



Sssh. Appropriately named a voiceless retroflex fricative, this sound is not native to Tamil. It migrated from the north. We have no *sha*, something about the nature of our southern land, instead birthing a different set of sounds to mediate the inner and outer climates of being through breath. Agastyar, the first Tamil speaker, is said to have believed that *sha* was not beneficial in our lands, for our bodies. Instead, Agastyar found *cha*. I look at

a phonetic symbol someone once taught me to translate this sound to Latin-adjacent scholars. Most of it is a familiar form, recognized and found often in the mundane. But there it is: a curious underneath. The unsayable nuance, living under and alongside the recognizable. *Ssh.*

S

Did you ever make a paper boat as a child? We made them in Shengotta (well, now that you know the history certain sounds in Tamil, please trace it as my family's tongue would: *Chenkottai*,— Tamil for 'red fort,') a village known for its rains and waterfalls. There were two kinds of boats we knew how to make from a quarter piece of newspaper. One boat, the standard, could also be worn like a cap— a *thoppi*. It could be made in about 10 folds. The older children in the village knew a more advanced technique: one where the boat had what they called the *shark's fin* underneath, an anchor of sorts. Some called this the *kathi kappal*, or the knife-boat. For many months, I didn't know about the *kathi kappal*, because when they are set to float on the temporary water-paths the rain makes in front of your home, you cannot tell the difference between the *thoppi* and the *kathi*. Both the hatboat and the knifeboat look the same on the surface, when floating.

But the boats that had the hidden underneath survived the current of water much longer, they had a gift of balance that the other kind did not. When the skies are falling on you and your fragile paper boats with the the vengeance of a hundred thousand tears, it is hard to know which of the boats have that hidden anchor— but the child in me found a way. It was simple. The boats with the hidden anchors could not be worn as caps. It paid well to predict.

My bets became more and more accurate. Look for the kids who had the hidden balance-maker underneath. They were the ones who weren't— who couldn't, really— advertise their boats by wearing them as caps. It got so bad that my mother started wondering if I was pestering the the *pettikada* corner store owner for free Tiger biscuits— how else could a child have amassed so many packets? How a hidden shark's fin prevented a cap from being worn and how this turned into packets and packets of biscuits... this was not something a girl of three plus three years knew how to explain to a mother.

But as I aged into the body of a woman, I realized— not without tragedy— that my mother had a knifeboat all along. The thing behind the thing. The hidden underneath is sacred, and by nature of its making, it cannot be worn proudly. And conversely, those who wore the crown revealed themselves to not possess the hidden underneath, either by choice or ignorance. The price paid for balance in a force-filled world. *It is dangerous to be discovered.*

Take your pick. Crown, or balance? *Sssh.*

Full excerpt on Tamil, sounds, silence, instructions to make *kathikappal*-s at:
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A prayer for my study:

May I choose silence over compulsive nuance.¹

May I not retreat to convenient silence when unable to face nuance.²

May I study until only truth remains.³

In-between this all, may I always remember my *ākāśha*. The days I am not love in this realm,
May we always sit in love there.⁴

¹ “What can be said at all can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence.” no.7 in Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*.

² Text of “Liberation Song” as I sang it in *Vimalakirti Sutra Ch. 7: The Goddess*, directed by Peter Sellars, featuring Michael Schumacher and myself, with words translated to English by Robert Thurman.

All syllables have the nature of liberation. Why?

Liberation is neither within nor without, nor in between.
Likewise, syllables are neither within nor without, nor in between.

Therefore, Reverend Śāriputra,
do not point to liberation by abandoning speech!

Why? *Holy liberation is the equality of all things!*

³ This life as an artist-scholar has me involved shifting from propositional content to forming representation; running between saying and showing, staring at the undulating space between theory and praxis. With more study, I hope the domain of the ineffable will once again become my home, the home I had before all this noise. Study could afford me a modality where the sayable and the showable comfortably fold into a nondualist existence? (diary entry, 2019).

***Let's Go Out e' Play* is a spi/ritual performance by Ganavya. It features her family, chosen and literal. Please join us in prayer, in song, in play. There are no rules. Please dance if you are moved to. Please sleep if you need to. We are just here to hold you, however we can. We are all children here, in the safety of prayer. This performance was made possible with the support of Roulette Intermedium and Jerome Foundation, and the love and wisdom of innumerable people.**

For more information on the many prayers that will be sung today, please visit:

ganavya.com/roulette-notes-7-2021

