state of the soul-body conglomeration, specifically referring to the final liberation and last existence; thus, the suicide is, ironically, a temporary solution to the more-permanent problem of *samsāra*. To reimagine the soul-body conglomeration, Marcus Banks reminds us of the fact that in Jainism, the soul takes on the shape of the body, and more specifically should take the shape of the human body; like an outline of the body, the soul sits just inside.<sup>86</sup> Indeed as he states, “The soul, freed of *karma*, has the form of the human body but no substance...simply shedding the body at death is not enough to liberate the soul [from *karma* and reincarnation].”<sup>87</sup> Also, Banks makes the statement that it is harder to liberate the soul from good *karma*, like joyful and happy desires, than from bad *karma* such as that incurred from breaking a vow. Therefore *sallekhanā* acts in part to avoid desirous things such as laying down in a better position for the “frail body.” The embodiment of Jains allows for them to share in their experience of being reborn in a human “frail” body, but also to commiserate in the gendered nature of their bodies.

Malli or Mallinath is the nineteenth *Tirthankara*.<sup>88</sup> She is regarded as having had a female reincarnation, but none of her icons ever depict her as a female, although she reached

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<sup>85</sup> The taking of one’s life through suicide and meditation, as described above in the *Sūtra*.

<sup>86</sup> Marcus Banks, “Representing the Bodies of the Jains” in *Rethinking Visual Anthropology*, ed Marcus Banks and Howard Morphy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 216-217.

<sup>87</sup> Banks, “Representing the Bodies,” 219.

<sup>88</sup> Her existence is hard to corroborate, as only two of the 24 *Tirthankaras* are mentioned outside of Jain texts. Malli is not one of them, but if she were to exist she would have lived centuries prior to the 8<sup>th</sup> Century BCE.

enlightenment as a woman. She, like Perpetua, is an example outside of the norm: she is the only female *Tirthankara*. However, most Jains who take the vow of *sallekhanā*, or even fast, are women. As Banks has noted, more women than men perform fasts and austerities in the Jain tradition at large, but have very few leadership roles within the Jain community.<sup>89</sup> The Digambara sect attributes this to the fact that, to them, women are more “ritually impure” by harboring vaginal life-forms, which men do not have, and therefore causing more violence to these life-forms; thus, women need to perform more austerities in order to shed the excess karma gained through breaking the vow of *ahimsa* so much more often.<sup>90</sup> Additionally, Malli is never depicted in female form outside of one icon which may not even be her.<sup>91</sup> Banks hypothesizes that it is because Malli’s gender is the least important of her features, at least in the Svetambara sect.<sup>92</sup> To Banks, the rest of Malli’s story – why she was turned into a woman, what she taught as a *Tirthankara* – reflects Jainism and its tenets more, including the fact that Malli performed *sallekhanā* at the end of her life.

And while Perpetua imagined herself as a man in her dreams, Malli does nothing of the sort. Laidlaw argues that, even for Svetambaras, the *Tirthankaras* and their icons must be male.<sup>93</sup> This is because “male celibacy is an arduous task,” though previously Banks stated that female lusts caused by vaginal life-forms made remaining celibate harder for women, refuting his emphasis on male celibacy being more “arduous” a task to control.<sup>94</sup> Rather, it is possible that Malli has a male form because his previous incarnations as males were the turning points in her

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<sup>89</sup> Banks, “Representing the Bodies,” 225.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, 226.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>92</sup> Digambaras believe that Malli was reincarnated as a woman, but did not reach liberation as a woman. This fits with their narrative that no woman can reach enlightenment and be liberated in a female form, though as in the case of Marajee, that does not stop women from practicing *sallekhanā* for other reasons.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid*, 227.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*, 227 and 228.

reaching enlightenment, and because gender is controlled by the *karma* that cannot be accrued through one-time thoughts or actions. By placing the gender of the next incarnation outside of the hands of the practitioner, Jains can focus more solely on their vows; further, women may be able to completely ignore their gender as a non-issue in the Svetambara sects and are therefore more likely to practice austerities for the good of their family, including taking the vow of *sallekhanā* for their families and community in the beginning and allowing the power of *darṣan* and suffering to benefit those who come to revere these practitioners. Especially for laywomen, family<sup>95</sup> becomes first priority, followed by more strict vows, when still a householder and physically able to raise the family in a Jain manner.

Laywomen can be mothers before ascetics so long as their faith is reflected in their comportment, as theorized by Moss in early Christian martyrdom. Ācārya Śāntisāgar Muni Mahārāja is a well-known Jain, “familiar to every Jaina family perhaps in the whole of India.”<sup>96</sup> He was married at a young age, at which point his wife died and, having never had sex, kept the vow of celibacy for life. By age 18 Muni began taking pilgrimages to important Jain sites, and became enamored with the idea of a fully ascetic life after his parents died.<sup>97</sup> According to Tukul, the Muni “developed an attitude towards all objects and problems which was fully consistent with scriptures.”<sup>98</sup> His faith and his comportment lined up well before other monks expected them to. He became a full, naked<sup>99</sup> monk at age 49, and after suffering from untreatable cataracts took the vow of *sallekhanā*, which was completed on September 18, 1955; he was 82 years old at the time of his death. However, he suggested ways to keep Jaina philosophical fundamental manuscripts

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<sup>95</sup> If celibacy is not practiced until later in life.

<sup>96</sup> T.K. Tukul, *Sallekhanā Is Not Suicide* (Ahmedabad: Swati Printing Press, 1976), 98.

<sup>97</sup> Tukul, *Sallekhanā Is Not Suicide*, 99.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid*, 99.

<sup>99</sup> Likely of the Digambara sect, whose monks do not wear clothing as they believe it to be a sign of worldly possessions.

from disappearing forever, and otherwise “carried the message of Jainism throughout the length and breadth of India and awakened thousands of Jainas and others spiritually inclined,” which is not a necessary vow but demonstrates his faith in the religion and his dedication to it. The Muni was described as “the very embodiment of India’s soul” by India’s then-Vice President Dr Radhakrishnan.<sup>100</sup> Tukol describes him as someone who raised the status of Jain munis<sup>101</sup> “to unequalled heights...for their life of austerity, *purity of character*, compassion...”<sup>102</sup>

Indeed the Muni’s faith is reflected in his excessive fasting and understanding of Jaina tenets. However, his eyes kept getting worse and so he eventually took the vow of *sallekhanā*. A few months before his death, the Muni said, “...Even during my youth, I did penance as much as possible...The [canon] were an ocean of philosophy...I am too insignificant to [expound the philosophy so eloquently]. Those who adopt the way of life preached by the Jina would attain happiness...he ought to develop his Faith...You cannot destroy your karmas without Right Faith and Right Knowledge.”<sup>103</sup> For the Muni, contemplating correct faith will lead to correct comportment or action. By believing so fruitfully in Jainism’s three jewels, the Muni “maintained his peace and happy attitude of mind till the last [breath]” and therefore passed into death correctly. As Tukol so perfectly sums up, “He lived what he preached and what had been taught to the humanity by the revered *Tirthankaras* thousands of years ago.”<sup>104</sup> The Muni is one of a lineage of Jains who practice what they preach, and led to their ability to practice *sallekhanā* successfully. As a narrative told and retold in most Jain families, the Muni’s *sallekhanā* and life narrative acts as a martyr narrative would in Christianity. As Elizabeth Castelli wrote in her book *Memory and*

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<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> Monk.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid*, 100.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*, 101-103.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid*, 104.

*Martyrdom: Early Christian Culture Making*, “memory accrues meaning through discursive and embodied repetition,” such as the acts of *sallekhanā* and martyrdom.<sup>105</sup> A collective memory reifies the communal identity.

## **Conclusion.**

Both martyrdom and *sallekhanā* are or played necessary parts in their respective religions despite having no doctrine devoted to their practices. By forming communities through the reiteration of acts and narratives, and providing exemplary practitioners, the Christian and Jain practices reinforce the religions itself. Without either of these practices, the religions may have died in their infancies, and without the practice of *sallekhanā* now, Jainism faces losing even more members.<sup>106</sup>

Even more importantly, the value of *sallekhanā* can no longer be ignored even though it does not perform a role as a tenet of Jainism. The Indian Government, in banning *sallekhanā*,<sup>107</sup> has defined the boundaries of all religions as existing only within the literature while completely ignoring the lived aspects. In doing so, the Indian Government is enforcing one moral and ethical code on a country that is diverse not only in people but religion. In claiming their “secular” status the Indian Government – intentionally or not – refuses to acknowledge the diversity of their

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<sup>105</sup> Elizabeth A Castelli, *Memory and Martyrdom: Early Christian Culture Making* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 12.

<sup>106</sup> The majority of Jains are in favor of *sallekhanā* even if there is backlash within the religion. See: Jaini, *The Jaina Path of Purification* (1979) for more.

<sup>107</sup> The ban is currently stayed and is being appealed by a Jain community in the Rajasthan High Court. See: Goswami (2015).

peoples, religions, and moral codes.<sup>108</sup> By reaffirming the importance of *sallekhanā* for the communal identity of Jains, through new uses of scholarship, I hope to open doors of discussion on the importance of lived religions in India.

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<sup>108</sup> The literature on the politics of secularism and religion in India is vast and outside the realm of this paper. However I would like to acknowledge discussion with Yogesh Chandrani, PhD, and his class titled "Politics, Religion and Secularism" for an expanded understanding of the current problem in India and other countries.

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