**Assisted Dying: A Personal View**

***Rajan Madhok with his partner Helen Job***

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Now it is personal. Suddenly what was an abstract concept has become real, as Helen has just been diagnosed with terminal cancer, and both of us are worried about what is coming next. Especially after what happened to two recent friends who had terrible experiences, both of whom were keen supporters of Assisted Dying (AD), but in absence of its availability went through painful, slow, undignified deaths, and which was equally distressful for the families.

It seems to us that the whole debate hinges on two principal issues.

One, there is no need for AD, instead we need better palliative care. But that is a false distinction; this is not a choice, we should have both. With close involvement in three deaths: both parents and husband, where she was the main carer, and with two friends recently amongst many others, she knows what she is talking about when it comes to death. Pain-free and dignified death is what she aspires to. She has personal experience of good palliative care and is hoping that she will be able to avail of St Kentigern, the local hospice, when the time comes, and equally clear that there may come a stage where nothing will work and she would like to go. The fact that latter option is not available to her is deeply upsetting.

Two, supporting AD is being anti-life, that life is sacred and must be preserved. And this then becomes a religion issue. To be transparent, I am a Hindu, and Helen does not believe in organised religion but has lived her life by the Quaker Values. In my poem about religion in India I wrote this:

*Trappings of all*

*Revile me*

*Teachings of all*

*Revive me*

We fundamentally do not see life: death distinction, just as we do not see assisted dying versus palliative care. We are pro-life and pro-death, to live is to die, and one should have the right to die as they have lived. Being responsible, being kind to others, and caring for fellow beings is how she has lived her life, and this compassion is what she wants in return. We respect every one’s choice and right to practice their own religion, and believe that no one should impose theirs on others. She believes that what is life with dignity and the decision whether it is worth going on are intensely personal matters.

To people’s surprise she has been rather Zen like since she was told about her terminal cancer, and feels very sad when her friends are shell-shocked as her situation has deteriorated rapidly – hopefully she will get her strength back at least for some time with treatment soon- and many of them broke down in tears. She is at pains to reassure them, and encourages them to enjoy life; not being able to go outside or have many visitors at the moment, she wants them to send her photos especially with children or grandchildren having fun. She has lived a full life, of course she would have liked more years, but as she said when she had Triple Negative Breast Cancer in 2021, it was a matter of time, and luck, and it has not worked in her favour. That is how it is.

To not acknowledge death as part of life is a dis-service to people, we will all die- it is one indisputable fact of life – and one must be prepared for it. Terms like fighting death and beating the cancer annoy her, she is not a defeatist, only a pragmatist, and says that we must accept death just as we accept life.

To resist the option of AD is not only to deny the individual concerned but to cause more suffering overall, since as a society we need to reconsider how we view death. This Bill is a once in a generation opportunity to redefine our relationship with death.

Even if the Bill passes, and we both hope it will, it will be too late for her, but for the sake of others to come we implore policymakers to consider carefully before they decide.

**NOTE**

Rajan Madhok is a retired public health doctor and supports My Death, My Decision.

Helen Job is a painter. The story of her original breast cancer is available here <https://northwalescancerappeal.co.uk/helens-cancer-diary.html>

They live in Denbighshire, North Wales.