



The Metaphysics of Self Negation: G.R. Malkani and Schopenhauer on The Idea of Suicide

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ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of suicide has been a subject of philosophical reflection across cultures, often treated through the lenses of religion, morality, law, and existential choice. This paper explores the metaphysics of self-negation through a comparative study of G.R. Malkani and Arthur Schopenhauer on the problem of suicide. While both philosophers recognize the profound existential weight of suicide, their interpretations diverge in striking ways, shaped by their broader metaphysical commitments. Schopenhauer, grounded in his doctrine of the will-to-live, views suicide not as a genuine negation of the will but as an act that paradoxically affirms it. For him, suicide merely rejects the conditions of life without overcoming the metaphysical essence of existence. True self-negation, in his system, can only be achieved through ascetic resignation and the denial of the will itself. By contrast, Malkani, a modern Indian philosopher, situates suicide within the context of individual freedom and moral autonomy. Through close textual analysis of Schopenhauer and Malkani's Opinion on suicide, the paper highlights the metaphysical concern between life as a blind striving and life as a value-laden project. It demonstrates how Schopenhauer's pessimism leads to a rejection of suicide as metaphysical liberation, whereas Malkani's existential humanism opens space for a more affirmative recognition of the individual's right to self-negation. Ultimately, the comparison reveals how Eastern and Western philosophical encounters on the theme of suicide enrich our understanding of freedom, value, and the limits of human existence.

Keywords: Suicide, Self-negation, Metaphysics, G.R. Malkani, Schopenhauer, Freedom, Value.

INTRODUCTION

The question of suicide has always unsettled human thought, not merely because of its moral or social implications but because of its metaphysical depth. Suicide does not simply end life; it is a deliberate act of self-negation, a radical assertion of one's power to annihilate one's own existence. To kill oneself is to negate the very ground of one's subjectivity, a gesture that seems at once to affirm and to deny the autonomy of the individual. For philosophers across cultures, suicide has functioned as a limit-case that tests the boundaries of ethics, metaphysics, freedom, and meaning. Two thinkers who stand at very different cultural and philosophical horizons; Arthur Schopenhauer, a German philosopher, and G.R. Malkani, a contemporary Indian philosopher deeply engaged with Neo-Vedantic reinterpretation of classical Indian philosophy and offer an intersecting perspective on suicide. Schopenhauer, steeped in a pessimistic metaphysics, sees suicide as ultimately futile; it does not negate the universal Will, the true root of suffering, but only ends the phenomenal life of the individual. Malkani, conversely, resists the moralist condemnation of suicide, stressing instead the autonomy of the individual to judge the tolerability of their own existence, even while acknowledging that suicide may reflect a tragic failure of endurance. The present paper explores suicide as a form of metaphysical self-negation through the lens of these two thinkers. It aims to bring into dialogue Schopenhauer's metaphysics of the Will and Malkani's Neo-Vedantic concern for freedom and understanding. By situating both within the broader problem of metaphysical negation, we may uncover deeper insights into the paradox of human existence; the drive toward life and freedom that simultaneously entertains the possibility of self-annihilation.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To examine the metaphysical foundations of self-negation in the philosophies of G.R. Malkani and Arthur Schopenhauer, with special attention to how each thinker conceptualizes the act of suicide.
- To analyze Schopenhauer's critique of suicide in the context of his broader doctrine of the will-to-live, and to clarify why he regards suicide as an affirmation rather than a negation of the will.
- To investigate Malkani's perspective on suicide as articulated in his '*Essay on Suicide*', emphasizing his defense of individual freedom, moral autonomy, and the value-orientation of life.
- To compare and contrast the two approaches of Schopenhauer's pessimistic metaphysics and Malkani's existential humanism in order to reveal points of similarities and dissimilarities in their treatments of self-negation. Also assess the contemporary relevance of their positions, particularly in relation to modern discussions of personal autonomy, human dignity, and the ethical justification of self-negation.

METHODOLOGY

In order to carry out the proposed research work in a systematic way, both analytic and descriptive method has been used. The interpretation is based upon the analysis of primary and secondary source related to G.R. Malkani and Schopenhauer's concept of Suicide. The study is primarily theoretical and is best on a close reading of G.R. Malkani and Schopenhauer's major philosophical works. The secondary sources are compiled from a variety of articles, periodicals and websites.

THE METAPHYSICAL BACKGROUND OF SELF-NEGATION

The problem of suicide has haunted philosophical, religious, and cultural discourse since antiquity. To grasp suicide as more than a sociological or psychological phenomenon, one must situate it in the metaphysical terrain of negation. Negation is not merely logical but ontological. It involves the refusal or undoing of being. Self-negation raises the paradox of a being that annihilates itself, an agent whose final act is to extinguish the very agency through which the act is performed. The metaphysical question of suicide intersects with ethics but cannot be reduced to it. Religious traditions often condemn suicide as sin; political systems often treat it as crime or pathology. But at the metaphysical level, suicide forces us to ask whether being is an obligation, whether existence itself commands fidelity. To commit suicide is to deny the unconditionality of life's value. In this sense, suicide appears as the most radical form of self-negation; not merely denying a proposition or rejecting a project but renouncing existence itself. Against this background, Schopenhauer and Malkani offer two distinctive interpretations. Schopenhauer treats suicide as futile metaphysical negation that fails to abolish the Will, the root of existence. Malkani treats it as a contextual act of freedom, sometimes tragically necessary, which must be met with understanding rather than condemnation.

Philosophy has long debated what the "self" designates. In the Cartesian framework, the self is the thinking subject, indubitable and foundational. In *Vedānta*, the self (*ātman*) is identical with Brahman, the absolute; thus, the negation of empirical existence does not touch the true self, which is eternal. In Schopenhauer's system, the self is a phenomenal appearance of the noumenal Will, condemned to striving and suffering. Each framework bears upon how suicide is interpreted; whether it negates ultimate reality, only phenomenal individuality, or simply one's embodied condition. Self-negation can be seen in two radically different lights. On one hand, it can be interpreted as the ultimate exercise of freedom; the power to withhold one's own existence. On the other, it can be seen as a destruction that undermines the very possibility of freedom, extinguishing the subject who might otherwise choose, endure, or transcend. This duality makes suicide a perennial philosophical problem.

SCHOPENHAUER'S PHILOSOPHY OF THE WILL AND SUICIDE

Arthur Schopenhauer's philosophy is one of the most profound and systematic attempts to think suicide in metaphysical terms. Arthur Schopenhauer's philosophy of suicide is inseparably bound to his broader metaphysical doctrine of the will. For Schopenhauer, reality in its innermost essence is not rational order or divine design, but an irrational striving force that he called the "will-to-live." All phenomena are objectifications of this primal will, endlessly striving, desiring, and consuming. Human existence, therefore, is inherently tragic because to exist as a human being is to be caught in the grip of a blind, ceaseless urge that can never be fully satisfied. Suffering is not an accident of life but its essence. Within this framework, suicide becomes a paradoxical act. At first glance, it appears to be the ultimate rejection of life, a refusal to participate in the perpetual cycle of desire and suffering. Yet, for Schopenhauer, suicide does not truly deny the will. Instead, it represents the will's own frustrated expression, the attempt of the individual will to avoid particular sufferings by annihilating its empirical appearance. He famously wrote, "To die voluntarily, to seek death of one's own accord, is to will life and to reject merely its conditions. The suicide wills life, and is dissatisfied only with the conditions under which it has been given to him" (E.F.J. Payne, 1969, p. 399). Here Schopenhauer insists that the suicidal person remains ensnared in the will-to-live. The act of suicide is not a negation of

willing itself but merely a rejection of the particular configuration of suffering one must endure in this individual life. Suicide arises not out of detachment but from an intensification of attachment; the individual still clings to life as such, but finds the present manifestation unbearable.

This insight reveals Schopenhauer's conviction that suicide is metaphysically self-defeating. While it may end personal suffering in a phenomenal sense, it leaves the noumenal essence of the will untouched. The will, being timeless and undying, continues to manifest itself in other individuals, other forms, other worlds. Thus, far from overcoming existence, suicide merely terminates one's own particular embodiment, while the will that animated it persists undiminished. As he writes, "The voluntary death does away with the phenomenon, but not with the thing-in-itself. The will-to-live, of which the individual is an expression, remains untouched by the suicide, for it manifests itself in other individuals and in countless forms" (E.F.J. Payne, 1969, p. 605). This position radically reorients the ethical and metaphysical meaning of self-destruction. If suicide does not negate the will, then it cannot be considered a true liberation. Instead, Schopenhauer places the hope of salvation not in death as such but in the ascetic path of voluntary renunciation. The ascetic, unlike the suicide, does not seek escape from particular sufferings, but rather achieves a radical transformation in which all willing itself is negated. In this state of "will-lessness," the individual ceases to strive, desire, or grasp at existence. Suicide is an act of despair, while asceticism is an act of wisdom. Schopenhauer describes this difference with characteristic clarity, "The suicide denies only the individual, not the species; he destroys the manifestation of the will in his person, but not the will itself. But he who voluntarily renounces, who turns away from all willing, denies the will-to-live in general; not merely the phenomenon, but the thing-in-itself. Thus, the saint, unlike the suicide, achieves true deliverance" (E.F.J. Payne, 1969, p. 400). For Schopenhauer, therefore, suicide represents the tragic confusion of the individual who mistakes the annihilation of the body for the negation of the metaphysical will. In fact, it is only the ascetic who transcends the cycle of suffering by refusing to participate in it altogether. Suicide does not rise above the will but is still its play, its desperate stratagem.

ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS

The ethical implications of Schopenhauer's analysis are far-reaching. While he refuses to condemn suicide as a moral crime in the Christian sense, he also refuses to glorify it as an act of freedom or heroism. Instead, he views it as metaphysical error. Suicide cannot liberate because liberation requires a transformation of consciousness, not merely the destruction of the empirical body. He states, "Death is the great opportunity no doubt, but it is missed by the suicide. For him, death is not liberation from the will, but only from its individual phenomenon" (E.F.J. Payne, 1995, p. 85). This subtle distinction is crucial, the suicide believes that by annihilating the body, he has annihilated suffering itself. But since suffering is rooted not in the body but in the will, such a hope is metaphysically misplaced. In the Christian tradition, suicide is condemned because life is a divine gift and man has no right to dispose of it. Schopenhauer, by contrast, grounds his critique not in divine command but in metaphysical necessity. Suicide is futile not because it offends God, but because it fails to touch the essence of reality. As Christopher Janaway notes, "Schopenhauer's rejection of suicide is part of his larger rejection of any solution to suffering that does not involve a radical denial of the will. Nothing short of this will do" (Janaway, 1999, p. 145). Schopenhauer refuses to condemn suicide as sin or crime. He argues that life belongs to the individual, and no external authority has the right to prohibit suicide. Nevertheless, he views suicide as morally problematic insofar as it is egoistic. The highest morality, for Schopenhauer, is compassion; the recognition of the suffering of others. Suicide focuses only on one's own suffering, neglecting one's relation to others. It is not immoral in a punitive sense but is limited in moral worth.

SUICIDE, COMPASSION, AND PESSIMISM

Another important dimension of Schopenhauer's position lies in his broader ethical system centered on compassion. In *On the Basis of Morality*, he argues that the highest ethical response is to recognize the unity of all beings in the will, leading to compassion for others' suffering. Suicide, however, can appear to conflict with this vision, since it withdraws from the communal struggle. But Schopenhauer remains consistent: suicide is not condemned morally but dismissed metaphysically. It is neither courageous nor cowardly, but simply irrelevant to the ultimate task of salvation. Nevertheless, one might ask, does Schopenhauer's metaphysical pessimism not in fact legitimize suicide? If life is inherently suffering, is not ending it the rational choice? Schopenhauer resists this conclusion. Life may be suffering, but the only authentic transcendence lies in negating willing itself, not in fleeing from its manifestations. As he puts it, "Suicide, far from being a negation of the will, is a phenomenon of the strongest affirmation of the will. For the will affirms itself most of all in the terror of death, and he who cannot endure it proves himself still bound in its fetters" (E.F.J. Payne, 1969, p. 606). It makes clear that the suicidal act is in fact a symptom of the will's grip, not its dissolution. The suicide does not rise above the will but demonstrates its power: the fear of suffering so overwhelms him that he affirms the will by fleeing from its current expression.

G.R. MALKANI'S PHILOSOPHY OF SUICIDE

G.R. Malkani, a modern Indian philosopher deeply engaged with Neo-Vedantic reinterpretation of classical thought, brings a very different perspective. Writing in the mid-twentieth century, Malkani confronted suicide not primarily as a metaphysical abstraction but as a pressing human problem, shaped by freedom, dignity, and the struggle of individuals in concrete contexts. G.R. Malkani approaches suicide not merely as an ethical problem but as a metaphysical question concerning self-negation, autonomy, and the realization of value in human life. His reflections move beyond conventional moral judgments, engaging with the tension between the individual and society, the purpose of life, and the legitimacy of self-directed death.

Malkani begins by situating the discussion of suicide within the social and political framework. He observes that the individual is born into a society and a state, with conditions, education, and environment shaping one's life from the outset. Yet he insists that the individual cannot be fully subsumed under social or political authority when it comes to deciding whether to continue living. He states that "The first question we want to raise is whether an act of suicide is an offence against the state. It is quite evident that the individual is not born to the freedom of nature and later on converted to the membership of a state. He is born as such a member and his political bearings are determined by his parentage and place of birth. The social and the political organization into which he is born determines not only the conditions of his birth but also his early education and the influences that are to mould his whole character. The state therefore has certain rights over the individual comparable with the rights which the parents claim over him." (Deshpandey, 1997, p. 109) Malkani's insight here emphasizes a crucial metaphysical point, freedom is conditioned but not obliterated by social and political structures. The individual's capacity to evaluate the worth of continued existence remains intact, even if the state presumes authority over life. This forms the foundation of his argument that suicide, as an act of self-negation, is not an offense against society or the state but a legitimate exercise of existential autonomy. He further elaborates, "Society has determined the conditions of his existence; but society cannot expect him to continue to live under those conditions if they are not tolerable to him. He is not a thing that can be subjected to any pressure from outside and still continue to exist with only a change of form." (Deshpandey, 1997, p. 110) This passage underscores Malkani's metaphysical anthropocentrism; the individual's subjective experience and sensibility are decisive. External authorities whether the state, religion, or society cannot adjudicate the legitimacy of suicide, for they cannot inhabit the individual's consciousness.

Malkani explicitly rejects conventional moral condemnation of suicide as a crime or sin against the state. He states that "Is an act of suicide under any circumstances a crime against the state? It appears to us that it is sheer stupidity to regard it as a crime...The state has certain rights over the individual, but only when it has induced him to believe that life is worth living. It has no right over his freedom to decide whether he would live or whether he would prefer to die...We can only condemn an act of suicide on the ground of the individual's own interests, and not on the ground of any offence against the state." (Deshpandey, 1997, p. 110) By relocating moral responsibility from society to the individual, Malkani situates suicide as a phenomenologically grounded act. It is the individual's evaluation of life's tolerability, and the metaphysical significance of the act lies in its assertion of existential sovereignty. Malkani acknowledging that moral prescriptions cannot account for the intensity of subjective suffering. Thus, suicide is context-sensitive; it may be morally and existentially justified when endurance is impossible. Malkani's metaphysics recognizes the limits of moralism in the face of individual suffering, emphasizing that the legitimacy of self-negation is determined by the inner life of the person.

LIFE AND VALUE

Central to Malkani's metaphysical perspective is the notion that life has no inherent value in itself; it is valuable only insofar as it functions as a means for realizing higher values. Suicide becomes a rational response when life ceases to fulfill its purpose. Malkani introduces a teleological standard; the worth of life is inseparable from its potential to realize values beyond mere survival. Suicide, in this light, is not a denial of life but a rational choice made when life no longer functions as a vehicle for meaningful realization. Malkani is particularly critical of religious condemnation of suicide, especially within Christianity, he states that "The Christian Church has done something to create a wholly unnatural and sickening atmosphere about suicide. It does not merely condemn it as many other religions do. It goes further and refuses to extend that Christian charity to the departed soul which every erring soul has a right to expect." (Deshpandey, 1997, p. 117) Here, he highlights the arbitrariness of social sentiment, arguing that judgments about suicide are often rooted in prejudice, aesthetic perception, or fear rather than rational or metaphysical understanding. Malkani further notes that certain individuals, particularly those convinced of the immortality of the soul or self, approach death with composure and joy. For Malkani, suicide can be an act of spiritual or existential mastery, rather than despair or weakness. It is a deliberate, conscious, and meaningful engagement with one's own mortality.

METAPHYSICS OF SELF-NEGATION

Synthesizing his reflections, Malkani situates suicide as a metaphysical assertion of freedom, not a mere empirical act, he said that, the achievements of an individual in life. And when he has recognized this, he has perhaps recognized all that is material in the discussion of the problem of suicide. It is mere religious superstition which can make them condemn an act of suicide as under all circumstances a reprehensible thing, worse still, as a crime deserving of punishment and social degradation. The metaphysical significance of suicide, then, lies in its demonstration that the individual can exercise sovereignty over the conditions of existence. Unlike Schopenhauer's model, where metaphysical self-negation is only possible via ascetic renunciation, Malkani's perspective allows direct engagement with death as a form of personal transcendence.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: MALKANI AND SCHOPENHAUER

Placing Schopenhauer and Malkani side by side reveals both striking similarities and profound differences in their accounts of suicide as self-negation. The metaphysics of self-negation, as expressed in the writings of G.R. Malkani and Arthur Schopenhauer, presents a complex interplay of ethical, existential, and metaphysical concerns. While both philosophers address suicide as a fundamental confrontation with suffering, they diverge sharply in their conception of its significance, legitimacy, and ultimate metaphysical consequences. This section undertakes a systematic comparison of their positions, highlighting both convergences and divergences in their thought. Both thinkers reject the moralist or religious condemnation of suicide. For Schopenhauer, suicide is not sin or crime but a misguided attempt to escape suffering. For Malkani, suicide is not cowardice or sin but a personal judgment in the face of unbearable life. Both also recognize that suicide often fails to achieve what it seeks: Schopenhauer says it fails metaphysically, as it does not negate the Will; Malkani suggests it often fails psychologically, as the expectation of relief may be illusory. The divergences, however, are crucial. Schopenhauer grounds his critique of suicide in a metaphysics of the Will. Suicide fails because it cannot abolish the Will itself. Malkani, in contrast, approaches suicide from a neo-Vedantic and existential standpoint. He sees it less as metaphysical error and more as a matter of personal freedom and tragic necessity. Schopenhauer emphasizes futility; Malkani emphasizes autonomy.

Metaphysical Perspectives- Despite these similarities, their metaphysical frameworks diverge fundamentally. Schopenhauer situates suicide within his doctrine of the will-to-live, a metaphysical entity that transcends individual existence. For him, suicide is ineffectual as metaphysical self-negation. According to him, "The voluntary death does away with the phenomenon, but not with the thing-in-itself. The will-to-live, of which the individual is an expression, remains untouched by the suicide, for it manifests itself in other individuals and in countless forms." (E.F.J. Payne, 1969, p. 605) In contrast, Malkani's philosophy places existential primacy on the individual. The act of suicide, when undertaken from a considered awareness of life's value or lack thereof, is a legitimate exercise of freedom. Unlike Schopenhauer, Malkani does not posit a metaphysical structure that outlives the act. According to Malkani, "The state has certain rights over the individual, but only when it has induced him to believe that life is worth living. It has no right over his freedom to decide whether he would live or whether he would prefer to die...We can only condemn an act of suicide on the ground of the individual's own interests, and not on the ground of any offence against the state." (Deshpandey, 1997, p. 110)) Where Schopenhauer sees suicide as a failure to transcend the will, Malkani views it as potentially a rational assertion of autonomy, contingent on the individual's judgment of the meaningfulness of life

Ethical Implications- Ethically, Schopenhauer faults suicide for its egoism, its lack of compassion. Malkani faults society for its lack of sympathy toward the suicidal. For Schopenhauer, suicide falls short of the highest moral good because it is self-focused; for Malkani, the highest moral failing is to condemn rather than understand those who suffer. Schopenhauer's critique of suicide is metaphysical but also bears ethical weight: the ascetic who negates the will achieves the highest ethical realization. Suicide is morally neutral, but metaphysically misguided. Malkani, however, explicitly rejects state or religious moralism as the standard for evaluating suicide. For Malkani, ethical assessment is inseparable from subjective experience. The morality of suicide is contingent upon the individual's capacity to judge whether continued existence is meaningful or bearable. Schopenhauer, by contrast, situates ethical value in metaphysical truth, requiring renunciation rather than death. He claims that, "But he who voluntarily renounces, who turns away from all willing, denies the will-to-live in general; not merely the phenomenon, but the thing-in-itself. Thus, the saint, unlike the suicide, achieves true deliverance." (E.F.J. Payne, 1969, p. 400) This contrast highlights the divergence in ethical grounding: Schopenhauer's ethics are metaphysical-universal, Malkani's are existentially individualistic.

Alternatives to Self-Negation- For Schopenhauer, true self-negation lies in ascetic denial of the Will, in transcending desire altogether. For Malkani, alternatives lie in endurance, in the creation of meaning, and in empathetic engagement with others. Schopenhauer's solution is metaphysical and ascetic; Malkani's is ethical and existential.

Shared Recognition of Suffering and the Limits of Endurance- Both Malkani and Schopenhauer recognize the centrality of suffering in human life, and they acknowledge that endurance has its limits. For Schopenhauer, suffering is inseparable from the very structure of the will. Similarly, Malkani emphasizes the subjective intolerability of certain life conditions, stressing that moral prescriptions cannot always apply universally. In both frameworks, human suffering is acknowledged as real and powerful. Both philosophers also recognize the limits of conventional moralist interventions: Schopenhauer through his emphasis on metaphysical necessity and Malkani through the primacy of the individual's subjective experience.

Suicide, Value, and Teleology- A second key point of divergence concerns the teleology of life. Schopenhauer denies that life has intrinsic teleological value beyond the perpetuation of the will. The ethical imperative lies in ascetic renunciation, not in the cessation of existence per se. Suicide, being an escape from particular suffering, fails to negate the will and therefore offers no ultimate metaphysical relief. Thus, in Malkani's framework, the rationality of suicide is tied to the teleology of life: when life fails to serve meaningful ends, ending it is a legitimate assertion of existential judgment. For Schopenhauer, by contrast, the ultimate ethical task is renunciation of all willing, and suicide cannot achieve this because it leaves the metaphysical will intact.

Freedom and the Boundaries of Autonomy- Suicide appears as the ultimate assertion of freedom; the capacity to decide even about one's own existence. Yet it also annihilates the subject who exercises that freedom. The paradox is inescapable: suicide both affirms and negates autonomy. Schopenhauer resolves this by showing its futility; Malkani resolves it by affirming the dignity of individual judgment.

CONCLUSION

Suicide, as the most radical form of self-negation, forces philosophy to confront the limits of freedom, the nature of suffering, and the value of existence. In contemporary discussions of mental health, euthanasia, and bioethics, the insights of Schopenhauer and Malkani remain significant. Schopenhauer's warning that suicide may not bring the relief one seeks cautions against simplistic glorification of self-negation. Malkani's insistence on autonomy and sympathy counters social stigma and calls for compassionate responses to suffering individuals. For Schopenhauer, suicide is metaphysically futile; it cannot abolish the Will, the true root of suffering, and thus remains a paradoxical affirmation of life's striving. For Malkani, suicide is not to be condemned but to be understood; it is a personal judgment of intolerability, a tragic failure of endurance, and an act that demands sympathy rather than censure. Together, their perspectives illuminate the double character of suicide; both as metaphysical illusion and as existential crisis. Suicide is neither simply cowardice nor simply freedom; it is the paradoxical attempt to affirm autonomy by destroying it, to seek release by annihilation. The metaphysics of self-negation thus reveals the depth of the human condition. To live is to suffer, but also to endure, to create meaning, and sometimes, tragically, to renounce existence. In confronting suicide, philosophy does not offer final answers but calls for deeper compassion and clarity: compassion for those whose suffering becomes unbearable, and clarity about the futility of seeking metaphysical release in death. Ultimately, the dialogue between Schopenhauer and Malkani shows that suicide, as self-negation, remains an open question at the intersection of metaphysics, ethics, and human freedom. It reminds us that to think suicide is to confront the most profound tension in human life: between the will to live and the possibility of its radical negation.

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