

Kshetra Naamaavali

Tracing Sanskrit Names of Countries using Etymology

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ABSTRACT

Etymology, as the flagship study of linguistics, relates phonetic aspects of words in different languages through the connected meanings. The present paper provides a listing of names of countries and continents (modern and ancient included) and through the etymologies in the source languages, reconstructs the Sanskrit names for such countries. The ability to reconstruct Sanskrit etymologies of country names with etymological roots in a diverse collection of languages with reasonable phonetic closeness suggests a common link between diverse language families of the world, and forms the highlight of the present paper.

KEYWORDS:

Sanskrit names, Etymological Studies, Country Names.

MOTIVATION

Among the various disciplines of linguistic research, etymological studies emerge as the icing on the cake [Sweetser 1991]. This is partially due to the fact that etymology based studies, despite their vulnerability to error and controversy, have influenced our perception of history on an interdisciplinary scale – spanning archaeology, anthropology, linguistics and acoustics, to name a few [Sweetser 1991].

Most commonly used as a tool to connect the dots between various languages of a single language family, etymological connections between such languages, coupled with their dating, enable us to build a language family tree [Matthews 2007]. However, over the last few years, the unification of languages into families has taken on a whole new level – from language families to macrofamilies, examples of which include Austric, Nostratic and Eurasiatic [Campbell and Lyle 2004].

On a related note, the attempt to solve some of the linguistic ‘mysteries’ such as the decipherment of the Indus Script in the Indian subcontinent has propelled etymological research in a new direction; specifically, the connection between ancient Indian languages such as old versions of Sanskrit and Tamil and various other languages around the world, old and new, such as Japanese, Elamite, Chukchi, Australian Aboriginal Languages and Semitic Languages have been explored and published [McAlphin 1975, Toth 2007, Victor 2007, Ohnu 1984, Butcher 2006].

Apart from the etymological research mentioned above, another interesting development in the field of Indian language research has Sanskrit as the highlight. While studies conducted by the NASA portray the 'perfection' of the Sanskrit Grammar [Briggs and Ricks 1985], studies and experiments conducted by Travis et al. prove that listening to the mere sounds of Sanskrit has a similar effect on physiological conditions such as heart beat rate, skin conductance and EEG to that of transcendental meditation [Travis et al 2001].

DIRECTION

Taking cue from the results mentioned above, the present paper is a result of a small exercise trying to answer the following question – "If Sanskrit had Etymological Connections to the major world languages, with an attempt to preserve the etymological connections, how would the names of countries sound in Sanskrit and how close would the name be to its modern name?". To answer this, various country names, modern and some ancient are taken and their etymologies are investigated. From the meanings of etymologies obtained, equivalent Sanskrit words are constructed.

At this juncture, a few points are noteworthy:

1. In cases where there are competing etymologies for a country's name, any one of the contenders is arbitrarily chosen to 'reconstruct' the Sanskrit name.
2. The Sanskrit names reconstructed are clearly not the only ones possible. In other words, different approaches to selecting the Sanskrit words would lead to different names. The criterion for choosing any Sanskrit word for reconstruction is merely qualitative closeness to the present name of the country.
3. It can be seen that the source etymologies for the countries of the world arise from a wide variety of languages including indigenous ones such as Taino, Ngola and Tswana, along with widely spoken international languages such as Spanish, Greek and Arabic. Thus a mapping of the country names to Sanskrit versions would clearly imply a universal connection between all languages of the world.

LISTING

Based on the Motivation and Direction elaborated above, this section gives a listing of various country names, modern and ancient, their source etymologies and languages with the meanings, and Sanskrit reconstructions of the same.

Modern name	Source words	Source language	Meaning	Sanskrit 'name'
Afghanistan	Afgan/stan	Pashtun/persian	Horse raising place	<i>Ashvakaayana</i>
Africa	Afar	Phoenician	Dusty	<i>Paraaga</i>
Albania	Alba	Latin	White	<i>Amala</i>
Algeria	Ziri	Berber	Moonlight	<i>Shashih</i>
Andorra	Ad-darra	Arabic	Forest	<i>Aranya</i>
Angola	Ngola	Mbundu	Protector/king	<i>Go-paala</i>
Antarctica	Anti arktikos	Greek	Anti/bear	<i>A riksha</i>

Aotearoa	Aotearoa	Maori	White cloud land	<i>Shvetaadri</i>
Aram	Arame	Ugaritic	Highlands	<i>Udaaram</i>
Armenia	Armnaia	Urartic	Assemble/create	<i>Grahya</i>
Asia	Asu	Semitic	Rising/light	<i>Aindra</i>
Australia	Australis	Latin	Southern	<i>Anuttara</i>
Austria	Oster riche	High german	Eastern march	<i>Aindra raajya</i>
Azerbaijan	Adharbayagan	Persian	Fire-protected	<i>Aashara paalaka</i>
Bahamas	Baja mar	Spanish	Shallow sea	<i>Gaadha samudra</i>
Bahrain	Bah-rayn	Arabic	Two seas	<i>Bhaaru</i>
Bangladesh	Bangla desha	Bengali	Bengal country	<i>Vanga desha</i>
Barbados	As barbadas	Portuguese	White figs	<i>Shveta radana</i>
Barbuda	Barbadas	Portuguese	Bearded ones	<i>Smashruna</i>
Belarus	Bel - rus	Belarusian/slavic	White/rowers	<i>Amala aritu</i>
Belgium	Belg	Celtic	To swell	<i>Proccha</i>
Belize	Beliz	Mayan	Muddy water	<i>Prankin jalam</i>
Benin	Ile ibinu	Yoruba	Vexation	<i>Bhooopa</i>
Bhutan	Bod	Tibetan	Tibet	<i>Bhauta</i>
Bolivia	Bolu ibar	Basque	Windmill valley	<i>Khalla vapra</i>
Bosnia	P. Indo european	Bos/bogh	Running water	<i>Aapaga</i>
Botswana	Tshwana	Tswana	Alike/group	<i>Gava</i>
Brazil	Ibirapitanga	Tupi	Red wood	<i>Brusee</i>
Britain	Prydain	Welsh	Painted ones	<i>Chitrita</i>
Brunei	Varunai	Sanskrit	Seafarers	<i>Varunai</i>
Bulgaria	Bulgha	Turkic	To mix/stir	<i>Mishraka</i>
Burkina faso	Burkina/faso	More/dioula	Honest/fatherland	<i>Bhadra pitrbhoo</i>
Burma	Brahma	Sanskrit	Brahma	<i>Brahma</i>
Burundi	Rundi	Rundi	Related group	<i>Runa</i>
Caledonia	Caled	Welsh	Hard	<i>Kathina</i>
Cambodia	Kamboja	Sanskrit	Unshaken	<i>Kamboja</i>
Cambria	Kom-brogos	Brythonic	Compatriot	<i>Sammodaka</i>
Cameroon	Rio de camaroos	Portuguese	Shrimp river	<i>Ganaalin</i>
Canada	Kanada	Iroquoian	Village	<i>Karvata</i>
Cape verde	Cabo verde	Portuguese	Green cape	<i>Tata harita</i>
Chad	Tsade	Kanuri	Lake	<i>Tataaka</i>
Chile	Chiri	Quechua	Cold	<i>Shishira</i>
China	Cheena	Sanskrit	Cheena	<i>Cheena</i>
Comoros	Al qamar	Arabic	Moon	<i>Amati</i>
Congo	Nkongo	Bakongo	Hunters	<i>Khattika</i>
Costa rica	Costa rica	Spanish	Rich coast	<i>Kaksha raivata</i>
Cote d'ivoire	Cote d'ivoire	French	Ivory coast	<i>Kaksha rajata</i>
Croatia	Harahuvati	Persian	Saraswati	<i>Saraswati</i>
Cuba	Cubao	Taino	Abundant fertile	<i>Bahusu</i>
Cundinamarca	Cundinamarca	Quechua	Condor's nest	<i>Garuda jalaka</i>
Cuzcatlan	Kozkatl	Nahuatl	Diamond jewels	<i>Kulisha kshetra</i>
Czech	Ceta	Bohemian	Military unit	<i>Sainika</i>
Denmark	Dhen - mereg	P. Indo european	Boundary forest	<i>Nata maarga</i>

Deutsch	Tewteh	P. Indo european	People	<i>Purusha</i>
Dominica	Dominicus	Latin	Lord	<i>Devakah</i>
Ecuador	Ecuador	Spanish	Equator	<i>Ekadoorah</i>
Egypt	Hwt ka pth	Egyptian	Opener	<i>Sphuta</i>
Emirate	Amir	Arabic	Commander	<i>Amara</i>
England	Angh	P. Indo european	Tight	<i>Amha</i>
Eritrea	Erythra	Greek	Red	<i>Rakta</i>
Estonia	Austam	Proto germanic	Eastern	<i>Aindra</i>
Ethiopia	Aithiopa	Greek	Burnt	<i>Sthithi</i>
Europe	Eurys ops	Greek	Wide faced	<i>Vistruta pratika</i>
Fiji	Fisi	Tongan	Look out	<i>Uddrishti</i>
Finland	Finne	Germanic	Wanderers	<i>Utana</i>
France	Frankon	Germanic	Spear, free	<i>Praheleya</i>
Gabon	Qaba	Arabic	Cloak	<i>Khadva</i>
Gambia	Kaabu	Mandinkan	Black river	<i>Kala nadi</i>
Gaul	Gallia	Latin	Strong	<i>Bala</i>
Georgia	Warucan	Persian	Wolf land	<i>Vrikaana</i>
Germany	Gairm	Celtic	Neighbour	<i>Anti gruha</i>
Ghana	Ghana	Mande	Warrior king	<i>Senagana</i>
Greece	Grauj	Greek	Grow old	<i>Jraya</i>
Grenada	Gharnatah	Arabic	Jewish suburb	<i>Ghara naata</i>
Guatemala	Cuauhtemallan	Nahuatl	Many trees	<i>Ketumala</i>
Guinea	Ghinawen	Berber	Black	<i>Nirdagdha</i>
Guyana	Guyana	Guyanans	Land of many water	<i>Goyaanam</i>
Haiti	Haiti	Arawak	Mountainous land	<i>Aharya sthithi</i>
Hayastan	Hayastan	Armenian	Haya land	<i>Haya</i>
Hellas	Selloi	Greek	Sacrificers	<i>Hotri</i>
Helvetia	Elv il	Welsh	Many profit	<i>Bahula vithi</i>
Herzegovina	Herzog-ovina	German-croatian	Duke land	<i>Raja bhumi</i>
Honduras	Honduras	Spanish	Depths	<i>Bahu doora</i>
Hungary	On-gur	Turkish	Ten arrows	<i>Dasha karnin</i>
Iceland	Island	Old Norse	Land of ice	<i>Sheena nilaya</i>
India	Hindu	Persian	Indus river	<i>Sindhu</i>
Indonesia	Indonesia	Greek	Indian islands	<i>Sindhu dveepa</i>
Iran	Aryan	P. Indo european	Noble, free	<i>Arya</i>
Iraq	Ur	Ugaritic	City	<i>Pura</i>
Ireland	Aryan	P. Indo european	Noble, free	<i>Arya</i>
Israel	Isra'el	Hebrew	Struggled with god	<i>Sangharsha</i>
Italy	Wet	P. Indo european	Year	<i>Varsha</i>
Jamaica	Xaymaca	Arawak	Wood and water	<i>Kaashta paana</i>
Japan	Ri ben	Shanghainese	Sun origin	<i>Surya bhumi</i>
Jordan	Yrd	Canaanite	Descend	<i>Avatarna</i>
Kazakhstan	Qazak	Kazakh	Nomad/free	<i>Kauta</i>
Kenya	Kere nyaga	Kikuyu	Black mountain	<i>Karka naaga</i>
Korea	Go guru	Goguryeo	Lofty walled city	<i>Thuna vilagna</i>
Kosovo	Kos ovo	Serbian	Blackbird field	<i>Kaka vapatra</i>

Kuwait	Kout	Arabic	Fortress	<i>Kota</i>
Kyrgyzstan	Kyrk iz	East turkic	Forty tribes	<i>Chatvarimshat</i>
Laos	Lava	Sanskrit	Lava	<i>Lava</i>
Latvia	Let gale	Baltic	Water land	<i>Jala sthala</i>
Lebanon	Lbn	Semitic	White	<i>Amala</i>
Lesotho	Motho	Sesotho	Human being	<i>Jantu</i>
Liberia	Liber	Latin	Free	<i>Lokya</i>
Liechtenstein	Liechtenstein	German	Light stone	<i>Laghu shila</i>
Lithuania	Liyati	Slavic	Pour	<i>Liyanati</i>
Luxembourg	Lucilem borg	Celtic/germanic	Small castle	<i>Laghu shila</i>
Macedonia	Makednos	Greek	High ones	<i>Maha tattva</i>
Madagascar	Maqad i shah	Persian	Seat of the shah	<i>Peetika sreshta</i>
Malawi	Malawi	Chichewa	Flaming water	<i>Jala dee</i>
Malaysia	Malai naadu	Tamil	Hilly land	<i>Shaila pura</i>
Maldives	Maala dweepa	Sanskrit	Chain of islands	<i>Maala deeva</i>
Mali	Mali	Malinke	Hippopotamus	<i>Kariyaada</i>
Malta	Melita	Greek	Honey	<i>Madaa</i>
Mauritania	Mauri	Berber	Moor tribe	<i>Maruta</i>
Mexico	Metztli xictli	Nahuatl	Moon navel	<i>Mati siraamula</i>
Moldova	Mulda	Gothic	Dust, mud	<i>Palitha</i>
Monaco	Monoikos	Greek	Single dwelling	<i>Bhala eka</i>
Mongolia	Mongkhetengrigal	Mongolian	Eternal sky fire	<i>Maha akasha dipa</i>
Montenegro	Monte negro	Italian	Black mountain	<i>Parvatha neela</i>
Morocco	Mur akush	Berber	Land of god	<i>Maruta akasha</i>
Namibia	Namib	Nama	Nothing area	<i>Na kimapi</i>
Nauru	Anaoero	Nauru	Beach	<i>Tata</i>
Nepal	Nipalaya	Sanskrit	Foothill abode	<i>Nipaalaya</i>
Netherlands	Neder land	Dutch/english	Lower lands	<i>Neecha sthala</i>
Nevis	Nieves	Spanish	Snow	<i>Neehara</i>
Niger	Nigre	Latin	Black	<i>Neela</i>
Norway	Nordr vegr	Norse	Northern way	<i>Uttara veethi</i>
Oman	Amoun	Arabic	Settled	<i>Nirmaya</i>
Pakistan	Pakistan	Urdu/persian	Land of the pure	<i>Pavitra sthala</i>
Palau	Aidebelau	Palauan	Indirect replies	<i>Pratijalpa</i>
Panama	Panama	Cueva	Abundance of fish	<i>Bahu matsya</i>
Papua	Papuah	Malay	Frizzy hair	<i>Paritapa</i>
Paraguay	Para gua i	Guarani	River from water	<i>Parvatataja aapa</i>
Persia	Persi	Persian	City	<i>Pura</i>
Peru	Biru	Peruvan	River	<i>Prerthwari</i>
Pindorama	Pindorama	Guarani	Palm tree land	<i>Patrim ajira</i>
Poland	Pole	Polish	Open field	<i>Vapatra</i>
Portugal	Portus galle	Portuguese	City of gaul	<i>Pattana bala</i>
Quebec	Kebec	Algonquian	Narrow river	<i>Suchimukha</i>
Russia	Rods	Norse	Rower	<i>Aritu</i>
Rwanda	Kwanda	Kinyarwanda	Expand	<i>Prakeerna</i>
Sahrawi	As sahra	Arabic	Desert	<i>Jhasha</i>

Sakartvelo	Karta	Mingrelian	Cattle pen	<i>Govraja</i>
Salvador	Salvador	Spanish	Saviour	<i>Avaspartru</i>
Samoa	Sa moa	Samoan	Sacred centre	<i>Su madhya</i>
Saudi arabia	Sa'ud ar rabi	Semitic	Arabic centre	<i>Sthithi arvan</i>
Shqipëri	Shqip	Albanian	Understanding	<i>Sakhya</i>
Siam	Shyama	Sanskrit	Dark	<i>Shyamala</i>
Sierra leone	Serra leoa	Portuguese	Lion mountains	<i>Shaila vaala</i>
Singapore	Simhapura	Sanskrit	Lion city	<i>Simhapura</i>
Slovakia	Slav	Slavic	Word	<i>Shabda</i>
Slovenia	Slav enia	Slavic	Word/land	<i>Shabda ayana</i>
Somalia	Sac maal	Somalian	Cattle herders	<i>Rumali</i>
Soviet	Soviet	Russian	Council	<i>Sabha</i>
Spain	I sepanim	Punic	Rabbits	<i>Shasha</i>
Sri lanka	Sri lanka	Sanskrit	Lanka land	<i>Sri lanka</i>
Sudan	As sudan	Arabic	Black land	<i>Kshamavat</i>
Suomi	Zeme	Baltic	Land	<i>Medina</i>
Swaziland	Swazi	Seswati	Pure/white	<i>Shveta sthala</i>
Sweden	Suos	P. Indo european	Our own	<i>Svajana</i>
Switzerland	Suittes	Alemannic	Bright	<i>Jvajvaluh</i>
Syria	Syria	Greek	Assyria	<i>Sura</i>
Taiwan	Tai wan	Chinese	Terraced bay	<i>Vailana</i>
Tajikistan	Tag dzig	Tibetan	Tiger land	<i>Vyaaghra sthala</i>
Tanganyika	Tou tanganyika	Swahili	To join	<i>Ayojanam</i>
Thailand	Tai	Tai	People	<i>Athithi</i>
Timor	Timur	Malay	Eastern	<i>Taamra</i>
Tobago	Tobago	Spanish	Tobacco	<i>Sarika</i>
Togo	To go	Ewe	Water shore	<i>Tataaka</i>
Tonga	Tonga	Samoan	Southern	<i>Dakshina</i>
Trinidad	Trinidad	Spanish	Holy trinity	<i>Trinaatha</i>
Tunisia	Ens	Berber	To lie down/rest	<i>Anushethe</i>
Turkey	Turk	Turkish	Created	<i>Sarga</i>
Turkmenistan	Turk men	Turkish	Pure turk	<i>Sargamahaa</i>
Tuvalu	Tuvalu	Tuvaluan	Eight islands	<i>Ashta dveepa</i>
Uganda	Baganda	Buganda	Bundle people	<i>Baandhava</i>
Ukraine	Krajna	Slavic	Land, country	<i>Kshetra</i>
Uruguay	Urugua i	Guarani	Shellfish water	<i>Kumi jalaja</i>
Uzbekistan	Uz bek	Turkish/sogdian	Self master	<i>Sva pati</i>
Vanuatu	Vanuatu	Vanuatuan	Our land	<i>Sva nilaya</i>
Vatican	Vaticinari	Latin	Prophezize	<i>Saakuute</i>
Venezuela	Venezia	Latin	Little venice	<i>Laghushete</i>
Vietnam	Viet nam	Vietnamese	Pacified south	<i>Kshuri yaamyaa</i>
Wadadli	Walladi	Mulatto	Our own	<i>Svah</i>
Wai'tu kubu'i	Wai'tu kubu'i	Carib	Tall body	<i>Unnata rogabhoo</i>
Wales	Welisc	Old english	Foreigner	<i>Nirdeshya</i>
Wallachia	Walh	Gothic	Celts	<i>Videshya</i>
Yemen	Yumn	Semitic	Happiness	<i>Samyamcha</i>

Yugoslavia	Jugo slavija	Slavic	Southern slav	<i>Yaamyā shabda</i>
Zaire	Nzere	Kongo	River	<i>Nadee</i>
Zambia	Zambia	Latin	Zambezi land	<i>Swami</i>
Zanzibar	Zangi bar	Persian	Black coast	<i>Shyaamapura</i>
Zimbabwe	Dzimbaze mabwe	Shona	House of stones	<i>Sthali paashya</i>

CONCLUSION

The listing given above attempted a reconstruction of the names of various countries in Sanskrit, tracing an etymological connection in the process. At this point, it is re-emphasized that the reconstructed etymologies are just one out of many alternatives possible, and that, in cases of competing etymologies, one of them are arbitrarily chosen. Nevertheless, the listing and the study behind the reconstructions does yield some valuable take-home points:

1. The listing includes modern names of countries and continents, as well as some of the older names for some countries.
2. The source languages for the etymologies cover a diverse range of languages and language families including indigenous languages such as Taino, Arawak, Kikongo, Tswana, Samoan and Maori, along with well known international languages such as Germanic, Greek, Spanish and Arabic.
3. The ability to reconstruct Sanskrit names for such etymologies with a reasonably close phonetic match to their original names suggests that the diverse collection of languages does have an etymological connection. As a consequence, theories proposing language macro-families do have credibility.
4. Last but not the least, Sanskrit based successful etymological reconstructions such as the ones presented here, along with published literature on Indology combining the disciplines of Genographics, Archaeology and Linguistics strongly suggest the notion that the Indian Subcontinent has had an influence on the development of human civilization on a global scale [McAlphin 1975, Toth 2007, Victor 2007, Ohnu 1984, Butcher 2006, Mahadevan 1970, Begley 1983, Allchin 1995, TallBear 2007].

In conclusion, it is noteworthy to note that the use of the etymological listing and Sanskrit reconstructions as a basis for proving/disproving theories about human civilization will eventually have to withstand the test of time.

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2. References for the Listing and Etymologies

Most of the references (around 316 in number) for the country etymologies are adapted from the Wikipedia article on 'List of country-name etymologies' available at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_country-name_etymologies. References for the Sanskrit Meanings are obtained from the Spoken Dictionary of Sanskrit at <http://spokensanskrit.de/>.