



# CLAY SANSKRIT LIBRARY

## Frequently Asked Questions

Here are some of our frequently asked questions and answers. Please feel free to put your question by simply emailing: [info@claysanskritlibrary.org](mailto:info@claysanskritlibrary.org).

Q1. Why do you print the Sanskrit in Roman script (as opposed to one of the traditional Indian scripts)? (editorial policy, criticism)

A1. For two reasons. The more important is that we want to make it easier for people to learn Sanskrit. We expect the great majority of our readers to use only the translations. But we know that every year in western universities, particularly in North America, many people take a first-year Sanskrit course, but only a tiny number go on to do a second year. Why? One reason must be a shortage of materials suitable for those who know just a little bit of Sanskrit. Our volumes can help such students, whether they are studying with a teacher or by themselves.

All Sanskritists know that there are two difficulties in learning the language, and unfortunately both occur at the beginning. The first is the need to learn a script unlike those most westerners have seen before. A particular difficulty of the script for beginners is that in most cases it does not mark the boundaries between words. The second difficulty is sandhi: the fact that the ends (and sometimes also the beginnings) of words change according to what follows (or precedes). This means that when words occur in sentences, the beginner is often unsure where the word boundaries occur, and so cannot identify the unit to look up in a dictionary. The sandhi problem for beginners is aggravated by the use of a script which allows little scope for punctuation marks.

Already in his pioneering work *Teach Yourself Sanskrit* (now in its 17th edition) Michael Coulson transliterated Sanskrit into Roman script and devised a system of punctuation to go with it which made most cases of sandhi transparent. All we have done is slightly to extend his system so as to cover all cases.

Our second reason is that for most of its history Sanskrit has been written in the local script. The common belief that there is some peculiar link between Sanskrit and the devanāgarī script is mistaken. Pali, the canonical language of early Buddhism, is an ancient Indian language directly derived from Sanskrit. Throughout its history it has been written everywhere in the local script. Thus in Sri Lanka it is written in the Sinhala script, in Thailand in Thai script, and in the West in Roman script. In fact Pali was first printed in the West, and from that day to this Pali printed in the West has been in the Roman script and no one has ever thought to object.

Until recently, Sanskrit in India was written and even printed in the local script. Even within living memory, those taking a degree in Sanskrit in Calcutta University - where the medium for the course was Sanskrit! - read and wrote their Sanskrit in the Bengali script. The same goes for other parts of India. Devanāgarī is the script used, in several different versions, for Hindi and Marathi. The printing of Sanskrit took off in the latter half of the nineteenth century in Bombay, where a form of devanāgarī is the local script, and that is why people have become accustomed to seeing Sanskrit printed in that script, but there is nothing sacrosanct about this recent development. In fact, none of the texts we are printing was originally written down in devanāgarī!