

JAINA MODES OF DYING IN ĀRĀDHANĀ TEXTS

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The doctrinal profile of the Jaina view of dying and death is embedded in the Ārāadhanā text-books, as e.g. the *Bhagavatī-Ārāadhanā*, which is also called *Mūlārāadhanā*. The texts reveal the social setting, the monastic disciplines, the ritual structures, knowledge of the human mind as well as of bodily processes, empathy and persuasive skills. The important function of telling the relevant stories at the right time and place is underpinned. Many stories in subsequent anthologies, the Ārāadhanā-kathā-kośas, pay special attention to the various ways of dying and the crucial hour of death. These stories underline thereby the impact of the last phase of life for the further existences of the soul. The stories of the *Bṛhat-Kathākośa*, the oldest extant collection of Ārāadhanā-kathās, exemplify the implementation of the Jaina doctrines and display various active and passive modes of dying, its endurance and performance.

This article will consider some of the striking aspects of the Jaina *ars moriendi* as they are presented and set forth and illustrated by exemplary stories in the Ārāadhanā tradition. Ārāadhanā means the accomplishment of faith, knowledge, conduct, and penance, particularly at the end of life (see verse 2 below). The ideal and the process of voluntary death described in the *Bhagavatī-Ārāadhanā* is in itself a very consistent system, representing an outline of Jaina individual eschatology and its stringent emphasis on the hour of death. It rests on the Jaina view of karma, rebirth and liberation and the moral codes.

First the texts will be introduced briefly, and then significant ways of dying will be described. The main section is divided into: (I) the end of life by renouncing food, and (II) ending one's life by killing oneself. These special cases of condoned self-killing will be illustrated by the respective stories.

Hariṣeṇas's *Bṛhat-Kathākośa*¹, dated 931, is the oldest of a group of Kathākośas, called Ārāadhanā-kośas. Of special importance and interest is the explicit role and function of the stories, which are supposed to illustrate doctrinal tenets for life and death and are narrated at the death bed to the person who decided to end life by renouncing food. These compilations are based on a much earlier Ārāadhanā-text, called *Mūlārāadhanā* or *Bhagavatī-Ārāadhanā*

¹ Published by Upadhye in 1943 with an elaborate introduction. See the bibliography under *Bṛhat-Kathākośa*.

authored by Śivārya alias Śivakoṭi.² The *Mulārādhana* in all probability “belongs to the earliest stratum of the pro-canon of the Digambaras.”³

Śivārya’s dates are not known. A. N. Upadhye⁴ and Karl Oetjens⁵ give reasons to place the author around the first century. Considering Śivārya’s statement that he relies on an older, more voluminous text, and considering the continuum of commentaries (by the Yāpanīya Aparājita around 700, by Amitagati 10th c. and by Āśādhara of the 13th c.) and considering the various Kathākośas (compiled by Hariṣeṇa 10th c., Śrīcandra 11th c., Prabhācandra 11th c. and Nemidatta 16th c.) which are based on it, one might assume that this Ārādhana-tradition was alive and productive for more than one and a half millennia.

I) End of life by renouncing food

The *Bhagavatī-Ārādhana* is a special work about voluntary dying and about the hour of death especially of Jaina monks and nuns, but also of lay-people. *Ārādhana* is explained in verse 2:

ujjovaṇaṃ ujjavaṇaṃ ṇivvahaṇaṃ sāhaṇaṃ ca ṇiccharaṇaṃ |
daṃsaṇa-ṇāṇa-carittaṃ tavāṇaṃ ārāhaṇā bhaṇidā || 2 ||

“Ārādhana is explained as: illuminating, undertaking, performing, reaching and mastering of faith, knowledge, conduct and penance.”

It is essential for liberation that this *ārādhana* takes place at the end of life as stated in verses 15 and 17:

suciram avi ṇiradicāraṃ viharittā ṇāṇa-daṃsaṇa-caritte |
marāṇe virādhayittā aṇaṇta-saṃsārio diṭṭho || 15 ||

“Even though transgressions with respect to knowledge, faith and conduct have been avoided for many years, if one fails the *ārādhana* at death, then *saṃsāra* is regarded as endless.”

On the other hand, it is said in verse 17:

² Published as *Mulārādhana*, 1935; *Bhagavatī-Ārādhana* 1978/2004; and *Bhagavatī-Ārādhana* 1990. My quotations are from the *Mulārādhana*.

³ See Upadhye’s 1943 introduction to *Bṛhat-Kathākośa*, 55.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 54 f.

⁵ Oetjens 1976: 23f.

diṭṭhā aṇādi-micchādiṭṭhī jamhā khaṇeṇa siddhā ya |
ārāhayā carittassa tena ārāhanā sāro || 17 ||

“It happened that primarily wrong believers gained final perfection in an instant when they observed the *ārāghanā* of right conduct; therefore this *ārāghanā* is the highest.”

At the critical hour of death the ascetic standard of detachment, forbearance and self-restraint ought to be upheld. Even a livelong, faultless conduct is forfeited if at the hour of death *ārāghanā* is hampered. That can happen, for example through a *nidāna* (desire for the next existence) or any other breach of detachment. On the other hand, a substantial purification of the soul and, in the best case, final liberation would also be possible as the fruit of *ārāghanā*,⁶ even if this perfection takes place only at the hour of death, although usually preparatory pure conduct is necessary.

The *Bṛhat-Kathākośa* has two stories relevant to this point. Story no. 3 is explicitly mentioned in the *Bhagavatī-Ārāghanā* in verse 24:

puvvamabhhāvidajoggo ārādhejja maraṇe jadi vi koi |
khaṇṇugadiṭṭhanto so taṃ khu pamāṇaṃ ṇa savattha || 24 ||

“If someone reaches *ārāghanā* while dying without having practiced the discipline before, then it is like in the exemplum of the tree-trunk; but this is not the general rule.”

The *exemplum* of the tree-trunk is narrated in the *Bṛhat-Kathākośa* as *Viṣṇudatta-kathānakam* (story no. 3), referring to a wretched blind man from a settlement of blind, deaf and destitute men. Once, utterly dejected by his poverty, mistreated by his wife, suffering from unbearable physical pain, and forced to go on his begging rounds Viṣṇudatta happens to run against a tree, gets hurt and falls down. But while falling he suddenly gains his eyesight and beholds a pot of jewels. On his way home he reflects about his merits which brought these benefits. He and his wife are overjoyed and they invite the villagers for a splendid meal.

When the wife was asked about their sudden fabulous fortune she told the other women how it happened that her poor husband went out, knocked the tree, fell down, gained his eyesight and a treasure. The women reported the events to their blind husbands, who ran out in excitement hoping to gain wealth and their eyesight in a similar manner. But they

⁶ There are different levels of *ārāghanā*: the highest *ukkassā* for the *kevalin*, the middle one *majjhimayā* for the monk, the lower one *jahaṇṇā* for the faithful layperson. And, accordingly, the results are final liberation for the highest, seven remaining existences for the middle and many existences for the faithful layperson - but he reaches at least lower heavenly regions, eventually the *acyuta* heaven.

merely fell into calamities and met with miserable ends. The story concludes saying: “The conditions for the beings filled with merits are not the same as for those loaded with demerits.”

The story illustrates the possibility of gaining the faculty of seeing and finding a treasure just on grounds of merit (*puṇya*) and the verse from the *Bhagavatī-Ārādhana* relates this to the gaining of *ārādhana*, i.e. the three jewels *darśana*, *jñāna*, and *cāritra*, in a perfect death, even for someone who, for whatever reasons, did not practice preparatory austerities. But this is not the rule.

Another story narrating the dying of a good death without long preparations is no. 2 of the *Bṛhat-Kathākośa: Somaśarma-kathānakam*. It tells about the rich Brahmin Somaśarma who happened to meet a Digambara *ācārya* in Mathura. The *ācārya* yielded to Somaśarma’s wish to be given the Digambara *dīkṣā* and started teaching him by writing down the phrase *namaḥ siddhaṃ*. But Somaśarma was unable to recognise even a letter. When the *ācārya* expressed his doubts about his ability to perform proper discipline since he could not even grasp one letter of the alphabet, Somaśarma became indifferent to his body and he wanted to die. He went to another *ācārya* to find out the pure and best way to die. The *ācārya* instructed him to keep the fourfold *ārādhana*, to renounce food, remain without movement and concentrate on the images of Candraprabha. Somaśarma went to the forest and following the instruction accomplished the *ārādhana*. He was reborn as a great god. The story ends with the statement: “In the case of Somaśarma *ārādhana* was perfected without preceding preparation, but this is not the standard.”

A coherent question arises in verse 18: What is the value of keeping the standard? Why should one prepare oneself with a long ascetic practice for the critical hour of death?

jadi pavayaṇassa sāro maraṇe ārahaṇā havadi diṭṭhā |

kiṃ dāiṃ sesa-kāle jadi jadadi tave caritte ya || 18 ||

“If the *ārādhana* at death is the core of the teaching, then why should one at all make earlier efforts through austerities and good conduct?”

The answer is clear: it makes the process easier (verses 19-20 and ff.):

ārāhaṇāe kajje pariyammaṃ savvadā vi kāyavvaṃ |

pariyamma-bhāvidassa hu suha-sajjhārāhaṇā hoi || 19 ||

“If one strives for the *ārādhana* one has to make preparations; it is easier to perfect the *Ārādhana*, if one is purified by preparations.”

And here the warrior metaphor is used:⁷

jaha rāyakula-pasūo jogaṃ ṇiccam avi kuṇai parikammaṃ |
to jida-karaṇo juddhe kammamattho bhavissadi hi || 20 ||
iya sāmaṇṇaṃ sādhu vi kuṇadi niccam avi joga-pariyammaṃ |
to jida-karaṇo maraṇe jhāṇa-samattho bhavissaṃ ti || 21 ||

“Just as the prince regularly trains with weapons and with an entirely trained body will be able to cope with his task in the battle, so too the ascetic constantly observes the discipline thinking: ‘With control over the senses I’ll be able to maintain the meditation while dying’.”⁸

The battlefield metaphor is even stretched further when the well-trained prince who grasps the banner of royal power is compared to the mendicant grasping the banner of *ārādhana* (verses 22–23):

jogābhāvida-karaṇo sattū jedūṇa juddha-raṃgammi |
jaha so kumāra-mallo rajja-paḍāyam balā haradi || 22 ||
taha bhāvida-samaṇṇo micchattādī rivū vi jedūṇa |
ārāhaṇā-paḍāyam harai su-saṃthāra-raṃgammi || 23 ||

“As this strong prince whose body is fit by training with weapons defeats his enemies on the battlefield and grasps with might the banner of royal power, so the devoted mendicant overcomes his enemies like wrong faith, etc. and grasps the banner of *ārādhana* on the well-prepared deathbed.”

The *Bhagavatī-Ārādhana* elaborates in over two thousand *gāthās* the details of the fourfold *ārādhana*. In the light of the last phase of life, in view of dying and death, the Jaina doctrine is recapitulated in order to convince the seeker or to strengthen the decision of the renouncer. *Ārādhana* is a doctrine, a process, a way of living, a way of dying, and it is a revered divinity, whose sanctity is represented in bas-reliefs in Śravaṇa Beḷgoḷa.⁹

Of the seventeen different types of death which are referred to in the *Bhagavatī-*

⁷ Granoff 2007: 73-100 and especially 79-85.

⁸ Cf. *Candāvejjhaya* verses 117-130: This section stresses the importance of preparation for the challenging hour of death, so that the dying person is able to keep the concentration vigilant like the archer who aims at his target (*vedhyaka*) the pupil of the eye (*candraka*).

⁹ Cf. Settar 1986 and 1990.

Ārādhanā in verse 25, five are described and evaluated according to the kind and degree of *samyaktva*. *Bāla-bāla maraṇa* is the death of wrong believers caught in *mithyātva*. *Bāla maraṇa* is the death of right believers without *samyak-cāritra*. *Bāla-pañḍita maraṇa* is the death of laypeople with *samyak-cāritra*. *Pañḍita maraṇa* is the death of monks with *samyak-cāritra*. *Kevalins* die the *pañḍita-pañḍita* death. One should note that “*sallekhanā*” is not mentioned as a type of death. It is number eleven of the forty chapters of the *bhakta-pratyākhyāna* rite (see below). The term literally means “scratching,” connoting thereby the emaciation of the body and the eradication of the passions (*kaṣaya*). It is a long-term preparation to one of the recommended deaths. The keeping of the vow of *sallekhanā* can take from six months to twelve years.

The *pañḍita* death has three varieties: *bhakta-pratyākhyāna*: giving up food with assistance; *ingīṇī*: dying in solitude with certain movements without assistance; *prāyopagamaṇa*: dying in solitude without movement and without assistance.

The first variety of these, the *bhakta-pratyākhyāna* forms the bulk of the *Bhagavatī-Ārādhanā*. It is described in forty chapters covering more than a thousand verses and primarily described for the *savicāra*, that is, a healthy monk who can undertake any activity necessary in the preparatory phases. The reason for this prominence is probably that this assisted death is a public affair and imparts the features of the Jaina discipline to the members of the community as well as to the onlookers. Here not all the steps from the initial decision to the disposal of the corpse (*viḥaṇā*) will be presented,¹⁰ but only a brief sketch of the context for the kind of support which is given to the one who has chosen to die this death. One of the prominent features of that support is the role of the teller of tales and the function of the *kathās*. They serve to strengthen the decision of the *ārādhaka*.

The steps of the *bhakta-pratyākhyāna* start with *arha*, fitness of the person for this kind of death and the outer signs (*liṅga*) of the one willing to undertake the renunciation of food. One of the relevant signs is nudity. This is also valid for women (verse 80) and points to the possibility of liberation of women which Digambaras would otherwise deny, because female nudity is regarded as unfeasible. Then comes the decision for dying by starvation, leaving the congregation and going to another *gaṇa* or group of mendicants. One should note here that it is the decision of the *ārādhaka* himself; he does not have to ask for permission. He searches (*mārgaṇā*) for a suitable superintendent of the last rite, that is, a highly qualified teacher (*susthita*). Such a *niryāpakācārya* has to have not only a thorough knowledge of the scriptures, of the monk’s discipline and be endowed with devotion and self-discipline, but he also has to have special abilities: he has to be an effective speaker and be a renowned narrator of different kinds of stories (*vicitrakathā*) (500). His role is like that of a captain of a ship

¹⁰ For a complete list see e.g. Upadhye 1943: 51f., Khadabadi 1979: 96–106.

filled with jewels and set assail on the roaring sea (503).

After the admission and confession of sins, a proper place (*śayyā*) is selected, which has enough room for the *ārādhaka*, who is now called a *kṣapaka*, i.e. the destroyer of *karmas*, for the superintendent (*niryāpakācārya*), for the attendant monks and one hall for preaching the dharma to the pious visitors.

For assistance of the *kṣapaka* on his death bed forty-eight monks are appointed (*niryāpaka*) (647-688). Out of these, four narrate religious stories in a pleasing (653) and impressive manner (652), which can aid the *kṣapaka* in his task (651). They have to have a high standard of speaking ability, including clarity and distinctness of expression, and a well-adjusted voice (652). They narrate *dharmakathās* of three types which evoke right knowledge and conduct and disgust with the world.

The *dharma*-stories are categorised in four types of which three are useful for the *kṣapaka*, standing for three types of inherent intentions: *ākṣepaṇī*: attractively pointing to *jñāna* and *cāritra*; *saṃvejaṇī*: shocking and revealing the power of *jñāna*, *cāritra* and *tapas*; *nirvejaṇī* demonstrating the impurity of anything corporeal leading to disgust with the body. The fourth type, *vikṣepaṇī*, is provocative by juxtaposing standpoints. This is not suitable for the *kṣapaka* because it may confuse him by not offering a clear and firm standpoint. Thus only the three types of stories should be told which evoke right knowledge and conduct and strengthen the asceticism by inducing attraction, shock and repulse (655 f.).¹¹

Four other monks narrate the four types of religious stories to the pious visitors outside, in halls or pavilions, out of the hearing range of the *ārādhaka* (668).

The *ārādhaka* / *kṣapaka* then renounces food, even when it is shown to him, he gradually leaves out solid food, then liquids. He begs for forgiveness and forgives everyone and practices various austerities in order to destroy his *karman*.

Then the *niryāpakācārya*, the superintendent himself, sits by his side and instructs him (*anuśiṣṭi*). There are many verses devoted to this phase of the rite, 720-1489. In his introduction to the *Bṛhat-Kathākośa* Upadhye calls it “a fine didactic work by itself,”¹² with a strong influence on later Jaina literature a study of which is indispensable for a Jaina monk. The *niryāpakācārya* unfolds the Jaina doctrine with an emphasis on the disgust of worldly life and the longing for salvation. The teaching includes appropriate similes and illustrations, like “A monk who desires a reward for his penance (or makes a *nidāna*), sells a valuable gem for a cowry.” And the *niryāpakācārya* may relate to the *kṣapaka* the lives of legendary persons in order to support the tenets.

In the context of story-telling the communicative setting is remarkable: in verse 720 it

¹¹ See also Balbir 1994: 228 f. where she refers to several other sources of this qualification of *dharmakathās*.

¹² See Upadhye’s introduction to *Bṛhat-Kathākośa* 1943: 52.

is said that the *niryāpakācārya* gives the doctrinal teaching arousing the desire for emancipation and disgust by murmuring into the *kṣapaka*'s ear (*karṇajāpaṃ*).

The *kṣapaka* feels physical and mental pain due to hunger and thirst and the rising of karmas. The *niryāpakācārya* and the attendants help him to regain his balance of mind and the power of endurance.

The *niryāpakācārya* is now a constant, attentive companion and exhorts and supports the *kṣapaka*, when he suffers afflictions of various kinds. He imparts to him the *kavaca*, the religious instruction as a protection or armour against the afflictions (*parīṣaha*). He reminds him of certain great men, who stood firm in all calamities.

Nineteen verses of this *kavaca* section refer to the life-stories of nineteen sages from Sukumārasvāmi to Vṛṣabhasena and include well-known names like Bhadrabāhu, Cāṅkya, Āṅṅikāputra, etc., who all died exemplary deaths. None of them, it should be noted, died in an assisted, public death. Some of them had to bear terrible pains when they were roasted on a rock, eaten by foxes, crushed in oil mills, hit by arrows. Others emaciated their bodies and died in solitude in *kāyotsarga*.

The *niryāpakācārya* reminds the suffering *kṣapaka* that *he* has good assistance through the attending monks and himself, who impart to him the nectar-like words of the Jina. Under these circumstances he should be able to reach the highest aim. Then he utters the following remarkable metaphor, which in the given context is a transfer of realities: he tells him that he is being given drink in the form of stories narrated by the monks (the commentary mentions again the three types of suitable stories); that he is receiving food in form of the advice offered by the *niryāpakācārya*, and that his own meditation, which he has always pursued is the medicine (*suipāṇaṇa aṇusatṭhibhoyaṇa ya sadovagahiṇa | jhāṇosaheṇa tivvā vi vedaṇā tīrade sahiduṃ || 1608 ||*).

The purpose of telling the *kathās* at the death bed, or in the words of the *Bhagavatī-Ārādhanā*, giving drink to the dehydrated in the form of stories, is clearly defined as strengthening the will-power of the *kṣapaka* and intensifying his aversion for worldly life. This means that the stories and the act of telling them are ascribed a considerable power.

After the *kavaca*, which is a prominent and elaborate stage of the rite, the *kṣapaka* gains equanimity and pursues his meditative way to the end.

II) Killing oneself

The section called *prāyopagamaṇa* entails in verses 2072-2076 the explicit affirmation of the possibility to end one's life by killing oneself in an abrupt and active way. Four exemplary stories are mentioned to illustrate the point.

In verse 2072 it says that:

*āgādhe uvasagge dubbhikkhe savvado vi duttāre |
kada-jogi samadhiyāsiya kāraṇa-jādehiṃ vi maramṭi || 2072 ||*

“In case the accomplished renunciators, who are firm in the endurance of hardships, are confronted with very serious difficulties, when alms are hard to get and everywhere there are hindrances, they die also by [taking recourse to] some [other] means.”

In the following four verses the names of the protagonists and a very short account of their deeds is given. The *Bṛhat-Kathākośa* and related *Ārādhanaśāstras* narrate the stories at length and with slight variations.¹³ Here the plots will be paraphrased or summarised, concentrating on the protagonists’ ending of their lives.

Verse 2073 of the *Bhagavatī-Ārādhanaśāstra* says:

*Kosalaya Dhammasīho aṭṭham sādheti giddha-putṭheṇa |
nayarammi ya Kollagire Caṃdasiriṃ vippajahidūna || 2073 ||*

“Dhammasīha of Kosala reached his aim in Kollagiri by means of dying through vultures after having left his wife Caṃdasiri.”

Dharmasiṃhakathā (Bṛhat-Kathākośa 154):

King Dharmasiṃha was happily married to queen Candraśrī until the time when he heard a sermon by Damavara teaching the Jaina dharma. He renounced the world and wandered off as a mendicant. Since Candraśrī felt very depressed about the loss of her husband her brother started looking for him. The brother disturbed Dharmasiṃha’s *tapas* several times with his horrifying voice and forced him back to his royal and family affairs. The king, however, renounced the world again and was initiated a second time. His brother-in-law kept searching for him once again. One day Dharmasiṃha, the royal mendicant, saw his brother-in-law running after him and decided to die lest his vow be broken again. He made his confession and renouncing his life he placed himself into the cadaver of an elephant. He died in *samādhi* and became a radiant god.

‘Placing himself in the cadaver of the elephant’ means that Dharmasiṃha chose to be eaten up by vultures, since they would tear and pick up the entire cadaver. The death by vultures is enumerated as the 13th of the 17 types of death, as a kind of self-killing by placing oneself among dead animals to be eaten up by vultures.¹⁴ By definition this kind of death also

¹³ See Hariṣeṇa, Prabhācandra, Śrīcandra.

¹⁴ Aparājita commentary to BhĀ 25: *giddha-putṭha* = *grdhra-sprṣṭa*.

encompasses self-killing by weapons. This type of death is neither disapproved (as is killing oneself by drowning, immolation or jumping to death) nor is it recommended. It is accepted under certain very precarious circumstances when keeping the right path is likely to become impossible.

The synopsis of the next story in the *Bhagavatī-Ārāḍhanā* is given in verse 2074:

*Pāḍaliputte dhūdā-heduṃ māmaya-kadammi uvasagge |
sādhedi Usabhaseno attham vikkhāṇasaṃ kiccā || 2074 ||*

“When for the sake of his daughter the father-in-law of Usabhasena hindered him to keep his vow, he reached his aim by hanging himself.”

This story is narrated in the *Bṛhat-Kathākośa* (no. 154): *Vṛṣabhasenamunikathānakam*. Vṛṣabhasena was the son of a wealthy merchant in Pataliputra and married to Dhanaśrī, the daughter of Dhanapati, another rich merchant. They were enjoying their life together, but when Vṛṣabhasena once heard a Jaina *muni* preaching the Jaina *dharma*, he renounced everything and became a monk. When his father-in-law saw how his daughter pined in deprivation, he started looking for the monk, made him break his vow and led him back home. But Vṛṣabhasena could not bear being at home and took *dīkṣā* a second time. Again his father-in-law managed by some ruse to make him break the vow and fetched him back home. Vṛṣabhasena was upset about this bondage and in order not to let that happen a third time he renounced right there according to the rules of the monks, died and became a god.

The story in the *Bṛhat-Kathākośa* is not explicit about the manner of his death; only that it was an abrupt action but ‘according to the rules of the monk’, that means most probably after a confession. The story narrated in Prabhācandra’s *Ārāḍhanākośa* and Śrīcandra’s *Kaha-Kosu* states that he stopped or interrupted his breath (*śvāsaṃ nirudhya*). The word *vikkhāṇasaṃ kiccā* in *Bhagavatī-Ārāḍhanā* verse 2074 is glossed in the Sanskrit commentary by the word *śvāsāvarodha* or *śvāsānirudhya*, thereby connoting strangulation. In the list of 17 types of death already referred to above, it is included as the 12th kind, *vippānasam*.¹⁵

As can be seen from these two stories, killing oneself without long preparation and elaborate rites is under certain circumstances acceptable and grants access to a heaven.

The following two instances of death are somewhat surprising because they mention the use of weapons and because of particular circumstances. The synopsis is given in verse

¹⁵ Cf. *Sthānāṅgasūtra* 2, 4: Mahāvīra permits *vehāṇasa* and *giddhapattha* (see also note 9 above), the strangulating and the death by vultures, under certain circumstances. But not drowning, immolation, taking poison, using weapons or jumping down.

2075 of the *Bhagavatī-Ārādhana*:

*Ahimāraeṇa ṇivadimmi māride gahida-samaṇa-liṅgeṇa |
uḍḍāha-pasamaṇatthaṃ sattha-ggahaṇam akāsi gaṇī || 2075 ||*

“In order to avert a (public) outrage a *gaṇin* killed himself with a weapon, when (the Buddhist) Ahimāraka, who had feigned to be a Jaina monk, had murdered the king.”

The story is no. 156 in the *Bṛhat-Kathākośa* titled *Jayasenanṛpakathā*. Jayasena, king of Śrāvastī, was Buddhist and his *guru* was Śivagupta. Once the Jaina-*ācārya* Yativṛṣabha came to the town and his sermon on Jaina dharma convinced the king completely. So he became an ardent *śrāvaka*, who converted his family and his country to the Jaina faith - much to the annoyance of his former Buddhist guru Śivagupta who then plotted against the king. He engaged the Buddhist lay person Abhimāra to murder the king. This Abhimāra approached Ācārya Yativṛṣabha and bowed to him full of false devotion.

One day the king went to the temple where Yativṛṣabha practiced *tapas*. In order to pay homage to him he left his entourage outside and entered the inner hall. Abhimāra with fake devotional attitude also made his way inside, where there were now just these three persons in the sanctuary. When the king bowed in front of the *ācārya* and touched the ground Abhimāra stabbed him with a sharp knife in his throat and disappeared. The *ācārya* saw that the king was dead and immediately realized that the situation was very dangerous for the Jaina community. He knew that to avert the impending danger he had to make a self-sacrifice (*ātmaviḥāta*). Using the blood of the king he wrote on the wall with his hand: ‘This deed was not committed by me but by Abhimāra.’ But apprehensive of the reproach by the people and to avoid public calamity I am killing myself in accordance with my status of a *muni*.

After the self-reproach and other prescribed actions he performed renunciation of everything and recited the *pañcanamaskāra-mantra*. Then the righteous one took the knife and cut open his belly. He gained *samādhi-maraṇa* and went to haven.

The king’s son arrived at the spot, saw the two dead bodies, informed the *saṅgha* and read aloud what the *ācārya* had written on the temple wall. He lived on as a pious Jaina.

The fourth instance of doctrinally recognised self-killing tells of Śakaṭāla, a well-known figure from the Nanda, Cāṇakya, Vararuci, Śakaṭāla circle of narratives. He was a minister of the ninth King Nanda and father of Sthūlabhadra and Śrīyaka.¹⁶

Linking the episode to the previous case of self-killing, verse 2076 of the *Bhagavatī-Ārādhana* reports Śakaṭāla’s case:

¹⁶ Cf. Hemacandra, 8. 4–66.

Sagaḍālaeṇa vi tadhā sattha-ggahaṇeṇa sādhide attho |

Vararui-paoga-hedum ruṭṭhe Ṅaṃde Mahāpaume || 2076 ||

“In the same way Śakaṭāla, a monk with Ācārya Mahāpadma, reached the aim by killing himself with a weapon because Vararuci by some device instigated the rage of King Ṅaṃda against him.”

In the *Brhat-Kathakośa*, story no. 157 is called *Śakaṭālamuni-kathānakam*. It is a long story, narrating the actions and interactions of the right and the false Nanda, the ministers Śakaṭāla and Vararuci whose turbulent fates are known from other works with variations. Without going into the antecedents suffice it to say here that Śakaṭāla’s and Vararuci’s relationship was difficult, because they had somehow to rely on each other, but at the same time it was burdened by jealousy, rivalry and mutual enmity. The end of the story tells the end of the life of Śakaṭāla.

Śakaṭāla became a pious Jain when he was taught the *dharma* by the *sūri* Mahāpadma. He renounced everything and attained highest indifference, was initiated and took leave from Nanda’s court. He moved around with Mahāpadma’s group and perfected himself as a monk. Once when they came to Pataliputra Vararuci, full of hatred, used the opportunity to harm him. He invited the begging monk to the inner apartments of the king. There Śakaṭāla received his alms and then left. But Vararuci denounced him by telling the king, that Śakaṭāla had come to the inner apartments and enjoyed himself there. Nanda, in his wrath, commanded his men to kill Śakaṭāla. When the righteous monk got to know this he prepared himself for death. He made his confessions, renounced everything and recited the *pañcanamaskāra-mantra*. Then he took a sharp knife and pushed it into his belly. Thus he performed *samādhi-maraṇa* and went to haven. When King Nanda learned that Śakaṭāla was not at fault in any way, he went to Mahāpadma, reproached himself and became a *śrāvaka*.

This story is classified under *śāstra-maraṇa* in the *Kaha-Kosu*, indicating once more that this act of self-killing is accepted and in accordance with the *ārādhana* principles. Śakaṭāla forestalled the king’s order by killing himself before the king’s men arrived to kill him. Why he chose to kill himself, instead of being killed, is not explained by the commentators. One reason could be that the monk feared the calamity which would have disturbed a controlled way of dying. Another interpretation would be that he did not want others to commit a violent deed. Yet another possible interpretation is that the self-killing is used as a proof of one’s innocence against unjustified suspicion.

Conclusion

The phase of dying is presented as the climax of a life striving for liberation. Whatever mode of dying is chosen, it requires will-power, conscious action and self-control. The “assisted death” as depicted in the *bhakta-pratyākhyāna* portion of the *Bhagavatī-Ārādhana* reveals a highly structured last path and a communicative setting in the difficult phases of the renunciation of food and drink. Telling the appropriate tales is a substantial feature of the support given to the dying person. The “death by self-killing” is by contrast a solitary death, supported by the firm conviction that it is the only possible measure to be taken on the right path.

Some points of difference with regard to common assumptions about the Jaina way of dying emerge clearly from the *Ārādhana*-tradition:

1. The *ārādhaka* does not have to ask for permission to end his life, he simply has to announce his decision.
2. Women, according to the *Bhagavatī-Ārādhana* can choose *paṇḍita-maraṇa* and perform it in nudity.
3. Killing oneself, even by means of a weapon, is condoned under certain circumstances.

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