

Chapter I

Origin of Sanskrit Letters

The Origin of Sanskrit letters

(I) As per Kashmir Shaivism

In Shaiva Sutras, there are three sutras (aphorisms) which deal with this subject -

(1) ज्ञानाधिष्ठानं मातृका (I-4)

It is the (un-understood) Mother (power of sound) inherent in the letters that is the basis of the limited knowledge.

(2) (तस्माद् गुरोः प्रसादात्) -

मातृकाचक्रसंबोधः (II-7)

(From a Guru who is pleased) comes enlightenment regarding the group of letters.

(3) कवर्गादिषु माहेश्वर्याद्याः पशुमातरः (III-19)

Maaheshwari and others, who have their field of operation in Ka (क) and other groups of letters, are the mothers of beasts (beings under limitations).

मातृका (Maatrakaa) is derived from the word मातृ (Maatru) to which a suffix क (ka) is added. This suffix, as per Kashmir Shaivism, conveys the idea that the word to which it is attached is not properly known. Hence मातृका (Maatrakaa) is the mother which is not known.

Maatrukaas are the subtle forms of the gross letters and their essential nature. When they are not properly understood, they impel human beings towards worldly activities. When these Maatrukaas are properly understood, they lead to self-realisation.

Aphorism II-7 has an introduction - "From a Guru who is pleased."
To become enlightened about the मातृका चक्र (group of letters) one should approach a Guru. Then the aphorism says that the Guru will enlighten the student about the letters.

In Kashmir Shaivism, the letters of Sanskrit alphabet are arranged in two ways - (1) according to Maatruka Chakra and (2) according to Maalini. Maatruka is the systematic reading of the letters from a to kṣa. In Maalini, the vowels and consonants are combined as follows -

न, ऋ, ॠ, लृ, ॡ, थ, च, ध, इ, ण

(na, ṛ, ṝ, lṛ, lṝ, th, c, dh, i, ṇ)

उ, ऊ, ब, क, ख, ग, घ, ङ, ई, अ

(u, ū, ba, ka, kha, ga, gha, ṅ, ī, a)

व, भ, य, ड, ढ, ठ, छ, ण, ज, र

(v, bh, y, ḍ, ḍh, ṭh, ch, ṇ, ja, ra)

ट, प, छ, ल, आ, स, अः, ह, ष, अं

(ṭa, pa, ch, l, aa, s, ah, ha, ṣ, am)

क्ष, म, श, अं, त, ए, ऐ, ओ, औ, द, फ

(kṣa, ma, sha, am, ta, e, ai, o, au, da, ph)

The total number of letters is 50 and not 51 as ऌ is not considered as a letter in Matruka-chakra and Maalini systems. According to Kashmir Shaivism, the universe is made up of thirtysix elements (tatwaas) which are represented by fifty letters. The manifestation of the universe begins with the element of Shiva and ends with the element of earth.

Phonematic manifestation

According to Shaiva scriptures, the Supreme or Parama Shiva is अनुत्तर (anuttara) and अकुल (akula), which means the unparalleled state of consciousness which is undifferentiated totality. It consists of the eternal awareness of 'I' or अहं (Aham). This 'I' or अहं (Aham) contains all the 50 letters of Sanskrit alphabet. The first 16 are vowels and next 34 are consonants. These phonemes are not merely inert letters. They are manifesting the various elements (tatwaas) of existence. They are the creative powers of the universe.

Manifestation of letters from अ (a) to ऊ (uu) -

The Supreme -I-consciousness assumes the state of अकुल (Akula), that has for its body the letter अ (a). When the world-manifesting power of अहं (Aham) or I-consciousness expands further, आनंदशक्ति (power of bliss) comes into play which assumes the form of the letter आ (aa).

After the state of bliss (aananda), Supreme-I-consciousness expands into two more levels. The first state is इच्छा (icchaa), the subtle state of will, which produces and is represented by the letter इ (i). The second level, called ईशान (Eeshaana), is the gross state of will, which is represented by ई (Ee).

Now ज्ञानशक्ति (power of knowledge) comes into play. In the subtle state (अक्षुब्ध), it produces the letter उ (u) which is an expression of knowledge (उन्मेष). In the gross state (the state of agitation, क्षुब्ध), the power of knowledge displays deficiency in knowledge (ऊनता). It is represented by the letter ऊ (Uu).

Letters अ (a) to ऊ (Uu) in अनुत्तर (phase 'अ')

All these six letters - अ, आ, इ, ई, उ & ऊ - rest on the indivisible plane of consciousness which is अनुत्तर or अ (a) phase. Hence these six energies represented by these six letters are not separate in nature. Each letter is an epitome for all. Other five are inherent in each.

Since अ (a) is the basis for expansion of all, it pervades all of them. Hence there is no difference in their essential nature.

Manifestation of letter ऋ (ṛ), ॠ (ṝ), ॡ (lṛ) and ॢ (lṝ) - the अमृत (imperishable) letters

Now kriya shakti (क्रियाशक्ति, power of action) comes into play. r (र), the seed letter of 'fire', combines with i (इ) of akṣhubdha state (subtle or unagitated state) of iccha shakti to form ऋ (ṛ). It (r) then combines with ee (ई) of kshubdha state (gross or agitated state) to form ॠ (ṝ). Similarly l (ल), the seed letter of 'earth' combines of i (इ) and ee (ई), mentioned above, to form ॡ (lṛ) and ॢ (lṝ).

These four letters ऋ, ॠ, ॡ, and ॢ are not subject to any change. They do not give rise to any other letters. They rest only in themselves. Hence they are said to be अमृत (imperishable) letters. Since they are incapable of producing any other letter, they are designed as eunuch (षढ) vowels.

Manifestation of letter ए (e), ऐ (ai), ओ (o) and औ (au)

(1) ए (e) - when the letter a (अ) representing अनुत्तर (Anuttara) and aa (आ) representing आनंद (aananda) combine with i (इ) representing इच्छा (icchaa), the letter e (ए) is formed. This letter e (ए) is called त्रिकोण बीजम् (triangular vowel) because all the three shaktis चित् (cit), आनंद (aanand) and इच्छा (icchaa) operate in its formation.

(2) ऐ (ai) - When the letter e (ए) combines with a (अ) or aa (आ), ai (ऐ) is formed. It is called षट्कोण बीज (hexagonal letter).

(3) ओ (o) - When unmesha, the letter u (उ) combine with anuttara, the letter a (अ) or aananda, letter aa (आ), o (ओ) is formed.

(4) औ (au) - औ (au) is formed by the combination of अ (a) or आ (aa) and ओ (o). Since all the three shaktis (शक्ति) unite in this letter, it is called शूलबीज or त्रिशूलबीज (Trishula Bija).

Kryaashakti comes into play from ऋ (r). Hence e (ए) is the fifth stage of kriyashakti, ai (ऐ) is the sixth, o (ओ) is the seventh and au (औ) is the eighth stage of kriyashakti. The vibration of kriyaashakti ends at au (औ).

Manifestation of अं (am) and अः (ah)

Ichhaa and jnana shaktis enter into anuttara. Kryaashakti also has reached its peak at au (औ). Now all the three shaktis abandon their variations and get immersed in the state of non-difference. The knowledge of the undifferentiated universe is indicated by a dot, Bindu or Vindu. Thus the letter am (अं) is formed.

Anuttara or Super-I-consciousness undergoes a change from a (अ) to au (औ). Am (अं) indicates that the anuttara (अ) has not undergone any change. In spite of all objectivity, there is no deviation from its position of changeless subjectivity.

The next stage, indicated by ah (अः), is known as visarga (creation) stage with two perpendicular dots which symbolise the inner and outer manifestation. The upper dot stands for Shiva in whose I-consciousness the entire universe rests. The lower dot stands for shakti through whom the outer universe is manifested.

Manifestation of consonants from क (ka) to म (ma)

The internal perception and external perception begin from anuttara (cit shakti). Shiva has five energies -

- Energy of consciousness, Cit Shakti
- Energy of bliss, Ananda Shakti
- Energy of will, Icchaa Shakti
- Energy of knowledge, Jnaana Shakti
- Energy of action, Kriya Shakti

The five pairs of letters from a (अ) to ऌ (lī), namely (1) a (अ), aa (आ), (2) i (इ), ee (ई) (3) u (उ), Uu (ऊ) (4) ṛ (ऋ), ṝ (ॠ) and (5) ḷ (ऌ), lī (ॡ) form five groups of five consonants with the help of the Shakti's of Shiva.

The following table shows the Shaktis, their corresponding letters and tatwaas (elements)

Sr. No.	Letters & Shakti	Consonant	Tatwaas (elements)
1	a (अ) and aa (आ) Cit and aananda Shaktis	क, ख, ग, घ, ङ, ka, kha, ga, gha, ṇ	earth, water, fire, air, space
2	i (इ) and ee (ई) Iccha Shakti	च, छ, ज, झ, ञ, c, ch, ja, jha, n	sound, taste, form, touch, smell
3.	ṛ (ऋ) and ṝ (ॠ) All the five energies	ट, ठ, ड, ढ, ण, ṭa, ṭha, ḍa, ḍha ṇ	speech, hands, legs, anus, sex-organ
4.	ḷ (ऌ) and lī (ॡ) All the five energies	त, थ, द, ध, न, ta, tha, da, dha, n	ears, eyes, skin, tongue, nose

5.	u (उ) and Uu (ऊ)	प, फ, ब, भ, म,	mind, intellect, ego,
	All the energies	pa, pha, ba, bha,	primal matter,
		ma	individual

Manifestation of semivowels from ya (य) to ha (ह)

(I) Ya, Ra, La and Va

The six elements of Lord Shiva, kalaa (कला, aspect), vidyaa (विद्या, knowledge), raaga (राग, passion), kaala (काल, time), niyati (नियति, restraint, fate) and maayaa (माया, illusion) pertain to the individual soul and not to the elements like earth, water etc. They are inside the thought and perception of the individual being. Hence they are designated as antastha (अन्तस्थ), remaining inside. They are also known as dhaaranaa (धारणा, giving life) as they give life to the individual.

The semivowels ya (य), ra (र), la (ल) and va (व) represent the elements mentioned above. They are also known as (कांचुकि) coverings as these maayic elements cover the consciousness of the knower - the individual soul.

(II) Sha, Ṣ, Sa, Ha

The difference or duality in the universe is a result of the coverings of maayaa. The I-consciousness, when the difference vanishes, brings fourth four letters known as Uushma (ऊष्मा), internal warmth or light.

As per Shaiva scripture, these letter represent the following states -

- Sha - Shudha-vidyaa, (Pure intellect)
- Ṣ - Sadaa-Shiva, perfect letter, Amruta (nectar) Varna (letter)
- Sa - Ishwara, the ruler
- Ha - Shakti, Divine power, praana bija
(seed letter of Shiva's life, Shakti)

Manifestation of Kṣa - Kuta-bija

When the letter ka (क) and sa (स) combine they form the letter kṣa (क्ष). This letter represents every thing from a (अ) to sa (स). The group of five letters of ka (क) are formed from a (अ) which is anuttara. Sa (स) is the essence of visarga. Hence kṣa (क्ष) is known as kutabija (कूटबीज, highest seed letter), representing Cit Shakti. All these five letter, Sha, Ṣ, Sa, Ha and Kṣa, which represent Shuddha Vidyaa (Mahaamaayaa), Sadaa Shiva, Ishwara, Shakti and Cit Shakti, together are known as Brahma-pancaka (ब्रह्मपंचक).

Source material -

1. Shiva Sutras - by Jaidev Singh - Motilal Banarasidas publishers, Delhi, 2003
2. Shiva Sutras - revealed by Swami Laxmanjoo in English, edited by John Huges, 1999 (Address not known)
3. Paraatrishikaa Vivarana - by Abhinava Gupta, English translation by Jaidev Singh, Motilal Banarasidas publishers, Delhi, 2003

The Origin of Sanskrit letters

(II) As per Laxmi Tantra

Laxmi tantra describes the origin of letters in chapter nineteen. It is in the form of a dialogue between Shakra (Indra) and Padmaa (Laxmi). It virtually follows the Maatrakaa chakra system of Kashmir Shaivism. Padmaa says 'The eternal essence of myself as speech is akaara (अकार). When the same (akaara) develops into aanand (आनंद) form, aa (आ), it is regarded as the second sound (vowel).

'The third vowel appears as icchaa i (इ), fourth as eeshaana (ई), fifth as unmesha u (उ), while the sixth is uurjaa (ऊ ऊ).

'The middle four vowels ṛ (ऋ), ṝ (ॠ), ḷ (ऌ), ḹ (ॡ) are modifications of iccha etc. (i.e. i, ī, u, uu).'

'Combination of the first vowel (अ) with icchaa (i), produces ekaara (e, ए). Icchaa (i) with aanand (aa, आ) forms ai (ऐ). First vowel (अ) with unmesha (u, उ) forms okaara (o, ओ). With (urjaa) au (औ) is formed. Thus all these are derived from the first vowel (अ) only.'

'The thirteen vowels aananda (आ) etc. are elaborations of the first sound (vowel a, अ). Their final and most subtle sound, ṁ (अं), then emerges.

'From me (Shakti) emerged the twenty five cosmic principles beginning with Pursha (पुरुष) and ending with earth (पृथ्वी) and their corresponding letters beginning with ka (क) and ending with ma (म).'

'The four sounds (letters) ya (य), ra (र), la (ल) and va (व) are known as dhaaranaa (धारणा) (also known as anthastha, अंतस्थ).'

‘The letters from sha (श) to kṣa (क्ष) (sha, ṣ, sa, ha, kṣa) represent the five fold brahman (namely satya and four vyūhaas [व्यूह] Aniruddha, Pradyumna, Samkarshana and Vaasudeva).’

(Laxmi Tantra, chapter XIX verses 1 to 46)

In chapter XX, an attempt is made to explain these letters which are called Maatrukaas. As per Laxmi tantra, Matrukaa, Little Mother, is a term for the letters or sound units. However, as per Kashmir Shaivism, Maatruckaa is a letter which is not properly understood.

Source material -

1. Laxmi Tantra - Edited by Pundit V. Krishnamacharya, Adyar library and Research centre, Adyar, Madras - 20, 1975.
2. Laxmi Tantra - A pancharatra text - Translation and notes by Sanjukta Gupta, publisher Leiden E. J. Brill, 1972

The Origin of Sanskrit letters

(III) As per Varnodhaara tantra (वर्णोद्धार तंत्र) statements picked up from Shabda Kalpadruma (शब्दकल्पद्रुम)

Devanaagaree - Lipi - moolum (देवनागरी लिपिमूलम्), written by Pt. Ganapati Shastri Hebbar, (Book no. 1) later known as P. P. Shri Krishnaashrama Swami, propounds the Divine origin theory. This book, with translation in Maraathi language, has been edited by Shri S. J. Modak, under the title Bhaaratiya Lipinche Maulika Roopa (Book no. 2).

In the last page of Prastaavana (introduction) to his book, Pt. Ganapati Shastri mentions 'योगपरंपरा', tradition of yoga, to justify his theory that letters were created by the Divine. The six centres (षट्चक्र) in the human body contain the fifty Sanskrit letters from A to Ha. Since these centres are in the human body from the day of creation, the Sanskrit letters found in them, are also present from the beginning of creation.

He propounds the theory of Bindu-sphotana (बिंदुस्फोटन). Bindu (point) denotes Shabala-brahma (शबलब्रह्म). It is known as Samasti Bindu (समष्टिबिंदु). When the desire to create arises, they become Vyasti Bindu (व्यष्टिबिंदु) as in अः. Then the two Bindus, undergo Bindu-sphotana. The line in between indicates अ and ह (a and ha). The process is indicated below.

1	2	3	4
.	.	()	()
	.	()	()
समष्टिबिंदु (शबल ब्रह्म)	व्यष्टिबिंदु	बिंदुस्फोटन	अहकारौ
Samasti-Bindu (Shabala Brahma)	Vyasti-Bindu (Book no. 1, page 1)	Bindu-sphotana	a-ha-letters

The construction of all the letters from a (अ) to ha (ह) is described as per the verses of Varnoddhaara tantra (वर्णोद्धारतन्त्र) as found in Shabdakalpa druma (शब्दकल्पद्रुम). The verses are given below -

वर्णोद्धारतन्त्रवचनानि

(Book no. 2, page 8, 9 and 10)

(अ)

दक्षतः कुण्डली भूत्वा कुञ्चिता वामतो गता । ततोर्ध्वसङ्गता रेखा दक्षोर्ध्वा तासु शङ्कर ॥
विधिर्नारायणश्चैव सन्तिष्ठेत्क्रमतः सदा । अर्धमात्रा शक्तिरूपा ध्यानमस्य प्रचक्षते ॥

(आ)

अकाररूपमासाद्य दक्षक्रोडायता त्वधः । ब्रह्मादयस्तथा शक्तिस्तासु तिष्ठन्ति नित्यशः ॥

(इ)

ऊर्ध्वाधः कुञ्चिता मध्ये रेखा तत्सङ्गता भवेत् । लक्ष्मीर्वाणी तथेन्द्राणी क्रमात्तास्वेव संवसेत् ॥
शीर्षाधः कुञ्चिता रेखा दक्षोर्ध्वा कामरूपिणी ॥ मात्राशक्तिः कोणयुता ध्यानमस्य प्रचक्षते ॥

(ई)

ऊर्ध्वाधः कुञ्चिता मध्ये त्रिकोणाधोगता पुनः । अधोगता कोणशीर्षा कुञ्चिता दक्षतः शुभा ॥
शीर्षादक्षे कोणयुता कुञ्चितोर्ध्वगता पुनः । चन्द्रसूर्याग्निरूपा सा मात्राशक्तिः प्रकीर्तिता ॥

(उ)

ऊर्ध्वाधो मध्यतः कुब्जा रेखा वामगता शुभा । तिष्ठन्ति वायुवह्नीद्राः शक्तिर्मात्रा परा
स्मृता ॥

(ऊ)

तद्रूपाधोगता रेखा कुञ्चिता वामतः शुभा । तिष्ठन्ति तासु रेखासु यमाग्निवरुणः क्रमात् ॥
अधोर्ध्वगामिनी मात्रा लक्ष्मीर्वाणी च सा स्मृता ॥

(ऋ)

तद्रूपाधोगता दक्षा वामतः कुञ्चिता त्वधः ।

(ऋ)

पुनर्दक्षगता रेखा तासु ब्रह्मेशविष्णवः ॥ मात्राशक्तिः परा ज्ञेया ध्यानमस्य प्रवक्ष्यते ॥

(ॠ)

रेखाधः कुण्डली वक्रा दक्षतो वामतो गता । वह्नीशवायवस्तासु नित्यं सन्ति च नित्यशः ॥

(ॡ)

तत्क्रोडतुल्यरूपा च रेखा सा वैष्णवी स्मृता । तत्सु बन्धाः सुरेशानि दुर्गा वाणी सरस्वती ॥

(ए)

कुञ्चिता वामतो रेखा दक्षकोणाऽऽयता त्वधः । पुनर्वामगता सैव तासु वह्नीशवायवः ॥

(ऐ)

एकाररूपमध्ये तु किञ्चिदक्षे तदोर्ध्वतः । चन्द्रेन्द्रभानवस्तासु मात्राशक्तिः क्रमात्स्मृता ॥
त्रिधाशक्तिमयी पूर्वा दुर्गा वाणी सरस्वती ॥

(ओ)

वामतः कुण्डलीभूत्वा दक्षान्मध्ये तु कुञ्चिता । किञ्चिदक्षगता या तु कुञ्चिता वामतस्त्वधः ।
ब्रह्मेशविष्णवस्तासु मात्रा तु ब्रह्मरूपिणी ॥ शक्तिश्च परमा सैव ध्यानमस्य प्रवक्ष्यते ॥

(औ)

ओकारदक्षमध्ये तु गता तूर्ध्वगताऽऽयता । किञ्चित्सा वामतो वक्रा तासु ब्रह्मेशविष्णवः ॥
शक्तिर्मध्यगता रेखा ध्यानमस्य प्रवक्ष्यते ॥

(अं)

अकाररूपशीर्षे तु दक्षिणे बिन्दुरूपिणी । ब्रह्मा विष्णुश्च रुद्रश्च क्रमशस्तासु तिष्ठति ॥ या
तु बिन्दुमयी रेखा सैवाद्या शक्तिरूपिणी ॥

(अः)

अकाररूपदक्षे तु द्विबिन्दुरध ऊर्ध्वतः । ब्रह्मेशविष्णवस्तासु मात्रा शक्तिः समीरिता ॥
बिन्दुद्वयान्विता रेखा सैवाद्या शक्तिरीरिता ॥

(क)

वामरेखा भवेद् ब्रह्मा विष्णुर्दक्षिणरेखिका । अधोरेखा भवेद्बुधो मात्रा साक्षात् सरस्वती ॥
कुण्डली चाङ्कुशाकारा मध्यशून्यं सदाशिवः । कदम्बगोलकाकारं ककारं भावयेत् सुधीः ॥

(ख)

शिवरूपा वामरेखा दक्ष रेखा प्रजापतिः । अधोरेखा विष्णुरूपा साक्षाद् ब्रह्मस्वरूपिणी ॥
वामाद्वामगता रेखा वह्निरूपा च सा स्मृता ॥ मात्रा कुण्डलिनी साक्षात् खकारः पञ्चदैवतः ॥

(ग)

अधःकुञ्चितरेखा या गाणेशी सा प्रकीर्तिता । ततो दक्षगता या तु कमला तत्र संस्थिता ॥
॥ अधोगता ततो या तु तस्यामीशः सदा वसेत् ।

(घ)

सृष्टिरूपा वामरेखा किञ्चिदाकुञ्चिता ततः । कुण्डलीरूपमास्थाय ततोऽधोगत्य दक्षतः ॥ अतः
ऊर्ध्वं गता रेखा शम्भुर्नारायणस्तयोः । ब्रह्मस्वरूपिणी देवी मात्राशक्तिः प्रकीर्तिता ॥

(ङ)

ऊर्ध्वाधः क्रमतो रेखा किञ्चिदाकुञ्चिता ततः । अधोगता कुण्डली तु मात्रा शक्तिस्वरूपिणी ॥
॥ रेखात्रयेषु ब्रह्मेशविष्णवः सन्ति देवताः ॥

(च)

वार्ताकुर्वर्तुलाकार ऊर्ध्वाधः क्रमतो गतः । रेखात्रयेषु चन्द्राग्निसूर्यास्तिष्ठन्ति नित्यशः ।
शक्तिर्मात्रा तु विज्ञेया ध्यानमस्य प्रचक्षते ॥

(छ)

ऊर्ध्वादधोगता रेखा कुञ्चिता कुण्डली ततः । पुनश्चाधोगता तासु सन्ति ब्रह्मेशविष्णवः ॥

(ज)

ऊर्ध्वाधः कुञ्चिता रेखा तासु ब्रह्मेशसंविभुः । वाग्देवी कमला नित्या द्विधा मात्रा प्रकीर्तिता ॥

(झ)

त्रिकोणकुण्डलीरूपा वामदक्षिणयोगतः । क्रमशस्तासु तिष्ठन्ति चन्द्रसूर्याग्नयः प्रिये ॥ तत्र
क्रोडगता मात्रा शक्तिर्ब्रह्मस्वरूपिणी । ऊर्ध्वमात्रा तथेन्द्राणी मध्ये नारायणी स्मृता ॥

(अ)

कुण्डलीरूपमासाद्य दक्षतो वामतस्तया । ऋजुश्चाधोगता मात्रा वामतः कुञ्चिता पुनः ॥
तिष्ठन्ति तासु नित्यासु सूर्येन्द्रवरुणाः सा कुण्डलीद्वयरूपा तु या मात्रा मध्यतः स्थिता ॥
महाशक्तिस्वरूपा सा ध्यानमस्य प्रचक्षते ॥

(ट)

ऊर्ध्वाधः क्रमतो रेखा कुण्डलीरूपतस्त्वधः । तिष्ठन्ति तासु नित्यासु कुबेरयमवायवः ॥ मात्रा
क्रोडगता चोर्ध्वा तत ऊर्ध्वगता तु सा ॥ या नित्या परमा शक्तिश्चतुर्वर्गप्रदायिनी ॥

(ठ)

वार्ताकुवर्तुलाकारो रेखाधिष्ठितदैवतः तिष्ठन्ति क्रमतो नित्यं चन्द्रसूर्याग्नयः प्रिये ॥
मात्राहीनस्तूर्ध्वशिखष्ठकारः परमेश्वरि ॥

(ड)

ऊर्ध्वाधः क्रमतो रेखा मध्ये त्वाकुञ्चिता तथा । लक्ष्मीर्वाणी भवानी च क्रमशस्तत्र संस्थिता
॥ ब्रह्मरूपा तया मात्रा महाशक्तिः प्रकीर्तिता ॥

(ढ)

ऊर्ध्वाधः क्रमतो रेखा वामदक्षिणतो गता । ततः सा कुण्डलीरूपा विष्ण्वीशब्रह्मरूपिणी ॥
महाशक्तिमयी मात्रा ध्यानमस्य प्रचक्षते ॥

(ण)

कुण्डलीत्वगता रेखा मध्यतस्तत ऊर्ध्वतः । वामादधोगता सैव पुनरूर्ध्वं गता प्रिये ॥

(त)

आदौ बिन्दुस्ततो मध्ये कुण्डलीत्ववाप्य सा । दक्षाद्वामगता नित्या ब्रह्मविष्ण्वीशरूपिणी ॥

(थ)

कुञ्चिता कुण्डलो भूत्वा वामाद् दक्षिणस्ततः । वामतः कुञ्चिता भूत्वा दक्षाधो दक्षतो
गता ॥ ऊर्ध्वं ऋज्वायतो रेखा सुरा गङ्गादयः क्रमात् । वाणी भवानी लक्ष्मीश्च ध्यानमस्य
प्रचक्षते ॥

(द)

त्रिशक्तिसहितं देवि त्रिबिन्दुसहितं तथा । आत्मादितत्त्वसंयुक्तं दकारं प्रणमाम्यहम् ॥

(ध)

त्रिकोणरूपरेखायां त्रयो देवा वसन्ति हि । विश्वेश्वरी विश्वमाता वामतः स्कन्धतः स्थिता ॥

(न)

वामतः कुण्डली रेखा ऊर्ध्वाधः क्रमतः स्थिता । चन्द्राग्निसूर्यरूपा सा मात्रा वाणी प्रकीर्तिता ॥

(प)

कुञ्चिता वामरेखायाः कोणादक्षिणतोऽपरा । कुञ्चिता साऽपि विज्ञेया मात्रा वामोद्वता तथा ॥ शम्भुर्ब्रह्मा भगवती क्रमशस्तासु तिष्ठति ॥

(फ)

वक्रा वामगता रेखा ततोऽधःसङ्गता भवेत् । तस्मादूर्ध्वगता भूत्वा दक्षमारभ्य कुण्डली ॥ ब्रह्मा विष्णुश्च रुद्रश्च कुण्डली ब्रह्मरूपिणी । मात्रा वामादक्षिणतः क्रमशः परिकीर्तिता ॥

(ब)

त्रिकोणरूपिणी रेखा विष्ण्वीशब्रह्मरूपिणी । मात्राशक्तिः परा ज्ञेया ध्यानमस्य प्रचक्षते ॥

(भ)

ऊर्ध्वाधः क्रमतो रेखा वामे वक्रा तु कुण्डली । पुनश्चाधोगता सैव अत ऊर्ध्वगता पुनः ॥ ब्रह्मा शंभुश्च विष्णुश्च क्रमशस्तासु तिष्ठति ॥

(भ)

किञ्चिदाकुञ्चिता रेखा वामादक्षिणतो गता । ततो वक्रा वामगता तासु वाण्यादयः क्रमात् ॥ ऋजुमात्रा मध्यगता कोणाद् दक्षगता पुनः महाशक्तिस्वरूपा सा ध्यानमस्य प्रचक्षते ॥

(म)

ऊर्ध्वाधः क्रमतो रेखा चतुष्कोणमयी शुभा । नारायणेशविधयः तासु तिष्ठन्ति नित्यशः । मात्रा कुण्डलिनी ज्ञेया ध्यानमस्य प्रचक्षते ॥

(य)

दक्षतः कुण्डली रेखा वामादक्षगताप्यधः । पुनर्दक्षगता द्वेधा ततोऽधोगत्य चोर्ध्वतः ॥ भवानी शङ्करो वह्निस्तासु तिष्ठन्ति नित्यशः । अर्धमात्रा ब्रह्मरूपा महाशक्तिः प्रकीर्तिता ॥

(र)

ऊर्ध्वाधः क्रमतो रेखा त्रिकोणाधोगता हि सा । विधिरीशः केशवश्च तासु तिष्ठन्ति नित्यशः । ऊर्ध्वस्थिता तु या मात्रा सा शक्तिः परिकीर्तिता । तस्य मध्यगता रेखा वह्नि रूपा हि सा स्मृता । निर्गुणोऽसौ सदा वर्णो न कदाचिद् गुणी भवेत् ॥

(ल) (ळ)

कुण्डलीत्रयसंयुक्ता वामादक्षगता त्वधः । पुनरूर्ध्वगता रेखा तासु नारायणः शिवः । ब्रह्मा शक्तिश्च सन्तिष्ठेत् ध्यानमस्य प्रचक्षते ॥

(व)

कोणत्रयुता रेखा ब्रह्मविष्णुशिवात्मिका । माया शक्तिः परा नित्या ध्यानमस्य प्रचक्षते ॥

(श)

कुञ्चिता वामतो दक्षगता तु गोकृतिस्त्वधः । पुनरूर्ध्वगता तासु वह्निचन्द्रदिवाकराः ॥ मात्रा भवानी विज्ञेया ध्यानमस्य प्रचक्षते ॥

(ष)

चतुष्कोणमयी रेखा वामादक्षिणतः क्रमात् । वह्नीन्द्रविष्णवस्तासु तिष्ठन्ति क्रमतः सदा ॥ ऊर्ध्वमात्रा शक्तिरूपा महालक्ष्मीमसा स्मृता ॥ मात्रा मध्यगता या तु वाग्देवी सा परा स्मृता ॥

(स)

कुञ्चिता वामतो दक्षगता च गोकृतिस्त्वधः । पुनरूर्ध्वगता तासु वह्निचन्द्रदिवाकराः ॥ मात्रा भवानी विज्ञेया ध्यानमस्य प्रचक्षते ।

(ह)

ऊर्ध्वादाकुञ्चिता मध्ये कुण्डलीत्वं गता त्वधः । पुनरूर्ध्व गता सैव तासु ब्रह्मादयः क्रमात् ॥ मात्रा च पार्वती ज्ञेया ध्यानमस्य प्रचक्षते ॥

बिन्दुस्फोटने वर्णोद्धारतन्त्रोक्त रेखा विन्यासे कृते प्राप्तायाः अकारादि-हकारान्त वर्णलिपिमालायाः

अवधिपूर्वकी

∴ ॐ ॐ ॐ ॐ ॐ ॐ ॐ ॐ ॐ
ॐ ॐ ॐ ॐ ॐ ॐ ॐ ॐ ॐ
ॐ ॐ ॐ ॐ ॐ ॐ ॐ ॐ ॐ

ॐ क न ड ड ण ड प ण
 ण ड ड ड ड ड ड ड ड ड ड
 ड ड ड ड ड ड ड ड ड ड
 ड ड ड ड ड ड ड ड ड ड
 ड ड ड ड ड ड ड ड ड ड
 ड ड ड ड ड ड ड ड ड ड
 ड ड ड ड ड ड ड ड ड ड

After Bindu-sphotana, when the lines are drawn as per Varnoddhaara tantra - the letters from a (अ) to ha (ह) are obtained. The above shows the same. (Book no.2, page ३)

The Western Theory

(I) The Origin of Sanskrit letters

In India, the letters of Sanskrit alphabet are looked upon as a gift from the Creator. They are highly respected as they are divinely inspired letters. Oriental systems believe that writing is divine and holy, that it is the speech of the gods, and that the letters possess an inherent power through which human beings can reach the highest mystery.

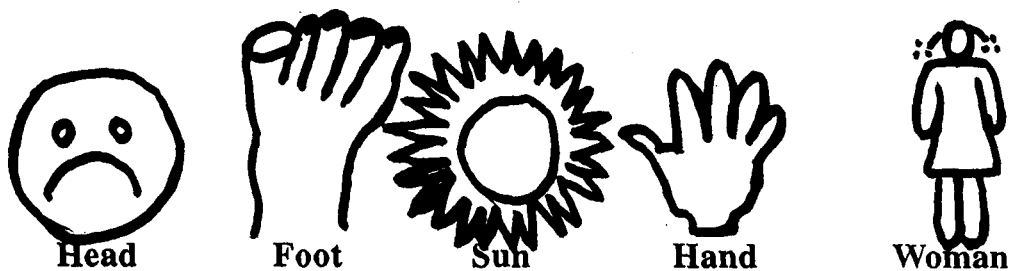
Some questions about this topic can never be solved as the clues are lost in antiquity. Is there only one origin or many? Did writing began in one region and spread to other areas? Is it possible that the writing systems developed independantly? The western scholars maintain that writing first appeared perhaps among Assyrians. They also put forth the theory that Aryans came from Turkestan via Afganistan and settled down in India. However, the Hindus do not accept these views. They also do not accept that the date of Rg. Veda is 1400 to 1000 B.C.

(II) The History of writing

Language existed long before writing. The lower primates used hoots and gestures for communication. The transfer of information, ideas and concepts from one person to another was done through oral communication at a later stage of evolution.

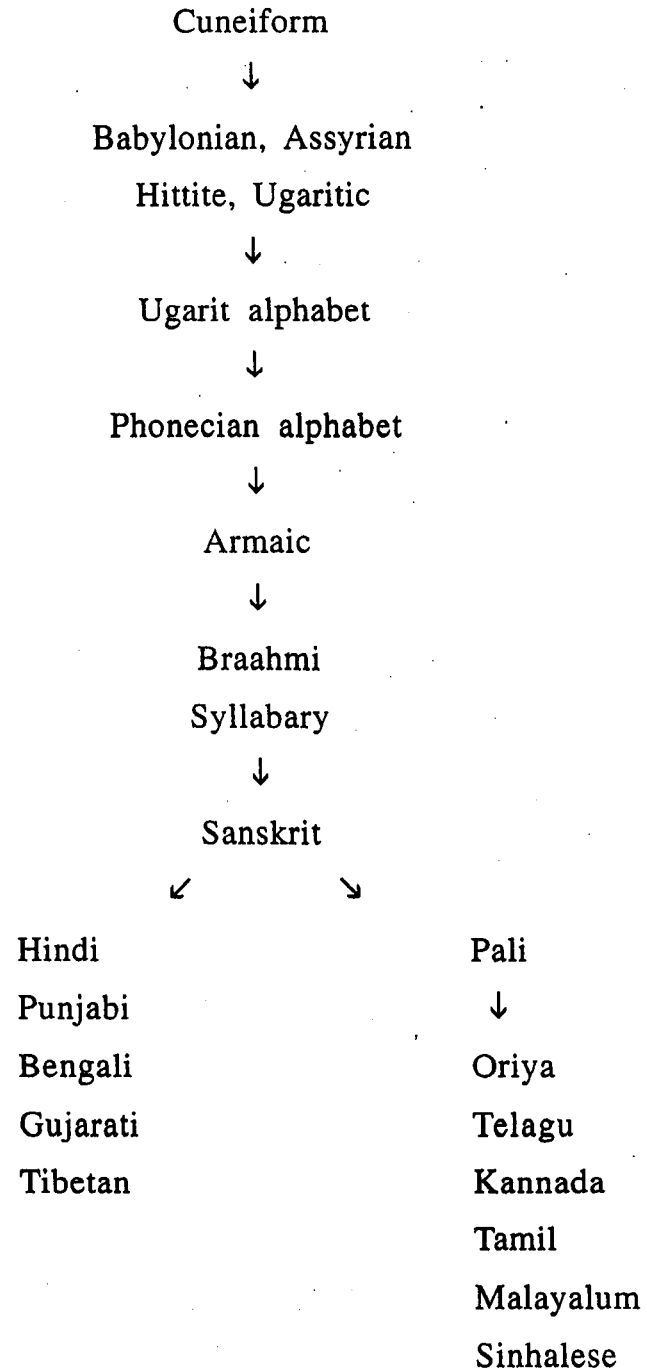
The advent of writing system seems to coincide with the transition of human beings from hunter-gatherer societies to a more permanent agrarian encampments when it became necessary to count one's property or to transfer the property to another individual or society. We see 'counting tokens' about 9000 years BP in the later stone age. Thus the written language is a product of an agrarian society.

Eventually pictures represented an idea or concept and finally represented sounds.



Eventually these pictorial representations, pictographs, became the script known as Cuneiform. Gradually the following alphabets developed.

The evolution of alphabets



Sanskrit : Introduction

Sanskrit is a classical language of India. It is also a ceremonial language of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. Sanskrit is one of the 22 languages of India. It is taught as a second language in schools and households through out India.

Sanskrit is mostly used as a ceremonial language in Hindu rituals. The hymns and mantras are in the Vedic Sanskrit which is one of the earliest attested members of Indo-European language family.

The word Samskritaa, means 'refined, polished, made perfect.' This refined language was used for religious and scientific discourses as contrasted with the languages spoken by the common people. Knowledge of Sanskrit was a symbol of social class and educational achievement. This classical form of Sanskrit evolved out of the earlier 'Vedic' form.

Vedic is the language of the Vedas. Rigveda, the earliest of the Vedas, as per scholars, was composed in the 3rd or 4th millenium BCE. Rigveda mentions Saraswati as the mightiest of all the rivers with its course ranging from the mountains to the sea (R.V.7.95.2). The date of drying up of Saraswati river is currently accepted as 1900 B.C. Hence Vedaas are definitely prior to this date.

It is accepted that Indian scripts such as Devanaagari, Telugu, Tamil, Bengali are less than 2000 years old. Brahmi script, which is at least 2500 years old, is the mother of these scripts. The early writings of Brahmi, discovered in Sri Lanka, have been dated tentatively to about 500 B.C. Mauryan king Ashok's record of 250 B.C. are in Brahmi script. The Indus script, also known as Harappan or Saraswati, used widely during 2600 to 1900 B.C. has been traced back to 3300 B.C. This means that the Indus script is likely to have been used to write Sanskrit and other spoken languages in the 3rd millenium.

Sanskrit, an Indo-European language

Sanskrit is a member of the Indo-European languages to which most of the European languages including English, Latin and Greek belong. All these have evolved from a single language or a group of closely related dialects known as Indo-European. These were spoken in the third millennium BC. The speakers of the original Indo-European language seem to have been tribes living in the area north of the Black sea.

Actually, Sanskrit belongs to the Indo-Iranian branch of Indo-European. The earliest speakers of Indo-Iranian are known as Aryans. These Aryan tribes first migrated into Central Asia. Then they penetrated into Iran and India. Later the Aryans at Iran and India went their own ways. In India, Aryans met a highly civilised society. This civilisation is known as Indus Valley Civilisation known through the excavations at Harappa and Mohenjo Daro. The date of this civilisation is approximately the middle of the third millennium. The speech introduced by Aryans into India developed and diversified into the major modern languages of Northern India like Hindi, Bengali, Punjabi, Gujarati, Marathi and others.

All the Indian scripts are evolved over centuries from a single source which is Brahmi script. It is written from left to right. It was first discovered from the inscriptions of emperor Ashoka, third century BC. Its origin is unknown though many look upon it as an adaptation of semitic alphabet.

Language and script

According to Darwin, the originator of the theory of evolution, language is the best and most important discovery. The earliest human being could convey his feelings, prayers etc., through the language.

Language has given the highest position to the human beings. The Sanskrit word "Bhaasha" (भाषा) seems to have its origin in 'Bhaasa' (भास) which means 'Light', 'Luster', 'Shine' etc. Language was an instrument for the human beings to express their thoughts and emotions. The language was of great help in making man a civilised social being.

The origin of language was accepted to be the Divine, by the Hindu and other spiritual texts. Bhattaakalanka, a Jain poet of the seventeenth century states that all the languages originated from the Divine. In one of the hymns to Shri Vardhamaana Swami, he states -

नमः श्रीवर्धमानाय
विश्वविद्यावभासिनी ।
सर्वभाषामयी भाषा
प्रवृत्ता यन्मुखांबुजात् ॥

Translation I bow down to Shri Vardhamaana, from whose lotus-like mouth emerged speech comprising of all the languages that express the knowledge found in the universe.

However, the theory of Divine origin is not acceptable in the present age.

Lipi (लिपि) Script

Nothing can be definitely said regarding the origin of Lipi script. 'Which is the nation that gave humanity the gift of writing?' - is a question for which there is no definite answer.

It is known that in the early stage of civilisation, man used to draw pictures of animals etc. He tried to express his feelings through the pictures. The pictures can be looked upon as the first stage of script. There is no pronunciation or sound associated with them. A small circle represents

the sun. Such pictures are found in Egypt, Crete etc. The next step is the picture that represents the feelings or emotions. For example, the circle represents the sun, the heat etc. Legs represent the action of walking and running. Finally, the letters or script, representing one sound were developed . Thus the 'Lipi' or letter is a visual representation of a particular sound. Thus, the written letter seems to have developed through pictography and ideography.

Three scripts are found in India - (1) Indus script (2) Braahmi script and (3) Kharosti script. The writings by emperor Ashoka on the stone pillars are in Braaahmi script. Indians are using various scripts derived from Braahmi. But they have forgotten Braahmi script. In the 14th century A.D. Firoz Sha Tughalak, Delhi emperor collected the Hindu and Muslim pundits and asked them to read Ashoka's writings. They could not. The moghal emperor Akbar of 16th century also failed to decipher the Braahmi script.

There are various views about the origin of Braahmi script. (1) It originated outside India and was brought here and developed by Aryans. (2) It is a gift of a semitic tribe. (3) It evolved in India and is a gift of Indians. There is no conclusive evidence in favour of any of these views.

Richard Salomon, University of Washington, in his 'A review article: On the origin of the early Indian scripts' (<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/~ucgadkw/position/salomon.html>) concludes as under -

One final and important problem remains. According to the position espoused in these books - which, given the authority of their authors and the quality of their scholarship, is likely to be hereby established as the currently

prevailing point of view, at least in the west - the heartland of India was preliterate until the 3rd century BC. But can we imagine such a state of affairs, given what we know (admittedly not too much) of the state of society and culture in India, especially in the northeast, before this time? If we can put any trust at all in the traditional lore of the Purāṇās and the testimony of the Pali canon, Magadha was the site of great and prosperous empires, notably that of the Nandas, decades if not centuries before the foundation of the Mauryan dynasty in around 320 BC. Can we believe that these dynasties with their legendary riches, and the remarkable intellectual and cultural life of India in the time of Buddha and Mahavira, existed in a totally illiterate sphere? It is certainly true that intellectual activity in India has always strongly favoured oral over written means of expression, and both von Hinuber and Falk have effectively put to rest the already discredited skepticism about the possibility of oral composition and preservation of the Veda, Panini's grammar, etc. (see e.g. Falk pp. 321--7). But the fact that Panini did not use writing in composing the Astadhyayi does not necessarily mean that he was illiterate (cf. Falk p. 259); it may only mean that writing was not considered an

appropriate vehicle for intellectual endeavors of his kind. Even given the very different cultural role of writing in India as compared to many other ancient civilizations, it is hard to conceive that practical affairs such as the keeping of records and accounts in a fabulously wealthy empire like that of the Nandas could have been kept in order without any form of writing at all, or at least without some alternative system of memory-aids like the Inca *quipu*. Thus one is tempted to think along the lines of William Bright (cited by Falk, p.290) of some type of writing that was "perhaps used for commercial purposes, but not for religious or legal texts."

Admittedly, we have not a shred of concrete evidence for this, and it is perhaps better to stick with what we have and assume that business affairs, like cultural ones, were conducted in pre-Mauryan Magadha simply on the basis of the highly-developed memory skills so well attested on ancient and modern India, perhaps with the assistance of a system of numerical notation such as that hypothesized above. This, it would be hard to deny in light of the evidence that Falk, von Hinuber, et al. have laid out before us, is the most likely scenario on the grounds of the unfortunately meager evidence that is left to

us. Still, we should not fall into the trap of thinking that the last word has been spoken. Admittedly, it hardly seems likely, after all the years of waiting, searching and the dashing of false hopes, that some major archaeological discovery will reveal a whole new picture of the origins of writing in the Indian heartland, or reveal a sustainable (rather than purely hypothetical) connection with the Indus script. Nevertheless, it would be unwise to rule out surprises in the future, and we should leave the door open, as does Falk (p.340), to discoveries that could revive theories of an early development of Brahmi. But we must also agree, if reluctantly, with his final sentence: "Zur Zeit erscheint dieser Fall jedoch kaum zu erwarten" (p.340). ("In this case, it appears that no conclusion can be drawn at this time").

Notes to main article :

Note 1 This is a review article of :

Der Beginn der Schrift und fruhe Schriftlichkeit in Indien. By Oscar von Hinuber. Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur, Abhandlungen der Geistes - und Sozialwissenschaftlichen Klasse, Jahrgang 1989, Nr. 11. Mainz: Akademie Der Wissenschaften Und Der Literatur}/ Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden}, 1990, 75 pp;

and *Schrift im alten Indien : Ein Forschungsbericht mit Anmerkungen*. By Harry Falk. Script Orientalia 56. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1933, 355 pp. DM 136.

Note 2 See note 1.

Note 3 *Annuaire du Collège de France 1988-1989. Résumé des Cours et Travaux*, pp. 507-514.

Note 4 *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens*, 36 (Supplementband) (1993); pp. 239-49.

Note 5 *Sitzungsberichte der kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Wien, Philologisch-historische Classe* 132, no. 5, 1895. 2nd revised ed. Strassburg: Karl J. Trübner, 1898. Reprint ed.: The Chowkhamba Sanskrit Studies, Vol. 33; Varanasi: The Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1963.

Note 6 *The Alphabet. A Key to the History of Mankind* (2nd ed.; New York: Philosophical Library, 1953), p. 336

Note 7 *Die Schrift in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart* (Glückstadt and Hamburg: J. J. Augustin, 1935)

Note 8 Here (n.24) cites Fussman, "Les premiers systèmes ...," p. 513. His subsequent to the theory of the invention of $\text{Br} \setminus = \{a\} \text{hm} \setminus = \{i\}$ under A'soka is made without reference to the works of von Hinüber and

Falk, which were evidently not yet in print when Norman wrote his article, though he was probably aware of their ideas on the subject.

Note 9 In *The Origin of Brahmi script*, ed. S.P. Gupta and K. S. Ramachandran, (History and Historians of India Series, vol.2; Delhi: D.K. Publications), pp.1-52. (Reviewed in *JAOS* 102 (1982), pp. 553-5).

Note 10 Fussman's ideas on these subjects will presumably be developed a greater length in his article on "Ecritures indiennes," in D. Arnaud's *Histoire de l'écriture*, cited in Falk's bibliography (p.31) as "im Druck" and still not available at the time of writing.

Note 11 The model for the structure of the book is, as the author notes (p.11), George Cardona's *Panini, a Survey of Research* (The Hague: Mouton and Co., 1976).

Note 12 The composite theory of the development, or invention, of Brahmi is not, as Falk notes (p. 338), entirely unprecedented. The French Semiticist J. Halevy in particular tried to establish a composite derivation from Aramaic, Greek and Kharosthi. Falk feels it was largely he published in French that Halevy's contributions have not received the credit they deserved (p.127); but it seems to me that it was the serious flaws in argumentation, reflecting profound mis-

understandings of the Indian cultural background, as well as his intemperate tone of argumentation (cf.p.132), rather than the language of his publications, that cost Halevy much of his credibility.

Note 13 In "Ueber den semitischen ursprung des indischen Alphabets, "ZDMG 10 (1856), pp.389-406.

Note 14 It is not exactly correct, as Falk states, that in my review in *JAOS* 102 (1982), p. 554 I opposed Goyal's position on the origin of Brahmi in A'soka's time ("Gegen ihn stellten sich z.B. R. Salomon" (p. 150). What I actually said was "the invention theory proposed by Goyal ... is not without its merits, especially in that it holds to the evidence (or rather, lack of evidence) as we have it ... But it falls far short of full cogency for lack of both corroborative evidence and historical parallels." In any case, this lack of corroboration and parallel has, to an large extent, been filled in by Falk.

Note 15 Similar arguments are also presented in K.R. Norman's review of von Hinuber's *Der Beginn der Schrift ...* in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* ser.3, vol.3 (1993), pp.277-281 (esp.p.279).

In conclusion, it can only be said that there is no conclusive evidence for the theory of the Divine Origin of the letters or for the modern theory.

The mystics, well versed in Kundalini Yoga, claim that the Sanskrit letters are found in the seven centres, the centres of consciousness, in the human body. That, they say, is the evidence for the Divine origin of the letters. All we can do at present is to wait for any new evidence to emerge before we can decide one way or the other.

* * *

Letters and their names

The following works give different names of the deities associated with various letters -

1. Shri Tantraabhidhaanum
2. Mantraabhidhaanum
3. Maatrukaa Nighantu
4. Laksmi Tantra
5. Worship ritual of Vaishnavas

Quite a few names are given against each letter in the first four works. In the nyaasa (न्यास) ritual (placement of various letters in different parts of the body) of the Vaishnavas, only one name of a deity is assigned to each letter. The same is reproduced here.

Sr.No	Letter	Name of the deity	Meaning
1.	अ (A)	Aja	Unborn
2.	आ (Aa)	Ananda	Bliss
3.	इ (i)	Indra	Wealthy
4.	ई (ee)	Isha	Controller
5.	उ (u)	Ugra	Fierce
6.	ऊ (Uu)	Urja	Extremely powerful
7.	ऋ (r)	Rutumbhara	Sustainer
8.	ॠ (ṛ)	Ruugha	Destroyer of evil forces
9.	ऌ (lr)	Lrusha	Blesses good forces
10.	ॡ (lṛ)	Lruusha	Destroyer of demons
11.	ए (E)	Ekaatma	Main Deity
12.	ऐ (ai)	Aira	Grants Happiness

Sr.No	Letter	Name of the deity	Meaning
13.	ओ (o)	Ojobhrat	Extremely powerful
14.	औ (au)	Aurasa	Father of Lord Brahmaa
15.	अं (am)	Anta	End of all
16.	अः (aha)	Ardha-garbha	Holds the universe in himself
17.	क (ka)	Kapila	Blissful
18.	ख (kha)	Khapati	Lord of sky
19.	ग (ga)	Garudaasana	Rides on Garuda
20.	घ (gha)	Gharma	Destroyer of enemies
21.	ङ (na)	nasaara	Present in matter
22.	च (c)	Caarvanga	Handsome
23.	छ (ch)	Chaandogamya	Can be known through Vedaas
24.	ज (ja)	Janaardana	Unborn
25.	झ (jha)	Jhatitaari	Defeats the enemies
26.	ञ (ṇ)	Name	Grants liberation
27.	ट (ṭa)	Tankee	holds a chisel
28.	ठ (ṭha)	Thalaka	grants bliss
29.	ड (ḍa)	Daraka	gives light
30.	ढ (ḍha)	Dharee	grants liberation
31.	ण (ṇ)	Naatma	Blissful
32.	त (ta)	Taara	Ferries across
33.	थ (tha)	Thata	Lifts mount Govardhana
34.	द (da)	Dandee	holds a stick
35.	ध (dha)	Dhanvee	holds a bow
36.	न (na)	Namya	respected by all
37.	प (pa)	Para	Highest of all
38.	फ (pha)	Phalee	grants fruits

Sr.No	Letter	Name of the deity	Meaning
39.	ब (ba)	Balee	All-powerful
40.	भ (bha)	Bhaga	All-knowing
41.	म (ma)	Mana	Wisdom
42.	य (ya)	Yajna	Respected by all
43.	र (ra)	Raama	Grants bliss to devotees
44.	ल (la)	Laxmipati	Lord of Laxmi
45.	व (va)	Vara	Supreme
46.	श (ś)	Shaanta Samvit	Blissful
47.	ष (ṣ)	Shanmukha	Of six faces
48.	स (sa)	Saaraatmaa	Divine
49.	ह (ha)	Hamsa	Swan
50.	ळ (Ḍa)	Lalanka	Grants happiness
51.	क्ष (kś)	Laxminarasimha	Man-lion, Lord of Laxmi

* * *