



The buttoned-up Brits who colonized India minimized the amatory side of Hindu gods such as Krishna (left).

Tantras, which appeared in subsequent centuries, refer to ritual sex. But sexual acts coexisted with the path of meditation and asceticism—some interpreted the acts as intended to occur only on a symbolic level—and so a kind of religious doublethink arose that fostered tolerance.

The more secular *Kamasutra*, a book that today is referred to much more often than it is read, appeared in the third century AD. Some of the views that the author, Vatsyayana, expressed about women and homosexuality are liberal even by today's standards in India. Yet "the *Kamasutra* plays almost no role at all in the sexual consciousness of contemporary Indians," in part because it is large-

ly known through the ham-handed translation by Sir Richard Francis Burton (and various others who generally aren't credited) published in 1883. In any case, Burton and other Britons who celebrated India's erotic traditions were outnumbered by Protestant British colonizers and missionaries who were put off by Hinduism's "amatory excesses," exemplified by gods such as Krishna—"all those arms, all those heads, all those wives."

Many elite Hindus admired the British colonizers and adopted their views of Hinduism.

"The fraction of Hinduism that appealed to Protestant, evangelical tastes at all was firmly grounded in . . . the philosophical, renunciant path," Doniger writes. Rammohan Roy (1772–1833), one of several religious leaders who toned down Hinduism's sexy side, developed a strain of religion that combined monistic Hindu beliefs with elements of Islam, Unitarianism, and even the ideas of the Freemasons.

Nineteenth- and 20th-century liberal Indian intellectuals tended to explain the shift from appreciation of to embarrassment about Hinduism's erotic past by blaming marauding Mughals and British Victorians. While there are elements of truth in these general-

izations, they ignore the Mughals and the Britons who celebrated the Hindu erotic arts, while downplaying India's own history of "Hindu antieroticism."

What India *has* picked up from the West is the bad habit of censorship. The erotic and the ascetic have a long history of coexistence in India that is endangered today, but the ancient "erotic path" won't be easily eradicated, Doniger suggests, in a country where two-thirds of young adults say they would have casual sex before an arranged marriage.

#### OTHER NATIONS

## The Islamist Bogeyman

**THE SOURCE:** "Missing the Third Wave: Islam, Institutions, and Democracy in the Middle East" by Ellen Lust, in *Studies in Comparative International Development*, June 2011.

ARGENTINA, PORTUGAL, THE SOVIET UNION: All turned democratic during what the political scientist Samuel Huntington famously called the "Third Wave" of democratization, a phenomenon of the 1970s, '80s, and early '90s. The authoritarian regimes of the Middle East and North Africa, however, were curiously resistant, and scholars have long tried to figure out why.

One group blames the region's oil riches, noting the negative correlation between resource wealth and democracy. Another says that the absence of civic life and the strength of tribal and family-based networks make the region

more disposed toward authoritarianism. For still others, the culprit is Islam, with its mixing of religion and governance.

Ellen Lust, a political scientist at Yale, is not completely persuaded by any of these explanations. An important factor is being overlooked, she insists: the ability of incumbent regimes to exploit the presence of Islamist movements. By portraying Islamists as a greater threat to society than the status quo, authoritarian regimes dampened the ambitions of democratically oriented opposition groups across the region, particularly in the 1980s.

Take Tunisia. The secularist regime of President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali, who took power in a bloodless coup in 1987, excluded Islamists from the political sphere. The fear of Islamism was high, particularly because of the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran. This anxiety was compounded in the early 1990s by a civil war in Algeria that was sparked when the state canceled parliamentary elections to head off a likely Islamist victory. Rather than risk having Islamists come to power during a push for reform in its own country, the Tunisian opposition swallowed its ambitions and accepted the state's repressive policies.

Ironically, countries where Islamist voices were incorporated into government experienced more liberalization than other states in the region. A prime example is Jordan, where King Hussein allowed the Muslim Brotherhood to be a part of the political fold for most of his reign from

1935 to 1999. "Secularists in such regimes were more likely to believe that they had little to lose if Islamists came to power," Lust explains, "and thus, they were more likely to demand reform."

The Arab Spring erupted in part, she believes, because dissatisfaction with the status quo grew so great that it trumped the long-standing fear of Islamist power. But it was also aided by the gradual accommodation of Islamist movements since the 1980s. (The Muslim Brotherhood cooperated with pro-democracy groups to overthrow Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak, for instance.) Whether Islamist and pro-democracy secularist groups can continue to find common ground will be a big factor in determining if the Third Wave can finally make it ashore in North Africa and the Middle East.

## OTHER NATIONS

## In Need of a Vodka Tonic

**THE SOURCE:** "Drinking Games: Can Russia Admit It Has a Problem?" by Heidi Brown, in *World Policy Journal*, Summer 2011.

FEW CULTURES ARE STRANGERS to the perils of the bottle. However, "there is a specific eeriness about the problem in Russia," writes Heidi Brown, who formerly reported on the country for *Forbes*. There, alcoholism is "widespread, it is socially accepted, and it has transcend-

ed regimes—from the tsars, to the communists, to today's hybrid mix of democracy and authoritarianism." The life expectancy of a Russian male born this year is just 60 years, nearly 20 years less than that of his Italian and French counterparts, and his death may well come from alcohol poisoning or a drink-related accident, suicide, or heart attack. Overall, alcohol contributes to 500,000 Russian deaths a year. Fetal alcohol syndrome, which causes marked physical and neurological impairments, is epidemic; a 2006 Tufts University study found that more than half of the children in one Russian city's orphanages suffered from the disorder.

The government's response has been weak—raising the tax on liquor and restricting advertising—for a reason, Brown argues. Traditionally, the Russian state has nursed its own booze addiction. In tsarist times, levies on spirits accounted for nearly half of the government's tax revenues, and during the Soviet era, 30 percent.

Vodka, a liquor distilled from rye, wheat, or other plant pulp high in starch or sugar, has been winter-chilled Russians' nip of choice for the past thousand years; unlike beer or wine, it won't freeze. If it has raked in state revenue, it has also been a handy tool for bringing the populace to heel. In the 18th century, Peter the Great encouraged drinking, then allowed indebted boozers to avoid prison by serving in the military—for enlistments of 25 years. Landowners paid their serfs in the clear spirit,