

Sex and Hinduism | Hindus: Hinduism : Sex before Marriage? | Hindu views about Sex

Sex and Hinduism

According to Hinduism, sex is an integral part of life. It is not a taboo. In fact, it is part of the four Purusharthas of life. Dharma, Artha, Kama, and Moksha are the four Purusharthas of a Hindu's life. The Kama here means all the activities, which give us pleasure. Sex is also one of those activities.

Kamasutra is the oldest book about the sex written by Vatsayana, a Hindu sage. This book gives detailed descriptions about sex like types, positions, importance, compatibility of partners, eunuchs, etc.

The ancient Khajuraho Temple in India is famous for the sculptures on it in which the statues of men and women are depicted as having sex in different positions.

According to Hinduism, sex is sacred only if it is marital. Hinduism prohibits premarital or extramarital sex.

Some sects in Hinduism worship Yoni (female genitalia) as the Goddess.

Hindus worship Lord Shiva in the form of Lingam, which is a symbol of male creative energy, and is always shown with Yoni, the symbol of female creative energy.

In ancient India, a widow without children was allowed to have sex with the appropriate person in order to have a child. This process was called as Niyoga.

In Mahabharata, Draupadi is depicted as having five husbands who were Pandavas.

Though Hinduism does not support prostitution, you will find prostitutes in all parts of India. Sex without marriage is a bad Karma and the person has to pay the price for it.

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Information:-

In Hinduism Dharma, Artha, Kama, and Moksha are the four Purusharthas of a Hindu's life and sex is an integral part of life, which is part of the four Purusharthas. The "Kama" means those activities, which give us pleasure and satisfaction. Sex is also one of those activities which gives great pleasure and satisfaction.

Kamasutra is a very ancient book about sex, written by the Hindu sage Vatsyana. This book has all those details and descriptions about sex types, sex positions, sex importance and compatibility of partners, eunuchs etc. The ancient Khajuraho Temple in Madhya Pradesh, India is well known for the sculptures on it. Here the statues of men and women are depicted as having sex in different positions. The builders of the Khajuraho temple were Rajputs and were followers of Waam-marga or left-handed Tantra, an acceptable way of attaining Moksha.

The sculptors created those pieces of art only outside the temple because it signifies that all those feelings must be left outside the temple, before entering the inner sanctum. There are no such sculptures inside the temple. The sculptures are also on Konark temple's exterior. It is a metaphysical symbolism. Hinduism recognizes the role of sexual desires in human lives.

The sexual depictions in some of the temples were meant to not only educate the people, but also to help those who were involved in sexual sadhanas for enlightenment. There is a difference between Nudity and expression of beauty and pornography. What appears in Hindu puranas and Itihasas are the expressions of genuine beauty and not pornography.

The carving of such bold sculptures denotes the free thinking creative minority existing in India at that time. This also signifies that Scythians, Huns, and Kushans' assimilation in Hindu society was complete by then. The freeness of the society towards discussing sex empirically and scientifically reveals about the overall openness of the culture.

According to Kama Sutra, the man should practise Dharma, Artha and Kama at different times and in such a manner that they may harmonize together and not clash in any way. He should acquire learning in his childhood, in his youth and middle age he should attend to Artha and Kama. In his old age he should perform Dharma and thus seek to gain salvation i.e. liberation. Moksha is a long process which can be achieved only when all material desires are fulfilled.

Acharya Rajnish aka Osho, in his book- "Sambhog Se Samadhi Tak" has very convincingly explained this. He says that a person is always engaged in pleasure till a time comes that he is satisfied of all these things going around the temple and then he enters the temple to see the God. That is first you have to deal with very natural things like Kaam and only after crossing this, you can attain Gyan or knowledge of God.

Hinduism only approves the marital sex as sacred and prohibits premarital or extramarital sex. Some sects in Hinduism worship Yoni (female sex organ) as the Goddess. Hindus worship Lord Shiva in the

form of Lingam, which is a symbol of male creative energy and is always shown with Yoni,the symbol of female creative energy.

In olden times India,a childless widow was considered to have sex with the appropriate person in order to have a child and it was called as “Niyoga”.In Mahabharata, Draupadi is depicted as having five husbands who were Pandavas.Though Hinduism does not support prostitution, you will find prostitutes in all parts of India.

Shiva Lingam

*Sex as Meditation-

During a conversation between Shiva and Shakti(Vigyan Bhairava Tantra),Devi Asks-

O Shiva, what is your reality ?
What is this wonderful universe ?
What consttutes seed ?
Who controlls the universal wheel ?
What is this life beyond form pervading forms ?
How may we enter it fully,
above space and time,
names and descriptions ?
Let my doubts be cleared !

Shiva then explains her 112 methods of meditation to attain enlightenment.

Lord Shiva explains-

At the start of sexual union

Keep attentive on the fire in the beginning,

And so continuing,

Avoid the embers in the end.

When in such embrace your senses are shaken as leaves,

Enter this shaking.

Even remembering union,

Without the embrace. These verses clearly indicate how sexual act can be utilized for achieving enlightenment. Enlightenment is a state, when all egos vanish. As in a sexual act, the couple leaves behind their ego and unites with each other and achieves sexual ecstasy. This very thing can be utilized to achieve spiritual ecstasy.

*Sex as Yajna-

Yajna or sacrifice is derived from root word “Yaj”, which means Worship or offering an oblation. It is an act by which a couple surrenders the ego, in order to gain pleasure, satisfaction and progeny.

“Her lap is a sacrificial altar, her hairs, the sacrificial grass, her skin, the soma-press, the two labia of the vulva are the fire in the middle. So great is the world of his who practises sexual intercourse. These verses from “Upanishad” clearly indicate that, sex is a form of worship and also as an act of sacredness.

*Message-

The Hindu Sage, Vatsayana says, both men and women should learn Kamashastra. In Hindu society sex was always considered to be individual choices. There are many instances in our history and scriptures mentioning pre-marital sex and love marriages. Also the extra marital affairs are personal affairs, we should let individuals to decide about it. Hence it is improper to call them anti-Hindu acts. Gandharva Marriage is the voluntary union of a maiden and her lover, which arises from desire and sexual intercourse for its purpose.

Hinduism has given freedom to its people. In Hindu society sex is neither a taboo nor pornography. Sex is a sacred act, recognized as human desire to be satisfied and which may be used to attain the ultimate goal of enlightenment.

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“Her lap is a sacrificial altar; her hairs, the sacrificial grass; her skin, the soma-press. The two labia* (lips) of the vulva are the fire in the middle.” [Brhad-Âranyaka Upanisad, 6.4.3]

“This man (ama) am I; that woman (sâ), thou!

That woman, thou; this man am I!

I am the Sâman; thou, the Rig!
I am the heaven; thou, the earth!
Come, let us two together clasp!

Together let us semen mix,
A male, a son for to procure!” [Brhad-Âranyaka Upanisad, 6.4.20]¹

Whenever the issue of Love, Nudity, Sex and Hinduism comes into picture, we usually get any one of the following reactions-

1] The Westerners in general and Western scholars doing South Asian studies [for example RISA²] in particular, and their Indian counterparts who consider Hinduism to be mix of voodoo and pornography.

2] The Hindu orthodox which thinks sex is a taboo.

Now I will examine, how valid is both of these perspective.

Hindu Purusharthas:

Purusharthas means objectives of a human being. They are the canonical four ends or aims of human life. They serve as pointers in the life. The four Purusharthas from lowest to highest-

- ? Kama – pleasure or desire³
- ? Artha – wealth
- ? Dharma – righteousness or morality
- ? Moksha – liberation from the cycle of reincarnation

According to Kama Sutra, “IN the beginning, the Lord of Beings created men and women, and in the form of commandments in one hundred thousand chapters laid down rules for regulating their existence with regard to Dharma, Artha, and Kama.” ⁴ Further it says- “MAN, the period of whose life is one hundred years, should practise Dharma, Artha and Kama at different times and in such a manner that they may harmonize together and not clash in any way. He should acquire learning in his childhood, in his youth and middle age he should attend to Artha and Kama, and in his old age he should perform Dharma, and thus seek to gain Moksha, i.e. release from further transmigration..”⁵

So, according to Hindu scheme of thing, even though Enlightenment is the ultimate goal of life, it encourages people to enjoy everything and fulfill all material desires. Moksha is a long process. It can be achieved only when all material desires are quenched. And hence, Hindu religion prescribes 2 methods, the path of renunciates, the path of householder. There is one more less popular but more maligned path of within “Tantras” which accept everything material, everything condemned as taboo and hence aims to rise above the animalistic desires.

Sex as Yajna:

Yajna or sacrifice is derived from root word “Yaj”. It means Worship or offering an oblation. Max Muller defines Yajna is an act by which we surrender something for the sake of gods”6. Sex is worship. It is an act by which the couples surrender their ego, in order to gain pleasure, progeny, eventually even enlightenment.

“Her lap is a sacrificial altar; her hairs, the sacrificial grass; her skin, the soma-press. The two labia of the vulva are the fire in the middle. Verily, indeed, as great as is the world of him who sacrifices with the Vâjapeya (“Strength-libation”) sacrifice, so great is the world of him who practises sexual intercourse”7 (Brhad-Âranyaka Upanisad)

These verses clearly shows that, sex was treated as a form of worship, an act to not only fulfill one”s desires and gain pleasures, but also as an act of sacredness.

Sex as Meditation:

In Vigyana Bhairava Tantra8, during a conversation between Shiva and Shakti,

Devi Asks:

O Shiva, what is your reality?
What is this wonder-filled universe?
What consttutes seed?
Who centers the universal wheel?
What is this life beyond form pervading forms?
How may we enter it fully,
above space and time,
names and descriptions?
Let my doubts be cleared!

So, Shiva explains her 112 methods of meditation to attain enlightenment. He says-

At the start of sexual union
Keep attentive on the fire in the beginning,
And so continuing,
Avoid the embers in the end.
When in such embrace your senses are shaken as leaves,
Enter this shaking.
Even remembering union,
Without the embrace.

These verses clearly indicate how sexual act can be utilized for achieving enlightenment. Enlightenment is a state, when all egos vanish. As in a sexual act, the couple leaves behind their ego and unites with each

other and achieves sexual ecstasy. This very thing can be utilized to achieve spiritual ecstasy.

Kamashastra:

It is the study of “Sixty Four⁹” arts like- Singing, Playing on musical instruments, Dancing, Union of dancing, singing, and playing instrumental music, Writing and drawing, Tattooing, etc. “Kamasutra” or the “art of lovemaking” only a part of this Shastra.

Is Hinduism pornography and Tantra a sex manual?

The straight answer is a simple No. It is Victorian mentality which condemns any depiction of sex. Hinduism recognizes the role of sexual desires in human lives. The sexual depictions in some of the temples were meant to not only educate the people, but also to help those who were involved in sexual sadhanas for enlightenment. There is a difference between Nudity and expression of beauty and pornography. What appears in Hindu puranas and Itihasas are the expressions of genuine beauty and not pornography.

“Tantra” is a much maligned word. “Tantra” actually refers to vast body of literatures called “Agamas” which are practical manuals for meditation. There are many Shaiva, Shaktha, Pancharatra Agamas. Using sex for meditation is prescribed in only few of the so many different paths described in Agamas. So, it is very wrong in equating Tantra with Sex.

Some Social Issues:

Sex Education: Sex education had always been present in Hindu history. Vatsayana says, both men and women should learn Kamashastra¹⁰.

Pre-Marital Sex and Love Marriages: In Hindu society sex was always considered to be individual choices. There are many instances in our history and scriptures depicting pre-marital sex and love marriages. So, crying out against them as being anti-Hindu is not quite proper. Manusmrithi recognizes 8 kinds of marriages of which “Gandharva Marriage¹¹” is one of them. It is the voluntary union of a maiden and her lover, which arises from desire and sexual intercourse for its purpose.

The same can be said about extra marital affairs. As they are personal affairs, we should let individuals to decide about it. Hindu society has always given this much freedom to its people.

Conclusion:

In Hindu society sex is neither a taboo nor pornography. Sex is sacred. Sex is recognized as human desire which should be satisfied and which can be used to attain the ultimate goal of enlightenment.

References & Notes:

¹ Brhad-Âranyaka Upanisad forms part of the Satapatha-brâhmana. The verses are taken from chapter

titled “Incantations and ceremonies for procreation”

<http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/sbe15/sbe15098.htm>

2 Religions In South Asia (RISA), a department under the American Academy of Religion (AAR), has been sponsoring studies for years now to deride Hinduism. Our gods and goddesses like Ganesha, Shiva, Parvati, Laxmi and Kali, our rituals like Upanayana our saints like Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and scriptures, Mahabharata, Ramayana and Gita all have come under such distasteful sexual connotation and nauseating voyeurism that one begins to wonder if it can at all be called academics.

<http://www.organiser.org/dynamic/modules.php?name=Content&pa=showpage&pid=195&page=2>

3 Kama in general means material desires and pleasures- Physical, Emotional, Sexual, Psychological. According to Kama Sutra of Vatsayana- “Kama is the enjoyment of appropriate objects by the five senses of hearing, feeling, seeing, tasting and smelling, assisted by the mind together with the soul. The ingredient in this is a peculiar contact between the organ of sense and its object, and the consciousness of pleasure which arises from that contact is called Kama.”

<http://www.sacred-texts.com/sex/kama/kama102.htm>

4 Chapter 1, Preface, The Kama Sutra of Vatsayayana, Translated by Sir Richard Burton.

<http://www.sacred-texts.com/sex/kama/kama101.htm>

5 Chapter 2, Observations on the Three Worldly Attainments of Virtue, Wealth, and Love, The Kama Sutra of Vatsayayana, Translated by Sir Richard Burton.

<http://www.sacred-texts.com/sex/kama/kama102.htm>

6 Max Muller, Sacred Books of East series.

7 Brhad-Âranyaka Upanisad

8 Vigyana Bhairava Tantra.

<http://www.escapefromwatchtower.com/vigyan.html>

9,10 Chapter III. On the Study of the Sixty-Four Arts, The Kama Sutra of Vatsayayana, Translated by Sir Richard Burton.

<http://www.sacred-texts.com/sex/kama/kama103.htm>

11 <http://hinduism.about.com/library/weekly/extra/bl-wed-types.htm>

Why did Ancient Hindu Temples have Sex Sculptures?

Sex symbols have been associated with Hinduism from an early stage. These symbols were mainly part of nature worship. There is difference of opinion regarding the exact reason for sex sculptures in Hindu temples. And the notion of Hindu sex temples is wrong. A Classic example is Khajuraho where only 20% of the sculptures are sex sculptures that too they are depicted along with other aspects of life.

Kama (materialistic living which includes sex) is one among the four paths suggested in Hinduism to merge with Brahman or to escape from rebirth (Moksha). Many scholars think these sculptures were meant to explain the 'Kama' aspect to people.

A closer study of Hinduism will reveal that sex was never a taboo during the ancient period. Some believe they were meant for sex education and there is nothing unnatural for temples to have them. In fact, the sex sculptures are all seen outside the Hindu temple along with other sculptures depicting materialistic way of life.

Buddhism had completely devoured Hinduism during the initial phase of 1st millennium. But soon the rigid Buddhist way of life began to create problems in the society. It is said that Hindu sages saw this as an opportunity to revive Hinduism. To invite people into family and sex life these sculptures were created.

The ancient Hindu kings of India were noted for their extravagance. Some scholars believe the sculptures were part of this luxury.