

Notes on Sanskrit



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Notes on Sanskrit

For my teachers.

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*vṛṣṭau pañca-vidhaṃ sāmopāsita
puro-vāto hiṃ-kāro meghe jāyate sa prastāvaḥ
varṣati sa udgīthaḥ vidyotate stanayati sa pratihāraḥ
udgrhṇāti tan nidhanam
varṣati hāsmāi varṣayati ha ya etad evaṃ vidvān vṛṣṭau pañca-
vidhaṃ sāmopāste*

One should meditate on the fivefold [any song or tune] in the rain.
The preceding wind as the syllable [exclamation]; the formation of
the cloud is the [introductory eulogy].

What rains is the [name of God]; the lightning and the thunder as
[that which keeps back].

The cessation as the [settling down].

It rains for him and he causes it to rain, he, who knowing this thus,
meditates on the fivefold [any tune or song] in rain.

Chāndogya Upaniṣad, translated by S. Radhakrishnan (1989)



In the Rainstorm

In 1755, lexicographer Samuel Johnson made his great attempt to 'fix' or 'embalm' the English language. Sometime during his decade-long labour, he realised the impossibility of the task:

Total and sudden transformations of a language seldom happen; conquests and migrations are now very rare; but there are other causes of change, which, though slow in their operation, and invisible in their progress, are perhaps as much superior to human resistance, as the revolutions of the sky, or intumescence of the tide. (2000: 324-325)

His comments were prescient. Thirty years after his dictionary was published, a cataclysm broke upon the English language.

Johnson believed that English was primarily derived from Roman and Teutonic languages; in 1786, philologist Sir William Jones realised that the branches extended much further. He proposed that ancient Greek, Latin, Sanskrit, Persian, Gothic and Celtic languages shared a common linguistic source, and what is now known as the Indo-European language family began to take root. Jones extended the study towards the religions associated with these ancient and classical languages. Distant cultures became comparable as linguistic and mythological distinctions were swept by tides; it was apparent that East and West were not as disparate as supposed. (250 years after the discovery, this secret remains guarded by philological lexicon and decompression sickness.)

By placing Dyaus [-*pitr*], Zeus [-*pater*], and Jupiter alongside one another, Jones discovered the multiplicity of the Sky-Father. And the whole earth was of one language. Are Abraham and Sarah versions of Brahmā and Sarasvatī? Is Zeus Isis Jesus Kṛṣṇa Christ?

his 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 2002: 93)

I began the study of Sanskrit after a friend told me that this ancient Indian language is poetry itself. Imagine the correct words breaking loose, line-breaks arranging themselves in the burble. The terms of the promise are manifest: Sanskrit, *saṃ-skṛta*, well-formed, perfection, of the gods, the beauty of artifice, hallowing convention preserving numbers, names of rivers, and the rounded shapes of the aftersound. I am not alone in the sanctum sanctorum, nor free from intrusion. The nineteenth-century lexicographer Sir Monier Monier-Williams, author of the authoritative Sanskrit-English dictionary, guides me through the language like poetry; I crouch in definitions, dragging lamps.

Monier-Williams' Sanskrit-English dictionary was first published in Oxford in 1899. This immense lexicographical project – 'dry, dreary and thankless drudgery' as he described it, alluding to Samuel Johnson (2008: ix) – was undertaken in his capacity as Boden Professor of Sanskrit at the University of Oxford. This 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"' (ix). Monier-Williams respectfully included this quotation in his preface to the dictionary.

In 1860, a ruthless campaign for the professorship took place in British newspapers and captured public interest. Max Müller, the

defeated rival, was the superior linguist, but he had never set foot in India, he was German, and he held liberal Christian views. This last characteristic proved to be the least forgivable. Monier-Williams was a devout Evangelist and unequivocal in this regard:

But what we assert is, that the national character is cast in a Sanskrit mould, and that 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. It is, in truth, even more to India than classical and patristic literature was to Europe at the time of the Reformation. It gives a deeper impress to the Hindu mind than the latter ever did to the European; so that a missionary at home in Sanskrit will be at home in every corner of our vast Indian territories. (1861: 41)

(Müller had a different approach: 'We all come from the East – all that we value most has come to us from the East, and in going to the East, not only those who have received a special Oriental training, but everybody who had enjoyed the advantages of a liberal, that is, of a truly historical education, ought to feel that he is going to his "old home," full of memories, if only he can read them' [2010: 24].)

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. नशिा niśā, f. night; a vision, dream; turmeric [Cf. *nak* & *nakti*; Zd. *nakht-uru*, *nakht-ru*; Gk. νύξ; Lat. *nox*; Lith. *naktis*; Slav. *nošti*; Goth. *nahts*; Angl. Sax. *neaht*, *niht*, Engl. *night*, Germ. *Nacht*.]

Listen closely, the one language speaks in scattered tongues.



Out of the Throat

Sanskrit was an oral language, meant to be passed down from (male, Brahmin) teacher to (male, Brahmin) student. Writing came late to Sanskrit; Brahmi, the first known South Asian script, is dated to *circa* 250 B.C.E. There were concerns about the democratisation of Sanskrit, as writing made the language accessible to women and non-Brahmins. Sanskrit scholar Sheldon Pollock describes the ideology of orality:

Long after writing became an everyday practice in the Sanskrit world, a bias toward the oral persisted; knowledge that is *kanṭhastha*, 'in the throat,' or memorized, was invariably privileged over knowledge that is *granthastha*, 'in a book.' Moreover, the representation of knowledge (or understanding or awareness) itself as impregnated by language-as-speech – and never language-as-text – radically differentiates the medieval Indian world from Latinate Europe of the same epoch. (2009: 82)

But Sanskrit did not deteriorate on contact with paper, it remains in all of its qualities (*sarvaguna*, valid through all parts, endowed with every excellence). Sanskrit is usually written in Devanāgarī, but there is no attachment to any script in particular, so people can read and write Sanskrit in letters of their choosing. The one language writes in many hands. 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 (an 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.'

Little Mothers

अ a unreality	आ ā smelling	इ i clean knowledge
ऋ ṛ destroying	ॠ ṛi destroying	ल l power
ए e sandalwood	ऐ ai vacuity	ओ o wind
अम् am shapes	अः aḥ the hand	
क ka power	ख kha always kind	ग ga able to do
च ca unreality	छ cha any fine art	ज ja self-consciousness
ट ṭa hearing	ठ ṭha ready wit	ड ḍa self-consciousness
त ta skin	थ tha the eye	द da organ of taste
प pa inner part	फ pha protector	ब ba the hand
य ya touching	र ra shapes	ल la melted butter
श śa vacuity	ष ṣa wind	स sa fire
ह ha any fluid		

ई i destroying

उ u power

ऊ ū power

औ au the sharp edge

घ gha clean knowledge

ङ ṅa great unreality

झ jha nature

ञ ña soul or spirit

ढ dha mind

ण ṇ hearing

ध dha smelling

न n speech

भ bha foot

म m cry aloud

व va fixed order

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: 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



Book 10, Hymn 125, Vāc
[Goddess of Voice, Speech, Language, Sound]

1 I travel with the [children of roar, the children of bright,
With the all-divine] I wander.
I hold aloft [the balance of skies, drop and fire,
And the sunlit streaming horses.]
2 I cherish and sustain [milk of the moon, and moon,
I press the adept, and fill him with sweet conciliation.]
3 I am the Queen, the gatherer-up [in understanding
I deserve the first sacrifice;
The Gods have placed me in many mouths, given me cause to
enter.]
4 [Who sees in detail, who breathes and blows, who] hears the
word outspoken
They know it not, but yet they dwell beside me. Hear,
[Faithfulness is the daughter of Speech.]
5 I, verily, myself announce and utter the [welcomed] word that
[In my love you are terrible, I make you wise, poor, praised.]
6 I [swell in the pause, bending your breath
I am the release after execution,
You follow me deeply, extending into worlds.]
7 [I come together with waters to conclude,
Tracing the earth with the backs of my fingers.]
8 I [resolve myself with] wind and tempest,
The while I hold [earth in all its places.]
[Far from today, far from here, I have become great and full.]

Rig Veda, translated by Ralph T. H. Griffith (1889)

Book 8, Hymn 100, Vāc
[Goddess of Voice, Speech, Language, Sound]

Who is the voice they speak, those ones who shine and spear? Who is the voice of the sacrificial rite, the beautiful low, the unintelligible rule?

Those ones milked all of her, she of the four powers, where is she now? Is she anywhere after this, is she too far for us?

Oh goddess of voice, what did they make of you? Did they speak your every sign, your every dream, your every shape? Did they untether your colours and break you apart?

Oh goddess who charms us, who makes us strong, feed on us. Oh cow, we are possessed by you, speak us into closeness, fold us in milk, that we may voice you.

An Explosion in Consciousness

later they discovered sound as the impulse, the eccentric unity
by this time she was declined in the masculine

स्फोट **sphoṭa**, m. bursting, opening, expansion, disclosure;
extension; a swelling, boil, tumour; a little bit or fragment, chip;
crackling, crash, roar; (in philosophy) sound (conceived as eternal,
indivisible, and creative); the eternal and imperceptible element of
sounds and words and the real vehicle of the idea which bursts or
flashes on the mind when a sound is uttered

स्फोटिका **sphoṭā**, f. shaking or waving the arms



The Lexicographer-Priest

myths are distributed
authored by atmosphere
the goddess disappears underground

how unexpected
to attend to the satellite
yad ihāsti tad anyatra yan nehāsti na tat kvacit
(‘what is here is there; what is not here is nowhere’)

the river is tangled in nomenclature
Prakṛti, Sarasvatī, Vāc blowing out of course
subject to the curves of the shell

boundless and destitute
characterised by daring
her body contradicts the definition

coated in white petals, tide-bound
she awaits the synonymous burst

presume the sea, presume the swell
the force of documentary proof

defined by putting together
bringing in close connection
nāmnāmmālā, string of beads, lexicon

words are lotus flowers looped on a wreath
the familiarity of the image cocoons you
soft cups possessed by the line
uphold the agreement made to caprice

he makes boxes and sheaths for seed-vessels
syllables bloom and smile
liberated by dark corners

these are monuments to fragility
in an ambiguous resting ground
words show through the page where they should not

one surpasses pearls
the other dances

there was no death in the family
expiations went unperformed
the river deemed redundant

see who stands in front of you
see who was never there
lines drawn in shadow
passages undercut

etymology is placing white crowns on confluence

'It is remarkable that, in reviewing my collection, I found the word
SEA unexemplified.' (Johnson 2000: 323)

अपार apāra, not having an opposite shore (the prefix 'a' negates the
beyond)

अपारपार apārapāra, that which will not acquiesce

तरंग taramga, 'across-goer', a wave, billow

तरंगमालन् तaramgamālin, the sea as garlanded by waves

बन्ध **bandha**, binding, fixing, bandage, chain
there is no use conferring

मध्य **madhya**, used like medius
earth as a woman's body, the sea as her waist

रत्ननधि **ratnanidhi**, the place where pearls are kept

this vessel is the final resting place
before the ocean churns

'If the changes that we fear be thus irresistible, what remains but to acquiesce with silence, as in the other insurmountable distresses of humanity? It remains that we retard what we cannot repel, that we palliate what we cannot cure. Life may be lengthened by care, though death cannot be ultimately defeated: tongues, like governments, have a natural tendency to degeneration; we have long preserved our constitution, let us make some struggles for our language.' (Johnson 2000: 326-327)

महीप **mahīpa**, 'earth-protector'
conversant with words, compiling defeat and invention

the lexicographer exhales
grasping the fix as it blossoms

so many things lost in the deluge
how strangely they hold up in light

Notes on Sanskrit

Commentary on *Śrī Devī Uvāca* [The Great Goddess Said]

'It was all the difference between a chaos and a kosmos, between the blind play of chance and an intelligible and therefore an intelligent providence. How many souls, even now, when everything else has failed them, when they have parted with the most cherished convictions of their childhood, when their faith in man has been poisoned, and when the apparent triumph of all that is selfish, ignoble, and hideous, has made them throw up the cause of truth, of righteousness, and innocence as no longer worth fighting for, at least in this world; how many, I say, have found their last peace and comfort in the contemplation of the *ṛta*, of the order of the world, whether manifested in the unvarying movement of the stars, or revealed in the unvarying number of the petals, and stamens, and pistils of the smallest forgot-me-not!' (Müller 2002: 246)

The laws of this language reflect the laws of the universe, we might never come closer to truth. This language does things to me, this language that speaks you more than you know. This is me putting you into practice. The linguistic and grammatical sequence parallels spiritual progression.

Śabda [Sound]

Join in when you can, just make the sounds, and the tune if you can manage it. All of these circle-shapes – coconuts, open mouths, wheels, garlands – are to remind you of your position in the diagram. They are circles of goddesses watching you move; each direction is exploited.

Akṣara [Letter]

The imperishable, the lady's sword, our names carved on the brightest edge of the blade. I tried to construct something similar out of elephant heads, house-fires, snails, and curtain rods, but the result was ugly and I didn't feel like repeating the process. Rather than a heap of language a volcanic eruption viewed from above? Some sort of grid that disintegrates the closer you look? Or, just the idea of the grid in your mind at all times, and you leave your skin alone.

Mātrkā [Alphabet]

It bears repeating: the body of the goddess, divided into lots of little mothers. Everyone must receive the allotted part:

It is in this sense that the universe is said to be composed of the letters. It is the fifty (or as some count them fifty-one) letters of the Sanskrit alphabet which are denoted by the Garland of severed heads which the naked Mother Kālī, dark like a threatening rain-cloud, wears as She stands amidst bones and carrion, beasts and birds, in the burning ground, on the white corpse-like (*Śavarūpa*) body of Śiva. For it is She who 'slaughters,' that is, withdraws all speech and its objects into Herself at the time of the dissolution of all things (*Mahāpralaya*). (Woodroffe 2011: 216-217)

Vowels are organised in order of transcendence, consonants in order of manifestation. The categories of letters are categories of existence: voiceless and voiced, unaspirated and aspirated. The mothers position themselves accordingly, from the back of the throat to the palate to the alveolar ridge to the teeth to the lips. The mothers are talking amongst themselves or they are worried about

you or they are doing their best to protect you – you weren't put on this world to speak for yourself.

Pada [Word]

Sometimes it seems like every word is another word for an astrological measurement (what are lunar mansions anyway) or a species of fig tree or the opposite of the action or one of the four stages of something or other or the pudendum muliebre. ('Pudenda' are 'the shameful parts'; 'muliebrity' is womanhood, as opposed to virility, chiefly obsolete [OED] – Monier-Williams can be so delicate!)

Vyākaraṇa [Grammar]

'[Grammar is...] the door of freedom, the medicine for the diseases of language, the purifier of all sciences; it sheds its light on them; ... it is the first rung on the ladder that leads up to realisation of supernatural powers, and the straight royal road for those who seek freedom.' (Bhartṛhari, cited in Filliozat 2009: 65)

You have entered the teacher's house.

Liṅga [Gender]

Holding onto its gender; having the gender of another; an absence of gender; having a gender that agrees; having a fixed gender; an impotent gender; a gender like a cloud without water; a gender like a lotus leaf; a third nature gender; a twofold gender; destitute of both genders; having the mark of a gender; the incongruity of gender; a gender that prevents old age and prolongs life; gender as a remedy for magical purposes; gender doubtful; variegating gender; gender in the image of god; gender that has an origin and

is therefore liable to be destroyed; a change of gender; the laws of gender; gender unknown; gender as a kind of ornament; gender as the meaning of words; another gender is required; having a gender that shares in everything; preserving its gender; gender of doubtful derivation that applies to closely connected things.

Vacana [Number]

Abhinavagupta said: 'This universe is established always and is in every way involved in third person (*nara*), second person (*Śakti*) and first person (*Śiva*) both in the dealings of worms and the all-knowing' (Singh 2011: 74).

Vibhakti [Case]

The birds of devotion, devotion asunder, the opposite or intensified meaning. A bewildering purpose; columns, elements, the sea. Her fragrant instrument and all beeswax embraces. The object found in perfect sleep: grassy plains, giant boars, logs, grasses, waves, freshwater dolphins, waves. It happened again, but the construction is too similar to repeat.

La [Tense and Mood]

This section is crescent-shaped to evoke the waxing/waning moon. She said that I had been gifted with insight. She hoped that I would have difficulty. If I was expressing reproach. I am making myself invisible. I died as you are dying. If she is a serpent I might be measured. When she will ask me to perform.

Artha [Meaning]

“Well, does not Reality shine as the perceiving Experient in the heart of all? Then what is the relevance of a question about it?”

“True,” says Abhinavagupta, “though it shines in everyone’s heart, it is not intimately assimilated by the heart as existent. So though present, it is as if non-present, just as the grass and leaves on the path of someone who passes on in a chariot (though present are not noticed by him).” (Singh 2011: 58)

- cow thunder diamond sour shape
- a lightning denunciation in her feeding language a monthly sacrifice
- brilliance the mythical weapon zigzag spells and might

Vākya [Sentence]

‘With streaming clouds trumpeting like haughty tuskers,
with lightning-banners and drum beats of thunder claps,
in towering majesty, the season of rains
welcome to lovers, now comes like a king, my love.’ (Kālidāsa,
trans. in Rajan 2006: 110)

‘Western wind, when will thou blow,
The small rain down can rain?
Christ, if my love were in my arms
And I in my bed again!’ (Anon.)

‘Yet there are subtler clouds, all the tenuous shadows of swift and uncertain source which pass across the relationship, changing its light and its modeling; suddenly it is another landscape, a faint black intoxication. The cloud, then, is no more than this: *I’m missing something*.’ (Barthes 2002: 170)

Sādhana [Practice]

‘[Ritual] is an activity governed by explicit rules. The important thing is what you do, not what you think, believe or say. In India this has become a basic feature of all religion, so that we should refer, not to the faithful or orthodox, but to the orthoprax (from Greek *orthos*, “right” and *praxis*, “action”).’ (Staal 1996: 116-117)

Nyāsa [Placing]

Each letter of the alphabet is associated with a particular part of the body. The devotee pays special attention to the body part while imagining the letter and making various sounds and gestures. Eventually the body part becomes the sacred seat of the goddess. The devotee repeats the process fifty times until every part of her body receives the attention it deserves. You are more than your there, there, and there – activate the whole!

Mantra [Sacred Formula]

The pleasure of syllables like so many pearl ornaments in the Hyderabad style. In this context, we can say with confidence: form is sometimes more than an extension of content: ‘Mantras are a typical product of Indian civilisation – a civilisation where form is all-important’ (Staal 1996: 263).

Cit [Consciousness]

Everything can be compared to the belly of a fish (the puffing and sucking of subjectivity, space, time), an image that makes me squeamish. You are more powerful when her belly protrudes, it means the sacrifices are well received.

Devī [Goddess]

He makes fun of her behind her back – hail, hail, honey, honey, honey, hail, gorgeous, gorgeous, dear, your majesty, your highness, your grace, madam, honey, darling, madam. She doesn't mind but her devotees aren't known for their benevolence (neither is she, but that's an old misconception).

Parāvāc [The Supreme Voice]

Abhinavagupta said: 'In that stage (i.e. in the *parāvāc* stage), there is absolutely no thought of difference such as "this" (a particular entity or individual), "thus" (a particular form), "here" (particular space), "now" (particular time)' (Singh 2011: 9). In all seriousness, she is the most perfect container.

Trika [The Trinity]

There are any number of versions of the three aspects of Reality: very-mother, very-measure, very-provable; wishing, knowing, performing; liberation, power, a chess piece; strange, better and worse, having nothing beyond or after. When the strange goddess looks in the mirror, she casts better and worse reflections, and a reverse order of categories is produced. Water becomes earth, thunder becomes fire, and the alphabet begins with the pinched aspiration. We are left with the latters. When she looks away from the mirror all the lights go out. The Eternal Now is with you or without you.

Samādhi [Union]

He hires a pilot to write 'unity in multiplicity' and 'diversity in unity' in the sky and asks her to accept whichever one she likes

best. She reads *Tender Buttons* with her friends and they make each other feel uncomfortable and repel new friends. They sit in the garden hoping her lavender-attachment doesn't become a eucalyptus-sized problem. She looks at postcards of nuns and witches and decides it's time to put the psychoanalysis away. They agree on the superiority of their own routines although they can't maintain a balance let alone an extended balance.

***Samdhi* [Euphonic Combination]**

Abhinavagupta said: 'If there is union of *bīja* (germ) in the form of vowels with the *yoni* (womb) in the form of consonants, in other words, if there is the homogeneous union of Śiva and Śakti, then what a pleasant surprise; without any effort, without tilling and sowing will be generated both *bhoga* (enjoyment) and *mokṣa* (liberation)' (Singh 2011: 122).

***Samāsa* [Compound]**

Love / the sound between them / the bit of a bridle; firmness / the sound between them / the bit of a bridle; fragrance / the sound between them / the bit of a bridle, and so on. Child of different of child; her debt of debt her; she serves all sorts of misfortune of sorts all serves she, and so on.

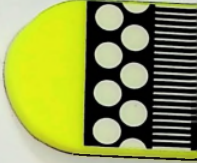
Once Very Familiar

Which beginning will convey us to the conclusion determined by form? Some of this is family matter, his dinner-table trajectory from palm reading to alien glow to the physiology of the universe. We laugh to tears over the existential chef, then I sit at my desk reading H.D. and Freud and Tantric philosophy and pencil affection in the margins. Abhinavagupta said:

The maxim 'that which is not there may be elsewhere' will not hold good in her case. Seize (mentally) that goddess, viz. consciousness, known as the initial ever-creative activity of I-feeling (*prathamām pratibhābhidhām*), void of even a trace of the foul stain of limitation. (Singh 2011: 91)

I'd like to make more of this but can't find the words in the dictionary. At what point in the patterns of time and space do we allow ourselves to stop looking?

'I am not yet so lost in lexicography as to forget that *words are the daughters of earth, and that things are the sons of heaven*' (Johnson 2000: 310). These fond feelings are misplaced, they belong to an age of approval, but now we believe in ourselves. I love you equally, which means: I want to love you equally and cross my fingers for the median. 'In the nature of consciousness, the omnifariousness of everything (*sarva sarvāt makatā*) is always present' (Singh 2011: 91). The dictionary becomes an ideal, because where else would 'set', 'bear', 'para-', and '-ness' sleep in the biggest beds. Samuel Johnson writes: 'I have sometimes, though rarely, yielded to the temptation of exhibiting a genealogy of sentiments' and 'nor can it be expected that the stones which form the dome of a temple should be squared and polished like the diamond of a ring' (2000: 320; 324), which is what I have been trying to say all along.



Sanskrit grammarians invented a letter – the long vocalic ‘I’ – to make the alphabetic system symmetrical. I look it up, expecting Monier-Williams to make a cranky comment, something like: ‘Surely, then, no one will maintain that, in these days of every kind of appliance for increased facilities of inter-communication, any language is justified in shutting itself up behind such a complex array of graphic signs, however admirable when once acquired’ (2008: xxviii). Instead, quietly, he defines the letter in the feminine: **ॠ** **ॠ**, the mother of the cow of plenty; mother; divine female; female nature.

She says all the good paths lead to India. He is less enthusiastic, finding me biased.

* * * * *

she is a series of knots and bursts
force the stick between these vowels or this conjunct
read her oblique eyes, her bent arms, the arch of her back
the sliding expression of her unity

fifty skull-beads, wrapped in silver foil
whatever the time of day they catch red light
the garland of letters which holds sides equally
‘Everything is the epitome of all.’

the sentence contains both directions
and answers hiding inside points of entry
drowned, dried, sun-blinded, mistaken
according to yet another measurement she will return

The Imperishable Tower

कमल
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