

Sanskrit

Sanskrit (IAST: *Ṣaṃskṛtam*; IPA: [s̪ə̌skr̩t̪əm]^[a]) is the primary liturgical language of Hinduism; a philosophical language of Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism, and Jainism; and a literary language and lingua franca for the educated of ancient and medieval South Asia.^[6] As a result of transmission of Hindu and Buddhist culture to Southeast Asia and parts of Central Asia, it was also a language of high culture in some of these regions during the early-medieval era.^{[7][8]} When Sanskrit had stopped being used as a main language and *lingua franca* it was only spoken and used by people of the higher class. It was also used as a court language in some kingdoms of South Asia after Sanskrit became a language for the upper class.^[9]

Sanskrit is a standardized dialect of Old Indo-Aryan, having originated in the second millennium BCE as Vedic Sanskrit and tracing its linguistic ancestry back to Proto-Indo-Iranian and Proto-Indo-European.^[10] As the oldest Indo-European language for which substantial written documentation exists, Sanskrit holds a prominent position in Indo-European studies.^[11] The body of Sanskrit literature encompasses a rich tradition of poetry and drama as well as scientific, technical, philosophical and religious texts. The compositions of Sanskrit were orally transmitted for much of its early history by methods of memorization of exceptional complexity, rigor, and fidelity.^{[12][13]} Thereafter, variants and derivatives of the Brahmi script came to be used.

Sanskrit is normally written in the Devanagari script but other scripts continue to be used.^[4] It is today one of the 22 languages listed in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India, which mandates the Indian government to develop the language. It continues to be widely used as a ceremonial language in Hindu religious rituals and Buddhist practice in the form of hymns and chants.

Contents

Name

Variants

- Vedic Sanskrit
- Classical Sanskrit

Contemporary usage

- As a spoken language
- In official use
- Contemporary literature and patronage
- In music
- In mass media
- In liturgy
- Symbolic usage

Historical usage

Sanskrit	
<i>Ṣaṃskṛtam</i> संस्कृतम्	
 <i>Ṣaṃskṛtam</i> in Devanagari script	
Pronunciation	[s̪ə̌skr̩t̪əm] pronunciation
Region	South Asia parts of Southeast Asia
Era	c. 2nd millennium BCE – 600 BCE (Vedic Sanskrit ^[1]), after which it gave rise to the Middle Indo-Aryan languages. Continues as a liturgical language (Classical Sanskrit).
Revival	 A few attempts at revival have been reported in Indian and Nepalese newspapers. India: 14,135 Indians claimed Sanskrit to be their mother tongue in the 2001 Census of India^[2] Nepal: 1,669 Nepalis in 2011 Nepal census reported Sanskrit as their mother tongue.^[3]
Language family	Indo-European - Indo-Iranian - Indo-Aryan Sanskrit
Early form	Vedic Sanskrit
Writing system	Devanagari (Official) Also written in various Brahmic scripts.^[4]
Language codes	
ISO 639-1	sa

Origin and development
Standardisation by Panini
Coexistence with vernacular languages
Decline

ISO 639-2	san
ISO 639-3	san
Glottolog	sans1269 ^[5]

Public education and popularisation

Adult and continuing education
School curricula
In the West
Universities
European scholarship
British attitudes

Phonology

Writing system
Romanisation

Grammar

Influence on other languages
Indic languages
Interaction with other languages
In popular culture

See also

Further reading

Notes

References

External links

Name

The Sanskrit verbal adjective *sāṃskṛta-* may be translated as "refined, elaborated".^[14]

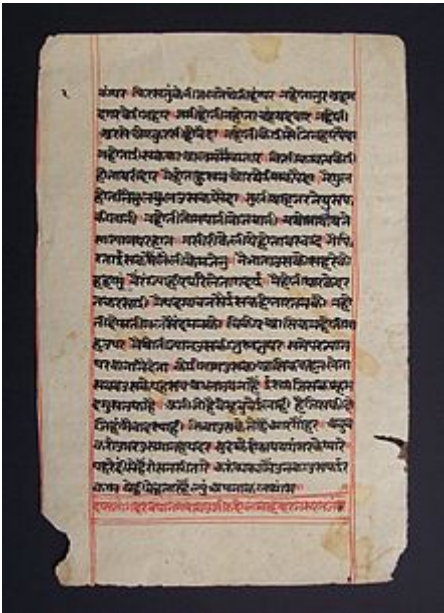
As a term for refined or elaborated speech, the adjective appears only in Epic and Classical Sanskrit in the *Manusmṛti* and the *Mahabharata*. The language referred to as *sāṃskṛta* was the cultured language used for religious and learned discourse in ancient India, in contrast to the language spoken by the people, *prākṛta-* (prakrit) "original, natural, normal, artless".^[14]

Variants

The pre-Classical form of Sanskrit is known as Vedic Sanskrit, with the language of the Rigveda being the oldest and most archaic stage preserved, dating back to the early second millennium BCE.^{[15][16]}

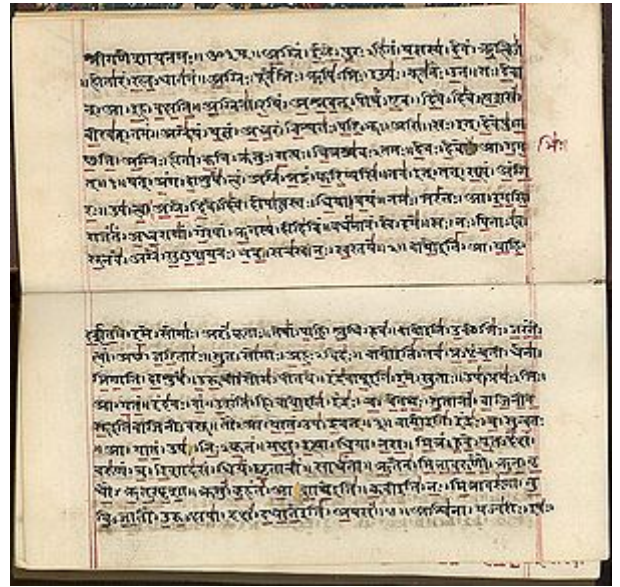
Classical Sanskrit is the standard register as laid out in the grammar of *Pāṇini*, around the fourth century BCE.^[17] Its position in the cultures of Greater India is akin to that of Latin and Ancient Greek in Europe and it has significantly influenced most modern languages of the Indian subcontinent, particularly in India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Nepal.^[18]

Vedic Sanskrit



Ancient Sanskrit on Hemp based Paper. Hemp Fiber was commonly used in the production of paper from 200 BCE to the Late 1800's.

Sanskrit, as defined by Pāṇini, evolved out of the earlier Vedic form. The present form of Vedic Sanskrit can be traced back to as early as the second millennium BCE (for Rig-vedic).^[15] Scholars often distinguish Vedic Sanskrit and Classical or "Pāṇinian" Sanskrit as separate dialects. Although they are quite similar, they differ in a number of essential points of phonology, vocabulary, grammar and syntax. Vedic Sanskrit is the language of the Vedas, a large collection of hymns, incantations (Samhitas) and theological and religio-philosophical discussions in the Brahmanas and Upanishads. Modern linguists consider the metrical hymns of the Rigveda Samhita to be the earliest, composed by many authors over several centuries of oral tradition. The end of the Vedic period is marked by the composition of the Upanishads, which form the concluding part of the traditional Vedic corpus; however, the early Sutras are Vedic, too, both in language and content.^[19]



Rigveda (padapatha) manuscript in Devanagari, early 19th century

Classical Sanskrit

For nearly 2,000 years, Sanskrit was the language of a cultural order that exerted influence across South Asia, Inner Asia, Southeast Asia, and to a certain extent East Asia.^[20] A significant form of post-Vedic Sanskrit is found in the Sanskrit of Indian epic poetry—the Ramayana and Mahabharata. The deviations from Pāṇini in the epics are generally considered to be on account of interference from Prakrits, or innovations, and not because they are pre-Paninian.^[21] Traditional Sanskrit scholars call such deviations *ārṣa* (आर्ष), meaning 'of the ṛṣis', the traditional title for the ancient authors. In some contexts, there are also more "prakritisms" (borrowings from common speech) than in Classical Sanskrit proper. Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit is a literary language heavily influenced by the Middle Indo-Aryan languages, based on early Buddhist Prakrit texts which subsequently assimilated to the Classical Sanskrit standard in varying degrees.^[22]

There were four principal dialects of classical Sanskrit: *paścimottarī* (Northwestern, also called Northern or Western), *madhyadeśī* (lit., middle country), *pūrvi* (Eastern) and *dakṣiṇī* (Southern, arose in the Classical period). The predecessors of the first three dialects are attested in Vedic Brāhmaṇas, of which the first one was regarded as the purest Ṛgveda Brāhmaṇa, 7.6).^[23]

Contemporary usage

As a spoken language

In the 2001 Census of India 14,135 Indians reported Sanskrit to be their first language.^[2]

Indian newspapers have published reports about several villages, where, as a result of recent revival attempts, large parts of the population, including children, are learning Sanskrit and are even using it to some extent in everyday communication:

1. Mattur, Shimoga district, Karnataka^[24]
2. Jhiri, Rajgarh district, Madhya Pradesh^[25]
3. Ganoda, Banswara district, Rajasthan^[26]
4. Shyamsundarpur, Kendujhar district, Odisha^[27]

According to the 2011 national census of Nepal, 1,669 people use Sanskrit as their first language.^[28]

In official use

In India, Sanskrit is among the 22 languages of the Eighth Schedule to the Constitution. The state of Uttarakhand in India has ruled Sanskrit as its second official language. In October 2012 social activist Hemant Goswami filed a writ petition in the Punjab and Haryana High Court for declaring Sanskrit as a 'minority' language.^{[29][30][31]}

Contemporary literature and patronage

More than 3,000 Sanskrit works have been composed since India's independence in 1947.^[32] Much of this work has been judged of high quality, in comparison to both classical Sanskrit literature and modern literature in other Indian languages.^{[33][34]}

The Sahitya Akademi has given an award for the best creative work in Sanskrit every year since 1967. In 2009, Satya Vrat Shastri became the first Sanskrit author to win the Jnanpith Award, India's highest literary award.^[35]

In music

Sanskrit is used extensively in the Carnatic and Hindustani branches of classical music. Kirtanas, bhajans, stotras, and shlokas of Sanskrit are popular throughout India. The samaveda uses musical notations in several of its recessions.^[36]

In Mainland China, musicians such as Sa Dingding have written pop songs in Sanskrit.^[37]

In mass media

Over 90 weeklies, fortnightlies and quarterlies are published in Sanskrit. Sudharma, a daily newspaper in Sanskrit, has been published out of Mysore, India, since 1970, while Sanskrit Vartman Patram and Vishwasya Vrittantam started in Gujarat during the last five years.^[38] Since 1974, there has been a short daily news broadcast on state-run All India Radio.^[38] These broadcasts are also made available on the internet on AIR's website.^{[39][40]} Sanskrit news is broadcast on TV and on the internet through the DD National channel at 6:55 AM IST^[41]

In liturgy

Sanskrit is the sacred language of various Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain traditions. It is used during worship in Hindu temples throughout the world. In Newar Buddhism, it is used in all monasteries, while Mahayana and Tibetan Buddhist religious texts and sutras are in Sanskrit as well as vernacular languages. Jain texts are written in Sanskrit,^{[42][43]} including the Tattvartha sutra, Ratnakaranda śrāvakācāra, the Bhaktamara Stotra and the Agamas.

It is also popular amongst the many practitioners of yoga in the West, who find the language helpful for understanding texts such as the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali

Symbolic usage

In Nepal, India and Indonesia, Sanskrit phrases are widely used as mottoes for various national, educational and social organisations:



Devi Mahatmya palm-leaf manuscript in an early Bhujimol script in Nepal, 11th century

- **India:** *Satyameva Jayate* (सत्यमेव जयते) meaning: Truth alone triumphs.^[44]
- **Nepal:** *Janani Janmabhoomischa Swargadapi Gariyas* meaning: Mother and motherland are superior to heaven.
- **Indonesia:** In Indonesia, Sanskrit are usually widely used as terms and mottoes of the armed forces and other national organizations (See: *Indonesian Armed Forces mottoes*). *Rastra Sewakottama* (राष्ट्र सेवकोत्तम; People's Main Servants) is the official motto of the Indonesian National Police. *Tri Dharma Eka Karma* (त्रीधर्म एक कर्म) is the official motto of the Indonesian Military. *Kartika Eka Paksi* (कार्तिक एक पक्षी; Unmatchable Bird with Noble Goals) is the official motto of the Indonesian Army. *Adhitakarya Mahatvavirya Nagarabhakti* (अधीतकार्य महत्ववीर्य नगरभक्ती;

Hard-working Knights Serving Bravery as Nations Hero") is the official motto of the Indonesian Military Academy *Upakriya Labdha Prayojana Balottama*(उपकृया लब्ध प्रयोजन बालोत्तम; "Purpose of The Unit is to Give The Best Service to The Nation by Finding The Perfect Soldier") is the official motto of the Army Psychological Corps, *Karmanye Vadikaraste Mafalesu Kadachana*(कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन; "Working Without Counting The Profit and Loss") is the official motto of the Air-Force Special Forces (Paskhas), *Jalesu Bhumyamcha Jayamahe* (जलेषु भूम्यं च जयमहे; "On The Sea and Land We Are Glorious") is the official motto of the Indonesian Marine Corps and there are more units and organizations in Indonesia either Armed Forces or civil which use the Sanskrit language respectively as their mottoes and other purposes. Although Indonesia is a Muslim-majority country, it still has major Hindu and Indian influence since pre-historic times until now culturally and traditionally especially in the islands of Java and Bali.

Many of India's and Nepal's scientific and administrative terms are named in Sanskrit. The Indian guided missile program that was commenced in 1983 by the Defence Research and Development Organisation has named the five missiles (ballistic and others) that it developed Prithvi, Agni, Akash, Nag and the Trishul missile system India's first modern fighter aircraft is named HAL Tejas.

Several nations in Indosphere of greater India have numerous loan Sanskrit words, such as in Filipino,^[45] Cebuano,^[46] Lao, Khmer,^[47] Thai and its alphabets, Malay, Indonesian (old Javanese-English dictionary by P.J. Zoetmulder contains over 25,500 entries), and even in English.

Historical usage

Origin and development

Sanskrit is a member of the Indo-Iranian subfamily of the Indo-European family of languages. Its closest ancient relatives are the Iranian languages Avestan and Old Persian.^{[48][49]}

In order to explain the common features shared by Sanskrit and other Indo-European languages, the Indo-Aryan migration theory states that the original speakers of what became Sanskrit arrived in the Indian subcontinent from the north-west some time during the early second millennium BCE. Evidence for such a theory includes the close relationship between the Indo-Iranian tongues and the Baltic and Slavic languages, vocabulary exchange with the non-Indo-European Uralic languages and the nature of the attested Indo-European words for flora and fauna.^[50]

The earliest attested Sanskrit texts are religious texts of the Rigveda, from the mid-to-late second millennium BCE. No written records from such an early period survive, if they ever existed. However, scholars are confident that the oral transmission of the texts is reliable: they were ceremonial literature whose correct pronunciation was considered crucial to its religious efficacy.^[51]

From the Rigveda until the time of Pāṇini (fourth century BCE) the development of the early Vedic language can be observed in other Vedic texts: the Samaveda, Yajurveda, Atharvaveda, Brahmanas, and Upanishads. During this time, the prestige of the language, its use for sacred purposes, and the importance attached to its correct enunciation all served as powerful conservative forces resisting the normal processes of linguistic change.^[52] However, there is a clear, five-level linguistic development of Vedic from the Rigveda to the language of the Upanishads and the earliest sutras such as the Baudhayana sutras.^[19]

Standardisation by Panini

The oldest surviving Sanskrit grammar is Pāṇini's Aṣṭādhyāyī ("Eight-Chapter Grammar"), written around the 6th-4th centuries BCE. It is essentially a prescriptive grammar, i.e., an authority that defines Sanskrit, although it contains descriptive parts, mostly to account for some Vedic forms that had become rare in Pāṇini's time. Classical Sanskrit became fixed with the grammar of Pāṇini (roughly 500 BCE), and remains in use as a learned language through the present day.^{[53][54]}

Coexistence with vernacular languages

According to Sanskrit linguist Madhav Deshpande, when the term "Sanskrit" arose it was not considered a separate language, but rather as a particularly refined or perfected manner of speaking. Knowledge of Sanskrit was a marker of social class and educational attainment in ancient India, and the language was taught mainly to members of the higher castes through the close analysis of

Vyākaraṇins such as Pāṇini and Patanjali, who exhorted proper Sanskrit at all times, especially during ritual.^[55] Sanskrit, as the learned language of Ancient India, thus existed alongside the vernacular Prakrits, which were Middle Indo-Aryan languages. However, linguistic change led to an eventual loss of mutual intelligibility.

A rock inscription at Junagadh added around 150 CE by Mahakshatrap Rudradaman I, the Saka (Scythian) ruler of Malwa, has been described as "the earliest known Sanscrit inscription of any extent",^[56] as the Ashokan and other early inscriptions were in Prakrit of various forms. This "unexpected resurgence as a language of contemporary record" is a sign of a "brahminical renaissance", which continued through the Gupta period, expanding the usage of Sanscrit.^[57]

Many Sanskrit dramas indicate that the language coexisted with the vernacular Prakrits. In the medieval era, Sanskrit speakers were almost always multilingual and well-educated. They were often learned Brahmins using the language for scholarly communication, a thin layer of Indian society that covered a wide geographical area. Centres like Varanasi, Paithan, Pune and Kanchipuram had a strong presence as teaching and debating institutions, and high classical Sanskrit was maintained until British times.^[55]

Decline

There are a number of sociolinguistic studies of spoken Sanskrit which strongly suggest that oral use of modern Sanskrit is limited, having ceased development sometime in the past.^[58]

Sheldon Pollock argues that "most observers would agree that, in some crucial way, Sanskrit is dead".^{[20]:393} Pollock has further argued that, while Sanskrit continued to be used in literary cultures in India, it was never adapted to express the changing forms of subjectivity and sociality as embodied and conceptualised in the modern age.^{[20]:416} Instead, it was reduced to "reinscription and restatements" of ideas already explored, and any creativity was restricted to hymns and verses.^{[20]:398} A notable exception are the military references of Nilakaṇṭha Caturdharā's 17th-century commentary on the Mahābhārata.^[59]

Hatcher argues that modern works continue to be produced in Sanskrit,^[60] while according to Hanneder

On a more public level the statement that Sanskrit is a dead language is misleading, for Sanskrit is quite obviously not as dead as other dead languages and the fact that it is spoken, written and read will probably convince most people that it cannot be a dead language in the most common usage of the term. Pollock's notion of the "death of Sanskrit" remains in this unclear realm between academia and public opinion when he says that "most observers would agree that, in some crucial way Sanskrit is dead."

— Hanneder^[61]

Hanneder has also argued that modern works in Sanskrit are either ignored or their "modernity" contested.^[62]

When the British imposed a Western-style education system in India in the 19th century, knowledge of Sanskrit and ancient literature continued to flourish as the study of Sanskrit changed from a more traditional style into a form of analytical and comparative scholarship mirroring that of Europe.^[63]

Public education and popularisation

Adult and continuing education

Attempts at reviving the Sanskrit language have been undertaken in the Republic of India since its foundation in 1947 (it was included in the 14 original languages of the Eighth Schedule to the Constitution).

Sanskrita Bharati is an organisation working for Sanskrit revival. The "All-India Sanskrit Festival" (since 2002) holds composition contests. The 1991 Indian census reported 49,736 fluent speakers of Sanskrit. Sanskrit learning programmes also feature on the lists of most AIR broadcasting centres. The Mattur village in central Karnataka claims to have native speakers of Sanskrit among its

population.^[64] Inhabitants of all castes learn Sanskrit starting in childhood and converse in the language.^[65] Even the local Muslims converse in Sanskrit. Historically, the village was given by king Krishnadevaraya of the Vijayanagara Empire to Vedic scholars and their families, while people in his kingdom spoke Kannada and Telugu. Another effort concentrates on preserving and passing along the oral tradition of the Vedas, www.shrivedabharathi.in is one such organisation based out of Hyderabad that has been digitising the Vedas by recording recitations of Vedic Pandits.^[66]

Haryana state has over 24 Sanskrit colleges offering education equivalent to bachelors degree, additionally masters and doctoral level degrees are also offered by the Kurukshetra University and Maharshi Dayanand University.^[67]

School curricula

The Central Board of Secondary Education of India (CBSE), along with several other state education boards, has made Sanskrit an alternative option to the state's own official language as a second or third language choice in the schools it governs. In such schools, learning Sanskrit is an option for grades 5 to 8 (Classes V to VIII). This is true of most schools affiliated with the Indian Certificate of Secondary Education (ICSE) board, especially in states where the official language is Hindi. Sanskrit is also taught in traditional gurukulas throughout India.^[68]

In the West

St James Junior School in London, England, offers Sanskrit as part of the curriculum.^{[69][70]} In the United States, since September 2009, high school students have been able to receive credits as Independent Study or toward Foreign Language requirements by studying Sanskrit, as part of the "SAFL: Samskritam as a Foreign Language" program coordinated by Sanskrita Bharati.^[71] In Australia, the Sydney private boys' high school Sydney Grammar School offers Sanskrit from years 7 through to 12, including for the Higher School Certificate.^[72]

Universities

A list of Sanskrit universities is given below in chronological order of establishment:



Sanskrit festival at Pramati Hillview Academy, Mysore, India.

Year Est.	Name	Location
1791	<u>Government Sanskrit College, Benares</u>	<u>Varanasi</u>
1821	<u>Poona Sanskrit College</u>	<u>Pune</u>
1824	<u>Sanskrit College, Calcutta</u>	<u>Kolkata</u>
1876	<u>Sadvidya Pathashala</u>	<u>Mysore</u>
1915	<u>Baroda Sanskrit Mahavidyalaya</u>	<u>Vadodara</u>
1961	<u>Kameshwar Singh Darbhanga Sanskrit University</u>	<u>Darbhangā</u>
1962	<u>Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyapeetha</u>	<u>Tirupati</u>
1962	<u>Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyapeetha</u>	<u>New Delhi</u>
1970	<u>Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan</u>	<u>New Delhi</u>
1981	<u>Shri Jagannath Sanskrit University</u>	<u>Puri</u>
1986	<u>Nepal Sanskrit University</u>	<u>Nepal</u>
1993	<u>Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit</u>	<u>Kalady, Kerala</u>
1997	<u>Kavikulaguru Kalidas Sanskrit University</u>	<u>Ramtek</u>
2001	<u>Jagadguru Ramanandacharya Rajasthan Sanskrit University</u>	<u>Jaipur</u>
2005	<u>Uttarakhand Sanskrit University</u>	<u>Haridwar</u>
2005	<u>Shree Somnath Sanskrit University</u>	<u>Somnath-Veraval</u>
2008	<u>Maharshi Panini Sanskrit Evam Vedic Vishwavidyalaya</u>	<u>Ujjain</u>
2011	<u>Karnataka Sanskrit University</u>	<u>Bangalore</u>

Many universities throughout the world train and employ Sanskrit scholars, either within a separate Sanskrit department or as part of a broader focus area, such as South Asian studies or Linguistics. For example, Delhi university has about 400 Sanskrit students, about half of which are in post-graduate programmes.^[38]

European scholarship

European scholarship in Sanskrit, begun by Heinrich Roth (1620–1668) and Johann Ernst Hanxleden (1681–1731), is considered responsible for the discovery of an Indo-European language family by Sir William Jones (1746–1794). This research played an important role in the development of Western philology, or historical linguistics.^[73]

Sir William Jones was one of the most influential philologists of his time. He told The Asiatic Society in Calcutta on 2 February 1786:

The Sanskrit language, whatever be its antiquity, is of a wonderful structure; more perfect than the Greek, more copious than the Latin, and more exquisitely refined than either; yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity, both in the roots of verbs and in the forms of grammar, than could have been produced by accident; so strong, indeed, that no philologist could examine them all three, without believing them to have sprung from some common source, which, perhaps, no longer exists!^[74]



A poem by the ancient Indian poet Vallana (ca. 900 – 1100 CE) on the side wall of a building at Haagweg 14 in Leiden, Netherlands

British attitudes

Orientalist scholars of the 18th century like Sir William Jones marked a wave of enthusiasm for Indian culture and for Sanskrit. According to Thomas Trautmann, after this period of "Indomania", a certain hostility to Sanskrit and to Indian culture in general began to assert itself in early 19th century Britain, manifested by a neglect of Sanskrit in British academia. This was the beginning of a general push in favour of the idea that India should be culturally, religiously and linguistically assimilated to Britain as far as possible. Trautmann considers two separate and logically opposite sources for the growing hostility: one was "British Indophobia", which he calls essentially a developmentalist, progressivist, liberal, and non-racial-essentialist critique of Hindu civilisation as an aid for the improvement of India along European lines; the other was scientific racism, a theory of the English "common-sense view" that Indians constituted a "separate, inferior and unimprovable race"^[75].

Phonology

Classical Sanskrit distinguishes about 36 phonemes; the presence of allophony leads the writing systems to generally distinguish 48 phones, or sounds. The sounds are traditionally listed in the order vowels (*Ac*), diphthongs (*Hal*), anusvara and visarga, plosives (*Sparśa*), nasals, and finally the liquids and fricatives, written in the International Alphabet of Sanskrit Transliteration (IAST) as follows:

Vowels:

a ā ī ū ṛ ṝ Ṝ;
e ai o au;
ṁ ḥ

Consonants:

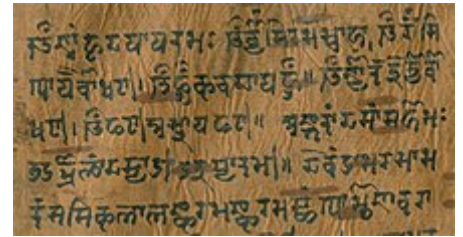
k kh g gh ṅ
c ch j jh ṇ
ṭ ṭh ḍ ḍh ṇ
t th d dh n
p ph b bh m
y r l v
ś ṣ s h

vedic sanskrit consonants

		Labial	Dental/ Alveolar	Retroflex	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Nasal		m	n	ṇ	ɲ	ŋ	
Plosive/ Affricate	voiceless	p	ʈ	ɖ	tʃ	k	
	voiceless aspirated	pʰ	ʈʰ	ɖʰ	tʃʰ	kʰ	
	voiced	b	ɖ	ɗ	dʒ	g	
	voiced aspirated	bʱ	ɖʱ	ɗʱ	dʒʱ	gʱ	
Fricative	voiceless		s	(ʂ)	ʃ	(x)	h
	voiced						ɦ
Flap	plain		ɾ	(ɽ)			
	voiced aspirated			(ɽʱ)			
Approximant		ʋ	l		j		

Writing system

Sanskrit originated in an oral society, and the oral tradition was maintained through the development of early classical Sanskrit literature.^[76] Some scholars such as Jack Goody suggest that the Vedic Sanskrit texts are not the product of an oral society, basing this view by comparing inconsistencies in the transmitted versions of literature from various oral societies such as the Greek, Serbian and other cultures, then noting that the Vedic literature is too consistent and vast to have been composed and transmitted orally across generations, without being written down.^[77] These scholars add that the Vedic texts likely involved both a written and oral tradition, calling it "parallel products of a literate society".^{[77][78]}



Kashmir Shaiva manuscript in the Śāradā script (c. 17th century)

Sanskrit has no native script of its own, and historical evidence suggests that it has been written in various scripts on a variety of media such as palm leaves, cloth, paper, rock and metal sheets, at least by the time of arrival of Alexander the Great in northwestern Indian subcontinent in 1st millennium BCE.^[79]

The earliest known rock inscriptions in Sanskrit date to the first century BCE,^[80] and the Junagadh rock inscription of Rudradaman I (c. 150 AD) "represents a turning point" as it is a more "extensive record in the poetic style" of "high Classical Sanskrit".^[81] They are in the *Brāhmī* script, which was originally used for Prakrit, not Sanskrit. It has been described as a paradox that the first evidence of written Sanskrit occurs centuries later than that of the Prakrit languages which are its linguistic descendants.^[76] In northern India, there are *Brāhmī* inscriptions dating from the third century BCE onwards, the oldest appearing on the famous Prakrit pillar inscriptions of king Ashoka. The earliest South Indian inscriptions in Tamil Brahmi, written in early Tamil, belong to the same period. When Sanskrit was written down, it was first used for texts of an administrative, literary or scientific nature. The sacred hymns and verse were preserved orally, and were set down in writing "reluctantly" (according to one commentator), and at a comparatively late date.^{[82][83]}

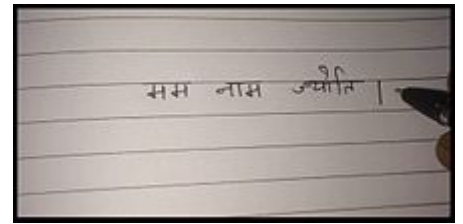


Illustration of Devanagari as used for writing Sanskrit

Brahmi evolved into a multiplicity of Brahmic scripts, many of which were used to write Sanskrit. Roughly contemporary with the Brahmi, Kharosthi was used in the northwest of the subcontinent. Sometime between the fourth and eighth centuries, the Gupta script, derived from Brahmi, became prevalent. Around the eighth century, the *Śāradā* script evolved out of the Gupta script. The latter was displaced in its turn by Devanagari in the 11th or 12th century, with intermediary stages such as the Siddham script. In East India, the Bengali alphabet, and, later, the Odia alphabet, were used.

In the south, where Dravidian languages predominate, scripts used for Sanskrit include the Kannada, Telugu, the Malayalam and Grantha alphabets.^{[84][85]}

Romanisation

Since the late 18th century, Sanskrit has been transliterated using the Latin alphabet. The system most commonly used today is the IAST (International Alphabet of Sanskrit Transliteration), which has been the academic standard since 1888. ASCII-based transliteration schemes have also evolved because of difficulties representing Sanskrit characters in computer systems. These include Harvard-Kyoto and ITRANS, a transliteration scheme that is used widely on the Internet, especially in Usenet and in email, for considerations of speed of entry as well as rendering issues. With the wide availability of Unicode-aware web browsers, IAST has become common online. It is also possible to type using an alphanumeric keyboard and transliterate to Devanagari using software like Mac OS X's international support.

European scholars in the 19th century generally preferred Devanagari for the transcription and reproduction of whole texts and lengthy excerpts. However, references to individual words and names in texts composed in European Languages were usually represented with Roman transliteration. From the 20th century onwards, because of production costs, textual editions edited by Western scholars have mostly been in Romanised transliteration.^[86]

Grammar

Word order is free, though there is a strong tendency toward subject–object–verb, the original system of Vedic prose.

Influence on other languages

Indic languages

Sanskrit has greatly influenced the languages of India that grew from its vocabulary and grammatical base; for instance, Hindi is a "Sanskritised register" of the Khariboli dialect. All modern Indo-Aryan languages as well as Munda and Dravidian languages except (Tamil language), have borrowed many words either directly from Sanskrit (*tatsama* words), or indirectly via middle Indo-Aryan languages (*tadbhava* words). Words originating in Sanskrit are estimated at roughly fifty percent of the vocabulary of modern Indo-Aryan languages, as well as the literary forms of Malayalam and Kannada.^[18] Literary texts in Telugu are lexically Sanskrit or Sanskritised to an enormous extent, perhaps seventy percent or more.^[88] Marathi is another prominent language in Western India, that derives most of its words and Marathi grammar from Sanskrit.^[89] Sanskrit words are often preferred in the literary texts in Marathi over corresponding colloquial Marathi word.^[90]

Interaction with other languages

Sanskrit has also influenced Sino-Tibetan languages, mostly through translations of Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit. Many terms were transliterated directly and added to the Chinese vocabulary. Chinese words like 刹那 *chà nà* (Devanagari: क्षण *kṣaṇa* 'instantaneous period') were borrowed from Sanskrit. Many Sanskrit texts survive only in Tibetan collections of commentaries to the Buddhist teachings, the Tengyur.^[91]

śivō rakṣatu girvārṇabhāṣārasāsvādatatparān

[illegible]

Sanskrit in modern Indian and other Brahmi scripts:
*May Śiva bless those who take delight in the
 language of the gods.* (Kālidāsa)

Sanskrit was a language for religious purposes and for the political elite in parts of medieval era Southeast Asia, Central Asia and East Asia.^[7] In Southeast Asia, languages such as Thai and Lao contain many loanwords from Sanskrit, as do Khmer. For example, in Thai, *Ravana*, the emperor of Lanka, is called *Thosakanth*, a derivation of his Sanskrit name *Dāsakaṇṭha* "having ten necks".

Many Sanskrit loanwords are also found in Austronesian languages, such as Javanese, particularly the older form in which nearly half the vocabulary is borrowed.^[92] Other Austronesian languages, such as traditional Malay and modern Indonesian, also derive much of their vocabulary from Sanskrit. Similarly, Philippine languages such as Tagalog have some Sanskrit loanwords, although more are derived from Spanish. A Sanskrit loanword encountered in many Southeast Asian languages is the word *bhāṣā*, or spoken language, which is used to refer to the names of many languages.^[93] English also has words of Sanskrit origin. Sanskrit has also influenced the religious register of Japanese mostly through transliterations. These were borrowed from Chinese transliterations.^[94]

In popular culture

Satyagraha, an opera by Philip Glass, uses texts from the *Bhagavad Gita*, sung in Sanskrit.^{[95][96]} The closing credits of *The Matrix Revolutions* has a prayer from the *Bṛihadaranyaka Upanishad*. The song "Cyber-raga" from Madonna's album *Music* includes Sanskrit chants,^[97] and *Shanti/Ashtangi* from her 1998 album *Ray of Light*, which won a Grammy, is the *ashtanga vinyasa yoga* chant.^[98] The lyrics include the mantra *Om shanti*.^[99] Composer John Williams featured choirs singing in Sanskrit for *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* and in *Star Wars: Episode I – The Phantom Menace*.^{[100][101]} The theme song of *Battlestar Galactica 2004* is the *Gayatri Mantra*, taken from the *Rigveda*.^[102] The lyrics of "The Child In Us" by Enigma also contains Sanskrit verses.^[103]

See also

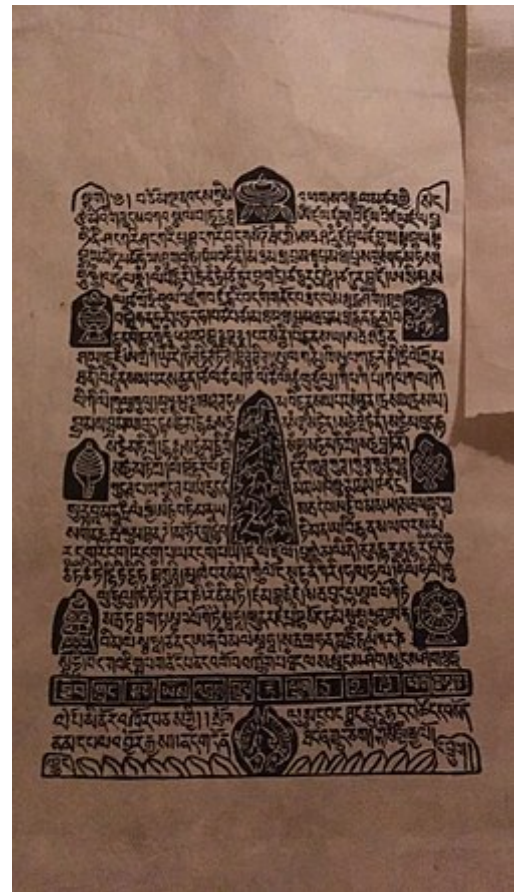
- Devanagari
- Bengali alphabet
- Sanskrit numerals
- Mattur India's Sanskrit Village

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Notes

- ↑ The exact pronunciation in Classical Sanskrit is unknown. For alternative pronunciations of ॐ, see *Anusvara § Sanskrit*



A text in Tibetan script suspected to be Sanskrit in content. From the personal artifact collection of Donald Weir.

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