8. Pleasure and Culture
Reading Urban Behaviour through Kāvya *Archetypes*

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Of all the facets of early Indian urbanism, the one explored arguably the least, if at all, is the behavioural. How did urban men and women behave as social and sexual beings? That is to ask, did they act in any way peculiar to them as city dwellers? Did they operate within parameters dictated by traditional norms and institutions emphasizing control and regulation of gender interaction? Or did cities see the emergence of alternative modes and codes of public and private intercourse?[1]

These are questions intrinsic to developing a rounded grasp of urbanism as a complex and transforming historical experience. These are also questions that may elude definitive or comprehensive answers, not least because human behaviour—anebulous and ever divisible—lends itself to generalization only at some peril. Moreover, the dominant sources from early India that dwell on aspects of social conduct—such as the Dharmaśāstras—do so in a theoretical and prescriptive fashion, making it difficult to discern categorically what trends may have prevailed, perhaps at variance from what was prescribed. In any case, such literature does not distinctly address the city or issues arising out of living in one.

It is nonetheless possible to investigate these questions and arrive at broad tendencies that seem to stand out in characterizing urban gender behaviour. I propose to do this by exploring a body of literature that has yet to receive the historian's serious and appropriate attention, but is uniquely endowed for an investigation of the kind I undertake. I refer to the *kāvya*, defined as literature as a form of art, as distinct from scripture (*āgama*), history (*itihāsa*), and technical treatise

(*śāstra*).[2] This is the realm of Sanskrit creative literature that includes not only poetry (*mahākāvya* or *sargabandha*), but drama (*nāṭya*), tale (*kathā*), and biography (*ākhyāyikā*).[3] Among its defining elements is a linguistic and thematic deference to aesthetics (*alaṁkāra*) and emotion (*bhāva* rendered as *rasa*). The fictive-narrative character of kāvyas and their orientation to the erotic (*śṛngāra*) as the primary aesthetic give to this literature the space and the licence, as it were, to explore themes of socio-sexual behaviour.

What is more, the classical Sanskrit kāvya flourished in the first several centuries of the first millennium CE. As such, it was contemporary to early Indian city life and indeed a product of it. Many kāvya texts, abundantly locating themselves in cities, resonate with an urban situatedness and constitute themselves as primarily urban literature. Their depiction of behaviour in the city then can be said to come close to being the self-perception of an urban culture, albeit from a by and large elite vantage. This is particularly valuable for an investigation of the city because of what archaeologists and historians have found to be the 'endemic problem of definition', that is, the fact that a universally applicable idea of urbanism continues to elude us. The main reason for this could be that 'what is urbanism?' is a metaphysical, not scientific, query,[4] so that the answer would turn almost entirely on the question of perspective.[5] The kāvyas provide one such perspective.

This literary genre has, however, been underestimated as a source for exploring the past, chiefly on account of its overtly aesthetic and conventional nature, which is believed to render historical inquiry futile. But, as I have argued elsewhere,[6] literary aesthetics and conventions are not sterile constructs, and kāvyas can yield complex and enriching insights provided they are handled in ways sensitive to the logic of literary modes of representation.

One of the major modes of representation recognizable in classical Sanskrit kāvyas is the construction of complex archetypes. An archetype, in the sense in which I use the word, is a recurrent motif. Its significance lies in its symbolizing potential. Kāvyas render experiences of perceived significance as eidetic[7] abstractions that are then recurrently employed to convey the sense of that experience. Developed with consistency yet complexity across texts, kāvya archetypes can be regarded as semantic codes analysing the structure of which it is possible to access a wealth of meanings.

In keeping with this approach, this essay explores, in the main, two kāvya archetypes, the *nāgaraka* and the *gaṇikā*, which represent respectively masculine and feminine models of urban behaviour as textually portrayed. Working through them I identify ideals that appear to distinguish the city's socio-sexual ethos. I also consider the contradictions and tensions these may entail with a view to developing a perspective on some of the dilemmas that seem to populate the city's moral universe.

This essay draws on a number of different kinds of kāvyas, several of these works of celebrated authors like Bhāsa, Kālidāsa, Bāṇa, Bhavabhūti, and Daṇḍin. It cites at length primarily from the *Mṛcchakaṭikaṃ* and *Caturbhāṇī,* and from the *Kāmasūtra.* Śūdraka's *Mṛcchakaṭikaṃ* is a *prakaraṇa* play from the third/fourth century CE. A *prakaraṇa* is a fiction play with multiple acts that has a story usually dealing with bourgeois life.[8] The plot of the *Mṛcchakaṭikaṃ* revolves around the love between a talented courtesan and a virtuous merchant who has fallen on bad days in the city of Ujjayini. The *Caturbhāṇī* is a set of four monologue plays, or *bhāṇa*, from the fifth/sixth century CE, namely, Vararuci's *Ubhayābhisārikā*, Īśvaradatta's *Dhūrtaviṭasaṁvāda*, Śūdraka's *Padmaprābhṛtaka,* and Saumillaka's *Pādatāḍitaka*. Set in various cities, enacted in each case by a *viṭa* who is a master eroticist and tutors prostitutes and lovers on the art and craft of love, these plays are classic specimens of erotic comedy in Sanskrit. Vātsyāyana's *Kāmasūtra* from about the fourth century CE is not a kāvya,[9] but being an urban treatise[10] on sexual pleasure, and displaying characters and concepts found in the kāvyas, it is an allied text of defining significance.[11]

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The term nāgaraka is not common in the kāvyas; a character is hardly ever described or addressed as such. However, the attributes and pursuits that a nāgaraka epitomizes are amply evident in the characterization of male characters across texts like the *Mṛcchakaṭikaṃ, Daśakumāracaritaṃ, Mālavikāgnimitraṃ, Caturbhāṇī, Avimāraka, Mālatīmādhava*, and *Kuṭṭanīmataṃ*. Before I look at some of these, let us turn to the *Kāmasūtra* to find out who a nāgaraka was and what being a nāgaraka meant. In the *Kāmasūtra*, the designation nāgaraka figures repeatedly and is given prominent treatment. A recent translation of the text renders the term as a 'man-about-town' who is 'a sophisticated connoisseur of the good life in general, of pleasure in

particular, and of sex even more particularly'.[12] Chapter four of book one titled *Nāgarakavṛtti* ('The Avocation of the Nagaraka') details in a prescriptive-cum-descriptive manner[13] all the signs of a nāgaraka, inscribing the full cultural connotation and urban(e) context of the term. It describes his daily routine thus:

I.4.5–6: He gets up in the morning, relieves himself, cleans his teeth, applies fragrant oils in small quantities, as well as incense, beeswax and red lac, looks at his face in a mirror, takes some mouthwash and betel, and attends to the things that need to be done. He bathes everyday, has his limbs rubbed with oil every second day, a foam bath every third day, his face shaved every fourth day, and his body hair removed every fifth or tenth day. All of this is done without fail. And he continually cleans the sweat from his armpits.

I.4.7–9: In the morning and afternoon he eats…. After eating he passes the time teaching his parrots and mynah birds to speak; he goes to quail-fights, cockfights, and ram-fights; engages in various arts and games; and passes the time with his libertine (*pīṭhamarda*), pander (*viṭa*) and clown (*vidūṣaka*). And he takes a nap. In the late afternoon, he gets dressed up and goes to salons (*goṣṭhī*) to amuse himself.

I.4.10,12–13: And in the evening, there is music and singing. After that, on a bed in a bedroom carefully decorated and perfumed by sweet-smelling incense, he and his friends await the women who are slipping out for a rendezvous with them.… And when the women arrive, he and his friends greet them with *gentle conversation and courtesies that charm the mind and heart* [emphasis added]. If rain has soaked the clothing of women who have slipped out for a rendezvous in bad weather, he changes their clothes himself, or gets some of his friends to serve them. This is what he does by day and night.

I.4.14, 19–22: He amuses himself by going to festivals, *goṣṭhī*s, drinking parties, picnics and group games.… A *goṣṭhī* takes place when *people of similar knowledge, intelligence, character, wealth, and age* [emphasis added] sit together in the house of a courtesan, or in a place of assembly, or in the dwelling place of some man, and engage in appropriate conversation with courtesans. There they *exchange thoughts about poems or works of art* [emphasis added], and in the course of that they praise brilliant women whom everyone likes.… They have drinking parties in one another's houses.

I.4.24–6: Picnics can be described in the same way. Early in the morning, men dress with care and go out on horse-back, attended by servants and accompanied by courtesans. They enjoy the daytime events there and spend the time at cockfights, gambling, theatrical spectacles… and then in the afternoon they go back in the same way, taking with them souvenirs of the pleasures of the picnic. And in the same way, in the summer, people enjoy water sports in pools built to keep out crocodiles.

It is possible to divide the nāgaraka's activities into four groups. The first relates to maintenance and enhancement of bodily hygiene and attractiveness; the second involves participation in sporting

contests; the third refers to the communitarian cultivation of arts and recreation, including music, poetry, conversation, and theatre. The *pīṭhamarda* and *viṭa* among his hangers-on are also said to be 'skilled in the arts' and in teaching them.[14] The final aspect of his pursuits, presented somewhat teleologically as a grand finale or climax, is indulgence in amorous dalliance and sex.

It follows from this analysis that the ideal of the nāgaraka consisted in the careful cultivation of every aspect of human personality: body, mind, spirit, senses, and etiquette. Moreover, the nāgaraka was not envisaged as an exception or an isolated instance. He is seen to belong to like society—'people of similar knowledge, intelligence, character, wealth and age'—in which he circulates and interacts. In housing the man-about-town, then, the city houses an ideal community (ideal in *this* perspective)[15] that typically gathers at, and can therefore be identified as, the goṣṭhī or cultural conclave.

Significantly, underlying the various attributes and endeavours of nāgaraka and company are twin central concerns: pleasure and culture. These can be regarded as furnishing the primary principles of an urban behavioural code. Despite the fact that it must represent only a minority experience, that *nāgarakavṛtti* can indeed be equated with urban behaviour needs underlining. For, although it is obvious that only a man of means could afford to be a nāgaraka, the word literally means simply a man who lives in the city (*nagara*).[16] And in order to commence on the lifestyle of the nāgaraka, the *Kāmasūtra* expressly ordains habitation in one kind of urban settlement or another (*nagare-pattane-kharvaṭe vā*).[17] This urban contextualizing of the nāgaraka is echoed by the low opinion the text has of sexual and cultural activity in the village.[18] Altogether, the equation asserted seems confirmed as reasonable.

To elaborate on the close mixing of sexual pleasure and culture in the concept of the nāgaraka, as I have noted earlier, all his functions and activities through the day seem to be as if building up to the erotic rendezvous—the love ritual—at night. (It should be clarified at the outset that the sexual relations entailed are with public women/courtesans and perhaps secret paramours; the construct of the nāgaraka is not concerned with domestic sex.) The 'ritual' itself is explicated and demonstrated much like an art form in subsequent chapters of the *Kāmasūtra*.[19] But, as the nāgaraka list tells us, en route to the climactic act of pleasure are a host of other acts. And these are

acts of culture (though not unproductive of pleasure in their own right).

I refer not merely to the making up or aestheticization of the body, or the music and singing, and the other arts the nāgaraka practises with his hangers-on or other nāgarakas. Significantly, it is with women themselves, their partners in the pleasure/sex rite, that the man-about-town is expected to make 'gentle conversation', 'exchange thoughts about poems and other works of art', enjoy 'theatrical spectacles', and show 'courtesies that charm the mind and heart'.[20] Further, a chapter in book five of the *Kāmasūtra* mentions a good conversationalist, a generous man who loves picnics and theatrical plays, and a man who dresses well and lives well—the nāgaraka, really—as a man 'sexually successful with women'.[21] Also, the chapter just preceding the one on the nāgaraka-vṛtti enlists literary work, music, make-up, and etiquette among the sixty-four arts 'that should be studied along with the *Kāmasūtra*'[22] by men and women alike. The compelling conclusion is that cultural expertise is seen as a complement to sexual expertise, and vice versa. The archetype of the nāgaraka epitomizes this evidently urban tendency to pursue art as pleasure and pleasure as art.

From the kāvyas we get examples of the different kinds of nāgarakas enumerated in the *Kāmasūtra*,[23] for instance Brāhmaṇas (Cārudatta,[24] Śaiśalaka[25]), kings and princes (Jayantaka,[26] Agnimitra,[27] Candrodaya,[28] Guptakula,[29] Upahāravarmā[30]), professionals and their sons (the judge and judge's son,[31] executive officer of the king,[32] general's son,[33] grammarian,[34] physician,[35] master-painter,[36], *vīnā* teacher[37]), and the merchants and their sons, the largest group (a few examples are Dhanamitra, Dhanika, Kuberadatta, Samudradatta,[38] Kṛṣṇilaka,[39] Cārudatta[40]).[41] These protagonists are seen enacting different facets of nāgarakavṛtti, be it adeptness at arts of various kinds,[42] gambling,[43] hosting of hangers-on (the viṭa, *vidūṣaka*, and pīṭhamarda)[44] or attendance at goṣṭhīs,[45] appreciation and patronage of plays and classical recitals (*prekṣā, gāndharva, saṅgītaka*),[46] or falling in love and undertaking sexual exploits with courtesans and queens alike.[47]

The most complete and memorable nāgaraka in the kāvyas, albeit one fallen on poverty, is Cārudatta of the *Mṛcchakaṭikaṃ*. In him not only do all the accomplishments and refinement of the nāgaraka's way of living come together, these are shown to be

enhanced by a nature that is generous to a fault. Thus, Cārudatta is eulogized as 'handsome in appearance and speech' (*priyadarśa priyavādī*),[48] 'the ideal of the educated' (*ādarśaśikṣitānāṃ*),[49] 'ocean of seemly conduct' (*śīlavelasamudra*),[50] 'refined and magnanimous of spirit'(*dakṣiṇodārasattvo*),[51] 'treasure of all manly virtues' (*puruṣaguṇanidhīḥ*),[52] and, additionally, 'a wish-fulfilling tree for the needy' (*kalpavrikṣaḥ dīnānāṃ*) and 'the bridge for the good to cross over their miseries' (*sajjanadukhānāmuttaranasetuḥ*).[53] For all these qualities, Cārudatta is shown universally acclaimed as 'an adornment to Ujjayini' (*alaṁkṛtojjayinī*)[54] and 'the foremost in the city' (*nagarīpradhānabhūtaḥ*).[55]

Thus, Cārudatta clearly personified the urban ideal, albeit one which in the *Mṛcchakaṭikaṃ* is qualified by the virtues of charity and magnanimity, something that is not explicitly a concern for the *Kāmasūtra*'s nāgaraka. Magnanimity apart, however, Cārudatta is true to the nāgaraka tendency to sexual and cultural good taste. The former is exemplified by his ardour for Vasantasenā, the best of the city's courtesans, and a beautiful and sophisticated woman. The latter, his commitment to culture, is highlighted in two episodes from the play. A late night vocal music recital leaves Cārudatta in raptures about the exponent's grasp of the nuances of his art that Cārudatta obviously follows well[56] (suggested also by the occurrence of musical instruments in his home).[57] Then, later on the same night when a thief breaks into his house, a hole dexterously excavated by the thief in the wall wins Cārudatta's admiration for the thief's mastery of *his* art ('*Aho! Darśanīyo ayaṃ saṅdhīḥ*! … *kathamasminnapi karmaṇi kuśalatā*')![58]

However, the *Mṛcchakaṭikaṃ* evidence on the phenomenon of the nāgaraka is complex. There are hints that Cārudatta's sophistication and inordinate aesthetic predisposition are the object of mild satire. For instance, when Cārudatta sings paens to the male vocalist's sweet, feminine voice, his vidūṣaka[59] Maitreya replies that he finds a woman reading Sanskrit and a man singing in a low, sweet tone hilarious and boring.[60] And when Cārudatta praises the thief's handiwork and expresses his regret that he found little to steal in his impoverished home, Maitreya's reaction strikes an honest chord: 'You're not sorry for that damn thief, are you?' he exclaims ('*Bhoḥ kathaṃ tameva caurahatakamanuśocasi*').[61] The vidūṣaka's responses are a foil to Cārudatta's gentility and make it out to be almost certainly overstated. Particularly in the theft episode, the author seems to be faintly

ridiculing the hero, who, for all his cultural superiority (or because of it?), is a figure of self-induced pathos and absurdity (right down to the swoon he falls into when he later learns that jewellery left with him for his safekeeping had been stolen).[62] This could possibly be a veiled comment on the effects of (too much) refinement and 'culture' as espoused by the nāgaraka.

Be that as it may, it is Cārudatta's affair with Vasantasenā, a public woman, that comes in for serious disapproval from Maitreya (or the playwright?) who, in sounding a contrary note, goes against the grain of the *Mṛcchakaṭikaṃ*'s (and generally the kāvya's) celebration of the theme of sexual love. Maitreya consistently expresses his distrust of and distaste for courtesans as mercenary, unreliable, and aggressive peddlers of their trade. Sometimes this is couched in sardonic humour. For instance, when Cārudatta agrees to keep safe Vasantasena's ornaments and asks Maitreya to receive these from her, Maitreya refuses with his trademark reply he applied earlier in the act to the worship of gods: '*Na me śraddhā*' ('I don't have faith!').[63] He also likens himself in the proximity of a prostitute (among other mal-elements) to a mouse falling prey to a snake.[64]

At other times Maitreya asserts the impropriety of a man associating with a courtesan by emphasizing the goodness and chastity of the man's wife (*satī, sadṛśadāra*) at home.[65] These are also the sentiments expressed in the *Kuṭṭanīmataṃ*[66] by relatives and well-wishers of male protagonists similarly attached to prostitutes. There is also seen in such men a corresponding sense of public shame at courting courtesans and a desire to conceal the fact.[67] This hold true for Cārudatta too, as I will presently discuss. The voice of satire in this case then seems to represent more than the voice of conscience, that of a countervailing social ideology in the city that does not sanction, let alone idealize, the nāgaraka's pleasure prescription. Instead, it seems to assimilate sexual permissiveness to social vice. I choose to broadly formulate the phenomenon as tension between *dharma* and *kāma* that, as Ludo Rocher has tracked with clarity,[68] is a concern in the *Kāmasūtra* as well. In accommodating this voice the kāvyas allow a stepping back from the 'ideal' and hint at the complexities involved in the cultivation of sexual pleasure in the city.

The contours of both the erotic ideal and the normative counter-thrust[69] are clarified through a subsidiary kāvya character, the viṭa. The *Kāmasūtra* defines the viṭa as 'a man who has used up his wealth but has good qualities and is married. Well respected among courtesans

and society people, he lives off them.'[70] In the *Kāmasūtra* and kāvyas alike, the viṭa is closely allied to the foremost among 'society people', the nāgaraka. He is not merely his aide and companion, but displays perhaps even more acutely than him his predilection for erotics and education. For instance, the *Natyaśāstra,* the earliest extant treatise on Sanskrit dramaturgy, provides that the viṭa be skilled in pleasing prostitutes and be courteous, a poet, proficient in argumentation, bold, and shrewd.[71] In some kāvyas he is described in terms similar to those used for the nāgaraka, for example, 'the city's eternal spring season' ('*nagarasya sarvakāla vasantabhūtaḥ*'),[72] 'one whose flourish of clever speech has been witnessed by entire Pāṭalīputra' ('*pāṭalīputra yasya vacanalīlāṃ anubhavati*'),[73] or 'whose treasure is open to all supplicants' ('*apavṛtadhano yo nityamevārthiṣu*').[74] As the evidence suggests, there may indeed be little to distinguish viṭa from nāgaraka—except for their financial position—so much so that it is entirely possible that the viṭa is none other than a nāgaraka 'who has used up his wealth' in pursuit of his rather capital-intensive interests (courtesans, conviviality, good life).

Be that as it may, the viṭa is an uncompromising votary of the ideal of erotic pleasure, soliciting customers (for courtesans) and liaising with courtesans (for prospective lovers),[75] counselling lovers,[76] arbitrating love quarrels,[77] and deciding disputes mostly of an amorous nature. He adds a significant dimension to the ideal when he insists, in the *Padmaprābhṛtaka*[78] that the pursuit of sexual desire (by courting courtesans) be open, free, and without restraint or 'the armour of hypocrisy' (*mithyācāra-kañcukamudghātyatāṃ*). It can be argued that this clarion call strikes a blow for the pleasure principle in the 'clash' with the opposing voice of traditional social morality, at once addressing and challenging the latter.

In the *Dhūrtaviṭasaṁvāda* the viṭa is seen expounding in professorial detail on a host of erotic queries put to him by an aspiring or noviciate bon vivant. He is expressly requested to solve doubts regarding kāma-*tantra* (erotica) that have arisen in a goṣṭhī, since his views would be authoritative (*pramāṇaṃ bhaviṣyati*).[79] In the same vein, the viṭa of the *Ubhayābhisārikā,* aptly named Vaiśikācala or 'the mount of the courtesan's art', is commissioned to explicate the *vaiśika* śāstra (code of prostitution) to courtesans and their daughters.[80] The viṭa, then, is the authentic exponent of kāma in the city, more so than even the nāgaraka and the courtesan, for both of them he deigns to admonish. He is imaged as a scholar and something of an institution in his

own right. Insofar as intellectual prowess is traditionally associated with austerity and asceticism, the city is remarkable in throwing up a master-eroticist as a model of learning. In the process, of course, the concept and content of 'learning' are themselves redefined.

Portentously, this role of the individual viṭa is seen expanded and extended to a whole community or assembly of leading viṭas in the *Pādatāḍitaka*. When Viṣṇunāga is kicked on the head in a love-match with a prostitute, he seeks to expiate the 'sin' (*pātakaṃ*, *kilviṣa*)[81]—his much-consecrated head being abused by a prostitute[82]—and consults the Brāhmaṇa *pīṭhīkā* (fraternity). They, however, find the issue *beyond the jurisdiction of the* Dharmaśāstras,[83] and refer him to the viṭa *samāja* (community of viṭas) instead as the more appropriate body.

The assembly of the viṭas, which could be as heterogeneously constituted as the ranks of the nāgaraka,[84] is duly convoked on this single-point agenda. The experts ponder over and debate the matter, raising fine points for and against, and considering different angles and schools of thought—and all this only after taking a duly administered oath that:

May he who speak here what is improper never win anything in gambling, always meekly obey his parents, drink milk, and be the husband of a married wife… serve his superiors, forsake the clubs, be in youth modest like the old.[85] (*dyūteṣu mā sma vijayiṣta paṇaṃ kadācit, mātuḥ śṛnotu pitaraṃ vinayena yātu; kṣīraṃ sṛtam pibatu modakamattu mohat, vyudhapatirbhavatu yoatra vadedayuktaṃ*.)

From start to finish, this episode is heavy with irony and parallelism. Not only is the intellectual-discursive mode of functioning of the viṭa samāja analogous to that of the Brāhmaṇa pīṭhikā, the viṭa body is explicitly projected as a system *alternative to the traditional socio-legal authority*. Its composition, its issues, doubts, presiding figures, ideals, and punishments (howsoever tongue-in-cheek) are all external to the Dharmaśāstric purview—and starkly urban in their context. The city alone seems to be productive of such novel behaviour, situations, and solutions that can question the relevance of traditional authority.

Reading the subtext further, it is possible to argue from all that has preceded that the kāvyas are present the city as a contested behavioural space, one that is claimed, as it were, by two opposing, unequal socio-sexual economies: one normative, dominant, repressive; the other inhabiting but a niche, contending the former's restrictions, and struggling to wrest for itself a de jure locus.[86] While the former maybe

loosely designated as Dharmasastric, the latter, in its exclusively urban location, would correspond to the nāgaraka/viṭa's society, the goṣṭhī. At the heart of the tussle are attitudes to sexual pleasure. While the conflict is somewhat muted when the focus is on men, it erupts in sharp relief when women enter the picture.

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The *Kāmasūtra* and kāvyas portray women in the city mainly in the context of pleasure, usually as heading for a rendezvous with lovers and dallying with them—in bedrooms, on terraces, in pleasure groves, pools, and rivers.[87] Chief among women so represented is the prostitute (*veśyā*) or courtesan (gaṇikā*)*. The *Kāmasūtra* distinguishes common types of prostitutes from an elite counterpart over a graded hierarchy which culminates with the gaṇikā or courtesan de luxe[88] who is clearly the text's ideal. Similarly in the kāvyas, the female lead in the *Mṛcchakaṭikaṃ*, Vasantasenā, is a gaṇikā just as Kamamañjarī seems to be one in a tale in the *Daśakumāracaritaṃ.*[89]

In fact, the gaṇikā can be regarded as the female counterpart to the nāgaraka. For one, just as the nāgaraka is identified with the city, so is the gaṇikā. She is described in one instance as '*nāgarīka*'[90] and celebrated in another as 'the ornament of the city' (*nagarasya vibhūṣaṇaṃ*)[91] or 'the good fortune of the city' (*nagaraśrīḥ*).[92] Second, the gaṇikā shares in, indeed stars in, the nāgaraka's engagement with erotics or kāma, albeit as a matter of profession and not indulgence.[93] Texts describe their affair as 'illuminating the city'[94] in one case, and as 'a jewel uniting with a jewel'[95] in another.

Third, the gaṇikā too is seen as a paragon of artistic and other refinements. Hence, the comment in the *Pādatāḍitaka* that 'it is understood that the courtesans' quarter is associated with elegant manners' ('*veśo vilāsa ityutpannametat*').[96] So much so that it is claimed in the *Dhūrtaviṭasaṁvāda* that a man acquires 'self confidence, heroism, ready wit, elegant pose, brilliance of spirit, knowledge of psychology and an acquaintance with the arts by attaching himself to a courtesan'.[97] Elsewhere it is observed that 'courtesans who are rich in grace… utter measured words on proper occasions. Seldom do they speak anything harsh.'[98] And a comparison between the courtesan and a woman more ordinary is summed up in an analogy of a chariot and a bullock cart.[99] The *Kāmasūtra* lists an impressive range of arts to be learnt by the courtesan. This includes singing, dancing, playing instruments, painting, and decoration; preparing

wines and other drinks; doing conjuring tricks, practising sleight of hand, telling jokes and riddles; completing words, reading aloud, improvising poetry, staging plays, knowledge of metre and literary work; gambling; and etiquette.[100]

This list appears addressed among women to courtesans de luxe and the daughters of kings and ministers of state, described as 'women whose understanding has been sharpened by the text'.[101] The grouping suggests that the gaṇikā is seen located within elite culture. The *Kāmasūtra* reiterates this impression with the words:

A courtesan who distinguishes herself in these arts
and who has a good nature, beauty, and good qualities,
wins the title of courtesan de luxe
and a place in the public assembly.
The king always honours her,
and virtuous people praise her.
Men seek her, approach her for sex,
and she is a standard for other courtesans to strive for. (emphasis added)[102]

Significantly, it appears that the combination of the cultural/intellectual with the sexual, represented by the gaṇikā, is publicly praiseworthy and respectable in the city. The addition of the cultural seems to have an at once emancipating and enhancing effect on the perception of sexual pleasure and of the stigmatized profession based on it. These are emancipated in that these seem to become respectable, and these are enhanced because, finally, after all the praise showered on her, it is the gaṇikā's status as a supplier of sex or a sex object that is promoted and reaffirmed. As such, the gaṇikā represents the harnessing of the concerns of civilization and culture in the service of the instincts of nature—aand vice versa. Culture seems to negotiate nature (sexual desire) into a form that is socially acceptable.

Further, by virtue of the combination of pleasure and culture, the gaṇikā comes to share in the city's *male* ideal. She is witty and skilled, refined and elegant, and displays free and frank demeanour. Their common background of learning and behaviour qualifies the courtesan to interact with men—not only sexually as women are expected to do, but *socially*, as partners and companions at gosthis, picnics, and festivals, as the nāgaraka's timetable tells us. Thus, the erotico-cultural ideal milieu seems to render the city as a space for partially transcending traditionally confining norms of gender interaction outside of the family.[103] Crucially, it is the courtesan, a public woman, and not the wife or family woman—a man's socially

legitimated partner—who can partake of this refashioned milieu. The figure of the courtesan emerges as a signifier of urban life insofar as it points to the availability of opportunities in the city for free and feted access to (such) women.

Having said that, it would appear that the nature of her profession significantly qualifies the perception of the courtesan as the feminine symbol of pleasure and culture in the city, and of feminine sexual and intellectual freedom. Addressed to a courtesan, Anaṅgadattā, in love with an impoverished man, a verse from the *Ubhayābhisārikā* is rich in allusions in this regard. It goes:

> Being addicted to the pleasure of lovesport, you overlooked the greed of your mother and disregarded the custom of courtesans, which for anyone of them is hard to ignore, and you went to the residence of your beloved man and enjoyed the sweet festival of love. By your merits you have done away with the stigma [of your profession].[104]

Among other things, the *Ubhayābhisārikā* verse points to the existence of a code for courtesans (*vaiśikaśāsanaṃ*), 'which for anyone of them is hard to ignore', and which consisted of variations on the same theme: profit, not real love or attachment, is the courtesan's object.[105] By corollary, to take a poor lover is taboo, as is retaining a paramour after reducing him to poverty, or establishing a relationship out of love or attraction for a man's charms or qualities—as Vasantasenā famously does with Cārudatta.[106] As the viṭa in the *Ubhayābhisārikā* puts it to another courtesan, Mādhavasenā, 'Exciting by every means the passion of a person [*sarvathā rāgamutpādya*], whether he is lovable or not [*vipriyasya priyasya vā*], one is merely to earn money. This is the confirmed view of the śāstra.'[107] He, however, recognizes that these cold, mercenary words are 'unwelcome advice"to a girl who is 'afflicted by the embrace of an undesirable person due to the greed of her mother'.[108]

Apart from other implications, there stands exposed from this discussion a contradiction within the compounded ideal of pleasure and culture we saw the city set up for the gaṇikā, like the nāgaraka, to pursue: there is an obvious clash between the cultural taste and refinement recommended to the courtesan de luxe and what is supposed to be her moving force, namely, the naked quest for money with little concern for any other criterion. The acuteness of the contradiction is heightened by the impression that the city can throw up characters/suitors always deficient in one of the two departments. Hence, the *Mṛcchakaṭikaṃ* dichotomy between

the rich, powerful boor (Saṁsthānaka) and the poor, victimized gentleman (Cārudatta). These are the options before Vasantasenā, the gaṇikā. In an interesting psychological insight, the playwright makes Vasantasenā say: 'Cārudatta is poor. That is why I am in love with him. A courtesan in love with a poor man is not reproached.'[109] That Cārudatta's poverty was not really his sex appeal need hardly be stated. But if Vasantasenā still rationalizes her love for him in these terms, it shows that her sexuality was partially responding to social mistrust and castigation of the courtesan's role as a gold-digger. And sure enough, even Cārudatta, who loves her and knows of her love for him, is shown expecting that he would have to pay for her services.[110] (It is interesting that while the virtuous hero does not see any conflict between love and having to pay for it, a courtesan does; hence, her choice of a paramour incapable of paying.)

Much later, and well after having established a love relationship with Vasantasenā free of cost, Cārudatta is shown deeply embarrassed when he has to *publicly* acknowledge his association with the courtesan ('*mayā kathamīdṛśaṃ vaktavyaṃ yathā gaṇikā mam mitramiti*'),[111] despite Vasantasena's cultural accomplishments and great prestige. He quickly tries to explain it away to himself as the fault of his youth, not character ('*yauvanamatraparādhyati na caritryaṃ*').[112] This sense of shame among men from reputed families at interacting with courtesans, and their desperate desire to conceal the fact, is found in more than one text and has already been referred to.[113] Moreover, it corresponds to the fairly low self-image of the courtesan as reflected in the *Mṛcchakaṭikaṃ* and *Cārudattaṃ*. For example, when an ordinary masseur apologises to Vasantasenā in apprehension of having been rude to her, she responds with: 'Don't worry. I am (no doubt) a gaṇikā' ('*viśvastu bhavatāryaḥ gaṇikā-khalvahaṃ*').[114] Similarly, on being queried by a monk who rescues her in a manhandled, bedraggled state, she describes her condition as 'what befits the profession of a courtesan' ('*yatsadrṣaṃ veśabhāvasya*').[115] Clearly, both incidents convey that a courtesan could expect insult and mistreatment.

Again, this militates against the distinct impression we earlier formed of the talented courtesan occupying a respected place in elite society. The confusion can be interpreted in different ways. At the very least, it is the reflection of a deeply ambivalent attitude to the courtesan in the city. Since she is a paragon of pleasure and culture combined, it can be argued that the ambivalence, taken to its logical end, shows up the combination of the two ideals as only a superficial one. Further,

the ambivalence may be imagined as a function of social hypocrisy. Insinuations to this effect are made in the *Padmaprābhṛtaka* where the son of a dispenser of dharma (*dharmāsanikaputra)*, ironically named Pavitraka, poses in public as a man of uncompromising purity but secretly has a liaison with a prostitute. The viṭa appropriately calls him 'a holy devil' (*caukṣapiśāco*) who 'pretends to be fasting but keeps sipping milk' ('*pāyasopavāsamiva ka etat śraddhāsyati*').[116]

On another plane, it is possible to extrapolate from Cārudatta's 'character versus youth' dichotomy that the apparently conflicting portrayals of the courtesan in the kāvyas project, again, a behavioural dilemma on the city: having to choose between unfettered (pre- or extramarital) sexual indulgence and a social morality that disapproved of it.

Yet another way of seeing the evidence is that it posits the courtesan as at the centre of a series of paradoxes, which then defines the working complexity of what may be termed the urban socio-psychology of pleasure. She is regarded as mercenary and deceptive, yet desirable and sought after. She is coveted, but the act of coveting her is publicly a matter of shame. She is culturally accomplished and celebrated but socially degraded. Indeed, a connection is to be seen between the two limbs of the paradoxes: She is desirable (among other reasons) *because* she is available commercially and, therefore, freely (!) to any who can afford her. As Saṁsthānaka's viṭa puts it to Vasantasenā: 'You are like a creeper growing by the wayside. Your body is like merchandise to be purchased with money. Therefore, serve equally the man you love and the man you don't.'[117] Conversely, easy availability is general accessibility. A courtesan is available to many and not the preserve of any one. Thus, the *Dhūrtaviṭasaṁvāda* explains in the following way the pleasure a courtesan gives:

> Amorous passion is a kind of desire. Desire means solicitation. And solicitation occurs *when there is a chance of not getting a thing* [*prārthanā cāsamprāpterutpadyate*]. In courtesans it occurs even when she is under control… or *because she is accessible to many* [*sā ca veśyāyāṃ svadhīnaprāptāyāmapi mātsaryādutpadyate bahusādhāraṇatvāt*'). And jealousy also gives rise to cupidity. (emphasis added)[118]

Then, desiring the courtesan is an object of shame *because* she helps realize sexual desire and provides pleasure in an open and expert way outside socially constructed and controlled relations like marriage that are in this perspective a narrow and confining sensual experience.[119] Hence, the viṭa reacts thus to the news of

the impending marriage of a young man attached to prostitutes: 'I indeed bewail with uplifted arms that (the man) leaves the wide road of courtesans [*veśyāmahāpatha*] for the narrow lane of a married life [*kulavadhūkumārga*].'[120] And elsewhere he says: 'No one leaves off a chariot to ride in a bullock cart' ('*na hi rathamatītya kaścid goyānena vrajet puruṣaḥ*').[121]

And, finally, the courtesan is socially degraded not only because she is a commercial sex worker, but because as such she is independent[122] and proactive in her relations with society in general and men in particular. Witness in this regard two of the several vivid synonyms used for the courtesan in the kāvyas: '*svādhīnayauvanā*' or 'mistress of her youth'[123] and '*prakāśanārī*' or 'the exposed woman'.[124]

Thus, the archetype of the gaṇikā emerges as a critical index of urban socio-sexual behaviour and the fault lines therein. Her sexual accessibility, facility, and proactivity characterize and highlight the city's ethic of unfettered pleasure, but also expose its dominant, normative structures that demand her social degradation, as being those of anti-pleasure. By 'anti-pleasure' I mean an approach to sexuality that firmly places social considerations over libidinal ones.[125] Chief among these structures appears to be the family, and the kāvya representation of the *kulastrī* or family woman, married or otherwise, completes the picture of feminine behavioural values that constitute the mainstay of anti-pleasure.

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As a model of feminine behaviour, the family woman is supposed to be everything the courtesan is not.[126] While the courtesan was bold and gregarious, witty and vivacious, the family woman or wife in the kāvyas and *Kāmasūtra* alike is all humility and modesty. Her traits include slow movements, speaking little and in a low voice, never retorting or saying anything harsh, nor laughing loudly.[127] She 'treats her husband like a god',[128] 'talks while avoiding his gaze',[129] and always acts in ways compatible with and dependent on him and his parents.[130] She is also required to refrain from standing at the doorway or gazing from it, chatting in the park, and lingering in deserted places.[131] The ultimate mark of the *kulavadhū* is the veil (*avaguṅṭhana*),[132] that is, for example, bestowed on Vasantasenā immediately after the courtesan is decreed a *vadhū* or wedded wife by royal order.[133] The avagunthana symbolizes all the qualities associated with the wife that present such a contrast with the *svādhīnayauvanā*

or *prakāśanārī*—she is timid and bashful, protected and dependent, controlled and subordinated.

Not just her demeanour, even the high-born woman's thinking is shown deferring to an overt moral code that prioritizes such considerations as modesty, propriety, and honour of the family. Thus, in the *Mālatīmādhava*, Mālatī repents over her love even for a worthy man in the following words:

> I alone am to blame in this matter who, degraded by immodesty, again and again looked (at him) with a heart… which was quite lost to all shame.… My noble father, my mother descended from a pure race, and my unblemished family are dear to me; neither this person nor my life.[134]

Similarly Kurañgī, the princess secretly in love with Avimāraka in the play of the same name, is expected to feel shame and fear, and to give a thought to family pride when she pines for her lover.[135] The cases of these women enact the family as the chief counterpoint to premarital sexual love and pleasure.[136] It is the arena where the conflicts induced by kāma (sexual desire) vis-à-vis dharma (socially defined and enforced considerations of morality/virtue) are 'resolved' in favour of the latter.

It is in the same light that we hear in the texts of the supposed naïveté and awkwardness, or indifference, of the wife in giving sexual pleasure,[137] and how it contrasts with the expertise and initiative of the courtesan, which are applauded. The grievance against the wife, as it were, can in fact be seen as a consequence and an inversion of a patriarchal truth, namely, that rites of marriage were designed to control the wife's sexuality, and, therefore, her sexual expression, so as to harness it for the specific purpose of legitimate childbearing within the caste and class arrangement that marriage signified.[138] In a remarkable display of sociological/gender insight, the *Dhūrtaviṭasaṁvāda* perhaps echoes this when it speaks of two kinds of feminine amorous desire (*strīnāṃ kāmitaṃ*) : 'That which is open [*prakāśaṃ*] befits courtesans.… That which is concealed [*pracchannaṃ*] is proper for married ladies as well as courtesans.'[139] It is further said, 'Males not being easily accessible to them, married women may run after anyone, whoever he might be. But courtesans do not hanker after all men.'[140] The suggested freedom of the courtesan and desperation of the wife implies that a sexuality degraded by commercialization and commodification may yet exercise a greater say than one that is privileged and protected. It is a patriarchal irony that is visibly played

out in the city in the types of the gaṇikā and the kulastri. Cārudatta's wife Dhūtā epitomizes the chastity and silence that are expected of the wife, apart from her obvious redundance to her husband's quest for sexual love and her resignation in the face of it.

A spatial manifestation of the patriarchal value system is the *antaḥpura* or inner chambers, also signified by the *abhyantaracatuḥśālakaṃ* or the inner quadrangle, of the family residence.[141] It was regarded as the domestic sanctum sanctorum to which the 'outer' world—with its corrupting (liberating/subverting?) influences—was not allowed. Thus when Vasantasenā entrusts Cārudatta with her necklace, he insists that the courtesan's jewels must not be taken into his inner residence.[142] However, in a necessary corollary, while the inner world must not be accessed by the outer, it may not access the outer world either. Hence, the powerful recurrent motif in our kāvyas of women beholding any special or mundane affair of the city, usually enacted on the royal road, through the windows, balconies, and terraces of their houses, the narrow openings of which they are invariably shown crowding.[143] The withholding of exposure to the public world[144] also meant denial of access to public opportunities, ensuring a woman's 'rightlessness'.

The connection between exposure and assertion of rights in the city, however, is a complex one in the world of the kāvyas. On the one hand, the 'exposed woman' has free access to public places (the streets of the city), public events (goṣṭhīs and saṅgītakas),[145] and public men (the king, nāgarakas, and so on). It is precisely because her business is public accessibility, however, that her basic rights to person and privacy are undermined, as we have seen. She also incurs social and moral stigma and reproach—the price for exposure.

On the other hand, the sexual and other behavioural restrictions laid out for the sequestered family woman did not necessarily pose an absolute obstacle between the inner and the outer world. Kāvyas show fairly routinely high-born women indulging in illicit love relationships with outsiders deep within (the bedroom) or high atop (the terrace) the antaḥpura edifice, or flirting with and seducing men on the street from their terraces.[146] The protected space was thus frequently breached and sub-spaces 'liberated' using the very qualities of seclusion and isolation to subvert the sequestration that these were meant to effect.

In the same context the *abhisārikā*, apparently a third feminine type in the city in the texts after the gaṇikā and the kulastrī, assumes

significance. The abhisārikā was the beloved seen slipping out onto the streets well after dark for a secret tryst with her lover.[147] The *Nāṭyaśāstra* tells us that the abhisārikā was the one who, having discarded modesty (*hitva lajjam*), compelled by intoxication and lust, sets out to meet her lover.[148] Referred to in the kāvyas as abhisārikā (she who goes forth), *sundarī* (a beauty), or simply *yoṣitā* (a woman), the referent is in no instance revealed to be a courtesan. Who then but the sequestered kulastrī by day was the stealthy abhisārikā of the night? It is as if the forces of pleasure 'return' to undermine the structures of anti-pleasure, inscribing in the process a full-blooded moral and behavioural complexity in the city.

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To sum up, pleasure and culture appear to be the leading values that orient public behaviour in the city, at least among the well-off echelons to which kāvya observations in this regard are more or less confined. It can be argued that the linking of the two ideals in the activities of the nāgaraka and the gaṇikā represents an urban behavioural strategy—an ingenious response to normative attitudes towards sex that seek to rule out all indulgence outside the contract of marriage and reorient it away from pleasure even within it. The pursuit of culture in common by (certain) men and women creates a uniquely urban zone where they can freely access each other socially and sexually, something that is denied by the traditional structure of society and its patriarchal-cum-caste ideology.[149] A niche public–private sphere of heterosexual interaction is thereby conjured in the city where the cultivation of culture provides the stage (and veneer?) for pleasure to play itself out. In this way avenues are created for satisfying behavioural needs and instincts unfulfilled by the traditional social set-up. The nāgaraka and the gaṇikā (in critical conjunction with the kulastrī) symbolize the tension between kāma and dharma—or ideologies of pleasure and anti-pleasure[150]—as well as the city's prescription for a partial resolution of that tension within a circumscribed arena.

NOTES

1. This question is located within the larger understanding that urbanism wrought radical change in the socio-economic order. The essay is concerned with only one, postulated manifestation of that change: a new public–private sphere that an urban environ occasions and an urban literature 'reports' and engages with, and against which a new socio-sexual discourse can be framed.

2. A.K. Warder, *Indian Kavya Literature, Vol. I: Literary Criticism*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1989, p. x.
3. These four plus a fifth, lyric (*anibaddha* or *khaṅḍakāvya*), are laid down by Bhāmaha, the fifth century poet, as the five main forms of kāvya. *Kāvyālaṁkara* I.18 cited in Warder, *Indian Kavya Literature*, p.122. Specifically on drama, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* from the second century CE, the earliest extant work to speak on 'kāvya composition', uses 'nāṭya' and 'kāvya' almost interchangeably (Warder, *Indian Kavya Literature*, p. 16), while Vamana, the eighth century rhetorician, calls natya the highest form of kāvya (Warder, *Indian Kavya Literature*, p. 33).
4. This is quoted in a discussion of urbanism in Paul Wheatley, *The Pivot of the Four Quarters: A Preliminary Enquiry into the Origins and Character of the Ancient Chinese City*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1971, p. 398.
5. If the role of perspective is thus conceded, the absence of a universal definition need no longer be seen as a problem.
6. See Shonaleeka Kaul, 'The City in Early India: A Study of Literary Perceptions (First Millennium AD)', unpublished PhD thesis, New Delhi: Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 2005, 'Introduction'.
7. From the Greek word '*eidos*' meaning 'type'.
8. Warder, *Indian Kavya Literature*, p. 136.
9. However, Doniger (in Wendy Doniger and Sudhir Kakar (trans.), *Vatsyayana Mallanaga* Kāmasūtra (new complete English translation of the Sanskrit text). Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. xxv says that the the *Kāmasūtra* looks like a work of dramatic fiction more than anything else, a play in seven acts. As she points out, 'The man and the woman whose sex lives are described here are called the *nāyaka* and the *nāyikā* (male and female protagonists), and the men who assist the *nayaka* are called the *pīṭhamarda*, *viṭa,* and *vidūshaka* (the libertine, pander, and clown). All of these are terms for stock characters in Sanskrit dramas... according to yet another textbook, the one attributed to Bharata and dealing with dramatic writing, acting, and dancing, the *Nāṭyashāstra*.' See also Shonaleeka Kaul, 'The City in Early India: A Study of Literary Perceptions (First Millennium AD)', unpublished PhD thesis. New Delhi: Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 2005, Introduction and 'Women about Town: An Exploration of the Sanskrit Kavya Tradition', *Studies in History*, 22 (1), 2006, pp. 59–76.
10. Doniger and Kakar (trans.), *Vatsyayana Mallanaga* Kamasutra, 'Introduction', p. xii.
11. See Note 9. Also, Sheldon Pollock is of the opinion that the *Kāmasūtra* may have been but a sourcebook for poets composing erotic works, again suggesting the closeness of the text and the kāvya genre (cited in Doniger and Kakar (trans.), *Vatsyayana Mallanaga* Kamasutra, 'Introduction', p. xxviii).
12. Ibid., p. 187, Note I.4.1.
13. Ibid., p. xvii.
14. *Kāmasūtra* (hereafter *KS*) I.4.31–2.
15. It would be a minority community, though.
16. This could be *any* man, irrespective of caste according to the *Kāmasūtra* (*KS* I.4.1) and irrespective of ethnicity according to descriptions of gatherings in

the *Caturbhāṇī* (*Pāda*. pp. 113, 159). The only criterion for being a nāgaraka was that he would have to be able to afford it (*KS* I.4.30). See also Note 41 later and its referent in the essay.

17. *KS* I.4.2.
18. *KS* I.4.2,36; V.1.52,54. For a discussion of the treatment of the village in the *KS* and kāvyas, see Kaul, 'The City in Early India', Ch. 6.
19. *KS* II.1–10.
20. All the quotes are from the timetable from the *KS* quoted earlier.
21. *KS* V.1.50.
22. *KS* I.3.15.
23. *KS* I.4.1. See Jayamangala's commentary on this sūtra in Doniger and Kakar, *Vatsyayana Mallanaga* Kamasutra, p. 17.
24. *Mṛccha.* 'Prologue', p. 9.
25. *Padma*. p. 67.
26. *Pāda*. pp.155–6.
27. *Mālavika*. I p.13.
28. *Padma*. p. 67.
29. *Pāda*. pp. 130, 135.
30. *Daśa*. III p.73;.
31. *Padma.* p. 80, *Pāda*. pp. 116, 143.
32. *Pāda*. pp. 103, 111, 129.
33. Ibid., p.102.
34. *Padma*. p. 79.
35. *Pāda*. p. 123.
36. Ibid., p. 137.
37. Ibid., p.1.
38. All four names are from *Ubhaya*, p. 1.
39. *Dhūrta,* p. 25.
40. *Mṛccha.* 'Prologue', p. 9.
41. This again suggests that the nāgaraka model could represent the behaviour of a heterogeneous sweep of (affluent) urban society.
42. *Padma*. pp. 73,79; *Pāda*. pp. 125, 130; *Ubhaya*. p.1; *Mṛccha.* III p. 117; *Daśa*. III p. 74.
43. *Dhūrta*. pp. 29,31; *Padma*. pp.83; *Daśa*. II pp. 53–4; *Mṛccha.* IV p. 173.
44. There are several examples from *Mṛccha., Avi., Mālavika., Kuṭṭani., Mālatī.*, etc.
45. *Pāda*. p. 112; *Dhūrta*. p. 42; *Kuṭṭani*. 209,235,795,1013, pp.158–9.
46. *Mṛccha.* III p. 105; *Kuṭṭani*. pp. 87, 68, 207; *Ubhaya*. pp. 3,13,19; *Cāru*. III p.25–6; *Pāda*. p.148; *Mālatī*. I p. 4; *Daśa*. II p. 59; *Pratijña*. I p. 20.
47. Examples are embedded in the narrative of all the texts cited in the context of the nāgaraka.
48. *Mṛccha*, II p. 89.
49. *Mṛccha,* I p. 53, verse 48.
50. Ibid.
51. Ibid.
52. Ibid.

53. *Mṛccha.* X p. 359.
54. *Mṛccha.* I p. 49, II p. 89, X p. 359.
55. *Mṛccha.,* X p. 355.
56. *Mṛccha.* III p. 105–7.
57. *Mṛccha.* III p.117.
58. *Mṛccha.* III p. 123.
59. The vidūṣaka was a jester-like hanger-on or sidekick of the nāgaraka or nāyaka (hero).
60. *Mṛccha.* III p. 105.
61. Ibid. p. 125. I have cited van Buitenen's evocative translation (*Two Plays of Ancient India*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1971, p. 89).
62. *Mṛccha.* III p. 125.
63. *Cāru.* I p. 17.
64. *Mṛccha.*I p. 26.
65. *Mṛccha.* X p. 403; III p.129. It should be noted that the man (Cārudatta) being thus accused of all but wanton adultery occupies otherwise the ethical high ground, but sees no conflict in his behaviour.
66. *Kuṭṭani.* 301–24, p. 111. The *Kuṭṭanīmataṃ* is Dāmodaragupta's ninth century erotico-satirical prose-poem about a matron's advice to young prostitutes.
67. *Mṛccha.* IX p. 329*; Pāda*. p.146; *Padma.* p.80; *Kuṭṭanī.* 301–24, 411–24, 440, p.111.
68. Ludo Rocher, 'The Kamasutra: Vatsyayana's Attitude toward Dharma and Dharmasastra', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 105 (3), 1985, pp. 521–9.
69. Note that the framing of the sentence reverses the usual, which is to speak of the normative as the ideal and any other ideology (in this case, the erotic) as the counter-thrust. This is in keeping with the location of the essay that is seeing things through the kāvya's eyes, as it were, and from what seems to be its standpoint.
70. *KS* I.4.32.
71. *Nāṭyaśāstra* XXXV.55, cited in Ajay Mitra Shastri, *India as seen in the Kuṭṭani-Mata of Damodaragupta*, Delhi:Motilal Banarasidass, 1975, p. 123.
72. *Ubhaya*. p.4. Spring here carries erotic undertones since the viṭa encourages lovers just as spring supposedly does.
73. Ibid., p. 23.
74. *Pāda*. p. 113.
75. *KS* I.4.34; *Mṛccha.*I p. 27, 31; *Padma*. p. 72.
76. *Ubhaya*. p. 23; *Padma*. p. 75.
77. *Ubhaya*. p. 3.
78. *Padma.* p. 80–81.
79. *Dhūrta*. p. 42.
80. *Ubhaya*. p. 9, 13.
81. *Pāda*. pp. 110, 112
82. Viṣṇunāga has the following to say to the prostitute about the sacredness of his head: 'Fie on you, O adulteress, who forgets her position and places a foot, without any care for its [the head's] high status, on this head where mother

bound the *śikhaṅḍaka* [ritual top knot] with careful hands, father kissed on my prostrating at his feet, saying "This is a good child", and on which brahmanas sprinkled water of peace and flower petals' (*Pāda*. p. 108, verse 9).

83. *Pāda*. p. 110. They put it like this: '*bhoḥ sādho avalokitavāṇ asmabhir manu-yaṃ-vasiṣṭha-gautama-bharadvāja-sankha-likhitāpastamb-hārīt-praceto-devala-vṛddhagargya-prabhṛtīnāṃ manīṣīnāṃ dharmaśāstrāṇi, naivamvidhasya mahataḥ pātakasya prāyaścittamavagacchāmaḥ iti.*'
84. For instance, the *Pādatāḍitaka* p. 113 lists as viṭas in the same breath a prince, a physician, a drummer, a royal officer, a hill man, an Abhira, a Parasava, a Maudgala, and so on. Heterogeneity was also no doubt ensured by the fact that these viṭas congregating in the city in question (appropriately called *sārvabhaumanagara*) came from different regions like Daśapura, Ananadapura, Surāṣtra, and Aparānta. The narrator viṭa addresses them as those who have 'come together from all parts of the country' (*sakalakṣititalasamāgataḥ*) (p. 159).
85. Ibid. p. 161, verse 124–5.
86. See Note 69.
87. *Megh*. I.25,33,37; *Raghu*. VI.75, XVI.12,69; *HC* II.90; *Vāsav*. 194–5, p. 104; *Dhūrta*. p. 54; *Jātaka*. XXVIII p. 256; *Ṛtu*. I.3, 9–11, 28, IV.6, 12, V.2, 5, 10; *Śiśu*. VII, VIII; *Avi*. III p. 301–2,311; *BC* II.31, IV.1–100. Other contexts in which women are seen associated with pleasure are the *madanamahotsava* and the ritual of kicking the *aśoka* tree for it to blossom at the onset of spring (known as *dohad*).
88. This is Doniger and Kakar's translation of the term '*gaṇikā*' (*Vatsyayana Mallanaga* Kamasutra, p. 16).
89. The *Daśakumāracaritaṃ* is Daṇḍin's eighth century *kathā* or novel about the heroic and amorous adventures of a bunch of princes. Also see *Daśa*. II p. 47.
90. *Kuṭṭanī*. 863, p. 111.
91. *Mṛccha.* VIII p. 277; *Daśa*. II p. 46.
92. *Mṛccha.* VIII p. 295.
93. I will discuss later in the section the contradictions her profession spawns in understanding the courtesan's position on kāma.
94. *Ubhaya*. p. 23.
95. *Mṛccha.* I p. 39.
96. *Pāda*. p. 125.
97. *Dhūrta*. p. 59.
98. *Dhūrta*. p. 57.
99. *Dhūrta*. p. 59.
100. *KS* I.3.15.
101. *KS* I.3.11.
102. *KS* I.3.17–18. The *Mṛcchakaṭikaṃ* and an episode from the *Daśakumāracaritaṃ* echo the highlighted portions. For example, *Mṛccha.* IX p. 347, and *Daśa*. II p. 51.
103. The gender equation is not necessarily transformed since the gaṇikā's accomplishments are meant to cater to men, but she certainly seems to have greater elbow room in playing out her role vis-à-vis men.

104. *Ubhaya.* p.7, verse 10.
105. *Ubhaya*. p.9; *Daśa*. II p. 48; *KS* VI.1.19, etc.
106. She is described as *guṇānuraktā* gaṇikā (*Mṛccha.* I p. 9).
107. *Ubhaya*. p.9.
108. Ibid.
109. *Cāru*. II p.19; *Mṛccha.* II p. 71.
110. *Cāru.* I p. 16; *Mṛccha.* I p. 59, V. p. 183.
111. *Mṛccha.* IX pp. 329.
112. Ibid.
113. *Dhūrta.* p. 58 spells it out: 'A person attached to a courtesan is not adored by people. His prestige is lost' ('*lokasya veśyāṃ prati sakto manuṣyaḥ pujyo na bhavati, sammatiśca tasya neṣṭā*').
114. *Cāru.* II p. 20.
115. *Mṛccha.* VIII p. 303.
116. *Padma*. p. 80–1.
117. *Mṛccha.*I p. 37.
118. *Dhūrta*. p. 58.
119. Indeed, the gaṇikā represents the collapsing of the public and the private worlds, bringing pleasure out into the former, and divorcing it from the agenda of reproduction that characterizes the latter.
120. *Dhūrta*. p. 33.
121. *Dhūrta*. p. 59.
122. Of course, there are limits to her independence, as we have already seen.
123. *Mṛccha.* I p. 51.
124. *Mṛccha.* III p. 109.
125. Ortner and Whitehead speak of kinship-based societies in particular displaying 'the power of social considerations to override libidinal ones'. They are cited in Pat Caplan (ed.), *The Cultural Construction of Sexuality*, London and New York: Tavistock Publications, 1987, p. 17.
126. And vice versa.
127. *KS* IV.1.37; *Kuṭṭanī*. 848 p. 108.
128. *KS* IV.1.1.
129. *KS* IV.1.22.
130. *KS* IV.1.37.
131. *KS* IV.1.22.
132. *Kuṭṭanī.* 895 p.108; references also in the *Padma., Dhūrta., HC*, and *Mṛccha.*
133. *Mṛccha.* X p. 403.
134. *Mālatī.* II p. 20.
135. *Avi*. II p. 269.
136. This is ironical since pleasure is typically associated with the private realm, which is in most senses co-terminous with the family. However, there is at work a patriarchal logic behind the paradox, which is that the family ensures that only a certain kind of pursuit of sexual pleasure is indulged in that is controlled and channelized towards social reproduction that preserves caste and class arrangements. So the family is the private realm, but fundamentally implicated in the affairs and agendas of the public or social realm. It is because

the courtesan is located outside the family that she can be the locus for contravening social norms.

137. *Dhūrta*. pp. 33 and 58. Sample this: 'One should not think indeed of entering into the prison of a married wife [*kulavadhūkara*] who is, as it were, a beast in woman's form and who behaves during intercourse like one born blind, looks miserable, and speaks within her teeth, creates sorrow even for a happy person, and covered with the garment of bashfulness, she would never look to her private parts on any pretext whatsoever' (p. 33). Or the question: 'Why is there no such pleasure [*sukhaṃ*] from a gracious married wife as there is from a courtesan?' (p. 58).
138. Jaya S. Tyagi, 'Brahmanical Ideology on the Ritual Roles of the Grhapati and his Wife in the Grha: A Study of the Early Grhyasutras (c. 800–500 BC', *Studies in History*, 18 (2), ns, p. 201.
139. *Dhūrta*. p. 53. In the text, however, these terms also carry the sense of distinguishing, respectively, affected desire [*kṛtakaṃ*] from desire born out of 'real love' [*kevalamanurāgadutpadyate*].
140. Ibid. The original is: *durlabhatvādapi puruṣāṇāṃ kulavadhvastu yaṃ kañcit kāmayante, vesyayā tu na sarvaḥ kāmyate.*
141. *Mṛccha.* I p. 21, III p. 109.
142. *Mṛccha.* III p. 109.
143. *Buddha*.III.13,18,21, VIII.13; *Raghu*.VII.11, XI.93, XIV.13; *Mṛccha.*II.p.101; *Dhūrta*.p.32.
144. The *Kuṭṭanīmataṃ* (869,889,895, p. 108) and the *Harṣacaritaṃ* (Bāṇa's seventh century biography of King Harsa) (IV.142–4) suggest that festivals were an exception to this rule, for both high and low women (*āryā, anāryā*) participated publicly in these. However, unrestricted public festivities can also be interpreted as performing the function of temporary relaxation of control before the reimposition of taboos in full strength. For a discussion of this idea in the context of other systems of power, see Kaul, 'The City in Early India', chapter 4.
145. The goṣṭhī is a cultural conclave while the *saṅgītaka* is a musical performance.
146. *KS* V.6.6; *Avi*. III p.313; *Mālatī.* II p. 17; *Daśa*. IV p. 86, V p.102, VI p.117, VII p. 125; *Kuṭṭani*. 833 p. 110.
147. *Ṛtu.* I.10; *Megh*. I.37; *Raghu*. VI.75, XVI.12, XVII.69; *Kaumudi*. IV p. 79; *HC* II.90; *Dhūrta*. p. 54.
148. *NS* XXIV.216.
149. It has been argued that patriarchy is the ruling ideology even in a text like the *Kāmasūtra*, which is seen to be as prescriptive and normative as a Dharmaśāstric text. See Kumkum Roy, 'Unravelling the Kamasutra', in Janaki Nair and Mary E. John (eds), *A Question of Silence? The Sexual Economies of Modern India*, London and New York: Zed Books, 2000, pp. 60–6. Even if that is so, a reading of the *Kāmasūtra* leaves one with little doubt that *it sees itself* as departing from sexual arrangements ordained by the Dharmaśāstras. See Rocher ('The Kamasutra') again on tell-tale signs of Vatsyayana's discomposure/ambivalence on the matter.

150. It should be noted that pleasure and anti-pleasure, in the sense in which the essay coins the concepts, are not antinomic but intersecting sets. Urban men could occupy the overlapping zone, whereas the courtesan at one end and the wife at the other belonged strictly to the mutually excluded realms of the intersecting sets. (Of course the abhisārikā suggests that women too may have forded the divide.)

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