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## ***Nirvana* - Liberation**

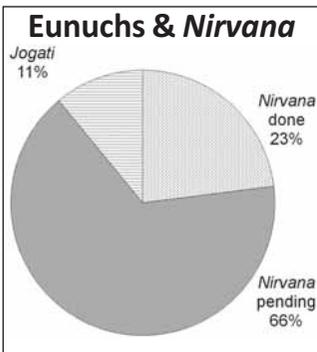
***Nirvana***, in popular Indian mythology, means liberation or freedom from materialistic desires or ties that bind the soul to this world. However, in the context of eunuchs, it means the traditional way of voluntary surgical removal of all male characteristics, such as the organs and feelings. Through this process, the non-erectile, undesired penis and the attached scrotum of the eunuch are removed.

*Nirvana* is done with the intent of developing female characteristics. The ritual, as practiced in the Indian subcontinent, has no parallel in the world. *Nirvana* has no equivalent in English. However, every eunuch knows what it means. It has been practiced since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when eunuchs realised some benefits that were conferred by voluntary castration. These castrations and their effects are shrouded in mystery and religious symbolism.

Many of the 19 lakh eunuchs in India have a rudimentary or a fully grown penis with/without testicles since birth. This penis serves the purpose for urination but not for sexual activities. The baby is brought up like a normal boy. As he grows up, he starts feeling like a girl. This feeling becomes dominant by the age of 6-8 years. He likes playing games of girls and wearing female

clothes. He likes *naaz*, *nakhra*, *itrana* (coy feminine behaviour) and similar feminine activities. Gradually he realises that he has a female mind trapped in a male body. Some of them report miniscule erections from about 3" morbid to 4" maximum size but most of them report 0" increase in size by any stimulating technique.

They seldom feel attracted to females like normal males. Instead they feel attracted to males. This attraction has



a conflict. They don't have vagina for penetration by a male. While some may lack sensuality, most of them like being appreciated for beauty, kissed at various sensitive locations of the body and being hugged. However, the presence of a penis greatly hampers their

ability to seek male company and hence, they yearn to lose their male genitals at the earliest but in most cases, it does not happen until a late stage in her life.

After a while, this desire becomes so overpowering that they often commit random acts of dementia in their quest to achieve *nirvana*, e.g. stealing chickens in the dead of the night and lopping off their heads. Each surgery is followed by feasting and get together. Also, because of injury suffered during surgery, the eunuch has to rest for about forty days after the operation. She must have enough savings to meet her expenses during this period.

### **Salient Features of *Nirvana***

The salient features of *nirvana* are as under:

1. Though eunuchs may have a penis of any size, viz. full length, rudimentary or any size in between, with/without testicles that are at any stage of development, they may opt for this procedure.
2. *Nirvana* means voluntarily getting rid of these male organs through surgery.
3. It leads to profuse bleeding. Eunuchs believe that 'dirty masculine blood' is lost through the bleeding and only the feminine portion is retained.
4. Eunuchs firmly believe that *nirvana* results in loss of facial and bodily hair, making their voices more feminine (though this is never achieved through surgery alone) and achieving a curvaceous feminine body.
5. Although they view their emasculation surgery as a 'sex change', eunuchs are also realistic in their recognition that they are not really women.
6. Expenses for this surgery are approximately Rs 35,000, plus feasting etc amounting to Rs 50,000 or more, which are fully borne by the eunuch involved. This funding is not done by the *guru*, who would condemn the eunuch to a lifetime of bonded labour for this favour.

Before the ritual, eunuchs may need to hide their genitals, so they tuck them between their thighs and wear double panties. Another reason for this practice is that during dance performances, pervers often grope eunuchs in the genital area and the discovery of

a penis can be a major source of embarrassment for a eunuch who is dressed as a female.

Above all, *nirvana* gives eunuchs higher status in their community and this is the primary reason behind their decision to undergo the procedure. When two eunuchs meet, each eunuch is keen to know whether the other has undergone *nirvana* or not. Though eunuchs have an inherent capability to recognise the status of *nirvana* of other eunuchs, they still ask for confirmation.

The seniority of a eunuch in the group for any preferential activity is determined by two dates:

- i) When she left home to join a eunuch *guru*, and
- ii) The date of her *nirvana*.

Undergoing *nirvana* significantly enhances the status of the eunuch in her group. For example, if two eunuchs join a band, the eunuch who has undergone *nirvana* will be senior to the other eunuch who has not undergone *nirvana* or *akwas*<sup>1</sup>.

### **Methods of *Nirvana*** <sup>2</sup>

*Nirvana* is done in two ways, depending upon the person who performs the ritualistic operation:

- 1. *Nirvana* by *Dai Ma* (midwife)** – This is carried out by a midwife. This type of operation entails a lot of blood loss but it is welcomed by eunuchs, who feel that all their masculine traits are removed through

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<sup>1</sup> In large parts of India, a eunuch is called *akwa* before *nirvana*.

<sup>2</sup> *Nirvana* photographs on page 171 and penectomy illustrations on page 416.

the profuse bleeding that occurs during the procedure. As eunuchs say, the purpose is achieved to greater extent, since the loss of blood is much greater as compared to the other type. Therefore, some brave eunuchs prefer this surgery at great risk to life and limb.

All eunuchs desirous of undergoing the *nirvana* have to abstain from the consumption of liquor and other intoxicants or drugs for a period starting at least a week prior to the surgery and continuing to the end of the forty day ritual, regardless of the method employed. This is done in order to aid the recovery process.

The eunuch reports to the *dai ma*, accompanied by a senior or a *guru*. The *dai ma* is assisted by other eunuchs during this procedure. She begins with the preliminary check-up. The eunuch is undressed and a strong black nylon rope is tied around her waist, below the navel. The knot is made as tight as possible by two hefty eunuchs pulling on either ends of the rope. This is done in order to restrict blood flow to the lower portion of the eunuch's body and make it numb, since no anaesthesia is used. A pot of oil is heated on a stove in a corner of the room and kept in readiness.

The eunuch is then made to squat on an inverted copper pitcher. Two eunuchs take a firm hold of her legs, standing on either side and holding a leg each, pull them apart. The *dai ma* ties a piece of sturdy string tightly around the penis and testes and pulls on it to stretch the organs away from the body.

The other eunuchs begin clapping and shouting loudly, in order to distract the eunuch's mind from the impending procedure and the resultant pain. Using a very sharp knife, the *dai ma* quickly lops off the penis from the top and the scrotum from below.

Blood gushes out profusely from the wound. This bleeding is allowed to continue for as long as possible, due to the notion of 'male' blood flowing out from the body after *nirvana*. The *dai ma* has to make a life-or-death decision about when to stanch the flow of blood – too soon and not enough 'male blood' will flow out, defeating the purpose of this method; too late and the eunuch may bleed to death. An experienced *dai ma* knows when to do this through years of experience.

The hot oil is poured over the wound, cauterising the flesh and then the *dai ma* quickly stitches the wound closed, inserting a small stick into the urethra to keep it open for urination. Some more hot oil is poured on the wound and the eunuch is then taken away and made to lie on a cot in a corner. She is not allowed to sleep for a few hours. The other eunuchs clap, sing and shout among themselves in order to keep the castrated eunuch awake.

After a couple of days, the eunuch is taken back to her home by her companions, for undergoing the 40 days ritual described later. Eunuchs maintain that the period of recovery is much shorter – 6 days or so – with the *dai ma* method, as compared to the other method, which takes much longer.

The mortality rate of eunuchs undergoing this procedure is higher as compared to the other method - about 4 in 100 persons, during the first four hours after the procedure. In case of death, the corpse is not handed over to the relatives of the deceased (even if they arrive to claim it). The *dai ma* has the final say regarding the disposal of the body.

- 2. *Nirvana* by experienced quacks** – This is done by so-called ‘doctors’, who are usually quacks, masquerading as medical people. At most, they may possess some rudimentary degree in *ayurveda* or some other alternative therapy.

The main difference between the two is the use of anaesthesia and the amount of blood loss after the procedure. The *dai ma* method does not use anaesthesia and results in much greater blood loss as compared to the second method. However, eunuchs believe that the *dai ma* method confers a much greater degree of femininity as compared to the other method and imparts a feminine glow to the eunuch’s face, due to the much greater loss of ‘male’ blood.

Of late, a few Mumbai based eunuchs have started undergoing surgeries for creation of vaginas, i.e. MtF GRS. The primary reason for this is their over-sexuality. They also wish to possess the ability to be penetrated by a male, so that they can give their partners the maximum satisfaction possible and thus create greater attraction. However, no instance of someone who has undergone GRS successfully could be found.

## ***Nirvana* – An Eyewitness Account**

In order to obtain first hand information about this procedure shrouded in extreme secrecy, the author accompanied a eunuch, who had come from Bhopal to get her *nirvana* done at Kadapa, Andhra Pradesh, along with two of her eunuch friends. Kadapa, though a small town, is yet a district headquarters and has gradually developed into a primary centre of *nirvana* for eunuchs of India.

Travelling in the unreserved general compartment of the train, they arrived dusty and weary at Kadapa, yet filled with hope that the eunuch might be able to fulfill her long standing desire. When the author and the eunuchs alighted at Kadapa, the party was surrounded by local eunuchs who volunteered to provide complete guidance about the procedure. They furnished details of one Babu, who facilitated such operations to the author, who then spoke to him over the phone. Never before had a non-eunuch accompanied a eunuch for such an operation, so the doctor raised a volley of questions. Instead of calling the party to his 'clinic', the 'doctor' instead offered to come to the railway station to discuss the matter. He was highly suspicious of being exposed by a 'sting' operation. He informed the author that a certain 'Dr Naganna' used to perform the *nirvana* procedure but he had moved away 3 years ago and subsequently, no more operations were carried out in Kadapa. He also informed the author that Naganna's son occasionally performed the procedure. According to Babu, his role was merely to carry out an HIV test and ensure the general health of the patient, for a charge of Rs 600.

The author requested him to do the same for the accompanying eunuch desiring to undergo the *nirvana* procedure but the 'doctor' refused to open his 'clinic' and advised that the 'patient' was too weak to undergo surgery. He also suggested that the summer season is not a good period for this surgery. Instead, they would be better advised to come back later, during the rains or in winter. The lasting impression given by Babu was that he wanted to get rid of the author and his party at the earliest without divulging any details, for fear of his illegal activities being exposed.<sup>3</sup>

The author was subsequently able to confirm that the 'doctor' performs such 'surgery' even now and charges about Rs 27,000 for healthy eunuchs and about Rs 33,000 for eunuchs infected with HIV, since he has to exercise extra caution during the procedure, such as wearing two layers of gloves for infected patients and is exposed to high risk.

The 'operation' is carried out by the 'doctor', in a hideout situated close to their 'clinic' near the old bus stand, Shivalayam in Kadapa. The location of this hideout, known only to the 'doctor' and his assistants, keeps changing often, in order to avoid exposure. The objective of this secrecy is to ensure that word of these illegal activities does not leak out to the authorities.

On the appointed day, the 'patient' reports at the clinic around midnight, accompanied by a couple of other

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<sup>3</sup> After being declined, the author managed to find an alternative after a few hours. He succeeded in observing and documenting the procedure at a different location, on condition of anonymity.

eunuchs. Only eunuchs who have undergone *nirvana* themselves can accompany a eunuch who wishes to undergo the procedure. No other male/female relatives or friends are allowed. The late hour is designed to ensure the minimum of interruptions and to avoid any prying eyes. After arrival, the quack once again stresses the fact that this surgery is irreversible and asks the eunuch and her companions for their final consent. Once it is given, the other eunuchs accompanying the 'patient' are made to wait in the 'clinic', while the 'patient' is blindfolded and led clandestinely to the hideout by a team of two assistants of the quack.

The actual 'operation theatre' is a small room, measuring about 10ft by 10ft. It has no communication with the outside world, save through a solitary door. The room is devoid of furnishings, except a cot and a TV set in a corner. There is a small table beside the cot, where the tools of trade are kept, along with some clothes, surgical equipment, bandages and gauzes, towels and bottles of antiseptic etc. Needles to administer the local anaesthesia, vials of anaesthetic, saline drips and stand etc are also kept ready during the procedure. A gas stove stands in a corner of the room, on which a small pot of water is boiled for use during the procedure. A small jar is also kept in readiness on the small table – it serves a rather unusual and singular purpose after the operation.

Upon reaching the hideout, all the clothes of the eunuch are removed and she is made to lie on the cot. The quack administers the local anaesthetic through the spine. At the same time, the TV is set to the desired

channel of the eunuch undergoing the procedure, in order to distract her mind from the pain and keep away any unpleasant thoughts. The surgical tools are 'sterilised' by immersion in the pot of boiling water, followed by swabbing with antiseptic.

Once the anaesthetic begins to take effect, the eunuch is turned over on the cot and her body is arranged in a spread-eagle position. The quack's assistants stretch the legs of the eunuch as wide apart as they can and quickly shave off all pubic hair. Subsequently, the groin is swabbed with antiseptic and made ready for the procedure.

Uttering a final prayer, the quack dons gloves and firmly grasps the penis in one hand and a scalpel in the other. He makes two superficial cutaneous incisions around the shaft, close to the glans and then longitudinally along either side of the shaft. Then, he peels back the skin lengthwise along the upper and lower parts of the shaft, exposing the corpus cavernosum.

This skin is to be retained and used later for covering up the wound. Then the quack makes two deep cuts in the shaft of the penis, as close as possible to the base – one from above and the other from below. These two cuts meet somewhere in the middle and the penis is severed. The matching of the cuts is precise, due to the quack's experience of performing this procedure over the years.

Once the penis is severed, the quack stretches the upper half of the leftover skin over the wound and uses stitches

to close the wound. Making a small opening in the covering skin, he inserts a small catheter into the urethra for urination. Subsequently, the quack slices off the scrotum, containing the testes if present and stretches the lower half of the leftover skin over this wound, again inserting stitches to keep the wound closed.

There is profuse bleeding at first, which reduces after about 3-4 minutes. Eunuchs refuse the use of any medication to reduce this bleeding, since they believe that it results in the draining of male attributes from their bodies. Once the bleeding stops, the wound area is swabbed with antiseptic and cotton gauze is placed over it. Thereafter, the area is bandaged, while keeping the catheter free, so that the eunuch can pass urine.

The severed penis and testes are put in the jar and shown to the eunuch and her companions after she regains consciousness, in order to prove the success of the operation. Subsequently, the assistants dress her in fresh clean clothes and walk her back slowly to the 'clinic', where she is handed over to her companions. The remaining charges for the 'surgery' are handed over to the quack and the eunuch and her companions are asked to leave as quickly as possible. There is no documentation of this procedure and no records are ever kept by anyone. This is done in order to ensure that if there are any complications after the procedure, the quack does not have to face the repercussions. Before leaving, the quack also hands over some oral painkillers to the eunuch's companions for use during their return journey.

As the anaesthesia wears off, the eunuch experiences immense pain. She has to travel back to her home town, in this case, Bhopal. The wound is raw and chafes constantly and severely with each step. She has to constantly lean on her companions for support, who have to almost carry her throughout the journey. The blood loss also makes her severely anaemic and she loses consciousness more than once.

Normally, a person could be brought back to his home quickly by air but eunuchs cannot fly, since they cannot afford it and also because they cannot clear security at airports. In this case, the only option for them is to travel by land and that too by train, since road travel in India is fraught with numerous jerks due to the condition of the roads and this entails the danger of the wound opening up afresh.

The method normally employed by eunuchs while travelling back to their homes is to dress the castrated eunuch in a *burqa* (black gown and veil covering the face worn by Muslim women) and travel in the general compartment of the train reserved for ladies. Once inside, they create a ruckus and make a nuisance of themselves, forcing women to vacate some seats, so that they can occupy them. No ticket checker dares to ask eunuchs for tickets and the eunuchs travel unmolested to their home.

She is made as comfortable as possible, antiseptic is applied to the wound and her bandages are changed regularly. However, the general lack of hygiene makes castrated eunuchs prone to various viral and bacterial

infections of the urinary system, which may cause grave complications like blockage of the urinary tract and infections in the pelvic region. In such cases, they take antibiotics and analgesics for the treatment of infection and reduction of pain. Sometimes, a second surgery is required to adjust the mutilated skin parts. There is not much that eunuchs can do in a life threatening situation, since it largely goes unnoticed.

Eunuchs rarely visit speciality hospitals, due to illiteracy and poor financial condition. For them, these complications are '*Allah ki marji*' (God's will) and as they say, 'they die a slow death every day and every moment and if one of them actually dies, they don't feel sad about her', though they may mourn her for a few days. Despite this, the quack in Kadapa claims that out of the eighty-seven odd persons that he has castrated so far, only one 'patient' developed serious infection, which lasted for two months and there have not been any fatalities.

In the case of surgery being carried out by qualified surgeons under proper conditions, the risks following such major surgery, viz. infection, trauma etc are reduced. These quacks are neither qualified nor experienced healers but they have demonstrated expertise in a specific type of surgery, i.e. *nirvana*. The results of their operations are always good but the fear of the illegality of the operation reduces the level of care afforded to the patient. It is generally felt that such surgery by quacks recommended by senior *gurus* should be legalised or be performed at government run hospitals at subsidised rates.

**Eunuch Genital Area Post-*Nirvana*  
(after removal of penis and scrotum)**



**Eunuch Genital Area Post-Nirvana  
(after removal of penis and scrotum)**





A *nirvanee* getting ready for 40<sup>th</sup> day ritual celebration



A eunuch before and after *nirvana*



The 'clinic' for *nirvana* consultation in Kadapa



The author at Kadapa railway station to document *nirvana*

## **Forty Day Ritual and *Pooja* Ceremony**

The arrival of the castrated eunuch and her companions at their home heralds the beginning of the forty days ritual, culminating in the *pooja* ceremony. The eunuch is confined to a secluded area. She is not allowed to meet any outsiders. All her needs are catered to by her companions.

During this period, another eunuch who has undergone *nirvana* is in attendance on her. Only this eunuch is allowed to come into physical contact with her and assist her with her daily tasks like taking a bath, cleaning the wound and dressing it, nursing her etc. Even if she needs to visit the toilet, which is normally located outside the house, she is taken in a *burqa*, accompanied by an attendant. This is ensured in order to prevent the castrated eunuch getting infected by others – since the wound is still not healed, the lesser the number of people coming into contact with the eunuch, the lesser her chance of picking up a stray infection in her weakened state. The wound is cleaned on a daily basis with antiseptic and dressed afresh.

She is fed a high calorie diet, comprising of *roti* with *ghee*, protein rich food like meat, *paya* soup, pulses etc. Spicy food, which may cause irritation of the wound is avoided during this period. On the 21<sup>st</sup> day, all facial hair is removed using a plucker. Eunuchs maintain that after this, facial hair does not grow back and takes on a feminine countenance. On the 39<sup>th</sup> day, massive preparations begin for the celebratory feast. About a thousand people, only eunuchs, are invited to a non-

vegetarian feast comprising of *dal gosht* (mutton cooked with lentils) or *biryani* to be held on the evening of 41<sup>st</sup> day. A tent is erected in open grounds near the home of the eunuch. This is elaborately decorated with flowers, garlands etc, just like for an Indian wedding ceremony. While the meat is prepared, dry fruits of many types, such as cashewnuts, almonds, raisins, walnuts etc (at least 1.25 kg of each variety) are also kept ready for use during the *pooja*.

The event is marked by singing and dancing throughout the day. Early in the evening, the ritual commences with the application of henna on the eunuch's palms and feet. This is followed a couple of hours later by the application of turmeric paste to the castrated eunuch's body. She is undressed and the *guru* applies thick turmeric paste, first to the groin and then the rest of her body. Afterwards, other eunuchs take turns in applying the turmeric paste to the eunuch's body.

Then, she is given the ritual bath. The *guru* offers the eunuch a green sari and green bangles. The eunuch dresses in this green sari, wears the green bangles and applies make-up. She wears a *mangalsutra* given to her by her *guru* and applies *sindoor* to her forehead in order to denote the bond between her and her *guru*, who assumes the role of her protector (just like a husband). Subsequently, the eunuch is escorted to the decorated tent by the *guru* and the others. A photograph of Bahuchara *Mata* is kept in the centre of the tent, next to a *kalash* filled with milk and other offerings. A lighted oil lamp is kept on this *kalash*, as a mark of devotion to Bahuchara *Mata*. This lamp

is symbolic of piety and devotion, similar to candles in churches. Upon reaching the tent, everyone offers prayers. Flowers, fruits and dry fruits are offered to the deity.

All the assembled eunuchs congratulate the *nirvanee* (eunuchs who have undergone *nirvana*) and bless her. The *nirvanee* is bestowed with gifts (cash or kind) by the invitees, who then proceed to feast on the *dal gosht* and *biryani*. This is accompanied by more loud singing and dancing by all those assembled that lasts till midnight or even later.

Well past midnight, at about 2 – 3 am, the *nirvanee* lifts the *kalash*, along with the lamp on her head and proceeds in a group to the nearest large water body (lake, river or sea), surrounded by her *guru* and other members of her band. Once the party reaches the water, the *kalash* is set down on the ground and prayers are offered, while its contents are poured into the water. The *nirvanee* seeks blessings and recites a prayer, which means “Just as no rock can obstruct your water, which flows unrestricted, let my urine pass unhindered while I am alive.”

When the prayer is concluded, the *nirvanee* proceeds to a nearby small banyan or *pipal* plant that has been procured by her fellow members and planted in the vicinity earlier. There, she lifts her sari, so that her head and face are covered by it and urinates on the plant. Eunuchs believe that if the plant subsequently withers and dies, the *nirvanee* will be blessed with a happy life, free from troubles and worries later on.

The party returns home by about 4 am. The *nirvanee* thanks the other *nirvanee* who has taken care of her during the past forty days and seeks her blessings for a happy life. She also offers her gifts in cash or kind (gold ornaments), amounting to about Rs 2,000 – 5,000.

The morning of the next day heralds a new life for the *nirvanee*. She is no longer an ‘*akwa*’ but a respected member of her community and takes her place in the hierarchy. Undergoing the procedure has greatly boosted her self-image. She has lost a lot of her bodily hair and acquired feminine curves during this period and she feels imbued with a feminine glow, giving her the confidence to be invited for functions by regular people on a priority basis.

### **Legality of *Nirvana***

The *nirvana* procedure, though desired by all eunuchs, is not legal in the country. It is primarily done in three locations in India, viz. Saudathi, Mehsana and Kadapa. Kadapa accounts for the majority of *nirvana* procedures. However, some eunuchs go to Bahuchara *Mata* temple in Mehsana, Gujarat for this ritual, since it is considered to be an auspicious place.

*Nirvana* or castration as such is not mentioned in the IPC but it is covered under various sections of the law. The closest term mentioned is ‘emasculatation’ under Section 320, Indian Penal Code.

### **Section 320**

The following kinds of hurt, inter alia, are designated as “grievous”:

First - Emasculation.

Fourth - Privation of any member or joint.

Fifth - Destruction or permanent impairing of the powers of any member or joint.

Eighth - Any hurt which endangers life or which causes the sufferer to be during the space of twenty days in severe bodily pain or unable to follow his ordinary pursuits.

### **Section 326**

Whoever (except Section 335 – grave and sudden provocation) voluntarily causes grievous hurt by means of any instrument for stabbing or cutting shall be punished with imprisonment for life or for ten years and shall also be liable to fine.

### **Section 87**

It proceeds upon the basis of '*Volenti non fit injuria*': he who consents, cannot complain. This rule is founded upon two simple propositions, viz, - (1) that every person is the best judge of his own interest; and (2) that no man will consent to what he thinks is harmful to himself. It is to be remembered that the section does not permit a man to give his consent to anything likely to cause his own death or grievous hurt.

### **Section 88**

An act is not an offence if it is not intended or known to be likely to cause death, which causes any harm to a person for whose benefit is done in good faith with his (express or implied) consent to suffer it.

Illustration: A surgeon, knowing that a particular operation is likely to cause the death of Z, who suffers from a painful complaint but not intending to cause Z's death and intending in good faith, Z's benefit, performs that operation on Z with Z's consent. The surgeon has committed no offence.

Scope – This section protects surgeons and surgical operations. Quacks are not protected by this section, as they cannot be said to act in good faith, which is a requisite of this section. Also, the consent clause may not be applicable in this case, since the purpose of the operation is not to save life.

### **Section 322**

Whoever voluntarily causes hurt, if the hurt which he intends to cause or knows himself to be likely to cause is grievous hurt and if the hurt which he causes is grievous hurt, is said "voluntarily to cause grievous hurt".

### **Section 109**

Abetment – Whoever abets any offence shall, if the act abetted is committed in consequence of the abetment and no express provision is made by this Code for the punishment of such abetment, be punished with the punishment provided for the offence. As *nirvana* is not legal, qualified surgeons do not perform this surgery, unless it is mandated due to medical reasons. Hence, eunuchs need to resort to quacks, who act in violation of all the Sections of IPC mentioned above. Therefore, all such surgeries are done in a clandestine manner and nobody comes to know of it.