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Sanskrit (Devanāgarī) Alphabet Transliteration

TRANSLITERATION

Transliteration is the magic key that opens the door to Sanskrit. It is how the Devanāgarī can be put into characters that everyone can read. It is also the means by which you can look up the Monier Williams online dictionary. If you download a program called Itranslator (Look up Omkarananda Ashram), it is also the means by which you can convert Roman lettering into Devanāgarī or into IAST, now the commonly accepted Romanised version that you will find in most publications, though in the Monier Williams online dictionary, IAST is called Roman Unicode.

You can find all of the transliteration conventions and the whole Sanskrit alphabet in tabulated form on pp3-6.

The systems below are

DEVANĀGARĪ

The script which is so identifiable as Sanskrit

Example: योगश्चित्तवृत्तिनिरोधः

IAST – International Alphabet of Sanskrit

It is the one with diacritical marks, ie the little dots and strokes that increase the range by which our 26 English letters can carry the burden of the 54 plus letters of the Sanskrit alphabet. Most books now use IAST for their representation of Devanāgarī. In the table, the IAST characters are coloured **blue**.

Example:

Devanāgarī: योगश्चित्तवृत्तिनिरोधः

IAST: **Yogaścittavṛttinirodhah**

ITRANS

This system was developed in the early days of digitization of Devanāgarī. It uses only keystrokes on the ordinary keyboard, not the diacritical marks of IAST. That makes it look a bit strange, but conversion programs like Itranslator require Itrans when you enter the word you want to convert. The benefit is the direct typing. No looking for symbols to manage the diacritics – which the Itranslator search function can't handle anyway. You will get Devanāgarī and IAST in your result, even though you have to put ITRANS into the search. The ITRANS system features in **light brown** in the table.

Example:

Devanāgarī: योगश्चित्तवृत्तिनिरोधः

ITRANS: **yogashcittavRRittinirodhaH**

HARVARD-KYOTO

Similar to Itrans, H-K does not require any diacritical input, and ordinary keystrokes manage the representation of the Devanāgarī – although it makes some weird twists to do it. The H-K system is required for searching the Monier Williams online Sanskrit-English dictionary, and the weird system is worth it to enable this blessing of the cyber age. The dictionary is now able to give you a read-out in either Devanāgarī or IAST, although the IAST is called Roman Unicode in the result. In the table of all the transliteration schemes, H-K characters are in **green**.

Example

Devanāgarī: योगश्चित्तवृत्तिनिरोधः

Harvard-Kyoto: **yogazcittavRittinirodhaH**

In all the examples below, the inherent “a” with every consonant is included with the transliteration. It has to be entered into Itranslator, otherwise you get a conjunct

consonant if followed by another consonant, or a virama if at the end of a word. It has to be entered into the dictionary, too, or your entry will not be recognized. You must remember, though, that the “a” does not appear in the Devanāgarī. Remember, too, that if any other vowel comes after the consonant, enter that vowel with the consonant and not the inherent “a”.

Example: k and s in Itranslator

kasa gives कस्

where you see the two distinct letters “k” and “s”; no “a” appears in the Devanāgarī, but it would be pronounced “kasa”.

with a virama – similar to a little comma after the consonant, the final sound is stopped

कस् Note the virama. कस्

So कस् is pronounced kasa, कस् while would be pronounced kas

Overpage you will find the Sanskrit alphabet and all of the transliteration conventions.

The alphabet has 54 letters, while the English alphabet has only 26. English letter order and pronunciation is completely irrational. Sanskrit letters are ordered phonetically, in the order in which the mouth has to move to make the sound. Pronunciation is systematic, with each consonant pronounced with the mouth placement proper to it and a soft “a” sound with it. (cf our “b” – see how your mouth changes to say the letter and then to pronounce the sound of it)

Because the alphabet is phonetic, you will always know how to pronounce whatever Sanskrit word you are looking at – the only thing that will stop you is the old habits of a lazy English-speaking mouth, your current accent, and some sounds that might be quite unfamiliar, like aspirated consonants.

For a more thorough discussion aimed at linguists or speech therapists, go to

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Devanagari>

Vowels

(Transliteration is the same for initial or medial vowel, as English doesn't distinguish them.)

	अ	आ	इ	ई	उ	ऊ	ऋ	ॠ	ऌ	ॡ	ए	ऐ	ओ	औ
IAST	a	ā	i	ī	u	ū	ṛ	ṝ	ḷ	ḹ	e	ai	o	au
ITRANS	a	aa / A	i	ii/ I	u	uu / U	R^i / RRi	R^i/ RRi	L^i / LLi	L^i / LLi	e	ai	o	au
HARVARD-KYOTO	a	A	i	I	u	U	R	RR	IR	IRR	e	ai	o	au

Consonants

varga set, class		Sparsā the twenty-five consonants constituting the five classes from k to m				anunāsika nasal	antahstha in-between	ūṣman rush of breath
kanṭhya guttural		क	ख	ग	घ	ङ		[ह]
	IAST	ka	kha	ga	gha	ṅa, nga	-	[ha]
	ITRANS	ka	kha	ga	gha	~Na		
	H-KYOTO	ka	kha	ga	gha	Ga		
tālavya Belonging to the palate		च	छ	ज	झ	ञ	य	श
	IAST	ca	cha	ja	jha	ña	ya	śa
	ITRANS	ca	Cha	ja	jha	~na	ya	sha
	H-KYOTO	ca	cha	ja	jha	Ja	ya	za

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Mūrdhanya roof or top of the palate, cerebral, lingual		ट	ठ	ड	ढ	ण	र	ष
	IAST	ṭa	ṭha	ḍa	ḍha	ṇa	ra	ṣa
	ITRANS	Ta	Tha	Da	Dha	Na	ra	Sha
	H-KYOTO	Ta	Tha	Da	Dha	Na	ra	Sa
dantya dental		त	थ	द	ध	न	ल	स
	IAST	ta	tha	da	dha	na	la	sa
	ITRANS	ta	tha	da	dha	na	la	sa
	H-KYOTO	ta	tha	da	dha	na	la	sa
oṣṭhya labial		प	फ	ब	भ	म	व	
	IAST	pa	pha	ba	bha	ma	va	
	ITRANS	pa	pha	ba	bha	ma	va/wa	
	H-KYOTO	pa	pha	ba	bha	ma	va	

Devanāgarī Diacritics

	Devanāgarī	IAST	Itrans	Harvard Kyoto
Anusvara (.) dot over letter to nasalise and close the vowel	• Eg ग ga Becomes गं	m̐ eg gam̐	.n/ M/ .m	M

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Visarga (:) Echoed sound of last vowel Eg नमः namaḥ	:	ḥ	H	H
Virama Placed at the end of a consonant, it stops the inherent vowel	◌̣	Transliteration of virama is not required – simply do not enter the inherent vowel	Transliteration of virama is not required – simply do not enter the inherent vowel	Transliteration of virama is not required – simply do not enter the inherent vowel