



Celibacy in Religion: Flesh is Weak and Spirit not particularly willing

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Date of Submission: 06-01-2023

Date of Acceptance: 19-01-2023

Abstract: Religions require celibacy from its adherents – that means life free of sex and free of masturbation. Now the fact is that celibacy is nearly impossible for most humans. Again most people are interested in sex, love and marriage. Hence only 1 in a 1000 gets interested in Religion. What is even worse is that out of 1 in 1000 who decide to become celibate, from all available evidences only 1 in 100 succeed in becoming truly celibate. Hence question is if Celibacy is necessary?

I. Introduction

Sex is an important human motivation. Indeed people pursue financial success to score well on sex. Sex is also the pathway to love, marriage and family. Of course sex can lead to perversities such as rape, pedophilia and harassment. But for most of humanity a controlled sex life can lead to fulfilment and happiness.

But religions go to an extreme in sexual control and insist on monks and nuns leading a celibate life – free of masturbation or sex. This is rather difficult. Firstly very people get interested in leading life free of sex. People are interested in having sex.

More importantly people who decide to stay away from sex or masturbation are not particularly successful in being celibate. The rate of sexual crimes among religious is cause for alarm. This paper explores on issues of sex and celibacy in context of religion.

Religion and Sexuality

While even secular society also places restrictions on expressions of sexuality, religions place far greater level of restriction on sexual activity. Secular societies prohibit rape, pedophilia, harassment and place restrictions on pornography, nudity, prostitution and incest. However societies are tolerant on sex among adult consensual partners, in love, marriage or even among friends. Masturbation is tolerated in secular societies and

even homosexuality is accepted increasingly. These restrictions seem reasonable and acceptable to most.

But religions place far greater degree of restrictions on expression of sexuality. Masturbation is prohibited. Sex is allowed in marriage but only for purposes of procreation. Contraception is prohibited. Monks and Nuns are required to lead an entirely celibate life without any sex at all or masturbation.

Let us compare 4 major religions of world and their view on sexuality.

Hinduism actually lists sex as one of major achievements of life in Dharma(Goodness), Artha (Money), Kama(Sex) and Moksha(Enlightenment). However Hinduism also prescribes various stages of life – Brahmacharya(Celibacy of Students), Grahastha(Married Person), Vanaprashtha(Forest Dweller) and Sanyasa(Renunciate).

Indeed there are texts of Hinduism which celebrate sex such as Vatsayana'sKamasutra. Indeed Khajuraho temples are full of sex. Most of Hindu Gods are married Ram-Sita, Shiva-Parvati, Vishnu-Lakshmi, Bramha-Saraswati, Krishna-Rukmini and Krishna having 16000 wives besides his fabled affair with Radha.

However Hindu monks were required to lead celibate life. And religious people are supposed to have sex only for procreation and not pleasure. Sex not meant for procreation is prohibited in Hinduism. Masturbation is of course banned.

Buddhism places some restrictions on sex for lay people as in they are not supposed to have illicit sex as in sex outside marriage. However Buddhist monks and nuns are supposed to refrain from all sexual activity including masturbation or sex. Buddha took to monastic life.

Islam however does not recognize or advocate life free of marriage. But Islam poses restrictions on masturbation. However Islam is lenient when it comes to men marrying up to 4 wives which is permitted. But Islam seems to be very restrictive when it comes to contraception. Prophet Muhammad, himself was married to 13 wives.



Christianity has to be divided into two strands – Catholicism and Protestantism. While both Catholicism and Protestantism permit sex within marriage for lay people, Catholicism insists on celibacy for monks and nuns. Catholicism prohibits masturbation and contraception. Catholicism permits only sex meant for procreation. Protestantism is more liberal and permits masturbation and contraception and some Protestants even permit sex outside marriage and Protestantism permits Sex meant for pleasure and not just procreation.

While religions place severe restrictions on sexuality, religions present unusual sexual behaviour among its founders and gods. For instance Krishna the Hindu God is supposed to have had 16000 wives. Muhammad the founder of Islam had 13 wives and also married 6 year old Ayesha. Jesus preached celibacy, but his relationship with Mary Magdalene is shrouded in secrecy.

Celibacy – Are they really Celibate?

Celibacy is unnatural. Almost 90% of men masturbate and perhaps priest do it too. Celibacy seems to be unnatural. In the movie Spotlight (2015) the voice of Richard Spie says “ Only 50% of Catholic priests are celibates. Many of them are having consensual sex with partners. In our 2016 novel Strange Gods: A Novel About Faith, Murder, Sin and Redemption, which I wrote with Msgr. Jack Myslinski, the character of Msgr. Matthew Ackerman says: The problem is being celibate. Celibacy turns us all into liars. ... The whole thing is built on mendacity. ... “

However if these studies cause you to believe that most priests are not celibate some other studies show that most priests are happy to be celibate. In a book by Monsignor Rossetti – ‘Why Priests are Happy’ says that contrary to secular opinion, most priests embrace celibacy as a positive aspect of their vocation.

Some would argue that celibacy causes more harm than good. For instance the requirement for celibacy is reason for paucity of priests in catholic church or even the lack of number of people who take up to celibacy among Hindus. Hence requirement for celibacy becomes an obstacle to religion.

Issue of sexual crimes among religious

In fact religious people committed to celibacy show a greater level of sexual crimes than the normal population. The Vatican examined cases of 3000 sexual abuse by priests between 2001 to 2010. In 2001, Pope John Paul II publicly

apologized for sexual abuse within Catholic church calling it contradiction with teaching and witness of Jesus Christ. Pope Benedict XVI apologised and met with victims. In 2018, Pope Francis accused of victims of fabricating allegations.

Australian Government’s enquiry found that 7% of Catholic priests were accused of abusing children. A German Bishops Conference revealed wide spread sexual abuse by German clergy. Pope Francis rejected an offer by top German bishop Reinhard Marx to resign over the Church’s “institutional and systemic failure” in handling child sexual abuse in the western city of Cologne. It revealed that 314 minors, mostly boys under the age of 14, were sexually abused there between 1975 and 2018.

In 2002, the Boston Globe revealed the massive scale of sexual abuse on children in the Boston diocese and efforts by the Catholic hierarchy to cover it up. The paper’s investigation was the subject of the Oscar-winning film Spotlight. In 2004, a church commission published a report requiring clergy to report suspicions of sexual assault. According to lawyers, more than 11,000 complaints have been lodged in the US by victims of priests. Dioceses have paid out hundreds of millions of dollars in out of court settlements.

Accusations of large-scale sex crimes in Ireland’s Catholic institutions go back decades, with the number of underage victims estimated at nearly 15,000 between 1970 and 1990 alone. Several bishops and priests accused of covering up abuse have been punished. ISKCON had its share of sexual abuse when 44 former students of these gurukuls filed a \$400-million (Rs 1,800 crore) lawsuit, alleging years of sexual, physical and emotional torture. The suit was filed in Dallas by high-flying Texas attorney Windle Turley, who had successfully sued a Catholic archdiocese in Texas for over \$50 million in sexual abuse cases last year. Turley believes that at least 1,000 children - some as young as three years old - were abused at the gurukuls. He has been quoted as saying that the abuse was of an “unthinkable” nature and included rape, sexual abuse, physical torture and emotional terror.

Sexual Abuse by Gurus

If ordinary priests are accused of sexual crimes, so are high profile gurus. For instance Asaram Bapu, was accused of rape in 2013. He is still in jail. So is his son, Narayan Sai, who was accused of rape and sexual assault. Maharishi



Mahesh Yogi was accused of sexual advances towards Mia Farrow by the Beatles in 1960s. Satya Sai Baba was accused of pedophilia in famous book Lord of the Air by Tal Brooke. Bikram the founder of Bikram Yoga has been accused of sexual crimes. Sant Rampal is accused of sexual crimes. Swami Muktananda has been accused of sexual crimes. It is safe to say that at least 50% of Gurus have some sexual scandals either hidden or known to people. Hence almost all Gurus are suspect.

Sex to Superconsciousness

Osho Bhagwan Rajneesh, despite his controversial image, hit it on target, in his controversial series of lectures – Sex to Superconsciousness in 1960s. He pointed out what should be obvious that most celibate people are obsessed with sex. He suggested that sex could be converted to love and that love used as spring board for Meditation. And Meditation be used to reach religious goals. However his ashram became a harem of sex, with sexual immorality, prostitution and drug abuse. His ashram became victim of law suits and his way of life resembles a brothel more than a religious institution. His way of sex also failed.

Moderation, Morality, Marriage, Masturbation and Marriage

In view of all this above the author has come to conclusion that since celibacy seems impossible, what is necessary is acceptance of Morality rather than Celibacy. In Morality Masturbation is permitted. Sex within Marriage is permitted. And moderation is recommended. Finally Meditation – Mindfulness Meditation of watching thoughts for 10-20 hours a week is recommended as a religious practice. This will bring to closure all this controversy around celibacy.

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