RITUAL SUICIDE AND THE RITE OF RENUNCIATION

By Patrick Olivelle, Bloomington

Suicide committed by the young and the old alike, by nobles and peasants, men and women, for what may be termed broadly 'religious' motives has been a common phenomenon in the history of India down to the present day\(^1\). It is, however, primarily in the ascetic traditions that suicide came to be considered a proper way, and in some cases the most excellent way, of bringing to an end man's earthly sojourn.

Greek records show that a naked philosopher (gymnosophist) named Kalanos, who accompanied Alexander the Great back from India, burnt himself on a pyre\(^2\). It is, moreover, recorded by Strabo that the Indian ambassadors to Augustus Caesar were accompanied by a man who committed his naked body to flames\(^3\). These classical accounts are corroborated by the frequent allusions to such suicide in ancient Indian literature and more especially in treatises on the life and conduct of ascetics.

Among the Jains the most excellent way to end one's life is by starvation (sallekhana)\(^4\). All the founders of the Jain faith (Jina or Tirthaṁkara) are said to have committed suicide in this fashion\(^5\). A similar practice existed among the Ājīvikas\(^6\). Buddhism is the only ascetic tradition that firmly disapproved of suicide on any grounds

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\(^3\) Ibid., XV. i. 73.


whatovert7. The Buddhist tradition includes the wish to end one’s life among the three desires that feed the fire of existence.

Turning to the orthodox tradition, we find that a vanaprastha (forest hermit), i.e. a member of the third stage of life (āśrama), was permitted to commit suicide when he found himself too feeble to perform the duties of his state8. The method recommended for him is the so-called Great Journey (mahāpravṛthā). It consisted of walking in a northerly or northeasterly direction toward the Himalayan mountains without eating or drinking until one fell dead.

The classical treatises of law (Dharmaśāstra) make no mention of suicide with reference to world renouncers (śamnyāsin), i.e. a member of the fourth stage of life. A verse of Manu9, moreover, echoes the message of the Buddha: a renouncer should wish neither to die nor to live on. He should be indifferent in this regard as in other matters. Later legal literature, however, as well as the special treatises on renunciation indicate that suicide was customary even among orthodox renouncers.

Suicide among World Renouncers

Suicide in the various ascetic traditions pointed to above has one characteristic in common. It is resorted to at the end of a life of asceticism when the ascetic has already reached perfection, which puts him beyond the sphere of human existence and makes life a purposeless burden.

In the orthodox literature on world renunciation (śamnyāsa), on the other hand, we find that suicide is enjoined at the very beginning of renunciation rather than as its consummation. In fact, suicide is presented as the concluding act of the initiatory rite of renunciation.

This connection between suicide and the rite of renunciation is nowhere as clearly established as in the Yatidharmaprakāśa by Vāsudevaśrama, a treatise on world renunciation composed probably in the 17th century c.e. The text runs as follows:

praiṣam uktvābhayadaksinām ca sareabhātebhya datvā vakyāmānā- prakāśaṁ tatvepradesādīnā lokānychalasyānapeksijāyāṁ rogādīnā kari-rāder bādhāyāṁ vā satyāṁ mahāprasthānikam eva kuryāt.

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7 In spite of the general rule forbidding suicide, Buddhist literature abound with instances of religious suicide. Cf. Upendra Thakur, op. cit., pp. 106—110.
8 Cf. Manusmṛti, 6. 31—32; Āpastambhdharmasūtra, 2. 9. 23. 2; Yajñavalkyasmṛti, 3. 55; Mahābhārata, 12. 185. 1.
9 “Let him not desire to die, let him not desire to live; let him wait for (his appointed) time, as a servant (waits) for the payment of his wages.” Manusmṛti, 6. 45.
"If he is indifferent toward promoting the welfare of the world by imparting the knowledge of the Truth etc. in the manner to be described below, or if he has an affliction of the body etc. due to a sickness and the like, having declared the praśaṇa\textsuperscript{10} and given the gift of safety to all creatures, he should undertake only (a course) such as the Great Journey.\textsuperscript{11}

At this point the author quotes two passages, the one from the Kathāsaritā Upanisad (2.3) and the other from the Garuḍa Purāṇa (2.26.5—9, 14—17)\textsuperscript{12}. He then continues:

\textit{iti tām ca vidyā vettam iechunā daṇḍagrahaṇāntam ākramaṇaṃ sampādya lokāna dākaupānāpekṣyāṃ sarirādādhyāyam vā satyām mahāpatha-prasthānam niraśanādikam vā vidheyam iti vyavasthitam.}

"Thus it is determined that, after entering the stage of life characterized by the carrying of the staff, an enlightened (renouncer) should undertake the Great Journey if he is indifferent toward promoting the welfare of the world, while a seeker after knowledge should undertake a course such as the fast unto death if he is afflicted in the body etc."\textsuperscript{13}

Next, Vāsudeva gives the conditions under which a person may undertake the renouncer’s way of life:

\textit{lokaṇa dākaupārrtham atnivedanārtham vā jivane cchāyām tu digambara bhūtānā prācīyām udecyān vā paśca vā sapta vā padāni gacchet. tata āsāyaṇeṇa vā “bhagavans tiṣṭha dākaupānādikam grāhante” ty uktah pranyayav kannipādī vāsah paridhāya . . .}

"Should he, however, wish to continue living either to promote the welfare of the world (in the case of the enlightened) or to attain the knowledge of the Self (in the case of the seeker after knowledge), removing all his clothes, he should take five or seven steps toward the east

\textsuperscript{10} Praśaṇa is the technical term for the formula: \textit{samyastam maya} (I have renounced). It is recited three times, first softly, then in a medium voice, and finally aloud. Cf. Baudhāyaṇadharmaśāstra, 2.10.17.27. In the opinion of later authorities, this is the essential act of the rite whereby the subject actually becomes a renouncer. Cf. Viśvēśvara Sarasvatī, Yatidharmasangraha. (Anandārama Sanskrit Series, No. 69; Poona: 1909), p. 18; Vāsudevārama, Yatidharmapramāṇa, crit. ed. & trans. by PATRICK OLIVELLE, Part I (Text) and II (Translation), Vienna (Publications of the De Nobili Research Library), 1976 and 1977. 20.1.

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 17.1—3.

\textsuperscript{12} These two texts are examined below.

\textsuperscript{13} Vāsudevārama, Yatidharmapramāṇa, ed. cit., 17.32. According to this text, an enlightened renouncer alone undertakes the Great Journey, whereas a seeker after knowledge resorts to one of the other four methods of suicide mentioned in the Kathāsaritā Upanisad, 2.3. This distinction is unique and I have not found it in any other text.
or toward the north. Then, requested by the teacher or by some other person: ‘Your Reverence, please stay. Take up the staff, the loin-cloth, and the rest,’ he should wear the loin-cloth and the other clothes with the mystic syllable OM.’

Further down, in his summary description of the rite, Vasudeva is even more emphatic. Here the previously required conditions for suicide are omitted. Suicide is given as the rule, whereas the desire to continue living is an exception permitted under certain conditions. ... iti pāṭhitvā maḥāpraśatānaṁ kuryād. tattvajñānārthanāṁ jīvaneśchāyaṁ tu digambaro bhūtavā prācyām udicyām vā pañca sapta vā padānī gacchet.

“Having recited [the verses giving safety to all creatures], he should undertake the Great Journey. Should he, however, wish to continue living in order to (acquire) the knowledge of the Truth, removing all his clothes, he should take five or seven steps toward the east or toward the north.”

From these passages we can gather the following points:
1. Persons resorting to renunciation are of two types: the enlightened (vidvat), i.e. one who has already gained the knowledge which leads to liberation (mokṣa); and the seeker after knowledge (vidvīdiṣu), i.e. one who renounces in order to gain that knowledge.
2. Both these types of persons may either commit suicide immediately after renouncing or continue to live as renouncers. The reasons, however, for committing suicide and for desiring to live are different for the two types.
   i. An enlightened renouncer commits suicide if he is indifferent toward promoting the welfare of the world. A seeker after knowledge does so if he is suffering from a serious bodily ailment and the like.
   ii. The former may continue living to impart his knowledge to the world, whereas the latter may do so to gain that knowledge.
3. Further, there is the suggestion, although we do not wish to labour this point, that suicide is the rule and the desire to continue living the exception.
4. Immediately after the pāriṇāma formula, whose recitation is considered the formal entry into renunciation, one either commits suicide or takes possession of the requisites necessary for a renouncer’s life.
5. When suicide is not committed, the renouncer takes five or seven symbolic steps toward the east or the north. He is then requested by his teacher or by some other respected person to return.

11 Ibid., 18. 1—5.
Of the twenty or so minor Upaniṣads devoted to the topic of renunciation the Kaṭhaśṛuti Upaniṣad, cited by Vāsudeva as an authority, is apparently the only one which enjoins suicide immediately after the rite of renunciation. Having described the rite up to the abandonment of the sacred fires and the discarding of the sacrificial thread, it states:

\[ \text{āta āryaṅvam anāśaman apām praveṣam agnīpraveṣam virādyāṇam mahāprasthānām virādyārāṇam va gacchat.} \]

"Then henceforth, he should starve to death, drown himself, enter fire, undertake the path of the heroes (i.e. die in battle) or the Great Journey, or else go to a hermitage."\(^{17}\)

This account differs from the more elaborate description of Vāsudeva at several points. According to this text, suicide is committed immediately after the abandonment of the sacred fires. No mention is made of the five or seven symbolic steps, of the distinction between the enlightened and the seeker after knowledge, or of the teacher’s plea for the new renouncer to return. Going to a hermitage, i.e. continuing to live, is given merely as one of the options.

There are two serious problems raised by the connection between suicide and the rite of renunciation established in the above texts. In general it may be asked how a rite of initiation could end in death by suicide. The life of a renouncer is a witness to values that transcend and contradict those of society. Renunciation facilitates the procurement of the liberating knowledge. Death bears no witness, procures no results. In these texts suicide is not even presented as a symbolic gesture of protest. It is enjoined at the conclusion of the renunciatory rite without rhyme or reason, without even a word of explanation. From the standpoint of the āśrama theory suicide is even more difficult to understand.

Manu (4. 1 & 6. 33) declares that the four quarters of a man’s life, each of which is assumed to be twenty-five years long, should be lived in the four stages of life (āśrama). Accordingly, one should follow the code of

\(^{16}\) These have been edited by F. O. Schrader, The Minor Upaniṣads, Vol. I — Saṁnyāsa-Upaniṣads (Madras: The Adyar Library, 1912), and by T. R. Chintamani Dhishti, The Saṁnyāsa Upaniṣads with the Commentary of Śrī Upaniṣad-Brahmayogin (Madras: The Adyar Library and Research Centre, 1929). Unfortunately I was not able to make use of the recent work of Prof. Sprockhoff on the Saṁnyāsa Upaniṣads, since this paper was written prior to its publication: J. F. Sprockhoff, Saṁnyāsa. Quellenstudien zur Askese im Hinduismus, I. Untersuchungen über die Saṁnyāsa-Upaniṣads, Wiesbaden 1978.

\(^{17}\) Kaṭhaśṛuti Upaniṣad, 2. 3. These are the five classical methods of religious suicide, to which others, such as hanging, stabbing, falling from a precipice or a tree, and taking poison, are added in later literature. Cf. Upendra Thakur, op. cit., pp. 111–125.
conduct (dharma) proper to renunciation during the last years of one’s life. It is difficult to see how this can tally with the idea of suicide at the outset of renunciation.

The second problem relates to virādhvan, literally ‘path of heroes’. In the Kathāsruti Upaniṣad, cited above, it is mentioned as one of the five methods of suicide. Commentators explain it either as mahāyuddha (great battle) or as dharmayuddha (righteous battle, or battle for the sake of righteousness). It is quite incongruent and, at first sight, implausible that a renouncer, who has taken the vow not to injure any living being, should carry arms in battle. Our doubt as to whether this is, in fact, a method of suicide for the renouncer is strengthened by the fact that the other four methods of suicide are well known in later literature on the subject, together with other methods, such as falling from a precipice or from a branch of a tree. Dying in battle, on the other hand, is enumerated as a method of suicide only in conjunction with the other four methods. These lists have an archaic character. Commentators never explain this particular method, other than to say that it means to die in a righteous battle. To be killed in battle is praised in the epic literature as the best way for a warrior (kṣatriya) to end his earthly life18. Even there, however, it is not taken as a type of suicide.

The answers to these questions depend on the solution of a more basic problem: was ritual suicide an integral part of the rite of renunciation from the outset or was it at first an external element which found its way into the rite proper through a process of gradual assimilation? The answer is found in a text (= T) preserved in two recensions, the one (= J) in the Jābāla Upaniṣad and the other (= P) in the Paramahamsaparivṛṣajaka Upaniṣad. Its archaic nature and the fact that it is found in the Jābāla Upaniṣad, which is one of the oldest Upaniṣads on renunciation19, makes it the earliest evidence we possess of the connection between renunciation and suicide. We give below the two recensions synoptically arranged.

Note: The center column contains the common readings, while the columns on the left and right give the readings peculiar to P and J, respectively. The roman numerals indicate the thematic divisions of T based on my analysis. They are not so indicated in either of the two recensions.

18 Cf. Bhagavadgītā, 2. 31—37.
I

brahmacaryam samaya
gri bhave

grahād

vani bhūtvā pravrajey yadi
vetarathā brahmacaryād eva
pravrajey grahād vā vanād
vā | aha punar avrati vā
vrai vā snātako vāṃśātako
natsamāgnir anagnikā vā
yad ahāra eva virajey tadbhav

II

iti buddhā sarva-
samsāreṣu viraktā
brahmacāri grihi
vānoprastha vā pita-
ram mātaraṃ
kalarām putram
āptabandhubhavṛgām

tadabhāve śreyam
saharvāśinām vā-
numodāyītvā
tad dhaike prajāpatyām eva-
śīrṣaṃ kuraṃtvā tadbhavatā

prāhaḥ | prāham evaitayā
karoti | taidhātavyāṃ eva
kuryāt | etā eva20 trayo
dhāro veda uta sattevam
rajas tāma iti |
ayan te yonir tvayo
yato jāto arōcalhah |
tam jānam agra arohah-
thā no vardhaya rōjim|h

20 All the manuscripts of P and several of J read etayaṃ. For reasons given by SCHRADE (op. cit., p. 351) we believe that this is a scribal error rather than a variant reading of P.
P

ityanena mantrevāgnim ājīghret | eṣa vā agner yonir

svāṁ yonim ga-

ccha

svāhety evam evaṁ̄tad āha /

III

grāmād

āṅgim āhytya

svavidhyukta-

kramena

pūrvavad āṅgim ājīghret /
yady

dīuro vā

āṅgim na vinded āpsa ju-
huṣṭ | āpo vai sarva deva-
tāḥ | sarvābhya devatābhya
juhomi svāhety kutvaddhyya

prāṇiṣyāt sājyaṁ havir anā-
mayan /

[A]
mokṣamandras trasy evam

vindet | tad brahma tad

upāsilavyam | evam evaṁ-
tad bhagavan | iti vai yājñā-

valkyāḥ ||5||

[B]

atha hainam atriḥ papracocha

yājñavalkeyaṃ | prakhāmi
tvā yājñovalkyāyajñopaviti
kathaṃ brahmaṇa iti | sa

hovāca yājñavalkeyaḥ | idam
evavya tad yājñopavitaṁ ya
dātā /

prāśyācamya

eṣa (J ayaṁ) vidhir(h)

pravrājinaṁ

virādhvāne vānāśaka vāpāṁ
Having completed the studentship, one should become a householder.

From the house (i.e. from the stage of a householder), having become a forest hermit, one should go forth (i.e. become a renouncer). Or else one may go forth right from studentship, or from the house or the forest. Otherwise, whether one is under a vow or not, whether one is a snātaka or not, whether one has

snātaka (lit. one who has taken a bath) is a person who has taken the ritual bath at the completion of his studentship (brahmacarya) but is not yet married.
ceased to keep the sacred
fires or has always been
without a sacred fire—on
whatever day one becomes
detached, that very day
one should go forth.\textsuperscript{22}

II

Having considered that (teach-
ing), a student,
householder or
forest hermit who
is detached from
every existence
subject to tran-
migration, after
taking leave of
his father, mother,
wife, son and all
his qualified re-
lations, or, in
their absence, of
a pupil living
with him...

Now, some, indeed, per-
form just the oblation to
\textit{Yajñavalkya}. One should \textbf{not}
do it thus. It is the oblation

\textsuperscript{22} Three optional courses are given here for a person who intends to
renounce. 1. He may go through the first three stages of life (dharma) and
then renounce. 2. He may renounce directly from \textit{any} of them. 3. Even a
person who does not belong to any dharma, e. g. a \textit{śūta} and a widower,
may renounce the very day he becomes detached.

\textsuperscript{23} In translating this phrase I have adhered closely to the original
Sanskrit where it ends in a gerund and is, thus, grammatically incomplete.
This is explainable only if it is a gloss pointing out what should be done
before beginning the rite described in section II. The commentators as well as
Schrader take it as a separate sentence belonging to the text proper and
connected with the theme of section I. Consequently, they add the word
\textit{pravrajaj} (‘he should go forth’) to ‘complete’ the sentence, even though it is
not found in any of the manuscripts.
to Agni (fire) that one should perform. For, fire is breath. It is breath that one cultivates by this (oblation). One should, indeed, perform the oblation to the three elements. These, indeed, are the three elements: goodness, energy, and darkness. One should consume the fire while reciting the following ritual formula:

This is thy due place of birth,
Whence born thou didst shine;
Mount it, O Agni, knowing it,
And make our wealth increase.
It is breath, indeed, that is the birthplace of fire. "Go to breath

“Go to thy birthplace

svāhā!”

He said: "Yes, indeed, it is so."

24 In Sāmkhya philosophy, these are the three strands (guna) of primal nature (prakṛti) the disturbance of whose equilibrium causes the evolution of the manifest cosmos.

25 This is performed symbolically by inhaling the smoke and warmth of the sacrificial fires. By this rite the renouncer mystically internalizes the fires, homologizing them with his breath. He thus abandons the external fires. This process is called technically agnīsamāropā (the depositing of the fire in the self).

26 Even though there is no iti before ēha, we think that the phrase evam evam ēha is the assenting response of the person who asked the initial question. In J that person is Janaka and in P Pitāmaha. In the Upaniṣads
Bringing some fire from the village,

(i.e.) from the house of a learned Brāhmaṇa, in the manner prescribed in the law of one's own (Vedic branch),

one should consume the fire in the manner described above. If being sick,

one is unable to obtain any fire, one should offer (the oblation) in water. Water, indeed, (signifies) all the gods. One should offer it, saying: "I offer to all the gods, svāhā!" Then, taking it out (of the vessel) one should eat that salubrious oblation mixed with ghee.

[A]
The ritual formula of liberation is the threefold (syllable OM). One should consider it thus: it is Brahmā, it should be meditated on. "Yes, indeed, it is so", (said Janaka)²⁷. So said Yājñavalkya. [4]

[B]
Then Atri asked Yājñavalkya: "I ask you, Yājñavalkya..."

²⁷ In J it is Janaka who asked the initial question which led to the present discourse of Yājñavalkya.
valkya, how can a man who does not wear the sacrificial thread be (regarded as) a Brâhmana?" Yâjñavalkya replied: "Of such a man the sacrificial thread is his very self."

Having eaten and sipped water,

This is the procedure for renouncers on the occasion of the path of heroes, a fast unto death, entering water or fire, or the Great Journey.

[C]

Now, a renouncer dressed in discoloured clothes, shaven headed, without possessions, pure, free from malice, and living on begged food, is fit for becoming Brâhman.

IV

If one is at the point of death, one may renounce mentally or orally.

This is the path.

[J. This path.]

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28 This difficulty arises because a renouncer discards his sacrificial thread by the investiture of which one becomes a twice-born. A Brâhmana is 'the highest of the twice-born' (devjottama). How can a renouncer continue to be a Brâhmana if he does not wear the sacrificial thread and has, thus, ceased to be a twice-born? This difficulty is dealt with at length in the Paramahamsaparivrâjaka-upanishad, 5, Nâradaparivrâjaka-upanishad, 3. 79—88.

29 A Sanskrit sentence does not need the copula to be complete. Hence, this phrase has to be translated differently (i.e. with or without the copula) depending on whether it is an independent sentence as in P, or the first words of a longer sentence as in J.
P T J
indeed, was discovered by Brahman. Along that
(path) goes the renouncer who knows Brahman. "Yes,
indeed, it is so", (said Atri). So said Yajñavalkya.

The text T occurs also in the Yajñavalkya Upanisad (1—5) and the
Nāradaparivrājaka Upanisad (3.77—79). These, however, follow
recession J except in a few readings. Hence, we have not considered
them separately. There are important additions and omissions in both
these versions which throw light on the stages of development of the
connection between renunciation and suicide. We shall discuss them when
we examine these stages.

The analysis of the two recensions leads us to the conclusion that
P has preserved better the original readings of T. What is, however,
even more important for the present study is that P reflects better the
original context and the sequence of themes.

The reading "From the house" (gṛhād) is certainly more original than
the parallel reading in J. The verb pravrajey (one should go forth) is
normally preceded by a word in the ablative, as witnessed by the words
brahmacaryaṇād etc. of the very next sentence. Moreover, this reading
is supported by the Yajñavalkya and Nāradaparivrājaka Upanisads
as well as by some manuscripts of J. The phrase "Having considered . . .
living with him" (iti buddhā . . . vānumodasītā) seems to be a gloss that
found its way into the text. The other variants of P also appear to be
such explanatory glosses: "Go to thy birthplace" (svām yonim gaccha)
on "Go to breath" (prāṇam gaccha); "from the house of a learned Brāhmaṇa"
(bṛtriṣṭāṇād) on "from the village" (grāmād); in the manner
prescribed in the law of one’s own (Vedic branch) (svayāvidhyakramanam)
on "Bringing some fire" (agnim āḥṛtya). Similarly, the words "being sick"
dūtro vā) explain why a person may not be able to find fire.

Apart from the above variants, which do not affect significantly
either the meaning or the sequence of themes, both recensions are identi-

29 The ablative noun indicates the state, condition, or place from which
one "goes forth". This usage of the word pravrajey is exemplified in the stock
Buddhist phrase: agnirnāma anupādityam gacchati — "he goes forth from
home into the homeless state". Cf. Mahāvagga, 1.9.1; 1.10.1; 1.38.2;
Dīgha Nikāya, ii. 35.

30 Cf. footnote 29.
cal up to '... salubrious oblation mixed with ghee' (sājyam havir anāmayam). At this point J breaks the sequence of themes. It concludes a paragraph with the addition [A], which deals with a topic quite unrelated to the procedure of renunciation. J begins a new paragraph with a question put to Yājñavalkya by Atri. This, again, does not quite follow the sequence of themes. Consequently, J is forced to introduce the words 'Having eaten and sipped water' (prāyācanyya) so as to return to the original sequence, viz. the eating of the sacrificial food mentioned just prior to [A]. The inclusion or the omission of the word pravṛājānām (for renouncers) does not alter substantially the meaning of the text as a whole. The passage [C] in J is a further digression from the sequence of themes. It is not clear whether [D] is original or a later addition in imitation of the Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad, 4. 4. 9. **

Following, therefore, what we believe to be its original sequence of themes, T describes the rite of renunciation in this order:**

I. Introduction: qualifications of a person entitled to renounce (adhitāritī). One should either pass through the āśramas (stages of life) or be totally detached.

II. First part of the ritual: the sacrifice to Agni and the abandonment of the sacred fires. The concluding words of this section, viz. “He said: ‘Yes, indeed, it is so.’” (evam evaitad āha), indicate that the author is ending one topic and passing on to another. [cf. footnote 26]

III. Digression: renunciation in face of death. The text here introduces a modification of the rite for persons who renounce just prior to death in a battle or suicide. The modified rite ends with the abandonment of the sacred fires. The phrase ‘one should consume the fire in the manner described above’ (pūrvaad aṁśīm ājīhṛt), which refers back to the procedure outlined in section II, indicates that this section is a digression from the original sequence of themes. The use of pūrvaad (in the manner described above), moreover, can be understood only if the author of T was referring to a situation different from that envisaged in II.

P concludes the description of the rite performed outside the context of immediate death with the words: eṣa samnyāsah (This is renunciation). This parallels the eṣa pautthā (This is the path) with which it ends the description of the rite performed when death is imminent. The author of P seems to contrast these two rites, calling the former ‘renunciation’ proper and the latter ‘the path’.

The paragraphs of this description follow the sections of T indicated by the Roman numerals. Paragraph V, however, is purely hypothetical, based on the sequence of themes in P.
IV. Continuation of the digression: when death is imminent and there is neither the time nor the strength to perform rites, i.e. when one is an ātura\(^{34}\), one may renounce mentally or orally.

At this point in the sequence of themes one would have expected T to pick up the original theme and describe the remaining portions of the rite when performed outside the context of death. Nevertheless, J turns to a completely different question, viz. the nature of a paramahamsa renouncer. P, however, continues with the description of the rite as performed by a healthy person who intends to continue living\(^{35}\). We cannot be sure that this description of P agrees verbatim with our hypothetical original T. Nevertheless, it fits perfectly into the sequence of themes in T as outlined above. We can, therefore, safely assume that this description gives the context in which the earlier sections are to be located and understood. We take it to be the hypothetical section V of T and give below a summary of its content.

V. Return to theme prior to the digression: after abandoning the sacred fires, healthy persons (svaśātha) who intend to live as renouncers should perform the remaining portions of the rite up to and including the recitation of the prāja formula and the gift of safety to all creatures (abhaya-dāna). After that the procedure differs for the two categories of renouncers:

i. If the new renouncer has already acquired the liberating knowledge of Brahman (vidvanmanugāsin), he walks naked toward the north.

ii. A person who renounces in order to acquire that knowledge (vividhīṣa) is requested by a householder not to depart. He then takes the requisites of a renouncer's life, such as a staff, a loincloth, and a begging bowl, and goes to a guru.

This section of P contains the passage [C] of recension J and the discussion of a paramahamsa's characteristics which constitutes the concluding paragraph of the Jābhāla Upaniṣad.

In explaining the crucial section III, classical commentators as well as modern translators have failed to take into account the syntactical connection between eṣa vidhiḥ (This is the procedure) and the words virādhrāne ... (on the occasion of the path of heroes ...) in the locative

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\(^{34}\) "An ātura is a person who expects to die that very moment due to the threat posed by a thief, a tiger, and the like, or that very day due to an illness and the like." Yatidharmapralāśa, ed. cit., 20. 12.

\(^{35}\) Cf. Paramahamsaparivṛjaka-upaniṣad, 3.
Ritual Suicide and the Rite of Renunciation

case. Both Upaniṣadbrahmayogin and Śaṁkarāṇanda, commenting on Jābāla Upaniṣad, 5, take esa vidhiḥ pravṛddhijīnāṃ (This is the procedure for renouncers) as a separate sentence referring back to the procedure of renunciation outlined earlier. They are, however, confronted with the difficulty that only the first part of the rite is described earlier in the text. They try to circumvent this problem by saying that the phrase prāṣṭhitāmaya (having eaten and sipped water) is a synecdoche, and, hence, indicates the entire rite. Without explaining why the next sentence has all the words in the locative case and is, thus, grammatically incomplete, they state that it gives the five methods of suicide for persons not entitled to renounce but totally detached from worldly affairs. Nārāyaṇa agrees with Upaniṣadbrahmayogin and Śaṁkarāṇanda in the explanation of the first part. However, he sees the necessary connection between that and the phrase virūḍhaścānāṃ ... He explains that the reference to suicide is made here because the rites prescribed earlier for renunciation are the same as those performed prior to committing suicide. According to him, therefore, esa vidhiḥ (This is the procedure) has a dual function. First, it points to the preceding description as showing how the rite of renunciation is to be performed. Second, by extended application (atideśa) it indicates the rites to be performed on the occasion of suicide. Although we do not accept his interpretation, it is significant that Nārāyaṇa admits the necessary syntactical connection between these two phrases.

Radhakrishnan follows the commentators in translating this passage. He is thus forced to include long parenthetical remarks to make sense out of it.

"This is the procedure for becoming a recluse. (For one who is weary of the world but not yet fit to become a recluse the following are prescribed), he may choose a hero’s death (by following the path of the warrior in the battlefield), he may fast unto death, throw himself into

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27 Cf. Upaniṣadādān Samuccayah (Ānandārama Sanskrit Series, No. 29; Poona: 1925), pp. 288–89.
28 According to these authors, those not entitled to renounce include non-Brāhmaṇas, sinners, and people not capable of studying.
30 In the context of the ritual, an atideśa is a rule by which the characteristics of one rite are transferred to other similar rites by way of analogy. Cf. Śabara’s commentary on the Pūrvamāṇāṃśāutra, 7. 1. 12; P. V. Kane, op. cit., V, p. 1322.
water or enter fire (burn himself to death) or perform the last journey (walk on unto death)."

As we said earlier, these interpreters have failed to recognize the obvious syntactical unity between *esa viññih* (This is the procedure) and the phrase *vīrādhuṇe* . . . (on the occasion of the path of heroes . . .). This oversight is facilitated by the inclusion of the additions [A] and [B] in recension J, since they interpret this text only as it is found in J. Further, they fail even to notice that section III repeats a part of the procedure already outlined in section II, let alone to offer an explanation of it. This repetition, as we have seen, is due to the fact that in this section T deals with a new topic, viz. the modified rite of renunciation used before going to battle or committing suicide. Consequently, the phrase *esa viññih* (This is the procedure), coming at the end of section III, can refer only to the procedure outlined in that section and not to that in section II. Further, this phrase is syntactically connected with *vīrādhuṇe* . . . Thus, the meaning of the whole sentence is this: the procedure outlined in III is to be followed when one renounces before going to battle or committing suicide.

We are now in a position to resolve the basic problem mentioned earlier: was ritual suicide an integral part of the rite of renunciation from the outset or was it at first an external element which found its way into the rite proper? The text T, which we have just examined, is the earliest evidence we possess of this practice. It records the custom of performing a modified rite of renunciation in the face of death. It is, therefore, in this context that the rite of renunciation became first connected with suicide; suicide, it should be noted, is only one of the several occasions when death is imminent.

Persons facing death fell into three categories: i. Those going to battle; ii. Those about to commit suicide; iii. Those in immediate danger of death (*ātura* — cf. footnote 34). According to T, persons in the first two categories performed the rite of renunciation up to and including

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42 Upaniṣadbrahmavijaya, for example, does not comment on this passage as found in the Pāramahamsaparīvaṇa- upaniṣad, saying that he has already explained it in the Jābali- upaniṣad. As we have seen, the latter is one of the oldest and certainly the most prestigious of the Upaniṣads on renunciation. It is the only one cited by Śaṅkara in his commentary on the Vedāntasūtras (cf. I. 2. 32; II. 1. 3; III. 3. 37 & 40—41; III. 4. 17—18 & 20; IV. 1. 3). See also Sureśvara, Bhṛddāranyaka-upaniṣad-bhāṣya-vārttiṣka, 225. The prestige of the Jābali has made these interpreters approach T from the standpoint of J. This, I believe, is one of the major reasons for the misinterpretation of T.
the abandonment of the sacred fires, while those in the third renounced by making a mental or a verbal resolution.

At this earliest stage, therefore, one renounced because one was about to die. The intention to commit suicide was only one of the several reasons for the imminence of death. Specifically in the context of suicide, therefore, the reason for renunciation was the intention to commit suicide.

With the passage of time several changes took place, as witnessed by the texts of the Yātidharmaprakāśa and the Kaṭhaśruti Upaniṣad cited above. A) The first category of persons was dealt with separately. Their’s was thought of as a special type of renunciation, called āhara-sannyāsa. B) The first category of persons coalesced with the second so that ‘going to battle’ came to be considered as a method of suicide. C) The greatest reversal, however, occurred when the resolve to commit suicide was no longer considered the reason for renunciation. Renunciation itself was considered the reason for suicide.

The texts we have examined reveal definite stages in the process whereby suicide became assimilated into the rite of renunciation: 1. The earliest stage is reflected in T as preserved in recension P. Renunciation was resorted to by persons whose death was imminent. Of these, those going to battle or about to commit suicide performed the rite of renunciation up to and including the abandonment of fire.

2. The text of the Kaṭhaśruti Upaniṣad cited above indicates a transitional stage. Unlike T, this passage enjoins suicide after the rite of renunciation. In Sanskrit this required only a minor linguistic change. Nouns originally in the locative are put in the accusative. Further, virādhan (path of heroes), which precedes the four methods of suicide in T, is placed here before mahāprasthāna (Great Journey). This transfer of position indicates that by the time of this text ‘path of heroes’, i.e. to die in battle, was considered one of the methods of suicide. Here, as in T, suicide is committed immediately after the abandonment of fire. However, the choice to continue living is given as the sixth option without any indication that one who opted for it had to perform the remaining portion of the rite. The author is probably unaware of this.

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43 The rite of renunciation for a person facing death is normally dealt with after describing the regular rite. Cf. Yātidharmaprakāśa, ed. cit., 20. Several complete works are also devoted to this topic. Cf. India Office MSS. Catalogue, No. 5665.

44 In the Devanāgarī script, moreover, the locative ending ‘e’ and the accusative ending ‘om’ can be easily confused if written carelessly.
anomaly, since by this time the distinction between the regular form of the rite and the curtailed version used prior to suicide had sunk into oblivion.

3. It is at this stage, reflected in the passages from the Yatidharmapramakaśa cited above, that suicide is finally assimilated into the rite to form an integral part of it. According to the account in the Yatidharmapramakaśa, the entire ritual, up to and including the recitation of the praisa formula, is performed irrespective of whether the renouncer intends to continue living or to commit suicide. 'Path of the heroes' is explicitly regarded as one of the five classical methods of suicide. Suicide, moreover, is no longer the occasion or the reason for renunciation; renunciation itself becomes the motive for suicide. If suicide is not contemplated, the new renouncer is called back after he has taken five or seven steps.

This stage of development is reflected in the emendations of T carried out in the Yajñavalkya Upaniśad (3—5). At the conclusion of the addition [A] in section III, it states: śikhām yeṣāṃ pavilam bhitteśa saṁnyastam mayetī trivāram ucceket ... “Having cut off his top-knot and the sacrificial thread, he should declare three times: ‘I have renounced!’” It is evident that the author of this Upaniśad is here attempting to ‘complete’ the account of T by inserting the recitation of the praisa, since by that time the modified rite ending in the abandonment of fire was no longer in vogue. The phrase eṣa vidhiḥ (This is the procedure), moreover, forms the conclusion of one paragraph and is thus entirely separated from the rest. Further, the conclusion of section III is completely rearranged by putting the addition [C] before the phrase virādheṣa...

“Then the renouncer, dressed in discoloured clothes, shaven headed, without possessions, pure, free from malice, and living on begged food, is fit for becoming Brahma. This is the path of renouncers. (One should resort to) the path of heroes, a fast unto death, entering water or fire, or the Great Journey. This path, indeed, was discovered by Brahma. Along that (path) goes the renouncer who knows Brahma.”

By thus rearranging the contents of T, as found in recension J, the author seeks to point out the ‘path’ of a renouncer who is a seeker after knowledge as well as that of a renouncer who is enlightened. The latter is the path of suicide.

4. The last stage constitutes a complete reversal of the process. Suicide at the conclusion of the rite of renunciation had become obsolete, a practice referred to in the older texts but no longer in vogue. Thus we find that most later works describing the actual performance of the
rite are silent on this point. The version of T found in the Nāradaparivṛtajāka Upaniṣad (3. 77—79) reflects this stage. In it this text ends with the question posed at the beginning of addition [B]. The conclusion of section III containing the instruction on suicide is omitted.

Texts reflecting this last stage instruct the renouncer, whether he is enlightened or a seeker after knowledge, to remove his clothes and take five or seven symbolic steps. A seeker, however, is requested to return and take possession of a renouncer's requisites. On this point, these texts agree with the account of the Yatidharmaprabhā. We have seen in T, as preserved in recension P, that when renunciation is resorted to outside the context of suicide or immediate death an enlightened person walks toward the north, i.e. undertakes a life of ceaseless wandering, while a seeker after knowledge is called back. Therefore, the steps taken by the new renouncer may be symbolic of ceaseless wandering. On the other hand, the Great Journey also entails walking toward the north or the northeast till one falls dead through fatigue and starvation. It is possible, therefore, that these steps are a symbol of this archetype of religious suicide. Taking a few steps would then be a symbolic enactment of suicide, the relic of an ancient custom.

Our study of the available texts on the connection between suicide and renunciation answers the question with which we started, namely how suicide could form an integral part of an initiation rite. It also provides an answer to our second question, namely, how dying in battle could be appropriate for a renouncer. As we have seen, 'the path of heroes' was at first not a method of suicide at all. It was, however, a situation in which the subject was in danger of imminent death. Under this aspect it was similar to suicide. The same confusion which made suicide a part of the renunciatory rite also led to the interpretation of 'the path of heroes' as a method of suicide.

We have observed the anomaly of suicide at the conclusion of an initiation rite. In resolving it, we noted that at first the practice was to perform the rite of renunciation prior to suicide rather than to commit suicide at the end of the rite. This, in its turn, gives rise to a further anomaly. Why should this rite of initiation be performed prior to imminent death? In other words, what were the reasons for recommending that persons in danger of imminent death perform the rite of renunciation?

Neither the treatises on renunciation nor the copious legal texts give a direct answer to this question. Nevertheless, we can gather some of the probable reasons for this practice by examining the beliefs regarding the efficacy of renunciation.

A text of the Garuḍa Purāṇa, cited as an authority in the Yatidharmaprabhāṣa, gives some of the benefits of renunciation when it is coupled with suicide.

"Whoever dies after undertaking a fast unto death will discard his human form and become resplendent (as) my equal. The days that a man shall live after making the vow to fast unto death are equal to seasonal sacrifices provided with the most excellent sacrificial fees. Should a man die after renouncing, whether it is done at home or at a sacred bathing place, he too receives twice the aforementioned recompense for each day (that he lives). Should a person who has contracted a major disease die fasting after taking (to renunciation), sickness will not touch him again; he will shine forth in heaven like a god. Should a man renounce when he is mortally afflicted, sickness and great sin will, (in their turn), renounce him in his next birth." There was also the belief that the rite of renunciation wipes away all sins, even those accumulated over many births.

"What needs to be purified is washed with earth and water. A river is purified by its current, a woman defiled in thought by her menstruation, and a Brāhmaṇa by renunciation." "Renunciation burns up all sins, whether they are incurred through birth or committed by one's own action, as a chaff-fire (burns up the impurities of) gold."

A verse quoted frequently in treatises on renunciation indicates that renunciation quod talis causes a man to be reborn in the highest of the heavenly worlds, viz. the world of Brahmā.

"Through renunciation one attains the abode of Brahmā, through detachment the absorption into primal nature (prakṛti), and through knowledge isolation (kaivalya, i.e. liberation)."

These texts reveal a general belief in the efficacy of renunciation to procure a rebirth in a heavenly world — even in that of Brahmā —.

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47 Garuḍa Purāṇa, 2. 26. 5—8.
48 Manusmṛti, 5. 108.
49 Samyāsa-upanisad, 2. 11.
50 Cf. Yatidharmaprabhāṣa, ed. cit., 2. 45—46.
and to wipe out all sins and impurities. The practice of renouncing in
the face of death may owe its origin at least in part to this belief.

A more important clue is given by Nyāsinhāśrama in his Vedānta-
tatttvaviveka. He first makes the general assertion that renunciation
is the means for attaining the liberating knowledge, since it removes
the obstacles on the path of that attainment. Consequently, he requires
that a person desiring liberation becomes a renouncer. He is, however,
faced with the difficulty that in the Upaniṣads and other sacred texts
many non-renouncers, such as King Janaka, are said to have attained
liberation. He overcomes this by asserting that renunciation performed
even in a previous birth removes the obstacles in the path of knowledge.
Thus a person who is not a renouncer may attain knowledge and liberation
by virtue of his renunciation in a previous birth. To buttress his argument
he appeals to the injunction of the Jābāla Upaniṣad (5) that a person in
immediate danger of death may renounce mentally or orally. Since
renunciation in general has knowledge as its goal, renunciation in the
face of death also should have the same purpose. In the latter case, how-
ever, this goal is unattainable immediately because of the imminence
of death. Therefore, according to Nyāsinha, renunciation performed at
the approach of death is intended to facilitate the acquisition of the
liberating knowledge in the next birth.

It is difficult to say whether this is an explanation thought out by
later theorists or one of the original reasons that gave rise to the practice
of renouncing in the face of death. However, it relates this practice more
closely to the original aim of renunciation, namely the attainment of
liberation.

The practice of resorting to renunciation prior to death in a battle
or suicide explains an obscure passage in the Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra
containing one of the earliest accounts of this rite.

After describing the procedure up to the evening fire sacrifice and
the vigil kept during the night, Baudhāyana states:

ya evam vidvān brahmaṇaṇīn ्yogas ्yogas ्yogas ्yogas ्yogas ्yogas ्yogas ्yogas ्yogas ्yogas ्yogas ्yogas

“A Brahmaṇa who, knowing this, dies after fasting during the night
of Brahman and depositing within himself the sacred fires, conquers
all sin, even (that of) killing a Brahmaṇa.”

51 Ed. S. Narayana Swamy Sastry (University of Mysore Oriental
Research Institute Publications, Sanskrit Series No. 96; Mysore: 1955),
pp. 54—59.
52 Baudhāyanadharmasūtra, 2. 10. 17. 21.
According to Govinda’s commentary, Baudhāyana simply intends to point out here that even a person who dies after performing this portion of the rite gains the full reward associated with renunciation, as if he had, in fact, completed the entire rite. It is, of course, conceivable that a person may happen to die during the rite of renunciation. However, it seems very unlikely that such a remote possibility was the reason for this statement.

We feel that what Baudhāyana had in mind here was the modified procedure of renunciation prior to imminent death either by suicide or due to some other reason. In text T we have seen that under such circumstances the rite ended with the depositing of the fires in the self. Baudhāyana also speaks of death not just at any stage of the rite but after “depositing within himself the sacred fires”. As in T, so in Baudhāyana this statement is made by way of a digression to note a situation in which the rite was concluded at that point.

A similar digression is made in another passage ascribed to Baudhāyana. After describing the procedure till the vigil of the night prior to renunciation, he states:

\[
\text{āvācalaiśa vīdhinā bhikṣuḥ syād āpadi dvijaḥ} \\
\text{“By this procedure alone should a twice-born become a mendicant during a time of distress.”} \\
\]

Further down, after describing the depositing of the fire in the self, he says:

\[
\text{elāṁ avasthaṁ samprāpya mṛto ‘py āwantuṁ āśnute} \\
\text{“After reaching this stage, even if he dies he attains immortality.”} \\
\]

Vāsudeva rightly points out that these two statements should be taken together as referring to a person who dies after completing this part of the rite. Here too this digression is understandable only in the light of the fact that the rite ended at that point when it was performed by a person about to die.

Renunciation and Suicide in Indian Law

There exists a great similarity, if not a total identity, between laws governing renunciation and suicide. For the most part they regulate the rites and ceremonies performed on behalf of a person who has died either as a renouncer or by suicide. We give below some examples of these laws:

1. Those who return to the world after renunciation are put on a par with those who vow to commit suicide and then repent. The same techni-

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54 Cf. Yatidharmaprakāśa, ed. cit. S. 42.
Ritual Suicide and the Rite of Renunciation

cal term, viz. *pratyavasita* (relapsed) is used with reference to both and
the same penance is prescribed for their purification.95 Nine types of
*pratyavasitas* are enumerated in the law book of Yama. In that list a
relapsed renouncer is placed in the midst of eight types of suicide. One
almost gets the impression that for Yama renunciation was not very
different from suicide.

"Those who turn back (after attempting suicide by entering)
water or fire, or by hanging, those who revert after renouncing or
undertaking a fast unto death, those who (attempt to) kill them-
sest by taking poison, falling from a precipice, undertaking
the Great Journey, or striking themselves with a weapon—these
nine (categories of persons) are called *pratyavasita*. They are ex-
cluded from all social contact. They become purified by performing
either the *cāndrāyana* fast or the *taptakṛṣṇa* penance."

2. Both a renouncer and a suicide are buried, not cremated.96

3. Tears should not be shed and the period of impurity (*ūcavaca*)
should not be observed by the kinsmen at the death of a renouncer or a
suicide.96

4. The customary libations (*udakakriyā*) are not to be offered in
both cases.97

5. The *ekodīśaśrāddhas* (food offerings intended solely for the
newly departed) are not performed for either a renouncer or a suicide.98

6. The rite by which the newly deceased is united with his fore-
fathers (*sarpindikārāṇa*) is not performed in either case.99

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95 Cf. P. V. Kane, op. cit., IV, pp. 113–14.
96 This consists of increasing and decreasing by a mouthful the quantity
of food eaten each day, according to the waxing and the waning of the moon.
One eats fifteen mouthfuls on the full moon day and decreases the food by
one mouthful a day till the new moon, on which day one fasts. The intake
of food is similarly increased in the second half of the month. Cf. Manusmṛti,
11 216.
97 This penance consists of consuming hot milk, hot ghee, and hot
water, and of inhaling hot air. Each of these is done for three days. Cf.
Manusmṛti, 11 214.
98 Yamasūtra, edited in Śrīṃśaṃ Sanskrit Series, No. 48; Poona: 1905), 22–23.
99 Cf. Gautamadharmasūtra, 14 11; Baudhāyanaśatrāṇisūtra, 3 11;
Baudhāyanaśatrāṇisūtra, 4 17 14; Yatiḍharmapratikāśa, ed. cit., 71, 1–41;
Uśrayaśaṭṭhāvān, op. cit., pp. 54–58.
100 Cf. *Yājñavalkyasūtra*, 3 6 & 21; Gautamadharmasūtra, 14 11–12.
101 Cf. Manusmṛti, 5 89. See also the references in the preceding footnote.
102 Cf. Mitāksāra on *Yājñavalkyasūtra*, 3 6.
103 Cf. Yatiḍharmapratikāśa, ed. cit., 71 15–18; P. V. Kane, op. cit., IV,
p 625.
7. A rite called nārāyaṇabali\textsuperscript{64} is performed for a suicide one year after his death. Thereby he is admitted once again into ritual relationship with his kinsmen. The same rite is performed twelve days after the death of a renouncer. The twelve days here corresponds to the twelve months in the case of a suicide. It is clear, however, that this rite was originally intended only in the case of a suicide, as pointed out by P. V. Kane: "The passage quoted by Mitākṣarā\textsuperscript{65} makes it clear that Nārāyaṇabali is meant only for those who commit suicide\textsuperscript{66}.

Medieval digests of law (nibandha) never explain this similarity between laws governing renouncers and suicides. However, these texts as well as treatises on renunciation offer various explanations of these laws in so far as they affect renouncers. For example, it is said that the reason for not observing the period of impurity, for not offering the ekadīqiṣṭasārūdhā, and for not performing the sapīṅḍakaraṇa is the fact that upon death a renouncer immediately passes to the state of the manes (pitṛ). He does not go through the intervening period during which an ordinary person lives as a ghost (pretā)\textsuperscript{67}. However, it is open to question whether these explanations of legal experts, so adept at clarifying every obscurity, were the real reasons for the origin of these laws.

The present study points to the intimate connection between renunciation and suicide that existed at a certain point in history as one of the possible reasons for the similarity of the laws governing them. Only further research into each of these laws, taking into account also their applicability to categories of persons other than renouncers and suicides, can determine what role, if any, this connection played in their origin.

\textsuperscript{64} HEKTA KRICK has recently published an important study on the nārāyaṇabali: "Nārāyaṇabali und Opfertod", Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens, XXI (1977), pp. 71—142. It may perhaps become the definitive work in this area and I regret that I was unable to make use of it; the present paper was written prior to its publication. She argues (p. 110) that in the Brāhmaṇical tradition Sannyāsa was conceived as a dīkṣā that concluded with the death (or suicide) of the dīkṣita. This may suggest different avenues for answering some of the questions raised in this paper. Yet, even though the ritual tradition increasingly came to view renunciation in these terms, it still leaves open the historical question as to how renunciation came to be so viewed. I agree with Dr. Krick that the answer may lie in the influence of the hermit (vānaprosthā) and warrior traditions in which ‘death sought after’ — Great Journey, fast unto death, death in battle — was seen as assuring bliss after death.

\textsuperscript{65} Cf. Mitākṣarā on Yājñavalkyaśāstra, 3. 6.

\textsuperscript{66} Cf. P. V. Kane, op. cit., IV, p. 303.

\textsuperscript{67} Cf. Yatidharmaprakāśa, ed. cit. 71. 15—16.