

Orchidectomy / Gonadectomy

Orchidectomy (Gonadectomy)

When the female child has testes, then the parents feel the need to remove them. These testes have not been able to develop.

Photo of Gonadectomy

The surgical removal of the gonads (testes) is called a gonadectomy. A gonadectomy is often performed at some point before adulthood in AIS in order to avoid a small risk of cancerous changes.

In the 1950s/60s the testes usually remained in place - often they were not discovered. In the 1970s/80s there was a move towards gonadectomy, early in childhood, on the basis that testes would not be welcome in a female patient and would cause psychological problems. In the 1990s/00s the emphasis moved towards gonadectomy after puberty based on a perceived risk of tumours.

Gonadectomy : Pros and Cons

Early gonadectomy may undermine the rights of the children to know their own medical history, to give informed consent.

One lady said 'After my testis were removed 8 years back, I experienced a range of psychological symptoms including: hot sweats, depression, mood swings and a distinct feeling of being generally unwell; even though I was taking oestrogens. My depression was not due to my discovery of having AIS because the doctors had lied to me and I did not know.

Many a times there may not be a need to remove dormant testes in a girl's body. There is no hurry to do surgery unless it's a life-threatening situation.' Intersex is largely a psycho-social phenomenon and not a medical emergency and doctors should not feel they have to be the only people to advise parents.

Maha Nirvana Pooja – An Eyewitness Account

It was midnight, somewhere during the mid of August 2009 and the inhabitants of Tirunelveli city, Tamil Nadu were in deep slumber. A heavy downpour was lashing the city and late sleepers were rooted to their houses. In the cover of darkness a banquet hall in the city buzzed with a huge gathering. People were not there to celebrate a wedding or a regular function. In fact, the gathering at an odd hour of the night was not even of so-called normal people like us. Eunuchs had assembled there to perform a '*Maha Nirvana Pooja*' (mass liberation religious ceremony), in which a group of 'normal' people would undergo surgery and be converted to eunuchs.

The organizer of this pooja was a Guru 'Sumadhi', who had 69 fellow eunuchs in her group. Out of these 69 eunuchs 21 were made eunuchs through surgery. On this auspicious day, a dozen common people were willingly being converted to *hijra*hood, as per their wishes. These people had originally come from Salem, Madurai, Villupuram in Tamil Nadu, as also from the far away Varanasi District of Uttar Pradesh and even cosmopolitan Mumbai.

Well after midnight, Guru Suman and her fellow eunuchs performed the Maha Nirvana Pooja and inducted the "common people" to their community. They were given female names like Urmila, Seema, Deepa, Shilpa, Sangeeta etc. These people had already spent 6 to 7 months with the fellow eunuchs of Guru Sumadhi. This was a trial period for them before going in for the surgery, since the guru wanted to confirm whether these people could live the life of eunuchs. Once she was sure of it, the desirous people were told to go in for a surgical procedure for the removal of male genitals. They were told

about the dangers of the operation and after their concurrence; they were brought to Mumbai, where they underwent surgery for the removal of their genitals.

Before the operation, these people were told to perform a 40 day fast and follow some special rituals. They were made to stay in separate rooms during these 40 days and many restrictions were placed on them, including coming out of their rooms, looking in the mirror or use of any type of cosmetics (whether oil or powder). They were also required to have a bath at regular intervals and change clothes regularly. The Maha Nirvana Pooja is conducted on the 41st night after the completion of these 40 days of rigorous testing.

Not only the other disciples of the new initiates' own guru but also those of other gurus are invited to this ceremony. The pooja generally starts after midnight at around 1 am, to prevent normal people from watching the proceedings. First fruits, sweets and other pooja ingredients are offered to the Goddess. Subsequently, the idol is bathed with 2 to 3 litres of milk filled in 2 pooja *kalashes*. This ritual bathing of the idols is called as '*abhishek pooja*'.

After this, the new eunuchs (surgically created – in this case) are brought to the pooja (prayer offering) hall with full make up and wearing green sarees, with their heads and faces completely covered. They are made to sit in front of the Goddess and guru. At the time of performing pooja, the guru and her assistants are completely naked. This midnight pooja lasts for around an hour.

During the pooja, only the newly initiated eunuchs, the guru, along with 6-12 disciples are permitted in the pooja room. Once finished, the guru passes on the information to all those gathered outside the pooja room that the pooja is over and they can come inside.

As soon as other gurus and eunuchs enter the pooja hall, the main Guru pours the milk, which was kept in the *kalash*, over the head of the newly initiated eunuchs. This ceremony is called as '*abhisheka*'. After this, the initiates are shown mirrors for the first

time in forty days, to observe how beautiful they look as eunuchs. Then they are told to go to a nearby riverside road, after confirming that nobody is present. The milk *kalash* is given to the initiates, who walk towards the riverside. They are surrounded by 20-30 other eunuchs, so that no one should see them.

On reaching the river, the initiates pour the remaining milk into the river and take a bath in it. This is the final process of the *Maha Nirvana Pooja*, which is now complete. Through this *Maha Nirvana Pooja*, Urmila, Seema, Shilpa, Deepa and others have got *nirvana*, i.e. *mukti* (liberation) from the gender they disliked and are now part of the community of their choice. Now they are *pukka* (confirmed) eunuchs. This ritual is done for Hindu eunuchs only.