

INTRODUCTION

When I was first asked to write a commentary for a new edition of the Kama Sutra, I was less than enthusiastic. In the '60s and '70s there seemed to be dozens of versions of the Kama Sutra. All were removed from my own lifestyle, and I didn't feel there was much I could relate to in the text. Although I'm fascinated by human sexual nature, I'm not very interested in sex practiced as a style of gymnastics. I would defend freedom for the aficionado of sophisticated sexual positions, but I've never felt that athletic poses had much to do with my own sex life. So it was with reluctance that I sat down and began to read a copy of the Burton and Arbuthnot translation, which was first published in 1883 and which I have quoted extensively in this book. To my

surprise, I got far more out of the experience than I'd thought possible. I began to understand the sense of humor behind some of the more exotic poses and realized that many of the poses were not just about sex—they were also about the union of body and mind. Some of the sexual poses in the Kama Sutra are yoga positions, and the goal of yoga is to create mental and physical harmony. The Kama Sutra makes sense in our sophisticated world in that we still strive for the experience of ecstasy.



The Kama Sutra and its associated texts, the Ananga Ranga, *The Perfumed Garden*, and the Tao, are not as baldly sexual as we might assume. There is a connection between these ancient writings and life in the 20th century. It's a connection that centers on feelings. Although it is possible for us to interact sexually with many people, unless we have also cultivated some love

and warmth toward the person who is arousing us, we won't get near the real goal of kama. The concept of kama involves the "enjoyment of appropriate objects by the five senses of hearing, feeling, seeing, tasting, and smelling, assisted by the mind together with the soul." As a concept, kama is just as relevant to us now as it was to the Indians in around AD 400.

The *Kama Sutra* may have been produced at any time between AD 100 and AD 400, and it was written in an India that no longer exists. In those days, the ideal citizen cultivated an ideal life. He surrounded himself with friends, made love as if it were an art form, ate and drank well, was interested in painting and music, and regarded himself as a fair lord and master.

The *Kama Sutra* was written for the nobility of ancient India, by a nobleman. Vatsyayana thought of life as consisting of *dharma*, *artha*, and *kama*. *Dharma* was the acquisition of religious merit; *artha* was the acquisition of wealth; and *kama* was the acquisition of love or sensual pleasure. These ideals are not that dissimilar from the codes we live by today. Although we aren't so focused on religious merit any more, we do pursue self-knowledge and personal growth; most of us would like to

have enough money to enjoy a comfortable lifestyle; and most of us would like to be involved in a loving sexual relationship. The main difference is that the world today is far more egalitarian than it was in the time of Vatsyayana. The *Kama Sutra* was intended as a sort of businessman's textbook—only the subject matter is



Indian painting,
18th century.

not money, but sex. It was aimed at men because women had very low status then. That isn't to say that women's needs are ignored in the text—they aren't. Pages of detail are aimed purely at exciting the female partner. The instructions concerning female stimulation are explicit. The "work of a man" includes kissing, pressing, stroking, and scratching, and, if a woman should fail to be satisfied by the act of intercourse, Vatsyayana suggests, "the man should rub the yoni [vulva] of the woman with his hand." He even advocates specific sexual positions to suit the sexual match of a couple. "High" congress (see *The Position of the Wife Of Indra*, page 71) permits the maximum penetration when a man with a small lingam or linga (penis) makes love to a woman who has a deep vagina. "Low" congress (see *The*

Twining Position, page 75) allows easy penetration for a man with a large penis and a woman with a small vagina.

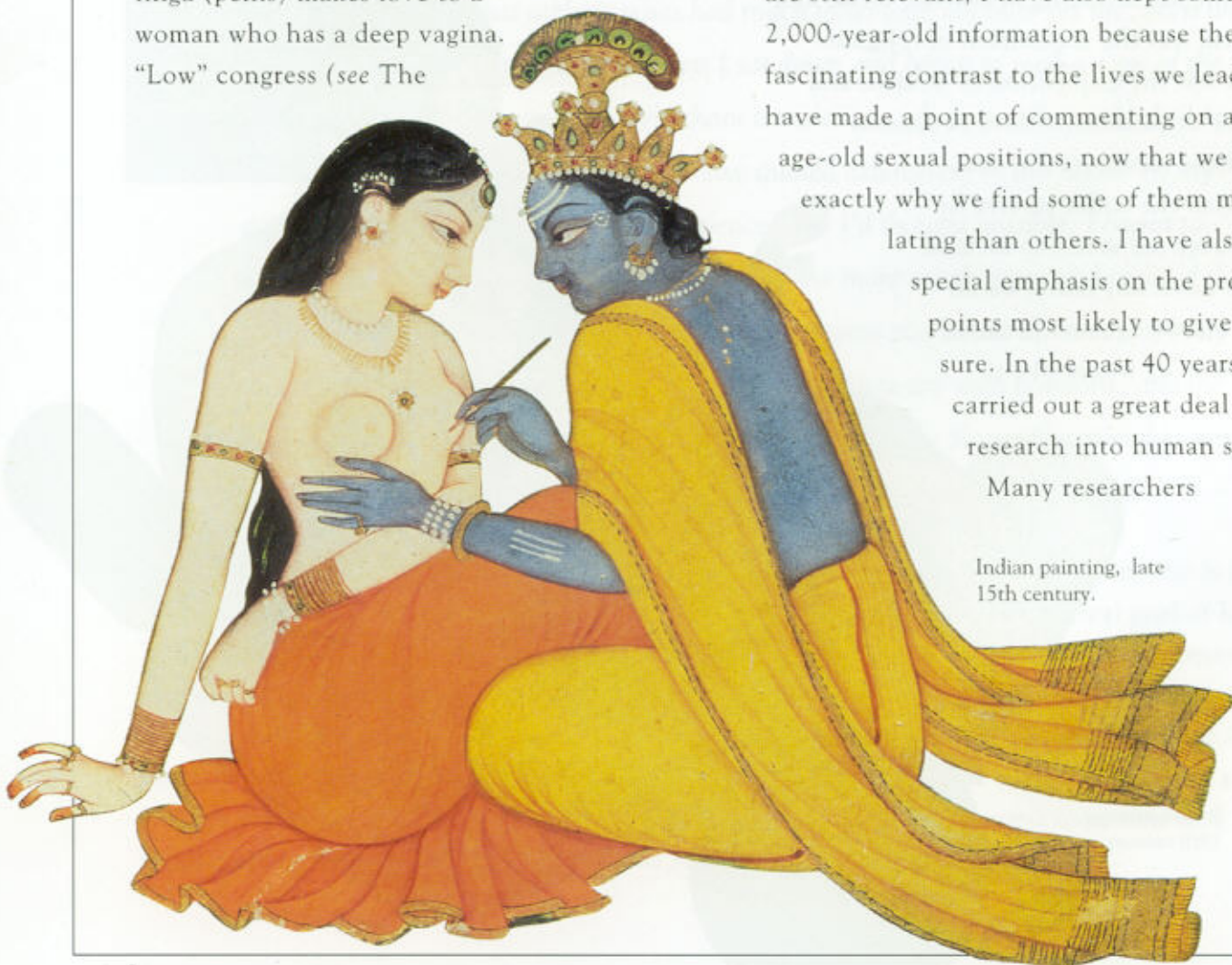
Although the *Kama Sutra* tends to be thought of as a book about sex, it is also a book about manners, conduct, and the arts that a cultivated individual was meant to practice. Although some of the things in the original manuscript would be thought of as peculiar in modern times (the art of teaching parrots and starlings to speak, for instance), there are many sensual arts, such as the use of perfumes, music, and foods, which all translate well into modern sexual practice.

In this version of the *Kama Sutra* I have not only selected the parts of the original text that are still relevant; I have also kept some chunks of 2,000-year-old information because they are in fascinating contrast to the lives we lead today. I have made a point of commenting on aspects of age-old sexual positions, now that we know

exactly why we find some of them more stimulating than others. I have also placed special emphasis on the pressure points most likely to give us pleasure. In the past 40 years, we have carried out a great deal of research into human sexuality.

Many researchers

Indian painting, late
15th century.



and sexologists, such as Masters and Johnson, Kinsey, and Shere Hite, have documented a wide range of sexual activity, from masturbation to foreplay and intercourse. One of the many tragedies of Hitler's Third Reich was that it resulted in the destruction of decades of sexual research, which American researchers only truly caught up with in the 1970s. On a more personal level, can you imagine anyone in your family handing down the small print of sexual experience from one generation to another? I would be very surprised if your parents told you the intimate details of their own sexual experiences. We don't talk openly about these things. Texts about love and sex, such as the *Kama Sutra*, are few and



far between, but they provide us with a valuable historical and cultural perspective on sex.

OTHER LOVE TEXTS

I had been pleased and surprised to discover new items of sexual information from reading this

ancient text, so I decided to take a look at some of the other early sex manuals.

The *Kama Sutra* was just one of the many Eastern love texts to be translated and printed in the Western world, and for this we must thank the famous Victorian explorer Sir Richard Burton and his colleague Forster Fitzgerald Arbuthnot. The *Ananga Ranga*, *The Perfumed Garden*, and the *Tao*—which are also featured and quoted in this book—have a lot to offer as well.

Detail from Persian illustration, showing lovers embracing and drinking wine.



THE ANANGA RANGA

Two years after the publication of the *Kama Sutra* in the West, Burton and Arbuthnot brought out the *Ananga Ranga*. This text was aimed specially at preventing the separation of husband and wife. As the author, Kalyana Malla, says, "The chief reason for the separation between the married couple and the cause, which drives the husband to the embraces of strange women, and the wife to the arms of strange men, is the want of varied pleasures, and the monotony which follows possession." Written around AD 1172, the *Ananga Ranga* is a collection of erotic works, including details from the *Kama Sutra*. Its title translates into "Stage of the Bodiless One," a reference to the story of how Kama, the Hindu god of love, became a bodiless spirit when his physical body was burned to a pile of ashes by a stare from the third eye of the god Shiva.

The book appeared shortly before the start of the Crusades—a time of great cultural exchange between East and West. The returning Crusaders brought many new practices back to Europe with them, including some concerned with sex. The tough warlords of the Crusades who survived the

years of fighting had enjoyed the education they subsequently experienced in Arabian, North African, and Syrian harems. Skilled lovemaking was one gain; so, too, were some of the niceties



Indian painting,
late 17th century.

of erotic refinement, such as cleanliness and sexual foreplay. It is thanks to these imported Arabian ideas that, in the period after the Crusades, we in the West learned the secrets of how to make love well.

THE PERFUMED GARDEN

It wasn't until Victorian times, however, that any written volume reflecting the ancient and highly imaginative Arabian erotic culture appeared in the West. *The Perfumed Garden* is a translation of an old Arabic manuscript found around the mid-1800s in Algeria by a French officer stationed there. The author of the original manuscript, Sheikh Nefzawi, probably lived in 16th-century Tunis.

When, on later pages, you read some of the details from *The Perfumed Garden*, you will be aware that Sheikh Nefzawi was a man who possessed far greater knowledge of human anatomy and sexual response than did the early Hindus. Perhaps this isn't surprising considering that the Arabs were famed as doctors and could be found at work in many outposts of the Old World. In practical terms, much of Sheikh Nefzawi's advice is well grounded and based on common sense, although it is not always accurate—for example, he recommends that some sexual positions be avoided in that they “predispose for rheumatic pains and sciatica.”

Although he may not actually have identified the area we now call the G-spot, he still had a good idea that certain sex positions produced particularly pleasurable sensations in women. It soon becomes clear that Sheikh Nefzawi himself must have been very sexually experienced.

The Perfumed Garden, like the *Kama Sutra*, deals with more than just the mechanics of sex. Sheikh Nefzawi also writes about sensual foods, aphrodisiacs, and the types of men and women he perceives as sexually desirable.

The Perfumed Garden was the third of Sir Richard Burton's publications for the Kama Shashtra Society (*shastra* means “scripture” or “doctrines,” and the Kama Shashtra Society existed to translate rare and important texts concerned with love and sex). The original text of *The Perfumed Garden* includes a large section on homosexual practices, which Burton diligently translated. He had just completed this chapter on homosexuality when he died (on October 20, 1890), and his wife, who was opposed to the project, threw the new translation into the fire.