

GRIHASTHA ASHRAMA AND THE KAMASUTRA

Bawa, Simmin

Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy, Jai Hind College (Autonomous), Mumbai

ABSTRACT

The *Kamasutra* is an ancient text guiding the sensual and sexual life of men and women in society. The text authored by Mallinga Vatsyayana is a work of art describing the variety of human sexual conduct and its pursuit from the time the person is in the *Grihastha ashrama* or the householder's stage of existence. This included men, women and the third gender. The *Grihastha* stage begins from the time studentship stage of *Brahmacharya Ashrama* ends and the person enters the stage of a householder where the person begins a professional career, acquires sources of income, gets married and begets children. The main protagonist of the *Kamasutra*, the "nagaraka" after acquiring education, sets up a lifestyle for himself, follows duties, participates in festivities, attends social gatherings, etc. The *nagaraka* also has a set of social skills and etiquettes to follow; maintain a wardrobe full of various attires for each function and makes efforts to maintain personal grooming; hosting and entertaining family, friends, lovers, courtesans and acquaintances, conduct business trade and maintain networking in social circles as well as indulge in cultural pursuits. Women had to focus on grooming, acquiring skills, maintaining the household and balancing between various relationships. But nowhere has Vatsyayana focused on mentioning stages of life where one procreates or prepares for *Vanaprastha Ashrama* or *Sanyasa Ashrama* or pursuit of *Moksha* or liberation. These aspects of the life of a commoner need to be explored at greater lengths in the academic arena for a holistic study on the great monumental work of Vatsyayana as *Kamasutra* is only seen as a work on sexual positions and portrayals. The current study proposes to explore various facets of the *Grihastha* life spelled out explicitly and implicitly by the author and aspects missed or avoided by him in the greater good of life. As we spend a large part of our life as householders, the views expressed by Vatsyayana hold good and true in these contemporary times as well which needs to be investigated exhaustively.

Keywords: *Grihashta Ashrama*, Householder, *Kamasutra*, Vatsyayana, Men, Women, *Nagaraka*, *Brahmacharya*, *Vanaprastha*, *Sanyasa*

INTRODUCTION

The *Grihashta* or the householder concept from classical *Vedic* Indian philosophy needs no introduction as the concept begins from the prehistoric times identifying the social needs of man and thus the desire to be surrounded with loved ones in the hope that love, care, and support as emotional needs are satisfied. Besides this, the biological urge to satisfy carnal desires and the gratification of paternal and maternal needs and leaving behind progeny with genetic imprints to take ahead in the world.

Early times, the term *Grahapati* was used which meant the 'house lord' but later the term *Grihashta* was used which implied 'stay at home.' But the proper interpretation would be someone who performs all religious duties while being at home instead of going forth. This term is believed to be derived from the *Shramanic* traditional discourse. The four *ashrama* systems prevailing at that time was a traditional framework in ancient Indian society that outlines the four stages or phases of life that a person was expected to go through. These

stages were primarily followed by individuals in the *Hindu* tradition and played a significant role in shaping their lives. The *Ashrama* system was closely associated with the concept of *Dharma*, which is the moral and ethical duty or righteousness that one must follow in life.

Following is a broad understanding of the *Ashrama* system:

1) ***Brahmacharya* or Student Life:**

This is the first stage of life, typically during childhood and youth, when an individual is expected to focus on education, learning, and acquiring knowledge. It is a period of celibacy and dedicated study under the guidance of a *guru* (teacher). The main goal during this stage is to develop one's intellect and character. The study of scriptures was an essential aspect of this stage.

2) ***Grihashta* or Householder Life:**

After completing their education, individuals enter the *Grihashta Ashrama*, which is the stage of married life and household responsibilities. During this stage, individuals are expected to get married, raise a family, pursue a career, and fulfil their

social and familial duties. The *Grihastha* stage involves the responsibilities of earning a livelihood and contributing to the well-being of society. In this stage, the *Grihastha* must keep performing religious rituals and be in touch with the religious principles and disciplines taught as well as pass it onto his children.

3) **Vanaprastha or Forest-Dweller or Retirement Life:** In this stage, typically around the age of fifty, individuals gradually start to detach themselves from material and worldly pursuits. They may retire from active family and social life and begin to withdraw to a simpler lifestyle. While not everyone went to the forest, as the name suggests, it symbolizes a more contemplative and ascetic phase where individuals focus on spiritual pursuits, meditation, and preparing for the next stage of life.

4) **Sannyasa or Renunciant Life:** This is the final stage, marked by complete renunciation of worldly attachments and desires. *Sannyasins*, or monks, lead a life of austerity, wandering, and meditation. They detach themselves from all material possessions and dedicate their lives to spiritual pursuits and seeking liberation

(moksha) from the cycle of birth and death (samsara).

While this system was influential in ancient India, it was not universally followed by all individuals. The *Ashrama* system mainly applied to those in the Brahmin caste, while people from other castes had variations in how they approached these stages of life. Additionally, over time, the rigid adherence to the *Ashrama* system has relaxed, and modern Indian society has evolved to accommodate various lifestyles and choices. However, the *Ashrama* system remains an important aspect of India's cultural and religious history.

DUTIES OF THE *GRIHASTHA*

During the stage of life as a *Grihastha* or the householder, the individuals were expected to fulfil various duties and responsibilities related to family, society, and the broader community. The duties of a *Grihastha* included:

1) **Marriage and Family Life:** *Grihastha's* were expected to get married and raise a family. They were responsible for maintaining their household, providing for their spouse and children, and ensuring the well-being and education of their offspring.

2) Financial and Material Support:

Grihasta's were responsible for earning a livelihood and providing financial support to their family. This often involved pursuing a profession, trade, or agriculture to generate income to meet the family's needs.

3) Social and Religious Obligations:

Grihasta's were expected to participate in social and religious activities. This included celebrating festivals, performing rituals, and contributing to the welfare of the community and the less fortunate. They often played a role in organizing religious ceremonies and family rituals.

4) Education of Children:

Grihasta's had the responsibility of educating their children, both in secular knowledge and moral values. They were expected to instill ethical and cultural values in their offspring, often with the help of teachers or gurus.

5) Caring for Elders:

Grihasta's were also responsible for taking care of their aging parents and other elderly members of the family. This included providing emotional support, financial assistance, and physical care when necessary.

6) Maintaining Dharma:

Dharma, the moral and ethical duty, played a significant role in the life of a *Grihasta*. They were

expected to adhere to their *dharma* by living an honest and virtuous life, upholding societal norms, and ensuring the welfare and harmony of the family and community.

7) Financial Planning and Saving:

Grihasta's were encouraged to save and invest for the future, including their children's education, their own retirement, and any charitable or religious contributions.

8) Balancing Material and Spiritual Life:

While *Grihasta's* were actively engaged in worldly pursuits, they were also encouraged to engage in spiritual practices and maintain a connection with their inner spiritual self. This balance helped them lead a holistic and fulfilling life.

9) Respect for Guests and Hospitality:

Grihasta's were expected to be hospitable and show respect to guests and visitors. Welcoming guests and offering them food and shelter was considered a virtuous act.

While these duties were traditionally associated with the *Grihasta* stage, not every individual or family adhered to them in the same way. The practice of these duties could vary based on factors such as personal beliefs, regional customs, and social

circumstances. Additionally, as society has evolved over time, the roles and responsibilities of individuals in the household have also evolved to reflect changing norms and values.

GRIHASTHA ASHRAMA AND KAMA

In the context of the *Ashrama* system in ancient India, the *Grihastha* stage of life was closely associated with the concept of ‘*Kama*.’ *Kama* refers to desire, pleasure, and sensual or emotional fulfilment. It is one of the four traditional goals of human life, collectively known as the ‘*Purusharthas*.’ The four *Purusharthas* are *Dharma* (duty or righteousness), *Artha* (prosperity or wealth), *Kama* (pleasure or desire), and *Moksha* (liberation or spiritual enlightenment). During the *Grihastha* stage, individuals were expected to pursue *Kama*, along with *Artha* and *Dharma*, while maintaining a sense of balance and righteousness. Here's how *Kama* was understood in the *Grihastha* stage:

1) **Balanced Pursuit of Desires:** *Grihastha*'s were encouraged to fulfil their desires, both sensual and emotional, in a balanced and responsible manner. This included enjoying the pleasures of married

life, romantic love, and family life. However, this pursuit was expected to be within the bounds of moral and ethical conduct.

2) **Marital and Family Happiness:** Part of the pursuit of *Kama* in the *Grihastha* stage involved finding happiness and satisfaction within the confines of one's family. This included nurturing a loving and harmonious relationship with one's spouse and ensuring the well-being and happiness of one's children.

3) **Procreation:** An important aspect of the *Grihastha* stage was procreation and the continuation of the family lineage. Having children was seen as a natural and desirable expression of *Kama* within the context of married life.

4) **Enjoyment of Sensual Pleasures:** *Grihastha*'s were not expected to renounce all sensual pleasures. They could enjoy the pleasures of food, clothing, and other material comforts within moderation and without attachment.

5) **Cultural and Artistic Pursuits:** The pursuit of *Kama* also extended to cultural and artistic activities, such as music, dance, poetry, and literature. Engaging in these creative endeavours was considered a way to

enhance one's aesthetic and emotional fulfilment.

6) **Respect for Sexual Ethics:** While *Kama* was celebrated, it was subject to certain ethical guidelines. Adultery and promiscuity were discouraged, and sexual relations were expected to be confined to the bounds of a monogamous and faithful marriage.

7) **Spiritual Growth:** Despite the pursuit of *Kama*, *Grihastha*'s were also expected to engage in spiritual practices and cultivate inner growth. The pursuit of pleasure and desire was not meant to overshadow the importance of spiritual development and adherence to *Dharma*.

The balanced pursuit of *Kama* within the *Grihastha* stage was considered a legitimate and essential aspect of human life. It was believed that by fulfilling one's desires in a responsible and righteous manner, individuals could lead a well-rounded and fulfilling life. However, the pursuit of *Kama* was just one of the four *Purusharthas*, and individuals were also encouraged to progress through the other stages of life and ultimately seek *Moksha*, or spiritual liberation, in the later stages of their life.

GRIHASTHA ASHRAMA AND KAMASUTRA

The *Kamasutra* is an ancient Indian text attributed to the sage Vatsyayana, believed to have been written around 2nd century CE. It is a comprehensive guide that deals with various aspects of human relationships, including sexuality, love, and marital life. The *Kamasutra* provides detailed advice on the art of lovemaking, relationships between men and women, and the pursuit of sensual pleasure within the context of the *nagaraka* or the man about town, marriage, and life of a courtesan. The text covers a wide range of topics related to romance, relationships, sexual techniques, and the art of seduction. While the *Kamasutra* includes discussions on sexual desire and pleasure, it also delves into broader aspects of human behavior, psychology, and the dynamics of love and relationships. The *Kamasutra* is often considered a treatise on the art of living a fulfilling life, including sexual satisfaction, within the context of social and moral norms. While the *Kamasutra* provides insights into the intimate aspects of life, it should not be seen as solely about sexual techniques but rather as a guide to

understanding the complexities of human desire and relationships. It offers advice on how to approach love and intimacy with respect, understanding, and consideration for one's partner. The *Grihastha Ashrama* and the *Kamasutra* are two distinct aspects of ancient Indian culture and life, but they are often associated with each other due to their shared focus on aspects of married life, sexuality, and relationships. In the context of the *Grihastha Ashrama*, the *Kamasutra* can be seen as a source of knowledge and guidance for individuals seeking to navigate the intricacies of married life and intimate relationships. It provides insights into the art of maintaining a fulfilling and harmonious relationship with one's spouse, which was considered an important aspect of the *Grihastha* stage. It is the stage of married life and household responsibilities. *Grihastha's* were expected to fulfil various duties related to family, society, and personal growth. This stage emphasized the pursuit of *Dharma* (duty or righteousness), *Artha* (prosperity or wealth), and *Kama* (pleasure or desire) while maintaining a sense of balance and ethical conduct. While *Kama* was an important aspect of *Grihastha* life, it was understood within the context of

a loving and harmonious marital relationship. While the *Kamasutra* is often associated with sexual techniques and positions, it is important to note that it also discusses the emotional, psychological, and spiritual dimensions of human relationships. It emphasizes the importance of mutual consent, respect, and understanding between partners, promoting the idea that sexual pleasure should be a harmonious and fulfilling aspect of married life. The *Grihastha Ashrama* represents the stage of married life in the *Ashrama* system, which encompasses various responsibilities and the pursuit of *Kama* within the context of *Dharma* and ethical conduct. The *Kamasutra*, on the other hand, is a comprehensive ancient text that provides guidance on human sexuality and relationships, with an emphasis on achieving pleasure and fulfilment in a respectful and loving manner within a marital context. The *Kamasutra* is often associated with the *Grihastha Ashrama* because it provides guidance on how couples can maintain a healthy and fulfilling sexual relationship within the context of marriage. It offers a framework for understanding and enhancing sexual pleasure while emphasizing mutual

consent, respect, and the importance of emotional and physical intimacy in married life. While the *Kamasutra* is famous for its explicit discussions of sexual techniques, it also addresses broader aspects of human relationships, including courtship, attraction, and the role of sensuality in marital harmony. It promotes a holistic view of human desires and relationships and encourages individuals to cultivate love, respect, and understanding within their marriages. The *Grihastha Ashrama* and the *Kamasutra* are connected through their focus on the responsibilities and pleasures associated with married life in ancient India. The *Kamasutra* provides detailed guidance on how to navigate the intimate aspects of a marriage while emphasizing the importance of balance, consent, and emotional connection.

The *Kamasutra* implies its affinity towards the *Brahmanical* orthodoxy by recognizing the validity of *Varna* and *Ashrama* systems. However, Vatsyayana divides human life into three phases only of *balya* or childhood, *yauvana* or youth and *sthavira* or old age and he distributes these across the *purusharthas* and *vidya's* or learnings but

only elaborating on *dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and only mentioning *moksha* but not elaborating on it.

MAN IN THE *GRIHASTHA ASHRAMA* AND *KAMASUTRA*

The *Kamasutra*, the ancient Indian text attributed to the sage Vatsyayana, provides a detailed and comprehensive guide to various aspects of human relationships, including the depiction of men and women in the context of love, sexuality, and relationships during the *Grihastha ashrama* stage of one's life. It offers insights into the roles, behaviors, and attributes of men, particularly in the context of romantic and sexual encounters. It is important to note that the *Kamasutra's* approach to relationships and sexuality is rooted in a historical and cultural context, and its depictions reflect the norms and values of that time. Following are key highlights of the same:

1) **Physical Descriptions:** The *Kamasutra* describes the physical attributes that were considered desirable in men during its time. It often emphasizes the importance of maintaining good health, personal hygiene, and grooming. Men are encouraged to be physically fit and to take care of their

bodies and to make themselves more attractive to their partners

2) **Behaviours and Manners:** The text discusses the behaviour and manners that men should exhibit in various social and romantic situations. This includes qualities such as politeness, respect, and courtesy when interacting with women and others.

3) **Sexual Techniques:** The *Kamasutra* includes detailed discussions of sexual techniques, positions, and practices. It provides guidance to men (as well as women) on how to enhance sexual pleasure, satisfy their partners, and achieve a fulfilling sexual relationship within the context of a loving and consensual partnership.

4) **Courting and Seduction:** The text delves into the art of courtship and seduction. It discusses the ways in which men can woo and win the affection of women through romantic gestures, conversation, and emotional connection.

5) **Role of Men in Relationships:** The *Kamasutra* acknowledges the importance of mutual consent and respect in sexual relationships. It emphasizes that men should prioritize the pleasure and satisfaction of their female partners and that both partners

should communicate openly about their desires and boundaries.

6) **Variety in Relationships:** The *Kamasutra* recognizes that relationships and sexual encounters can take various forms and emphasizes the importance of variety and spontaneity in maintaining a healthy and satisfying romantic life. It encourages both men and women to explore and enjoy variety in their romantic and sexual lives.

7) **Respect for Women:** While providing guidance on romantic and sexual matters, the *Kamasutra* underscores the importance of respecting women as individuals with their own desires, needs, and autonomy. It promotes a respectful and consensual approach to sexual relationships

The text does not focus solely on men. Instead, it offers advice to both genders on how to navigate the complexities of love, desire, and partnership.

WOMAN IN THE *GRIHASTHA ASHRAMA AND KAMASUTRA*

The *Kamasutra*, provides guidance and insights into various aspects of love, sexuality, and relationships, including the depiction of women in the context of

romantic and sexual relationships through the *Grihastha ashrama* stage of worldly and earthly life. It is essential to understand that the *Kamasutra* reflects the norms, values, and cultural context of ancient India, and its teachings may not align with modern perspectives and values. Here are some aspects of the depiction of women in the *Kamasutra*.

1) **Physical Attributes:** The *Kamasutra* describes the physical attributes that were considered desirable in women during its time. It often highlights the beauty of women and the importance of maintaining good health, personal hygiene, and grooming. It describes the characteristics that were considered attractive during the time when the text was written, including features like soft skin, well-proportioned bodies, and expressive eyes.

2) **Behaviour and Manners:** The text emphasizes that women should exhibit qualities such as politeness, modesty, and respect in their interactions with men. It underscores the importance of women being courteous and considerate in their relationships.

3) **Role in Relationships:** The *Kamasutra* acknowledges that women play

an active and important role in romantic and sexual relationships. It recognizes their desires, needs, and agency, emphasizing that both partners should prioritize each other's pleasure and satisfaction.

4) **Sexual Pleasures:** The text discusses female sexuality and offers guidance on how women can enhance their sexual pleasure and satisfaction. It includes information on various sexual positions and techniques that can be pleasurable for women.

5) **Mutual Consent:** The *Kamasutra* emphasizes the importance of mutual consent and open communication between partners. It encourages both men and women to engage in sexual activities with their partners willingly and enthusiastically.

6) **Variety in Relationships:** The text recognizes that romantic and sexual relationships can take various forms and encourages both men and women to explore and enjoy variety in their intimate lives.

7) **Women to Learn Sixty-four Arts:** In the *Kamasutra*, it is mentioned that women, particularly courtesans or women of the Kama Sutra tradition, were expected to be well-versed in a wide range of skills and arts, often referred to as the "64 Arts" or the "Sixty-Four *Kalas*." These arts were

considered essential for courtesans to be attractive, cultured, and alluring companions to men. The 64 Arts encompassed a broad spectrum of talents, including dance, music, poetry, painting, drawing, sculpture, makeup, cosmetics, massage, aromatherapy, cooking, culinary arts, fashion, clothing, etiquette, conversation, seduction, erotic arts, etc. These skills were considered essential for courtesans to create an enchanting and alluring persona. While these arts were often associated with courtesans and women in the Kama Sutra tradition, it is important to note that not all women in ancient India were courtesans, and the acquisition of these skills may have varied depending on social status and personal interests.

CONCLUSION

Though the early depiction of the Grihastha Ashrama may seem like it is only a stage where men are given key roles of getting educated, Vatsyayana insists on the education of women through the sixty-four arts; getting married; managing household responsibilities for both genders and elaborating that the man brings in income and the woman spends it wisely and also

saves for the future; pursuing careers for both genders but for women it was restricted to being courtesans or in case their husbands left them or died then the sixty-four arts would help women financially; contributing to the well-being of society and also performing and honoring all religious rituals, principles and disciplines.

The only area of Grihastha Ashrama that Vatsyayana does not mention which is an essential aspect of one's life as a householder is begetting children and procreation. It is nowhere mentioned in the text and the reason for the same could be because the text focuses on seeking as much of pleasure in one's life as possible and this pleasure was largely of a physical kind in which Vatsyayana excludes pleasures of the progeny.

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