

Glories of Sanskrit

The Glories of Sanskrit (Sanskrit Mahatmya)

Srila Prabhupad was keen on publishing his books at a high academic standard. He specifically instructed the **Bhaktivedanta Book Trust** to include a Sanskrit or Bengali pronunciation guide, an index of verses, and other features to assist readers in accurately reciting the verses in “every volume”.

“Every volume of *Srimad Bhagavatam* as well as *Sri Chaitanya Charitamrita* must be fully complete with an index, list of references, glossary, Sanskrit pronunciation guide, and index of Sanskrit (or Bengali) verses. This will be best.”

Letter, February 6, 1975

Sanskrit is a highly “reformed” language. Every word is pronounced exactly according to its spelling. In English, some words are phonetically ambiguous (e.g., “c” in chair is pronounced differently than the “c” in cat), but in Sanskrit every syllable and every consonant and vowel accurately and precisely represent a unique sound. “Therefore it is called Sanskrit. [In] Sanskrit everything is reformed. It is not by that b-u-t but, p-u-t put, if you say ‘u’, then you must say b-u-t but and p-u-t put but not that sometimes put sometimes but, no, that will not be allowed in Sanskrit.

The pronunciation must be regular. You cannot change.

Sanskrit means reformed language.”

Lecture, April 23, 1972

In lectures **Srila Prabhupad** sometimes stressed the vague and variegated phonology of the “whimsical” English language, and sometimes he pointed out that the definition of the word “Sanskrit” is “refined” or “perfect”. “The real meaning of ‘Sanskrit’ is ‘reform.’ It is not whimsical, just like in the

English language, 'b-u-t but, p-u-t put.' It is not like that. Every word, every syllable has a symbolic meaning."

Lecture, January 19, 1969

Not only the phonetics, but the rhyme of Sanskrit verses, because of the very strict form of the *shlokas*, is unparalleled.

Shyamsundara: Today when we were looking at the Sanskrit *shlokas*, I suddenly realized that this very strict form of *shlokas* made it easy for the people to memorize.

Prabhupad: Yes, oh yes. That Sanskrit *shloka* is so made that if you repeatedly chant five, six times, it

will be memorized. And once it is memorized, you will never forget it.

Shyamsundara: Then you can pass it down and you don't have to write it.

Prabhupad: No. That requires only memory. That was the system, *shruti*. Once hears from the spiritual master, it is memorized for good. The memory was so sharp, and the memory was prepared by this *brahmacharya*.

Shyamsundara: And the grammatical rules are so arranged to make it easy to memorize – natural rhythm.

Prabhupad: Natural, quite natural, natural rhythm. It's not artificial.

Shyamsundara: Whereas our Western poems are all so many different lines, lengths, rhythms. You can't remember them.

Prabhupad: There is no standard. There is *Sahitya Darpana*, there is a book. So many words; the first pronunciation five, second pronunciation seven, like that. There are different kinds of *sandhi* [ways of conjoining words].

Shyamsundara: So it's meant for hearing and memorizing.

Vedabase; no date supplied

Modern languages are creations of mankind and are thus imperfect, but Sanskrit emanates directly from a spiritual source, and is also spoken in *deva nagara*, or the planets of the demigods. **"Devanagari."** This language is spoken in the higher planetary system. Even in Vaikuntha this language is spoken. Devanagari, *deva nagara*. Just like Tokyo is a Japan *nagara*; similarly, *nagara* means 'city' and the citizens are called *nagari*, 'those who live in the city.' They are called *nagari*. So, devanagari. These letters are called Devanagari.

Lecture, April 23, 1972

The poetic, beautiful Sanskrit language is known as the "language of the gods." "Yes, Sanskrit is spoken not only on Krishna-loka but also in higher planets of the demigods. It is called the language of God and the demigods. It was spoken also on this planet. When the people were all godly they used to speak in Sanskrit. Sanskrit is the origin of all languages of the civilized people. It is most perfect, not only descriptive; the word 'Sanskrit' means 'the most perfect.' Because not a single word you can pronounce without having a bona fide principle. It is not like the English language: 'but/put' with an irrational difference in pronunciation; no principles. Sanskrit is not like that. Therefore it is perfect. It is not whimsical. English poetry has one line one-inch long; next line 600 inches long. Sanskrit is not like that. There are strict principles, and it is so beautiful. Therefore in Sanskrit no ordinary man can become a poet. No other language of the world can be compared with it. No other language of the world is so perfect as Sanskrit. Any language near to Sanskrit language is nearer to perfection. Sanskrit is pronounced the same way here or there, it is standard."

Letter, February 1, 1968

Although it may take long to master Sanskrit, once it is learned, the student passes through “the gateway to education.”

“Anyone serious about studying the Sanskrit language should first learn grammar. It is said that simply to finish studying Sanskrit grammar takes at least twelve years, but once one learns the grammatical rules and regulations very nicely, all other scriptures or subject matters in Sanskrit are extremely easy to understand, for Sanskrit grammar is the gateway to education.”

Sri Chaitanya Charitamrita, Adi 15.5, purport:

By learning Sanskrit grammar, “all the *shastras* are open.” Formerly Sanskrit schools first taught grammar very thoroughly, and this system continues even now. A student was supposed to study grammar carefully for twelve years in the beginning of his life, because if one is expert in the grammar of the Sanskrit language, all the *shastra* are open to him. **Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu** was famous for teaching grammar to students, and therefore Keshava Kashmiri first referred to His position as a teacher of grammar.”

Cc. Adi 16.31, purport:

With knowledge of Sanskrit, a student can delve into the ocean of “Vedic literature without any translation.” Many Vedic texts are yet to be translated.”. . . if you understand Sanskrit grammar, then you can read all the Vedic literature without any translation. Simply by studying. Therefore the Sanskrit scholars are first of all taught grammar. And when one is expert in reading grammar properly, then all Vedic literature becomes very simplified.”

Conversation, May 6, 1975

Vision for Sanskrit Education (Sanskrit Vidya Abhipraya)

Prabhupad envisioned that his adult disciples and the *gurukul* children would both learn Sanskrit. He wanted it to be a “compulsory” element of the *gurukul* curriculum.

“Sanskrit should be compulsory for all our children to learn, and anyone who has an elementary knowledge of the alphabet and grammar can begin to teach it.”

Letter, February 28, 1972

Prabhupad was displeased at the mispronunciation of Sanskrit by *gurukul* children, and he insisted that the teachers “teach the children perfectly Sanskrit and English.”

“You should teach the children perfectly Sanskrit and English instead of spoiling time and money. The children cannot pronounce correctly the Sanskrit. Let them read it correctly; that is wanted first. They must pronounce nicely English and Sanskrit. The English is no difficulty. If you can do this, then your education is all right. . . . You may introduce contests, but if the children and also the older devotees cannot pronounce Sanskrit correctly, it is all a useless waste of time.”

Letter, September 3, 1974

Prabhupad also wanted his disciples to hear and repeat the verses of the **Bhagavatam** after understanding the pronunciation.

“This is our program. We have come here not to exploit your country, but to give you something substantial. This is the Krishna consciousness movement. So read **Srimad-Bhagavatam**, pronounce these verses very nicely. Therefore we’re repeating. You hear the records and try to repeat.”

Lecture, April 14, 1973

Strategy & Implementation (Prayoga)

Every *brahman* was trained in the “science to pronounce a Vedic *mantra*.” “It is the practice of the *brahmans* conversant with

the science to pronounce a Vedic mantra in the right accent. The combination of the mantra and Sanskrit words must be chanted with the right pronunciation; otherwise, it will not be successful.”

Srimad Bhagavatam 4.13.27, purport

Sometimes **Prabhupad** would dedicate a substantial amount of time during his lecture to arduously train disciples in the brahminical practice of invoking “transcendental vibration” by chanting a verse.

Pradyumna [*chanting verse*]: *Na ghaöetärtha-sambandhaù.*

Devotees: *Na ghaöetärtha-sambandhaù.*

Prabhupad: It is *sandhi*? *Na ghaöeta artha*. It has been lost? *Na ghaöetärtha-sambandhaù. Na*

ghaöetärtha-sambandhaù. Again, recite the whole *shloka*.

Pradyumna [*devotees repeating*]: *Sri-Shuka uvaca, ätma-mäyäm äte räjan,*

parasyänubhavätmanaù, na ghaöetärtha-sambandhaù svapna-drañöur iväïjasä.

Prabhupad: Now read again.

Pradyumna: Whole thing?

Prabhupad: No, this same verse. Practice it. In this way you practice one mantra daily. Each mantra will purify you hundred yards daily. Go forward. These mantras are very powerful, given by Vyasadeva Goswami, vibrated. [. . .] So we should try to learn, get it by heart, at least one *shloka*, two *shlokas* in a week. And if we chant that –just like you are chanting so many songs – similarly, if we chant one or two verses of *Srimad Bhagavatam*, that will make you very quickly advanced for spiritual realization.

We are therefore taking so much trouble to get this transliteration, the meaning, so that the reader may take advanced step, full advantage of the mantra. It is not that to show some scholarship, that “I know so much Sanskrit.” No. It is just offered with humility to learn the mantra, because one who will chant the mantra – mantras are all transcendental vibration. Hare Krishna mantra is the *maha-mantra*, but they are also mantras, all the verses from the *Bhagavad-Gita*, the *Srimad Bhagavatam*, spoken by Krishna, spoken by Vyasadeva, an incarnation of Krishna. They’re also mantras, infallible instructions. So try to get it by heart, chanting. Either you chant by seeing the book or get it by heart, it is all the same. But try to chant one, two *shloka* daily. Chant!

Pradyumna [*chants with devotees responding*]: *Sri Shuka uvaca, ātma-māyām āte rājan,*

parasyānubhavātmanaù, na ghaöetārtha-sambandhaù.

Prabhupad [*correcting*]: *Na ghaöetārtha-sambandhaù.* Like that. It is written like that?

Pradyumna: *Ghaöetārtha-sambandhaù.*

Prabhupad: *Artha, artha* separated?

Pradyumna: No. Together. *Ghaöetārtha.*

Prabhupad: No. *Ghaöetārtha-sambandhaù.* It should not be. *Na ghaöetārtha-sambandhaù.* Like that. *Tä* should be long. *Tä. Ghaöeta artha-sambandhaù. Na ghaöetārtha-sambandhaù.* Is that all right?

Pradyumna: Yes.

Prabhupad: So pronounce like that.

Pradyumna: *Na ghaöetārtha-sambandhaù.*

Prabhupad: Loud. *Na ghaöetārtha-sambandhaù.*

Pradyumna: *Na ghaöetärtha-sambandhaù.*

Prabhupada: Yes. *Na ghaöetärtha-sambandhaù.*

Devotees: *Na ghaöetärtha-sambandhaù.*

Pradyumna: *Svapna-drañöur iväïjasä.*

Prabhupad: Oh. Again pronounce.

Pradyumna: *Sri Shuka uvaca [repeats verse].*

Prabhupad: Very important verse. Now we shall go to the words and meaning. Again recite. *Sri Shuka uvaca.* [*Devotees repeat the verse.*]

Prabhupad: Once again. Do it again. [*Pradyumna repeats the verse.*]

Prabhupad: Again. [*Devotees repeat again.*] Anyone can recite? All right. See the book and recite.

Shyamsundara: *Sri Shuka uvaca, ätma-mäyäm åte räjan, parasyänubhavätmanaù.*

Prabhupada: *Parasyä.* The transliteration is the long “a.” You have seen? You just try to follow the transliteration. That will be easier.

Shyamsundara: *Parasyänu...*

Prabhupad: *Parasyänubhava, bhavätmanaù. Ätmä.*

Shyamsundara: Yes. Long “a”. *Ätmanaù.*

Prabhupad: Yes. Now, beginning.

Shyamsundara: *Parasyänu . . .*

Prabhupad: No. First line. [*Devotees repeating.*]

Shyamsundara: *Sri Shuka uvaca, ätma-mäyäm åte räjan,*

parasyānubhavātmanaù.

Prabhupad: Read it again.

Shyamsundara: *Sri Suka uvaca, ātma-māyām āte rājan, parasyānubhavātmanaù na*

ghaöetārtha.

Prabhupad: *Na ghaöetārtha-sambandhaù, svapna-drañöur iväïjasä.* Next. Next. You read. Go on. One after another. [*Continues with a devotee reciting, and Prabhupad correcting.*] You read the transliteration. The thing is hearing the meter and repeat. That's all. The writing is already there, transliteration. Simply you have to hear the written. Just like you have chanted so many verses, songs, by hearing. The hearing is very important.

A child learns another language simply by hearing, pronunciation, hearing. That is natural. If we hear one thing repeatedly, you will learn. You will learn. So one has to hear a little attentively. Then it will be easy. There is no difficulty. This is by hearing. So simply you have to hear. Therefore the whole Vedic *shastra* is called *shruti*. It is a process of hearing. Go on. [*Recitation continues.*]

Next. Each one of you. *Na ghaöetārtha-sambandhaù svapna-drañöur iväïjasä.* What is the *äïjasä* spelling?

Devotee: I-v-a-n-j-a-s-a. *Iväïjasä.*

Prabhupad: Long *a* or short *a*?

Devotee: Long *a*.

Prabhupad: Yes. *Iväïjasä. Äïjasä. Äïjasä* means wholesale. Go on. [*Recitation and corrections continue.*]

Na ghaöeta artha- sambandhaù, combined together it becomes *na ghaöetārtha-sambandhaù. Tārtha.* What

is the spelling? *Tārtha*?

Devotee: T, long a, r-t-h-a.

Prabhupad: Of *tha*? What is the . . .?

Devotee: T-a-r-t-h-a.

Prabhupad: T-h-a. There must be r.

Pradyumna: Yes. *Ghaöetārtha*. G-h-a-t-e-t-a-r...

Prabhupad: T-a-r. Yes. T-a, *artha*. So you were missing that r. *Na ghaöetārtha-sambandhaù*. All right.

Next. [*Recitation continues.*] Get it next. Come here. So you have to study like that. So many *shlokas*, I am taking so much labor. If you do not read it carefully. It is not for that I am making business, for selling only, and not for my students. You must all read like this, practice. Why so much trouble is being taken, word-to-word meaning and then transliteration? If you chant this mantra, that vibration will cleanse the atmosphere. Next chant. [*Another devotee recites verse*]. Very good. Next, next. Bhanu Prabhu [*he recites*]. Thank you very much. He has pronounced very nicely. So he will teach you. Yes.

Next. [*Another devotee recites.*] Very good. [*Another devotee recites verse.*] Very good. Yes. In this way, each one of you, you chant and others will follow. Then in one or two days, you get the *shloka* by heart. You can chant. It is not difficult. Now read the word meanings and translation.

Karandhara: *Sri-Shukau uvaca*—Sri Shukadev Goswami said; *atma*—the Supreme Personality of Godhead;

mayam—the energy; *ate*—without; *rajan*—O King . . .”

Prabhupad: *Rajan*. It is address, addressing. Nominative is *raja* and addressive is *rajan*. Go on.

Lecture, April 20, 1972

This long discussion took place during his *Bhagavatam* class in Tokyo and is one of several instances when Prabhupad engaged his disciples in understanding the Sanskrit grammar, the word-for-word pronunciation, and the translation. He wanted his disciples to memorize and recite verses. Shatadhanya Prabhu recalls another incident that took place in Tokyo in 1972:

“One day **Srila Prabhupad** became very upset and spoke in a strong voice about how he had gone to all the trouble to include the Sanskrit *shlokas* and transliterations in the *Srimad Bhagavatam*, but the devotees were neither showing interest nor learning the correct Sanskrit pronunciation; they were ignoring the Sanskrit he had placed in his books. He adamantly said that from now on every devotee in ISKCON must learn to pronounce the Sanskrit and understand the *shlokas*.

“For the next three weeks, during every *Srimad Bhagavatam* class, Prabhupad called upon each devotee to chant the *shloka* aloud. He would take ten or fifteen minutes with each person, teaching how to pronounce every Sanskrit syllable in the *shloka*. He taught seven or eight people every day.”We were studying the Second Canto, and I remember even to this day the *shloka* that **Srila Prabhupada** drilled into us then, intensely, day after day. In fact, Pradyumna would tutor us during the day so that during the next morning we would not be embarrassed when we were called upon to chant. We were finally able to correctly chant all the *shloka* in the chapter ‘Answers by Citing the Lord’s Version.

“Before **Prabhupad** left Tokyo, he announced that there would be a final exam. In the temple room at class time, **Prabhupad** called on each devotee to recite the entire chapter in Sanskrit. Then **Prabhupad** went through all the trouble to make corrections and explain how we did. This went on for hours, and he told each of us whether our recitation was good or needed more work. Somehow I was the last one to chant. I took my turn and recited the whole chapter. Then **Prabhupad** looked

at me and said, 'First prize'."

Prabhupad wanted the members of ISKCON to become proficient in all areas of devotional service. Pronunciation of Sanskrit was no exception. **Prabhupad** wanted his disciples to recite the scriptural verses "co-jointly as they chant [the] Hare Krishna *mahamantra*." "I am happy to learn that you have begun to teach our students Sanskrit pronunciation. Please see that they can pronounce very nicely the Sanskrit verses in **Bhagavad-Gita, Srīmad Bhagavatam, Isopanishad, and Brahma-Samhita**, and teach them to chant co-jointly as they chant Hare Krishna *maha-mantra*."

Letter, April 17, 1970

Every mantra of the *Bhagavad-Gita* and *Srīmad Bhagavatam* is *shabda-brahma*, or the Absolute Lord in His form of transcendental sound. If the mantra is poorly articulated, then the sound form of the Lord is disfigured. Instead of invoking the Lord, the distorted sound may invoke inauspiciousness. Therefore **Prabhupad** emphasized that the devotees be educated "to pronounce in Sanskrit vibration".

"Your teaching of Sanskrit pronunciation has been very much successful. I was just thinking of teaching our students the pronunciation of the Sanskrit verses in the **Bhagavad-Gita, Srīmad Bhagavatam**, etc. and by Krishna's will you have already begun this. It will be a great help for me if the students are taught to pronounce in Sanskrit vibration. It will be another effect of transcendental sound vibration."

Letter, April 5, 1970

Along with musical accompaniment, devotees could "sing also, like songs, with tamboura" the Vedic mantras, suggested **Prabhupad**. "Yes. You can sing also very nicely, sing also, like songs, with tamboura. It is very nice [sings]: *cintāmañi-prakara-sadmasu kalpa*. Like that, it is very nice. In every temple there should be, one man should play on

tamboura and chant. It requires nice pronunciation, and with the sound of tamboura. People are coming, offering *darshana*, and the singing is going on. That is the system in Indian temples. It immediately vibrates.”

Vedabase; no date supplied

In his strategic outlook for **ISKCON**’s future, **Prabhupad** knew that Sanskrit education was an essential scholastic tool for the *gurukul* children. It would enable them to firmly and deeply grasp the Vedic literature. Thus, he ordered the *gurukul* educators to “purchase minimum fifty copies of the primary Sanskrit book.”

“One thing is, I have just returned from the Dallas Gurukul school, and the young students there require to learn Sanskrit language. So I think you may purchase minimum fifty copies of the primary Sanskrit book for learning Sanskrit language from Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan in Chowpatty and send to Dallas school as soon as possible. Ask them if they will donate, but if they will not donate then purchase outright minimum fifty copies of the first grammar or primary book for learning Sanskrit at earliest age.”

Letter, September 13, 1972

Not only for the children but for his adult disciples, too, **Prabhupad** encouraged Sanskrit classes, not for the purpose of becoming scholars, but to aid in their pronunciation of the mantras “in the proper accent.”

“Regarding Sanskrit class, it is very encouraging that Mr. Parikh is helping you in this connection, but the chief aim for learning Sanskrit would be how to pronounce the Sanskrit verses especially in our published books. . . . Therefore the main aim of this Sanskrit class should be how you can learn this chanting in the proper accent. It is not our aim to become a Sanskrit scholar.”

Letter, April 16, 1970

Anybody who reads **Srila Prabhupad's** books can learn something about Sanskrit by studying the word-for-word synonyms given for each verse. **Prabhupad** was even willing to produce recordings of the verses to assist the readers in "pronouncing Sanskrit very nicely just by reading" his books. "The linguistics professor has correctly remarked. It was my intention in presenting the books that anyone who would read would learn Sanskrit. For example almost all of my disciples are pronouncing Sanskrit very nicely just by reading my books. He says that there is no pronunciation guide, but it is there is it not? The best thing would be a recording."

Letter, September 26, 1975

In the following conversation with Dr. Patel, **Prabhupad** expresses his wish to explain the "*Bhagavad-Gita* grammar," i.e., analysis of the Sanskrit syntax, to probe the meanings and formations of words and phrases in the *Gita* verses. The **ISKCON** devotees Harivenu Dasa and Yadu Dasa have fulfilled **Prabhupad's** desire by authoring a book series called *Sanskrit* 12

Grammar in Bhagavad-Gita (see the Resources section for details). This series has detailed Sanskrit lessons, with practical demonstrations and examples from the verses of the *Gita*.

Dr. Patel: ...teach Sanskrit through *Bhagavad-Gita*.

Prabhupad: Oh, that we are doing. We give each word's meaning. Each word of any Sanskrit *shloka*, we give the meaning. That is right.

Dr. Patel: That is the way I learned myself.

Prabhupad: If one is serious to learn, he can learn. There is no difficulty, no: *dharma-shetre kurukshetre*. Now, if he inquires, "The word is *dharma-shetra*. Why it is written

shetra?" then it is grammar.

Dr. Patel: That is what I say. That is the way I learned.

Prabhupad: So that, if he likes, he can learn it. *Saptami, adhikaraëa saptami, sthana, shetra, shetre,*

dharma-shetre. If he simply tries to learn the nominative case, the objective case, then he'll learn.

Dr. Patel: [*speaks something in Sanskrit*]: Like that. All things in different ways.

Prabhupad: *Sanjaya uvaca.* It is nominative case. *Dharma-shetre kuru-kshetre samavetäù,* this is plural number, *yuyutsavaù,* plural number. *Mamakau päëòaväç caiva.* *Päëòaväù* is plural number, and when it is added with *ca* it becomes *çca.* The *visarga.* In this way he can learn. *Eva,* again *sandhi.* *Mämakäù päëòaväç ca eva.*

Dr. Patel: My meaning was that. My idea was that.

Prabhupad: Yes. So any serious student, he can learn at home. It is not very difficult. And after studying one or two or a dozen sentences, automatically, yes, he learns *sandhi,* he learns verb, he learns subject, object, everything. No time; otherwise, I would have made *Bhagavad-Gita* grammar. Yes.

Prabhupad: That is what I really meant when I say that.

Prabhupad: You can do that. You can do that. People will read it, *Bhagavad-Gita* grammar.

On the *Bhagavad-Gita* teach them grammar. Just like Jiva Goswami compiled *Hari namamrita vyakaran,* similarly, you write. You have got both the knowledge, Sanskrit, and through English, *Bhagavad-Gita* grammar. People will take it. I have no time; otherwise, I would have done it. Simply nominative case, objective case, *shabda-rupa.*

Conversation, April 13, 1976

Diacritics

Although **Prabhupad** did not have enough time to write a complete Sanskrit grammar text, he did make sure to include the diacritic marks on the roman transliterations of the scriptural texts in his books. This assists the reader to “pronounce exactly” the Sanskrit verses.

Prabhupad: You are reading the transcription or original verse?

Hridayananda: Transcription.

Prabhupad: So this transcription is quite helpful in pronunciation. Everything exact it is coming. The diacritic marks: follow, you can pronounce exactly.

Conversation, June 10, 1976

Because the Sanskrit alphabet has more letters than the English alphabet, to allow those with no knowledge of Sanskrit to correctly pronounce the words, scholars introduced a system of using a combination of the English alphabet and dots and lines called diacritical marks. These can be seen on the letters *ä, é, ü, â, ë, ï, ç*, and others. The diacritics tell a reader exactly how the sound is to be produced. For example, the line over the top of the vowel *a* (*ä*) tells the reader to hold the vowel twice as long as normal.

Prabhupad instructed his publishing house to strictly adhere to this academic standard of “correct diacritic spelling” in all his publications. “In reply to Jayadvaita’s questions, henceforward the policy for using diacritic markings is that I want them used everywhere, on large books, small books, and also BTG. If there is any difficulty with the pronunciation, then after the correct diacritic spelling, in brackets the words “pronounced as _” may be written. So even on covers the diacritic markings should be used. We should not have to

reduce our standard on account of the ignorant masses. Diacritic spelling is accepted internationally, and no learned person will even care to read our books unless this system is maintained.”

Letter, December 31, 1971

The diacritic system is known as the roman transliteration (“transliterate” means “to write in the corresponding letters of another alphabet”). It has been “internationally accepted by all scholars” for almost a hundred years. Each Sanskrit sound can be precisely transliterated without loss or ambiguity. All **Prabhupad**’s books contain diacritics on the transliterated Sanskrit words. “Diacritical marks must be maintained. These are internationally accepted by all scholars so I want that they should remain. If they are a botheration then leave out the Sanskrit words altogether or wherever there is a Sanskrit word, keep the English spelling for pronunciation (following it), e.g., Krishna pronounced “Krishna”. If you are printing children’s books you may avoid Sanskrit words, but in my speeches there must be Sanskrit. This changing from one standard to another is not good, either avoid Sanskrit, put English pronunciation in brackets or use the diacritical marks whenever there is Sanskrit.”

Letter, December 28, 1971

The roman transliteration enables novice Sanskrit students to read Sanskrit without knowledge of the Devanagari script, provided they are willing to “learn the diacritic marks.”

“You practice this diacritic mark. English transliteration is there. It is not very difficult. Simply if you practice twice, thrice, four times, it will come exactly, the pronunciation. You have to learn the diacritic marks. Then it will be all right.”

Lecture, March 27, 1976

Without diacritics, a Sanskrit word written in roman letters

will probably have an ambiguous pronunciation. The word meaning changes if one ignores the diacritics.

“Devotees call the temple in Belgium ‘Radhadesa,’ but there is no actual place like that with reference to the name Radha. The name comes from Radhadesa, a part of Bengal where the Ganges does not flow, the place where Nityananda Prabhu appeared.”

—Bhakti Charu Swami

The following excerpt from the *Sri Chaitanya Charitamrita* describes the place called Radhadesa:

räòhe yäìra janma kãñëadäsa dvijavara

çré-nityänandera teìho parama kiìkara

SYNONYMS

räòhe—in West Bengal; *yäìra*—whose; *janma*—birth; *kãñëadäsa*—Kãñëadäsa; *dvija*—*vara*—the best

brähmaëa; *çré-nityänandera*—of Nityänanda Prabhu; *teìho*—he; *parama*—first-class; *kiìkara*—servant.

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TRANSLATION:

The twenty-first devotee of **Sri Nityanand** in Bengal was Krishnadas Brähmaëa, who was a first-class servant of the Lord.

PURPORT:

In this verse the word *Radhe* refers to Radhadesa, the part of Bengal where the Ganges does not flow.

Cc. Adi 11.36

In this example, by ignoring the diacritics, devotees changed

the word Radhadesa ("part of Bengal where the Ganges does not flow") to Radhadesa (intending it to mean "the country of Rādhā"), which has a completely different meaning. By ignoring the dot (under òha in Radhadesa) etc., devotees changed the meaning of the word. A dot can change a lot.

Benefits of Pure Pronunciation (Shuddha Uccharanam Labha)

Pradyumna: Prabhupad: Sri Devotees: Devotee: Shukau Uvacha In regard to preaching/strong/em/strongg programs, devotees know that the pious Indians are naturally attracted to the pure recitation of Vedic mantras. If preachers can impress the public with spectacular recitation of "*Veda*-mantra," they will be "received like God."

"And wherever you go, in any part of the world, if you can chant this mantra, oh, you'll be received like God. It is so nice. And in India he'll actually receive like Gods if you chant this mantra. They will so offer their respects, so many. *Veda*-mantra."

Lecture, April 20, 1972

Just like the Lord's holy names, verses of scripture are also transcendental vibrations.

Their pure recitation brings all auspiciousness. By purely chanting mantras, "wherever you go, you will be all respected," **Prabhupad** told his disciples.

Prabhupad: ...transcendental vibration. So everything is there. If you do not practice, what can I do?

The transliteration is there, the accent is there, and now our Pradyumna is there also. Utilize time; become attracted. As Krishna is all-attractive, you become attracted at least to some. Krishna is all attractive.

You cannot become all-attracted. At least you become attracted to some. They are becoming attracted by good apartment, by

shaving the beard, like that. You told me they are trying to remain young?

Sudama: Yes, yes. You have given us so many *shlokas*. Now we have so much to start. So many mantras,
Bhagavad-Gita, Srīmad Bhagavatam, Isopanishad.

Prabhupad: Huge. So why you are not utilizing this facility?

Sudama: We're missing the point.

Prabhupad: This evening you will have to chant these verses and you will explain. Who will explain?

You will explain? That's all right. Then I shall speak. First of all let them hear from my disciples, then I shall speak. Is it all right?

Sudama: Yes, **Srīla Prabhupad.**

Prabhupad: So now practice whole day how to pronounce these *shlokas*.

Pradyumna: Better all chant.

Prabhupad: Yes. And explain. Practice like this. Then wherever you go, you will be all respected.

Lecture, April 25, 1972

15

Prabhupad desired that his *sankirtana* devotees uniquely "demonstrate the chanting of the mantras" to attract the public to Krishna. "When we lead our world Sankirtana Party, at that time, if we can demonstrate the chanting of the mantras as they are stated in ***Isopanishad, Bhagavad-Gita, Srīmad Bhagavatam, Brahma-Samhita***, that will be our unique position."

Letter, April 16, 1970

Prabhupad did not write books just for distribution. He also wanted his disciples to study them and practice “resounding the mantras.”

Prabhupad: *Bhagavata?* So from the very beginning, *Om namo bhagavate, janmädy asya yataù.*

[**Pradyumna** chants the verse one word at a time, with the devotees and **Srila Prabhupad** repeating, until Srila Prabhupad stops him at the word *abhijäaù.*]

Prabhupad [*Chants the verse one word at a time, with devotees repeating*]: Like that.

Pradyumna: *Janmädy asya yato 'nvayäd.*

Prabhupad: No, first of all let them practice. [*Chants the verse one word at a time, with devotees repeating.*] Read like that.

[*Pradyumna chants the verse one word at a time, with devotees and Srila Prabhupad repeating.*]

Prabhupad: Again. [*Pradyumna repeats, as above.*] Next you. [*Devotee recites whole verse one word at a time with devotees and Srila Prabhupad repeating.*] Hm. Kirtananand Maharaj. [*Kirtananand recites with the devotees and Srila Prabhupad repeating.*] This word *abhijäaù* or *abhijäaù* [*he pronounces it differently*] both ways you can pronounce. So it is easier for you, as it is spelling *abhijäaù*, or *abhijäaù*, as you like. Yes. [*Kirtananand continues and the devotees repeat.*] Thank you. Viñëujana Mahäräja [*recitation takes place*]. Karandhara Prabhu [*recitation takes place*]. You [*a devotee recites*]. Any more? Anyone else? Hm. [*Srila Prabhupad chants the verse twice, one line at a time, and devotees repeat.*]

Prabhupad: So, if you chant these mantras, at least one in one day, your life will be glorious. This mantra, *bhagavata-mantra*, not only *Bhagavata*, every Vedic literature is a

mantra. Transcendental sound. So practice resounding this mantra. So we have taken so much labor to put in diacritic marks, all the words, word meaning; utilize it. Don't think that these books are only for sale. If you go to sell these books and if some customer says, "You pronounce it," then what you will do? Then he will understand, "Oh, you are for selling, not for understanding." What do you think? So therefore it is necessary now, you have got nice books, each and every *shloka*, verse, should be pronounced. Therefore we have given this original verse in Sanskrit, its transliteration with diacritic mark. These marks are universally accepted amongst the scholars. So all the scholars of Sanskrit, they agreed to use this mark for pronouncing Sanskrit language. Sanskrit language is very important, honored all over the world.

So if, those who are Indians, especially present in this meeting, that if you want to glorify your country, then you present this Vedic literature. I am therefore so much laboring hard that we, before my leaving this body, I may give you some books that you can enjoy after my death. So utilize it. Utilize it. Read every *shloka* nicely, try to understand the meaning, discuss amongst yourselves. *Nitya bhagavatasevaya*. That is our mission.

Lecture, July 6, 1972

In Jhansi, where **Prabhupad** started the League of Devotees, his very first disciple, Dr. Acharya Prabhakara Mishra, was a college principal and Sanskrit scholar. **Prabhupad** envisioned an institute for scholars from all countries to "learn and read Sanskrit." "As such it is now necessary that men of culture all over the world may learn and read Sanskrit, the mother of all other languages of the Aryan stock. The League of Devotees, therefore, will maintain a Sanskrit academy and a degree college especially for the purpose of disseminating the benefit of this great language to all. Scholars from all countries will be welcome to remain as inmates at the

institute.”

On the mission of the League of Devotees, 1953

Even after establishing the International Society for **Krishna Consciousness** twenty years after preaching in Jhansi, **Prabhupad** still contemplated launching “a bona fide language school” and paying Sanskrit scholars to train his disciples in Hindi and Sanskrit. He thought this would be a great aid in their preaching mission, especially in India. We want to introduce this program of teaching our students Hindi and Sanskrit for two reasons. First of all, as I have already explained in a previous letter, if we can establish a bona fide language school then our American and European disciples can acquire student visas for coming to India. This will solve our visa problem. Secondly, if our students can actually preach in Hindi, periodically quoting Sanskrit, it will be a very good credit for us and very respectfully received by the Indian people.

The curriculum can be two hours in the morning and two hours in the evening and the pundits can be paid Rs. 200 per month. Our students, however, must be prepared to apply themselves and actually learn the languages.”

Letter, December 21, 1973

Other benefits of purely uttering Sanskrit are cultural and physical. To speak Sanskrit means to be refined and cultured by definition. As the language of the gods, it brings divine grace. The Sanskrit sounds create beneficial vibrations for the *nāḍīs* (the pathways of everyone’s life air) and strengthen the nervous system, thereby contributing to good health.

The Lord Accepts the Motive (*Bhava-grahi Janardana*)

One of the first arguments devotees offer against improving their pronunciation is: “Krishna is in my heart, and therefore He knows what I really mean to say; the Lord takes only the

essence of a devotee's attitude. He is glorified as *bhava-grahi janardana*." "The Supreme Personality of Godhead is known as *bhava-grahi janardana* because He takes only the essence of a devotee's attitude. If a devotee sincerely surrenders, the Lord, as the Supersoul in everyone's heart, immediately understands this. Thus even though, externally, a devotee may not render full service, if he is internally sincere and serious the Lord welcomes his service nonetheless. Thus the Lord is known as *bhava-grahi janardana* because He takes the essence of one's devotional mentality."

Bhagavata 8.23.2, purport:

This is the Lord's merciful nature. He pardons the mistakes in the "grammatical composition" of a devotee's prayers, if the intent and service attitude is "pure for serving Krishna."

"So even we offer Krishna prayer with broken languages, because Krishna is Absolute, Krishna will accept it."

Bhava-grahi janardana. Krishna sees how much your heart is pure for serving Krishna. Krishna does not see the wording, the grammatical composition of your prayer."

Lecture, May 6, 1973

The story of the illiterate South Indian *brähmaëa* of Çré Raigam teaches us a similar lesson. His fellow *brähmaëas* in his village laughed at him and made fun of his incorrect pronunciation of *Bhagavad-Gita shlokas*. But because of his intense *bhäva* (ecstatic love) for the Lord, he was shedding tears of ecstasy while thinking of the Supreme Lord driving the chariot of His devotee, Arjuna. As a result, the *brähmaëa* received the *darshana* (audience) of Lord Caitanya. With these arguments, one may justify laziness as being an indication of devotion: "I don't need to learn Sanskrit grammar and pronunciation." After all, Çaikaräcärya has said:>aJa GaaeivNd& >aJa GaaeivNd& >aJa GaaeivNd& MaU!MaTae

SaMPa[aae SaiàihTae k-ale/ Naih Naih r+aiTa duk*-Ha(k-r<ae

bhaja govindaa bhaja govindaa

govindaa bhaja mudha-mate

samprapte sannihite kale

nahi nahi rakñati òukãï karaëe

Worship Govinda, worship Govinda, worship Govinda, you fool!
Your grammatical word jugglery will not save you at the time of death.

Dvādaça Manjaréka Stotra

Prabhupad was tolerant of our mistakes. The Vaishnavas are addressed as *sara-grahi*, i.e., they accept only the essence and do not consider the mistakes in an offering. *Bhava-grahi*

Prabhupad accepted a pure service attitude. He forgave our mispronunciation of “guru” as “goru” (meaning “cow”) and took “the meaning of guru and not goru, even if it is spoken as goru”. “You are chanting, the mantras, but because it is not your language, sometimes it appears broken. Just like guru.

Sometimes you say ‘goru.’ ‘Goru’ means cow and ‘guru’ means spiritual master. So the difference in meaning is vast. The spiritual master is not a cow or a bull [laughs]. Because it is not your language, it does not matter, because *bhava-grahi janardana*, Krishna, is within you. He knows what you want to chant. Therefore He takes the meaning of guru and not goru, even if it is spoken as goru. I don’t take offense because I know that your desire is something else. I do not protest that you are addressing me goru. I am not goru. So that is not a fault. Similarly, it is said *yasmin prati-shloka abaddhavaty api*. If somebody does not know how to spell, how to say, but his idea is there, *abaddhavaty api*, because he wants to chant the holy name of the Lord, *namany anantasya, ananta*, His name is being chanted.”

Lecture, June 10, 1969

Here **Prabhupad** refers to **Narada's** famous instruction to Vyasadeva:

TaÜaiGvSaGaaeR JaNaTaagaivâvae

YaiSMaNa(Pa[iTaëaek-MabÖvTYaiPa)

NaaMaanYaNanTaSYa YaXaae_iªTaaiNa YaTa(

é*<viNTa GaaYaiNTa Ga*<aiNTa SaaDav")) 11))

tad-väg-visargo janatägha-viplavo

yasmin prati-çlokaṁ abaddhavyaty api

nāmāny anantasya yaço 'ikitiṇi yat

çāëvanti gäyanti gāëanti sädhavaù

That literature which is full of descriptions of the transcendental glories of the name, fame, forms, and pastimes of the unlimited Supreme Lord is a different creation, full of transcendental words directed toward bringing about a revolution in the impious lives of this world's misdirected civilization. Transcendental literature, although imperfectly composed, is heard, sung and accepted by purified men who are thoroughly honest.

Bhagavata 1.5.11

The Lord gives preference to "the motive, not the pronunciation of the language."

"Yes, you can sing prayers in Sanskrit, but prayers in English can be also pronounced because the Lord accepts the motive, not the pronunciation of the language. He wants to see spiritual motive. Even if some effectiveness is lost in translation, if the motive is there, it will make no difference."

Letter, January 2, 1968

The Lord in our heart, Paramatma, witnesses all our mind's acts. If we just pronounce the name of the Lord with the tongue, but do not meditate upon Him within our mind, then the effectiveness of our chanting is reduced. But if we are sincerely chanting the Lord's names, "even it is not... perfectly pronounced, still, God will understand." "Because God will take your mind, not your pronunciation. If you mean to pronounce God's name, even it is not, I mean to say, formally or perfectly pronounced, still, God will understand that you are trying to chant His name. That is your perfection."

Lecture, October 9, 1969

These statements are often misconstrued to justify improper pronunciation. However, the pure devotee actually wishes to offer the best service to the Lord. Reciting the pastimes of the Lord in the form of scriptural verses is also devotional service, and if our motive is to please the Lord, then we should endeavor to perform this service to the best of our capacity.

If one knows the proper method, one should perform the service appropriately. Prabhupad makes this point in the following letter: "everything perfect for Krishna."

"It is not our philosophy to print errors. Of course, our spiritual subject matter is transcendental and therefore it remains potent despite mistakes in grammar, spelling, etc. But this type of translation may only be allowed if there is no other way to correct it, then it is all right. But if you know the correct order, then you must make it perfect. That is our philosophy: everything perfect for Krishna."

Letter, January 20, 1972

1.7 Gravity of Mantra Recitation (Mantroccharanam Gambhirta)

Priests would ensure that their *mantroccharanam* (pronunciation of Vedic mantras) was precise by testing sacrificial hymns on animals. If the sacrificed animal regained a new life, the pronunciation was verified to be correct (*Bhag.* 4.19.27, purport). If the pronunciation was even slightly flawed, the result of the sacrifice could be reversed, as in the case of Tvañöö's sacrifice. Although this incident depicts an extreme situation, it demonstrates the importance of pronunciation, which can cause even life or death. If mantras are improperly chanted, they can yield an opposite result. Tvañöö wanted to produce a creature to kill Indra, but he chanted one syllable long instead of short, so the sacrifice produced Vātrāsura, whom Indra killed.

hTaPau}aSTaTaSTvía JauhaveNd]aYa Xa}ave)

wNd]Xa}aae ivvDaRSv Maaicr& Jaih iviÜzMa()) 11))

hata-putras tatas tvañöö

juhävendrāya çatrave

indra-çatro vivardhasva

mā ciraà jahi vidviñam

TRANSLATION:

After Vishvarupa was killed, his father, Tvañöö, performed ritualistic ceremonies to kill Indra. He offered oblations in the sacrificial fire, saying, "O enemy of Indra, flourish to kill your enemy without delay."

PURPORT:

There was some defect in Tvañöö's chanting of the mantra because he chanted it long instead of short, and therefore the meaning changed. Tvañöö intended to chant the word *indra-shatro*, meaning, "O enemy of Indra." In this mantra, the word *indra* is in the possessive case (*ñañöhé*), and the word *indra-*

shatro is called a *tat-puruna* compound (*tatpuruna-samasa*). Unfortunately, instead of chanting the mantra short, Tvañöä chanted it long, and its meaning changed from “the enemy of Indra” to “Indra, who is an enemy.” Consequently instead of an enemy of Indra’s, there emerged the body of Vātrāsura, of whom Indra was the enemy.

Bhagavata 6.9.11

In the compound word *indra-shatro*, the ending of the word *shatro* is uttered short when it is in the possessive case (*ñañöhi*) and long when it is in the vocative case (*sambodhana*).

Tvañöä mistakenly uttered it long. He expected “Indra’s killer” to be born from the sacrifice, but the *mantra* he uttered meant “Indra is the killer of the person to be born.” In the above scenario, “long” and “short” do not denote *dérgha* and *hrasva* (see section 2.4.2 on vowels), but long (*udatta*) and short (*anudätta*) pitch accents on vowels (also in 2.4.2). Tvañöä spoke Vedic Sanskrit (*vaidika bhana* or *vaidika sanskrit*), in which the word meaning can change depending on the pitch in which a vowel is accented. Vedic Sanskrit occurs only in the *shruti-shastra*, the four *Vedas*, and it is also called *shrauta bhana*. The rest of Sanskrit literature is written in classical Sanskrit (*laukika bhana* or *laukika sanskrit*), which is not altered by vowel pitch accents.

The commentaries by Sridhara Swami and Vaàçédhara on *Bhagavatam* 6.9.11 explain this incident in more detail. They say that the version of the mantra given in 6.9.11 is different from the mantra used by Tvañöä. The mantra given in the *Vedas* and described by Sridhara Swami and Vaàçédhar was *indra-shatrur vardhasva*, and their explanations of the mistake are based on this. It was customary to change a Vedic mantra a bit when mentioning *shruti* texts in writing because the audience did not necessarily have qualifications (*adhikara*) in *shruti*. Hence the mantra from the *Veda* was changed in 6.9.11.

Or it was changed owing to considerations of the verse meter.

Hence we see that there is no actual vocative in the Vedic mantra. Sridhara Swami mentions that the mistake was in the *svaras*, vowel pitch accents. As far as the letters were concerned, they were accurately chanted. The mistake in the *svaras* (vowel pitch accents) was that he chanted “*indra*” with the *udātta* accent, which changed it from what was intended (a *tatpuruna* meaning “Indra’s enemy”) to something else (a *bahuvréhi*) meaning “Indra is the killer of the person to be born.” /ememBhag.) pitch accents on vowels (also in 2.4.2). Tvañöä spoke Vedic Sanskrit (/strong/em