

## APHRODISIACS—A PSYCHOSOCIAL PERSPECTIVE

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Aphrodisiacs are sex stimulants, the word etymologically arising from the Greek Goddess Aphrodite, Goddess of love, also meaning venereal. From time immemorial man's endeavour have been to increase his sexual powers. When man did not know metals and used only stones he exhibited his sexual powers by ritual dances accompanied by hunting. Primitively early man was motivated by his quest for food, sex and self-preservation. This led to the formation of groups and unitedly they would go sometimes to the ecstasy of dance impelled with the instinct of procreation. Symbols of a phallic pattern came in, and so also the fertility dances wherein we detected a distinct theme. How people behave sexually is a part of societal analysis and is a study of intimate social relationships. Society has its subunits, families, communities economics and polity—all find their ultimate origin in sex. No society would go beyond a generation without it and particularly without some way of heterosexual relationships. However natural we may think the phenomenon of sex, it must be emphasised that it is a patterned and learned behaviour. The method of its expression, timing and the type of partner it is engaged with, and the imagination associated with it are all conditioned culturally and regulated socially.

B. Malinowski, the famous anthropologist once wrote that :

To the average normal person, in whatever type of society we find him, attraction by the other sex and the passionate and sentimental episodes which follow are the most significant events in his existence..... "To the sociologist, therefore, who studies a particular type of society, those of its customs, ideas, and institutions which centre round the erotic life of the individual should be of primary importance."

In India we find in the *Kāma Sūtra* of Vātsāyana an important compendium of erotic literature of about the third century A.D. It reigned authority for about a thousand years and it is still accepted as a classic treatise on the Indian way of love and sex. It can be said that Vātsāyana had astute wisdom by which he comprehended the sex pattern of Ancient India. Sex life was then comparatively free when people were quite gay and contented. In the twelfth century Kokkoka delved into this theme and his society was not as it was before. The other important erotic literature of medieval India is the *Anaṅga Raṅga* of Kalyāna Māla.

It was written about a thousand years later than the *Kāma Sūtra*. It was probably written in honour of King Ahmad of the House of Lodis who reigned in between 1450 and 1526 A.D.

In Arabic and Muslim dialects the *Anaṅga Raṅga* is named as the *Lizzat-al-Nisa*. It has been translated into many languages of the East. The Sanskrit and Prakrit terminology of *Anaṅga Raṅga* means Stage or form of the Bodiless one, Kāma Deva, the Hindu Cupid who turned to ashes by the fiery eye of Śiva and also restored to life. But the treatise as a whole seems to have been a derivative of the previous erotic works as *Kāma Sūtra*, the *Ratirahasya*, the *Pañcasāyaka*, the *Smarapradīpa*, the *Ratimañjarī* and *Abhilāṣita Cintāmoni*. Now to comment on the psychosocial background of medieval India when the *Anaṅga Raṅga* and *Koka Śāstra* were written it may be mentioned that the motivation of the passionate lovers were something new.

For Bohemians there was little scope. Social intercourses amidst the sexes were meagre and premarital relationships less. Child marriage came in and the women were under vigil. Extramarital sex was available to the affluent, rulers and courtesans. This they did by polygamy, having harems, concubines and allowing prostitution. In the fifteenth century we see that a Khilji King at Mandu created a city of women by having 15000 women at his disposal. In the sixteenth century Prince Baz Bahadur falls in love with a Hindu courtmistress Rupamati which gained a legendary halo. It was probably a psycho-social reaction against the accepted moral codes of the day. The *Anaṅga Raṅga* and the *Koka Śāstra* seem to have been written for the husbands and not for the lovers. In that way these two books appear more like marriage manuals unique of their kind. Because behind the Indian husband's mind was aesthetic love which have been revealed in poetry, paintings and sculpture of the medieval period. Take for example the poetry of Bhānudatta—his *Rasamañjarī*, the immortal Khajuraho and Konarak sculptures and the Kangra pictures which show sexuality with dignity and esoteric charm. Now to understand the Hindu concept of aphrodisiacs of the medieval period of India one has to take note of the *Anaṅga Raṅga* and the Book XV of *Ratirahasya* of Kokkoka.

Aphrodisiacs are mentioned there as *Vājikaraṇas*, the word *vāji* meaning horse and *araṇa* meaning making, i.e. measures to excite lust by charms etc. The *vājikaraṇas* were of two kinds:

- (i) the external or mechanical methods as flagellations, scarifications and external applications on the male or female genital or extra genital parts;
- (ii) the medicinal or oral preparations to excite sexual passions.

These are known in Arabian Medicine as *Imsak* which means holding or retaining.

In the prescription of external applications are found the different *prayogas*. These *prayogas* are herbal and chemical external applications to the male genital or extragenital parts before congress to hasten the orgasm of the woman or to delay the orgasm in man so that the desire for union may not remain unsatisfied. Eight *prayogas* are prescribed. Most of these *prayogas* are herbal plants or seeds which can be applied on the soles of the man's feet, naval or bound round the waist in a red thread in particular *nakṣatras* or mansions of the Moon or placed in the mouth. It has been mentioned that the above *prayogas* are ineffective in impotence and in weak persons or neuresthenics as we call them today. The medicinal or oral *vājīkaraṇas* are in eight different varieties which are mainly herbal preparations and the eighth contains *lohavaśma*, *triphalā*, juice of *yaṣṭi-madhu* or liquorice. The *vājīkaraṇas* are said to comfort the heart and excite the sexual desire. Forceful praises of these *vājīkaraṇas* are quite common with the directions and some of them may be worthy of trial from the scientific point of view. Besides the above mentioned *vājīkaraṇas* other *prayogas* have been prescribed for increasing the dimensions of the *liṅga* and also to render the *yoni* small and hard by intra vaginal instillations.

Smell as a sexual attractant having aphrodisiac properties have been mentioned. For this oil of *śiras*, *jai*, jasmine and *campaka* have been advised after bathing to counteract evil odours from too much perspiration. To prevent halitosis or foul smell from the mouth, which may act as an anaphrodisiac, various oral pills have been suggested composed of saffron or *keśar*, musk or *sugandha garbha*, nutmegs, coriander seed, *ekāṅgi-mura* and last but not least betel leaf or *pān-supāri*.

As a beverage and as an aphrodisiac the consumption of liquor in the medieval period was no less though the *Dharma Śāstra* condemned its use. During the Muslim and Moghul rule, in spite of the Quranic injunction, there was much prevalence of alcoholism in society. Alauddin Khilji once embarked upon a scheme of prohibition but failed in spite of his best efforts.

In view of the licentiousness of the kings, queens and the courtesans of the medieval period aphrodisiacs were a psycho-social necessity. They had to fulfil their extramarital obligations in the harems, with the concubines and dancing girls. Roasted meat of venison or sparrows, *matsya-supa* or fish broth, omelette of crocodile eggs, 'instinco' fish, honey of Mecca were valuable aphrodisiacs in the late medieval period while under the Muslim rule. Shah Jahan knew many aphrodisiacs mentioned in the chronicles of Taimur-I-Lang.

Opium was used as an aphrodisiac. It was found in Gujrat during the Muslim rule that Mahmud Bigarha (A.D. 1459-1511) was a veritable opium consumer and a sex maniac. *Majun*, a mixture of opium and *bhoja*, a kind of country wine also containing *bhāṅg* or hemp was also very popular. It was used by

Emperor Babar and Gujrat Sultan Mahmud III. Much of the ways of living and social behaviour during the Mughal rule can be found in the observations of Mannuci (Nicolas) the Venetian physician in the Court of Shah Alam. He wielded then great influence by his adept knowledge of scientific medicine in spite of the presence of the hakims in Shah Alam's court as the Persian Muqim and Muslim Khan.

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