



Jain nuns in meditation. Ladnun, December 2015. Photo @Claire Maes

Is Sallekhanā a form of Suicide?

A Critical Examination of the Legality and Ethicality of the Jain Fast to Death

Guest lecture by Prof. Dr. Claire Maes (University of Tübingen)

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14.00-15.30

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Rämistrasse 59, 8001 Zürich

Jains have a wide constellation of different types and lengths of fasts. Within this constellation, *sallekhanā*, or the soteriological practice of fasting to death, is the *summum bonum*. While the rite went uncontested for over two millennia, in recent years it became a matter of the courts. The Rajasthan High Court criminalized the practice as illegal on 10 August 2015. Soon after the Supreme Court of India stayed the ban on *sallekhanā*. While the final ruling is still pending, the Rajasthan Court case brought to the foreground pertinent questions around fasting and the ethics of dying.

Is, for instance, *sallekhanā* a form of suicide? Or also, does the support of a *sallekhanā*-aspirant constitute assisted suicide? In this lecture, I seek to discuss these legal and ethical questions by bringing the case of *sallekhanā* in conversation with the end-of-life option, known as the “Voluntarily Stopping Eating and Drinking” (VSED), a legitimate and widely available option to hasten death in various countries, including Austria.

Students, staff and everyone interested is cordially invited.

Prof. Dr. Angelika Malinar