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Kama Sutra retold — they can't get enough of it

Divya A | TNN

Most Indians would find it hard to think of a better sex guide than the Kama Sutra, never mind that it was compiled back in the second century. Interestingly, the sexually-liberated Western world seems to feel the same way, inevitably assuming a reverent position when it comes to our ancient manual of love.

So says Susan Quilliam, who has just finished "reinventing" the seminal book *The Joy of Sex* for the 21st century.

Alex Comfort's original *Joy of Sex*, which sold eight million copies in 1972, made a number of references to eastern sexuality and in particular to Vatsyayana's Kama Sutra. Quilliam's *The New Joy of Sex*, due for release in a week, still draws upon Comfort's Indian inspiration. Though she admits to STOI she changed a lot of Comfort's original text 'to suit the times', Quilliam has retained the references to Indian erotic scripture because she believes "eastern sexuality still has a lot to offer to the West".

It is a timely reaffirmation of the Kama Sutra's attractions for the West, 125 years after the traveller Richard Burton translated the manual from Sanskrit, titillating millions in the English-speaking world even as the manual gained an unfortunate and undeserved reputation abroad for being a pornographic work.

Now Quilliam claims she has reclaimed some of the real meaning of the Kama Sutra's instructions.

Comfort's sex manual focused on the range of sexual positions prescribed by the Indian text, she says, describing this as a "shallow Western interpretation, the book has much more to offer than that". Accordingly, Quilliam's *The New Joy of Sex* retains just a few of Comfort's comments, as well as his "references to complex positions, meditative sexuality, to breathing, to turning positions". But for the real joy of the Kama Sutra, Quilliam recommends that her "readers refer to the original."

Back in 1972, Comfort was writing for a world when sexual freedom was a new feeling for Europe and America, the contraceptive pill newly available and couples suddenly had the luxury to discover the joy of sex.

Now, Quilliam says Comfort must surely have turned to the Kama Sutra "because he knew just how much the book had to offer the newly-emerging sexual consciousness of the Western world".

So just how valid is the Kama Sutra in 2008 – the era of HRT, Viagra and sex therapy? "I feel that the strengths of the Kama Sutra are for everyone who wants to find joy in sex," says Quilliam, adding, "There are few things in the Kama Sutra that hold much more for our times – the admission that everyone needs to learn about sex and not just take it for granted, the belief that sex is a positive and powerful way to self-development and enlightenment, its emphasis on meditative practice and awareness of oneself during sexuality and also on the importance of pleasure for women."

In an extraordinary 21st-century nod to the ancient attributes of the Kama Sutra, Quilliam adds, "No other scripture has given so much thought to such finer aspects of lovemaking, what really makes it lovemaking and not just sex".

Comfort's *Joy of Sex* often used direct quotations from Burton's translation but Quilliam believes "he was sometimes prone to overinterpretation, to giving anecdotes rather than facts, and to mixing different sexual traditions — for example, mixing Indian and Japanese traditions".

But why exactly does a highlyevolved, highly-sexualised Western society need to look to an ancient oriental interpretation of the joy of sex? Don't they have an old and trusted sex guide of their own?

Quilliam explains that "the Judaeo-Christian tradition has certain erotic passages in the Song of Solomon.

"But since the Christian tradition did not see sexuality as a path of improvement and enlightenment, it largely discouraged erotic writing. Hence, there is no sex manual as such that is as old as the Kama Sutra and teaches in the same way".

But what did Quilliam, 58 and a self-confessed lover of sex, personally like most about the Kama Sutra? "It's the emphasis on the wide scale of sex including foreplay, mock-fights, game-playing, as well as intercourse, the sacredness of sex, the emphasis on emotion in sex and on connection between partners".

In other words, the joy of the Kama Sutra retold.

Kama Sutra, then & now

FROM THE 1972 BESTSELLER 'JOY OF SEX'

Now widely familiar from the Kama Sutra, the Koka Shastra and so on. Intercourse on a bed or on cushions, fully naked but with the woman wearing all her ornaments. Many complicated positions, including some derived from yoga which aim to avoid ejaculation, standing positions and woman-on-top positions which are regarded as specially devout, since in Tantric Hinduism she is Energy and he is Immanence. ...There is a section on sexual technique in the chief classical dance treatise - dancers were temple maidens or devadasis who gave themselves to the devout as part of a religious exercise. Difficult for us to recapture, in spite of a dawning awareness of the psychoanalytic rightness of much Hindu intuition.

FROM THE UPDATED 'NEW JOY OF SEX'

Not just a mystic ritual — though the Kama Sutra majors on it — but a way of connecting before sex. Standing, sitting or lying, use belly-to-belly breathing. Keep going until you are in sync, then slow down together breath by breath until slow and steady. (If breath is unpleasant cut back on spicy food and cigarettes; if it still causes a flinch, book a dental appointment.) ...Any position where one or both partner switches viewpoint, or begins on top and ends up underneath; the Kama Sutra warns that these are only mastered with practice.



THE 'JOY' OF KAMA SUTRA: Cover of Susan Quilliam's rehashed version (left) and Richard Burton's translation of the Kama Sutra