

your path to a strong body,
a stress-free mind, a calm heart

Fit Yoga

www.fityoga.com

Dance of the Kama Sutra

sensual steps to tap into your inner goddess

Detoxify Your Body and Find Bliss

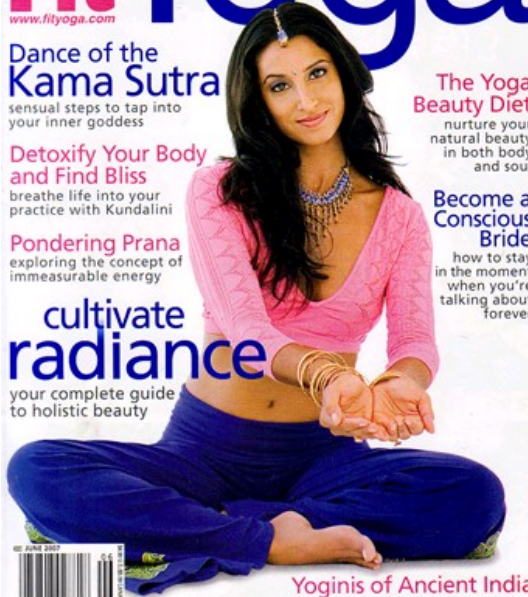
breathe life into your practice with Kundalini

Pondering Prana

exploring the concept of immeasurable energy

cultivate radiance

your complete guide to holistic beauty



The Yoga Beauty Diet
nurture your natural beauty in both body and soul

Become a Conscious Bride
how to stay in the moment when you're talking about forever

Yoginis of Ancient India
their special message for today's modern woman

167 JUNE 2007
7480902882

Dance of the Kama Sutra

Sensual movement opens a way to your inner goddess

By Hemalayaa Behl

Although it might come as a surprise to most Westerners, only a small part of the *Kama Sutra* is devoted to the mechanics of sex. This ancient Sanskrit work promotes the sacredness of sex and the cultivation of sensuality as one of life's highest callings. Its author, Vatsyayana, was a man writing for men, but some of the *Kama Sutra* speaks directly to women, telling them how to attract husbands and how to be good wives. Of the 64 arts Vatsyayana lists in the *Kama Sutra*, the foremost are music and dancing.

Times have changed since the 4th century. Women no longer think of finding a mate as an art they have to master, and certainly not dictated by a man. But the need for connection with our sensual self—our inner goddess—remains as strong as ever, maybe even stronger in an age when women are just as likely to be in the boardroom as the boudoir. Whether our goal is loving another or loving and accepting ourselves, feeling our sensuality and expressing it requires conscious effort.

It took me a long time to find my own inner goddess. From the age of 8 to 18, I lived in Milton, Ontario, and my family was one of very few Indian families in town. My greatest desire was to look like everyone else with white skin and blonde hair. But my parents are from Punjab, India, and my skin was dark, my hair,

brown. Though I was born in Canada, my parents were fresh off the boat, and English was my second language.

The best of Bollywood
I didn't like many things about being Indian, except one: the dancing. In our culture, we danced at every and any occasion. This celebratory dance, called Bhangra is a form popularized in India's Bollywood movies.

Bollywood is India's Hollywood, and Bombay is the bustling city where these vibrant films, famous for their storytelling through dance and music, are made. In contrast to my parent's conservative Sikh values, the Bollywood dance numbers that mesmerized me as a girl were exuberant and sensual, and they epitomized freedom. Dancing always made me happy. It started me on the road to accepting myself and discovering my sensuality.

Looking back, I feel blessed to have been brought up in such a rich culture. I first encountered yoga as a little girl watching my dad practice in his pajamas. In my early 20s, I began taking yoga classes, studying yoga philosophy, and most of all, studying Indian dance.

Sharing the sensual self
This journey of embracing my own culture, and uncovering its sensual as well as spiritual traditions,

28

FIT YOGA



The need for connection with our inner goddess remains as strong as ever, maybe even stronger in an age when women are just as likely to be in the boardroom as the boudoir.



begin transforming my life. Gradually, I shed the shy and demure pigtailed Indian girl I had been and began to share the fruit of my emerging sensual side with the women in my life. At first, I began teaching friends, then clients, then classes.

In my workshops, women's circles, and retreats, I create a safe space for spontaneous sensuality. By that, I mean the sensual, playful self that women of all shapes and sizes can find in their bodies through dance, yoga, and movement.

I truly believe that a healthy mind, a healthy body, and a joyous life flow from an open heart, so heart awareness guides our journey together. In these gatherings of women, we quiet ourselves to find the guides, teachers, and masters within our own hearts. We sit in a circle and use creative ways to get in touch with our desires. In the workshop, we learn the sacred and sensual movements of the Dance of the Kama Sutra.

More like a "playshop" than a workshop, the journey begins with our hands on our hearts, and yogic invocations to the gurus, teachers, and masters who have come before us. We move slowly into yoga, waking up the spine, muscles, tendons, and skin. We then shake and jiggle our bodies from our fingers to our toes before embarking on some bold Bollywood dance moves. This vibrant style of dance is a playful collision of classical Indian temple dance and Bombay's bigger-than-life film industry.

We're ready to express our sacred sensuality and unleash our inner joy—a joy that we carry into our lives.

28

FIT YOGA



The steps are sassy, suggestive, coquettish, and our backs to release blocks that inhibit us from



enormously fun. An added bonus that it's impossible not to laugh, or at least break into a smile as you shimmy, hop, shake, pop, pulse, seduce, and get your freak on, Bollywood style.

Shifting to the sacred

At this point, once we're all warmed up and buzzing, the soundtrack changes, and we shift gears and let our movements help us connect to Mother Earth. Our breath deepens and lengthens. With new prana (chi or life force) awake in us, we find a seat and chant in Sanskrit the sacred names of God.

Now we're ready for sacred dance, slow movements that are less about how we move than about getting connected to our inner feelings. These movements put us in touch with our bodies and our hearts. We open our hips, our shoulders, and

embracing ourselves and our sensuality. This is a dance of love and laughter. Our bodies buzz from the earlier energetic dance and chanting. We're ready to express our sacred sensuality and unleash our inner joy—a joy that we carry into our lives.

One important aspect of this dance is the gaze. I like to say that the eyes are the storytellers of this dance. They reveal our focus and, in sacred dance, we let them rest on our heart's desire. We imagine our chosen beloved—a lover, a friend, or God—and we dance as an offering to them. We cultivate our capacity to gaze out at the world with love.

The freedom and fullness of expression that we find in this dance allows us to flourish. Sacred dance instills confidence, joy, and poise. Gesture by gesture, swish by swish, we remember that we are—and have always been—divine dancers.

Bring the divine to everyday life

After taking the *Kama Sutra* dance journey, many women find a new peace of mind and ease in their bodies. "For years I looked at my body—hips, belly, and buttocks—as parts of myself that I couldn't love," Catherine said after the workshop. For most of her adult life, she saw herself as "fat and ugly." But after our sacred dance, she saw that her dancing legs and flailing arms had carried her into a divine experience. "My body can carry me into the arms of God as much as prayer or meditation," she said.

Another woman, Elizabeth, who is married and has two teenage children, wrote to me: "The workshop reminded me of a period in my life

which I feared was lost and irretrievable."

Sexuality never disappears. When we fail to perceive it, we have to find a way to unleash our love and dance with life. And sometimes it takes a group of women to lead us there. [24](#)

The daughter of Indian parents, Hema Sahla's yoga training began at home, where her first teacher was her father. She went on to study yoga philosophy and meditation as well as asana. Hema is also a student of India's other great movement traditions. Her in-depth study and practice of classical Indian dance informs how she teaches yoga. Her latest DVD, *The Bollywood Dance Workshop*, was released in January 2007. A DVD based on this workshop, *Dance of the Kama Sutra*, is scheduled for release this autumn. For more information about Hema's workshops and retreats, visit www.hemalyaa.com.

JUNE 2007

23

31

#117 YOGA

[Back to Articles](#)



[About Hemalaya](#)

[Calendar](#)

[DVDs | Preview](#)

[Press](#)

[Links](#)

[Contact](#)



Hemalaya
e-Diary

Sign up for Hemalaya e-Diary and receive healing news, updates and exclusive offers! [Click here.](#)

To view Hemalaya's e-Diary Archive [Click here.](#)