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## **Nāgaraka in the *Kāmasūtra*: An Introduction to Masculinity in early India**

Sukhdev Singh<sup>1</sup>

1) National Institute of Technology Patna, India

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# Nāgaraka in the *Kāmasūtra*: An Introduction to Masculinity in Early India

Sukhdev Singh

National Institute of Technology Patna

## Abstract

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The object of this study is to examine the idea of masculinity through the Nāgaraka in the *Kāmasūtra*. The methodology that this study applies is textual analysis, or close reading. That is, it attempts to find the meaning of masculinity, especially with reference to the Nāgaraka, within this composition itself. Additionally, it utilizes scholarship in the field for a better understanding of masculinity. As a result, this study finds out that *kāma* as a tendency is not specific to males and females. Since knowledge has been a masculine enterprise wherein the females enter with the *Kāmasūtra*, their entrance might be viewed as disruption of the masculine monopoly that poses challenges to masculinity. It pinpoints the factors that build or refashion masculinity. It hinges on the economic stability or declination and the ideas of *prakṛti* or *svabhāva*, or nature, and *teja* or *tejas*, or radiance and natural talent, and undergoes changes accordingly. This study suggests that economic declination might create a category of service providers, for instance, the *veśyā*, sub-Nāgaraka and the *trītyāprakṛti*, or third nature, person. They corroborate malleability and fluidity of masculinity. The idea of masculinity as malleable and fluid in the *Kāmasūtra* is what this study concludes.

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**Keywords:** Nāgaraka, *Kāmasūtra*, masculinity, Vātsyāyana, economic declination



# Nāgaraka en el *Kāmasūtra*: Una Introducción a la Masculinidad en la India Temprana

Sukhdev Singh  
National Institute of Technology Patna

## Resumen

El objeto de este estudio es examinar la idea de masculinidad a través del Nāgaraka en el *Kāmasūtra*. La metodología que se aplica en este estudio es el análisis textual, o lectura cercana. Es decir, intenta encontrar el significado de la masculinidad, especialmente con referencia al Nāgaraka, dentro de esta composición misma. Además, utiliza el conocimiento en este campo para una mejor comprensión de la masculinidad. Como resultado, este estudio identifica que la tendencia *kāma* como una tendencia no específica de hombres y mujeres. Dado que el conocimiento en este ámbito ha sido monopolizado por los hombres, las mujeres y su entrada en el *Kāmasūtra* podría ser vista como la interrupción del monopolio masculino que plantea desafíos a la masculinidad. Se señalan los factores que construyen o remodelan la masculinidad que dependen de la estabilidad o el declive económico y de las ideas de *prakṛti* o *svabhāva*, de la naturaleza, de la *teja* o *tejas*, del resplandor y talento natural. Este estudio sugiere que la declinación económica podría crear una categoría de proveedores de servicios, por ejemplo, el *veśyā*, *sub-Nāgaraka* y el *trītyāprakṛti*, o tercera naturaleza. Éstos corroboran la maleabilidad y la fluidez de la masculinidad. La idea de la masculinidad como maleable y fluida en el *Kāmasūtra* es lo que se concluye en este estudio.

**Palabras clave:** Nāgaraka, *Kāmasūtra*, masculinidad, Vātsyāyana, declinación económica

The scope of this study is a detailed examination and discussion of the idea of masculinity, especially, in the context of the Nāgaraka in the *Kāmasūtra*. There are two significant factors that this study finds out on which masculinity is contingent. The first is the economic stability, or its declination, in daily life. It is also an essential requirement that one must fulfil to enter the category of the Nāgaraka. It sustains his daily lifestyle, shapes, and indicates his masculinity through different objects, body care and his regimen. The second factor is the two interrelated, and often interchangeably applied, concepts of *prakṛti* or *svabhāva* and *teja* or *tejas*. The former refers to one's nature, and the latter means radiance, energy or power, and natural talent or glory. The *Kāmasūtra* mentions three types of *prakṛti* or *svabhāva*, namely, male, female, and neither male nor female, which is designated as the *trītyāprakṛti*, or third nature. The *trītyāprakṛti* has two types: *strīrūpiṇī*, or the one that adopts a female appearance, and *puruṣarūpiṇī*, or the one that adopts a male appearance. This study elaborates ramifications and how these two factors contribute to the idea of masculinity.

It starts with exploring the meaning of the words *kāma*, which is a tendency that originates in the mind, and *sūtra*, which like a string ties the idea of *kāma* and like a formula explicates or solves *kāma*-related matters. The point that emerges through the meaning of the word *kāma* is that it is not entangled in masculinity and femininity but impacts them. The *Kāmasūtra* appears to be a bundle consisting of different strands of ideas, one of which is about production, circulation, and consumption of knowledge. This study discusses how knowledge is a masculine enterprise, especially, in the context of the story of birth of the *Kāmasūtra*. However, it also notes that the male dominion over the *kāma*-related knowledge loosens as the figure of the *veśyā*, who might be the earliest example of learned and professional female, gains prominence and has the *kāma*-related knowledge produced, circulated, and consumed. This study indicates that her presence might disturb the idea of masculinity and change the nature of knowledge.

In the next section, the study discusses the etymology of the word *nāgaraka*, which means a male citizen, man-about-town, and a hero; his importance or position, which is on par with the king and his officials; and

how the Nāgaraka is inside this composition, as if a character in drama, and outside it, as the prime consumer of the *Kāmasūtra*. Most importantly, a closer look reveals the significance of economic stability, or its declination, in his daily life, which this study finds out is an essential requirement to be deemed a Nāgaraka. It sustains his daily lifestyle, which is visible through his opulent house, and shapes and indicates his masculinity through different objects, body care, and his regimen. In short, an idea of masculinity emerges in the *Kāmasūtra* that is founded on materiality. Besides materiality, the *veśyā*, who has already been mentioned as a disruptor of masculine monopoly over the *kāma*-related knowledge and who provides the Nāgaraka sexual and social services for a fee, and the sub-Nāgaraka, or sub-citizen, which is a category of service providers that is created because of Nāgaraka's economic declination, have been discussed in this study as elements that enhance the Nāgaraka's masculinity and might be a testament to the changes that the idea of masculinity undergoes due to economic declination in daily life.

Finally, from not being specific to masculinity or femininity, from slight disruptions in the masculine enterprise of the *kāma*-related knowledge, from changes in the idea of masculinity due to economic stability or declination to the impact of the *veśyā* and other service providers' presence, the idea of malleable and fluid masculinity emerges through the *trītyāprakṛti*'s female and male appearances. In other words, this study captures the gradual progression of the idea of masculinity that completes in malleability and fluidity through the Nāgaraka in the *Kāmasūtra* and holds him as the earliest example that introduces it.

### **Meaning of the *Kāmasūtra***

To understand the meaning of the *Kāmasūtra*, one might break it into two words *kāma* and *sūtra* and define them. The very first definition of *kāma* in English might be in Richard Burton's (1883-1925) translation of the *Kāmasūtra* wherein he emphasizes on appropriate objects and places the mind and the soul in a position of subordination to the senses (*Vātsyāyana*, trans. 1883-1925, p. 8). He misses that appropriateness of hearing, feeling, seeing, tasting, or smelling is decided by the mind, and the human senses merely

mediate by collecting and sending data from the objective world to the mind. They might remain incapable of deeming what is appropriate. Since the senses are in a superior position, it depends on the sensory contact between a sex organ and an object to generate *kāma* and designate this experience as *kāma* in the definition. The contact may generate something, but to cognize and call it *kāma*, or pleasure, is not a functionality of the human senses. Thus, it might be observed that this translation puts forward a sensory definition of *kāma*.

In the Alain Daniélou (1994) translation, mind is not placed in a position of subordination (Vātsyāyana, trans. 1994, 1.2.11). *Kāma* is viewed as a *pravṛtti*, or tendency, related to mind and inclined toward the human senses (Vātsyāyana, trans. 1994, 1.2.11). However, the sense of hearing is missing, and a practitioner, who achieves contentment, is also mentioned. This translation defines *kāma* as a state of mind inclined toward pleasure of the senses.<sup>1</sup>

The Hindi translation of the *Kāmasūtra* by Parasnath Dwivedi (1999) defines *kāma* as: vested in the *manasa*, or mind and heart, and connected with the *ātma*<sup>2</sup> or soul, *kāma* is a *pravṛtti*, or tendency, of the human senses called ear, skin, eye, tongue, and nose for the corresponding elements or things that are known to or grasped by the senses (Vātsyāyana, trans. 1999, 1.2.11). It might also be put in this way: suffused with *sukha*, or pleasure, that is caused by attachment or close connection in the act of *āliṅgana*, or embrace, etc., *kāma* is a fruitful *arthapratīti*, that is, actual attainment of pleasure because of touching the special organs such as nipples (Vātsyāyana, trans. 1999, 1.2.12). In Dwivedi's (1999) translation, the locus of origin of this tendency called *kāma* is mind and heart, and it is interconnected with soul also. Thus, *kāma* is a tendency that originates in the mind and heart, but it is still rooted in the soul, that is the source of existence. Rather than judging the corresponding elements, which are sound, objective world, sight, taste, and smell, the spontaneous functionality of the human senses is to collect data through its natural ability and send it to the mind and heart that might make a decision.<sup>3</sup> In the second half of the definition, *kāma* is the natural ability of the human senses that leads to generation and realization of pleasure when two parts of body interrelate, for instance, hands interrelate with nipples through their

ability to touch. The Dwivedi (1999) translation, in this way, defines *kāma* in terms of a natural mental tendency, characteristic, ability, or functionality, of the sentient beings, especially, humans.

In their translation of the *Kāmasūtra*, Wendy Doniger and Sudhir Kakar (2002) use *pleasure* for *kāma* (Vātsyāyana, trans. 2002, 1.2.11-12). It consists in engagement of the human senses under the supervision of the mind; and they also bring in the conscious self as the driver, thereby creating distinct categories (Vātsyāyana, trans. 2002, 1.2.11-12). Thus, they define *kāma* as produced by the human senses that are supervised by the mind and driven by the conscious self. For them *kāma* is an experience that one has directly through an object that is related to the human senses. It results when this object of the human senses gets stimulated by touch. In other words, Doniger and Kakar create distinctions between mind and conscious self and reduce mind's functionality as *kāma* for them is a direct result of the human senses.

The *Kāmasūtra* does not mention masculine and feminine endowments in these definitions of *kāma*. That is, the tendency of *kāma* is neither exclusive to males nor females. This study observes that the tendency of *kāma* goes beyond the binary of masculinity and femininity and, thereby, affects them.

The word *sūtra* might be translated into English as formula, string, aphorism, or girdle. That is, a *sūtra* ties things together just as a piece of string or girdle does to contain or manage things. In terms of an aphorism, it might also contain a general truth about something. It might also be shaped like a formula that is used for solutions. Thus, *sūtra* in the word *kāmasūtra* ties together the idea of *kāma*, and its meaning and truth. Grammatically, it has been shaped as a formula to explicate, propound, or solve matters related to *kāma*.

### **Knowledge as a Masculine Enterprise before the *Kāmasūtra***

In the story of birth of the *Kāmasūtra* mostly males play decisive roles. Prajāpati, or the creator, also known as Brahmā, delivers one hundred thousand chapters in the form of a *pravacana*, or oral instruction or discourse,<sup>4</sup> on the *trivarga*,<sup>5</sup> which comprises of *dharma*, *artha* and *kāma*, so that the created abides by it (Vātsyāyana, trans. 1999, 1.1.5). This discourse is

transferred from Prajāpati to several semi-divine, sage-like, and ordinary males (Vātsyāyana, trans. 1999, 1.1.6-12).<sup>6</sup>

This story might suggest that creation and knowledge occur at the hands of the male divine entity. It originally belongs to this entity; and whatever is original might be traced back to him. The movement of knowledge is downwards: from prominent male divinity to other males. However, this handing out of knowledge to males is in abridged form. One might view the abridged form as a handout.

As part of pedagogical practice, handouts are utilized as “a teaching tool” (Gerlach, 1974, p. 83). Similarly, the *Kāmasūtra* is part of pedagogical practice as *kāma*’s consumption in youth and the *Kāmasūtra*’s study are recommended to males and females (Vātsyāyana, trans. 1999, 1.2.3; 1.2.13; 1.2.18; 1.2.37-38; 1.3.1-2; 1.3.12; 1.3.14; 2.7.27-31; 2.7.33-34). The handouts could be mere skeleton notes, and thereby “intentionally brief” (Klemm, 1976, p. 10). Due to its abridged form and the fact that it is a small part of Brahmā’s discourse comprising one hundred thousand chapters, the *Kāmasūtra* appears to be skeletal for knowledge that is contained in Brahmā’s discourse.

The handouts “state the essence of an issue in the most economical way” (Gerlach, 1974, p. 84). That is the reason why they “are stripped of unessentials” (Klemm, 1976, p. 12). Thus, the handouts “Present one idea at a time” (Gerlach, 1974, p. 83). Similarly, the *Kāmasūtra* deals with the idea of *kāma* economically with the help of its *sūtraic*, or formulaic, form. In short, knowledge that the male human gets in the form of the *Kāmasūtra* is merely a handout, which might not be the original form of knowledge.

One might identify this male human through the *Ṛg Veda* and Manu. The former mentions the Puruṣa, or the primordial being, from whose different parts of body four other beings are generated: the Brāhmaṇa from the mouth, the Kṣatriya from the arms, the Vaiśya from the thighs, and the Śūdra from the feet (*Ṛg Veda*, trans. 1973, p. 603). The latter borrows this structure and codifies the *varṇa*, or the four-fold stratified social system (Manu, trans. 2000, pp. 6-7). He ascribes educational and ritual functions to the Brāhmaṇa; the Kṣatriya gets to protect their kingdom; the Vaiśya gets farming and commerce; and to serve these three upper *varṇas*, the Śūdra is assigned



(Manu, trans. 2000, pp. 12-13). The *Ṛg Veda* and Manu amply attest that this human belongs to the Brāhmaṇa *varṇa*, and the story of the *Kāmasūtra*'s birth reveals that this human that receives the handout is male.

Since the divine male is the fountainhead of knowledge, the handout that the male Brāhmaṇa gets might not be the original form of knowledge. The male Brāhmaṇa's sole authority over production, circulation and consumption of knowledge might be questionable. The story of the *Kāmasūtra*'s birth reveals a grave fallacy about originality of knowledge on which the male Brāhmaṇa has monopoly and supremacy. One might suggest that the male Brāhmaṇa's knowledge about the *trivarga*, which might be viewed as the founding principle of Indian society, is fake, a replica, or merely a tip of the iceberg.

One might note that the male Brāhmaṇa's monopoly on the *kāma*-related knowledge starts to weaken when the females are recommended to study the *Kāmasūtra*. Thus, birth of the *Kāmasūtra*<sup>7</sup> marks a shift from the idea wherein knowledge appears to be a masculine enterprise. This feminine entrance in the masculine enterprise of knowledge could potentially dilute or disturb the idea of masculinity.

### The Nāgaraka

Nāgaraka is a prominent constituent of the *Kāmasūtra*. The word *nāgaraka* might be loosely translated into English as a male citizen. It might also be translated into English as a man-about-town (Doniger, 2007, p. 71).<sup>8</sup> He is also referred to as a *nāyaka*, or hero (Doniger, 2003, p. 20). Besides the king<sup>9</sup> and his officials, the Nāgaraka is the most important person in the *Kāmasūtra*. Not only that he occupies the central space in this composition, but it is also him to whom the *Kāmasūtra* is primarily addressed. He is one of "those who had leisure and means, time and money" (Doniger, 2007, p. 71).<sup>10</sup> He is the prime consumer of this composition as "men of wealth and power, kings and merchants, would commission texts to be copied out for their private use" (Doniger, 2003, p. 21). Since this composition's tone appears to be prescriptive, it is possible to view the *Kāmasūtra* as a pocketbook or manual of instructions that he is to apply to his life (Ali, 1998, p. 167).

The Nāgaraka and other people's lives are deeply entrenched in stiff economic conditions. The *Kāmasūtra* appears to emphasize the material conditions instead of the *varṇa*, or the four-fold stratified social system,<sup>11</sup> dynamics. That is why Daud Ali (1998) views the Nāgaraka as an integral part of the ruling classes that are sustained by the labor of productive classes (pp. 166-67). Does the emphasis on economic or material conditions negate *varṇa* or mitigate its significance? At least, the *Kāmasūtra*'s focus does not seem to be the *varṇa* dynamics.

Thus, the Nāgaraka might also be viewed as a category<sup>12</sup> with an essential qualification of having a stable economic base, but not necessarily the *varṇa*. That is, to lead a life as the Nāgaraka, or to be inducted to this category, a male requires stability in economic terms, his *varṇa* is inconsequential. Following is the source of his economic stability: a donation made to him, victory, business, labor, and inheritance of the paternal private property (Vātsyāyana, trans. 1999, 1.4.1). Such stable economic base ensures a male's induction to this category and sustains the prescribed lifestyle. The patrilineal resources might help build a male his masculinity (Breitenberg, 1996, p. 16). The stable economic base might be one of the building blocks of the Nāgaraka's masculinity.

### **Bed in the Drawing Room**

As part of the Nāgaraka's lifestyle, his house is mentioned. It is to be in a town, the capital, or a big village; he may stay at other good people's houses; or he may manage a place to live wherever he can eke out a living (Vātsyāyana, trans. 1999, 1.4.2). Architecturally, it should have two separate rooms, be in the vicinity of a pond, and it should also have an adjoining garden (Vātsyāyana, trans. 1999, 1.4.3). The External Room should consist of soft bedding with pillows on both sides of the bed; at the side where one places his or her head, there should be a bench on which the previous night's fragrant ointment and garlands, a box of wax, utensils to contain other fragrant things, bark of a specific tree, and betel etc. be kept (Vātsyāyana, trans. 1999, 1.4.4).

Daud Ali (1998) links the courtly practice of artifice with this description of exteriority, for instance, pond and the garden in whose vicinity the Nāgaraka's house is to be located (p. 167). He finds it implicit in the *Kāmasūtra*'s idea of pleasure whereby pleasure is generated through “the experience of the outer domains of the self” (Ali, 1998, p. 167). The minutely described interior of the External Room is “extended to the very structuring of courtly action. Pleasure was understood most centrally as an engagement with surfaces, which in turn was often conceived of as a ‘play’ or ‘dalliance’ (*krīḍā*)” (Ali, 1998, pp. 167-68).

Architecturally, the External Room in the *Kāmasūtra* might be equivalent to a Drawing Room. It is usually located near the main entrance of one's house, and it is used for entertaining their guests (Gheorghe, 2011, “The Differences Between”). The presence of the bed in the External, or Drawing, Room might problematize the idea of the act of sex. Is the act of sex a public or private matter? The publicness of the act of sex is emphasized when pleasure gets generated through *krīḍā*, or sport, play or dalliance, with external elements. The very act of sex becomes a *krīḍā*, which is a public matter as it entails two or more participants.

Fragrant things in the medieval *kāmaśāstra* tradition are inextricably “associated with the ideal lifestyle of both the king and the cultivated man-about-town” (McHugh, 2011, p. 64). James McHugh (2011) writes, “These affective materials are indispensable for pleasure, and the informed consumption of them is vital part of what it is to be a cultivated [male] person” (p. 65). Association and expertise about these material objects construct what the successful Nāgaraka and the king ought to be (McHugh, 2011, p. 65). It is argued in the *Nāgarasarvasva* that fragrant objects “are celebrated as eminent / inflamers of lust, / The best lover should be carefully instructed at the start from perfume texts” (qtd. in McHugh, 2011, p. 70). Since the material objects can induce sexual desire, the Nāgaraka must have to have expertise, which can be developed by studying the *Kāmasūtra* or the *Nāgarasarvasva*, as his object is to be the best lover, which indicates his masculinity.

## Daily Routine and Body Care

The Nāgaraka's daily routine begins with defecation, cleaning of teeth, rubbing sandalwood ointment on body, use of rouge and wax, looking at his face in the mirror, and consuming fragrant betel (Vātsyāyana, trans. 1999, 1.4.5). Daud Ali (1998) explains these daily activities through the idea of adornment or decoration “as part of the birth of discipline and science of ‘aesthetics’” (p. 168).

Body care or grooming and personal hygiene are also emphasised under the same idea, therefore the Nāgaraka is instructed to bathe every day, have his entire body massaged with oil on every second day, use soap every third day, have his beard and moustache shaved every fourth day, and have pubic hair shaved every fifth and the tenth day, and he should always keep his armpits clean from sweat (Vātsyāyana, trans. 1999, 1.4.6). It also includes eating of proper meal twice a day, whereby he should eat both meals either during the first half of the day or he should eat his first meal in the daytime and the second meal in the evening (Vātsyāyana, trans., 1999, 1.4.7).

In a different context, McComas Taylor (2013) links the ideas of male bodies as inscriptive surfaces (p. 155) with R. W. Connell's (2005) idea of hegemonic masculinities (p. 77). On such surfaces “physical strength, manliness, physique, beauty and desirability, but also fertility and ascetic energy, or *tejas*” are inscribed (Taylor, 2013, p. 155). One might notice how beauty and desirability are inscribed by way of body care or grooming and personal hygiene that are part of the Nāgaraka's daily routine. That is how his masculinity might be built, and it might also qualify to be hegemonic masculinity as he is a powerful individual in the *Kāmasūtra*. Thus, facilitated by the stable economic base, which Taylor (2013) also views as a definitive factor (p. 156), the Nāgaraka's daily routine, which includes self-adornment, body care or grooming, personal hygiene, and regimen, might significantly contribute to building of his masculinity.

### **The *Veśyā* and Social Intercourse**

The Nāgaraka's social intercourse has five parts. The first includes *smāja*, or assembly, that is held at a Sarasvatī temple for the local artists who entertain while demonstrating their expertise in different forms of arts (Vātsyāyana, trans. 1999, 1.4.14-15). He honours them by giving away prizes and request them to stay for some more time (Vātsyāyana, trans. 1999, 1.4.16). He should be helpful to them as well as other non-artist guests in a time of need; the duty of such a *smāja* is to honour and respect, and to help the local artists and the non-artist guests in a time of need (Vātsyāyana, trans. 1999, 1.4.17). This might be viewed as an attribute of his generosity, which is facilitated by the stable economic base and is viewed by Taylor (2013) as a definitive factor in building of one's masculinity (p. 156).

The second is a personal indoor meeting of an intimate nature. It is held at the Nāgaraka's house, at another male's house who is equal to him in social standing, education, intelligence, and economic prosperity, or at a *veśyā*'s, or learned and professional female's, house (Vātsyāyana, trans. 1999, 1.4.19). In this assembly, the civilised, popular, and talented artists should be accorded appropriate honour and the invited guests should be given special treatment and respect (Vātsyāyana, trans. 1999, 1.4.21). The third is a drinking party, in which *veśyās* have the Nāgaraka drink a variety of intoxicating and non-intoxicating beverages, and themselves drink with him (Vātsyāyana, trans. 1999, 1.4.23).

The fourth is stroll and other activities in the garden. They are drinking and horse riding in *veśyās* and other messengers or assistances' company, watching cock fight, gambling, and enjoying dance, drama, music, and acrobatic performances by other artists (Vātsyāyana, trans. 1999, 1.4.25). The fourth type of amusement or recreational activity also includes swimming and other water sports, especially, at the time of summer (Vātsyāyana, trans. 1999, 1.4.26). The fifth is about celebrating different festivals and sporting in groups (Vātsyāyana, trans. 1999, 1.4.27).

The mention of these learned and professional females at the time of social intercourse is indicative of their significant role in society. They are viewed as having beauty, good character, capacity of distinguishing themselves and

having high social stature and esteem (Sternbach, 1951, p. 26, 32; U. K. Singh, 2007, p. 162).<sup>13</sup> They are knowledgeable as they have command over the sixty-four arts, which form criteria to qualify as a learned and professional female (Sternbach, 1951, p. 29; U. K. Singh, 2007, p. 166; Saxena, 2006, pp. 9-10). These arts are a marker of elitism and equip her to hold equal position as men in society (Srinivasan, 2005, p. 345; Saxena, 2006, p. 10). It seems that the *veśyā* is identified here as the feminine element that enters the masculine enterprise of knowledge.

She is also capable of performing an act of truth (Srinivasan, 2005, p. 350).<sup>14</sup> Between ninth and thirteenth century CE in Karnataka, their role remains significant as patronising them has been a trend and a symbol of the monarchy (Surebankar, 2012, p. 367). Similarly, holding of *goṣṭhīs*, or talks, “on the upper level of their houses” is also mentioned (Surebankar, 2012, p. 368; Saxena, 2006, p. 11).

Due to institutionalization<sup>15</sup> of their work, they play a significant role in economy as professional women by earning, paying taxes, and consuming “luxurious articles of trade – betel leaves, precious metals and stones, ornaments, cosmetics and medicinal items” (Surebankar, 2012, p. 369). They are famous, command honour, have a distinct social identity, and contribute to society by doing philanthropic works (Surebankar, 2012, pp. 369-370; Saxena, 2006, p. 8, 13). Unlike other women,<sup>16</sup> they remain free “from the confinement of domestic routine, childbearing and social convention and seclusion of the inner realms of the home” (Sengupta, 2014, p. 124). She might also be viewed as the first paid working female, a professional in entertainment business, due to her mastery of the sixty-four arts, and an independent and free-thinking female (Sengupta, 2014, pp. 124-125, 127; Saxena, 2006, p. 12).

Her presence with the Nāgaraka in social intercourse adds prestige to his status in society because she is “the symbol of status” (Y. B. Singh, 1993, p. 181). She might also be capable of understanding male sexuality for manipulating it to her advantage (Sengupta, 2014, pp. 129-130). Her presence with him might also be viewed in terms of an attribute to the Nāgaraka’s masculinity (Surebankar, 2012, p. 367). In short, the *veśyā* plays socio-

culturally, politically, economically, intellectually, and sexually significant roles in society.

The Nāgaraka's social intercourse, especially vis-à-vis the *veśyā*, might constitute what Daud Ali (2011) calls the *kāma* world (p. 1). In this world of *kāma*, sensual pleasure is mixed with aesthetics and ethics (Ali, 2011, p. 1). In other words, the *kāma* world is constituted not only by pleasure of the act of sex but also by other knowledge practices called *aṅgavidyās*, or supporting knowledges, which are “necessary for romantic accomplishment in the *Kāmasūtra*” (Ali, 2011, pp. 1-2). The Nāgaraka and the *veśyā* take the centre of “this world of art and music, precious gems and metals, colourful flowers, luxurious fabrics, and enticing perfumes...in order to succeed in experiences of ‘pleasure’” (Ali, 2011, pp. 1-2). The *veśyā* and material objects might contribute to building of the Nāgaraka's masculinity.

### The Sub-Nāgaraka

Since sub-Nāgaraka, or sub-citizen, who is lesser in importance and prestige than the Nāgaraka, exists in the *Kāmasūtra*, one might assume that this category is created due to economic declination. One might assume that when the Nāgaraka, who is a symbol of economic prosperity, leisurely lifestyle, and the highest socio-cultural activities, undergoes economic declination, he is relegated to the sub-Nāgaraka's position. Such categorisation is a hallmark of a social system in which one's status is additionally defined by the economic stability. There are several sub-Nāgarakas: *pīṭhamarda*,<sup>17</sup> who teaches the *veśyās* how to earn a living; *viṭa*, who earns a living by being in contact of the Nāgarakas and *veśyās* in whose assemblies and parties he is honoured; *vidūṣaka*, who is expert in curiosity-related sports and is good at comic; and village Nāgaraka, who narrates stories about and creates character sketches of the urban Nāgaraka to inspire villagers (Vātsyāyana, trans. 1999, 1.4.31-33; 1.4.36). These sub-Nāgarakas' occupations might indicate towards their position as service providers.

Economic stability and declination, respectively, in the Nāgaraka and the sub-Nāgaraka's contexts form two contradictory elements of society in the *Kāmasūtra*. Insofar as economic stability is concerned, G. Bongard-Levin

(1979) mentions advancement in agricultural technologies and developed methods of irrigation facilitated by dams (pp. 129-30). He also mentions development in craftsmanship in the domain of weaponry and textile industries (Bongard-Levin, 1979, pp. 133-34). Bongard-Levin (1979) mentions expansion of internal and the foreign trade that is facilitated by road and water transportation and communication advancement; the exchange of commodities; and the trade districts that are supervised by the state (pp. 134-36).

Dwijendra Narayana Jha (1998) critiques the use of titles and epithets “which imply the existence of lesser kings with considerable authority within the [Gupta] empire” (Jha, 1998, p. 152). That is, the powerful are engrossed in self-projection to cover up their administrative inefficiencies. Jha (1998) calls decentralisation of the administrative authority that is expedited by not paying but assigning revenues to the religious representatives, the military and other types of employees; and this later leads to grant of land and villages to the employees and other administrative officers (p. 153). This is the emergence of a socio-economic category called the landlords which occupies the middle space between the state and the peasantry (Jha, 1998, p. 153). Jha (1998) views it as undermining of the state authority, beginning of the feudal-cum-serfdom system of exploitation and the practice of subinfeudation (pp. 153-55). The decline of foreign and internal trade; the industrial slump; and the dearth of foreign and domestic metal monies (Jha, 1998, p. 156). Finally, the economic declination results in disappearance of cities, urban centres, or the trade districts (Jha, 1998, p. 158). Jha (1998) does not belie the economic stability, he rather places it vis-à-vis the economic declination (p. 173).

One might note that society undergoes some sort of atomisation that the *Kāmasūtra* captures. The categories such as the *Nāgaraka*, sub-*Nāgaraka*, *veśyās*, and other service providers indicate this. The atomisation due to economic volatility might be reflection of one’s masculinity.



### Conclusion

The self is based on *prakṛti* or *svabhāva*.<sup>18</sup> The term *prakṛti* may be defined in terms of a distinct and innate quality or element that is central to one's form or character and remains immutable. This term is also described as one's nature, temperament, original or natural state of behaviour, and propensity. One might note that these elements might be contingent on economic base, and, therefore, they do not remain constant. That is, one's nature is considered immutable, yet it turns out to be mutable and slippery in the *Kāmasūtra* due to its dependence on the economic base.

The term *svabhāva* can be split into words *sva* and *bhāva*. The former means of self or of one's self, and the latter may mean emotion, manner, mental attitude or state of mind or body, and a way of feeling or thinking. This term is also described as one's nature, character, innate disposition, and one's own condition or state of being. Therefore, it might also be understood as contingent on the economic base.

In the context of *prakṛti* or *svabhāva*, the word *teja* is used in the *Kāmasūtra*. It may mean resplendence, brightness, heat, radiance, luminosity, halo, energy, or power. Its most common use is vis-à-vis an exceptional individual in terms of emission of *teja* from his face or the entire personality. Wendy Doniger (2003) uses *tejas*, which designates light and heat, but, according to her, may mean natural talent or glory (p. 25). In the *Kāmasūtra*, rigidity, hardness, inflexibility, or stiffness and arrogance, audacity, impudence, boldness, or haughtiness are associated with *tejas* of the male (Vātsyāyana, trans. 1999, 2.7.22). That is, these innate qualities define the first *prakṛti* or *svabhāva* called the male. Doniger (2003) uses the terms roughness and ferocity as natural talent or glory that defines this *prakṛti* or *svabhāva* (p. 25).

The second *prakṛti* or *svabhāva* called the female is defined as gentle by nature with tender body (Vātsyāyana, trans. 1999, 2.1.37). In the *Kāmasūtra*, powerlessness, inability, suffering, resistance, and weakness are associated with *tejas* of the female (Vātsyāyana, trans. 1999, 2.7.22). That is, these innate qualities define the female. In addition to lack of power, suffering and weakness, Doniger (2003) uses self-denial also as natural talent or glory that

defines the female (p. 25). But the first and the second *prakṛtis* are reprogrammed in the act of sex: the former assumes the latter's nature, and the latter former's (Vātsyāyana, trans. 1999, 2.7.23).

The final *prakṛti* or *svabhāva* is defined as neither a male nor a female. This *prakṛti* is called the *ṭṛtīyāprakṛti*, or third nature. S/he dilutes or disturbs the idea of masculinity. S/he has two appearances, namely, *strīrūpiṇī* and *puruṣarūpiṇī* (Vātsyāyana, trans. 1999, 2.9.1). The first has styles of dressing, conversation and gestures like females, who are comely and coquettish, have softness, timidity, naïveté, impatience, and modesty like females (Vātsyāyana, trans. 1999, 2.9.2).<sup>19</sup> The second has the male appearance and s/he is not feminine in its style of dressing, speaking, and gesticulating, nor is it mild and simple-minded, and s/he does not disclose her/his latent wish for the male contact (Vātsyāyana, trans. 1999, 2.9.6).

The *ṭṛtīyāprakṛti* persons might be viewed in terms of service providers. In this regard, the practice of the *aupariṣṭaka*, or oral, act of sex is ascribed to her/him. It is a medium of pleasure and a source of living for the *strīrūpiṇī*; and s/he is prescribed to follow the code of conduct of a *veśyā* (Vātsyāyana, trans. 1999, 2.9.4-5). The *puruṣarūpiṇī* works as a masseur for males (Vātsyāyana, trans. 1999, 2.9.6). S/he is required to initiate confidence building measures, which might lead to arousal and, thus, begin this act (Vātsyāyana, trans. 1999, 2.9.7; 2.9.9-10).

The *puruṣarūpiṇī*'s case may be understood through the seventeenth century barber in London. Mark Albert Johnston (2010) mentions how the barber and his shop become a site of “congregation, fraternization, and fellowship”, and how both stood for “pleasure and pain, health and contagion, licit and illicit activity” (pp. 115-16). Since body care or grooming is one of the essential components that builds the Nāgaraka's masculinity, congregation of Nāgarakas for the massage service by the *puruṣarūpiṇī* is possible to assume. Visiting her/him is a usual practice, thereby part of tradition, of affluent<sup>20</sup> males. Johnston (2010) also mentions “rubbing, friction” and “unguents, lotions” (p. 117). As mentioned above, unguents, lotions and perfumes constitute the *kāma* world in which the Nāgaraka takes the centre stage. They are also integral to massage just like rubbing and friction.

Massage is an activity in which the one who seeks it surrenders his or her body to a masseur or a masseuse for pleasure of the body that is generated through superficial pain. It might be engagement of the masseur or the masseuse's hands with different parts of the pleasure-seeker's body. It is an intimate activity. Is it not how *kāma* has been defined above in the second half of its definition in the Dwivedi translation? The seventeenth century barber's services have potential to fashion or undo his customers' masculinity (Johnston, 2010, p. 117).<sup>21</sup> Since the *puruṣarūpiṇī* is neither a male nor a female, s/he slips through gender or sex binaries. Her/his act, the massage, that s/he provides the Nāgaraka is *kāma*. This act might also be viewed in terms of confidence building measures. By virtue of the massage, *kāma*, or confidence building measures, the *puruṣarūpiṇī* engages the Nāgaraka in the act of oral sex. The very slipperiness that her/his gender or sex, or the act of oral sex, creates in the space occupied by them might also affect, or refashion, the Nāgaraka's masculinity.

To sum up, this study finds out that the tendency of *kāma* is not restricted to masculine and feminine binaries. The masculine monopoly in the *kāma*-related knowledge is challenged when females study the *Kāmasūtra* and thereby affect masculinity. In the Nāgaraka's context, this study also finds out that masculinity is contingent on the economic base. As his economic conditions change, his masculinity is affected. It is also affected by his relations with service providers such as the *veśyā*, the sub-Nāgaraka, and the *trītyāprakṛti* persons. To conclude, the idea of masculinity as conceived in the *Kāmasūtra* is malleable and fluid not only because of these factors but also intrinsically.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> It also presents a convolution of the definition in the second half (Vātsyāyana, trans. 1994, 1.2.12).

<sup>2</sup> Lalji Shrivak (1999) traces the development of complex concept of *ātmā* or *ātman* back to the *Vedas* and *Upaniṣads*. The idea is *ekam sat*, or one reality, which controls everything (p. 9). The *Ṛg Veda* mentions *ātman* as “breath, vital air, vital essence” (p. 9). Similarly, *ātman* in the *Upaniṣads* “consists of knowledge (*vijñānamaya*), of mind (*manomaya*), of breath (*prāṇamaya*), of seeing (*cakṣumaya*)...and of everything (*sarvamaya*)” (p. 9). The *Upaniṣads* mention that it “dwells in all phenomena of the universe, and it controls everything from within” (p. 9). This study uses *soul* for *ātmā* or *ātman* to avoid complexity.

<sup>3</sup> This definition of *kāma* has affinities with Daud Ali’s (1998) interpretation of *kāma* in which he views the mind as forming a bridge between soul, consciousness and intelligence and the human senses (p. 164).

<sup>4</sup> The Burton translation mentions *pravacana* as commandments, which might be indicative of his Christian foundations (p. 6). Doniger and Kakar translate it into “the means” to achieve something (Vātsyāyana, trans. 2002, 1.1.5).

<sup>5</sup> The word *trivarga* is composed of *tri*, which means three, and *varga*, which could mean section, category, class, or division. *Dharma*, *artha* and *kāma* constitute it. Nevertheless, the Daniélou translation uses “triple level” for it (Vātsyāyana, trans. 1994, 1.1.5). Doniger and Kakar translate it into “the three aims of life” (Vātsyāyana, trans. 2002, 1.1.5). Daud Ali (1998) mentions it under *puruṣārthas*, or goals of man, which also include *mokṣa*, or liberation (p. 163). He bifurcates the *puruṣārthas* by placing the *trivarga* on the one hand and *mokṣa* on the other. The former is for the *gṛhapati*, or householder, and the latter is for the *śramaṇa*, or renouncer, or the *bhikkhu*, or monk. Elsewhere Ali (2011) mentions the *kāmaśāstra* texts concerned with *kāma* as part of the *trivarga* or *puruṣārthas* and thereby constituting “an ethically complete life in the world” (p. 7). He views these *śāstras* on *kāma* as providers of “an ethical/practical framework for the enjoyment of pleasures” (Ali, 2011, p. 7). Kumkum Roy (1992) calls it “legitimate domains of activity for a man” (p. 55).

<sup>6</sup> They are Manu, Bṛhaspati, Nandī, Śvetaketu, Pāñcāla Bābhavya, Dattaka, Cārāyaṇa, Suvarṇanābha, Ghoṭakamukha, Gonardīya, Goṇikāputra, and Kucumāra. Of these males, Manu gets *dharma*-, Bṛhaspati *artha*- and Nandī gets the *kāma*-related discourse. The *kāma*-related discourse is truncated into one thousand chapters. Śvetaketu, the son of *ṛṣi* Uddālaka, reduces it to five hundred chapters. Pāñcāla Bābhavya shortens it to one hundred and fifty chapter and divides into seven parts. Dattaka splits the sixth part called ‘Vaiśika’ from Bābhavya’s at Pāṭaliputra *gaṇikās*’, or learned and professional females’, behest, and develops a separate composition. This instance corroborates the female entry into the masculine enterprise of knowledge. There are several types of such learned and professional females. Smita P. Surebankar (2012) mentions *rajasule* or *rajaivesye*, or courtesan, *devadasi*, or temple dancer,

## 72 Singh – Masculinity in Early India

and *vyakti* or *samaja vesye*, or common prostitute, between ninth and thirteenth centuries CE (p. 367). Ludwik Sternbach (1951) points out ten words, including *ganikā*, *śilpakārikā* and *kaśikastrī*, that the *Arthaśāstra* uses for such women; and nine words, including *paricārikā*, *kulaṭā* and *naṭī*, that the *Kāmasūtra* uses for such women (pp. 25-26). Y. B. Singh (1993) refers to Daṇḍin's distinction between two types of *ganikās*: *guṇa-śulkā*, who focuses on qualities of a person, and *dhana-śulkā*, whose focus is money (p. 182). In other words, the figure of the learned and professional female emerges and disrupts this masculine enterprise of knowledge. The males from Cārāyaṇa to Kucumāra develop the remaining six parts of Bābhavya's composition into separate compositions.

<sup>7</sup> Daud Ali (1998) discusses the idea of *kāma* in the Vedic context wherein the objective of *kāma* is not attainment of pleasure but procreation (p. 164). There is a disconnection between *kāma* and procreation in the *Kāmasūtra* (Ali, 1998, p. 165). *Kāma* becomes “a realm of theorization and a way of organizing knowledge and practice. It became the subject of a scientific discipline (*śāstra*) which eventually culminated in the composition” of the *Kāmasūtra* (Ali, 1998, p. 164).

<sup>8</sup> James McHugh (2011) uses *man-about-town* in medieval *kāmaśāstra* tradition's context. Daud Ali (1998) uses *townsman* and *city-dweller* for the word *nāgaraka*.

<sup>9</sup> Smita Sahgal (2015) views the king in terms of supremely powerful (p. 4). But he might appear to be marginal vis-à-vis the prominence accorded to the *Nāgaraka*. Similarly, Kumkum Roy (1992) also finds him vulnerable if his power is exercised without constant watchfulness (p. 56).

<sup>10</sup> Daud Ali (1998) calls him “household-possessing city-dweller” (p. 166). The *Nāgaraka* is a person who owns private property. This private property might have been a result of inheritance from his paternal side (Vātsyāyana, trans. 1999, 1.4.1). He is expected to be prosperous and cultured (Saxena, 2006, p. 6). He has virtues as well vices that are part of urban lifestyle (Rocher, 1985, p. 525). His bourgeois lifestyle is founded on the prosperity due to India's trade with Inner Asia and Eastern Mediterranean counties (Ray, 1977-1978, p. 864). Megasthenes' account of urban lifestyle at Pāṭalīputra might be corroborated by the archaeological sites at Bulandibagh and Kumrahar in Patna (Ray, 1977-1978, p. 874).

<sup>11</sup> Ludo Rocher (1985) gives indication of *varṇa* while discussing a man who is *grhūtavidyā*, or having acquired the necessary learning, and *gārhapatyam adhigamya*, or having advanced to the stage of a householder, to whom the *Kāmasūtra* is addressed (p. 524).

<sup>12</sup> Daud Ali's (1998) reference to the *Nāgaraka* as a social category that emerged due to “Increasing sedentarization, the spread of agriculture and intensified urbanization” might be similar here (p. 161). The difference between the two is that the former emphasises the stable economic base for entrance to this category and the latter brings into focus the factors of sedentarization, agriculture, and urbanization as the basis of emergence of the category.

<sup>13</sup> Ludwik Sternbach's (1951) source is the *Kāmasūtra*. He also mentions the *Arthaśāstra* wherein she has been viewed as a “government servant” (p. 26).

<sup>14</sup> It means that one is capable of formally declaring that she or he perfectly executes their duties that have been prescribed in accordance with their position in social hierarchy (Srinivasan, 2005, p. 350). In *Milindapañha*, a *veśyā* Bindumatī performs this act when Aśoka asks. (U. K. Singh, 2007, pp. 164-65).

- <sup>15</sup> Reasons for social acceptance and institutionalization are the intermingling of Perso-Greek and Indian cultures in the North-Western and the Mauryan courts (Singh, 1993, pp.185-89). For R. S. Sharma why this “class of alienated women” emerges is “the urban surroundings and break-up of the old tribal family” (Singh, 2007, p. 166). When one can buy some women’s favours, or pleasure out of home is paid for, institutionalisation occurs (Saxena, 2006, pp. 4-6).
- <sup>16</sup> Monika Saxena (2006) views them in terms of family women (p. 2).
- <sup>17</sup> It might be possible that *pīṭhamarda* teaches *veśyās* the sixty-four arts due to his expertise in *śāstric* knowledge and arts. He can afford only jasmine, soap, and juice, resin, or other fragrant things (Vātsyāyana, trans. 1999, 1.4.31). It is also not clearly mentioned in the *Kāmasūtra* who pays for a *veśyā*’s education. Nevertheless, in the *Arthaśāstra*, it is the king who provides for her education and protection (Sternbach, 1951, p. 35; Srinivasan, 2005, p. 346; Singh, 2007, p. 165; Sahoo, 2010-2011, p. 360).
- <sup>18</sup> Lin Foxhall (1998) finds a notion of hierarchy implicit in the building of masculine self (p. 2).
- <sup>19</sup> The Roman term *infamis*, which means the one “who ‘took the woman’s role,’” echoes it (Walters, 1998, p. 150).
- <sup>20</sup> Johnston (2010) also mentions the economic or financial dimension to the maintenance of masculinity for which the affluent customers of the London barber pay (p. 118).
- <sup>21</sup> This barber’s services have been equated with the services that the erstwhile prostitute provides (Johnston, 2010, pp. 119-122). This equation might also resemble the *strīrūpiṇī*, a service provider, who is prescribed to adopt code of conduct of a *veśyā*.

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76 Singh – *Masculinity in Early India*

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**Sukhdev Singh** is Assistant Professor at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, National Institute of Technology Patna, India

**Contact Address:** Direct correspondence to Sukhdev Singh, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, National Institute of Technology Patna. Bihar (800005), India. email: [dr.singhs@outlook.com](mailto:dr.singhs@outlook.com)