



Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia

For Mains: Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia and related issues

Why in News?

Recently, Jean-Luc Godard, one of the legends of French New Wave cinema, died by assisted suicide at the age of 91.

What is Assisted Suicide?

- **About:**
 - Assisted suicide and euthanasia **both are practices under which a person intentionally ends their life** with active assistance from others.
 - Several European nations, some states in Australia and Colombia in South America allow assisted suicide and euthanasia under certain circumstances.
- **Types:**
 - **Active:**
 - Active euthanasia, which is legal in only a few countries, entails the use of substances to end the life of the patient.
 - **Passive:**
 - It involves simply **stopping lifesaving treatment or medical intervention** with the consent of the patient or a family member or a close friend representing the patient.

What are the Arguments for and against Assisted Suicide?

- **Arguments for:**
 - **Freedom of Choice:**
 - Advocates argue that the **person should be able to make their own choice.**
 - **Quality of Life:**
 - Only the individual really knows how they feel, and how the physical and emotional pain of illness and prolonged death impacts their quality of life.
 - **Dignity:**
 - Every individual should be able to die with dignity.
 - **Resources:**
 - It **makes more sense to channel the resources of highly skilled staff, equipment, hospital beds, and medications toward lifesaving treatments** for those who wish to live, rather than those who do not.
 - **Humane:**
 - It is **more humane to allow a person with intractable suffering** to be allowed to choose to end that suffering.
 - **Loved ones:**
 - It can **help to shorten the grief** and suffering of loved ones.
- **Arguments Against:**

- **Moral and Religious Arguments:**
 - Several faiths see **euthanasia as a form of murder and morally unacceptable**. Suicide, too, is “illegal” in some religions. Morally, there is an argument that euthanasia will weaken society’s respect for the sanctity of life.
- **Patient Competence:**
 - **Euthanasia is only voluntary if the patient is mentally competent**, with a lucid understanding of available options and consequences, and the ability to express that understanding and their wish to terminate their own life. Determining or defining competence is not straightforward.
- **Guilt:**
 - Patients may feel they are a burden on resources and are psychologically pressured into consenting. They may feel that the financial, emotional, and mental burden on their family is too great.
- **Slippery slope:**
 - There is a risk that **physician-assisted suicide will start with those who are terminally ill** and wish to die because of intractable suffering, but then begin to include other individuals.
- **Regulation:** Euthanasia cannot be properly regulated.

Does India allow Assisted Suicide or Euthanasia?

- In a landmark judgment, the **Supreme Court of India legalised passive euthanasia** in 2018, stating that it was a **matter of ‘living will’**.
- According to the judgment, **an adult in his conscious mind is permitted to refuse medical treatment or voluntarily decide not to take medical treatment** to embrace death in a natural way, under certain conditions.
- The **court laid down a set of guidelines for ‘living will’** and defined passive euthanasia and euthanasia as well.
- It also laid **down guidelines for ‘living will’ made by terminally ill patients** who beforehand know about their chances of slipping into a permanent vegetative state.
- The court specifically stated that the **rights of a patient, in such cases, would not fall out of the purview of Article 21** (right to life and liberty) of the Indian Constitution.
- The SC’s judgment was in **accordance with its verdict in March 2011** on a separate plea.
 - While ruling on a petition on behalf of Aruna Shanbaug, the **court had allowed passive euthanasia for the nurse** who had spent decades in a **vegetative state**. Shanbaug had become central to debates on the legality of right to die and euthanasia in India.
 - A vegetative state is **when a person is awake but is showing no signs of awareness**.
- However, another bench of the Supreme Court, in 2014, **cited inconsistencies in earlier verdicts on passive euthanasia**, including the one given in the Shanbaug case, and referred the matter to a Constitution bench.

Source: IE