Under Which Conditions Is \textit{sallekhana} Permitted for Jain Laity?

HOTTA Kazuyoshi

Introduction

In Jainism, the practice of fasting unto death is known as \textit{sallekhana}. Since early times, such fasting has been practiced not only by mendicants but also by laypersons. Since \textit{sallekhan	ext{a}}, which is a kind of voluntary death, was criticized as constituting suicide,\(^1\) some Jain monks have emphasized that \textit{sallekhan	ext{a}} and suicide differ in various points. This paper focuses on the conditions under which \textit{sallekhan	ext{a}} is permissible for Jain laity through an examination of \textit{Śrāvakācāra} texts concerning the code for laypersons.\(^2\) First, I will survey the various word forms of \textit{sallekhan	ext{a}} in the texts belonging to this genre. Second, I will determine the place that \textit{sallekhan	ext{a}} holds in the code for laypersons. Finally, I will examine the conditions under which the practice of \textit{sallekhan	ext{a}} is permitted.

1. Word-Forms of \textit{sallekhan	ext{a}}

The word \textit{sallekhan	ext{a}}\(^3\) is derived from root \textit{sam}/\textit{ṭikh}. It is considered to be way of death for the wise (\textit{paṇḍitamarāṇa}).\(^4\) The term is interpreted as meaning “to scrape off” (\textit{lekhan	ext{a}}) “properly” (\textit{sam}) the outer body and inner passions.\(^5\) In Digambara Sanskrit texts, the word-form \textit{sallekhan	ext{a}} is most prevalent,\(^6\) but additionally \textit{sallekha},\(^7\) \textit{sallekhan	ext{a}},\(^8\) \textit{sulekhan	ext{a}},\(^9\) and \textit{sallesaṇa}\(^10\) can also be found. On the other hand, Śvetāmbara Sanskrit texts mostly use the form \textit{samlekhana}.\(^11\) Digambara Prakrit texts also use \textit{sallehaṇ	ext{a}},\(^12\) \textit{sallīhaṇ	ext{a}},\(^13\) and \textit{sallekaṇ	ext{a}},\(^14\) while Śvetāmbara Prakrit texts use \textit{samlehaṇ	ext{a}}.\(^15\) Such differences in the preverb forms have been pointed out as a characteristic of the \textit{Tattvārthasūtra},\(^16\) but can also be applied to other texts.
2. The Place of sallekhana in the Codes for Laypersons

Most Śrāvakācāra texts discuss twelve vratas consisting of five anuvratas, three gunavratas, and four śikṣāvratas. The contents of the five anuvratas are common to all texts, while the contents of the gunavratas and śikṣāvratas vary. Some texts count sallekhana as one of the śikṣāvratas. Other texts discuss sallekhana even though they do not count it as one of the śikṣāvratas. In particular the Dharmaratnākara (DhR), Dharmasāṃgrahaśrāvakācāra (Śr(M)), and Sāgāradharmāṃśta (SDhA) each dedicate one chapter to a discussion of sallekhana, and the Navapadaprakaraṇavytti (NPPV) describes it in detail by referring to the story of a role model. From the above, although the practice of sallekhana does not constitute an obligation for laypersons, it can be said that it is recommended to enthusiastic practitioners.

3. Under Which Conditions Is sallekhana Permitted?

Jainism has made the following three counterarguments against the criticism that sallekhana is equivalent to suicide, i.e., (a) the conditions under which the practice of sallekhana is permitted, (b) the difference of the state of mind possessed by a practitioner engaging in sallekhana and a person killing a living being, and (c) the five types of transgression of the rules pertaining to sallekhana. As space is limited, the discussion below is limited to (a) in this paper.

The Umasvāmiśrāvakācāra (Śr(U)) and Śrāvakācārasāroddhāra (Śr(PN)) list the following six conditions, i.e., (i) a great famine, (ii) a fatal disease, (iii) old age, (iv) in case one is about to be killed by hostile forces, (v) in case the ascetic practices might be lost, and (vi) in case one is at death’s door. The Praśnottaraśrāvakācāra (Śr(S)) lists (1) old age, (2) lack of physical ability, (3) a fatal disease, (4) an unavoidable calamity, and (5) a great famine. Furthermore, phrases equivalent to (v) and (vi) above are also added. The Puruṣārthānuśāsana (PAA) also lists the following five conditions, i.e., (1) a fatal disease, (2) an unavoidable calamity, (3) in case one’s self-control might be destroyed by ill-doers, (4) in cases in which water or fire might cause one’s death, and (5) in case one knows one’s end through inauspicious signs. The Dharmasāṃgrahaśrāvakācāra (Śr(M)) lists (1) a great famine, (2) an unavoidable calamity, and (3) a fatal disease, and also refers to (4) old age and (5) premonitions of one’s death. Furthermore,
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Ratnakaraṇḍaśrāvakācāra (RK) and the Ratnakaraṇḍaśrāvakācāratikā (RKT) list (1) an unavoidable calamity, (2) a great famine, (3) old age, and (4) a fatal disease alongside a phrase that is equivalent to (v). 26 The Dharmopadeśaśapiyusavarsāravakācāra (SRB) lists the same four conditions, but lacks a phrase corresponding to (v). 27 The Cāritrasūra (CS) lists (1) an unavoidable calamity, (2) a great famine, and (3) old age as well as a phrase equivalent to (v). The Lāṭīsamhitā (LS) lists (1) old age, (2) an unavoidable calamity, and (3) a fatal disease. 28 Siddhasenaṇaṇin interprets the content of Umasvāti’s commentary on the Tattvārthasaṭṭra as the time when dharma and āvāṣyaka are damaged based on the following three defects (doṣa): 29 (1) kāla (hard times or a great famine), (2) saṃhananadaurbalya (weakening of the body), 30 and (3) upasarga (calamity caused by a god, man, an animal or oneself). Jinabhadra also interprets it as the same three situations, but he does not mention a great famine. Akalaṇka and Vidyānandin mention the case in which āvāṣyaka is destroyed through damage to the senses caused by (1) old age and (2) disease, while the Yogaśāstra (YS) and Yogaśāstravṛtti (YSV) list cases in which (1) one cannot practice the six āvāṣyakas and (2) one is at death’s door. The other texts only mention that death is near for some reason. 31

From the above, it can be said that an unavoidable calamity, a great famine, old age, and a fatal disease are essential conditions, and phrases such as “in case one is at death’s door” and “for the purpose of dharma” loosely encompass these four conditions. These four conditions are decreased in number as needed and in the last case, the expression “in case one is at death’s door” incorporates all of them.

4. Conclusion

The following stanza taken from the Yaśastilakacampū (YTC) skillfully expresses the background in which these conditions were established. “If the king who has learned a military art for twelve years fell into disorder in the field, what can be a military art for him? The past conduct of the monk who is at death’s door is the same.” 32 This stanza implies the difference between sallekhana and suicide. That is to say, sallekhana is a religious practice in which one dies with dignity for the teachings of Jainism.

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Notes
1) Tukol 1976 argues for sallekhana from the viewpoint of a judge. Recently, the relation between sallekhana and suicide have become a major public issue. See “Jain practice of Santhara allowed by Supreme Court,” India Today: http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/jain-practice-of-santhara-allowed-by-supreme-court/1/462019.html (the last browsed date October 28, 2015). 2) As for a previous study on this issue, see Williams 1963: 166–172; Sogani 1967: 117–119; Bhargava 1968: 139–142. As for a study based on Śvetāmbara canonical texts and inscriptions, see Caillat 1977. 3) As to the other various names, see Settar 1989: 95–98. 4) As to the division of death in Jaina canonical texts, see Schubring 1935: $56$. 5) T(P) §705. As to the examples of sallekha in Pāli canonical texts, see Kawasaki 2005. 6) KAT, CPT, CS, T(A), T(P), T(Bh), T(V), T(S), DhR, PAA, PASU, RK, RKT, LS, Śr(A), Śr(AD), Śr(U), Śr(PN), Śr(B), Śr(M), Śr(S), SDhA, SRS, HP. Doha and ŚrDK do not use the word derived from the root sam/ordinary. 7) PP, RM, VC.

8) YTC. 9) BhDhU. 10) Śr(G). The etymology of this word form is unknown. 11) T(U), T(S), T(H), NPPV, PRP, PRPV, YŚ, YŚV, ŚrDKV, ŚrPrV. 12) CP. 13) KA, BhS(D). According to the variant of KA, there are four manuscripts which use sallekha. 14) Śr(V). 15) NPP, ŚrPr. 16) See Kanakura 1944: 174. 17) CP, CPT, Doha, PP, BhDhU, BhS(D), RM, VC, Śr(G), Śr(V). 18) KA, KAT, CS, T(A), T(U), T(P), T(Bh), T(V), T(S), T(H), DhR, PAA, PASU, PRP, PRPV, YTC, YŚ, YŚV, RK, RKT, LS, Śr(A), Śr(AD), Śr(U), Śr(PN), Śr(B), Śr(M), Śr(S), ŚrDK, ŚrDKV, ŚrPr, ŚrPrV, SDhA, SRS, HP. As to sallekhanā, Śr(PN) states almost the same contents as Śr(U). The contents of gunavrata and sikṣāvrata of US and ŚrVS are not clear. Śr(AD) seems not to include sallekhanā in sikṣāvrata. 19) SDhA is a kind of anthology, so I do not discuss it in this paper. 20) Śr(U) 450–451 (= Śr(PN) 349–350). 21) Śr(S) 22.3–5. 22) Śr(S) 22.11ab. 23) PAA 99–100. 24) Śr(M) 7.21. 25) Śr(M) 7.9–10. 26) RK 122. KAT quotes this stanza and follows its opinion. Śr(G) is almost the same as RK. See Śr(G) 3.50. 27) Śr(B) 5.3. 28) CS, pp. 260–261; LS 233. 29) T(S) on T(U) 7.17. T(S) inserts the word ”maranam.” 30) As to the word samhanana, see Kawasaki 2014: 442. 31) YTC 891–895; Śr(A) 6.98; ŚrPrV on ŚrPr 377, 380, 383; SRS 31.61; HP 58.160–161. Furthermore, we can categorize KA, CP, BhDhU, BhS(D), and PASU into this group. 32) YTC 898.

Primary Literature and Abbreviations
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Secondary Literature


Key words śrāvakācāra, sallekhanā, suicide

Assistant Professor, Otani University, PhD

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