

Lesson 3. The Anunasiks justification for existing.

A long long time ago, knowledge was passed on from guru to shishya verbally. No books. No revision. Rehearing, definitely. The prospect of making a mistake was great. Pronunciations had to be accurate. If one invited श्वजनाः instead of स्वजनाः to one's feast, one could be assured of hurt neglected relatives and a smile on every canine face on the street.

The word संस्कृत itself means 'that which has been systemized.' Just take a look at our व्यञ्जन table again, you'll begin to appreciate how systematic it is. It also gives us excellent clues on how to pronounce the अनुनासिक व्यञ्जन s. Those are the ones that really trip us up.

The first row beginning with क is called the क वर्ग, literally meaning Class क. It includes all the व्यञ्जन s in that class...क ख ग घ ङ । Notice how the tongue remains in exactly the same place when you say these words out loud. Now, just as you would say क, say ङ, but bring out the sound nasally as well. The क वर्ग is called the कण्ठः, since the sounds of this group are based in the throat.

च वर्ग । This group is called the तालु . तालु is the palate. Keep the tongue in the same position as you would when saying च् then say ज् which roughly is a न्यं । The rest ट् वर्गमूर्धा (the top of the palate), the त् वर्ग ...दन्तः (the tongue touches the teeth every single time) and the प् वर्ग... ओष्ठः (here the lips are used) are easy to pronounce.

That's all very well but what in heaven's name are that ङ् and ज् doing there? When are they used? **The rule is that one ought to use that अनुनासिक व्यञ्जन with only those consonants that belong to the same class.**

WHEN WRITING

For example, the correct form of the word Shankar is शङ्कर and not शंकर . The trick is to look at the व्यञ्जन immediately after the nasal sound in a word and then decide which अनुनासिक one to write. Also, only म् has the अधिकार to be used as an अनुस्वार... the dot on top of a letter at the end of a word. Therefore to give you examples of words from all the वर्ग s..... अङ्क is correct and not अंक । पञ्च is correct and not पंच । कण्ठ and not कंठ । दन्त and not दंत । चम्पा and not चंपा.

WHEN PRONOUNCING

Sanskrit is like water . It flows. It should be easy for us to vocalize words. Therefore the म् in words adapts its pronunciation to flow in with the next word . In the sentence अहं तारा , the dot is pronounced like न् to flow with the next letter त to whose class the न् belongs. Pronounced, अहन् तारा and not अहम् तारा (And written अहं तारा ।) अहं कान्ता is pronounced as अहङ् कान्ता. The म् should sound like ङ् । Therefore अहं टिपू सुल्तान् is pronounced as अहण् टिपू सुल्तान् । If we have royally confused you, let us know.
