

THE DHARMA OF KĀMA

Kāmasūtra's Morality of Integrated *Puruṣārtha*

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1. Introduction

Sexuality has been one of the biggest human preoccupations, hence the usage of several sexual analogies to understand the world around us. For instance, ancient cults believed rain to be the seminal seed of the heavens, and the Earth's seasonal cycles were compared with menstruation in women.¹ Sexuality has commanded a significant share in the human discourse of every century, either in the eagerness to explore it, or through fervent attempts to define it, or in the struggles to suppress or sublimate it. If the beginnings of literature in the West saw sexuality embellished in erotic themes of Homer, Hesiod and Ovid, the ancients of the East were no less enthusiastic in their amorous dispositions.

Taoism, a major influence on the Chinese views on sex, subtly integrates ethics with sexuality,² by underlining that sexual coition is an act of complementary participation, with a harmonizing intent, and not one where each partner aims for his or her sexual emancipation alone. The ancient *tāntric* texts cannot be fully grasped without a perspective of sexuality. Worshipping the phallus, not just as an image of the male ego but a representation of earth's potency itself,³ is a popular cult practised by Śaivaite sects that trace its lineage to the *tantras*. In the R̥gveda, *parāhatā*, a word for tilling the earth, is explained with connotations insinuating a sexual longing in the wetness of moist earth.⁴ The Aṭharvaveda contains

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¹Clifford Bishop, *Sex and Spirit*, London: Duncan Baird Publishers, 1996, 16.

²Taoism believes the human body contains *yin* and *yang* essences; *yin* predominating in the female and *yang* in the male, and intercourse brings about a balance, consequently leading towards a peaceful life; see Vern L. Bullough, *Sexual Variance in Society and History*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1976, 282.

³Thomas Moore, *The Soul of Sex: Cultivating Life as an Act of Love*, New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1998, 42.

⁴Ivo Fiser, *Indian Erotics of the Oldest Period*, Praha: Universita Karlova, 1967, reprint ed., New Delhi: Gaurav Publishing House, 1989, 44.

spells to selectively secure or destroy one's virility.⁵ In the Chāṇḍogya Upaniṣad the sexual act is compared to a sacred sacrifice. The Śatapata Brāhmaṇa correlates the construction of the sacrificial altar with heterosexual union; the altar as the woman and the fire as her male counterpart and the overall rite as an embrace of the two; and the kindling of the sacred fire using friction-sticks as coition between eternal lovers.⁶ Scriptural sexuality reflected in social life as well – the Vedic Indians embodied a sexual openness in their social attitude. Sexual life in Vedic India was predominantly heterosexual, yet other so called perversions like homosexuality, sodomy, oral coition, etc., were also in practice. Incest was depicted as a matter of fact, especially portrayed through the mouthpiece of Vedic gods, while premarital intercourse was accepted and extra-marital relations were practised widely. Virginity does not seem to be mandated of women at the time of marriage.⁷ It was in this melting pot of sexuality that Mallanāga Vātsyāyana lived to create the *Kāmasūtra*,⁸ which, through a subtle integration of sexuality with moral values and traditional tenets, promptly serves to inculcate sexual maturity in its age.

2. Context of the *Kāmasūtra*

Vātsyāyana was not an Epicurean in any sense, yet he was no puritan either. While his hedonism was buoyed by humanistic inclinations, it was also weighed down by a diligence towards morally conducive conduct. He firmly situates his work in the socio-religious context of his times. Vātsyāyana lived in a society, the boundaries of whose sexual traditions were constantly at risk of being pushed by virtue of its diverse practices. He must have pondered the naked indulgence of the society into sexual

⁵B. Kuppuswamy, *Elements of Ancient Indian Psychology*, New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1985, 237.

⁶Fiser, *Indian Erotics of the Oldest Period*, 109.

⁷For detailed discussion with examples see Fiser, *Indian Erotics of the Oldest Period*, 45-80; Also see Haran Chandra Chakladar, *Social Life in Ancient India: Study in Vātsyāyana's Kāmasūtra*, New Delhi: Cosmo Publication, 1984, 4 and 177; For instances of incest amongst Vedic gods, see *Ṛgveda* X.10, *Ṛgveda* X.61.5.9 and *Ṛgveda* X.162.5

⁸The author uses Vātsyāyana, *The Complete Kāma Sūtra: The First Unabridged Modern Translation of the Classic Indian Text by Vātsyāyana Including the Jayamangalā Commentary from the Sanskrit by Yashodhara and Extracts from the Hindi Commentary by Devadatta Shāstrā*, trans. Alain Daniélou, Vermont: Inner Traditions India, 1994, as the main translation reference as well as the source for verse level quotations.

matters which coupled with creativity and lustful hunger would unfailingly seek new frontiers of experience. His concern is laid out in his own words, where he says,

Passion feeds on varied practices. Variety fosters mutual attraction. [For instance] the courtesan is interesting to an erotic man due to her [various] talents...⁹ passion knows no rules, nor place, nor time...¹⁰ the fantasies a man invents under the effect of erotic excitation are not imaginable even in dreams...¹¹ moral objections do not resist the mounting of passions.¹²

Hence he created the *Kāmasūtra* in an attempt to curb the inordinate ballooning of sexuality and to lead it towards harmonizing human nature, aimed at ensuring well-being of the society through a complementary integration of individual as well as societal prerogatives.

His vision is of a society that functions harmoniously without undue suppression – one that recognizes and pursues its ends while never losing the bearing on its limits. Vātsyāyana lived at a time when great cities with economic prosperity thrived across the Indian heartland,¹³ and hence, it became imperative to re-establish the ethical boundaries of communal living in accordance with the changing value systems. The *Kāmasūtra* by virtue of its systematic socio-ethical directives endeavours to provide a firm base to a world of shifting moral grounds.

3. Sexual Insight with Ethical Outlook

The *Kāmasūtra* is a widely misinterpreted text, mainly owing to current marketing strategies, who, in their attempt at glorifying glamour and frenzy of sensual tumult, have ended up relegating the didactic image of *Kāmasūtra* into a mere sex-manual. It is a manual on sex, nevertheless, but not one of pornographic nature. The *Kāmasūtra* does not sensationalize sex anymore than a book on the culinary arts being seen as advocating gluttony. It is, in essence, a codification of the various sexual themes that have remained relevant in every society throughout the course of history. Vātsyāyana’s treatise, in effect, stands at the confluence of pleasure and morality, with a meticulous eye towards traditional compliance and scientific systematization.

⁹Vātsyāyana, *The Complete Kāma Sūtra*, 2.4.25, 135.

¹⁰Vātsyāyana, *The Complete Kāma Sūtra*, 2.3.2, 120.

¹¹Vātsyāyana, *The Complete Kāma Sūtra*, 2.7.32, 166.

¹²Vātsyāyana, *The Complete Kāma Sūtra*, 5.1.44, 317.

¹³For details see Chakladar, *Social Life in Ancient India*, 148.

Kāmasūtra is a book that looks upon sex as a necessary, yet not sufficient, condition in the life of the ideal *grhstha*, focusing not so much on value appreciation of sexual matters as it does on guiding the householders' mind towards a cautious, disciplined, and morally compliant experience of sexuality. For instance, in part I chapter II, Vātsyāyana mentions:

The development of the transcendent aspect of human love in the couple, together with mutual progress, is not possible for animals, birds, or insects. Men who do not understand the ultimate meaning of sexual pleasure behave like animals... Man's nature is not only animal, and he may not follow his desires at will, like a beast. Man must keep his aims before him: virtue, material success, the begetting of sons, and the growth of his family... [Also,] animals and birds make no difference between brother and sister, mother and father, etc., and their life as a couple is not for life.¹⁴

Furthermore, Vātsyāyana chooses as his subject the individual exclusively involved in the social stream of life, namely the *nāgaraka*, the well-bred well-endowed householder citizen along with his familial counterpart – his one or many legitimate wives – and interludes with other participants in the social fabric like prostitutes, kings, ministers, messengers, maids, nurses, etc. Vātsyāyana's exclusive focus on the *ganikā* – the beautiful, intelligent, and well educated courtesan – and her professional quiddities, though raises questions on his compliance towards a moral and cultural framework, is nevertheless an important signifier towards his social and material aspirations. The extant of the *Kāmasūtra*, seen with the *nāgaraka* on the one side and the *ganikā* on the other provides it with a comprehensive baseline for its intended signification of *kāma* and *artha*. Furthermore, Vātsyāyana is categorical in excluding the pre- and post-*grhstha* stages from the purview of his doctrines. According to him, “Old age must be dedicated to the practice of virtue and spiritual pursuit [*mokṣa*]... [and] celibacy is recommended during the period of study, for the acquiring of knowledge.”¹⁵

Hence, it can be seen that the *Kāmasūtra* attempts to focus exclusively upon societal beings for whom sexuality is an integral part of conducting their lives, and attempts to impress upon them the need to approach pleasure with the attitude of a connoisseur and not like a starving man who gives more importance to the quantity of food rather than its

¹⁴Vātsyāyana, *The Complete Kāma Sūtra*, 1.2.17-20, 33-37.

¹⁵Vātsyāyana, *The Complete Kāma Sūtra*, 1.2.4-6, 26.

quality. In the words of Kochuthara one may, in this context, assert that the “*Kāmasūtra* is not a treatise on hedonistic sexual pleasure, but a treatise on culturing sexuality.”¹⁶ The aspect of cultured approach is duly highlighted when Vātsyāyana categorically lays down,

One cannot give oneself over to pleasure without restrictions. One’s activities must be coordinated taking due account of the importance of virtue and material goods... The lewd man is vain. He undergoes humiliations, does not inspire trust, and attracts people’s scorn.¹⁷

Therein, for Vātsyāyana, lies the elevating of experiencing pleasure from an animal level to a human level, and as a moral consequence of which prevents one from giving oneself over to an exaggerated sexual life and hence saves the individual and his or her relations from getting destroyed.¹⁸ Balancing the pursuit of pleasure with moral abidance is the ideal conduct: “Wise men choose ways of acting that allow them to achieve the three aims of life without letting the pursuit of pleasure lead them to ruin.”¹⁹

4. *Trivarga* as the Integrated *Puruṣārtha*

Kāma, inasmuch as embodying the feeling of desire, can be viewed as the base of every intentional human drive. Desire, then, becomes a necessary presupposition to any and every end that is in the purview of human pursuit. In effect, even moral behaviour or its consequent liberation cannot manifest without first being preceded by a desire for them. Hindus, therefore, acknowledge *kāma* as one of the *trivargas* – the triumvirate of the ends of life – whose fulfilment leads one to *mokṣa*, the final *puruṣārtha* in both a literal and metaphysical sense. The greatest of authorities acknowledge the high pedestal of *kāma* – Manu subscribes to *kāma* as a *puruṣārtha* but subjugates it to dharma at all costs, while Kauṭilya places *artha* in an exalted status. The prudence of Vātsyāyana, though, sees it differently. In part I chapter II, he starts with an affirmation of the importance of *kāma*, while concurrently subsuming it in an integrated *trivarga* framework,

Sexuality is essential for the survival of man, just as food is necessary for bodily health, and on them depend both virtue and

¹⁶Shaji George Kochuthara, “*Kāma* without Dharma? Understanding the Ethics of Pleasure in *Kāmasūtra*,” *Journal of Dharma* 34, 1 (January-March 2009), 69-95, 91.

¹⁷Vātsyāyana, *The Complete Kāma Sūtra*, 1.2.32-33, 42.

¹⁸Vātsyāyana, *The Complete Kāma Sūtra*, 1.2.34, 42.

¹⁹Vātsyāyana, *The Complete Kāma Sūtra*, 1.2.40, 44.

wealth... [However] one cannot give oneself over to pleasure without restrictions. One's activities must be coordinated taking due account of the importance of virtue and material goods... Whether one pursues the three aims, or two, or even one, the achievement of one of them must not be prejudicial to the other two.²⁰

He recognizes the interplay between the three *trivarga* components, with dharma, *artha* and *kāma* having an importance not of its own standing but with reference to successful and congenial realization of harmonious social order, towards which the *grhstha*, owing to his productive and regenerative responsibility, may be seen as a prime contributor. He avoids the fallacy of unilateral view, instead arrives at a balance of values that first, clearly delineates the role and significance of *kāma* with respect to dharma and *artha*, and second, places it in the perspective of a holistic *trivarga*. For Vātsyāyana, the value of *kāma* is not one of subservience to other components in the *trivarga* but an interdependent relationship intertwined essentially with the values of dharma and *artha*. Hence, Vātsyāyana models *trivarga* as a compound *puruṣārtha* in itself, inhering from a mutual and shared signification of dharma, *artha* and *kāma*.

5. The Holistic Ethical Imperative

Vātsyāyana's holistic emphasis on the *trivarga* is substantiated through his two-pronged approach, wherein he delves in depth over subjects that have a bearing on *kāma* as well as *artha*. At first, his detailed treatment on all modalities of the lifestyle of a *grhstha* embodies a comprehensive treatment of *kāma*, insofar as the applicability of *kāma* upon the householder citizen is concerned. An entire chapter is dedicated to setting the right framework for a *grhstha*'s life and living, in order to ensure a clean and congenial atmosphere that makes possible the mature experience of pleasure.²¹ Parts III and IV of the *Kāmasūtra* methodically elucidate the process of acquiring a wife and ways to maintain conjugal understanding through the channel of sexuality. Part II is the heart of the discourse on *kāma* treating at great length allowances and restrictions regarding amorous advances, and quite apparently, is also the section responsible for lending it the sex-manual sobriquet. This part dealing with sexual postures, embraces, petting, caresses, blows, sighs, scratching, and the like, throws explicit prominence on the aspect of pleasure in sexual encounters. Furthermore, there existed an implicit connection of *kāma* with *grhstha*

²⁰Vātsyāyana, *The Complete Kāma Sūtra*, 1.2.32-40, 42-44.

²¹See Part I, Chapter 4 in Vātsyāyana, *The Complete Kāma Sūtra*.

stage as Spellman emphasizes through the allegory of *Kāma*, as the Hindu Eros, being associated with Vasantha, the spring wind deity.²² Thus, the emphasis on *kāma* is duly treated in all facets of *grhstha*'s sexuality – in the preconditions, mindset, communication, performance, expectation and coordination of sexual matters. Vātsyāyana, however, treats *artha* in the same vein as *kāma*. For him,

Artha signifies material goods, wealth. *Artha* consists of acquiring and increasing, within the limits of dharma, knowledge, land, gold, cattle, patrimony, crockery, furniture, friends, clothing, etc... It is from those that know their subject that one can decide the time for sowing or the methods for raising cattle.²³

Artha even gains prominence over *kāma* in the context of prostitution and royalty, as Vātsyāyana says, “Money is the basis of royal power... It is the means of realizing the three aims of life, even in the case of prostitutes.”²⁴ In part I chapter III, where the sixty-four arts are listed, Vātsyāyana lays down the purpose of being acquainted with the arts as,

[Women] divorcing their husbands, or if a misfortune should happen to him, they [can] go to another country and live comfortably... [and] A man who is expert in the arts, even though suffering a certain contempt, has success with women.²⁵

Hence, through the interleaving of the goals of material prosperity and pleasure gratification, Vātsyāyana achieves the holistic approach of emphasizing on both *kāma* and *artha*.

The thread of morality runs all through this integrated approach. For instance, while laying down the rules for the lifestyle and conduct of a *nāgaraka*, Vātsyāyana advocates the showing of kindness to one's employees, respect towards one's dependants and courtesy in social transactions.²⁶ Discussion on sexual advances and foreplay is accompanied by a clear caution to avoid indulgence and recklessness:

One must in all cases know when to stop if there is risk of mutilation or death... A countless number of people are imprudent and ignorant of the rules and, driven by passion in the ardour of their erotic practices, are unable to measure the consequences... the fantasies a man invents

²²John W. Spellman, “Introduction” to *The Kama Sutra of Vatsyayana*, by Vatsyayana, trans. Richard F. Burton, New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2009, 23.

²³Vātsyāyana, *The Complete Kāma Sūtra*, 1.2.9-10, 28.

²⁴Vātsyāyana, *The Complete Kāma Sūtra*, 1.2.15, 31.

²⁵Vātsyāyana, *The Complete Kāma Sūtra*, 1.3.20-21, 56.

²⁶Vātsyāyana, *The Complete Kāma Sūtra*, 1.4.36, 73.

under the effect of erotic excitation are not imaginable even in dreams... like a speed-maddened horse, flying at a gallop and seeing neither holes nor ditches, two lovers blinded by desire and making furious love do not take account of the risks involved in their conduct.²⁷

Men are advised to treat their female counterparts, whether she be the wife, lover, or a preferred courtesan, with fragility and a clear assessment of the partner's endurance limits.

... in his sexual behaviour with a girl, an educated man takes into account his own strength and the fragility of the partner. He knows how to check the violence of his impulses, as well as the girl's limitations of endurance.²⁸

Thus, through his directive of a conscious and cautious approach towards passion and pleasure, Vātsyāyana weaves the thread of dharma through the integrated emphasis on *kāma* and *artha*, hence providing a cloak of righteous mentality that societal beings, like the *nāgaraka*, can don, and eventually, in their effort towards righteous living, imbibe.

6. Morality as an Undertaking

Vātsyāyana does not wear the hat of a strategist, though the *Kāmasūtra* has a clear strategy of moral rectitude, neither does he put on the gown of an ontologist, though the *Kāmasūtra* stands upon an epistemological foundation of human values; instead, he plays the role of a social scientist and a conscientious moralist.

As a scientist, he is absolutely meticulous with the subject matter of every chapter, incorporating diligent classifications and categorizations. For instance, part II chapter 1 delves into the classification of male and female characteristics according to their sexual dimensions, ardour and tempo, part II chapters 2 through 7 give detailed elucidations of various amorous advances, and part II chapter 6 exclusively deals with different types of sexual postures. Every assortment seems almost exhaustive in itself. The comprehensiveness of his taxonomy is further validated through his citation of relevant authoritative references. The entire chapter I part 1 is dedicated to invocation of these references. For instance, the extant of the chapter on courtesans (part VI of *Kāmasūtra*) is claimed to be the scholarly work of Dattaka, who was an accepted authority on courtesan

²⁷Vātsyāyana, *The Complete Kāma Sūtra*, 2.7.27-33, 166.

²⁸Vātsyāyana, *The Complete Kāma Sūtra*, 2.7.34, 166.

matters.²⁹ As a moralist he takes this data of scientific precision, and coats it into packets of practical directives, rolling it into the language of aphorisms.

This is done so that its target audience – the average householder – receives it without defiance and perplexity. The *grhstha* is an individual managing several priorities and responsibilities. His life is not unidirectional. Unlike the stages of *brhmacarya*, whence focus is solely on culturing dharma, and *sannyāsa*, whence focus is on attaining *mokṣa* alone, the passions of a *grhstha* are not singularly directed towards a single aim. The *puruṣārtha* for a *grhstha* is the *trivarga* as a whole, as the one who does not devote his energies towards the fulfilment of all three – dharma, *artha*, and *kāma* – together risks misdirecting his socially productive capacity. Hence, having engaged his creative faculties in the balancing act of juggling individual goals with conjugal and social commitments, a *grhstha* would, understandably so, be intellectually sapped and exhausted, and it would be much to his preference if he had to deal with simple manuals giving directives in elementary language, rather than dreary didactic professions. *Kāmasūtra*, in response to this need, avoids plain moral discourse and instead takes the holistic approach; one, where the moralist and social scientist work together to present morality not as a sermon rather as an undertaking – where the followers who duly perform their actions in accordance with directives (much like following a manual) become automatically ethical without involving any elaborate reasoning or deliberation on their part.

7. Materialist and Rationalist Blend

Vātsyāyana takes along both the materialist and rationalist perspectives in order to propagate his model of *kāma-dharma*. This stand is necessitated due to the very nature of *kāma* and *artha* being material fulfilments, and dharma, owing to its metaphysical nature, having a predominantly rational essence. The basic materialist tenet of the *Kāmasūtra*, as already seen above, is in its advocacy towards the experience of *kāma* as well as in its acknowledgement of *artha* as the prerogatives of life. Acute materialist inclinations are evident in part I chapter 3 where, in reference to the sixty-four arts described by him, Vātsyāyana says:

[The women who] divorcing their husband, or if a misfortune should happen to him, they go to another country and live comfortably on

²⁹For more on Dattaka’s authority see A. M. Shastri, *India as Seen in the Kuttanimata of Damodara Gupta*, Varanasi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1996, 181.

their savings [earned through the knowledge of the arts]... a man who is expert in the arts, even though suffering a certain contempt, has success with women...³⁰

Thus suggesting the sixty four arts as several proficiencies that one should possess in order to display one's capacity at accomplishments, and which endows material benefit upon its practitioners.

As a rationalist, Vātsyāyana appeals to the average citizens' power of reason in order to uphold his phenomenological and epistemological presuppositions. For instance, the use of potter wheel argument to explain the waxing and waning of pleasure cycles in a woman.³¹ Similarly rational arguments are employed in part I chapter 2 to justify the applicability of *trivarga puruṣārtha*. Vātsyāyana's robust argumentation could situate him in par with the *Naiyāikas*, who upheld a rationalist theory of knowledge. Vātsyāyana too believes theory as the basis of knowledge,³² and his moral edifice rests on an epistemological basis as it is the conscious intervention on the part of actors involved, and not merely ritualistically mimicked behaviour, that differentiates human sex from mere animal sex.

Animal sex per se is not viewed abhorrently by Vātsyāyana, for in the chapter on sexual postures³³ he vividly suggests animal patterns for postures between human partners, concluding with the final recommendation that "sexual relations can be diversified by studying the movements of domestic and wild animals, as well as insects."³⁴ It is well known that animals, including many from the primate species, display elaborate courting procedures and, hence, it cannot be stated with certainty that animals do not gain pleasure from their sexual acts. Yet, an inherent characteristic of confined receptivity is seen in the sexual instinct of animals, which Vātsyāyana lays down as,

Among animal species with a relatively low level of consciousness, the females, urged on by an unconscious instinct, behave according to their desire when the season arrives.³⁵

As a proponent of the holistic *puruṣārtha*, Vātsyāyana had to embody many perspectives, which would uphold the relative importance of

³⁰Vātsyāyana, *The Complete Kāma Sūtra*, 1.3.20-21, 56.

³¹Vātsyāyana, *The Complete Kāma Sūtra*, 2.1.20-21, 98.

³²Vātsyāyana, *The Complete Kāma Sūtra*, 1.3.4-6, 48-49.

³³See instances in part II chapter 6 in Vātsyāyana, *The Complete Kāma Sūtra*, 145-158.

³⁴Vātsyāyana, *The Complete Kāma Sūtra*, 2.6.51, 157.

³⁵Vātsyāyana, *The Complete Kāma Sūtra*, 1.2.20, 36.

trivarga components with respect to each other. His attempt to weigh the *trivarga* components on an even scale forced him to wear many skins, and hence justifies the integrated approach of being a materialist and rationalist both at once.

8. Core Values of Sexuality and Moderation

Emphasis on core values of sexuality is the conduit through which Vātsyāyana brings together dharma, *artha* and *kāma* into the narrative of *Kāmasūtra*. This is a significant aspect in the value proposition of *trivarga*. The values of sexuality are invoked through emphases on family, love and a mature experience of sexual pleasure.

Family receives emphasis in its conjugal dimension, as that is precisely the domain of *kāma*. The onus of ensuring comfortable and congenial living quarters is placed on the husband, while the wife is made responsible to operationalize it in a sanctified manner and with dignity. On the husband’s role, Vātsyāyana says,

Having completed his studies and acquired the means of livelihood by gifts received, conquest, trade, and work, or else by inheritance, or both and, having married, the *nāgaraka* must settle down in a refined manner... He must establish himself in a big city, a town, or even a large village, near the mountains, where a decent number of persons of good society are living... [his house must have] two separate apartments, [one] on a site near water, with trees and a garden and a separate place of work.³⁶

The wife, on her part, is advised to be an apostle of devotion and a stickler to organized conduct of household matters. She ought to be,

totally trusting, considering her husband as a god and completely devoted to him... she takes responsibility of the household... attends to cleaning the clothes, tidying the rooms, flower arrangements, cleaning the floor, being attractive to look at, performing the three daily rites of offering to the gods and of worshipping them at their domestic shrine... [she behaves] suitably to her husband’s elderly parents, servants, his sisters...³⁷

As the model of trust, she always seeks “her husband’s permission to attend marriage ceremonies... or to go to receptions or to temples... and it is only with his approval that she takes part in games.”³⁸

³⁶Vātsyāyana, *The Complete Kāma Sūtra*, 1.4.1-3, 57.

³⁷Vātsyāyana, *The Complete Kāma Sūtra*, 4.1.1-5, 277-278.

³⁸Vātsyāyana, *The Complete Kāma Sūtra*, 4.1.15-16, 279-280.

Emphasis on the value of pleasure can be witnessed all through part II which contains detailed preparatory procedures recommended prior to sexual union. The stress on diversity of pre-coital techniques and variety in the practices of sexual foreplay as well as coital postures underline the importance of the pleasure dimension.

The emphasis on the value of love is a resultant of all prior emphasis and its implications. Two partners bonding effectively on the platform of intimacy contain, for Vātsyāyana, an unfailing aspect of love. In that intimate moment, “he speaks to her of the wonder of love, born at their first meeting, and of the pain felt in separating... [then] they embrace and exchange passionate kisses. United by their experience, their passion grows.”³⁹ Towards the end of fifth chapter in part II, when amorous advances have been sufficiently recounted he, in the context of couples that practice those advances persistently, asserts, “when [these partners] continue having sexual relations, or [even] live chastely together, true love never decreases, even after a hundred years.”⁴⁰ Furthermore, the best emphasis on love can be witnessed in the advocacy of the *gāndharva* marriage. Of the eight types of marriages recognized traditionally in his time, Vātsyāyana is antagonistic of all but *gāndharva*, as it is only *gāndharva* that involves wilful consent of both the man and his to-be-wife. In the chapter on union by marriage Vātsyāyana concludes,

In order of importance, the best marriage is the one in accordance with ethics... Love is the goal of the marriage union, and although the *gāndharva* marriage is not the most recommended, it remains the best... Marriage can bring many joys and sorrows. Because it is based on love, the *gāndharva* marriage is the best.⁴¹

The stress on informed consent on the part of both partners is such that Vātsyāyana even places *gāndharva* above the traditionally superior *brāhma* form of marriage.⁴²

In addition to the above emphases, Vātsyāyana’s Aristotelian attitude of taking the middle path can be viewed as a buttress to his profession of holistic *puruṣārtha*. Vātsyāyana seems to be an advocate of establishing a contextual middle ground – a fair mean between extremes – as a reasonable

³⁹Vātsyāyana, *The Complete Kāma Sūtra*, 2.10.13, 202.

⁴⁰Vātsyāyana, *The Complete Kāma Sūtra*, 2.5.43, 144.

⁴¹Vātsyāyana, *The Complete Kāma Sūtra*, 3.5.28-30, 269-270.

⁴²For a discussion on *brāhma* and other forms of marriage, see the translator’s notes for chapter III part 3 in Vātsyāyana, *The Complete Kāma Sūtra*, 217-228, and also concluding comments to chapter III part 5, 270-273.

moral directive. For instance, while focusing on the intricacies of sexual interplay between a male and female partner, he proposes a wilful mean in order to achieve a sexual union where the partners are consciously and wilfully involved, which for Vātsyāyana is the moral imperative to elevate the act from a mere animal level to a human level. To this effect, he says,

If, out of excessive modesty, [the man] does not touch the girl, she, seeing his lack of initiative, will consider him an animal... If, on the contrary, he suddenly attacks the inexperienced girl, he will only manage to arouse fear and disgust, and she will become hostile to him.⁴³

Vātsyāyana approaches matters with the attitude of moderation. He instructs that “one must not go too far in the direction of the weft of woof. Success with girls is obtained by moderation,”⁴⁴ and by doing so, “the wise predict a sure success for a man of wit with moderate behaviour, who plays only reasonable games,”⁴⁵ thus embodying an attitude that is key in fulfilling the vision of achieving a harmonious integration between components that may not be ideally complementary. In their respective extremities, each of dharma, *artha* and *kāma* can function in mutual exclusion of the rest. For instance, strict dharma, like the one enjoined for *sannyāsa*, relegates *artha* and *kāma* down to a sinful level. In order to achieve a fitting fulfilment of *grhsthāśrama*, extreme indulgence in any of the *trivarga* components is not befitting, and it is only reasonable that a moderate mean between those extremes is diligently arrived at.

9. Anomalies to the Holistic Approach

Though an esoteric reading of the *Kāmasūtra* reveals the subtle framework of holistic *trivarga* in its narrative, the author admits to certain instances that present a notorious, yet irrefutable, deviation to the holistic approach and, quite justifiably, cannot be overlooked. This anomaly, according to the author’s interpretation, happens in three cases.

Firstly, Vātsyāyana seems to overemphasize pleasure in his attempt to render *kāma* inalienable. For instance, virile behaviour in women is advocated when “the boy, wearied after his uninterrupted sexual exercises, seeks rest and is no longer dominated by passion,”⁴⁶ and by inverting the roles, “she is determined to unite him with the instrument that she is inserting into his anus, so that he gets the taste [rasa] for one pleasure

⁴³Vātsyāyana, *The Complete Kāma Sūtra*, 3.2.33-34, 237.

⁴⁴Vātsyāyana, *The Complete Kāma Sūtra*, 3.2.31, 236.

⁴⁵Vātsyāyana, *The Complete Kāma Sūtra*, 1.4.39, 73.

⁴⁶Vātsyāyana, *The Complete Kāma Sūtra*, 2.8.1, 168.

[rata] after another...”⁴⁷ Secondly, Vātsyāyana seemingly in his nature as a realist propounds injunctions whose morality carries problematic shades. For instance, a man having many wives is instructed to “treat them [all] equally. He may not neglect some and put up with the short-comings of others,”⁴⁸ thus highlighting a possible acceptance of polygamy by Vātsyāyana. To the man, he permits sexual relations with widows and courtesans, when done for the sake of pleasure alone,⁴⁹ and to the women, he counsels marrying a man out of love for his money, and not for his qualities, appearances or abilities.⁵⁰ Furthermore, a courtesan is instructed to look for gaining both money and pleasure from a man,⁵¹ insinuating that Vātsyāyana was in support of sensual and material exploitation. The entire part V describes procedures for gaining another man’s wife, thus hinting at Vātsyāyana’s advocacy towards licentiousness. Thirdly, Vātsyāyana seems to favour subjugation of female freedom to her male as well as family priorities, especially in his injunctions towards duties of the wife:

In her relations with her father-in-law and mother-in-law, [the wife] must be submissive and not contradict them... she must not get excited at amusements and games... never give anything without her husband’s knowledge... when her husband departs on a journey abroad, she removes the married woman’s marks and her jewels, dedicates herself to devotion, and looks after the house according to the rules established by her husband... she does not go to visit her own family, except in the case of sickness or for religious festivals, and always accompanied by someone of her husband’s family as witness to the purity of her trip.⁵²

The above instances alienate Vātsyāyana from his holistic sexual moral approach; drawing unto him a blanket of hedonistic, amorally realistic and anti-feministic personality. Yet, in defence of the author’s reading of the holistic *trivarga* message, it should be understood that a treatise on morality would be grossly incomplete if it stuck to idealistic situations and ignored the profligacy of everyday life. A frank admission of imbalances and transgressions prevalent in society could be viewed as a sincere attempt to create awareness, rather than the advocacy of it. The author

⁴⁷Vātsyāyana, *The Complete Kāma Sūtra*, 2.8.4, 169.

⁴⁸Vātsyāyana, *The Complete Kāma Sūtra*, 4.2.67, 301.

⁴⁹Vātsyāyana, *The Complete Kāma Sūtra*, 1.5.2, 75.

⁵⁰Vātsyāyana, *The Complete Kāma Sūtra*, 3.4.49-53, 259.

⁵¹Vātsyāyana, *The Complete Kāma Sūtra*, 6.1.1-6, 391-392.

⁵²Vātsyāyana, *The Complete Kāma Sūtra*, 4.1.37-45, 283-284.

speculates that varied western interpretations of the ancient text could have introduced splintering anomalies in its narrative, and conscientiously relegates its confirmation to further scholarly reading by audience of this passage.

10. Conclusion

Vātsyāyana’s defence of *kāma*, insofar as he strives to highlight its necessary nature in fulfilment of the *puruṣārthas*, may lead one to hastily conclude that he stands at loggerheads with authorities that condone *kāma*, in its nature of sexual or sensual desire, for its unethical implications. It would be a gross misunderstanding to situate *Kāmasūtra* in opposition to moral treatises. Vātsyāyana’s constant effort throughout *Kāmasūtra*, explicitly in the beginning and implicitly later on, is to assuage one’s temperament towards pleasure (*kāma*) and its material ramifications (*artha*) in order to contain it in the subtle channel of moral boundaries (*dharma*). Vātsyāyana does not try to subvert morality for the sake of carnal pleasure, which is what calling it merely a sex manual makes it look like; rather he attempts to refocus morality in the perspective of societal life and reinstate it in the domain of everyday living. *Kāmasūtra* is the work of a moral teacher with a social mindset that upholds a set of cardinal virtues in the form of the *trivarga*; and in which, *dharma*, like Platonic justice, stands as the overarching virtue, governing the practicability of the other two virtues of communal life, *kāma* and *artha*. In this respect, *Kāmasūtra* is not merely a *sūtra* on *kāma* – a text that would solely focus on enhancing sexual pleasure – rather it is *kāma-dharma-śāstra*, in being a treatise that aims to achieve a subtle balance between enjoyment of sensual and material pleasure along moral lines.

Kāmasūtra manages to deftly achieve that delicate balance in its treatment of sexuality, through an esoteric and material emphasis on pleasure on the one side and its practise within moral boundaries on the other. Treatises on sexuality have often diverted from this endeavour, for instance, poetics like *Ratirahasya* and *Anaṅgaraṅga*, end up eulogizing and romanticising sexuality in its sensual experience with morality taking a backseat, while moral discourses like the *Dharma Śāstrās* bear a puritanical mindset resorting to injunctions that bear the flavour of a Victorian inhibition towards sensual pleasure. *Kāmasūtra*’s morality is not prohibitive; rather it is participative and holistically inclined. Moreover, it is directed towards the societal beings who not only form the significant chunk of human population but also a section prone to moral detractions.

Vātsyāyana's outlook is definitive, insofar as he never loses sight of his moral direction, while his insight is systemic, in that he takes an all-inclusive view of sexuality in all its applicable scenarios and modalities.

In spite of the rich cultural expositions through discourses in historical machinery and the variety of experiences over centuries of human experience, we continue to witness ambivalence in the area of sexuality, insofar as our sexual attitudes are concerned. On the one hand are conservative societies that view sex as taboo, and hence table raging debates to curb and discipline sexual profanities and perversities, while on the other is the harsh reality of escalating sexual transgression and ever increasing hankering for sexual gratification through the avenue of pornography.⁵³ A similar picture of ambivalence can also be derived from Foucault's dichotomous view of historical discourses in sexuality – seen sometimes as *ars erotica* and sometimes as *scientia sexualis*.⁵⁴ Sexuality is the avenue for humans to seek a pervading oneness in their own being along with a harmonizing unity with another. A spiritual experience of sexual pleasure is an avenue to reach the promised land of sexual (and seemingly spiritual) bliss. *Kāmasūtra*'s emphasis on a systematic and ethical experience of sexual pleasure should be taken as a conduit to enhance and emancipate the sexuality in human beings, thus guiding its followers towards improving their self-image, insofar as it is influenced by sexuality, and in turn serving and preserving the fabric of an equitable and balanced society. It is in order to achieve this goal that *Kāmasūtra* was necessary for its times, as much as it is still relevant in the present day society.

⁵³For a brief discussion on statistics related to the prevalence of pornography and further links, see Saju Chackalackal, Editorial: "Sex and Religion: Contemporary Responses," *Journal of Dharma* 34, 1 (January-March 2009), 3-18, 5.

⁵⁴For detailed reading see Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, volume 1: *The Will to Knowledge*, trans. Robert Hurley. Victoria: Penguin Group (Australia), 2008, 57-69.