

NAMES IN SANSKRIT LITERATURE

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In this study, I shall present a few selected names in Sanskrit epics, dramas and other early writings. Most of these names are still used in the modern Indian languages. Many of these names may be interpreted through the myths and symbols attached to them.

It seems that some myths and symbols occur and reoccur, sometimes simultaneously and sometimes consecutively, in many cultures and in many languages and traditions far apart, changing considerably and sometimes beyond recognition, in the process of transmission. Carl Jung suggests that each individual or culture has memories not only of his unique history, but also of man's shared past. Jung writes that there is a collective unconscious which exists, a group psyche, a storehouse of latent emotions shared by human beings and cultures far apart which are transformed into names, myths and symbols. These names have exercised a profound influence on the mental and spiritual development of human beings, whether among the most primitive or the most developed and advanced civilizations in the world. The customs, folk etymologies, and the secret power encoded in them, makes the study of names an exciting adventure.

It was universally believed, since the dawn of civilization that just as there are words of power, there are names of power, each having a mystic property and an inherent virtue. Many considerations determine the choice of names--geographical location, names of seasons, rivers, trees, mountains, professions and traditions. Family names and surnames, particularly in India, are generally determined by the Caste or social group to which one belongs. The most popular Sanskrit names are theophoric in character. It is a belief commonly held, that to pronounce constantly the name of God, is to invoke health, happiness and good fortune in this world and to ensure salvation and spiritual bliss in the next.

Sanskrit belongs to the linguistic family of Aryan languages --Indo-Germanic and Indo-Keltic. Sanskrit is in many ways closer than any other Indo-European language to the parent tongue. The relationship of Latin and Greek to their verb conjugation systems with Sanskrit may be clearly recognized; e.g., the conjugation in Sanskrit of the Verb to be is:

Asmi	I am	Asti	He is	Stha	You are
Asi	Thou art	Smas	We are	Santi	They are

The Sanskrit alphabet is methodical and scientific, and its elements are classified first into vowels and consonants and then classified again within each section according to the manner in which each sound is formed--the position of the tongue and lips in relation to each other and to the teeth, jaws, upper palate, lower palate,

throat and breath. Thus it is completely phonetic; the sounds are guttural, palatal, retroflex, dental and labial.

Speaking of names and mythology in general, myth enriches and makes more flexible any spoken language, because of the many terms that pass into it, through common usage; for example, the words achillean, lunacy, tantalize, hypnotic, floral, have come into parlance from Greek or Roman mythology.

The names selected for consideration from ancient Sanskrit, have not become common nouns or adjectives, but generally appear in hundreds of names in India, given to individuals even today. Their sound or appearance may or may not be the same, but the meanings and implications remain identical. Thus, these names bridge the ancient and modern world. James Joyce bridges the ancient and the modern world in Ulysses, by a continuous parallel of interface between myth and realism, and I would like to benefit by his technique in relation to the Sanskrit names and the myths evoked by them. In Finnegans Wake, the entire tribal cycle of society begins again and is awake - but we shall consider just a few names here. Some names in Greek and Roman mythology make and enrich literature through the ages, e.g., Chaos, Cosmos, Terra, Uranus, Cyclops, Hyperion, Poseidon--they illuminate literature. The Sanskrit names for consideration here, illuminate oriental literature.

VISHNU. Vish means to pervade or penetrate and is a manifestation of solar energy--Vishnu is described as striding through

the seven regions of the universe in three steps and enveloping all things with the dust of his beams. These three steps are explained as denoting the three manifestations of light: fire, lightning and sun. He is called the unconquerable preserver. Vishnu's preserving and restoring power has been manifested to the world in a variety of forms called AVATARS or incarnations, in which a portion of his divine essence was embodied in a human or supernatural form possessed of super human powers. All these AVATARS or incarnations became manifested for correcting some great evil or effecting some great good in the world. These incarnations are ten in number - as fish, as turtle, as a wild boar, as man-lion, as dwarf, as Rama (hero of Ramayana) with a bow, as Rama with axe, as Balram, Krishna's brother; 9th as the Buddha and 10th as Kalkin who will come to destroy the present age of corruption and degeneration. There is a prophecy that he is to come again riding on a white horse, with a drawn sword blazing like a comet--he will save and reward the just and good, and crumble to ashes the rest of the wicked world. Kalkin's prophecy appears similar to that in the Bible--Revelations, Chapter 19. As preserver and restorer, Vishnu is a very popular deity, and the worship paid to him is of a joyous character. He has a thousand names, and many thousands of other names are derived from his names. Repetition of his name is a meritorious act of devotion. Sometimes Vishnu appears in the guise of a turtle acting as a pivot for a

mountain--in order to assist in the churning of the sea of milk.

The gods and demons are alternately hauling on the great snake Vasuki in order to produce the liquid of immortality from the sea of milk. Vishnu is also seen seated on the summit of the mountains assisting the gods.

Vishnu generally sleeps on the cosmic waters, and he becomes an incarnation to assist the needy or oppressed. He assumes the form of a wild boar--dashing across heaven, he dives into the waters and saves the earth from demons and calamities--he protects the earth goddess.

The 7th incarnation is Rama, hero of the long epic, Ramayana, which is like the Odyssey of Homer and the 8th incarnation is Krishna who is mentioned in the longest epic in the world, the Mahabharata, which may be likened to the Iliad. Of the 1000 names of Vishnu, here are a few derived from it: Achyuta, Ananta, Anantasyama, Chatur Bhuj, Damodara, Govinda, Gopala, Hari, Harikesha, Jalasaya, Janadhara, Kesava, Kirtin, Lakshmipati, Madhusudhan, Narayana, Vitambari and Vasudeva.

Referring to Vishnu in the incarnation of a boar--or Varaha--it may be observed that the boar symbol appears in various places in the British Isles, carved upon rock and stones, or as tomb-stones in Scotland--at Argyll Edinburgh and in other areas. It is also found in the churchyard in Cumberland, on several graves. In St.

David's Cathedral, in South Wales, near the Shrine of St. Andrew, there is the carving of a boar, and in many places, the boar is connected with St. Andrew. In the old Cornish language, it is found that the word for boar was Bora - The Severn Boars, Boreham in Sussex where there is a church dedicated to St. Andrew. The Church for St. Ferrers in Devonshire (Ferrers may be a form of the Sanskrit word Varaha, boar) is dedicated to St. Andrew and has boar symbols in it.

SIVA. Almost as popular as the numerous forms of VISHNU was SIVA; his character, however, unlike that of VISHNU, is ambivalent. He is a great ascetic and the patron diety of ascetics generally. On the high slopes of the Himalayas, SIVA the great Yogi sits on a tiger skin deep in meditation, and through his meditation and prayer, the world is maintained. Snakes, of which he is the master, encircle his neck and arms. His body is covered with ashes, a favorite ascetic practice. Beside him is his weapon, the trident. Incidentally, the trident is also Neptune's weapon. As he sits under a tree on Mt. Kailasa in the Milalyayas, he has his foot on a dwarf, who symbolizes human ignorance. SIVA on one occasion reduced the god of love to ashes for daring to inspire him with amorous thoughts while he was engaged in meditation. On another occasion, he changed his beautiful wife Parvati into a fisherwoman for being inattentive to his teaching.

Another aspect of SIVA appears when he lurks in horrible places such as battlefields and crematoria. He wears a garland of skulls and he is surrounded by ghosts, evil spirits and demons. He is death and time, which destroy all things. Shiva divides his personality; he is also lord of the dance (Nataraja). SIVA dances in his abode in the Himalaya mountains in the north or in the south, near the Indian Ocean. He has invented 108 different dances, some of which are recognized and performed on the stage to this day. Some of his dances are calm and gentle, while some are fierce and orgiastic and furious. Of the furious dances, the most famous is the Tandava in which the angry deity, surrounded by drunken attendants, breaks out into a wild rhythm which destroys the world at the end of the cosmic cycle. Siva is associated with another Indian deity named Skanda, a war god--he is also called Mangala in Sanskrit. The earliest inhabitants of Scandinavia seem to have gone from the British Isles and to have retained the symbolic serpent or dragon in their midst. This may be the dragon which the Welsh have today as their national emblem.

While SIVA dances, he holds two cobras above his head. Round his neck, two more snakes are entwined. He also wears a garland of skulls. There are many legends woven round SIVA's dance--symbolizing 5 cosmic functions of Creation: (1) Creation, (2) Conservation, (3) Destruction, (4) Incarnation and (5) Liberation.

The study of names, symbols and myths can be done profitably

by referring to urns, bowls and fonts. Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn" is a case in point, where he gives a poetic interpretation to the figures on an urn. In studying a culture, bowls of a sacred nature in stone or metal play a very important part. In Sanskrit, a bowl or font or urn is called a Kunda.

A great silver bowl of antiq-ity from ancient times--the Gundestrup Bowl, was discovered in Jutland, and is now in the National Museum in Copenhagen. This is embossed with mythological representations. Let us analyze, for a moment, the details of the two plaques on this ancient cauldrom. The deified figure on these plaques is thought to be Cernunnos. It is said that Cernunnos may be Herne the Hunter, with whom he is identified. Both the figures, on close scrutiny, appear to be forms of SIVA, the Hindu deity. The first figure on the Gundestrup Bowl is sitting on the ground in an oriental pose. Within the clenched fist of his right hand is a circular symbol and in the left a serpent, and round the neck is a torc, indicating divinity; the whole countenance shows a peaceful, contemplative and meditative mood. The hair appears to be arranged in coils and mats. On the left of the figure is a boar, and on the right is a stag, both looking affectionately at the figure. In front of the tiger is an unclothed boy, riding bare-backed on the dolphin--he looks like one of the attendants of SIVA. Taking the composition as a whole, it seems to represent SIVA in Keltic form--in the attitude of an ascetic.

The second plaque with its frolicsome animals apparently also represents Cernunnos, in deep meditation, making a Rudra gesture. The oriental character of this representation is emphasized by the 2 conventional animals, elephants, and by the two chakras or discs.

SIVA has 1000 names; he is Rudra, Ugra Deva, Mahadeva, Isana, Shantara, Trilochana, Nila Kanta, Pinaka, Ajagaiva, Shankara, Chandra Shekher, Pasupati and many others. SIVA as Mahakala is the great reaper, who carries the scythe of time and death. Makal is a form of Yama, the god of death. The personal feast of Makal is held in India at the same time that the feast of Michaelmas is held--the feast of St. Michael. Makala or Rudra the storm god form of Siva is always represented with a sacred spring of water at his feet. St. Michael is highly esteemed on the coast of Brittany. An ancient pillar with a mound on top, in Brittany, bearing the name of St. Michael, shows the pre-Christian origin of this Saint. The usual sacred spring of Makal or Rudra is to be found at the foot of this pillar and it is called St. Michael's fountain. On the top of the hill is a chapel which is said to have replaced a shrine originally dedicated to Makal, god of the winds. The women got the chapel to pray for favorable winds when their husbands and sons had gone to sea for fishing. Their annual merrymaking is at Michaelmas and celebrated much like the festival of Makali celebrated in India at the same time.

Makal or Yama takes on a legal aspect--as Yama, Lord of Souls, and functions as Judge of the Dead. The representation of St. Michael

as a judge may be seen in St. Martin's Church in Rinslip in Middlesex, England, where St. Michael is represented on a wall painting, weighing a soul. In Westminster Abbey, on the Shrine of Edward the Confessor, St. Michael is seen weighing a soul.

Apparently the God Yama and Sama (another aspect of Siva) was worshipped in Ireland under the name of Samhain. The feast of Saman (Sanskrit) is still celebrated in Edinburgh at the time of All Hallows (Oct. - Nov.)

Speaking of serpents - Sesha is the king of the serpent race or Nagas who live in the north-east on the foothills of the Himalayas. When the gods churned the sea of milk, they used Sesha as a rope. Sesha's colours are black and yellow. The Goksfad Viking ship at Oslo in Norway is shaped like a serpent - it has a line of round shields on either side of it, 64, in black and yellow. These are said to be the colours of King Arthur and St. Antony. They are also the colours of Shesha. The sister of Sesha the serpent king is Manasa the serpent goddess. She is invoked against the ever present danger from poisonous snakes.

There are many relics of the serpent symbol in Britain. In Wiltshire, there is a ruined shrine in Avebury. It is said to have been one of the largest serpent temples in the world. The large and wonderful grotto in Margate is Serpentine in form and is evidently of great antiquity. In the interior, on what is called the snake

panel, there is a pattern of two serpents--this pattern is also found in an ancient tavern in Sussex.

The Nagas, a powerful and warlike tribe who have lived in the North East foothills of the Himalayas for centuries, have many of the characteristics, physical appearance, ways and customs of the North American Indians; their dances, colours of garments, and crafts are so similar. The Naga people have probably played an important part in anthropological history' they are snake worshippers and worship Sessa. It seems that they are the forerunners of the Soshone or Snake Tribes of North America. These tribes probably inhabited North and South Dakota, Idaho, Ohio, and Wyoming, with the Snake or Lewis River running through their vast territory. The Horned Serpent was the god of the Muskogean Confederacy in America, and of its descendants, it is said, are the Choctans, the Cherokees and the Crees. The Crees had a fire ceremony which they call by the name of Pushtika, a name composed of two Sanskrit syllables. There are many mounds in North America shaped in the form of a serpent--particularly in the state of Ohio. The name of Ohio may have originated from the Sanskrit word Ahi, a snake.

Taking many factors into consideration, it is possible that the Aztecs of Mexico derived their name from ASTIKA of India. There is a statue of Manasa the serpent goddess, holding a child in her lap; the child's name is ASTIKA. The goddess Manasa, referred to earlier, is

flanked with a canopy of seven hoods of cobras. Manasa means wind born; it is also the name of the cactus plant which is useful for curing snake bites. It may be considered a coincidence perhaps, that the coat of arms of Mexico includes an eagle holding a serpent in its mouth, and that there should be a cactus plant on the armour. In the Sanskrit legend, the eagle destroyed the serpent. It is possible that the snake-worshipping Aztecs of Mexico derived their name from the serpent Astika of India.

I shall refer to the names of some women in Sanskrit literature. Whereas the Greek God Zeus had one wife, Vishnu had 3. He found it hard to manage or to be managed by 3 wives. He gave Saraswati to the god Brahma. Saraswati or Minerva is the goddess of knowledge and sits on a peacock. Schools and universities have Saraswati as a symbol--she patronises the arts of music, dance and song; her festival is celebrated at Spring every year. Lakshmi sits on a lotus, wife of Vishnu, she is the epitome of feminine beauty. Lakshmi or Sri or Cree is generally said to have been fully grown like Aphrodite--at the churning of the sea of milk--as one of the 14 precious things yielded by the churning. The goddess of fortune and prosperity, she is worshipped every year at the Dewali festival of lights in October. She holds a lotus in one of her hands. When Vishnu assumes the form of Krishna, she becomes his wife Rukmini. Lakshmi has a hundred or more names, among which are Hira, Indira, Jaladhya, Chanchala, Lola,

Lokamata, and Kamala. It is possible that Lakshmi's name Sri or Kri and the British surname Cree, and the River Cree in Scotland, and the Cree Indians in Canada, have the same source. Ceres the goddess of fortune was once worshipped in Scotland, it is said; the Cree Indians are said to have a mother goddess as well.

Another female name in Sanskrit literature is that of DURGA - the wife of SIVA. She is mentioned under a large variety of names in Sanskrit epics. As Sakti or the female energy of SIVA, she has two characters--one mild, and the other fierce. Her various names refer to her various forms, attributes and actions. In her milder form, she is peaceful and beautiful. She is Uma, light; Gawri, brilliant; Parvati, mountaineer. In her terrible form, she is Durga, the inaccessible; or Chandi the fierce. In this form, she is a beautiful woman, riding on a tiger in menacing attitude; she thus protects the oppressed and fights for the victory of good over evil. Then, she is called Mahakali. She may be Brigit or Bharati or Bride, from which Britannia derived, having a trident in her hands. Durga worship or Puja is performed for the victory of good over evil in India every year to this day.

There are a few other literary names and symbols which recur in Sanskrit and have passed into parlance.

CHAKRA is the wheel Lakshmi holds in her hand. It denotes progress, fortune and prosperity. This ancient 13th century wheel is

from the Sun temple at Konarak on the East coast of India and is the wheel of a giant solar chariot borne on 12 great wheels, each 10 ft. in diameter. It makes us recall that life is lived in an endlessly recurring cycle. The bow of the great Viking ship at Oslo is in the shape of a serpent. A disc has been discovered in it, corresponding to the Indian wheel Chakra; it may be Chakra, the wheel of Lakshmi. There is no doubt of the Aryan influence in the construction of this ship. The circle or wheel is represented in Britain as the wheel of St. Catherine.

In Aryan allegory, and in Sanskrit literature generally, a river or the mouth of a river is represented as Apah and we may compare the English word aperture and the Gaelic prefix abar converted into Aber with the Sanskrit word Apah. The prefix aber is found in many names in the British Isles--for example, Abercombie, Aberdeen, Abercairn, in the neighborhood of the sea coast or an estuary or geographical aperture. Aberlady is surely connected with the divine mother represented by the Keltic deity Themis. Themis impersonating the Cosmic waters, is also the spirit of the River Thames, according to Keltic mythology - from which it obviously received its name. The sacred Tamasa mentioned in the first great Sanskrit epic, the Mahabharata, may have given its name to the River Thames.

The Oxford Dictionary of Place Names refers to the Thames as identical with the Sanskrit Tamasa, which is a tributary of the River Ganges in India.

There are some other Sanskrit names which may be the origin of some names in English, e.g.,

Canada	the name may be the ancient Sanskrit one Kannada -- founder of a school of Indian philosophy -- also the name of a language in India.
Cree Indians	River Cree in Scotland, St. Catharines of Cree in London, Chakra or Cree or Sree -- the name of Lakshmi.
Narada	the name of a waterfall on Mount Takhoma in Washington State -- also called Mount Rainer, the highest peak.
Rama	the name of a tribe in Central America -- the hero of the epic Ramayama, 7th incarnation of Vishnu.
Balder	handsome Swedish god of light and radiance Baldev - brother of Krishna, handsome and brave.
Tara	One of the names of Durga.

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