

## CHAPTER 1

# Writing Sanskrit

Sanskrit is written in a very precise manner. For every sound, there is one sign, and each sign always represents the same sound. In a way, Sanskrit is thus easier to read and write than English, where, for example, there are several different ways of pronouncing the same letters (think of *thorough* vs. *through* vs. *tough*), and several different ways of writing the same sound (as in *meal*, *thief*, *see*, *receive*). The script Sanskrit is now commonly written in is known as the *devanāgarī*.

The meaning of this name is not quite clear. *nāgarī lipiḥ* means ‘urban script’. (The macrons (the lines over *ā* and *ī*) indicate long vowels. The word *lipiḥ* is regularly omitted.) Several related scripts were known under the name *nāgarī*. The name *devanāgarī* (*deva-* = ‘deity; divine’) is used for this particular script, perhaps because of its role in writing down texts of religious importance. The name of the language itself is based on the Sanskrit word *saṃskṛta-* ‘composed, perfected’; the name contrasts this language, used for religious and learned purposes, with the Prakrits, the everyday spoken languages (*prakṛta-* ‘natural, normal’).

Take a look at Table 1 on p. 11. It introduces you to four kinds of information: the individual *devanāgarī* characters; how they are transliterated, i.e. written with the alphabet used by, among other languages, English; how they are pronounced; and the order in which they are conventionally listed. (Note that that order diverges from that of the English alphabet; the system behind it is explained in Chapter 2.) This rather large amount of information is best approached in steps.

- **Look over the table to get a first impression.**
- **Look at the pronunciation hints for each sound. Say them out loud.**
- The list goes from left to right, top to bottom. A systematic explanation of labels such as ‘aspirated’ will be given in Chapter 2. A macron over a vowel (as in *ā* rather than *a*) indicates a long vowel.
- Note that, unless indicated otherwise (see p. 12), **the presence of the vowel *a* is assumed after any consonant.**
- English does not make a conscious distinction between **aspirated** and **unaspirated** sounds. Native speakers of English thus often find it difficult to differentiate between e.g. त *ta* and थ *tha*. Try to add a noticeable puff of air to each aspirated sound, and let the pronunciation hints guide you.

- Also, English does not contain any true **retroflex** sounds. They are similar to ‘dental’ sounds such as *t* and *d*, but the tongue touches the roof of the mouth further at the back. To pronounce them, curl your tongue back, then do the same as when you pronounce a *t* or a *d*. (The result is a sound often perceived as creating a (stereo-)‘typical’ accent in Indian speakers of English.)
- Many of the hints are approximations, and you will hear slightly different pronunciations from different speakers. Follow your teacher, but if you study on your own, remain close to these hints and consistent in your pronunciation, and you will be fine.

### STUDY THE SCRIPT

- Look at the general remarks on how to write *devanāgarī* characters (‘Writing single characters’, below). Try your hand at copying a few of them (maybe ten per session): write a line of *a*’s, a line of *ka*’s etc. Use the exercise sheets on pp. 366–72 of the book for your first attempts. <http://www.avashy.com/hindiscripttutor.htm> also helps.
- Make flash cards, one for each character, with the *devanāgarī* on one side and the transliteration on the other. Look at the cards with the *devanāgarī* side on top; pronounce each of the characters you see. Then turn all the flash cards over so that the ‘English’ side is on top. Take a piece of paper, write down the *devanāgarī* equivalent of what you see, and turn over each card to check. As always when using flash cards, put all those cards that you have had difficulties with into a separate pile and then go specifically through that pile. If you prefer online flash cards, go to the *Cambridge Introduction to Sanskrit* website, [www.cambridge-sanskrit.org](http://www.cambridge-sanskrit.org). And most importantly: do not worry if you find all of this difficult at first. You will be reading *devanāgarī* a lot and will get used to it soon.

### WRITING SINGLE CHARACTERS

When you look over the list of characters in Table 1, you will see that many contain a horizontal and/or a vertical line. In addition to these, there is a distinctive element that identifies the character. It is common practice to start writing a character on the left (which usually means starting with the distinctive element), then to add the vertical line – if there is one – and to add the top horizontal line last.

Finally, note that the *devanāgarī* script does **not have capital letters**.

**Note:** The vowel signs in Table 1 are used only at the beginning of a word when no other consonant precedes. The signs for vowels in other positions are given in Table 2. Also note that the *r* and *l* sounds may function both as vowels and as consonants in Sanskrit. When they are used as vowels, they are written in transliteration as *r̄* (long *r̄*) and *l̄*. You will see the difference in usage when reading actual words in the coming chapters.

Table 1: *The devanāgarī characters*

अ a as in <i>but</i>	आ ā as in <i>father</i>	इ i as in <i>bee</i> , but shorter	ई ī long vowel as in <i>bee</i>	उ u as in <i>put</i>	ऊ ū as in <i>fool</i>	VOWELS
ऋ ṛ short vocalic <i>r</i> , as in <i>father</i> (US pronunciation)	ॠ ṝ like <i>r</i> , but longer	ऌ ḷ short vocalic <i>l</i> , as in <i>table</i>	(ॡ ḹ*) like <i>l</i> , but longer			
ए e long vowel, similar to the first e in <i>where</i>	ऐ ai as in <i>my</i>	ओ o long vowel, as in <i>more</i>	औ au as in <i>loud</i>			

kinds of stops:	unvoiced unspirated	unvoiced aspirated	voiced unspirated	voiced aspirated	nasal	CONSONANTS
velar stops	क ka unspirated <i>k</i> , as in <i>ski</i>	ख kha aspirated <i>k</i> , as in <i>cut</i>	ग ga hard <i>g</i> , as in <i>golf</i>	घ gha aspirated <i>g</i> , as in <i>egghead</i>	ङ ṅa 'velar' <i>n</i> , as in <i>sing</i>	
palatal stops	च ca unspirated palatal, as in <i>charm</i>	छ cha aspirated <i>c</i> , as in <i>ranch house</i>	ज ja as in <i>jam</i>	झ jha aspirated <i>j</i> (rare); as in <i>sponge holder</i>	ञ ña like <i>-n-</i> before consonants, <i>-ny-</i> before vowels	
retroflex stops	ट ṭa retroflex <i>t</i> : see note above	ठ ṭha retroflex aspirated <i>t</i>	ड ḍa retroflex <i>d</i>	ढ ḍha retroflex aspirated <i>d</i>	ण ṇa retroflex <i>n</i>	
dental stops	त ta unspirated <i>t</i> , as in <i>still</i>	थ tha aspirated <i>t</i> , as in <i>hot-</i> <i>headed</i> ; <i>not like</i> <i>English -th-</i>	द da as in <i>dance</i>	ध dha aspirated <i>d</i> , as in <i>mad-house</i>	न na as in <i>name</i>	
labial stops	प pa unspirated <i>p</i> , as in <i>sports</i>	फ pha aspirated <i>p</i> , as in <i>upheaval</i>	ब ba as in <i>but</i>	भ bha aspirated <i>b</i> , as in <i>clubhouse</i>	म ma as in <i>mother</i>	
semi-vowels	य ya as in <i>yes</i>	र ra as in <i>run</i>	ल la as in <i>leave</i>	व va as in <i>water</i>		
sibilants and <i>h</i>	श śa palatal <i>s</i> : as in <i>ship</i>	ष ṣa retroflex <i>s</i> : further back in the mouth than ś: as in <i>wash</i>	स sa dental <i>s</i> as in <i>sing</i>	ह ha as in <i>house</i>		

\* This sound does not actually appear, but is conventionally listed in this place to complete/balance the system. It will not be discussed further in this book.

### Similar Characters

The following pairs of characters look very similar and may thus initially cause confusion:

भ *bha* and म *ma*    ब *ba* and व *va*    थ *tha* and य *ya*    ख *kha* and रव *ra-va*  
 घ *gha* and ध *dha*    प *pa* and ष *ṣa*    ङ *ṅa* and ङ *ḍa*    उ *u* and ज *ja*

If you remember that each of these can be confused with another sign, it will be easier to notice any mistakes you may have made reading words that contain them (and an unknown *thoga* will turn out to be *yoga*, etc.)

#### *Devanāgarī* Mnemonics

As you have seen by now, the *devanāgarī* script consists of a large number of signs that to most learners are completely new. When memorising them, break them up into elements that you can recognise more easily. अ *a*, for example, is like the number 3 connected to a capital T. इ *i* consists of the top line, a small connector and a capital S with a squiggle at the bottom. उ *u* looks similar to a number 3 with a flat top line and a slight extension at the bottom. ग *ga*, in addition to the line at the top and the downward stroke shared by so many *devanāgarī* characters, has as its characteristic element something that looks like a golf club; this may also help you remember that ग *ga* always represents a hard g (as in e.g. *golf*), never a soft one (as in e.g. *gin*). Different mnemonics work for different people; come up with as many of them as you find useful.

You may now do **Exercise 1**.

### WRITING WORDS

#### a) Combining Consonants and Vowels

There is one distinct difference between *devanāgarī* and the alphabet used by e.g. English: in English writing, all letters are equal, and written one after the other. Yet in *devanāgarī*, there is a difference between the representation of consonants and that of vowels: the ‘main’ signs represent consonants. The sign for the vowel following a consonant is then added to the right, to the left, above or below the consonant sign. There is **no sign indicating the vowel a**: given that this is the most frequent vowel in Sanskrit, it apparently seemed most economical to have its presence ‘assumed’ whenever no other vowel was explicitly indicated. The absence of a vowel after a consonant is indicated by the *virāma* (literally ‘stop, end’), a small diagonal stroke below the consonant sign: e.g. क् *k* (vs. क *ka* from Table 1). For examples of vowels other than *a*, compare:

क् *k* + ी *ī* = की *kī*      क् *k* + ृ *r* = कृ *kr*

Table 2: Combining consonants and vowels

क	ka	का	kā	कि	ki	की	kī	कु	ku	कू	kū	कृ	kr̥	कृ	kṝ
कृ	kṝ	(कृ)	kṝ)	के	ke	कै	kai	को	ko	कौ	kau	कः	kaḥ	कं	kaṃ

Notice particularly the sign for **short i**, which is always *added before the consonant after which it is pronounced*:

$$\text{क् } k + \text{ि } i = \text{कि } ki$$

Table 2 presents an overview of all such vowel signs.

Generally, vowel signs look identical no matter which consonant they are combined with. Yet there are two noteworthy exceptions: the signs for *u/ū* and *r/ṝ* are usually attached to the bottom of the vertical line of the consonant sign. Yet, by convention, the vowels in *hr̥* and *ru/rū* are placed *within* the consonant signs:

$$\text{हृ } hr̥ \quad \text{रु } ru \quad \text{रृ } rṝ$$

The vowel signs just described (the ‘**dependent**’ vowel signs) may only be used when the vowel follows upon a consonant. When a vowel has no preceding consonant sign to attach to, as may be possible at the beginning of a word, we have to use the ‘**independent**’ or **initial vowel signs** (e.g. अ, आ etc.) listed at the top of Table 1.

You may now do **Exercise 2**.

### b) *Visarga* and *Anusvāra*

Note the two signs in the bottom right-hand corner of Table 2. *-ḥ* and *-ṃ* do not appear at the beginning of words; hence there are no independent signs for them. *-ḥ*, the *visarga*, is often pronounced similar to the *-ch* in German *Bach* or Scottish *loch*, but slightly weaker; you may also hear it pronounced like a standard *-h-*, with a weak repetition of the preceding vowel (making e.g. नरः *naraḥ* ‘man’ [naraha]). *-ṃ*, the *anusvāra*, is not a sound of its own, but nasalises the preceding vowel, making e.g. *-aṃ* sound approximately like French *grand*.

The following words exemplify the aspects of the *devanāgarī* described so far:

महाराजः *mahārājaḥ* ‘great king’

Note that the short *-a-* in the first and fourth syllables is not explicitly indicated.

हिमालयः *Himālayaḥ*  
(the mountain range)

Note that the sign for the *-i-* is written before the sign for the *-h-*, but pronounced after it.

गुरुः *guruḥ* ‘teacher’

Note that the *-u-* looks different when combined with *-r-*.

अशोकः *Aśokaḥ* (an Indian emperor)

Note the form of the vowel *a-* at the beginning of the word.

हंसः *haṃsaḥ* ‘goose’ or ‘swan’

Note the dot indicating the *anusvāra* in *haṃ-*.

### c) Combining Consonants

Finally, we need to look at **conjunct consonants**. In a word such as महाराजः *mahārājaḥ* ‘great king’, every consonant is followed by a vowel. But in a word such as *maṇḍalaḥ* ‘circle’, the *-ṇ-* is directly followed by a *-ḍ-*. If we wrote this as \*मण्डलः, it would spell \**maṇaḍalaḥ*.

One way of indicating that there is no vowel following upon a consonant is to employ the *virāma* (see above), yet, by convention, this is done almost exclusively at the end of words whose last sound is a consonant. Within words, however, the **signs for individual consonants are linked**. Usually, this is done by omitting the right-hand vertical element of the first sign:

ण् *n* + ङ् *ṅ* = ञ् *-ṅ-* मण्डलः *maṇḍalaḥ* ‘circle’

The same happens in the word *ātmā* ‘soul’:

त् *t* + म् *m* = त्म् *-tm-* आत्मा *ātmā* ‘soul, self’

This also works in a combination of three or more consonants:

त् *t* + म् *m* + य् *y* = त्म्य् *-tmy-* as in माहात्म्यम् *māhātmyam* ‘magnanimity, generosity’

Sometimes, a letter does not have a vertical element, or cannot be combined with the next letter for some other reason. In these cases, letters may be made smaller and stacked on top of one another. Some examples:

क् *k* + क *ka* = क्क *kka*    द् *d* + म *ma* = द्म *dma*    द् *d* + भ *bha* = द्भ *dbha*

द् *d* + य *ya* = द्द्य *dya*    न् *n* + न *na* = न्न *nna*    प् *p* + त *ta* = प्त *pta*

Some conjunct consonant signs cannot be recognised on the basis of the regular forms of the single consonants and must thus be memorised. They are the following:

- ***r* before other consonants**: a small hook in the top right-hand corner of the following syllable sign (consonant + vowel): अर्जुनः *Arjunaḥ* (name); दुर्योगः *duryogaḥ* ‘crime’. Do not confuse this sign with the (identical-looking) hook on the sign for initial *ī*, ई.

- **r after other consonants:** a small diagonal line in lower half of adjacent consonant: क्रोधः *krodhaḥ* ‘anger’; भ्राता *bhrātā* ‘brother’; especially in combination with -t-: अत्र *atra* ‘here’ (in some other fonts, this appears as त्र).
- **ś before some other consonants:** a small loop in top left corner: अश्वः *aśvaḥ* ‘horse’; पश्चात् *paścāt* ‘after’; श्री *śrī* ‘beauty; happiness’
- **kṣ क्ष** as in क्षेत्रम् *kṣetram* ‘field’
- **jñ ज्ञ** as in ज्ञानम् *jñānam* ‘knowledge’
- **tt त्त** as in उत्तमः *uttamaḥ* ‘highest’
- **kt क्त** as in भक्तिः *bhaktiḥ* ‘devotion’ (in other fonts, this appears as क्त).

A list of all common conjunct consonants is given in larger print on pp. 385–6 in the Appendices. It may look daunting, but you will soon find that you hardly need it: the single elements of most conjuncts are easily recognisable. Only a handful of characters change their shape noticeably when combined with others; see the list above and in the Nutshell below. These are the only elements that need to be individually memorised (if you find flash cards helpful, make cards of these conjuncts). If you want to be particularly thorough, go through the list while covering the transliterations with your hand. Make your own list, or set of flash cards, of all the conjuncts you do not recognise. Go over that list again.

THE NUTSHELL									
To write words:					Conjunct consonants				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Take a consonant sign.</li> <li>– Add a vowel sign before, after, above or below it.</li> <li>– If a consonant follows instead of a vowel, combine the two signs to form a conjunct consonant.</li> <li>– If a word begins with a vowel, use an independent vowel sign.</li> </ul>					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Consonant signs combine and change their form when two consonants stand directly next to each other.</li> <li>– Often, consonant signs are combined by omission of the vertical stroke of the first consonant.</li> <li>– If that is not possible, one may be written on top of the other.</li> </ul>				
त्र/त्र <i>tra</i>	श्व <i>śva</i>	श्च <i>śca</i>	श्र <i>śra</i>	क्ष <i>kṣa</i>	ज्ञ <i>jña</i>	त्त <i>tta</i>	क्त/क्त <i>kta</i>	द् <i>dr</i>	द्य <i>dya</i>

## REVIEW QUESTIONS

(If you cannot remember an answer, go back and find it in the text.)

- 1) How are the following four written in *devanāgarī*: *ta, tu, ti, t?*
- 2) What are conjunct consonant signs? When are they needed?
- 3) List all Sanskrit vowels.
- 4) Why are there two sets of vowel signs (independent and dependent) in *devanāgarī*?
- 5) What are *virāma*, *visarga* and *anusvāra*?

## EXERCISES

- 1) Say out loud the following syllables and transliterate them into Roman (i.e. English) script.

- a) त क फ प ष अ म च थ न इ र
- b) स म श ऋ उ ऊ ज फ ब भ न त
- c) ष व ह ट ङ ई भ ध घ ऐ ल स
- d) औ घ ल त न थ य ध ब व श ष

- 2) Say out loud the following syllables and transliterate them into Roman script.

- a) ने य मा रु लि अ धु वा फू कि ढै फु
- b) गौ धी डे मु घो थु टा छी मृ ठ उ बौ
- c) दा तृ ओ ढो जा प ह भै दो दौ द छे
- d) का चू डि बृ ते द रु जी गे इ च हु

- 3) Pronounce the following words and write them down transliterated into Roman script. If you do not recognise a consonant combination, look for it in the reference list (pp. 385–6).

- a) नरः अदितिः कर्म देवः उषाः शिवः आयुर्वेदः एकाय सरस्वती नाम  
अवतारः भारतः नमस्ते अग्निः प्रियौ आत्मा राक्षसः भगवद्गीता चक्राणि मनुः
- b) कृष्णः देवी गणेशः रामः कलियुगम् लक्ष्मी मिलम् मुनिः पूजा  
ऋग्वेदः हनुमान् शान्तिः तन्त्रम् योगी अमृता ब्राह्मणः इतिहासः महात्मा  
पुत्रैः संसारः निर्वाणम् पण्डितः आश्रमः ईश्वरेभ्यः संस्कृतम्
- c) सिंहः स्वामी विष्णुः आचार्यः महायानम् ऋषिः वाक्षु अर्हः इष्टम् अन्नम्  
उक्त्वा अञ्जलिः गुप्तः अक्षः गन्तुम् यज्ञः अश्वः स्वस्तिः पत्सु क्व
- d) वाग्भिः उत्तमः उक्तम् अत्र वत्सः स्त्री बोधिसत्त्वः इत्था वाक्यम्  
अद्य पद्भिः तत्तत् रात्या लब्धायै मन्त्रम् विद्युत् बुद्धः ब्रह्म



4) Transliterate the following words into *devanāgarī*.

<i>guruḥ</i>	lit. 'heavy', i.e. important → 'important one' = 'teacher'
<i>Rāmāyaṇam, Mahābhārataṃ</i>	the two big Indian epics
<i>Rāmaḥ</i>	hero of the <i>Rāmāyaṇa</i> ('Rāma's Journey')
<i>Sītā</i>	Rāma's wife
<i>yogaḥ</i>	yoga
<i>Upaniṣad</i>	name of a literary genre
<i>Aśokaḥ</i>	great Indian emperor of the third century BC
<i>Rādhā</i>	Kṛṣṇa's beloved
<i>somaḥ</i>	an intoxicating substance used in Vedic rituals
<i>Hastināpuram</i>	a city in northern India
<i>svayaṃvaraḥ</i>	'self-choice', a ceremony at which a woman may choose her husband
<i>Kurukṣetram</i>	'the Kuru Field', where the central battle of the <i>Mahābhārata</i> takes place
<i>Indraḥ</i>	a god
<i>mātā</i>	'mother'
<i>pramāṇam</i>	'measure'
<i>mokṣaḥ</i>	'release, liberation'
<i>maitrī</i>	'friendship'
<i>nṛpatiḥ</i>	'leader, king'
<i>saṃskṛtam</i>	'Sanskrit', lit. 'put together, perfected'
<i>vyāghraḥ</i>	'tiger'
<i>Kāmasūtram</i>	'Love Guide', a treatise on human interaction
<i>Samjayaḥ</i>	the narrator of the <i>Bhagavad-Gītā</i>
<i>Kālidāsaḥ</i>	a famous poet
<i>dharmah</i>	religious duty

5) Some reading: the *Mahābhārata* (by far the longer of the two great Indian epics) describes itself.

यत् इह अस्ति तत् अन्यत्र यत् न इह अस्ति न तत् क्वचित्  
 what here is that elsewhere what not here is not that anywhere

'What is here, that (may also be) elsewhere. What is not here, that (also is) not anywhere else.'  
 (*Mahābhārata* 1.56.34)

Combining the words according to the rules of *sandhi* (Chapters 11, 13 and 16), one arrives at the normally quoted form of this sentence:

यदिहास्ति तदन्यत्र यत्रेहास्ति न तत्क्वचित्

## CHAPTER 2

## The System of Sanskrit Sounds

While you are still learning to write the *devanāgarī* characters, read through this chapter. It offers more details on pronunciation and introduces you to some technical terminology concerning the sounds of Sanskrit. Our focus is on studying the Sanskrit language itself, yet you will see throughout your study why it makes sense to not just know which sounds Sanskrit contains, but also what the relationships between these sounds are.

For example, the traditional order of the *devanāgarī* signs as laid down by the ancient Sanskrit grammarians is based on those relationships.

Table 3: Linguistic labels of the Sanskrit sounds

VOWELS	simple	a ā i ī u ū ṛ ṝ ḷ (Ī)
	complex	e ai o au

CONSONANTS	Stops and Nasal	velar	unvoiced unaspirated	unvoiced aspirated	voiced unaspirated	voiced aspirated	nasal
		k	kh	g	gh	ṅ	
		palatal	c	ch	j	jh	ñ
		retroflex	ṭ	ṭh	ḍ	ḍh	ṇ
		dental	t	th	d	dh	n
	labial	p	ph	b	bh	m	
	Semivowels	y r l v					
	Sibilants	ś ṣ s					
		h					

This order of Sanskrit sounds works along three principles: it goes from simple to complex; it goes from the back to the front of the mouth; and it groups similar sounds together.

**First come the vowels, then the consonants.** Vowels are ‘simpler’ than consonants as they can easily be pronounced on their own, while consonants usually need the help of a vowel to be pronounced. Think of how you pronounce *e* and *b*: when you pronounce the vowel *e*, you just say *e*, whereas if you pronounce the consonant *b*, what you say will sound more like the word *be*, i.e. you add an *e* to the *b*-sound itself. That is why *b* is counted among the ‘consonants’, literally those ‘that sound along, whose sound is accompanied by another’. **Among themselves, both the vowels and the consonants are ordered according to where in the mouth they are pronounced, going from back to front.**

## VOWELS

*a* is pronounced in the low back of the mouth, *i* is pronounced higher up, *u* then is pronounced with a rounding of your lips and thus, in a way, further to the front of the mouth. Next there are the vowel (or ‘vocalic’) forms of *r* and *l*, written in transliteration as *ṛ* and *ḷ*. Each sound is given first in its short, then in its long variant: *a ā i ī u ū ṛ ṝ ḷ ḹ* (ḹ). All these are known as the **simple vowels**.

They are followed by the **complex vowels**, *e ai o au*. At an earlier stage of the language, *e* and *o* actually were *\*ai* and *\*au*, and current *ai* and *au* once were *\*āi* and *\*āu*. Knowing that *e ai o au* were once *\*ai \*āi \*au \*āu* allows us to understand not only why all four of these are known as ‘complex’ vowels (all of them once actually were vowel combinations or ‘diphthongs’), but also to see that the pattern of ‘short vowel, then long vowel’ that we saw in *a ā i ī* etc. is maintained here, too. All four complex vowels count as long.

## CONSONANTS

### a) Stops

Among the consonants, we first get the **stops**. Their name derives from the fact that, in order to pronounce them, we *stop* and then release the flow of air at some point in our mouth. First come the velar stops or **velars**, formed by briefly stopping the air in the back of our throats (at the so-called *velum*). Then come the **palatals** (the tongue touches the *hard palate*, or roof of the mouth), the **retroflex stops** (tongue ‘retroflexed’, i.e. curled back and touching the roof of the mouth), the **dentals** (tongue touches teeth; *dent-* = Latin ‘tooth’), and the **labials** (lower and upper lips touch; *labia* = Latin ‘lip’).

In each of these ‘places of articulation’ we find several different stops. They are traditionally listed in the order of **unvoiced unaspirated – voiced unaspirated – unvoiced aspirated – voiced aspirated**, thus in a way proceeding from ‘simple’ to ‘complex’. ‘Voiced’ means that the vocal cords vibrate

when the sound is pronounced: put a finger on your throat and say the letters *d* and *t*. When you say *d*, you will feel a vibration, which is absent when you say *t*. This vibration is what we call *voice*. Sounds that have it are called ‘voiced’; those that do not, ‘unvoiced’.

Alternatively, as English never aspirates its voiced stops, you can try the following method: hold your hand flat in front of your mouth and say ‘ta’ and ‘da’ (or ‘ka’ and ‘ga’, etc.). Whenever you feel a strong puff of air, you can know that a stop is unvoiced; where the puff of air is weak, the stop is voiced.

The difference between aspirated and unaspirated sounds is more difficult to explain because English does not consciously make this distinction. Basically, ‘aspirated’ means that a sound is accompanied by air. Hold your hand in front of your mouth and say the word *pot*. The puff of air that you feel emerging when you pronounce the *p* is its *aspiration*. You find an almost unaspirated *p* in the word *spot*: notice there is nearly no puff of air accompanying that *p*. You should try to make this kind of distinction between all pairs of aspirated and unaspirated stops. If, like most native speakers of English, you find this difficult, pronounce Sanskrit *p* as you would the *p* in *pot*, and then add a more noticeable aspiration to pronounce *ph*, *kh* etc.

**Three things to note:** One, Sanskrit *th* must not be confused with the English *th* in words such as *the* or *thanks*. Parallel to other aspirated stops, *th* is pronounced as a *t* with a puff of air accompanying it. Two, even though aspirated stops are transliterated into English with two letters (as *kh*, *gh*, *ch*, etc.), they are one sound only. And finally, as English has no aspirated voiced stops (such as *gh*, *bh*), don’t worry if you find them difficult to pronounce at first. Follow the pronunciation hints in Chapter 1, and you will soon be comfortable with them.

### b) Nasals

After each series of stops there are the respective **nasals**, so called because the pathway from the oral to the nasal cavity at the back of our mouth is open when they are pronounced. Other than that, they are parallel to their corresponding stops: the velar nasal is pronounced in the same place as the velar stops, the palatal nasal as the palatal stops, and so on.

### c) Semivowels/Glides

Next come the remaining consonants, once again ordered according to where in the mouth they are pronounced. First, there are the sounds that have vowel equivalents: *-y-*, *-r-*, *-l-* and *-v-*. They correspond to the vowels *-i/-ī-*, *-ṛ/-ṛī-*, *-l-* and *-u/-ū-*: whenever these vowels come to stand before a vowel other than themselves, they change into their consonantal forms (thus, *i* changes into *y* (e.g. *i + a → ya*), *u* into *v*, *ṛ* into *r*, and *l* into *l*; you will see numerous examples

of this from Chapter 7 onwards). These sounds are called **glides, liquids** or **semivowels** (literally ‘half-vowels’).

#### d) Sibilants and *h*

Next come the three kinds of **sibilant**, or *s*-sound: the palatal ś, the retroflex ṣ, and the dental s. (Note that they are listed in the same order as the corresponding stops.) Finally, there is *h*, which is pronounced more or less as *h* is in English. The sound is voiced (unlike in English, where *h* is unvoiced), yet an unvoiced pronunciation is predominant now.

**Note:** Do not confuse the *h* with *visarga* (*ḥ*), in spite of how similarly they are transliterated into English.

#### USE OF THIS CHAPTER FOR REFERENCE

At this point, the information in this chapter may seem superfluous; yet later on it will be very useful to understand the systematics just outlined. Understanding the traditional order of the sounds/letters makes memorising it easier (and you will need to know this order when you use a dictionary or word list). Yet more importantly, it will help you understand the relations between various words and word forms: in Sanskrit, numerous words are formed from the same base. For example, based on √भज् *bhaj* (a verbal ‘root’, thus marked with the root symbol √ and properly introduced in Chapter 3) meaning ‘to allot, give to; to honour, worship’, we find words such as -भाज्- *-bhāj-* ‘worshipping’, भाग- *bhāga-* ‘portion, allotment’, भक्ति- *bhakti-* ‘giving out; worship’, and many others. In these related forms, we see that a **palatal consonant appears as its velar counterpart** (*-bhāj-* vs. *bhāga-*), and a **voiced consonant appears as its voiceless counterpart** (*bhāga-* vs. *bhakti-*) before another voiceless sound. Both of these correspondences occur very frequently. Also, knowing about the **relationship between the vowels *u/ū* and their consonantal counterpart *v***, we shall see how the *-ū-* in the verbal root भू- *bhū-* ‘to be’ and its semivocalic equivalent, *-v-*, in the verb form भवति *bhavati* ‘he/she/it is’ correspond (→ Chapter 7 for more details on this). When we are familiar with the **links between simple and complex vowels**, we understand how words such as the root चोर- *cora-* ‘thief’ and चौर्य- *caurya-* ‘robbery’ can be formed from the root √चुर् *cur* ‘to take, steal’. In short, we gain a better *understanding*, rather than just *knowledge*, of the Sanskrit language. We also greatly decrease the amount of vocabulary we shall have to memorise.

More detailed discussion of the ways in which sounds correspond to each other can be found in Chapters 7 (vowel gradation), 11, 13 and 16 (*sandhi*), and 17 (noun formation, especially *vṛddhi* derivatives).

## REVIEW QUESTIONS

- 1) What is the systematic difference between consonants and vowels?
- 2) Why are all of *e ai o au* called 'complex vowels'?
- 3) What are 'stops'?
- 4) In the order of Sanskrit sounds as given in Table 3, what do the stops standing in the same line have in common? What do those standing in the same column have in common?
- 5) What is the palatal counterpart of *k*?
- 6) What is the voiceless counterpart of *d*?
- 7) How do you pronounce Sanskrit *th* and *ph*?
- 8) List all velar stops.

## READING EXERCISES

- 1) Identify and transliterate the following conjunct consonants. Example: स्त *sta*
  - a) ग्न ज्य ल प्त ब्र ष श्य स्र ष्म च
  - b) स्थ ष्ण र्श न्म च ख्य र्द ज्ञ
  - c) श्र ग्न ण्ड व्य त्स स्य न्य र्ज
  - d) र्त क्ष त्प र्भ द्र न्द्र च ष्ठ स्त
  - e) क्त ज्ञ त्व न्द प्र र्म श्च ण्य
  - f) भ्य स्त्र ल्क ल्य ध्य श्च क्ष्य
  - g) स्व ष्य ब्र र्ध प्य न्त त्म च्य
  - h) च्च त्त त्य न्व र्थ र्य दृ स्य ह्य
  - i)ञ्च क्र द्र न्य र्ण च र्व ष्ठ स्म
  - j) र्ह न्न च क्य स्त्व द्रञ्च र्ग ह्य ज्ञ
- 2) Transliterate the following words:
  - a) गच्छति ततः गृहम् क्षलियः ज्ञानम् स्निह्यति युद्धम् तिष्ठति पृच्छति
  - b) तुष्यति द्रवति राज्ञी कृत्स्नम् चन्द्रः विद्युत् कृत्वा सुहृत् क्षुद्र अद्य
  - c) क्रोधः अश्वः श्री शक्रोति वृणोति द्वेष्टि गृह्णाति विश्व अन्योन्य श्रुत्वा
  - d) बन्धुः बुद्धिः शत्रुः दृष्टिः अश्रु कीर्तिः स्नानम् अन्तरिक्षगः हृच्छयः पृथिवी
  - e) जितेन्द्रिय अनन्तरत्नप्रभव बलहाकच्छेदविभक्तरागा लाङ्गूलविक्षेपविसर्पिशोभ

(The long words in e) are compound nouns (→ Chapter 14) and taken from a work by the poet Kālidāsa.)

3) Transliterate the following words into *devanāgarī*.

- |   |                                     |                              |
|---|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| a) <i>kumāraḥ</i> ('young man, prince') | b) <i>avatarati</i> ('he descends') | c) <i>hastī</i> ('elephant') |
| <i>chāyā</i> ('shade, shadow')          | <i>uvāca</i> ('he said')            | <i>darśanam</i> ('sight')    |
| <i>amara</i> ('immortal')               | <i>āśā</i> ('hope')                 | <i>anya</i> ('other')        |
| <i>puram</i> ('city')                   | <i>sakhī</i> ('female friend')      | <i>svalpa</i> ('small')      |
| <i>paurah</i> ('citizen, city-dweller') | <i>pitarau</i> ('parents')          | <i>śighra</i> ('fast')       |

## 4) Read and transliterate the following.

- a) अर्जुनः उवाच  
Arjuna said:

चञ्चलम् हि मनः कृष्ण प्रमाथि बलवत् दृढम् ।  
unstable indeed (the) mind o Kṛṣṇa troubling powerful violent

तस्य अहम् निग्रहम् मन्ये वायोः इव सुदुष्करम् ॥  
of it I (the) restraining (I) think of the wind like very-difficult-to-do

श्रीभगवान् उवाच  
(The) Blessed Lord said:

असंशयम् महाबाहो मनः दुर्निग्रहम् चलम् ।  
doubtlessly o great-armed (strong) one (the) mind hard-to-restrain moving

अभ्यासेन तु कौन्तेय वैराग्येण च गृह्यते ॥  
through practice but o Kunti-son through indifference and it is restrained

'Arjuna said: "The mind, indeed, is unstable, o Kṛṣṇa, troubling, powerful [and] violent. Restraining it [lit. 'the restraining of it], I think, is like restraining [lit. 'the restraining of'] the wind: very difficult to do." – The Blessed Lord [Kṛṣṇa] said: "Doubtlessly, o strong one [Arjuna], the mind is hard to restrain and moving/unsteady. But through practice, o son of Kunti, and by indifference (to worldly matters) it is/can be restrained."

(*Bhagavad-Gītā* 6.34–5)

- b) यद्यत् आचरति श्रेष्ठः तत्तत् एव इतरः जनः ।  
 whatever does the best (person) that(ever) also another person  
 स यत् प्रमाणम् कुरुते लोकः तत् अनुवर्तते ॥  
 he what measure makes the world that follows

‘Whatever the best person does, that another person does (or: other people do), too.  
 What standard he sets, that the world follows.’

(*Bhagavad-Gītā* 3.21)

- c) वैरूप्यम् च न ते देहे कामरूपधरः तथा ।  
 ugliness and no your in the body desired-form-holding thus  
 भविष्यसि रणे अरीणाम् विजेता च न संशयः ॥  
 you will be in battle of enemies conqueror and no doubt

‘And there [will be] no ugliness in your body; also, you will possess any form you wish  
 [lit. ‘you will be desired-form-holding’], and you will conquer [your] enemies in battle.  
 [There is] no doubt [about this].’

(Brahmā making a promise to Rāvaṇa,  
*Mahābhārata* 3.259.24)