



## Newsletter Archives

The Psychology and Practice of  
Pleasure: Explorations in the  
Kama Sutra

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# The Psychology and Practice of Pleasure: Explorations in the Kama Sutra

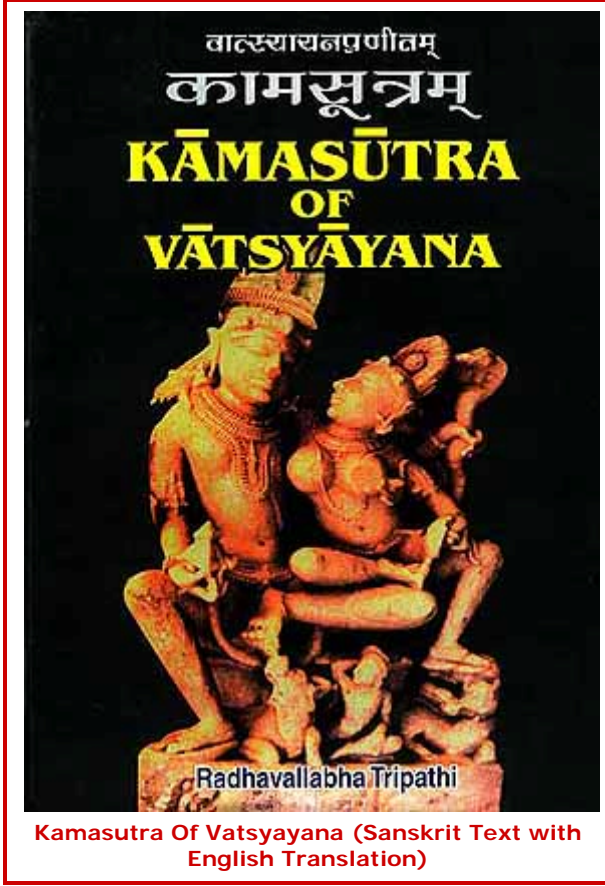
Article of the Month - September 2006

When the venerable Brahmin Shvetaketu, saw his mother being led away forcibly by another man, even as his father remained indifferent - saying that such unregulated behavior was the order of the day, the son was understandably incensed at the unjustness of it all, and decided to unravel before the world an authoritative scripture channelising man's animal instincts into a disciplined practice of pleasure.

Towards this end he undertook to rearrange the text originally presented by Nandi, the bull of Shiva, in a thousand chapters, which perhaps were too exhaustive for the human mind to comprehend.



Nandi: Vehicle of Lord Shiva



Shvetaketu abridged it into 500 chapters, and it was only later that Vatsyayana, the celebrated author of the Kama Sutra, condensed it further into the thirty-six chapters that exist today.

Thus, the intention of the Kama Sutra is to link pleasure with virtue, and it is all about not being a slave to sensual desire. In fact, it gives a comprehensive definition of the Sanskrit word 'Kama,' going much beyond its conventionally accepted translation as mere physical desire:

When the five sense organs – the ears, skin, eyes, tongue and the nose – presided over by the mind and the soul, derive pleasure from objects suited to each, such an inclination is called Kama. (1.2.11)

A significant observation here is that Kama is to be enjoyed from objects one is naturally inclined to. The Mahabharata also says:

The pleasure, the joy, that arises at the time of the physical senses and the mind and the heart enjoying their natural objects, is Kama. (Vana Parva 33.37)

## **Pleasure and the Spiritual Life:**

The Indian tradition believes that human life is but a spiritual journey, with each and every aspect governed by one or more of the following motives:

- 1). Dharma: Virtuous living.
- 2). Artha: Material prosperity.
- 3). Kama: Gratification of the senses.
- 4). Moksha: Liberation.

While the first three, mutually tied to each other, form a group and represent the aims of life, Moksha - the highest ideal, is independent and beyond them. All our actions are governed by one or more of the three motives, individually, or in combination. Thus says the Kama Sutra:

In Dharma, Artha and Kama, the preceding one is better than the succeeding one, i.e. Dharma is superior to Artha, which in its turn is higher than Kama. (1.2.14)

There are exceptions to this rule however:

Both for a king and the prostitute, material prosperity is the highest ideal, since their worldly sojourn is governed by it alone. (1.2.15)

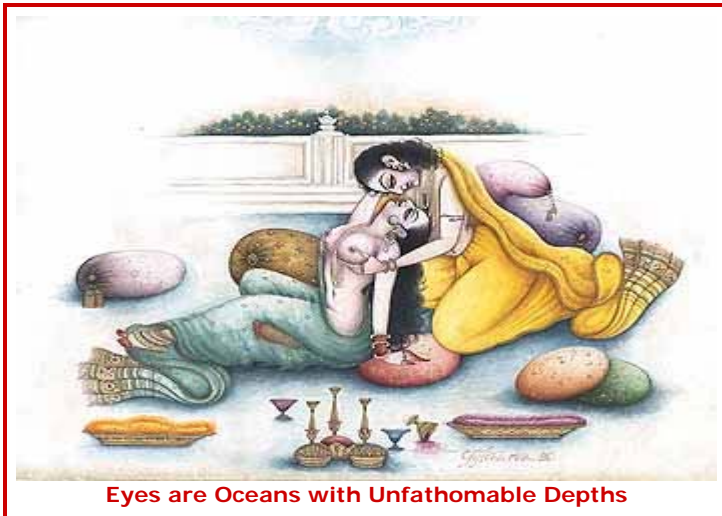
This seems particularly applicable to politicians governing our lives today. For those of us who are neither kings nor prostitutes, the golden rule is that whenever one motive is in conflict with one or more of the others, we have to choose that which safeguards the highest ideal. For example, when pursuing money, Dharma is not to be compromised, and when Artha and Kama are in discord, the latter needs to be sacrificed.

Thus we realize that Vatsyayana has the self-confidence to acknowledge the relative superiority enjoyed by the other ideals over the subject he is expounding. His ambition is not to establish Kama as an ultimate principle, but rather to make us realize its correct and relevant position in the sphere of human existence. Therefore, in the Kama Sutra, sensuality is not glorified in its own right, but given its rightful place in our lives.

## Protesting the Kama Sutra:

Ancient critics had two objections to the setting down of such a treatise dealing with physical love:

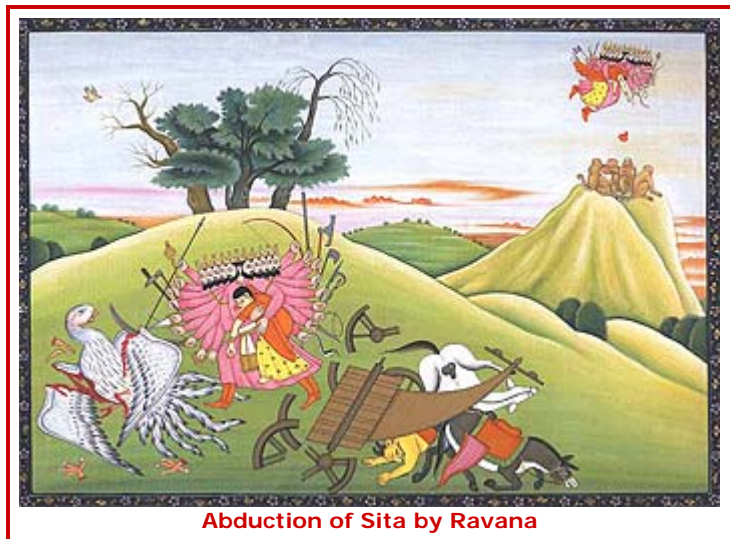
a). There is no need for a text to disseminate the nuances of Kama, since even animals and birds (what to say of humans) are found to be naturally inclined to it. (1.2.17)



Vatsyayana counters this by asserting that 'brute nature' is different from human nature. Animals in the wild mate randomly, and their females, who remain perpetually free and uncovered, are in the heat only for a specific fertile season of the year; and even in those moments, their lovemaking is crude and swift, not preceded by conscious thinking. For humans however, the act of physical love is a refined pleasure, treated as seriously as attaining prosperity or being

virtuous. Women and men need the Kama Sutra to learn the proper means to pursue this pleasure correctly. Thus, Vatsyayana elevates lovemaking to the level of both an art and science.

b). Physical pleasure should not be sought after because it interferes with the superior goals of Artha and Dharma. Its practice leads one to impurity and the company of loose characters. It generates lethargy and unrighteous behavior. There are several instances, like that of King Ravana, who even though had a large army for his protection, was blinded by Kama and met his end because of it. (1.2.32-36)



Replying to this, Vatsyayana says that Kama is as essential as food for the well being of the body. If it generates evils, it should be understood like the sometimes negative effect of food. Pleasure should be pursued with moderation and caution. One does not stop cooking because there are beggars who may deprive us of the food, nor does one restrain from sowing crops because deer may graze the fields once they ripen.

### **Ethical Harmony of the Three Aims of Life:**

Thus, with a philosopher's rigor, Vatsyayana establishes Kama as an independent branch of study, declaring physical desire to be an integral need of the body, to be satisfied in ethical rhythm with Artha and Dharma. One such balanced journey is as follows:



**The Seven Rounds (Sataphere)**

After having completed one's studies, a man who marries a maiden, following the canons of ancient scriptures (shastras), gains in Dharma and Artha. (3.3.1)

Here, Vatsyayana implies that one should observe celibacy while a student. (1.2.6), and, secondly, physical relations with one's legally wedded wife are best suited for the harmony of the three ideals. Paradoxically however, he dedicates a whole portion of his text to extramarital relationships, but enjoins that:

Only when the man is convinced that a woman is of easy virtue, and not one devoted to her husband, should he approach a married woman. (1.5.5)

One should never have an adulterous affair for mere gratification of the senses. (1.5.21)

He even gives a list of reasons why a man can indulge in such a relationship, which include monetary gains for an impoverished individual, or even that thus satisfied, the woman may help him gain favor with her powerful husband. Further, Vatsyayana

defines the kind of woman who is eminently approachable, but even that comes with a rider:

A lady who has had physical relations with five or more persons is approachable for relationship. However, even such a woman, if she be a relative, friend, or the wife of one who studies the Vedas or of a king, she is inviolable. (1.5.31)

He clarifies why, even though many practices are unadvisable, his treatise still describes them in detail:

One should not start practicing whatever is stated in this text. One has to apply his or her own discretion as well as consideration of time and place. Because of the privacy and fickleness of human nature, carnality has no limits. The purport of this scripture is to regulate sensual behavior and to stop human beings from excesses. (2.9.41-45)

After recommending marriage, Vatsyayana then waxes eloquent on ways in which the couple can enhance each other's pleasure.

### **Softening the Bashful Maiden:**

While approaching his bride, a man should not do anything forcibly. Women are like flowers, they are to be enticed tenderly. If treated vigorously, before their confidence is awakened with soft and steady measures, they may develop apathy towards coition. Hence, a man should behave with them only in a gentle, persuasive manner. (3.2.5-6)



**The First Time (Suhag Raat)**

All virgins listen to whatever their man speaks, but being bashful, do not even speak a little or respond to what he says. (3.2.17)

A man does not win over his new bride by either totally giving in to her or by going contrary to her wishes. He must, therefore, follow the middle path. (3.2.31)

A man, who does not woo his bride, thinking that she is excessively bashful, does not understand the real state of her emotions and is despised by her like a beast. (3.2.33-34)

Indeed, though she is herself looking forward to making love, her natural bashfulness restrains her. This has an immense psychological impact on the male psyche, inflaming his desire, because, as Vatsyayana rightly states:

A man takes an easily achieved woman lightly, and craves for the one not easily attainable. (5.1.16)

Men, by their very nature, scorn that which is easily available. (6.1.21)

### **Men, Pay attention to Your Woman's Desires:**

In the Kama Sutra, Vatsyayana asserts that each individual is unique, and a couple in a relationship works with two different temperaments, achieving a dynamic harmony taking into account each other's special needs:

A man, knowing the nuances of physical pleasure, should initiate proceedings only after ascertaining the delicacy, endurance and momentum of the woman's desire, and also his own strength. (2.7.34)

With his organ established in her temple of cupid (madan-mandir), the man should direct his strokes in various directions, and wherever she rotates her eyeballs with pleasure, that is the aim that should be targeted. This indeed, is the deep secret of female life. (2.8.16)

### **The Practice of Pleasure: An Equal Relationship**

Vatsyayana is refreshingly liberal in his outlook and constantly insists on a level playing field:

During lovemaking, whatever the man does to inflame desire, the heroine, reciprocating in a similar manner, should answer a blow by a blow, and a kiss with a kiss. (2.1.36)

As a woman moans at his blows, similarly should a man moan at her blows. (2.7.19)

### **Foreplay and The Nature of The Big O**

A significant issue taken up by Vatsyayana is whether the pleasure experienced by a man and a woman during a successful session of lovemaking is the same, or do they climax differently? He says:

How can there be a difference of effect between partners of the same species driven into action with the same aim?

However, there can be a difference in intensity and nature of the effect (experience gained by men and women at the end of union), due to the distinction of means adopted by both and because of personal notions (personality).

By difference of means is meant that while the man approaches lovemaking like an actor, the woman is the one acted upon. (Man is the agent, woman is the locus). Besides, there is also the natural distinction of ego. The male rejoices under the impression that he is handling her, and the female takes pleasure in being handled by him.

Objection: Therefore, the means of the man and the woman differ and hence so will the effect.

Reply: It is unjust to hold a difference of effect merely because one is the performer and the other is the performed upon. Different subjects working together can reach one and the same aim simultaneously. When two rams butt heads, they but receive a similar shock.

Objection: In the example of the ram, the two subjects are the same, while in the game of love, there is the difference of gender.

Reply: In essence a man and woman are not different, belonging to the same species of human beings.

Thus, men and women relish similar joy in physical union, reaching the same kind of pleasure. However, before commencing the actual act, a woman should be entertained with suitable foreplay so that she peaks before the male (2.1.30), since generally it is seen that men discharge before women climax (2.1.34), leaving the latter unfulfilled.

If her passion remains unfulfilled, and the man climaxes before her, she throws her hands in despair, perspires profusely, bites, does not allow him to get up, and kicks him. (2.8.18)

(To avoid this situation), the man before uniting with her, should excite her by applying his hand to her temple of cupid, much like the elephant waves his trunk, and only when she is thus softened and moist, should penetration be performed. (2.8.19)

Limb having become limp, eyes closed, bashfulness having gone and nestling the male organ tightly within her own – these are the signs indicating a woman's climax. (2.8.17)

## **Women on Top – The Key to Their Hearts**

When a couple is more deeply established in the relationship, it can start experimenting:

Due to heightened passion or temperament, there can sometimes be a reversal of roles. This however, does not last for long, and at the end, both revert back to their original natures. (2.7.23)

With a man exhausted by constant amorous labor, but not yet satiated, a woman, with his consent, should make him lie under her and help by assuming the man's role. (2.8.1)

Even a sensual woman, being naturally reserved and prone to hiding her emotions, when on top, out of passion lays bare all her heart's contents. A man should thus detect the nature of a woman's affection by her actions during the reversal of roles. (2.8.39-40)

## Quarrels and Lovers' Spats

Perhaps the most original, poetic and relevant contribution of the Kama Sutra is placing the role of quarrels and fights in a loving relationship in the correct perspective. He actually encourages a couple to engage in mock battles and arguments, but always asks the women not to take things lying down:

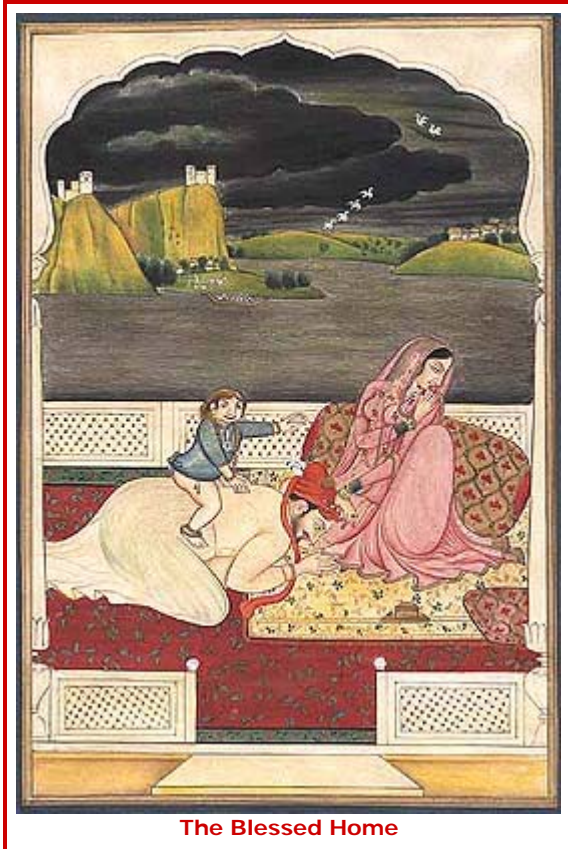
If her husband takes the name of a co-wife in front of her, or calls her by her rival's name, under no condition is the woman to tolerate it. She should immediately start a quarrel, weep, make all kinds of trouble, scatter her hair, hit him, and removing all her ornaments should fall down to the ground. (2.10.27)

With the woman throwing such ferocious tantrums, the man however should remain unperturbed and, lifting her back into the bed, say soothing words of conciliation, falling at her feet to appease her. (2.27.28)

Lashing out at whatever he says, her anger all the while rising, she should grab him by the hair, and raising his face, kick him twice or thrice on the head and the chest. Then as if going away from him, she should go up to the door, and then sit on the threshold, shedding tears. Under no condition is she to walk out of the door. After some time, when she realizes that his conciliatory words have reached their utmost, she should then embrace him, reprimanding him in a harsh and reproachful tone, but at the same time showing a loving desire to mate with him. (2.10.29-31)

For a woman, there can be a no greater reason for distress than a man calling her by another's name, rivaled perhaps only by a comment on her weight. According to Vatsyayana, even such a situation is redeemable, and the couple has to resolve the matter between themselves. It cannot be taken out of the house. Nobody has a role to play between them. In the best-selling book 'The Godfather,' the main character, refusing to mediate in the dispute between his daughter and son in law, put it thus: "Even the King of Italy dare not come between a husband and wife."

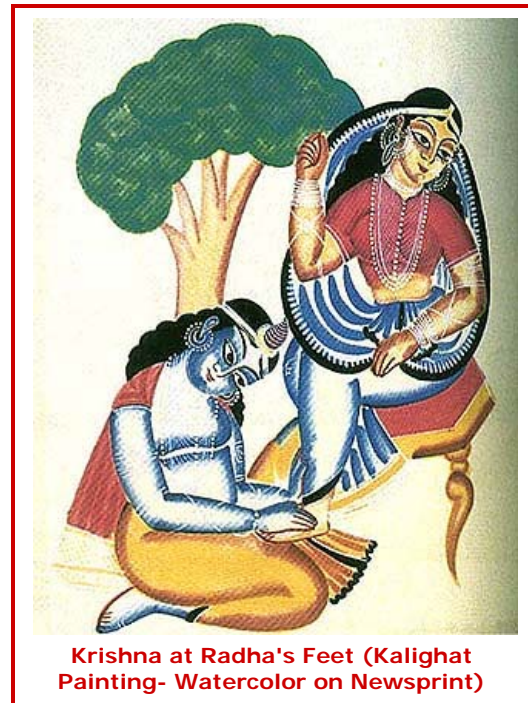
For erring men, the Kama Sutra recommends this evergreen rule:



**The Blessed Home**

A lady, however shy or furious she may be, cannot ignore a man falling at her feet, this is a universal rule (meaning not restricted by time, place or context). (3.2.11)

Indeed, this was the very manner in which Lord Krishna, even after having sported with another female the whole night, managed to extract forgiveness from his beloved Radha.



**Krishna at Radha's Feet (Kalighat Painting- Watercolor on Newsprint)**

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We hope you have enjoyed reading the article. Any comments or feedback that you may have will be greatly appreciated. Please send your feedback to [feedback@exoticindia.com](mailto:feedback@exoticindia.com).

This article by Nitin Kumar

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