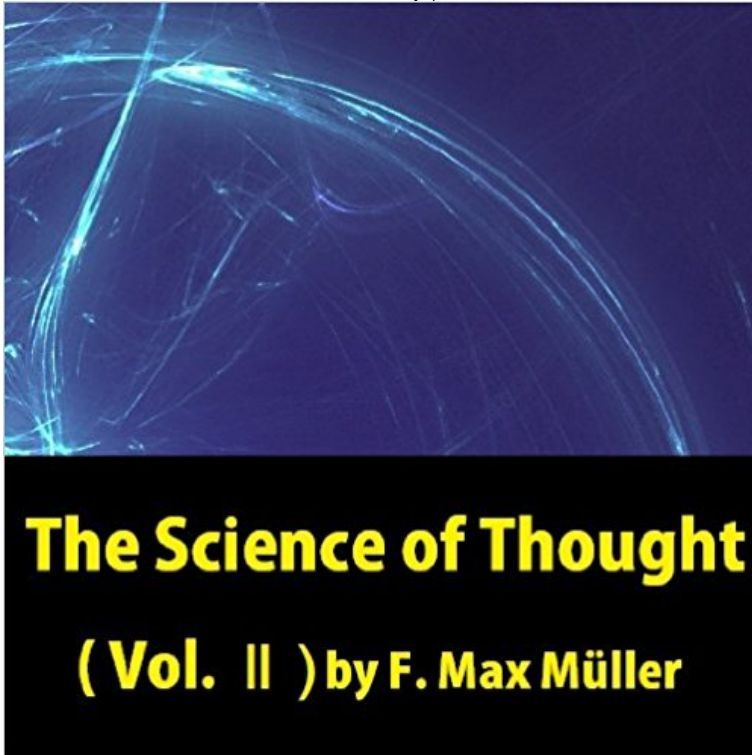


The Science of Thought Vol. 2



CHAPTER VII. THE ROOTS OF SANSKRIT. IT may be objected, no doubt, that all that has hitherto been suggested on the origin of, . . . , Roots of roots and concepts is theory only, or a mere Aryanian-outline of the general purposes which the 8 roots of any language might be made to serve, provided always that such roots exist, and that they possess the peculiar character which has been ascribed to them. It is easy to say that all roots must express acts, and more particularly such simple acts as constitute the daily occupations of a primitive society. The question is, Is it so, and can we by historical evidence prove that it was so in any of the languages best known to ourselves? In order to answer this question perfectly, we ought, if possible, to analyze the dictionary of a whole family of languages, the Semitic or Aryan, and show that the original meanings of their roots are really such as we have postulated. Hebrew has been reduced to about 500 roots, 1 but it would be desirable that some professed Semitic scholar should undertake to collect the roots for the whole Semitic family in its widest sense. An attempt has indeed been made to collect the roots of the whole Aryan family, but the results are as yet so uncertain that it would be unsafe to base any arguments on so changeable a foundation. Ben-fey counted 1706 roots in Sanskrit, 226 of classes ii, iii, v, vii, viii, ix; 1480 of classes i, iv, vi, x, the last comprising 143 roots. For Gothic, Benloew admitted 600 radicals, for modern German only 250, while Grimm has collected of

strong verbs alone 462 in the Teutonic family. For Slavic, Dobrowsky gave 1605 radicals. Pott thinks that a language has on an average about 1000 roots, but Fick has reduced the number of roots necessary to account for the whole wealth of Aryan words to a much smaller number. He admits as primitive roots those only which consist 1. of one vowel; 2. of the vowel a and consonant (ad, ap, ar); 3. of a consonant or double-consonant and the vowel a (da, pa, sa, sta, spa, sna). It stands to reason that when there is so much doubt as to what is the exact number of roots in any single language, and what is to be considered as a typical root or as a mere variety, there must naturally be much greater doubt when we have to determine what are the primitive phonetic elements out of which, according to general phonetic laws, a whole family of languages could have fashioned its dictionary. Fick's attempt to do this for the Aryan family is very creditable, but it goes too far. This being the case, it is best, I think, to begin with an examination of the roots of one of the Aryan languages only, with a view of ascertaining their 1 Fick, *Worterbuch der Indo-germanischen Sprachen* (1870), p. 939. original form and meaning. The objection that we cannot properly speak of roots except during a period when the Aryan languages were not yet separated is not tenable. The radical period of Aryan speech must no doubt be placed before the agglutinative and inflectional (I still hold to these three stages of evolution), and in that sense all roots may be said to be Aryan, and not either Sanskrit, Greek, or Latin. But we have only to suppose that all Aryan languages,

except Sanskrit, had become extinct, and nothing would prevent us in that case from drawing up a list of Sanskrit roots. The chief reason, however, why I prefer to try the experiment which we have to try, on the roots of Sanskrit, is that we possess for Sanskrit a very complete, perhaps more than complete list of roots (dh&tup&Aa) which is ascribed to a very ancient grammarian, Pjiimni, whom I place between the time of Buddha and Alexander the Great, though I have little doubt that much of the work ascribed to him must have been prepared for him by earlier grammarians. To Hindu grammarians at all events belongs the credit of having for the first time conceived the idea of a root, and of having made as complete a collection of the constituent

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