

THE KAMASUTRA

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 what the western world terms the “paradigmatic textbook for sex” (Doniger 2003:18). Vatsyayana directs the reader’s attention towards the promotion of the greater whole. “He made this work in chastity and in the highest meditation, for the sake of worldly life, he did not compose it for the sake of passion” (Kakar 7.2.57). Since works from the Kamasutra were not easily accessible, Vatsyayana wanted to summarize these works into one. The *Kamasutra* is the aphoristic summary of the Kamasutra and since *sutras* precede the *sastras* in Indian history, it is given more religious authority than the Kamasutra (Doniger 2001:82). Hence the name *sutra*, which literally means a “thread of thoughts and pages” are put together in such a way to form a “string” of meaning (Doniger 2001:82). Another example of this type of literary composition consists of the literature on *dharma*, *The Laws of Manu* which is part of the Dharmasastras [Hindu legal treatises on moral, ethical and social laws. To get a further understanding on the Dharma Sastra texts in comparison to the *Kamasutra*, see Rocher (1985)].

The *Kamasutra* was first translated into English by Sir Richard Francis Burton in 1893 and the majority of the English world is familiar with the text through this translation. 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. People of today have a misconception of

what the *Kamasutra* truly delivers in terms of its contents. Many consider it a text that is about sexual positions, or a guide to make one skilful with love making. The *Kamasutra* does help in this 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). Other authors after Vatsyayana composed similar texts to that of his *Kamasutra*. During the 11th century a man named Koka Pandit composed the *Rati Rahasya* [Koka Pandit physically engaged in the arts of love, and therefore was able to give a more extensive study with his personal endeavours in the *Rati Rahasya*] based on Vatsyayana's *Kamasutra*. Then a few centuries after, another man named Kalyanmalla in the 15th century composed the *Ananga Ranga* [Kalyanmalla had written the *Ananga Ranga* originally for the benefit of his own master, Lad Khan, who was a Muslim nobleman] which is based off the other two texts (Thomas 75). All three of these texts are highly regarded for its contents on love and its pursuit in life.

Within Hindu society and tradition, the *Kamasutra* is generally read by males who are a part of the twice-born (*dvija*) class in their second stage of life, that of the householder (*grhastha*), which is initiated with marriage (*vivaha*). Within this stage of life, the male must pursue and fulfill the goals that are prescribed for the householder. These goals are *dharma* (religious duties, morality, social obligation—the spiritual), *artha* (skill, attainment of wealth—political and economic welfare), and *kama* (desire/attachment—love and pleasure). These are what are known as the *trivarga*, and Vatsyayana generates a form of hierarchy with these three aspects of the *trivarga* (Rocher 521-522). Unlike *kama*, the texts that are associated with *artha* and *dharma* to fully understand and obtain the meanings of each, are laid out in the Dharmasastra and the Arthasastra [This text was written by Kautilya with its focus upon pursuing the attainment of material success for householders. Traditionally it was intended to help aid a king in his role and guidance of ruling a kingdom. To get a

further understanding on the Artha Sastra in comparison to the Dharma Sastra and *Kamasutra*, see Rocher (1985)]. Notice the difference between the three goals and the texts that are generally associated with it. The *Kamasutra* is not a *sastra* because Vatsyayana asserts that the actions of *kama* comes naturally, where *dharma* and *artha* must be developed and learned (Rocher 522). According to Sir Richard Burton's translation of the *Kamasutra*, "[h]e should acquire learning in his childhood; in his youth and middle age he should attend to *artha* and *kama*; and in his old age he should perform *dharma*..." (5).

Throughout the householder's stage of life, it is the goal of *kama* and *artha* that are the primary concerns and in order to prosper in society one must pursue these goals relentlessly. As a result, this stage is the most crucial aspect of the life of a householder; to be able to cultivate the art of love to have children and to obtain wealth and power to leave for the children after the completion of this stage (Ostor 110).

Originally, according to traditional lore, the *Kamasutra* contained thousands of chapters, and over time it was reduced down to what it is considered to be "thirty-six chapters, in sixty-four sections, in seven books, consisting of 1,250 sutras" (Kakar 1.1.4-23). The written work of the *Kamasutra* is not composed in such a way that it resembles a rule book, where each rule is numbered and one must follow from one step to the next. The text is written along the lines of a work of dramatic fiction and underneath all the sexual content and details of married life it appears to take on the characteristics of classical Indian drama (Doniger 2003: 20). The *Kamasutra* therefore consists of characters whose sex lives are used to demonstrate the appropriate behaviours to be undertaken by the householders. The man and woman whose lives are illustrated throughout the text are called the hero (*nayaka*), the heroine (*nayika*), and the men who assist the hero are termed the libertine (*pitamarda*), pander (*vita*) and clown (*vidushaka*)

(Doniger 2001:88 and Doniger 2003:20). Like most classical Indian dramas as noted above, the *Kamasutra* is composed of seven acts. Each act depicts the different phases of the hero's life. Act one is an introduction into the text giving a general idea of love and its involvement in the lives of men and women. Act two is an in-depth discussion on the beginnings of sexual techniques. Act three describes the process of acquiring a potential wife and engaging in marriage. Act four is the section in which the text describes the proper conduct of a wife and her roles in a marriage. Act five depicts how a male goes about seducing other women and other men's wives. Act six is the exploration of various women, more specifically those who are courtesans. Finally, act seven is the exposition of the male exploring different aphrodisiacs and magic spells as a means of attracting others to himself.

Throughout the text, there are a total of sixty-four chapters [The *Kamasutra* is not entirely composed of prose but also includes several *loka* verses which are cited at the end of each chapter. These *loka* verses comprise about a tenth of the total text, see Kakar (2002)]. Within the Indian culture, sixty-four is considered to be a sacred number, somewhat of a natural number. Hence the sixty-four various sexual positions or arts, depicted in the text (Kakar xxiii). Vatsyayana believed that there are eight different ways of making love, and within those eight there are eight different positions totalling sixty-four forms of the art on love. The *Kamasutra* does not only prescribe how the male should act throughout the householder stage in search of *kama*, but it also prescribes duties and actions of how a female should act as well. These sixty-four forms of art in which the female is encouraged to perform include, singing, dancing, cutting leaves into shapes, arranging flowers, playing water sports, making costumes, the science of strategy (Kakar 1.3.15) and many more. Therefore, Vatsyayana suggested that women should at one point be encouraged to read the *Kamasutra*, “[a] woman should do this before she reaches the prime of her youth, and she should continue when she has been given away, if her husband wishes it” (Kakar 1.3.2).

In total, about one-fifth of the text is committed to the art of love making and sexual pleasure, while the rest is guidance for males and females in their relationships and relationships of that with others. It has helped those who are in the householder stage of life on their pursuit to fulfill the goal of *kama*. Vatsyayana gave a positive definition of *kama* in which,

“[p]leasure, in general, consists in engaging the ear, skin, eye, tongue, and nose each in its own appropriate sensation, all under the control of the mind and heart driven by the conscious self. Pleasure in its primary form, however, is a direct experience by the sensual pleasure of erotic arousal that results from the particular sensation of touch. A man learns about pleasure from the *Kamasutra* and from associating with the circle of men-about town” (Kakar 1.2.11-13).

Although today in Western society, people still consider the *Kamasutra* to be solely based on depictions of sexual endeavours; those who follow tradition will find that the *Kamasutra* is a text of useful insight and guidance on their pursuit of love and pleasure. In summation, the fundamental effect one might feel while reading and following the *Kamasutra* is an overall experience of *sukha* (happiness).

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64 arts

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