

**A SANSKRIT
HANDBOOK FOR
THE FIRESIDE**

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A Sanskrit Handbook for the Fireside by Elihu Burritt

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PREFACE.

IF any Sanskrit scholar shall happen to glance through this book, he will see that it is made for learners and not for teachers, and also for young beginners in the study of the language who must or would prosecute it by themselves, without the oral instruction of a teacher. I have assumed that they are young in years, as well as knowledge in regard to the language, and I have spoken to them on the subject as to children, using the simplest forms of exposition. I do not know what kind of experience others remember in connection with their first efforts to master the rudiments of the language, but I cannot forget my own, and I have endeavoured to make just such a book as would have enabled me to have made more progress in a week than I accomplished in six months with the works I could procure. In doing this, I have had in mind thousands who have heard much about Sanskrit and its place among ancient and modern languages, but who have regarded it as beyond the range of classical studies, and one necessarily monopolised by a few eminent *savants* in Europe and America. I have hoped and sought, in some little degree, to break up this monopoly, and to encourage and assist young men and women to enter upon the study of the language with both the assurance and proof that they could make considerable progress in it by themselves, without the help of a professional teacher. There are thousands of young ladies in America, and probably in England, who graduate from upper schools in town and village every year with some acquaintance with Latin, French, and German, or with one of those languages. Nine in ten of them, probably, let all this knowledge drop out of their minds for lack of exercise after leaving school. Now I have believed that such graduates of our upper schools

have acquired the discipline and ability to enter upon the study of Sanskrit, and to learn and appreciate its intimate relations and affinities to the languages they have become partially acquainted with, and that they could thus be led to feel and enjoy a new philological interest in the great sisterhoods of human speech.

Believing this as a theory, I resolved to test it by actual experiment. I invited a half-dozen young ladies, recently graduated from our town schools, to undertake the study of Sanskrit, without any books to help them, or any written instructions except those of the black-board. The first lesson was confined to the alphabet. The Sanskrit equivalents were written over the English letters just in the order in which these are placed. Then short, simple English words, in which the consonant is preceded and followed by a vowel, were spelt in Sanskrit, such as *Abi, Ira, Helen, &c.* Then words with the simpler combinations of consonants were taken, as *Abbot, Blake, Butler, Graham, &c.* Next, names involving the most complicated clusters of consonants were tried, as *Phillipston, Pittsfield, &c.* When these were accomplished, we expelled the hyphen from English compound words, and spelt *dishcloth, cornthresher, black-guard, &c.* In the course of an hour, the whole class had mastered and applied the most involved and difficult combinations to be found or formed in Sanskrit. At the second lesson they began to read easy sentences, taking the first two verses of St. John's Gospel, of which the verb *as, esse,* and three or four other words form the text. These were conjugated, declined, and analysed on the black-board, and pretty fully impressed on the memory of each member of the class; and when they left, I felt that they had made greater progress in the language in two hours than I had done in two months at first, with an experience in such studies which they did not possess. Each subsequent lesson was chosen for its exposition of some grammatical or phonetic principle, or as illustrating the form and use of some particular mood, tense, or voice of a verb, as the Reduplicated Perfect, the Periphrastic Perfect, the Aorists, Intensives, Desideratives, &c.

Now the Reading and Parsing Exercises in this book are just those I gave at the black-board to this class of young ladies, and which they all seemed easily to comprehend. And I present them to all who may use this rudimental work as if standing at the same black-board and speaking to them, one by one, two by two, or in larger circles, across the same table; believing that they will be

able to make the same progress in the study through the simple expositions I have given. If this hope and faith be realised, what has been a pleasant task will yield me the best fruits of a labour of love.

I can easily understand that all professional Sanskritists who may see this little handbook, will object that its text for reading exercises is not taken from the classic literature of the language, but from a translation, which does not and could not illustrate its genius. But they should remember that this rudimental work was only designed to encourage young men and women to enter upon the study of Sanskrit, and to help them up and over the hitherto steep door-stone of the language into the vestibule of its own literature, and there to introduce and transfer them to eminent professors who could lead them into its richest classics. In order to cross this threshold, they need the simplest terms and forms of rudimental instruction in grammatical, phonetic, and reading exercises. In reading-lessons they need to have the principles and rules that underlie and govern the structure of the language applied and illustrated in sentences as simple as those in the Latin Primer for children. No original Sanskrit literature affords such rudimental exercises for young beginners, or narrative or didactic forms in which such a succession of simple sentences may be found, as in the translation of St. John's Gospel. It is true the translations chosen are not classic Sanskrit, but there is not a word in them that may not be found in the classic literature of the language. There is not a made-up word in them, or a Greek word taken in unmodified, as in the Latin translation, such as *baptizo*, *scandalizo*, &c. *Majj* is as purely Sanskrit, and as often found in its classics, as *mergo* in Latin or *βάρω* in Greek literature. The conjugation, declension, derivation, and analysis of all the verbs, nouns, pronouns, and adjectives in these translations are the same as if they were found in the Vedas. If their metaphorical meanings are not so fully illustrated or employed, their most common and positive significance is given as the point of departure for the metaphorical, indicating the intervening line or succession of ideas by which the metaphorical reaches its latitude of thought.

But the Reading Lessons presented are not all of the Latin Primer order, or taken from the easy narrative and short sentences of St. John's Gospel. It is doubtful if any classical Sanskrit can produce more complicated and difficult exercises in reading than

many of St. Paul's tortuous arguments, winding in and out of parenthetical sentences, sometimes carrying the main line of his thought through one entire chapter half way into another. The seventh chapter of Hebrews has been selected as containing as hard lessons for the learner as he would find in any of the Sanskrit classics.

I hope and believe that the young student will not only be able to learn, without outside help, all this handbook contains, but that its instruction will enable him or her to read any classical work in Sanskrit with only the help of a dictionary. If it shall thus introduce into this interesting, central field of philological study and interest a considerable number of young persons in England and America, who otherwise would not have made the venture, it will procure me a personal pleasure almost equal to that I have enjoyed in a different class of efforts for the good of mankind.

ELIHU BURRITT.

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CONTENTS.

PART I.

	PAGE
CHAPTER I.—INTRODUCTORY REMARKS	1
CHAPTER II.—SINGLE AND COMPOSITE LETTERS	6
List of Compound Consonants	8
Table of Consonant-Combinations	9
CHAPTER III.—COMBINATION OR COALESCENCE OF LETTERS	11

PART II.

CHAPTER IV.—NOUNS AND THEIR CASES	16
Numbers and Genders	16
Terminations for Masculine and Feminine Nouns	16
Adjectives	19
Degrees of Comparison	20
Numerals	20
CHAPTER V.—PRONOUNS AND ADJECTIVE PRONOUNS	21
Personal Pronouns	21
Reflexive Pronouns	23
Demonstrative Pronouns	24
Relative Pronoun	26
Interrogative Pronouns	26
Compound Pronouns	27
Indefinite Pronouns	27
Adjective Pronouns	28
CHAPTER VI.—VERBS AND THEIR CONJUGATION	30
First Division	34
Second Division	34
Frequentative or Intensive Verbs	39
Desiderative Verbs	40
Causative Verbs	42