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Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-08828-3 — The Cambridge Introduction to Sanskrit
A. M. Ruppel
Excerpt
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CHAPTER 0
Studying Sanskrit

WHY LEARN SANSKRIT?

There are many good answers to this question. Sanskrit is studied by scholars of language, religion and literature, by historians, sociologists and anthropologists and anyone else with an interest in India's cultural heritage.

Sanskrit as a language is quite simply beautiful, its structure complex enough to be interesting, but straightforward enough to be manageable. Knowledge of Sanskrit grants access to an enormous body of literature. Literary writing uses the means of a language to not just express a thought, but to express it in an interesting, appealing, artful way. Thus it always is more rewarding to read a work of literature in its original language. Yet the fact that much may be lost in translation is especially true in relation to Sanskrit: the breadth of meaning of Sanskrit words, and the way this breadth is used in Sanskrit poetry (especially in the form of puns and word play) sometimes make expressions or even whole sentences or texts nearly impossible to translate. Only in the original can one truly enjoy them. Furthermore, Sanskrit literature offers a wide window onto India: Sanskrit is the language not just of the sacred writings of Hinduism (and some of Buddhism and Jainism), but also of many other texts that have greatly influenced Indian culture and society over the course of more than two millennia.

This book aims to teach Sanskrit by following two principles. First of all, it attempts to minimise the need for rote memorisation by maximising understanding of underlying structures, patterns and similarities. As will become clear from Chapters 3 and 5, both nouns and verbs in Sanskrit have large numbers of different forms that need to be memorised. Throughout this book, parallels will be pointed out between new forms to be studied and forms that are already known, and various other hints will be offered that should facilitate memorisation. Chapters dedicated to the introduction of new forms alternate with chapters and sections explaining the processes by which the great variety of forms comes to be (such as Chapters 7 on vowel gradation, 14 on compound nouns, 17 on noun formation); others recommend ways of handling e.g. the abovementioned multitude of meanings that a single word may have. While no linguistic background knowledge is required of the student, the book offers information on the history and development of Sanskrit whenever that helps to understand how the language as we see it works. (Such notes that may be helpful but are not crucial if one simply wants to know what forms Sanskrit contains are printed in grey.)

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Secondly, this book offers a large number of actual Sanskrit readings from its early chapters on. The study of any ancient (or 'dead') language is faced with one main challenge: ancient languages have no native speakers who could provide us with examples of simple, everyday speech. The texts we do have are, for the most part, highly polished literature, too difficult to read for a beginner. Many textbooks thus exclusively provide exercise sentences and texts that were written by the author and that keep the student away from texts in the original language for months, if not for the entire length of the course. While those exercise sentences and texts are very useful for consolidating knowledge of newly introduced grammar, going through them does not provide anything like the thrill of reading original Sanskrit texts that were composed 1,000, 2,000 or even 3,000 years ago and that have been studied by and have influenced countless people across the centuries. This book introduces actual Sanskrit readings from Chapter 6 onwards. They are short and heavily annotated at first, but will soon get longer and more varied.

Wherever this may be helpful, the book will point out parallels or noteworthy contrasts between Sanskrit and English. The many systematic commonalities between these two languages have over time led scholars to the realisation that these (and numerous others) all have their roots in one common ancestor language. That ancestor is not spoken any more, is not attested in writings or inscriptions anywhere, and we only know it through our reconstructions that are based on the material we have from the (attested) daughter languages. As a non-attested ancestor of the Indo-European languages (so-called because they stretch geographically from India in the east to Europe in the west) it is referred to as *Proto*-Indo-European (or PIE for short). Each of the daughter languages is defined by the different ways in which the material from the mother language developed into it; thus the same PIE root gives us English *mother*, but Sanskrit *māt(a)r-*; thus both Sanskrit and English have the grammatical category of e.g. the *genitive case*, but express this category in formally different ways. In short, there are numerous inherited similarities between English and Sanskrit; when our existing knowledge of English may help us understand new Sanskrit material, the English will be discussed explicitly, too.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Notes for Teachers

An undergraduate-level course for complete beginners that meets four to five times a week will take about one academic year to work through this book. From around Chapter 34 on, material is introduced that will be encountered less frequently when reading Sanskrit texts; rather than covering it in the introductory year, one may thus consider coming back to it whenever a specific form or construction is first encountered in an intermediate/reading course.

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The book attempts to be as detailed as possible (partly so that students who wish to use it for self-study can do so). If you are trying to save in-class time, consider presenting only the necessary core of a topic and having your students read up on the surrounding information (such as links to already introduced material, or historical details) at home.

There are more exercises included in this book than can be covered in a normal one-year course. This was done so that, whenever something proves difficult, a student should be able to find as many exercises as they need to understand new material; whenever new material has been mastered, an exercise may simply be left uncompleted.

The Readings (at the end of each chapter from Chapter 6 on) were chosen so as to introduce students to actual Sanskrit, to represent a fair variety of genres (some had to be omitted because their language would have been too challenging for students in their first year) and to be self-contained and interesting in their own right. Often, they contain (annotated) material that is systematically introduced only in the following chapter; thus consider doing the Readings of one chapter when you are already going through the material of the next.

Some or all of the *sandhi* in the Reading passages up to Chapter 16 has been removed; note that this makes them unmetrical. (The same applies to various passages that have been slightly changed so as to make them intelligible to students at that point; that changes have been made is indicated by means of an ^{x}.)

The book introduces students to *devanāgarī* (the script Sanskrit is written in) right at the start, and then gives them seven chapters of parallel use of *devanāgarī* and transliteration to familiarise themselves with the script properly. To make sure no form is misread (and because there are textual editions solely in transliteration that the students may wish to use later on), both the Reference Grammar and Vocabulary in Appendix III are given in transliteration.

Notes for Students

Like all complex matters, Sanskrit is best studied with a teacher. While it is recommended that this book be used in a classroom context, it has been written specifically so that it *can* be used for self-study. If you do the latter, the most challenging element will be pacing and motivating yourself. Ideally, you should set yourself a certain topic to work through on a given day; but if the possible open-endedness of this discourages you, set yourself a time goal instead: decide to work for forty-five minutes or, on a busy day, for twenty minutes. The most important thing is to go on and work continuously. You can do more in fifteen minutes of focussed work than you might think.

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Before you start using this book, leaf through it. Read this chapter. Turn towards the **end of the book** and make a note of the **resources** available to you there: most importantly, there are lists (of conjunct consonants, *sandhi*, forms and vocabulary) that you will make reference to quite regularly; they are marked with separate grey tabs in the margins, but you may further want to add a sticky note or other bookmark. Directly preceding them, there are introductions to the Sanskrit texts from which this book presents excerpts, as well as brief overviews of Sanskrit metrics, Sanskrit grammatical terminology and Vedic Sanskrit (older than the Classical Sanskrit this book introduces you to), as well a reference list of all text passages cited in this book. These latter provide supplementary information that is not crucial, but well worth knowing about (the grammar you study does not stem from a context-less vacuum after all); they are likely to prove especially useful towards the end of your basic studies.

As you will see, this book contains a large number of **exercises** and both **sentences** and **passages for translation**. The exercises specifically review new forms; the sentences show you new material in context; the passages are meant to ease you into reading/translating longer texts and to expose you to a variety of Sanskrit literary genres and sources. It is *not* necessary to go through all exercises etc. before continuing on to the next chapter. Instead, you may find it helpful to return to remaining exercises before a test, or when reviewing material at any later stage.

STUDY TECHNIQUES

No matter how well one understands the patterns behind e.g. the numerous forms of Sanskrit nouns and verbs, the language will always remain memorisation-heavy. There are many different tricks and techniques that will help you manage the large amount of forms that you will have to memorise. The most frequent of these is the use of **flash cards**: write a Sanskrit word on one side and its translation on the other. Go through the cards and keep those that you have trouble with in an extra pile. Go through the extra pile repeatedly, putting cards into the first pile as they become familiar. Do this until none of the extra pile is left. (If you find this method effective, make flash cards also e.g. for noun or verb endings or to learn the characters of the *devanāgarī*.) See the section on the *Cambridge Introduction to Sanskrit* website below for online flash cards.

When you memorise words for corporeal things (such as a horse or an army or a village), **create a mental image** of this thing as you say the Sanskrit word aloud. **Recite forms out loud**, from top to bottom of a table, bottom to top, right to left or left to right. If you are a chess player, go through a table of noun forms etc. following e.g. the **Knight's Move** (two fields in one direction, one field sideways in either direction). If you have a visual memory, **colour code** your tables, e.g. by making all nominative case forms blue, all accusatives red, all instrumentals green etc. (–› Chapter 5 on nominative, accusative etc.). Perhaps you will find it helpful to make flash cards of verbs from

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different classes in different colours, too (–› Chapter 3 on verb classes). If you have any kind of recording device, **record yourself** reading out a table or a list of vocabulary, and listen to this recording a couple of times. Small **notes** put up **on a bathroom mirror** work surprisingly well. Some people prefer memorising just a set of grammatical endings; others find it easier to memorise a whole set of noun or verb forms; yet others like to memorise example phrases or sentences that contain the form(s) in question. Find out which one works best for you, and use it.

Finally, do not attempt to memorise too many words or forms at once. Set aside ten minutes to study ten words, or fifteen to study ten new words and review the ten you studied last time. Do this again for ten new words later in the day.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

Up to Chapter 36, this book contains all the materials you need for your studies, including a full vocabulary list (starting on p. 411 in the Appendices). By the time you reach Chapter 36, you will need to get a **dictionary**. A number of online dictionaries may be found at www.sanskrit-lexicon.uni-koeln.de. An overview of other online sources may be found at http://sanskritdocuments.org/dict.

Use of a regular dictionary is preferable, though, as that will allow you to see the context (related words, compounds, alternative forms) of any word you look up. Also, a printed dictionary will never encounter any problems displaying *devanāgarī* or transliteration or understanding which word you are searching for; and, of course, it can be used where a computer or the internet may not be available. A. A. Macdonell's *Practical Sanskrit Dictionary* is user-friendly, and, thanks to recent Indian reprints, both reasonably priced and readily available. It is highly recommended for use at the intermediate level. V. S. Apte's *Practical Sanskrit–English Dictionary* contains many more details than Macdonell, yet the *devanāgarī* typeface is considerably less legible than that in Macdonell (and there is no transliteration, should you prefer one). Monier Monier-Williams' *Sanskrit–English Dictionary* is initially less user-friendly; yet its scope and contents make it invaluable for serious Sanskrit study. These latter two are thus recommended for more advanced readers of Sanskrit texts.

The Reference Grammar (in Appendix III) provides a complete overview of regular *sandhi* (–› Chapter 11 on *sandhi*), and of noun and verb forms in Classical Sanskrit. Should you want to buy a full **grammar**, two good choices are *A Sanskrit Grammar* by William Dwight Whitney and A. A. Macdonell's *Sanskrit Grammar for Students*. Both include extensive discussion of irregular forms; and while Whitney covers both Classical Sanskrit and earlier stages of the language, Macdonell focuses on Classical Sanskrit, but includes a short and excellent summary of the differences between it and Vedic.

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Cambridge Introduction to Sanskrit Website

There are a number of sites with resources for learning Sanskrit. Links to these, as well as to flashcard sets made specifically for the vocabulary and other material in this book, may be found on www.cambridge-sanskrit.org. Feedback on this book may be sent to ruppel@cambridge-sanskrit.org.

FURTHER STUDY – LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

C. R. Lanman's *Sanskrit Reader* offers selections from a variety of Sanskrit textual genres, complemented by explanatory notes on each passage, as well as a complete vocabulary. W. Sargeant's edition of the *Bhagavad Gītā* and P. Scharf's edition of the *Rāmopākhyāna* (the summarised version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* contained within the *Mahābhārata*; –› Literature Introductions on pp. 382–4) offer one stanza per page, each with word-by-word translation, formal analysis and complete vocabulary. A. A. Macdonell's *A Vedic Reader for Students* and Hans Henrich Hock's *An Early Upaniṣadic Reader* offer a broad selection of samples from each genre. The Clay Sanskrit Library (NYU Press/JJL Foundation, 2005–9) includes a large variety of Sanskrit texts in transliteration and with facing translation. If you use these, try to understand the Sanskrit as best you can, and use the facing translation only to fill the gaps in your own translation. (Note also that they have transliteration conventions that differ slightly from those used elsewhere.)

A good way to learn more about the many different genres of Sanskrit literature is to refer to the relevant chapters in works such as J. Gonda's multi-volume *History of Indian Literature* (especially for technical and philosophical/religious literature), M. Krishnamachariar's *History of Classical Sanskrit Literature* (esp. on *kāvya*/court poetry) or A. A. Macdonell's *A History of Sanskrit Literature*. Furthermore, Macdonell's *Vedic Reader for Students* and H. H. Hock's *An Early Upaniṣadic Reader* contain good introductions to each genre, and J. Brockington's *The Sanskrit Epics* is a treasure trove of information. Whitney's *Sanskrit Grammar,* Lanman's *Reader*, all of Macdonell's works, as well as Krishnamachariar's *History*, are also available in pdf format online.

Unless otherwise noted, the original Sanskrit texts and English translations used in this book are those of the Clay Sanskrit Library (NYU Press/JJL Foundation, 2005–9).

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abl	ablative case
Abs	absolutive
Acc	accusative case
Act	active voice
Adj	adjective
Aor	aorist
Caus	causative
Cpd	compound
Dat	dative case
Du	dual number
f./Fem	feminine gender
Fut	future tense
Gen	genitive case
Ifc	'at end of compound'
Impf	imperfect tense
Impv	imperative mood
Ind	indicative mood
Indc	indeclinable form
Inf	infinitive
Instr	instrumental case
irreg.	irregular
lit.	literally
Loc	locative case
m./Masc	masculine gender
Mid	middle voice
Nom	nominative case
n./Ntr	neuter gender
Num	numeral
Pass	passive voice
Perf	perfect tense
Pl	plural number
Pot	potential mood
Pres	present tense
Pron	pronoun
Pron Adj	pronominal adjective
Ptc	participle
Sg	singular number
Voc	vocative case

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NOTES FOR THE READER

The asterisk * is used to mark forms that are not actually found, but are reconstructed for an earlier stage of the language.

[+] indicates an incorrect form. [x] behind the reference to a reading passage indicates this passage has been slightly changed from the original.

> Notes that appear indented and in grey give linguistic or other background information that you may find helpful, but that is not crucial to understanding the material.

For printable handouts of various tables and overviews, please refer to the *Cambridge Introduction to Sanskrit* website at www.cambridge-sanskrit.org.

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