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Advantages Of A Eunuch's Life

Every cloud has a silver lining. Beyond all adversity lies hope. It is said that 'When one door closes, another opens but often we look so long at the closed door that we do not see the one which has been opened for us.' Thus it is with eunuchs – though they suffer from extreme deprivation, Mother Nature has favoured them with a few bonuses, which are the result of their peculiar condition.

On the physical front, the lack of proper genitalia may be a deprivation for people like us but it has benefitted eunuchs in some way or the other. Generally, they do not suffer from either gynaecological problems like cysts, fibroids, cancer of the cervix or uterus etc or problems related to male genitalia like prostate cancer and enlargement, cancer of the testes etc. On an average, the life expectancy of a eunuch is around 14 years more than that of a normal person, all other things being equal.

Lord Krishna, in his religious discourse '*Bhagawad Gita*', has said:

अन्तवन्त इमे देहा नित्यस्योक्ताः शरीरिणः ।
अनशिनोऽप्रमेयस्य तस्माद्युध्यस्व भारत ॥18॥

The material body of the indestructible, immeasurable and eternal living entity is sure to come to an end; therefore, fight, O descendant of Bharata. (2.18)

य एनं वेत्ति हन्तारं यश्चैनं मन्यते हतम् ।
उभौ तौ न विजानीतो नायं हन्ति न हन्यते ॥19॥

Neither he who thinks the living entity the slayer nor he who thinks it slain is in knowledge, for the self neither slays nor is slain. (2.19)

वासांसि जीर्णानि यथा विहाय ।
नवानि गृह्णाति नरोऽपराणि ।
तथा शरीराणि विहाय जिर्णा-
न्यन्यानि संयाति नवानि देही ॥22॥

As a person puts on new garments, giving up old ones, the soul similarly accepts new material bodies, giving up the old and useless ones. (2.22)

अव्यक्तोऽयमचिन्त्योऽयमविकार्योऽयमुच्यते ।
तस्मादेवं विदित्वैनं नानुशोचितुमर्हसि ॥25॥

It is said that the soul is invisible, inconceivable and immutable. Knowing this, you should not grieve for the body. (2.25)

Life is a journey; ultimately all souls will unite and merge into super consciousness. However, they have to follow a path by being reborn time and again and



Nisha suffered a double whammy - she lost a foot in addition to being born a eunuch. This added hardship has given her a headstart on the road to salvation.

doing *karma*. According to the theory of reincarnation, taking repeated births is necessary in order to attain the ultimate objective of salvation. The travails faced by an individual in his/her life are the result of choices made by the soul in its progress towards this objective. After death, the soul is present in a stage of existence between lives. This period is normally between five to ten years.

When the soul is ready to take birth in a new life, it is directed to select the modalities of existence in that life, such as parents, the joys and sorrows to be faced in that life and surroundings. Each soul is free to choose its fate in the next life, which includes fame and fortune, challenges of health and wealth, physical and/or mental disabilities, fear and phobia, career, business, job, love, loan, family problems, foreign travel and all such major issues of life.

These choices are embedded in the subconscious. The soul enters the selected womb around four months and four days after conception. The choices made by it before birth have to be followed during the course of its life. In the case of eunuchs, the soul chooses to become devoid of gender and bear the extreme physical and mental hardship associated with this deprivation.

While there may be seeming divergence on the issue of suffering, whether self-inflicted or otherwise, as interpreted by different faiths, there is some confluence of thought on the result of undergoing such tribulation on the emancipation of the soul. It is generally thought that the greater the quantum of such suffering, the greater the progress on the path to redemption.

The choice of undergoing *illat* (physical pain), *jillat* (humiliation) and *killat* (penury) offers an opportunity for the soul to cleanse itself of *sanskar* or the cumulative consciousness of actions (whether appropriate or otherwise) accumulated over many lifetimes. The purging effect of experiencing such deprivation results in liberating the soul from this accumulated 'baggage' and infusing the requisite impetus in its progress towards salvation.

All religions maintain that undergoing tribulations in life is essential for redemption. For example, Christians observe Lent while Muslims observe *Ramadan*, both periods of fasting (hence deprivation) as undergoing voluntary tribulations towards progressing on the path to salvation. This is congruent with the philosophy that the more the challenges in life, the closer the soul comes to *moksha* (salvation).

Karmic misdeeds in past lives have to be atoned for, before the soul can progress towards salvation. If the soul has chosen to be reincarnated in the body of a eunuch in this life, then due to the cumulative effect of so many hardships of stigma, ostracism, physical and

mental abuse, poverty, humiliation and others borne during this life, it triumphs over many challenges in one life and gets a head start, so to speak.

The most fundamental aspect of undergoing tribulations, in order to progress towards salvation, is the attribute of willingness or choice of the soul to undergo them. Souls have to incur such deprivation and torture out of choice for the cleansing effect to be applicable to such existence. Where such existence is accompanied by an externalisation of the issues, with the intent of affixing the blame to external factors or others, it cannot serve the intended purpose of self-realisation and the purge of the cumulative consciousness. When most normal people attribute their troubles to others and blame them for their hardship, their souls are not participatory to this act of voluntary denial of comfort and pleasure and thus, lose out on the expiatory benefits of the deprivation and cannot progress on the expected path to salvation.

Eunuchs accept their fate in life and do not ascribe their misery to others in society or even to the Almighty. They face their lot in life with stoic composure, perhaps realising at a subliminal level that in doing so, they are crossing that first barrier in the numerous hurdles that a soul has to face in the achievement of its final goal of salvation.

However, hardship alone does not make the road to salvation easy. The soul has to be virtuous and follow the path of righteousness. The following few dictums make the path of salvation easier:

Ahimsa (Non-violence) – Cause no harm to living beings. This is the fundamental principle, from which stem all other principles. It involves minimising intentional or unintentional harm to any other living creature. ‘Non-violence’ is sometimes interpreted as not killing but the concept goes far beyond that. It also includes not harming or insulting other living beings, either directly or even indirectly, through others, respecting the views of others (non-absolutism and acceptance of multiple views).

Satya (Truthfulness) – A person who speaks the truth becomes trustworthy like a mother, venerable like a preceptor and dear to everyone like a kinsman. Given that non-violence has priority, all other principles yield to it, whenever there is a conflict. For example, if speaking truth will lead to violence, it is ethical to be silent or even tell a lie.

Asteya (Non-stealing) – *Asteya*, ‘non-stealing’, is the strict adherence to one’s own possessions, without desire to take another’s. One should remain satisfied by whatever is earned through honest labour. Any attempt to squeeze material wealth from others and/or exploit the weak is considered theft. Some of the guidelines for this principle are:

- (1) Always give people fair value for labour or product.
- (2) Never take things which are not offered.
- (3) Never take things that are placed, dropped or forgotten by others.
- (4) Never purchase cheaper things if the price is the result of improper means (e.g. pyramid scheme, illegal business, stolen goods etc).

Brahmacharya (Celibacy) – Control the senses, including the mind from indulgence. The basic intent of this vow is to conquer passion and prevent the waste of energy. Through this vow, the householder must not have a sexual relationship with anybody other than one's spouse.

One of the primary urges of all living beings is the desire to procreate – hence, the primeval impulse for sexual pleasure. Living beings indulge in this act for the fulfilment of the deep seated desire to pass on or continue their characteristics to the next generation, thus ensuring the survival of their genes, as dictated by Mother Nature.

The preclusion of this act results in extreme deprivation of a fundamental nature. This voluntary sacrifice by the soul results in freedom from an elementary form of ties that bind the soul to the material world, enhancing its spirituality.

Where sex is indulged in by eunuchs, it is dictated by the necessities of survival rather than the desire to extend their lineage. The onus of bearing the depravity of sexual liaisons involving eunuchs is more the responsibility of 'normal' people, who are the perpetrators, rather than the eunuchs themselves, who are most likely the victims of such acts.

Aparigraha (Non-possession or non-materialism) – In order to absolve people of further sinful acts emanating from this desire to acquire and possess, religion propagates the dictum of non-possession. Maintain

detachment from people, places and material things. Mere ownership of an object itself is not possessiveness; however being attached to it is possessiveness. The notion of possession is illusory.

The reality of life is that change is constant. Thus, objects owned by someone today will be the property of someone else in the future. The householder is encouraged to discharge his or her duties to people and objects as a trustee, without excessive attachment or aversion. For monks and nuns, non-possession is complete renunciation of property and relations including home and family.

Inadvertently, eunuchs adhere to the same principles.

- At the emotional level, they are devoid of attachments. They do not have bonds of blood except with parents and siblings. Often, they have painful relationships with either one or both parents and siblings.
- They do not have attachment to property, never being allowed to harbour such ambitions on account of extreme social prejudices.
- They do not have feelings of lust either, since they are deprived of a clear gender. Thus, they follow the path of celibacy by default.

The initial stretch on the path to salvation has to be initiated and completed through self-realisation and correction. This helps the soul to imbibe the spirituality and consciousness necessary to embark upon the journey towards salvation and enables it to develop the requisite qualities for emancipation. Once this stage is completed, the final stretch of this arduous

journey can only be accomplished under the guidance of a suitable '*guru*' or spiritual guide.

However, it is impossible for eunuchs to obtain the services of such *gurus* (not to be confused with the *gurus* of their bands) due to their marginalised existence on the fringes of society. Thus, they are restricted to experiencing religion at a basic level of ritualism and formalistic observance.

Structured, formal religion, steeped in rituals and adherence to mandated practices, is the first rung of the ladder of salvation. However, every soul has to pass through this before it can ascend to the higher levels of emancipation. By their adherence to the basic practices of religion, souls who have chosen the lives of eunuchs ascend this rung of the ladder and are subsequently ready to undertake the further steps necessary for their progress towards ultimate salvation.

Their future hopes do not go beyond their own selves. They have no children to feed and no reason to deviate from the path of non-possession and non-stealing. There may be some deviants on account of the surfeit of materialism around them but the majority of eunuchs follow the path of righteousness.

When there are no distractions of a life filled with artificial pleasures, then truth pervades the being. Their lives are a celebration of their spiritual journey towards salvation, though they may not consciously perceive it. This realisation usually dawns in a subsequent birth. They are set on a course and pursue it relentlessly.

One question remains – if being a eunuch is so rewarding, why did sages not desire a eunuch’s life, in order to proceed faster along the road to salvation? It is possible that their souls had already led previous lives as eunuchs and had been reincarnated as sages after progressing through that stage.

There is no evidence but it would appear that every soul needs to take at least one birth as a eunuch in its progress towards salvation. These deductions are based on the following observations:

The notion of possession originated in civilised history with the domestication of cattle, demarcation of boundaries for dwellings and storage of food/goods for future use. The recorded history of development of these traits is about 8,000-10,000 years. We may consider an average human lifespan to be about 40 years.¹ Then assuming a resting period of 5-10 years between lives, a soul on an average, has taken about 200 births, assuming that most of them have been as humans. The ratio of intersex population to the total population is 1.57 per thousand. It means that for every thousand births that a soul takes, it has to take 1.57 lives as a eunuch or once in about 600 lives.

We are still a few thousand years away from salvation. During the long trek on this path, though it may be the prerogative of the soul to select the type of trials that it

¹ It is only in modern times (post 20th century) that average lifespans have increased to their current levels. Prior to the advent of modern medicines and life support systems, the life expectancy was about the figure mentioned.

wishes to undergo during a particular lifetime and hence, the lessons that will be learned from that experience, it is nevertheless mandatory for the soul to undergo the cumulative experience of imbibing all the essential knowledge that is requisite for redemption. It is always easier and more enjoyable to experience pleasure and hence, probably more sought after during the initial phases of this long march of the soul.

However, along with repeated incarnations, resulting in the acquisition of more knowledge comes realisation of the fact that pleasure and pain are but two sides of the same coin and are inseparable. One cannot be experienced without the other following it. Thus, the lessons learned during a eunuch's lifetime are the complementary factor providing the necessary impetus for the journey of the soul and arguably, the more important since the experience is harder to assimilate. Perhaps, only when souls attain the necessary level of maturity are they presented with this rather singular opportunity to make the quantum leap in the journey towards the final goal.