



SAMSKRTASUBODHINĪ

A  
*Sanskrit*  
*Primer*

*Madhav*  
*M.*  
*Deshpande*

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*Dedicated  
to  
Late Professor Shreedhar Ganesh Jinsiwale  
(1852-1903)  
my great-grand-mother's maternal uncle  
who was  
the first Professor of Sanskrit  
(at the Free Church College, Bombay)  
in our family  
and  
whose stories inspired me  
since my childhood  
to follow in his footsteps*

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## PREFACE

To  
The Fourth Reprint Edition

I started working on this book around 1976 and almost twenty generations of my students at Michigan used its successively improved versions before the book was finally officially published in 1997. During its long pre-publication life, this book received attention and assistance from a number of my students, especially Ann Wehmeyer, Sandy Huntington, Brian Akers, Patrick Pranke, and Jonathan Silk. Professor Gudrun Buhnemann (Wisconsin) and Professor Stella Sandahl (Toronto) have also offered suggestions for improving the book. Professor Thomas Hudak (Arizona) offered invaluable help in preparing the camera-ready copy of the book and made suggestions for formal consistency. Besides these students and colleagues, I also want to thank (Late) Pt. N.N. Bhide and Professor S.D. Laddu of Pune for their extensive comments. The current fourth reprint of the book incorporates corrections pointed out by Dr. Gary Tubb (Columbia). With all this help, I still bear the ultimate responsibility for the final shape of the book.

This book looks at Sanskrit as a productive language, rather than as a dead language which can only be deciphered. I have not insisted on each Sanskrit example being a citation from a classical text, though many examples are versions of classical passages modified to fit the level of grammar covered in a given lesson. I have personally contributed poems, plays, and serious writing, and have participated in literary and Śāstric debates in Sanskrit. Therefore, I have not felt shy in composing Sanskrit passages myself, though I have deliberately kept modernisms of modern Sanskrit at a minimum and have emphasized the classical patterns. The book is expressly designed to be *introductory*. That means it does not pretend to cover and explain all possible nuances of Sanskrit grammar, and does not go into every possible exception to its rules. It deals with the standard classical language, and does not deal with Vedic Sanskrit, or with peculiarities of the epic, Buddhist or other non-standard varieties of Sanskrit.

The book is oriented toward learning and teaching Sanskrit as a language, and does not aim at teaching Sanskrit linguistics, either in its Indo-European or Pāṇinian dimensions. In this regard, I have been influenced a lot by the textbooks of English, German and French I used to learn these languages. Those students who need more direct access to Sanskrit linguistics should be directed to specific works in that category. Similarly, the book is not intended to teach Hinduism, Buddhism, or Jainism. The examples are inclusive of these traditions, but they also include Sanskrit poetry and satire, and are intended to teach Sanskrit as a language, rather than as a moral, religious, or a mystical code.

Each introductory book ultimately needs to make a choice of facts, explanations, and the order and the amounts in which these facts and explanations should be provided to the student. My choice is guided by my own experience of teaching Sanskrit for the past thirty-two years. The book is not designed for self-study, and assumes that the instructor knows a great deal more Sanskrit

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than what is contained in this book and can provide more detailed explanations if demanded by students. I hope that the publication of this book will advance the cause of Sanskrit instruction.

I have myself composed the bulk of stories and exercises in this book. A few of them are direct quotations from classical works, and others are altered versions of classical passages modified to fit the level of grammar known to the student at a given point. I have not consciously and deliberately excerpted examples from other Sanskrit textbooks. However, there will necessarily be a certain amount of shared examples. I studied Sanskrit since the age of ten, using a wide variety of teaching materials in Marathi, Sanskrit, and English, and these materials have an enormous overlap in cited examples. As a result, it is not possible to attribute a given example to a specific source. I wish to acknowledge my general indebtedness to all the teaching materials I have used over the years to acquire the knowledge of Sanskrit.

I am extremely pleased to see that this book is now going into its fourth printing in a short span of seven years. Its success as a basic textbook for teaching Sanskrit is by now self-evident. In this fourth reprint, I have made additional corrections for the minor typographical and other errors which I noticed myself, and also those which were pointed out to me. However, except for these very minor corrections, the book remains identical with the first three printings.

Ann Arbor, May 27, 2003

**Madhav M. Deshpande**



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# SANSKRIT LANGUAGE

Professor Madhav M. Deshpande

Sanskrit is the oldest attested member of the Indo-Aryan language-family, itself a sub-branch of Indo-Iranian, which is in turn a branch of the Indo-European family of languages. The oldest known Indo-Aryan texts, the *Vedas*, were composed in an archaic form of Sanskrit called Vedic. The oldest among the *Vedas*, the *R̥gveda*, dates to the middle of the second millennium B.C. and was composed largely in the Northwestern region of the Indian sub-continent. Subsequently, Indo-Aryans moved further east and south within the sub-continent, and later Vedic texts were produced in these areas. The late Vedic period continued until the middle of the first millennium B.C.

In all probability, writing was not known in this period, and the literature relevant for religious ritual was preserved by an extraordinarily accurate oral tradition which survives to this day in many parts of India. One can, however, detect dialectal differences as far back as the *R̥gveda*, and these increased as the Indo-Aryans moved into different regions. With these migrations, the orally transmitted Vedic texts themselves imperceptibly underwent successive alterations, as is evident from the branches and sub-branches of the Vedic textual traditions. The *R̥gveda* was followed by other *Vedas*, i.e., the *Atharvaveda*, *Yajurveda* and *Sāmaveda*, in various recensions. These texts consist largely of prayers to Vedic deities composed by the Aryan priests, ritual formulae, curses, incantations, etc., and are generally referred to by the word *mantra* in the Indian tradition. These were followed by prose compositions, mostly commentatorial and exegetical in nature, called *Brāhmaṇas*, and philosophical and mystical texts known as the *Upaniṣads*. The chronological divisions among these texts are not sharp and there is some overlap, but the language of the early Vedic texts can be neatly distinguished from that of the late Vedic prose. There are traces of vernacular languages, or what are later called Prakrits, even in early Vedic texts, but it is fairly clear that some form of Sanskrit was used as the first language by the Vedic poets.

Throughout its history, Sanskrit was influenced by the languages with which it came in contact and, in turn, it influenced them. Even the oldest Vedic texts show some signs of convergence with non-Aryan languages in phonology, syntax and lexicon. Indications of this convergence, only minor in early phases, become more pronounced in later centuries. Sanskrit, as a second language, was also substantially influenced by the first languages of its speakers, be they Indo-Aryan vernaculars such as the Prakrits or non-Aryan tongues such as the Dravidian languages of South India. At the same time, as the elite language par excellence, Sanskrit exerted tremendous influence on Indo-Aryan and non-Aryan vernaculars. In almost every case, the literary

vernaculars were in fact Sanskritized varieties of these languages. The vernacularization of Sanskrit and the Sanskritization of vernaculars have been simultaneous processes in Indian linguistic history, which have substantially affected every dimension of all these languages. In the case of Sanskrit, the dedicated indigenous tradition of scholarship has helped maintain a certain amount of stability in the morphological structure of the language. A closer examination, however, reveals substantial changes in phonology, syntax and lexicon.

The middle of the first millennium B.C. marks a general transition to what is called Classical Sanskrit. Somewhat akin to the language of the late Vedic prose, the Classical language slowly began to lose its standing as a first language to becoming a second-language important for religion and learning acquired through ritual apprenticeship and a study of grammar. By this time, the language of the Vedic hymns, which were orally preserved and recited, was becoming partially unintelligible, and its correct pronunciation and comprehension required deliberate study. This eventually led to the emergence of phonetic analysis, etymological studies, sophisticated recitational techniques, and general exegetical efforts. Eventually, this helped the development of the tradition of Sanskrit grammar. The oldest surviving grammar (i.e., *Aṣṭādhyāyī* "Grammar in Eight Chapters") is ascribed to Pāṇini who lived in the Northwestern corner of the sub-continent about 500 B.C. It presents a state of affairs in which the Vedic texts were orally preserved and studied, and a form of colloquial Sanskrit was widely used with near-native fluency. However, it also suggests the existence of vernacular languages which are fully attested a few centuries later as the Prakrits or the Middle Indo-Aryan languages. It is unlikely that Sanskrit was Pāṇini's mother-tongue, but it is obvious that it was widely used in various walks of life by different communities and was not restricted to the priestly class or to the context of ritual. In later centuries, the sociolinguistics of Sanskrit went on changing. Eventually, Sanskrit became a fossilized classical language, a second-language of high social prestige restricted generally to ritual and elite learning.

The earliest readable inscriptions in India, those of the King Aśoka in the 3rd century B.C., are in Prakrits (= Middle Indo-Aryan languages) and not in Sanskrit. The earliest known Sanskrit inscription of any importance comes from the Śaka (= Scythian) ruler Rudradāman (2nd century A.D.). It is important to note that the political patronage of Sanskrit in the ancient times emanated from the foreign rulers of western India and Sanskrit was given the status as the official language by the Guptas and by the "new" Kṣatriyas. Sanskrit was used by these rulers as a means to integrate themselves into the local society, as did Śakas, or else as a symbol of high status. Sanskrit eventually became the dominant language of inscriptions through the rest of the first millennium A.D. It was used by poets, philosophers, ministers,

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and was the language of technical literature ranging from medicine and mathematics to archery and erotics. While the Classical language generally follows the description given by Pāṇini, many Sanskrit dialects, differing from Pāṇini's description to varying degrees, are seen in the two great epics, the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, in Buddhist and Jain religious texts, in inscriptions and in late popular literature. These varieties are often described by terms such as Epic Sanskrit, Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit, Inscriptional Hybrid Sanskrit, Vernacular Sanskrit, and even Dog Sanskrit. The elite scholastic tradition generally maintained a strict adherence to Pāṇini's grammar, and Classical Sanskrit continues to be written and spoken in traditional Hindu academies to this day. *It is a living second language.* It has been recognized by the constitution of India as one of the national languages. It is widely used in temple and domestic ritual, to a limited extent for new literary activity and even for a daily news broadcast by the All India Radio. Its knowledge is essential for any non-superficial understanding of the linguistic, religious, social and even political history of the Indian sub-continent. In the field of linguistics, it was the "discovery of Sanskrit" by Sir William Jones and others in the 18th century that led to the development of the field of Indo-European historical and comparative linguistics in the West.

### Writing System

In the course of its history, Sanskrit was written in many different scripts, yet the tradition of indigenous phonetics and grammar predates the appearance of writing and analyzes the oral language. The script most commonly used for Sanskrit currently is called Devanāgarī. It is a syllabic form of writing in which the consonant signs form the core of the written syllable. Vowels coming after the consonant are indicated by various add-on ligatures with the exception of the short *a* which is inherent in the consonant sign. Vowels are indicated with independent characters only when they appear in the beginning of a word. The organization of Sanskrit alphabet shows a highly sophisticated level of phonetic analysis dating back to the middle of the first millennium B.C. A chart of the Sanskrit Devanāgarī alphabet in the traditional order is given below.

## Devanāgarī Alphabet

### Independent Vowel-Signs

अ *a* आ *ā* इ *i* ई *ī* उ *u* ऊ *ū*  
ऋ *r̄* ॠ *r̄̄* ऌ *l̄* ए *e* ऐ *ai* ओ *o* औ *au*

### Add-on Vowel-Signs

ऱ *ā* ऱि *i* ऱी *ī* ऱु *u* ऱू *ū*  
ऱ̣ *r̄* ऱ̣̄ *r̄̄* ऱ̣̣ *l̄* ऱ̣̣̣ *e* ऱ̣̣̣̣ *ai* ऱ̣̣̣̣̣ *o* ऱ̣̣̣̣̣̣ *au*

### Consonant-Signs (with Inherent *a*-Vowel) Stops and Nasals

	-Voice -Asp	-Voice +Asp	+Voice -Asp	+Voice +Asp	+Voice -Asp
Velar	क <i>k</i>	ख <i>kh</i>	ग <i>g</i>	घ <i>gh</i>	ङ <i>ṅ</i>
Palatal	च <i>c</i>	छ <i>ch</i>	ज <i>j</i>	झ <i>jh</i>	ञ <i>ñ</i>
Cerebral	ट <i>ṭ</i>	ठ <i>ṭh</i>	ड <i>ḍ</i>	ढ <i>ḍh</i>	ण <i>ṇ</i>
Dental	त <i>t</i>	थ <i>th</i>	द <i>d</i>	ध <i>dh</i>	न <i>n</i>
Labial	प <i>p</i>	फ <i>ph</i>	ब <i>b</i>	भ <i>bh</i>	म <i>m</i>

### Semi-Vowels (+Voice, -Asp)

य *y* र *r* ल *l* व *v*

### Sibilants

-Voice      -Voice      -Voice      +Voice  
श *ś*      ष *ṣ*      स *s*      ह *h*

-Voice                      +Voice  
x: *ḥ* (Visarga)      x̣ *ṃ* (Anusvāra)

The following provides a sample Sanskrit text printed in Devanāgarī along with the standard Roman transcription:

आसीद् राजा नलो नाम वीरसेनसुतो बली ।  
उपपन्नो गुणैरिष्टै रूपवानश्वकोविदः ॥

*āsīd rājā nalo nāma vīrasenasuto balī /  
upapanno guṇairiṣṭai rūpavānaśvakovidah //*

“There was a powerful king named Nala, the son of Virasena. He was endowed with all desirable virtues, was handsome and was expert in dealing with horses.”

## Sounds

The Sanskrit sound system has thirteen vowels. Of these, *a*, *i*, *u*, *r̥* and *l̥* are short, and *ā*, *ī*, *ū*, *ṝ*, *e*, *o*, *ai*, and *au* are long. The last two are diphthongs, while the rest are monophthongs. An extra-long variety (*pluta*) of most of these vowels is found occasionally in vocatives, etc. As given in the chart of the alphabet above, Sanskrit has thirty-six consonants, i.e. five series of stops and nasals, four semi-vowels, three voiceless sibilants, a voiced *h*, a voiceless *h*, and *ṃ* or *Anusvāra*. In addition, ancient phonetic treatises note numerous variations and disputes concerning the exact nature of some of these sounds, e.g., *ṃ* and *h*. Ancient phoneticians, for instance, debate whether *ṃ* (*anusvāra*) is a vowel or a consonant, and some even consider it to be a sibilant (*ūṣman*). Modern linguists sometimes question whether the sounds *ṅ*, *ṇ*, *ḥ*, *ṃ* etc. should be considered allophones rather than independent phonemes. Similarly, the indigenous grammarians speak of nasalization of vowels and semi-vowels, yielding sounds like *ē*, *ī̄*, *ṃ̄*, *ṃ̄* and *l̄*. These may also be treated as allophones, and the same is true of extra-long vowels. There has been a great change in the vowels from Indo-European to Sanskrit. To illustrate this change, we may consider the case of diphthongs. For example, the twelve Indo-European diphthongs - *\*ei*, *\*oi*, *\*ai*, *\*eu*, *\*ou*, *\*au*, *\*ei*, *\*ōi*, *\*āi*, *\*eu*, *\*ōu* and *\*āu* - were reduced to four Indo-Iranian diphthongs *\*ai*, *\*au*, *\*āi* and *\*āu*. Of these, *\*ai* and *\*au* became the Sanskrit monophthongs *e* and *o*, while *\*āi* and *\*āu* became Sanskrit *ai* and *au*, respectively.

The consonant system of Sanskrit is marked by the opposition of aspirated and unaspirated stops, both voiced and voiceless, in each series. Some consonants are restricted in their use. For example, *ṅ* appears only before or after palatals, and *ṇ* only finally or before gutturals (which may subsequently be lost). The sounds *h* and *ś* do not occur at the end of a word, and only *k*, *ṭ*, *t*, *p*, *ṅ*, *n*, *m*, and *ḥ* can occur at the end of a sentence. Certain sounds such as *jh*, which are not of Indo-European origin, occur in

onomatopoeic expressions or words borrowed from Prakrits or non-Aryan languages. The retroflex or cerebral consonants constitute the chief innovation of Sanskrit. The origin of these sounds is hotly debated, and explanations range from developments internal to Indo-Aryan to borrowing from Dravidian and/or some other non-Aryan languages. It seems most likely that both the influences played a concurrent role. The pronunciation of some consonants is different depending on where they occur in a word. For instance, *y* and *v* were pronounced more strongly initially than intervocally. The ancient Sanskrit of the Vedic texts as well as the spoken Sanskrit of Pāṇini had living accents. The Sanskrit grammarians distinguish between *udātta* "raised", *anudātta* "unraised", and *svarita* "rising-falling" accent. Of these, the position of the *udātta* generally agrees with that of the primary word-accent in I.E. Other Sanskrit accents are mainly prosodic in nature. These accents were lost in the later classical language, but were preserved in the recitation of the Vedic scriptures.

## Grammar

Sanskrit, like Greek and Latin, is an inflected language, so that the bulk of grammatical information is carried by the morphology. The morphemes can be divided into stems and affixes. The stems are further divided into nominal stems and verbal roots. There are primary nominal stems (including adjectives, pronouns and indeclinables) such as *anda-* "egg", *kha-* "sky, space", *bala-* "strength", etc., which cannot be further broken down into components, and secondary nominal stems, generally of three kinds: a) nominals derived from other nominals via affixation, e.g., *kuru* + *a* > *kaurava* "a person belonging to the lineage of *kuru*", *nara* + *tva* > *naratva* "man-ness"; b) nominals derived from verb roots through affixation, e.g., *kr̥* + *tr̥* > *kartr̥* "doer, maker", *gam* + *ana* > *gamana* "action of going"; and c) compounds, e.g., *nara* + *pati* > *narapati* "lord of men, king", *cakra* + *pāṇi* > *cakrapāṇi* "one who has a discus in his hand, Viṣṇu". Verb roots can be divided into primary roots (e.g., *gam-* "to go") and secondary (e.g., *putra* "son" > *putrīya-* "to want to have a son"). A third category of stems is that of indeclinable items. These generally include particles (e.g., *upari* "above"), pre- and post-positions (e.g., *adhi*, *pari*, *anu*), adverbs (e.g., *satatam* "always"), connectives (e.g., *ca* "and", *vā* "or"), and occasionally even nouns (e.g. *sva* "heaven"). The inflections may be generally divided into prefixes (e.g., *a* + *gacchat*), infixes (e.g., *bhi-na-d* + *ti*) and suffixes (e.g., *as* + *ti*). They may also be divided into inflections producing secondary stems and roots, and inflections producing the final inflected items. The latter may be generally divided into case-affixes for nominal stems and finite verb endings for verb roots.

The nominal stem is characterized by gender as an intrinsic property. There are three genders, i.e. masculine, feminine and neuter. The gender is grammatical and usually cannot be correlated with any semantic factor, although male and female living beings are often masculine and feminine, e.g., *nara-* "man" (masc.) vs *nārī-* "woman" (fem.). Within this pair, the masculine can also be used as the generic. In the use of pronouns, generally, the neuter is most generic, and among animate entities, the masculine is the generic term, e.g., *kim* (neut.) "what?", *kaḥ* (masc.) "who (male or female)?", and *kā* (fem.) "who (female)". The declension of nouns is affected by several factors, i.e. gender (masculine, feminine, neuter); the final sound or sounds of a given stem, e.g., the *a* of *nara-*, or the *an* of *rājan-*; number (singular, dual, plural) and case (nominative, accusative, instrumental, dative, ablative, genitive, locative, vocative). A sample nominal declension for the word *deva-* (masc.) "god" is given below:

	Singular	Dual	Plural
Nominative	<i>devaḥ</i>	<i>devau</i>	<i>devāḥ</i>
Accusative	<i>devam</i>	<i>devau</i>	<i>devān</i>
Instrumental	<i>devena</i>	<i>devābhyām</i>	<i>devaiḥ</i>
Dative	<i>devāya</i>	<i>devābhyām</i>	<i>devebhyaḥ</i>
Ablative	<i>devāt</i>	<i>devābhyām</i>	<i>devebhyaḥ</i>
Genitive	<i>devasya</i>	<i>devayoḥ</i>	<i>devānām</i>
Locative	<i>deve</i>	<i>devayoḥ</i>	<i>deveṣu</i>
Vocative	<i>deva</i>	<i>devau</i>	<i>devāḥ</i>

The nominative and accusative forms of a neuter nominal are identical with each other and these are also the same as the vocative, with the exception of the singular. All other forms of neuter nominals are identical with the corresponding masculine forms. Consider the relevant forms for *vana-* n. "forest":

	Singular	Dual	Plural
Nom., Acc.	<i>vanam</i>	<i>vane</i>	<i>vanāni</i>
Vocative	<i>vana</i>	<i>vane</i>	<i>vanāni</i>

The feminine nominal declension is slightly different in its affixes, e.g., *mālā-* f. "garland", instrumental sg. *mālayā*, dative sg. *mālāyai*, locative sg. *mālāyām*, etc.. The pronominal declensions are slightly different from the nominal declensions, e.g. masculine dative sg. *deva-* › *devāya* "to god" vs *ta(d)-* › *tasmai* "to him". The adjectives are not normally distinguished in declension from nouns. Vedic morphology differed in some cases from the Classical forms, e.g. nominative plural: classical *devāḥ* vs Vedic *devāsaḥ*; instrumental plural: classical *devaiḥ* vs Vedic *devebhīḥ*.

The Vedic verbal system is far more complex than the Classical system. Verb roots are generally of two types,

athematic and thematic. The first type has a variable accent and a variable stem form to which terminations are directly attached, e.g., *as + ti* › *asti* "is". The second type had an invariable accent and stem, and the vowel *a* was inserted between this stem and the final termination (e.g., *budh + a + ti* › *bodhati* "knows"). This made the second type a more regular formation, since the thematic *a* prevented the far more complex interaction between the root-final and affix-initial consonants. In the history of Sanskrit, there is a gradual movement away from the athematic toward the thematic type. Despite the fact that Classical Sanskrit lost accents, the effects of these accents on the derivation, such as the alternations of *i/e/ai*, *u/o/au*, *ṛ/ar/ār* etc., survive. In Vedic, a verb often has a number of stems. Consider the forms for the roots *gam-* "to go" and *bhū-* "to be, become", i.e. present (e.g., *gacch-*, *bhav-*), aorist (e.g., *gam-*, *bhū-*), perfect (e.g., *ja-gam-*, *ba-bhū-*), future (e.g., *gam-i-ṣya-*, *bhav-i-ṣya-*) etc., each stem providing a different aspectual dimension such as continuous, punctual and completed action. Each stem could have up to five moods, i.e. indicative (e.g. *gacch-a-ti* "goes", *bhav-a-ti* "is, becomes"), injunctive (e.g., *gacch-a-t* "May X go", *bhav-a-t* "May X be / become"), subjunctive (e.g., *gacch-ā-ti* "May X please go", *bhav-ā-ti* "May X please be / become"), optative (e.g., *gacch-e-t* "should go", *bhav-e-t* "should be / become") and imperative (e.g., *gacch-a-tu* "must go", *bhav-a-tu* "must be / become"). The indicative of the present, perfect and future stems could have present and past tense forms, while the aorist indicative was limited to the past tense. The different present stems indicated meanings such as indicative (e.g., *gacch-a-ti* "goes", *bhav-a-ti* "is / becomes"), intensive (e.g., *jan-gam-ī-ti* "keeps on going", *bo-bhav-ī-ti* "keeps on becoming"), causative (e.g., *gam-aya-ti* "X makes Y go", *bhāv-aya-ti* "X makes Y be / become"), desiderative (e.g., *ji-gam-i-ṣa-ti* "X himself wants to go", *bu-bhū-ṣa-ti* "X himself wants to be / become"), etc. Each tense or mood had three persons (first, second and third) and three numbers (singular, dual and plural). Each tense or mood could also be conjugated in two voices with different terminations - active and middle (e.g., *gacch-a-ti* / *gacch-a-te* "goes", *bhav-a-ti* / *bhav-a-te* "is / becomes"). There were a number of participial forms indicating various tenses and voices (e.g., present active participle *gacch-ant-* "going", *bhav-ant-* "being / becoming"; present passive participle *gam-ya-māna-* "being gone to"; present middle participle *gacch-a-māna-* "going", *bhav-a-māna-* "being / becoming"; past passive participle *ga-ta-* "gone to"; past active participle *ga-ta-* or *ga-ta-vant-* "gone", *bhū-ta-* or *bhū-ta-vant-* "that which was / has become"; future active participle *gam-i-ṣy-ant-* "he who will go", *bhav-i-ṣy-ant-* "he who will be / become"; future middle/passive participle *gam-i-ṣya-māna-* "that which will be gone to"), as well as a number of nonfinite verbal forms such as gerunds (e.g., *ga-tvā* "having gone", *ā-gam-ya* "having come", *bhū-tvā* "having been / become", *sam-bhū-ya* "having been born") and infinitives of various kinds (e.g., *gan-tum*, *gan-tave*, *gan-tavai*,



*gam-a-dhyai*, *gan-toḥ* "to go"; *bhav-i-tum*, *bhav-i-toḥ* "to be / become" , and numerous kinds of verbal nouns (e.g., *gam-ana-*, *ga-ti-* "going", *gan-tr-* "goer", *bhav-ana-* "being", *bhāv-a-* "being"). Thus, for a given verb, the total number of derived forms was very large. This complexity was greatly reduced in the Classical language. The injunctive virtually disappeared and the subjunctive was largely incorporated into the imperative. The aorist and the perfect survived only in the indicative and the aorist participle was lost. The great variety of Vedic infinitives was reduced to a single form in *-tum*. The different meanings of the aorist, the perfect and the past tense forms of the present stem were all merged into a single notion of past. In the late Classical language, the frequency of the finite verb is greatly reduced and its function is taken over by participles and periphrastic constructions of various sorts; in general, the language came to favor nominal sentences over verbal sentences. The Classical language, as the repository of traditional learning, retained access to a variety of ancient verbal forms, but in practice the frequency of finite verbs was substantially reduced. A sample paradigm of the present tense active forms of the root *pat-* "to fall" are presented below.

	Singular	Dual	Plural
1st	<i>patāmi</i>	<i>patāvah</i>	<i>patāmaḥ</i>
2nd	<i>patasi</i>	<i>patataḥ</i>	<i>patatha</i>
3rd	<i>patati</i>	<i>patataḥ</i>	<i>patanti</i>

## Syntax

Sanskrit syntax is in its general features Indo-European and the use of cases, tenses and moods in Sanskrit has close parallels in Greek and Latin. The older Sanskrit relied more on the finite verb as the center of its sentences, while the late Classical language became more nominal through the use of participles and purely nominal sentences. While Sanskrit is one of the so-called free-word-order languages, generally the word-order is of the SOV type, though the pragmatic shifts of focus and emphasis can alter this prototypical word-order. In non-emotive technical prose, the topic-comment (*uddēśya-vidheya*) order is generally followed, while in the conversational language, the emphasized part of the sentence is often fronted. The word-order dictated by pragmatic considerations has to interact with other rules requiring specific positions for pronouns, clitics etc., and this often leads to discontinuous constituents. Adjectives generally precede nouns, but when functioning as predicates, they generally follow a noun. The older language shows a free choice between prepositional and postpositional usage of adverbs, but the later language generally moves in the direction of postpositional use. The use of passive gradually increases in the Classical language, and the usage of

passive participles, even where it is not warranted by the discourse-pragmatics, is taken as an indication of the influence of the ergativity in the substratum languages. The syntax of the late Classical language is substantially influenced by that of the first languages of its users, and features such as ergativity are reflected in the use of Sanskrit though changed frequencies of various forms. The most remarkable feature of the Classical language is the compounds, especially their phenomenal length. Long compounds are used with great facility to present vistas of frozen descriptions, while the action in the narrative is handled by means of participles and verbs. An example involving typical Sanskrit compounds is given below (Jayadeva's *Gītagovinda*, 1.4.1):

*candana-carcita-nīla-kalevara-pīta-vasana-vana-malī*  
Sandal-wood-smearred-blue-body-yellow-garment-forest-garland-  
possessing + Nom. Sg.

*keli-calan-maṇi-kunḍala-mandita-gaṇḍa-yugaḥ smita-śālī*  
play-moving-jewel-ear-ornament-adorned-cheek-pair + Nom. Sg.  
smile-habit + Nom. Sg.

"[Krishna] is wearing forest garlands, a yellow garment, and has his blue body smeared with the paste of Sandalwood. He is always smiling and his cheeks are adorned with jeweled ear-ornaments which move during his play."

### From Vedic to Classical Sanskrit

In becoming a Classical language, Sanskrit moved away from being anyone's mother-tongue and emerged as a powerful elite language, a status which it held for over two thousand years. In this process, we observe the following developments:

- a) preservation of a great many surface forms of ancient Sanskrit,
- b) loss of many semantic and syntactic distinctions,
- c) incorporation of a large number of words from Indo-Aryan and non-Aryan vernaculars in a Sanskritized form,
- d) strong influence of vernaculars on the pronunciation, semantics and syntax.

Such changes occurred throughout history, and created a certain gap between the actual performance of Sanskrit users in different regions and at different times, on the one hand, and the academically maintained prescriptive ideal of Pāṇinian Sanskrit on the other. The more elite a user of Sanskrit, the more his performance tended to approximate the Pāṇinian ideal; the more populist, the more his performance tended to approximate the local vernacular. Given these variations, the actual productions of each Sanskrit author show a unique balance between these

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sociolinguistic pressures. Only with this in mind can we hope to arrive at a realistic picture of the Sanskrit language as it is actually attested in the extant documents.

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# LESSON 1

## THE SANSKRIT ALPHABET

1. The Sanskrit alphabet is organized as follows, reading from left to right:

**Vowels** (when not combined with consonants)

अ a	आ ā	इ i	ई ī	उ u	ऊ ū
ऋ ṛ	ॠ ṝ	ऌ ḷ			
ए e	ओ o	ऐ ai	औ au		

**Consonants** (with inherent vowel *a*)

Velar:	क ka	ख kha	ग ga	घ gha	ङ ṅa
Palatals:	च ca	छ cha	ज ja	झ jha	ञ ña
Cerebrals:	ट ṭa	ठ ṭha	ड ḍa	ढ ḍha	ण ṇa
Dentals:	त ta	थ tha	द da	ध dha	न na
Labials:	प pa	फ pha	ब ba	भ bha	म ma
Semivowels:	य ya	र ra	ल la	व va	
Sibilants:	श śa	ष ṣa	स sa		
Aspirate:	ह ha				

(Add-on signs:)      ̣ ṃ (anusvāra)      : ḥ (visarga)

Ś ' (avagraha) - the apostrophe  
(used to indicate a lost 'a' sound)

2. Below is a guide to pronunciation of the respective Sanskrit sounds for native speakers of American English. It should be kept in mind that these are **only approximate equivalents**.

The vowels above should be pronounced as follows:

- a - like the *a* in *organ* or the *u* in *cut*.  
ā - like the *a* in *car*, held twice as long as short *a*.  
i - like the *i* in *chin*.  
ī - like the *ee* in *week*, held twice as long as short *i*.

- 
- u - like the *u* in *bush*.
  - ū - like the *u* in *rule* but held twice as long as short *u*.
  - ṛ - like the *ri* in *rim*, (regionally as *ri*).
  - ṝ - like the *ree* in *reed*, (regionally as *roo* in *root*).
  - ḷ - like *l* followed by *r* (*lr*).
  - e - like the *e* in *they*.
  - ai - like the *ai* in *aisle*.
  - o - like the *o* in *go*.
  - au - like the *ow* in *how*.
  - ṃ (anusvāra) - before pause, pronounced like *m*, but contextually changes like *n* in *bingo*, *punch*, and *mint*.
  - ḥ (visarga) - a final *h*-sound: *aḥ* is pronounced like *aha*

The consonants are pronounced as follows:

- |    |   |                               |     |   |  |
|----|---|-------------------------------|-----|---|--|
| k  | - | as in <i>kick</i>             | jh  | - | as in <i>hedgehog</i>  |
| kh | - | as in <i>Eckhart</i>          | ñ   | - | as in <i>canyon</i>  |
| g  | - | as in <i>give</i>             | ṭ   | - | as in <i>tub</i>   |
| gh | - | as in <i>dig-hard</i>         | ṭh  | - | as in <i>light-heart</i>   |
| ṅ  | - | as in <i>sing</i>             | ḍ   | - | as in <i>dove</i>  |
| c  | - | as in <i>chair</i>            | ḍha | - | as in <i>red-hot</i>   |
| ch | - | as in<br><i>staunch-heart</i> | ṇ   | - | as <i>rna</i> (prepare to say<br>the <i>r</i> and say <i>na</i> ). |
| j  | - | as in <i>joy</i>              |     |   |  |

Cerebrals are pronounced with tongue to roof of mouth, but the following dentals are pronounced with tongue against teeth:

- |    |   |   |   |   |                    |
|----|---|---|---|---|--------------------|
| t  | - | as in <i>tub</i> but with tongue against teeth.         |   |   |                    |
| th | - | as in <i>light-heart</i> but with tongue against teeth. |   |   |                    |
| d  | - | as in <i>dove</i> but with tongue against teeth.        |   |   |                    |
| dh | - | as in <i>red-hot</i> but with tongue against teeth.     |   |   |                    |
| n  | - | as in <i>nut</i> but with tongue between teeth.         |   |   |                    |
| p  | - | as in <i>pipe</i>                                       | l | - | as in <i>light</i> |
| ph | - | as in <i>uphill</i> (not <i>f</i> )                     | v | - | as in <i>vine</i>  |

b	-	as in <i>bird</i>	ś (palatal)	-	as in the <i>s</i> in
bh	-	as in <i>rub-hard</i>			German word <i>sprechen</i>
m	-	as in <i>mother</i>	ṣ (cerebral)	-	as the <i>sh</i> in
y	-	as in <i>yes</i>			<i>crashed</i>
r	-	as in <i>run</i>	h	-	as in <i>home</i>

3. All vowels are considered to be voiced sounds and do not have aspiration. In the following chart, the term 'voice' refers to a sonorous vibration, while the term 'aspiration' refers to a rush of air. The characters *ṡ*, *ṡ̄*, and *ṡ̃*, refer to nasal counter parts of *y*, *v*, and *l*. The phonetic analysis of Sanskrit consonants is as follows:

Point of Articulation	Stops				Semi-Vowels		Sibilants	
	-Voice		+Voice		+Voice -Asp	+Voice +Asp	-Voice +Asp	
	-Asp	+Asp	-Asp	+Asp				
<b>Velar</b>	<i>k</i>	<i>kh</i>	<i>g</i>	<i>gh</i>	<i>ṅ</i>		<i>ḥ</i>	
<b>Palatal</b>	<i>c</i>	<i>ch</i>	<i>j</i>	<i>jh</i>	<i>ñ</i>	<i>y/ṡ̄</i>	<i>ś</i>	
<b>Cerebral</b>	<i>ṡ</i>	<i>ṡh</i>	<i>ḍ</i>	<i>ḍh</i>	<i>ṇ</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>ṣ</i>	
<b>Dental</b>	<i>t</i>	<i>th</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>dh</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>l/ṡ̃</i>	<i>s</i>	
<b>Labial</b>	<i>p</i>	<i>ph</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>bh</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>v/ṡ̄</i>		

4. The following character charts provide a clear view of the basic calligraphic shapes of the Devanāgarī letters, which are traditionally written with a pen with a slanted tip. There are minor regional differences in the shapes of Devanāgarī characters, and the shapes in these charts, as well as the shapes of Devanāgarī characters in the rest of this book, are close to the typography of the well known Nirṇayasāgara Press of Bombay.

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