



Editorial

On 18th May 2015, the person responsible for legalising the Passive euthanasia was heavenly aboded. She is Late Ms Aruna Shanbaug. The young beautiful Ms. Aruna Shanbaug, nurse by profession, working in King Edward Memorial (KEM) Hospital, Mumbai was brutally sodomised after strangulation with a dog chain by hospital cleaner Mr. Sohanlal Bharta Walmiki on 27th November 1973. The is chamic damage suffered by her brain left her in Persistent vegetative state. The incidences after the crime and the condition of Ms. Aruna led to the discussions regarding the mercy killing of a person, which forced the Indian judiciary to take a stand on this issue. As a result, passive euthanasia by means of withdrawal of life support to patients in a permanent vegetative state was legalised in India by the honourable Supreme Court of India on 7th March 2011. The Supreme Court in its historic judgement specified two irreversible conditions to permit Passive Euthanasia: (1) The brain-dead patients in whom the ventilator can be switched off and (2) The patients in a Persistent Vegetative State (PVS) for whom the feed can be tapered out and pain-managing palliatives can be added, according to laid-down international specifications.

Euthanasia is a subject of debate. The countries like Belgium, Netherlands, Colombia and Luxembourg have legalised euthanasia whereas Australia, Mexico and Thailand have criminalised it. But assisted suicide is legal in Switzerland, Germany, Japan and Albania and in few states of the USA. When there is such a difference of opinion, should euthanasia really be legalised? The supporters of euthanasia argue that every person has a right to die a dignified and empathetic death. They have the right to end their suffering if they wish to do so. Whereas the opponents of euthanasia feel that it shouldn't be the job of doctors as it's their moral responsibility to treat their patients until his/her last breadth as mirrored by the Hippocratic Oath. Legalising it will deceitfully target the disabled and poor person.

Thus it's a complex issue to be handled carefully. More weight on any one side of the balance can bring down the weighing pan on the opposite side. So both legalising and non-legalising have their own pros and cons. Only more and more debates and discussions at national and international level by eminent scholars in the field can bring some relief to the issue. Moreover it can be applied on a case to case basis with caution under the guidance and supervision of law.

I dedicate this editorial to all the staff members of KEM Hospital, Mumbai who have taken care of Ms. Aruna Shanbaug without any self-motive for a period of 42 years.

..... May the soul of Ms. Aruna rest in peace. May our prayers guide her on her journey to our Creator.....Ms Aruna gave us the root map of euthanasia, now it's our turn to walk the path to bring new laws which are accepted by all the needy.....

Dr Shankar M Bakkannavar
Editor – in – Chief