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On the Right to Die with Dignity

Context

- The debate surrounding the **right to die with dignity** lies at the intersection of constitutional law, medical ethics, and human rights.
- The case of Harish Rana brought this debate to the forefront of Indian constitutional discourse.
- After remaining in a **Persistent Vegetative State (PVS)** for more than a decade following a tragic accident, Rana's parents approached the Supreme Court seeking permission to withdraw life support.
- Their plea raised profound questions about the meaning of life, dignity, and autonomy under **Article 21** of the Indian Constitution.

The Tragedy of Harish Rana and the Constitutional Question

- In 2013, 20-year-old Harish Rana suffered critical injuries after falling from the fourth floor of his accommodation.
- The accident left him in a **Persistent Vegetative State**, with no ability to respond to stimuli. For **thirteen years**, he remained dependent on life support systems, primarily sustained through **Clinically Assisted**

Nutrition and Hydration (CANH).

- Despite continuous medical attention and devoted care from his parents, no signs of recovery appeared.
- Confronted with the emotional and physical burden of prolonged treatment without improvement, his parents petitioned the Supreme Court seeking permission to withdraw life support.
- The case presented a fundamental constitutional dilemma: whether continuing medical treatment that offers no possibility of recovery serves the purpose of protecting **life**, or whether it merely prolongs **biological existence** without dignity.
- Addressing this question required a deeper interpretation of the right to life guaranteed under **Article 21**.

Evolution of the Right to Die with Dignity in India

• Gian Kaur v. State of Punjab (1996)

- The jurisprudence surrounding end-of-life decisions in India has gradually developed through landmark judicial decisions.
- In *Gian Kaur v. State of Punjab* (1996), the Supreme Court affirmed that Article 21 guarantees the right to live with dignity, but rejected the idea that it includes a right to die.
- The judgment emphasised the sanctity of life and upheld the criminalisation of suicide.

• Aruna R. Shanbaug v. Union of India (2011)

- The debate resurfaced in the case of Aruna Shanbaug, who remained in a Persistent Vegetative State after a brutal assault.
- In *Aruna R. Shanbaug v. Union of India* (2011), the Supreme Court recognised the concept of passive euthanasia under exceptional circumstances.
- Although the request to withdraw life support in that case was denied, the Court established procedural guidelines to regulate decisions involving the withdrawal of treatment, drawing upon international legal frameworks.

• Common Cause v. Union of India (2018)

- The Constitution Bench recognised that the right to refuse medical treatment forms part of the right to life and dignity under Article 21.
- The Court linked this right to the principles of privacy, autonomy, and self-determination, affirming that individuals possess control over decisions affecting their own bodies.
- Detailed safeguards were established to regulate withdrawal of medical treatment, including the involvement of primary and secondary medical boards.

The Supreme Court's Reasoning in the Harish Rana Case

- The first issue concerned whether Clinically Assisted Nutrition and Hydration (CANH) qualified as medical treatment.
- The Court determined that CANH involves continuous **medical supervision**, specialised knowledge, and periodic evaluation.
- Because its administration requires professional expertise and emergency management, it was recognised as a form of medical intervention.
- The second issue concerned whether withdrawing this treatment would serve Rana's best interests.

- The Court emphasised that such decisions must consider the perspectives of family members, **medical professionals**, and the patient's condition.
- When recovery becomes impossible and treatment merely prolongs **biological life** without improvement, continuing intervention ceases to serve a meaningful purpose.
- Consequently, the Court concluded that withdrawing life support was consistent with Rana's **best interests**, recognising the limits of medical treatment in circumstances where recovery is unattainable.

Constitutional Morality and the Ethics of Death

- While the Constitution safeguards life as a fundamental right, it also recognises that dignity, autonomy, and personal choice are essential components of that right.
- Situations involving irreversible medical conditions challenge **traditional assumptions** about the purpose of life-sustaining treatment.
- By allowing passive euthanasia under **strict safeguards**, the judiciary has attempted to reconcile ethical considerations with constitutional values.
- The Common Cause guidelines ensure that decisions regarding withdrawal of treatment are carefully evaluated through medical boards, procedural safeguards, and consideration of the patient's best interests.

Conclusion

- The story of **Harish Rana** represents both a personal tragedy and a significant development in **constitutional jurisprudence**.
- His case strengthens the evolving recognition that **dignity, autonomy, and compassion** must guide decisions concerning life and death.
- Through cases such as **Gian Kaur, Aruna Shanbaug, and Common Cause**, the Supreme Court has gradually expanded the interpretation of **Article 21** to include the **right to refuse medical treatment** in situations where recovery is impossible.

On the Right to Die with Dignity FAQs

Q1. What constitutional issue was raised in the Harish Rana case?

Ans. The case raised the issue of whether the right to life under Article 21 includes the right to die with dignity through withdrawal of life-sustaining treatment.

Q2. What condition did Harish Rana suffer from after his accident?

Ans. Harish Rana remained in a Persistent Vegetative State (PVS) after suffering critical injuries from a fall in 2013.

Q3. Which Supreme Court case first recognised passive euthanasia in India?

Ans. The Supreme Court recognised passive euthanasia in the Aruna R. Shanbaug v. Union of India (2011) case.

Q4. What are the Common Cause guidelines?

Ans. The Common Cause guidelines provide legal procedures and safeguards for withdrawing or withholding medical treatment in the patient's best interests.

Q5. Why did the Supreme Court allow withdrawal of life support in Rana's case?

Ans. The Court allowed withdrawal because continued treatment offered no therapeutic benefit and withdrawing it was considered in the patient's best interests.

Source: **The Hindu**

Building India's Climate Resilience With Water At The Core

Context

- The **COP30** climate conference in **Belém, Brazil** (2025) marked a shift toward practical and measurable climate adaptation, emphasising accountability and systems that function under stress.
- A key focus was the **integration** of **water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH)** into global adaptation indicators, highlighting the central role of water in the climate-food-water nexus and its importance for countries like India.

Water at the Centre of Climate Change Impacts

- Climate change is most directly experienced through **water-related disruptions**, including floods, droughts, glacial melt in the Himalayas, saline intrusion in coastal aquifers, and erratic monsoons that threaten food security and rural livelihoods.
- Agriculture contributes around 40% of anthropogenic methane emissions, largely from rice cultivation, livestock, and organic waste.
- Improving water-use efficiency, wastewater reuse, aquifer recharge, and climate-resilient sanitation has therefore become central to climate mitigation and adaptation.

Belém Adaptation Indicators and Water Governance

- The 59 Belém Adaptation Indicators, introduced under the UAE Framework for Global Climate Resilience, establish measurable benchmarks for climate adaptation and emphasise the role of water systems in climate resilience.
- One key cluster of indicators aims to reduce water scarcity, improve resilience to floods and droughts, ensure universal access to safe drinking water, and upgrade sanitation systems to withstand extreme climate events.
- Another cluster highlights risk governance, including the creation of **universal multi-hazard early warning systems** by 2027, stronger hydrometeorological services, and updated national vulnerability assessments by 2030.
- The framework signals a shift from simply building infrastructure to ensuring that water and sanitation systems continue functioning effectively under intensifying climate stress.

India's Water Governance and Climate Adaptation

- India is strengthening climate adaptation by building on existing frameworks.

- The creation of the **Ministry of Jal Shakti** in 2019 and the Water Vision 2047 emphasise integrated water governance, sustainability, equity, and resilience.
- The **National Aquifer Mapping and Management (NAQUIM)** Programme 2.0 has shifted from merely mapping aquifers to implementing aquifer-level management plans, translating scientific knowledge into practical water governance policies.
- The **National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG)** has expanded beyond sewage treatment to include biodiversity restoration, digital monitoring, and international cooperation, positioning clean rivers as buffers against climate-related shocks.

Key Challenges Slowing Progress

- **Persistent Water Scarcity** – Water scarcity remains uneven across regions. Since most climate disasters in India are water-related, resilient WASH systems require climate stress testing of infrastructure, diversified water sources, and stronger service delivery systems.
- **Fragile Adaptation Finance** – Although global discussions propose mobilising \$1.3 trillion annually by 2035 for climate adaptation, funding pathways remain uncertain. Water projects need to be recognised and financed as core climate investments.
- **Digital Fragmentation in Water Data** – Despite extensive hydrological and meteorological datasets, AI-driven real-time integration of water data into planning and governance systems is still limited.

Aligning Global Targets with Domestic Missions

- **Existing Missions Supporting Adaptation** – India already has multiple programmes aligned with global adaptation goals, including drinking water access, sanitation expansion, irrigation efficiency, urban water reforms, and climate action plans.
- **Integrating Data for Real-Time Decision-Making** – The Belém framework emphasises convergence rather than new programmes. India’s digital public infrastructure offers an opportunity to integrate hydrological data, agricultural advisories, insurance, and financial systems for better climate decision-making.

Belém Indicators and the Future of Climate Adaptation

- **A Framework for Climate Survival** – The Belém Adaptation Indicators serve as a practical framework for measuring climate resilience, transforming adaptation from a broad policy goal into a structured and accountable development strategy.
- **India’s Opportunity for Leadership** – With ongoing water sector reforms, technological capabilities, and community-driven initiatives, India is well positioned to not only participate in global climate negotiations but also lead in implementing large-scale climate adaptation.
- **Water as the Foundation of Climate Action** – Effective climate action must place water at the centre of policy, ensuring that adaptation measures are rapid, equitable, and supported by strong technological systems.
- **Measuring Resilience Through Functioning Systems** – True resilience should be judged not by the amount of infrastructure built, but by how well essential systems continue to serve people during floods,

droughts, and other climate shocks.

- **Aligning Policy, Finance, and Metrics** – To translate ambition into measurable resilience, India must align its policies, financial resources, and monitoring frameworks, enabling it to set an example for the Global South in climate adaptation and sustainable development.

Building India's Climate Resilience With Water At The Core FAQs

Q1. What was the significance of COP30 in Belém for climate adaptation?

Ans. COP30 in Belém shifted the focus toward measurable climate adaptation, introducing indicators that integrate water, sanitation, and hygiene systems into global accountability frameworks for resilience planning.

Q2. Why is water central to climate change impacts?

Ans. Climate change manifests most directly through water disruptions such as floods, droughts, glacial melt, and erratic monsoons, affecting agriculture, food security, ecosystems, and livelihoods.

Q3. What are the Belém Adaptation Indicators?

Ans. The Belém Adaptation Indicators are 59 global metrics under the UAE Framework for Global Climate Resilience designed to measure progress in water security, sanitation systems, and climate risk governance.

Q4. How is India strengthening climate resilience through water governance?

Ans. India is improving climate resilience through integrated water governance under the Ministry of Jal Shakti, aquifer management programmes, river rejuvenation initiatives, and expanded drinking water and sanitation missions.

Q5. What challenges hinder India's climate adaptation efforts?

Ans. Major challenges include uneven water scarcity, uncertain climate adaptation finance, and fragmented hydrological data systems that limit real-time planning, coordination, and effective climate resilience strategies.

Source: **TH**

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