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Kamala

Référence électronique

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कमल kamala,

The European sciences of comparative philology and comparative mythology were initiated in part by the discovery of Sanskrit. In the late 18th century Sir William Jones detected linguistic similarities between Sanskrit, Greek, and Latin; he extended the study towards the religions associated with these ancient and classical languages. By placing Dyaus [-pitṛ], Zeus [-pater], and Jupiter alongside each other Jones discovered the multiplicity of the Skyfather. And the whole earth was of one language and one speech, and it was assumed that the source was Hebrew. On the other hand, some excited Orientalists attempted to prove that Greek, Roman, and Biblical religions were all derived from an ancient Brahman culture – language itself was all the evidence needed. Are Abraham and Sarah versions of Brahma and Sarasvati? Is Zeus Isis Jesus Krishna Christ? ‘This is not intended as casting a slur on Sir W. Jones. At his time the principles which have now been established by the students of the science of language were not yet known, and as with words, so with the names of deities, similarity of sound, the most treacherous of all sirens, was the only guide in such researches.’ (Müller, 1870)

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‘We are by nature Aryan, Indo-European, not Semitic: our spiritual kith and kin are to be found in India, Persia, Greece, Italy, Germany; not in Mesopotamia, Egypt, or Palestine.’ So wrote Friedrich Max Müller in 1865, five years after losing the Boden Professorship of Sanskrit at Oxford University to Monier Williams (later known as Sir Monier Monier-Williams). The position was funded by Colonel Boden, who stated in his will that ‘the special object of his munificent bequest was to promote the translation of the Scriptures into Sanskrit, so as “to enable his countrymen to proceed in the conversion of the natives of India to the Christian Religion.”’ (Monier-Williams respectfully includes this quotation in the preface to the Sanskrit-English dictionary that he wrote and compiled; it is considered to be the definitive dictionary for English-speaking Sanskritists.) Academically, Müller was the superior linguist, but he had never set foot in India, he was German, and he held relatively liberal Christian views. Given the religious motivations of Sanskrit scholarship in England, this last characteristic proved the least forgivable. Monier-Williams was unequivocal in this regard: ‘the national character is cast in a Sanskrit mould, and [the] Sanskrit language and literature is not only the key to a vast and apparently confused and unmeaning religious system, but it is also the one medium of approach to the hearts of the Hindus, however unlearned, or however disunited by the various circumstances of country, caste, and creed. [...] a missionary at home in Sanskrit will be at home in every corner of our vast Indian territories.’ (1861)

I am at home in a language that is not my own. When I work in Sanskrit, I lose myself in the dictionary’s words; when I hear him speak I forget the sound of my own voice. How could it be otherwise? I can only get to the language by means of the dictionary; Monier-Williams makes the connection, he whispers in my ear as Sanskrit speaks. This is my home but he opens the door to let me in. My knowledge of Sanskrit will never exceed his; my love of Sanskrit will never be separate from him. I am not at home in this language although I should be, if *nomen est omen* is as heavy as it sounds. My name is Sanskrit; I ask Monier-Williams what I mean. Listen closely, the one language speaks in scattered tongues. ‘The Sanskrit is the most ancient type of the English of the present day.’

‘We ought to be able to say, like the Emperor Maximilian, *homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto*; or, translating his words somewhat freely, “I am a man; nothing pertaining to man I deem foreign to myself.” Yes, we must learn to read in the history of the whole human race something of our own history; and as in looking back on the story of our own life, we all dwell with a particular delight on the earliest chapters of our childhood, and try to find there the key to many of the riddles of our later life, it is but natural that the historian, too, should ponder with most intense interest over the few relics that have been preserved to him of the childhood of the human race.’ (Müller, 1865)

material: grey steatite

text: eggfire sideglance tallyquarters fishspikes jeweldropchest threelines triangle tree

image: male horned beast, so-called unicorn; a birdcage balances on a fruit blossoming bush

material: grey steatite

text: spokestareye twoonethirds jeweldropchest blockaxe jewellesschest

image: none

material: grey steatite, top right corner chipped

text: sideglance twoonethirds blockaxe (?)

image: white elephant, dressed in saddle

material: grey steatite

text: spokestareye threelinesundone fishspikes beltedfishspikes jewellinechest threelines triangle tree

image: spotted rhinoceros, draped in cloth, standing before a trough

material: grey steatite

text: armsdown armsdown twoonethirds threelinesbitten shellclappers fivelines phallusarmour stickfigure

image: short-horned bull, standing before a trough

material: grey steatite

text: threelines stickfigure twoonethirds jewellinechest scoredcloth facecrossedout threelinesbalanced threejewelsstacked

image: male horned beast, so-called unicorn; a birdcage balances on a fruitless bush

material: grey steatite

text: none

image: thick-lined swastika



Indus Valley Civilization, c. 2600-1900 B.C.

Sanskrit, c. 1500 B.C.

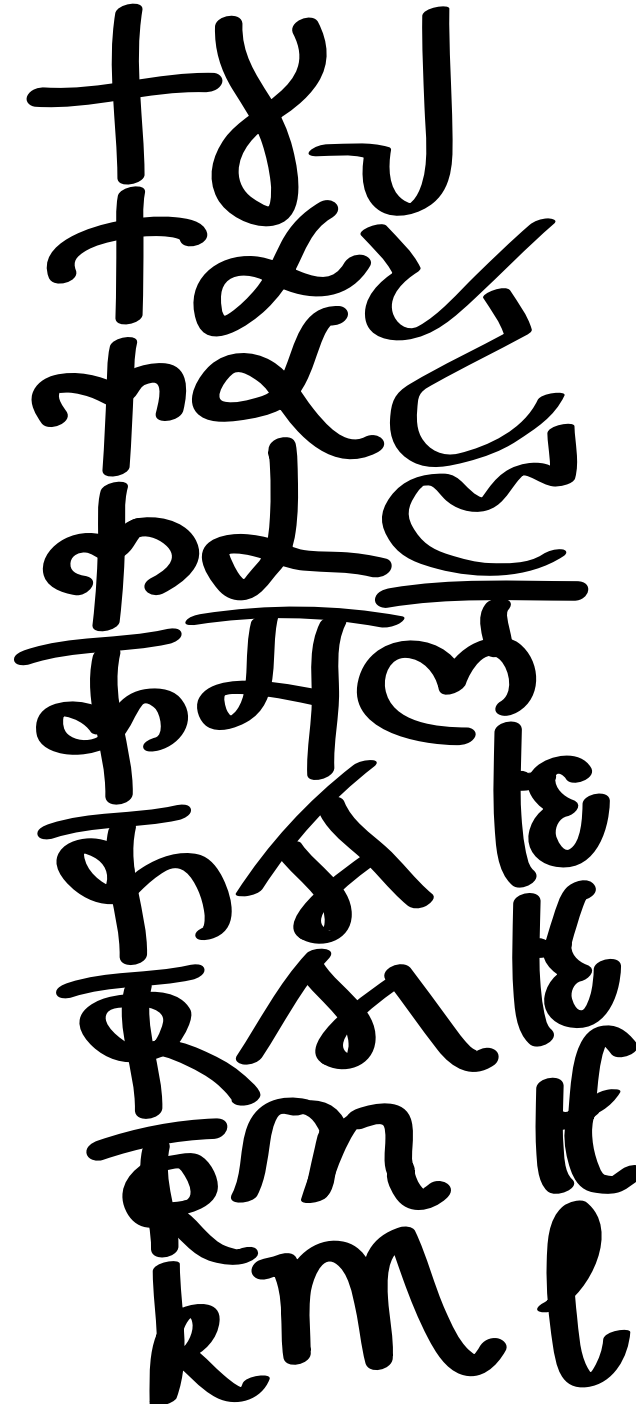
Latin, c. 500 B.C.

Brāhmī script, c. 300 B.C.

Roman script, c. 100 B.C.

English, c. 500 A.D.

Devanāgarī script, c. 1200 A.D.



The names of deities are points on a map. The most popular Hindu deities have over a thousand names each; the people know her as Lakṣmī (a good sign), but for Tantric purposes I'll call her Kamala (lotusflower). She is Śrī (in the sense of "diffusing light"), Sundarī (beautiful woman), Bhūmi (earth, soil, ground), and in the Vedas she makes her first textual appearance as Aditi (not tied, free; or the "Eternal and Infinite Expanse").

But she is much older than the Vedic riding-Aryans would have us believe. She is Indus Valley ancient, her bodies rolled in buff terracotta 2500-2000 years Before Christ. She is primordial power reduced to a joke, a babbling scratching hysteric. She is the last one to know the language, so we swaddle her arguments and swallow them whole.

अमृत **amṛta**, not dead; imperishable; the nectar (conferring immortality, produced at the churning of the ocean), ambrosia (or the voice compared to it); antidote against poison; the residue of sacrifice; clarified butter, boiled rice; anything sweet, a sweetmeat

to Lakṣmī, to Kamala

four white elephants bathe her in nectar

call her Gajalakṣmī (elephant fortune) if you are likely to forget

in the early days she was boundless
laughing too loudly, going for long drives on her own
her body pliable one minute, crumbling the next
she never felt the need to shout

there are multiple paths to follow in order to find her
the terracotta bodies
goddess-sound
the unbounded feminine
bound by rings around the sacrificial fire
(eventually made explicit in thread and gold)

is it surprising that the Mother came first?
she climbs up the words in your throat
bringing up penance with the white cloth



Good Genius

manuscripts , important documents &c.
and with other women
honorific prefix
she appeared with a lotus in her hand
of a poetess to assume the form of a
regarded as a rival
foam of the ocean
four times three short syllables
as identified with betray (heroism)
rose-coloured
speech ; cloves ;
dominion , majesty
the bladder
desirous , lustful
verse or formula
for help or refuge

Vedic Gods give birth to Goddess Speech
or so they explained the phenomenon
of sound blooming out of their bodies

devīm vācam ajanayanta devās tāṃ viśvarūpāḥ paśavo vadanti |

sā no mandreṣam ūrjaṃ duhānā dhenur vāg asmān upa suṣṭutaitu ||

goddess-speech they-generate the-gods those many-coloured flock they-speak

those not with-regards-to-charming-powerful milking cow-speech from-us above beautiful-hymn

later they discovered

sound is the first impulse

स्फोट **sphoṭa**, bursting, opening, expansion; sound (conceived as eternal, indivisible, and creative)

within and without; not tied, free

by this time she was declined in the masculine

there is no evidence to suggest that early Indians had any notion that their language came from without
the Aryan invasion was subtle as the sentence in context

Goddess Speech and Mother Tongue are not to be confused; the latter is a European concept, distinguishing naturalness from artificiality, assuming that languages must be learnt one at a time. Sanskrit is not an ethnic marker; the words *gentem lingua facit* landed like walls around the displaced tower. I could be as Sanskrit as the German yoga instructor as the Russian investment banker as the Punjabi girl studying Buddhist coins as the Brahman looped in sacred string. This language holds us under the water, making us gasp for put-together-perfected. Names, places, units of time overlap; how far should we follow these flares of coincidence into the blue-green darks?

Sanskrit was an oral language, meant to be passed down from (male, Brahman) teacher to (male, Brahman) student. Writing came late, finally making Sanskrit accessible to women and non-Brahmans, and other students outside the ashram. Traditionalists worried that the language would deteriorate on contact with paper, but Sanskrit remains in all of its qualities (सर्वगुण **sarvaguna**, valid through all parts).

The one language writes with many hands. If the alphabet is the body of the Goddess, might we relate the Hindu pantheon with Indian multiscryptuality? Transliteration is no crime; promise to sound it out one syllable at a time and you will walk out of the divine-city-writing unpunished. My first teacher (a Northern Irish woman who couldn't quite make the dental consonants) said something like: 'It doesn't matter if you don't know what the words mean, they know you and speak you clearly.'

the real vehicle of the idea which bursts or flashes on the mind when a sound is uttered; shaking or waving the arms
she says all the good paths lead to India

कमल श्री लक्ष्मी पद्म



श्री लक्ष्मी पद्म कमल



कमल श्री लक्ष्मी पद्म

श्री लक्ष्मी पद्म कमल



कमल श्री लक्ष्मी पद्म कमल



श्री लक्ष्मी पद्म कमल

कमल श्री लक्ष्मी पद्म

श्री लक्ष्मी पद्म कमल



she went to the ocean

scooped in a lotus shell

fingers trailing milk

they landed so newly and emphatically her flower capsized in the storm
the ones and the others had cause to churn this ocean
in search of the life that she once meant

she sank in unknown places

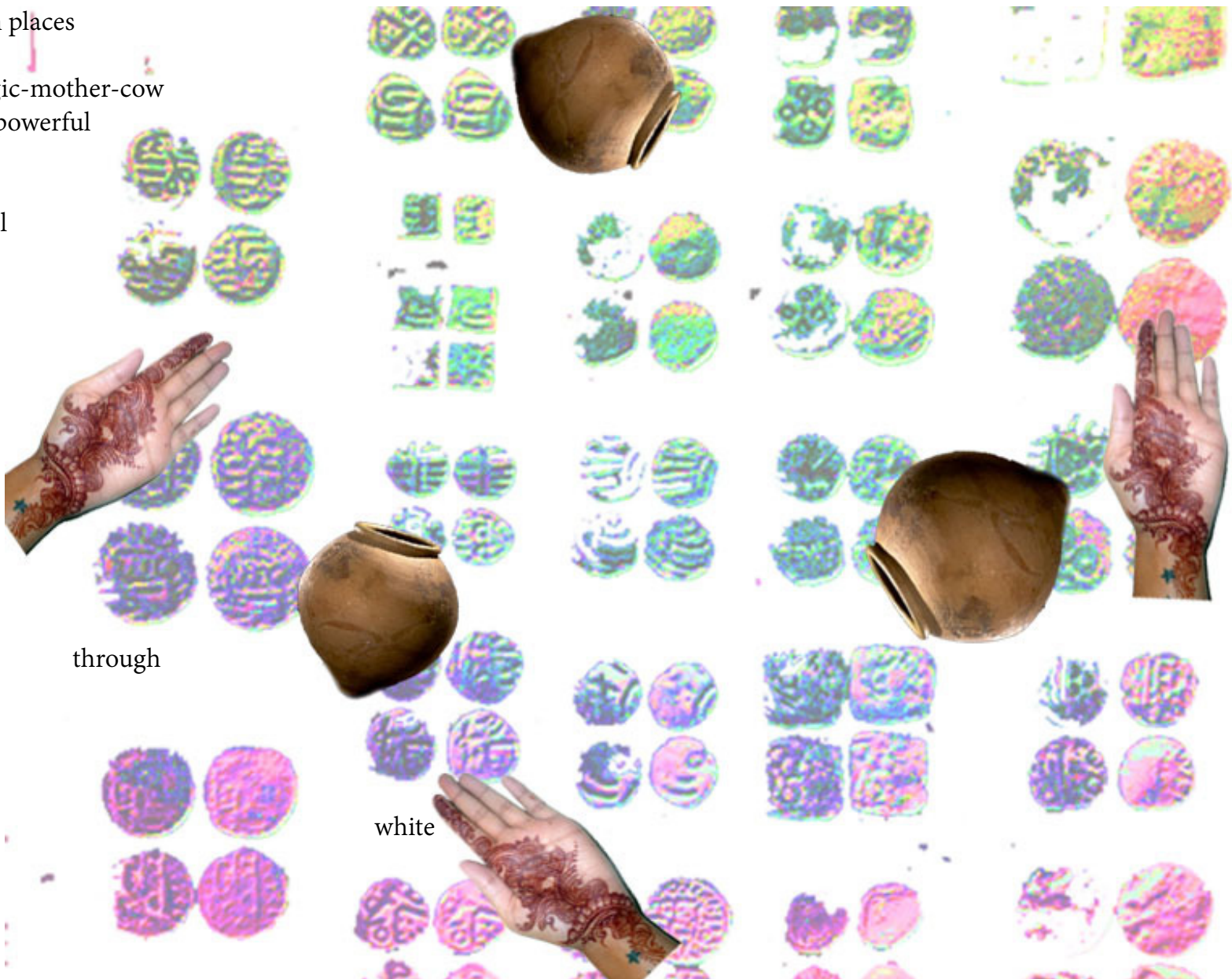
down beside the magic-mother-cow
the tree when it was powerful
the white elephant
the original horse
the pinkish blue jewel

objects

falling

through

white



a lump of butter, she rose to the top

asura, an opponent asura, an opponent of the gods **vasuṁ, serpent king** deva, a deity deva, a deity deva, a deity deva, a deity deva, a deity

kṣīra-sāgara, milk, thickened milk-the ocean **mandaraccha, a sacred mountain-trick** **kuṁḍala-sāgara, milk, thickened milk-the ocean**

kāma
kām, the mythical deadly poison
halahata, a cow which satisfies all
dhanvantari, the physician of the gods
airāvata, Indra's elephant
kaustubha, a celestial jewel
produced from the ocean"
the prototype of the elephant race and
a particular portion of the moon's path
of a form of the sun
a kind of rainbow

a bad sign, impending misfortune
a good sign, good fortune, prosperity, chara, splendour, lustre
she sprang with other precious things from the foam of the ocean
he appeared with a lotus in her hand
she appeared at the creation floating over the water on the expanded petals of a lotus flower
wife, wife, mother, sister of mother, wife, wife, and with other women
the Good Genius or Fortune of a king personified
often regarded as a rival of his queen lakṣmī, the goddess of fortune and beauty
royal power, dominion, majesty
of a poetess

apparas, a class of spirits
succiḥśravas, of the horse
amṛta, the nectar (conferring immortality)
not dead; immortal; imperishable; beautiful, beloved
world of immortality, heaven, eternity; final emancipation
produced at the churning of the ocean
fond of the water
have the faculty of changing their shapes at will
sometimes called "nāgās"; they inhabit the waters of the clouds
"going in the waters between the waters of the clouds and the sky but often appearing in the sky"
pāṇḍurā, the goddess of the ocean
kinnorī, the goddess of the ocean
pāṇḍurā, the goddess of the ocean
kinnorī, the goddess of the ocean
pāṇḍurā, the goddess of the ocean
kinnorī, the goddess of the ocean

Appendix

There is a curious association between clouds and elephants. Admittedly, they share characteristics – their towering greyness, their obdurate disposition to hold or release water – still they do not feel comfortable together. Something about the glorious earthiness of one, the frustrating unearthliness of the other. An unlikely myth reveals that elephants were once winged, smilingly roving the sky like clouds. They stopped to rest on a tree, beneath which the sage Dīrghatapas sat to teach. Unfortunately the branches could not withstand their clumsy weight, and crashed to the ground, killing several of the ascetic’s students. The furious Long-(in space and time)-Austerities cursed them, as sages in Indian mythology are wont to do. The elephants could no longer fly or float or metamorphose, but their vapourish origins were preserved in language.

धाराट dhārāṭa, the Cataka bird (fond of raindrops) [proud cuckoo, only drinking water as it falls from the sky]; a cloud (filled with drops); a furious elephant (emitting rut-fluid)

घनाघन ghanāghana, (said of an elephant); compact, thick (a cloud); mutual collision or contact [another shared feature, the sound when they clash]

मराल marāla, (a horse; an elephant; a grove of pomegranate trees; white oleander; a villain; a cloud; lamp-black); redness mixed with a little yellow [a helpful definition or not, depending on how you see it; the components of a myth, whereby the horse and elephant are friends who don’t know it till the end; the scene is red with a little yellow mixed in]

मतंग matamga, “going wilfully” or “roaming at will”, an elephant; a cloud [look out for her, she comes after Kamala, the forest-green girl, drunk elephant Goddess]

नभोगज nabhogaja, “sky-elephant”, a cloud

सत्त्रि sattri, one who is accustomed to perform sacrifices; an elephant; a cloud

श्वेत śveta, white, dressed in white, “snow-mountain”; “a bright side-glance”; a white cloud; of a mythical elephant; of the mother of the elephant; buttermilk and water mixed half and half

It is important that we end this page in white, wet with milk and water, the first cycle is complete.