

Finding Meanings in The *Kamasutra*

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Introduction

The *Kamasutra* as widely understood is not a text about sex position alone. Rather it is a book about the art of living – about finding a partner, maintaining power in a marriage, committing adultery, living as or with a courtesan, using drugs – and also about the positions in sexual intercourse.¹ The *Kamasutra* covers a variety of topics, among them ways of attaining the goals of life (*dharma*, *artha* and *kama*), finding and keeping a partner, sexual positions and techniques, adultery, and dealing with or as a courtesan (Danielou page 20-21). The *Kamasutra* was certainly one among the many erotic text to emerge from India. However it was not the first of its genre, nor was it the last. But what separates it from other text such as the *Kokashastra* (or *Ratirahasya*) and the *Anangaranga*, is the social and psychological narratives it contains while *Kokashastra* and *Anangaranga* concentrate primarily on the sexual positions². There are many translations available of text ever since The *Kamasutra* was first translated into English by Sir Richard Francis Burton in 1893 Many other translations have been composed over the past century by such people as Indra Sinha in 1980, and most recently by Wendy Doniger in 2002. Primarily for my seminar paper I have looked at Richard Burton(1883), Alan Daneilou(1994) and more recent translation by Wendy Doniger and Sudhir Kakkar(2002). In my seminar paper I am interested in finding meanings into the different sections of the book by mostly relying on primary sources i.e of the text available. In doing so I have also tried to incorporate my own views on subsequent chapters. The full details of the composition of the Hindu literary text, *Kamasutra*, is not fully known but is estimated to have been composed around the first century B.C.E. (Peterson 135). It was composed by Vatsyayana in northern India and written in the ancient Indian literary language, Sanskrit. There is very little on the background of Vatsyayana but it is believed that he was a Hindu religious man who was a part of the upper classes (Peterson 135). Vatsyayana had taken pieces of earlier works from the *Kamasutra* [Tradition of works and literature on erotics, love and pleasure (science of love)] to put together

¹ Many consider it a text that is about sexual positions, or a guide to make one skilful with love making. The *Kamasutra* does cover area of romance, but that is only a portion of what it has to offer to those who read it. This Hindu text covers all areas in the art of loving, from finding a partner, maintaining a marriage, committing adultery, living with courtesans, the use of drugs, and of course, positions of sexual intercourse (Doniger 2002:126)

² The *Kamasutra* is an ancient Hindu text composed by Vatsyayana. The *Kamasutra* is believed to be a manual of sexual intercourse positions by most western societies, but the *Kamasutra* is a guide that helps people to achieve moral and noble lifestyles. The text discusses the nature of love, family lifestyles, forms of marriage, duties of a wife, behavior a man and woman should exhibit, traits to consider when choosing a partner and ways to develop physical attraction (Doniger 2007:66).

what the western world terms the “paradigmatic textbook for sex” (Doniger 2003:18). The *Kama Sutra* does not claim to be an original work, but a compilation³ Vatsyayana states, on the other hand, that he himself had checked through personal experience the practices he describes⁴. Vatsyayana’s *Kamasutra* is an ancient Hindu text belonging to the *Kama Sastra* genre of literature (Rodrigues 152). The title, *Kamasutra*, is composed of two Sanskrit words: *kama* meaning “desire/pleasure,” and *sutra* meaning “treatise” (Doniger and Kakar 13). The *Kamasutra* covers a variety of topics, among them ways of attaining the goals of life (*dharma*, *artha*, and *kama*) finding and keeping a partner, sexual positions and techniques, adultery, and dealing with or as a courtesan (Danielou, page 20-21).⁵

As a treatise the text is divided into seven books of uneven lengths dedicated to different topics. The seven books are further subdivided into chapters, which contain the individual sutras (aphoristic formulations)

Book 1 deals with the place of *kama* (pleasure love) in a life of multiple and often competing and conflicting demands. It also constructs the everyday profile of the *nagaraka*, the man-about-town, members of the male elite of the city to whom the text was primarily addressed.

Book 2 describes different kinds of sexual practices.

Book 3 is about ways to court a girl for marriage.

Book 4 focuses on strategies to win and retain the love of her husband.

Book 5 elaborates on ways to win the love of another man's wife.

Book 6 is about courtesans and how best they can manage their lives of inherent complexity and risks.

Book 7, the last, provides instructions on esoteric sexual methods and devices.

Book 1 (General Remarks)

Introductory part of The *Kamasutra* begins with Salutation to *dharma*, *artha* and *kama*. Burton in his translation states that

³ The text must be seen in the development as a culmination of a long historical process of accumulating, editing, compiling, and theorizing and compiling into a manual(my own view)

⁴ The minute and subtle details and generalizations about different kinds of men and women, their physical features, and their cultural and sexual habits gives enough reason to believe that text genesis evolved due to observations of amorous acts carried out by diverse group of men and women engaged in amorous act for a prolong period.(authors own views)

⁵ According to Alan Danliou The *Kama Sutra* is not a pornographic work but an impartial and systematic study of one of the essential aspects of existence. First and foremost, it is a picture of the art of living for the civilized and refined citizen, completing in the sphere of love, eroticism, and the pleasures of life, those parallel treatises of politics and economy and ethics, the *Artha Shastra* and *Dharma Shastra*, to which it makes constant reference

in the beginning, the Lord of Beings created men and women, and in the form of commandments in one hundred thousand chapters laid down rules for regulating their existence with regard to dharma, artha, and kama.⁶ The first section of the book holds its importance from a sociological point of view since it gives an extremely vivid account of the sophisticated nagaraka or town dweller. It describes his dwelling, his daily hygiene, and his amusements, including the various types of social gatherings and religious festivals which he attended.

My Own views

First introductory chapter deals with general remarks in which three aims of life (Trivarga) Five conduct of the well-bred townsman (nagaraka) and reflections on intermediaries who assist the lover in his enterprises is explained. First chapter is significant as Vatsyayana attempts to elevate Kama to a more or less equal footing with the other two components of the Trivarga other being artha and dharma and establishes the need for everyone to learn art of lovemaking for cultivation of nature into culture. This section also throws open the debate that text was not gender biased however it is not quite clear how many women knew the text first hand. Social conditions in the times of composition of text also is a good reminder of the urban audience of the text who had time and luxury to indulge in such acts. It also tells us about the universal nature of the text as it stays clear of the varna debate

Book 2 (sexual Union)

Chapter 2 is titled "Ways of Embracing." These ways are divided into two categories, the first of which occur "when a man and woman have not yet made love together", and are intended to "reveal the signs of their love" (Doniger and Kakkar 40). The next three chapters discuss kissing, scratching and biting. The author argues that there is no specific order in which these three actions must occur, because they all involve passion; "Vatsyayana says: Everything at any time, because passion does not look before it leaps" (Doniger and Kakkar Page 42).

The 2nd book of the *kamasutra* which cries for more attention than any other is a stark reminder that all is not about sexual poses as only chapter 6 is dedicated to the poses. There are many hints in this section about the idea of ideal symmetry when it comes to making love. It further establishes that harmony is key to lovemaking and it is only realized through symmetry and typologies that matches in physical and psychological sense. This section also establishes the active role of female counterpart when they play the man's part in women body. The text in doing so establishes women agency when it comes to orgasm and their fulfillment in the process of lovemaking. In this chapter what I found is that messages in the verses are repetitive in nature and structure, at least in terms of practicing various types of love-making poses. Reason behind this could be perhaps since it is as a text where a student is supposed to read the original with enlightened commentary.

⁶ Dharma is acquisition of religious merit, and is fully while Artha is acquisition of wealth and property etc and Kama is love, pleasure and sensual gratification. (See page 8 Richard Burton)

Book 3 (Virgins)

Book three of the *Kamasutra* text, named Virgins, emphasizes exclusively on marriage, how to create confidence in a girl, on courtship and the display of the feelings by gesture and signs, things to be done only by the man on the acquisition of the girl, what a girl should do to win over a man and make him subject to her and forms of marriage.

There are five chapters in the text, Virgins, which focuses on the aspects of marriage. These five chapters are: (1) Courting the girl, (2) Winning a virgin's trust, (3) Making advances to a young girl, (4) Advances a man makes on his own, (5) Devious devices for weddings.

Vatsyayana clearly says that women should be of noble family and same class and age difference should be of 3 years between bride and bridegroom. It is clear from the text that his description of the types of marriages agrees with the standard eight listed in other works the only way he differs with them in suggesting a gap of as little as three years between the ages of the bride and bridegroom. However this is not all that is required for courting a girl.

But a man who has good qualities but no money, or who has indifferent qualities but no opportunities, or who has money but is a neighbour, or a man who is dependent on his mother, father, and brothers, or who is regarded as a child and welcomed as a guest, should not court a virgin, because he will not get her (Doniger and Kakkar page 84)

In this book the analysis given in the following section of the various types of marriage and of the ways of approaching a bashful bride, however, is truly remarkable. Although his description of the types of marriages agrees with the standard eight listed in other works, he differs with them in suggesting a gap of as little as three years between the ages of the bride and bridegroom rather than the ratio of one to three, and in suggesting that the gandharva or marriage by mutual consent is the best type of union. This section also contains an interesting list of games to be played by a suitor and a young girl, but the games are inadequately explained in the translation.

Book Four (wives)

Book 4 in the the *Kamasutra* is all about wives and that is the main focus of this article. Book Four consists of two chapters and within the two chapters are eight topics. These topics include: The Life of an Only Wife, Her behaviour during his absence, The Senior Wife, The Junior Wife, The Second-hand Woman, The Wife Unlucky in Love, Women of the Harem, and A Man's Management of Many Women. This chapter categorizes women in 4 types i.e only wife, co wife, The junior wife, second hand women or widow. Vatsyayana gives these reasons for polygamy among ordinary men, since the powerful, the rich townspeople, kings, and so on, do it to show off. From a social point of view, Vatsyayana generally conceives of two wives for the ordinary citizen and explains the duties of the chief and younger wife. (Danielou, page 303)

The fourth section lays down a rather strict code of behaviour for the wife. However, she is granted some independence, notably in carrying out economic affairs in her husband's absence. Vatsyayana relegates the remarried widow or divorcee, punarbha, to a rather lowly position. In this section Man's freedom in choosing his partner and wives is quite clear

and he is endowed with variety. Classification of women in different category hints at lower status of women and their acceptance.

Book 5 (Other Men's Wives)

Book 5 revels in understanding the nature and psychology of women. Vatsyayana is of opinion that women should be judged by their conduct, by the outward expression of their thoughts, and by the movements of their bodies. This particular section of the book clearly states that the reason for having affairs with the wives of other men have already been discussed so its only a matter of choice for the seeker to pursue women whom he desires. It is categorically stated that a man must consider, from the very beginning, whether such women can be won and be sure about her availability. The text discusses the importance of its practicality when it states that men are generally successful with women: a man who knows the text, a good storyteller, a man who has been close to the woman from childhood, a man in the prime of youth, a man who can gain a woman's trust by engaging her in such things as games, a man who carries out her commands, a good conversationalist, a man who does what the woman likes, a man who used to be the messenger of another man, a man who knows a woman's vulnerable spots a generous man who loves picnics and theatrical plays, a man so strong and hot that people call him a bull, an impetuous man, a brave man, a man who surpasses her husband in learning, good looks, good qualities, and enjoyments, a man who dresses well and lives well. (Doniger and Kakkar page 107) in similar manner it is also established in the text about the women who are to be won easily

A woman who stands at the door; a woman who looks out from her rooftop porch onto the This section talks about art of seduction and committing adultery and polishing their love games so that it is easier to pursue women of one's own desire. Various psychological aspect of male and female counterpart is dealt in this section so that it is easier to take control of their affairs. Text ability to situate kings and officials at moral platform also calls for introspection but alternative means are also suggested in order for them to access them in their private realm.

Book 6 (Courtesan)

Book 6, about courtesans, was prepared by Vatsyayana from a treatise on the subject that was written by Dattaka, for the women of Pataliputra (the modern Patna), some two thousand years ago. (Burton, Page 135). Richard burton in his translations mention that the details of the domestic and social life of the early Hindoos would not be complete without mention of the courtesan⁷ and he think so because Part VI is entirely devoted to this subject. He draws the comparison of the treatment given to courtesan in east and west where he points out that west treated prostitute with brutality and contempt and east considered courtesans as a part and portion of human society so long they behaved themselves with decency and propriety (Burton, page 135)

⁷ Vatsyayana makes a distinction between courtesans (ganika) and prostitutes (veshya). Courtesans are women exceptional for their beauty, their manners, and their knowledge. They have a place in society. Even kings treat them with respect (Danielou, Page 76)

The following section dealing with courtesans are notable for their psychological insight and strongly manipulating spirit adopted by Courtesan in the business surrounding money. The major portion of the advice given to courtesans concerns ways of extorting money from lovers. Various categories of courtesan not only establishes the taxonomy but wider acceptance of women of such nature in society. However to suggest that every courtesan enjoyed same status and followings would be devious. It's quite clear that there was hierarchy in terms of their acceptance.

Book 7 (Erotic Esoterica)

The last section of the *Kamasutra*, Book Seven, deals with "erotic esoterica" (Doniger and Kakkar 233) or "occult practices" (Danielou 487). Book Seven consists of two chapters, "Making Luck in Love," and "Rekindling Exhausted passion," each of which is made up of three sub-divisions (Doniger and Kakkar 233-242).

The final section suggests reclamation of unrealized potential of youth through cosmetics, love charms, aphrodisiacs, magical drugs, and methods for increasing the size of the genital organs. However its suggestions carries the burden of advice taken from Specialized person. This part is not suited to a common person given the esoteric nature of many of its suggestions. This testifies the nature of the text being incomprehensible in its entirety.

Final Conclusion

In a nutshell, the book's various expositions comes from the author's personal experience of and his well-read study of practices of carnal pleasure. Book sets its agenda by putting the narrative within the context of a highly stratified caste society with little to no social/economic/spiritual/political mobility. However in the midst of all these limitations, Vatsyayana through his work the *kamasutra* elevates the society at least from the ethical and moral sphere to sphere of carnal pleasure of spiritual and cultural nature where pursuits of Kama is humanized to a larger extent. It handles many aspects with socio cultural point of view i.e only one out of seven parts discusses "Sexual Union" while the rest focuses on more cultural issues and etiquette. The text gives a detailed description on several aspects on practices related with sex, love and marriage. The text also gives prescriptions about the highest ideal/potential one can work towards. However its not the general standard that was actually lived by but the standards a person was meant to aim for.

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