



The Ascetic of Desire: A Novel of the Kama Sutra

Sudhir Kakar

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The Kama Sutra is the most widely read treatise on sex ever written, though the man who chronicled all there was to experience between men and women remains, for the most part, a mystery. In *The Ascetic of Desire*, called a literary achievement of the highest order, by *The Times (India)*, acclaimed author Sudhir Kakar tells the story of the man who is believed to be the author of the Kama Sutra, Vatsyayana, and the time in which he lived—the fourth century A.D., considered the golden age of Indian history.

In *The Ascetic of Desire*, the elusive sage Vatsyayana recounts his youth to a young pupil. The young man, planning to write Vatsyayana's biography, listens dutifully as Vatsyayana shares stories of a childhood spent largely in the brothel where his favorite aunt worked. As Vatsyayana's story unfolds, the pupil finds, to his consternation, that his own life has begun to reflect and parallel the ascetic's narrative. At the point where their stories intersect, the unexpected happens.

Like Arthur Golden's *Memoirs of a Geisha*, Sudhir Kakar's novel is a startling combination of psychological insight and historical detail. With rights sold in eleven countries, this is a story of universal appeal imbued with a distant world's charm and exotic allure.

The best novel on sex and sensuality I have ever read. (Khushwant Singh, author of *Train to Pakistan*)

The Ascetic of Desire: A Novel of the Kama Sutra Details

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From Reader Review The Ascetic of Desire: A Novel of the Kama Sutra for online ebook

Himanshu says

A very good book. About the life and times of Vatsayayana the author of Kamasutra. Well researched and well written .

Sheokhanda says

When I saw the book and bought it to read, I never realized what the author might be really trying to say. It is another one which I would rate with eleven minutes. Nicely done. after reading it, I am definitely going to read more of sudir kakar's books. One thing is for sure now, atleast I would like to assume that "Kushwant Singh and sudhir Kakar" must be best of buddies (if not in real life then in literate sense).

This book is strictly Adult affair.

Mainak Ghosal says

Sex is notoriously difficult to write about, not only in India but also abroad... as cited by Lee Siegel's postmodern take on the book, Love in a Dead LanguageAll Indian were silent about SEX for a long time and also it will be for many more years to come,,, see the SEX EDUCATION fiasco ... some states implemented some didnot.....This book treats sex as prevalent in the GUPTA period when India was a Culturally superior country in the whole Globe & other dominating countries like Europe was far behind in the dark ages.....No one knows what happened to sage/writer Vatsayana after writing Kamasutra... not even a sketch of him exists as that of Chanakya .. the writer of Arthashastra ...

Varun Bhargava says

The book weaves a rich fictional history of a period in the sub-continent that isn't spoken of much. The content is both conceptually scholastic and sexual; an educational learning in writing historical fiction well.

Paula says

For school. I'm glad I accidentally read this fiction piece before starting the translations of the Kama Sutra. It is a quick read that gives an accessible overview of the general historical (and a bit of geographical) context of India during the era in which Vatsayana wrote as well as offering a thumbnail understanding of the Kama Sutra.

Seema says

You might not expect it, but is also a good historical account of India from the lens of desire and sexuality.

Shailendra says

Very Good One,

Informative...

Dhanaraj Rajan says

It is a commentary on Kama Sutra but written in the form of a novel.

Radu-andrei Deme says

Unexpected literary delight...

Chaitanya says

Fantastic book. Sudhir Kakar invokes a beautiful imagery of love and eroticism through the eyes and landscape of the author of Kamasutra (Vatsyayana) and his complex biographer. The book certainly holds sway even in the 21st century where desire may have assumed a different language but continues to hold a lot of the same principles as ever before.

Vatsyayana, a rebel of his times challenged the conservative views of sages and scholars on the erotic arts. But the ascetic was also a man of deep solitude who was eternally trapped yet incredibly unforgiving of the Lord Kama's influence on his life. The book at the end teaches a wonderful lesson when it states that the purpose of desire is its cessation, as we witness in all our lives. A few may stand out and beat the odds but the overwhelming nature of desire is in its eventual surrender to the state of solitude.

The book is full of anecdotal gems narrated by Vatsyayana and each of them holds the reader with rapt attention. For anybody interested or fascinated by eroticism, this book is a must read. The reality of the battle of conservative ideals with progressive ones will never cease to exist but its fascinating nonetheless, to observe the same albeit in vastly different landscapes than this century, in the world of Kamasutra.

Rick Goff says

What a marvelous read this novel is! I have given it 4 stars, rather than 5, as a penalty to the proofreader. I'll forgive one error, but not a dozen. Outside of that, though ...

The title refers to Vatsyayana, the author of the Kamasutra. Vatsyayana was a scholar of erotics, and his book is a survey of literature in the field. As a comparison, we might say he was an astronomer, not an astronaut. The novel has two narrative frames. The outer frame contains the story of the narrator, who adopted Vatsyayana as his guru and spent many days, over years, in the company of the guru and his beautiful wife. The inner frame contains the life of the guru, beginning with his birth to a beautiful courtesan and his childhood in a brothel.

I want to summarize the movement of the stories, but I don't have the psychoanalytic vocabulary to do so. The men and women who populate the story are spiritual creatures who are motivated by their biological characteristics no more than by their circumstantial experiences.

If discussion of our sexual nature and practice makes you giggle or frown, then you can't enjoy this book. (Or sex, I'm guessing.) If you recognize sex as a central concern of our biological, spiritual and emotional lives, then I recommend this erudite, compassionate novel. Its treatment of relationships between generations, genders, deities and mortals, castes and nations is likely to provoke new thought and understanding.

Marc Masurovsky says

Charming and learned novel detailing the life of Vatsyayana, author of the Kamasutra, through the eyes of a young man aspiring to be his disciple who eventually becomes enamored of Vatsyayana's wife. It's a slow read but it grows on you, the way that historical fiction seeps under your skin, rich in detail, highly textured, filled with scents and aromas. Ironically, the many references to sexual practices are very clinical, much in the spirit of Vatsyayana, the unquestioned master of the erotic arts in ancient India. worth the read. And I learned a lot about the Gupta empire.

Irina says

Romanul e despre o cultura complet diferita, cu obiceiurile ei, care fascineaza. E o cu totul alta lume. Erotica era, in acele vremuri, o stiinta. Curtezanele erau cunoscatoarele unei adevarate arte, sau, mai bine spus, cunosteau 64 de arte. Beneficiau de educatie inclusiv in domeniul literaturii, artei... Personajul principal e un tanar care povesteste intalnirea sa cu acela care ii va deveni guru, Vatsyayana, autorul Kamasutrei. Aflam amanunte din viata acestuia, amanunte care se impletesti cu modul in care acesta a descris anumite lucruri in Kamasutra. Unele amanunte lipsesc si vor ramane in cartea autorului tanar, cel care va deveni comentatorul Kamasutrei. Cel care a devenit studentul lui Vatsyayana va deveni in cele din urma iubitul sotiei lui Vatsyayana, Malavika. Vatsyayana urmarea ca Malavika sa se transforme intr-o zeita insa ea va fi tentata de

studentul sau. Ea mai fusese in trecut amanta unui poet pe care la inceput nu-l placuse. Ei doi vor trai impreuna si vor avea si o fetita, stergandu-si trecutul, plecand intr-un loc unde nimeni nu stia ce se intamplase de fapt. Vatsyayana insusi fusese amantul nevestei gurului sau. Vatsyayana povesteste despre copilaria sa in casa de toleranta a mamei sale si a surorii acesteia. Chandrika va fi studiata de Vatsyayana si se va baza pe experientele cu ea in scrierea Kamasutrei. Tatal sau, un negustor, il va lua cu el in calatoriile sale insa dupa moartea sa calatorile vor lua sfarsit, spre regretul baiatului.

Cateva citate:

- "Citatele ne leaga de stramosii nostri, la fel ca riturile pe care le savarsim regulat, cand e luna plina, mi-a spus odata. Putem sa gandim doar ce s-a mai gandit inaintea noastră. Daca vreodata o sa ai impresia ca ti-a venit o idee noua, aminteste-ti ca doar ai uitat de unde provine."
- "In functie de fiecare kavi cu care vorbea, prima prezentare a lucrarii lui Vatsyayana despre sexualitatea femeilor fusese considerata ori un succes rasunator, ori un scandal imens. Cele doua notiuni erau identice, in ceea ce-lprimea pe Udayana, iar in anul 88 Vatsyayana a fost admis in randul liuteratilor din Kausambi. Argumetele lui Vatsyayana (pe care le atribuise, desigur, inteleptilor antici) despre autonomia sexuala a femeii, despre reactiile ei din timpul actului sexual, nedeterminate exclusiv de activitatea sexuala a barbatului, faptul ca incuraja casatorii din dragoste si nu pe cele traditionale, dar si admiratia sa nedisimulata pentru curtezane si pentru talentele lor au facut inevitabila reactia negativa a savantilor conservatori, atragandu-si totodata si aparatori devotati din randul celor moderni."
- "Corpul e un templu [...] Trebuie pastrat stralucitor, dulce si parfumat pentru salasluirea zeilor."
- "Poate ar fi trebuit sa ma surprinda faptul ca savantul a carui lucrare isi propune sa accentueze dorinta barbatilor si a femeilor cauta linistea. [...] Ajunsesem sa suspectez ca exista ceva contradictoriu, sau macar discontinuu, intre ce-mi povestise despre viata lui si ce facea ca profesie."
- "Sunt surprins cat de usor e sa construiesti un trecut diferit, fara sa fie neaparata nevoie sa minti, numai prin anumite omisiuni, necorrectand prezumtiile false, evitand sa spui adevarul cu o voce prea tare."
- "Asemeni unui yoghin care nu separa meditatia de viata de zi cu zi, ci incearca sa transforme toate clipele vietii sale intr-o meditatie, continua Chandrika, meditatia lui Vatsyayana despre kama trebuie sa aiba loc inauntrul domeniului eroticii, nu in afara sa."

Lu Lu says

booooriiing. though informative.
