

CAST IN STONE ONE HOUR

# Sex and its thesis

A forthcoming exhibition in Paris' Pinacothèque museum will showcase Indian erotic art with sculptures, scriptures, paintings and artefacts collected from around the world. Curator ALKA PANDE and art historian MARC RESTELLINI told KARAN BHARDWAJ that the exhibit will look at Kama Sutra from women's perspective

Kama Sutra, the mother of all erotic writings, has often been misconstrued not only by Indians but by most international scholars as well. The sex talk somehow dictates the larger connotation of the text which is more about way of life and balance between the women and men. Retelling the story of this fourth century literature to the world and possibly explaining its true sense, museum Pinacothèque (Paris) will showcase over 300 artworks on the Indian erotic art through miniature paintings, sculptures, scriptures and rare Sanskrit texts. The exhibition titled *The Kama Sutra, Spirituality and Eroticism in Indian Art* has been curated by Alka Pande, and will take place in October. "We wanted to put the right context of Kama Sutra which talks about balance of life through four purusharthas, dharma, artha, kama and moksha. There can be no kama if there's no artha. It is mentioned in Upanishads also that to have the best balance in life, you need four purusharthas to go together," said Pande.

On display will be the exhibits from



Musée Guimet (Paris), Reitberg (Zurich), Cinquantenaire Museum (Royal Museums of Art and History, Brussels), unseen sculptures from the estate and collection of Arvind Singh Mewar of Udaipur, private collections of Beroze and Michel Sabatier and the erotic art collections of Belgian doctors Johan Mattelaer and Guy Martens.

The lady curator is determined to give a fresh perspective to the artworks. "The first translation of Kama Sutra was done by Richard Francis Burton in 1873. It took 80 years to be translated in English in England and America in 1963. All the writings and translations have been done by men except for Wendy Doniger and me. When a woman curator is looking at it, her vision is going to be more inclusive of women as well. It talks of perfect mentality between men and women. There's no commodified patriarchal gaze to it," Pande said adding, "Since my first



writing on Indian erotica in 2001, I have written five or six interpretations of the Kama Sutra and have got that freedom to express my self. The exhibition is a feminine perspective not a feminist perspective."

According to art historian Marc Restellini, also the founder of Pinacothèque, Indians were way modern than Europeans and gave a new meaning to modernity centuries ago. "You cannot imagine scriptures giving the sex education outside churches. But the temples here made the impossible possible. It's incredible," he said. Restellini was first exposed to erotic art as a teenager. "There was a book in my parent's library which had some pages dedicated to scriptures of Khajuraho. It made me dream. I was fascinated by those images and wondered if people in France would be able to look at them. As luck would have it, a guy contacted us last year at the

museum and informed he was the collector of erotic art from this region. That's we started ideating the show," shared Marc, who is also smitten by the aesthetics of these works.

"I was shocked at first. The pleasure of women in 'sex' is a modern idea. It was considered as a taboo in Europe till thirty years ago. But this view is predominantly visible in works which were made in 16th century onwards. I think this modernity in creative thoughts probably came from the advent of British rule in India," he said.

A recital by Bharatnatyam dancer Laxmi Viswanathan is also included in the exhibition.

"Viswanathan has also written a book on India's last living courtesan of Tamil Nadu. The exhibition will also offer a perspective on third gender, which was also a part of the Kama Sutra," said Pande.