

‘Sanskrit-Speaking’ Villages, Faith-Based Development and the Indian Census

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Abstract Over three sections, the 2001 and 2011 Indian censuses are scrutinised to locate, down to the sub-district administrative and village levels, where L1-L3 (first to third language) Sanskrit tokens were returned during census enumeration. First, there is a theo-political discussion of Sanskrit’s imaginative power for faith-based development. This includes a discussion on how ‘Sanskrit-speaking’ villages signify an ambition toward cultural renaissance. Next, Sanskrit’s national-level enumeration is discussed. Finally, closer scrutiny is paid to the top four states (Maharashtra, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh). On average, more Sanskrit tokens were returned by men than women; 92% of L2-Sanskrit tokens are linked to L1-Hindi; most L1-L3-Sanskrit tokens cluster with Hindi, English, and/or the State Official Language; most Sanskrit tokens are Urban, as opposed to Rural; and most tokens are found across the Hindi Belt of north India.

Keywords ‘Sanskrit-Speaking’ villages. Hindu nationalism. Linguistic utopia. Social imaginary. Mother tongue.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Sanskrit, Theo-Politics, and Faith-Based Development. – 3 Comparing 2001 and 2011 Census Results. – 4 An Explication of Census Data in Several States. – 4.1 Maharashtra. – 4.2 Bihar. – 4.3 Madhya Pradesh. – 4.4 Uttar Pradesh. – 5 Concluding Remarks.



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1 Introduction

bhāṣā saṃskṛtāpabhraṃśaḥ bhāṣāpabhraṃśastu vibhāṣā |
sātattaddeśa eva gahvaravāsināmca prakṛtavāsināmca ||
 Abhinavabharati 17.49

The corruption of Sanskrit is *bhāṣā*, and the corruption of *bhāṣā* is *vibhāṣā*.
 It is the language of the same countries of forest dwellers and of rustic people.
 (Kavi 1934, 376)

This paper is part of the *Imagining Sanskritland* project, which focuses on locating and documenting how, where, and why the Middle Indo-Aryan language, Sanskrit, is spoken in the twenty-first century. This builds on the previous work of Nakamura (1973), Hock and Pandaripande (1976), Hock (1991), Aralikatti (1989; 1991), Aklujkar (1996), Hastings (2004; 2008), and Deshpande (2011; unpublished). Generally, this project expands beyond linguistic analysis of sentence structure to document the aspirations, ideologies, and moral horizons inherent in identifying as a speaker, as well as documenting second-language acquisition through a focus on imperfect learning, substrate interference, and bilingualism.

The project first focused on code-switching between Hindi and Sanskrit and the transubstantiation of symbolic capital in a residential Sanskrit college/yoga ashram in Gujarat, India (McCartney 2011; 2014a; 2017a; 2018a). Another focus was the two-week intensive speaking course in New Delhi (McCartney 2014b). The focus pivoted to include a relatively famous 'Sanskrit-speaking' village in Madhya Pradesh, India (McCartney 2015; 2016a; 2016b; 2016c; 2017b; 2017c; 2017d; 2018b), which includes discussion of language revival and hybridisation (McCartney, Zuckermann 2019). This combines with analysing the theo-politics of Sanskrit's imaginative consumption within the transglobal wellness industry and the topic of 'yoga fundamentalism', which maps out the distanced and banal ways that consumption of yoga lifestyles can potentiate tacit and unwitting support of Hindu supremacism (McCartney 2017e; 2017f; 2017g; 2019a; 2019b; 2020). More recently, the project has pivoted to cover matters related to Sanskrit's soft power potential within the context of faith-based, sustainable development and competitive diplomacy. This involves environmental impact assessments of yoga lifestyle brands and the cultivation of nostalgic moods predicated by Neo-Romanticism, mystical holism, and dark green religion (McCartney 2021a; 2021b; 2021c).

Informed by Deumert's (2009) and Posel and Zeller's (2015) demographic analyses of census data related to language shift and bilingualism in South Africa, this project pivots to look for Sanskrit

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('speakers') in the Indian census data. An initial result, upon which this present paper directly builds, is McCartney (unpublished). The policy of India's census enumeration states that if the number of speakers of any language drops below 10,000 then it will no longer be reported as a separate language (Goswami 2012).¹ If Sanskrit were to dip below the threshold, this would have unintended consequences for its soft power deployment. Therefore, the politics of census enumeration for the purposes of state building are relevant. Simply looking for Sanskrit speakers is something of a fool's errand. Sanskrit is a post-vernacular language in a perpetual state of acquisition. The media only reports the perceived success of Sanskrit's revival (Indian Yug 2020).

In short, India's 2011 census results clearly demonstrate that Sanskrit 'speakers' are overwhelmingly found in urban areas spread across the 'Hindi heartland',² which is only a part of India's complex linguistic ecology and "linguistic area" (Emeneau 1956). What this paper does is use the Indian government's census data to geographically locate where *people who identify as speakers of Sanskrit were at the time of census enumeration*. For now, this is as good as it gets, as the data presented below are not capable of verifying the fluency of people who claim to speak Sanskrit. Discussion of several issues relating to this are found across the project's publications mentioned above. The outcomes from this present paper include future research being more strategic.

Even though some consider Sanskrit to be the "language of the rural masses" (Deopujari 2009) and the "language of future India" (Mohan 2020), it is also thought that "Sanskrit is the forgotten language of urban India" (Indian Eagle 2020) and that "NASA believes San-

1 This is one reason why the RSS (Rashtriya Svayamsevak Sangh, 'National Volunteer Corps') "wants citizens to voluntarily register Sanskrit as their second language in the census. The RSS feels that if people register the language, the final census data would reflect higher literacy of Sanskrit, which will force the government to take measures to preserve the language" (Tare 2010).

2 Compare the notion of the "Vedic God" by Hebden (2011). The geographic focus of this paper is the 'Hindi Heartland' or 'Hindi Belt', which covers most of the plains of north India, where Sanskrit's close relatives - Hindi and its related languages - are spoken. This is pertinent because, as is discussed below, this is the linguistic area where the census results indicate most of the 'Sanskrit speakers' live. As is evident, below, the link between people who identify as Sanskrit speakers with both Hindi and English is immense. By way of example, the state of Bihar's Sanskrit areas is discussed below. This paper expands upon Jha's (2017) explanation of how studies of language politics in north India tend to focus on the Hindi-Urdu debate. This debate builds on a centuries-old development of language order in premodern India (Ollet 2017), taking on communalist narratives. This culminated in the nineteenth century around which of these mutually intelligible languages - Hindu and Urdu, which derive from Hindustani, but use different scripts, respectively, Devanāgarī देवनागरी and Nasta'liq نستعلیق - should become the national language. Currently, India does not have a national language. Instead, it has two official languages, Hindi and English (Dasgupta 1995).

sanskrit is a scientific language for programming” (TNN 2019). Moreover, Sanskrit is thought to be a “gift of India for [the] entire humanity” (India Education Diary Bureau 2020) and that the “Sanskrit effect” is caused by “chanting Sanskrit”, which “increases brain cognitive areas” (Sanskriti 2018). The benefits of chanting are predicted to extend beyond humans, as “Cows will talk in Tamil and Sanskrit” (Patherpanchali 2018). Back down on the ground, it is difficult to locate Sanskrit speakers because the available information are unreliable factoids mentioned on the internet,³ copied and pasted from

3 Yet, these lofty ambitions have humble origins amongst the mythical villages, whose inhabitants are meant to be grateful that Sanskrit’s perceived civilising power will finally reach them, even if this ideological benevolence is soaked in a neo-colonial Sanskritisation impetus that is made explicit in ways, such as “*Samskṛtam sarveṣāṃ krte... sarvadā; Sanskrit for everyone... forever*” (Amaravāṇi 2020). Strength, it seems, is not found in linguistic diversity. Amara-vāṇi (immortal-language) is ultimately a part of Samskrita Bharati, which itself is the linguistic node of the more prominent Hindu nationalist parent organisation, the Rashtriya Svayamsevak Sangh (RSS). It is through its international branch, the Hindu Svayamsevak Sangh (HSS), that Samskrita Bharati operates at an international level. It mostly services the Indian diaspora through cultural and linguistic events, which can be an opportunity for the collapsing of the ‘big’ versus ‘little’ tradition binary (Vertovec 1994), such as a potential muddling of Sanskrit as it goes through its interlanguage stage of acquisition. However, the expansion beyond the imagined borders, especially through extending into cyberspace, requires a recalibration of relations, especially to the *puṇya bhūmi* (‘sacred land’) of the *Hindutvavādins* imagination, within the context of transnational development and multiple modernities (Jaffrelot 2017). After all, “Sanskrit is a gift of India for entire humanity”. At least, that is what India’s HRD Minister, Ramesh Pokhriyal, asserted just after the *Central Sanskrit Universities Bill, 2020* was passed by India’s upper house of parliament to upgrade three Deemed Sanskrit Universities to Central University status (India Education Diary Bureau 2020). Amaravāṇi promotes Sanskrit through songs. One example is the song *Viśva-bhāṣā Samskṛtam* (‘The Universal-Language is Sanskrit’). Information on the song’s page, on Amaravāṇi’s website, also claims, that “There are many villages in India where the entire population speaks solely and fluently in Samskṛtam!” (Amaravāṇi 2020). Such truth claims are a curious thing. I am reminded of one verse from a seventh century Ayurvedic text, which discusses poor vision resulting from false perception: “*Dūrāntikastham rūpaṅca viparyāsenā manyate | doṣe maṅḍalasaṁsthāne maṅḍalānīva paśyati || AS.Utt.15.4 ||*” “Due to false perception (*viparyāsa*), a patient perceives a thing located far away, as close by, and things located close by, as far away” (Aṣṭhāṅgasaṅgraha, Uttaraśthānam, 15.4 [Vāgbhaṭa 2020]). In a topsy-turvy way, *viparyāsa* refers to the act of imagining something to be real and true, when it is false. The term *niścaya* can mean both correct perception and enquiry. We find in the Vaiṣṇava tradition encouragement to cultivate *niścaya* (*Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* 3.26.30), which is recommended for both soteriological aspirations and mundane matters. This concept is similar to that of Nāgārjuna (c. 150 CE-c. 250 CE), who discussed, in the *Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra*, the concept of *pratīyasamutpāda*. This refers to the “basic principle of thought that no two contradictory judgements can hold good in regard to the same thing in the same respect” (Ramanan 1987, 167). In other words, ‘Sanskrit-speaking’ villages either are true and do exist or they do not. There is very little available evidence, be it documentary, direct, real, circumstantial or testimonial. Furthermore, what percentage of a village’s population and to what degree of fluency and ordinal ranking of usage, considering frequency of code-switching, domains and topics, might be the minimum requirements to satisfy claims of any village being one that is ‘Sanskrit-speaking’?

other websites lacking accurate details. Nonetheless, these factoids are enough for people to believe that 'Sanskrit-speaking' villages exist.⁴ People rely on this meme to provide emotional reinforcement for deeply held religious beliefs hoping it will re-enchant the world to provide profound meaning in one's life. 'Sanskrit-speaking' villages endow the world with a perceived sense of divinity, meaning, and significance. As an empty signifier, the village is remote enough to remain perceived as an infallible closed circuit. Similarly, Olshansky, Peaslee and Landrum (2020) provide insight into the cognitive defence mechanisms of flat earthers, which include motivated reasoning to dilute cognitive dissonance and maintain cognitive consistency. Having visited several of these so-called 'Sanskrit-speaking' villages, I became increasingly frustrated, as most of these villages contain hardly anyone who can hold a casual conversation across general domains and topics or utter increasingly complex sentence patterns, and include more complicated use of tense, aspect, or mood. Nonetheless, throughout the last decade, my primary question has been: "Where are the Sanskrit speakers?"⁵

Jhirī is a village in Madhya Pradesh that I have paid more attention to (McCartney 2015; 2016a; 2016b; 2016c; 2017b; 2017c; 2017d; 2018b) where apparently everyone speaks Sanskrit (Samskrit101 2009). Oblivious to issues of linguistic human rights (Skutnabb-kangas 2012), Ghosh (2008) celebrates how the residents "hardly speak the local dialect, Malvi, any longer. Ten years have been enough for the sanskritization of life here". A potent claim that "even those who don't know the technicalities of the language still speak fluent Sanskrit" (Hindutvains 2011) is demonstrably false. For instance, while conducting fieldwork in Jhiri, one of the residents repeatedly claimed that everyone in village fluently spoke Sanskrit. Beaming with pride, he often emphatically asserted, "*Bhoḥ, asmin grāme iva sarve janāḥ saṃskṛtaṃ vadituṃ śakyante khalu* [Sir, in this village everyone can speak Sanskrit!]. However, this was easily disproven by speaking to

⁴ My term, *laukika-saṃskṛta-bhāṣā-aviparyāsa-ābhāsa-samanveṣaṇam*, refers to the attempt to look everywhere (*samanveṣaṇa*) for the semblance (*ābhāsa*) and distorted perception (*aviparyāsa*) of vernacular (*laukika*) variants, or regional dialects, of Sanskrit (*saṃskṛta*), as a spoken language. This includes its mention in yoga-related outlets (Dizon 2016; Bedewi 2020). By first identifying the 'pseudo-perception' (*pratyakṣa-ābhāsa*) found in discourse (*vyavahāra*), the process moves to falsifying (*dūṣayati*) fallacies (*hetvābhāsa*) related to the enduring claims about 'Sanskrit-speaking' villages, which are legion.

⁵ In logic, *ābhāsa* takes the meaning of 'erroneous though plausible argument'. These rumours act as a buffer warding off existential anxiety. At least it is potentially comforting to know that a 'real' and 'true' India still exists and that "India's own Jurassic Park" is found in rural Madhya Pradesh, in a village that "is a lost world that has been recreated carefully and painstakingly, but lives a precarious existence, cut off from the compelling realities of the world outside" (Ghosh 2008). The *village* holds an ambiguously utopian relation to future India (Nandy 2001; Mohan 2012).

anyone within arm's reach, who would require prompts from others as they could not reply to simple sentences, such as "*Bhavataḥ nāma kim* [What is your name?]" or "*Mitram, kutra gacchasi* [Friend, where do you go?]", let alone pass sentence repetition tests. Yet, these rumours become factoids and bloom into unassailable facts in support of "core Indian values" (Prabhu 2014). One potent example is the use of spoken Sanskrit to sell a motorbike, which uses a 'Sanskrit-speaking' village as the backdrop (Sharma 2009).

One issue with validating the returned Sanskrit *tokens* in the census data is that they are self-reported. Another issue is that census enumerators are bound by law not to question the maximum three languages given. Therefore, if someone believes they speak Sanskrit (or any other language) and identify as a speaker of Sanskrit then it becomes a demographic fact.⁶ Simply put, one token refers to one individual instance of someone claiming to be either a L1 ('mother tongue'), L2 (second-language), or L3 (third language) speaker.⁷ These epistemic methodological issues have been discussed at every census (Office of the Registrar General 2020).

All of the data are publicly available in downloadable spreadsheets (Office of the Registrar General 2020). The 2011 data come from the relevant C-16 ('mother tongue')⁸ and C-17 (bi-/tri-lingualism) tables, which only became available in late 2018. Multiple versions of these

⁶ India, like many nations, has used different and equally ambiguous terminology to capture the primary language(s) used by their citizens. There are actually three language 'situations' that can be captured by censuses: (a) the language first used by the respondent; (b) the language most commonly used by the respondent at the time of the census; and (c) the knowledge of particular official language(s) by the respondent (Arel 2004). The Indian census does not appear to achieve this tertiary system, simply because it does not ask the necessary questions. Is this due to either pragmatic expediency, ideology, or both? Building upon Foucault 2007, Duchêne, Humbert, Coray 2018 explain the consequences of reducing real world complexities through statistics to quantifiable categories. These can become tools of governance for national solutions. This, after all, is probably the point. Yet, if there is an ideological component, it then becomes more challenging, particularly when added to the epistemic relativism of self-reporting, to gather meaningful data to implement productive policy.

⁷ This present study does not have the capacity to verify whether these tokens translate into real-world pragmatic abilities to communicate in Sanskrit.

⁸ A 'mother tongue', is defined in the Indian Census guidelines (3.1) as, a "the language spoken in childhood by the person's mother to the person. If the mother died in infancy, the language mainly spoken in the person's home in childhood will be the mother tongue. In the case of infants and deaf mutes, the language usually spoken by the mother should be recorded. In case of doubt, the language mainly spoken in the household may be recorded" (Office of the Registrar General 2020). Section 3.2.a-d stipulates that an 'enumerator' is "Bound to record the language as returned by the person as her/his mother tongue"; and that they must record the "mother tongue in full, whatever is the name of the language returned by the respondent and do not use abbreviations". Collectors are not expected to determine if a "language returned by a person is a dialect of another language"; and, if there is any "relationship between mother tongue and religion" (Office of the Registrar General 2020). This gets complicated

tables exist, as each state has a separate C-16/17 table. Having collected and sorted millions of data points, each table was filtered using excel data analytic functions. The subsequent aggregate token amounts were then cross-analysed over several levels of administration. These levels include the national, state, district, sub-district levels, as well as rural and urban zones and sex ratios.

A key finding demonstrates high levels of affinity between the triune of Sanskrit (S), Hindi (H), and English (E), which is also nuanced by each state's official language (SOL). This means that people who identify as L1-L3 speakers of Sanskrit are overwhelmingly clustered within a specific set of L1-L3 languages, which more often than not includes Hindi and English.⁹ Therefore, the statistically relevant identity of the typical 'Sanskrit speaker' is an educated, middle-class urbanite who lives in north India.¹⁰

Based on 2011's C-16 table, the total nation-wide number of L1-Sanskrit Persons amounts to 24,821 (tokens); [fig. 1] shows the totals for all states and union territories.

when Hindu nationalist groups urge people to list Sanskrit as their L1 in the lead up to each census (Tare 2010).

9 This has much to do with India's language planning policy, which prefers a Sanskritised Hindi as the official language (see Articles 343 and 351 of India's constitution). For example, L1-S_L2-H_L3-E would mean an individual's languages are L1-Sanskrit, L2-Hindi, and L3-English. The following formula $S=(L1\alpha_L2\beta_L3\gamma)(SOL)$ is an attempt to articulate the ways in which Sanskrit can be found within complex linguistic ecologies and the influence of the state language in modifying the triadic SHE. For instance, across the language area of Maharashtra, the state language, Marathi, competes, as it were, for space on, like different taste buds, on the tongues of the state's citizens.

10 In the post-Independence era, studies related to contemporaneous spoken Sanskrit were initiated first by the Sanskrit Commission (Azad 1957), which laid down several recommendations for preserving and promoting Sanskrit as a spoken language, some of which have been successfully introduced. Deshpande (2011) explains how, due to the changes in the three-language educational policy, Sanskrit has fared better in the Hindi speaking states than in the non-Hindi speaking states, where a dramatic reduction in students studying Sanskrit occurred once it became optional in 1968 (see Azad 1957, 99). This does not stop activists from trying to install Sanskrit as the national language (*rāṣṭra-bhāṣā*) and global *lingua franca* (*viśva-bhāṣā*) (Ramaswamy 1999). As well, these language politics have long encoded Hindi as a hegemonic language yet raise the status of Sanskrit. Complementing this, Babu (2017, 113) explains that in India Sanskrit sits atop the linguistic hierarchy and caste system by invoking the notion of *catur-varṇa* ('four-classes') by positing Sanskrit as occupying a privileged position and English (which is a rank outsider in the constitutional scheme), as a language with emancipatory capacity due to its positioning outside the legitimised hierarchy.

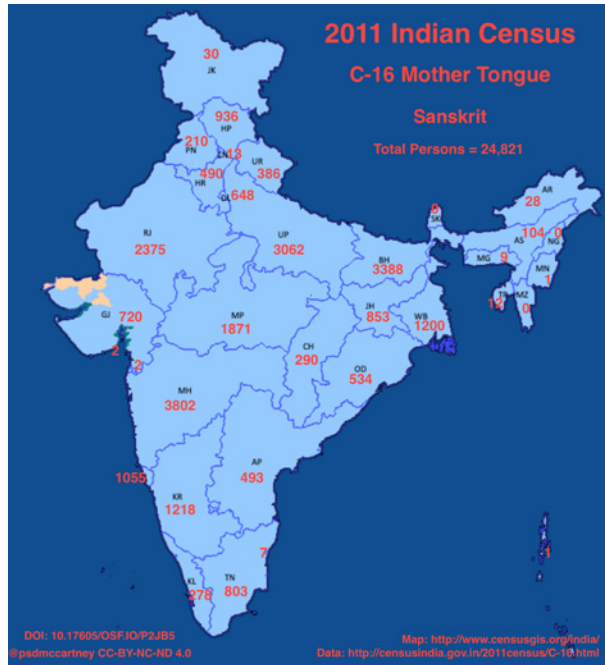


Figure 1 2011 India: States L1-Sanskrit. (India 2020)

A deeper historical review of Sanskrit's enumeration across all 15 censuses occurs in [tab. 1], which provides a cursory glance at Sanskrit's India-wide total Persons' results from 1881 to 2011.

Table 1 Total Persons L1-Sanskrit returns, 1881-2011¹¹

Year	Total Sanskrit	Total population	%
1881	1,308	224,000,000	0.0006
1891	308	287,000,000	0.0001

¹¹ The Sanskrit data at each census is located in Plowden 1883, 132; Baines 1893, 144; Risley, Gait 1903, 164, 174; Gait 1913, 106; Marten 1923, 96; Hutton 1933, 492; Yeats 1943, 9; Mitra 1994; Office of the Registrar General 1954, 7; Mallikarjun 2002; Breton 1976, 304; Office of the Registrar General 2020. Yeats explains that "The language and script questions have not been tabulated and I make now a recommendation to the Government of India that they be not tabulated even if the suspended operations are resumed" (1943, 9). Mitra (1994, 3207) explains that war, communal tensions, and Yeat's transition to self-enumeration from household enumeration resulted in a completely botched census that produced incoherent results left unpublished. Mallikarjun (2002) shows that of the 2,554, one person identifies as a speaker of 'Vedic' Sanskrit and another as a speaker of VedPali, while 93 and 5 people respectively claim to speak Pali and Prakrit. Breton (1976, 304-8) provides a good overview of the 1961 census.

Year	Total Sanskrit	Total population	%
1901	716	238,396,327	0.0003
1911	360	252,093,390	0.0001
1921	356	251,321,213	0.0001
1931	1,181	278,977,238	0.0004
1941	N/A	318,660,580	N/A
1951	555	361,088,090	0.0001
1961	2,554	439,234,771	0.0006
1971	2,212	548,159,652	0.0004
1981	6,106	683,329,097	0.0009
1991	49,736	846,427,039	0.006
2001	14,135	1,028,737,436	0.001
2011	24,821	1,210,854,977	0.002

This paper has three main sections. The first (§ 2) discusses key theo-political points related to Sanskrit's imaginative power. § 3 explicates Sanskrit's national-level enumeration comparing the 2011 and 2001 censuses. § 4 burrows down to the lowest administrative levels of four states to show which districts, sub-districts (*tehsil/taluk*, or *talug*), and in some cases, blocks, returned the highest numbers of L1-L3 Sanskrit tokens.

2 Sanskrit, Theo-Politics, and Faith-Based Development

Inspection of faith-based competitive diplomacy, in relation to Yoga and Sanskrit, is sparse.¹² The ways in which Sanskrit is imbricated is often under appreciated. While for some, Sanskrit might be a dead language and a symbol for millennia of oppression, for others it is a treasure trove of untapped knowledge that might just save humanity and a heritage language one might like to speak (McCartney 2021a). Sanskrit helps define and chart one's path toward a moral horizon. This speaks more about temporalities of becoming rather than being (Fahy 2020). It helps an individual link to an archaic modernity or futured-past and potentially return to an imagined Vedic 'Golden Age' fuelled by re-enchanting, eco-sustainable, neo-Romantic, mystical holism (Hebden 2011; Subramaniam 2019). However, Sanskrit's reclamation and acquisition are indelibly constrained by substrate

¹² The most closely related is Jacobs' documentation (2016) of the world's largest volunteer-based charity, the Art of Living Foundation, that originates from India. Watanabe (2019) explores a Japanese organisation's operations in south-east Asia. Haynes's (2021) edited volume explores international relations across several religions. Nelson (2021), however, provides the most comprehensive account of faith-based NGOs as non-state political and moral actors.

interference from the L1s influencing how it, as a L2, is spoken. One of the key assets used to justify Sanskrit's role as a tool for development is its perceived linguistic purity. It is argued that only a 'pure' Sanskrit can deliver the utopian world it inspires. What, exactly, might a pure Sanskrit sound like and how might it power anything? Answering this question is a particularly vexing matter, especially when considering that the earliest layers of the Vedic corpus contain hundreds of loan words from other Indo-European and non-Indo-European languages.¹³ During the post-Vedic Period (c. 500 BCE), vernacular Sanskrit, otherwise known as *bhāṣā*, was referred to as the language of the conquerors (Burrow 1965). Burrow showed through a study of the morphology of Classical Sanskrit how the diversity of forms prevalent in the earlier Vedic language reduced significantly, even though it did become the language of Vedic and later Hindu texts, commentaries, rituals, and literature (Subbarao 2008). In the contemporary revival movement, this simplification has continued to the point where vernacular Sanskrit can be feasibly equated with a Sanskritised form of Hindi (Deshpande 2011; unpublished).

The production, reception, and consumption of the 'Sanskrit-speaking' village narratives across various media appear to function in a similar way to *phalaśruti* paratexts. The *phalaśruti* is the textual component listing the benefits of hearing or reciting the particular text. Taylor (2012, 94-5) explains that these "fruits of hearing" texts often include potential punishments and dangers listed along with the promise of heavenly rewards and that this "is a way of enabling the discourse to function as 'true' and is at least partly driven by a distinctly earthly agenda". Another similarity between Taylor's discussion of paratexts and the 'Sanskrit-speaking' village discourse is the way in which quantifiable and qualifiable measurements seem illusive. Nonetheless, the 'Sanskrit-speaking' village boots this signal. Consider the example of this faith-based development narrative that has evolved over the past decade in the state of Uttarakhand, which, in 2010, voted in Sanskrit as its second official language (Trivedi 2010; McCartney 2021c). Even though this project was implemented a decade ago, and has endured changing governments and allegations of corruption, by 2013 ₹21 crore (USD 275 million) had already been spent on promoting Sanskrit education in Uttarakhand. Regrettably, there is very little to show for it (Singh 2015). Recently, however, an updated policy has increased this imposition of language shift toward the target language, Sanskrit (Ahmad 2020). This new policy aims to

13 Historical linguistics demonstrates that the oldest intangible artefact of the Sanskrit canon, the R̥gveda (c. 1600-1100 BCE), contains approximately two percent non-Aryan vocabulary, idiomatic expressions and phonemic influences, which are derived from the Dravidian language family, the Bactria-Margiana Archaeological Complex, and the Harappan Kubhā-Vipās Substrate (see Witzel 2010).

create a Sanskrit village in every 'block' (an administrative division often confused with sub-districts) of Uttarakhand (News Desk 2020; Upadhyay 2020). The state of Uttarakhand consists of two Divisions, 13 Districts, 79 Sub-districts, and 97 Blocks. One wonders how much more investment might be needed to transform 97 villages scattered across the Himalayas into *saṃskṛta-grāmāḥ* ('Sanskrit-villages'). After all this investment not one L1-Sanskrit token comes from any village or rural area.¹⁴ While 70% of the state's total population live in rural areas, 100% of the state's total (n=246) L1-Sanskrit tokens are linked to urban areas.

The ideology behind this top-down development project aims to reverse engineer India and the world through implementing a 'dharmaic' lifestyle predicated by Sanskrit and Yoga. It aims to reform society toward an imagined Sanskritland, where just like the following song that attendees at Samskrita Bharati language camps learn, the aspiration is that Sanskrit will be spoken "*grhe grhe* [in every home], *grāme grāme* [in every village], *nagare nagare* [in every city], and *deśe deśe* [in every country]". This might seem terribly banal and optimistically utopian, yet it is part of a yoga-oriented, faith-based, competitive diplomatic, soft power initiative. Evidence of this includes propositions such that Yoga and Sanskrit can solve climate change (Chauhan 2015; King 2015; Jacobs 2016; United Nations India 2019; Miller 2020). The final aspiration of Samskrita Bharati, however, is evidenced through its road map, which aims to build on simple Sanskrit (*saṃskṛtaṃ saralam*) utterances toward it being spoken all the time (*saṃskṛtaṃ sarveṣāṃ*). This potentially leads to an

¹⁴ Sanskrit and Yoga are used to brand the nation (McCartney 2021a). The production of legitimacy and authority in diplomatic and economic arenas involves interweaving narratives involving a product, a place, and a nation (Aronczyk 2013) through which nations work to control their own images by implementing strategic communication strategies (Ermann, Hermanik 2018). This narrative is only a few clicks away from confirming one's bias. The following quote, from Soumitra Mohan (2020), encapsulates the sentiment around its didactic potential: "The language deserves to be treated much better than it has been so far, more so when it has been called the best 'computerable' language. Sanskrit's credentials to be a language of future India are definitely better and greater than we have realised so far. Its revival will not only renew and revive the pride in our own cultural heritage but will also bring about spiritualism and the concept of a meaningful society and polity, thereby bringing order and peace all across the country, a desideratum for any developed society". A similar sentiment comes from Sampūrṇānanda Saṃskṛta Viśvavidyālaya (SSV)'s homepage (2019) (<https://ssvv.ac.in/brief-history>). SSV is one of India's best-known Sanskrit universities, which is located in Benares, Uttar Pradesh. SSV explains on its homepage that "Sanskrit is the most ancient and perfect among the languages of the World. Its storehouse of knowledge is an unsurpassed and the most invaluable treasure of the world. This language is a symbol of peculiar Indian tradition and thought, which has exhibited full freedom in the search of truth, has shown complete tolerance towards spiritual and other kind of experiences of mankind, and has shown catholicity towards universal truth. This language contains not only a rich fund of knowledge for people of India, but it is also an unparalleled way to acquire knowledge and is thus significant for the whole World".

unavoidable critical mass (*saṃskṛtaṃ anivāryam*), which will inevitably lead to a language shift (*saṃskṛta sarvatra*), and adoption of the new global *lingua franca* (*viśva bhāṣā*) (McCartney 2017e). The perceived net-positive outcome (*abhyudaya*) has India positioned as the next global superpower and paragon of moral virtue, its ultimate dispenser (*viśva-guru*) (Bharati 2014; Singh R.K. 2014; Press Trust India 2018; 2019).

3 Comparing 2001 and 2011 Census Results

Now, it is time for some bookkeeping (*pusta pālana*). This section provides a straightforward analysis of the 2001 and 2011 census results. The Persons category is further disambiguated by two binaries, Rural/Urban and Males/Females. In the 2011 result (n = 24,821), fewer L1-Sanskrit tokens were returned from Rural areas (10,908), as opposed to Urban areas (13,913). This gives a ratio of 44:56. However, Bihar completely reverses this with an 89:11 ratio in favour of rural areas. See [tab. 2] for a comparison of the 2011 top ten Rural:Urban states.

Table 2 Rural and Urban Top Ten States, 2011 (Office of the Registrar General 2020)

2011 Urban Top 10		2011 Rural Top 10	
Bihar	3,041	Maharashtra	3,555
Rajasthan	1,461	Uttar Pradesh	1,668
Uttar Pradesh	1,394	Madhya Pradesh	1,020
West Bengal	1,066	Karnataka	1,016
Himachal Pradesh	857	Rajasthan	914
Madhya Pradesh	851	Tamil Nadu	743
Goa	385	Gujarat	680
Odisha	306	Goa	670
Jharkhand	264	NCT of Delhi	594
Maharashtra	247	Jharkand	589

The sex difference splits 55:45. A total of 13,636 Male tokens were returned compared to 11,185 Female tokens. Every state/union territory has more Males to Females at a 60:40 average. However, Tamil Nadu has a 50:50 split and Puducherry (Pondicherry) is the only instance where Males are fewer than Females at 29:71 (Office of the Registrar General 2020); table 3 compares the L1-L3 (total) 'Sanskrit speakers' between the 2001 and 2011 censuses [tab. 3]. Self-reported L1 speakers increased from 14,135 to 24,821; the L2 figure has stayed almost the same, while the L3 figure has dropped by 48%.

Table 3 2001-2011 Sanskrit L1-L3 (Office of the Registrar General 2020)

	L1	L2	L3
2001	14,135	1,234,931	3,742,223
2011	24,821	1,134,362	1,963,640
% change	43 %	-9 %	-48 %

We can still use these data to locate sub-district administrative zones which have the highest numbers. Table 4 elaborates on the previous table, demonstrating that even though the total number of L1 rose between 2001-11 the total L3 has almost halved [tab. 4]. This suggests that the total number of L1-L3 for 2011 decreased by 37%, even though the 2011 L1 increased by 76%.

Table 4 L1-L3 Sanskrit 2001 and 2011 (Office of the Registrar General 2020)

		2001 Total	2011 Total	% Change
	L1	14,135	24,821	43%
	L2	1,234,931	1,134,362	-8%
	L3	3,742,223	1,963,640	-48%
	L1-L3	4,991,289	3,122,823	-37%
Male	L1	8,189	13,636	67%
	L2	875,107	713,772	-18%
	L3	2,751,121	1,266,098	-54%
	L1-L3	3,634,417	1,993,506	-45%
Female	L1	5,946	11,185	47%
	L2	359,824	420,590	14%
	L3	991,102	697,542	-30%
	L1-L3	1,356,872	1,129,317	-17%

Another significant point relevant across the L1-L3 range relates to the relationship between Hindi, English and Sanskrit. The reason the L2-Sanskrit figures are different between table 4 and table 5 is due to table 4 consisting of all the L2-Sanskrit speakers [tab. 4]. In contrast, table 5 shows only the L1-Hindi_L2-Sanskrit and L1-Hindi_L2-English figures [tab. 5]. This figure is significant, as 95% of L2-Sanskrit speakers are L1-Hindi speakers (1,174,019 / 1,234,931).¹⁵ This locates the L2-Sanskrit phenomenon within an exceptionally Hindi-centric con-

¹⁵ The Hindi language category consists of 57 sub-languages and dialects (Office of the Registrar General 2020).

text. This is similar to Breton's (1976, 304) observation based on the 1961 census, that "Le centre de la connaissance du sanskrit à notre époque est de loin la plaine gangétique (Uttar Pradesh: 79,000, Bihar: 29,000, Punjab et Haryana: 20,000, Delhi: 9,000)". However, it is important to appreciate that this group only comprises 0.3% of the total number of L1-Hindi speakers. The Male figures for both L2-Sanskrit and L2-English have fallen (24 and 11%) while the Female figures have increased (6 and 19%). The Totals have respectively decreased 15 and 1.2%.

Table 5 L1-Hindi_L2-Sanskrit/English between 2001 and 2011 (Office of the Registrar General 2020)

	L	TOTAL	Male	Female
2001	Sanskrit	1,174,019	830,827	343,192
	English	32,399,287	21,931,407	10,467,880
2011	Sanskrit	994,863	631,099	363,764
	English	32,018,890	19,592,236	12,426,654

Table 6 begins with the 2011 Total Persons figures for L1-Sanskrit [tab. 6]. Below, in the next part of the table the L1-Sanskrit_L2-Hindi_English combination equates to 69% of the total L1-Sanskrit_L2- α figure. In the bottom part of the table the combined L1-Sanskrit_L2- α _L3-Hindi_English portion is 77%. These data show the intimate relations that Hindi and English have with Sanskrit.

Table 6 2011 L1-Sanskrit_L2-[Hindi-English]_L3[English-Hindi] (Office of the Registrar General 2020)

	TOTAL	Male	Female
L1-Sanskrit	24,821	13,636	11,185
L2	19,712	11,075	8,637
L2 Hindi	12,221	6,960	5,261
L2 English	1,347	727	620
H+E Total	13,568	7,687	5,881
H+E %	69	69	68
L3	7,910	4,600	3,310
L3 Hindi	2,267	1,327	940
L3 English	3,796	2,211	1,585
H+E Total	6,063	3,538	2,525
H+E %	77	77	76

Table 7 below presents data related to L1-Sanskrit_L2- α [tab. 7]. It shows Hindi's clear L1-Sanskrit_L2- α majority with 62% of the L2 category.¹⁶ While Hindi is one of India's official languages (alongside English, which also ranks high), the data show the intimate relation with the Hindi heartland. Notice that Female L2-Odia tokens were higher than Male (180:132), as well as Konkani (39:37), and Others (83:76).

Table 7 L1-Sanskrit/L2- α rankings, 2011 (Office of the Registrar General 2020)

L2	TOTAL	Male	Female
Hindi	12,221	6,960	5,261
Marathi	1,934	1,071	863
English	1,347	727	620
Bengali	900	462	438
Kannada	839	502	337
Tamil	551	281	270
Gujarati	365	254	111
Urdu	325	193	132
Odia	318	138	180
Telegu	271	150	121
Malayalam	163	86	77
Konkani	159	76	83
Others	76	37	39

Table 8 shows the fluctuations between the dominant Sanskrit states by comparing the results from the 2011 and 2001 censuses [tab. 8]. What might explain Uttar Pradesh's fewer speakers and Maharashtra's increase?

Table 8 2011 and 2001 State-level L1-Sanskrit Census Results (Office of the Registrar General 2020)

	2001	2011	% change
Maharashtra	408	3,802	832
Bihar	754	3,388	349
Uttar Pradesh	7,048	3,062	-57
Rajasthan	989	2,375	140
Madhya Pradesh	381	883	132
Karnataka	830	1,218	47

¹⁶ Note: this list is only a portion of the total.

Did all the speakers from Uttar Pradesh move to Mumbai? How can the dramatic rise in states like Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Karnataka be explained? These data show that the Sanskrit-speaking sentiment predominates in the Hindi belt. Having provided some national level statistics, what follows is a closer look at these top-ranking states, pinpointing L1-L3 Sanskrit tokens down to district and sub-district administrative levels. This begins in Maharashtra.

4 An Explication of Census Data in Several States

4.1 Maharashtra

Table 9 shows the top ten districts in the state [tab. 9]. Making sense of all the data is challenging because there is an overwhelming amount of overlap between tables. For ease of comprehension, table 9 is a modified version of the original. Several columns have been deleted.¹⁷ Respectively, both Pune District (28%) and Pune City Sub-district (22%) represent the highest L1-Sanskrit administrative zones in their category for the state. It is clear from the Urban 3554:Rural 145 ratio that 96% of Maharashtra's Sanskrit tokens are located in urban areas.

Table 9 2011 Maharashtra C-16 Sanskrit–Top 10 Districts (Office of the Registrar General 2020)

C-16 POPULATION BY MOTHER TONGUE										
State Code – 27 / Mother Tongue Code – 17 / Mother Tongue Name – Sanskrit										
District code	Area name	Total			Rural			Urban		
		P	M	F	P	M	F	P	M	F
000	MAHARASHTRA	3,802	1,984	1,818	247	145	102	3,555	1,839	1,716
521	Pune	1,091	567	524	51	33	18	1,040	534	506

¹⁷ As an example, before the token numbers are given, on the right of each table, the complete line for Pune District would read, C0116 (table code, denotes that these data are from the C-16 'mother tongue' table), 027 (state code), 521 (district code), 0000 (sub-district code), Pune (area name), 017000 (mother tongue code), Sanskrit (mother tongue name). This would look like the following, C0116-027-521-0000-Pune-017000-Sanskrit. Where it gets confusing is when districts, sub-districts, and towns have the same or similar names and coding. For example, the district of Pune (27-521-00000) is similar to its sub-district constituent, Pune City (27-521-04194). The same logic applies to every other district/sub-district across the entire suite of census tables. Another example is Nashik District (27-516-00000), which has a similarly named sub-district, Nashik (27-516-04152). This raises some methodological issues. We can use these fields to find all sub-districts in each state and rank them. We can also filter just the districts and rank them in the same way.

C-16 POPULATION BY MOTHER TONGUE

State Code – 27 / Mother Tongue Code – 17 / Mother Tongue Name – Sanskrit

District code	Area name	Total			Rural			Urban		
517	Thane	710	385	325	14	9	5	696	376	320
518	Mumbai Suburban	556	263	293	0	0	0	556	263	293
516	Nashik	442	239	203	21	12	9	421	227	194
505	Nagpur	195	98	97	6	6	0	189	92	97
519	Mumbai	109	54	55	0	0	0	109	54	55
511	Nanded	61	30	31	5	2	3	56	28	28
515	Aurangabad	55	29	26	5	3	2	50	26	24
514	Jalna	51	27	24	47	24	23	4	3	1
504	Wardha	42	21	21	22	10	12	20	11	9

Table 10 shows the L1-L3 relations found in the C-17 tables [tab. 10]. In particular, the relations between the state language, Marathi, with Hindi, English, and Sanskrit are located. While Sanskrit clusters with Hindi and English, at the state level it becomes a bit more complicated since it is important to consider the relevant state language in this clustering. Hindi and English, however, still have an overwhelming presence. The left column shows L1-Marathi at the national level,¹⁸ the middle column shows how many of these returned L2-Hindi, while the right column shows the figures for L3-Sanskrit. This repeats for each line demonstrating the L1-Marathi_L2- α _L3- β scenarios. Using the same formula, the second part of the table zooms in to the state level figures. L1-Marathi_L2-Hindi_L3- α equates to 42% of the L2 category. The final part of this table focuses on L1-Sanskrit_L2- α _L3- β .

Table 10 2011 Maharashtra C-17 Bi-/Trilingualism (Office of the Registrar General 2020)

Marathi across India		
L1	L2	L3
Marathi 83,026,680	Hindi 34,650,142	Sanskrit 57,070
	Kannada 1,468,221	Sanskrit 559
	English 1,395,659	Hindi 870,985
		Kannada 26,907
		Sanskrit 13,142
	Gujarati 361,327	Sanskrit 238
	Khandeshi 292,555	Sanskrit 124
	Konkani 98,318	Sanskrit 168

¹⁸ Notice C17-0000_2011 compared to C17-2700 in the middle and right panels, respectively. The state code for Maharashtra is 2700 and the national code is 0000.

Sanskrit 56,360		Hindi 22,477
		English 19,780
L1-Marathi in Maharashtra		
L1	L2	L3
Marathi 77,461,172	Hindi 32,660,911	Sanskrit 54,500
	English 1,202,810	Sanskrit 12,673
	Kannada 512,117	Sanskrit 471
	Khandeshi 292,035	Sanskrit 124
	Telegu 150,921	Hindi 31,881
		Sanskrit 38
	Gujarati 60,552	Sanskrit 142
	Sanskrit 54,100	Hindi 21,474
		English 19,415
L1-Sanskrit in Maharashtra		
L1	L2	L3
Sanskrit 3,802	Hindi 1,782	English 888
		Marathi 365
	Marathi 1,259	Hindi 598
		English 306
	English 334	Marathi 49

This demonstrates that the L1-SOL_L2_L3 cluster with Hindi_English is a predictor for the relative number of L2 and L3 Sanskrit speakers. This is consistent across every national and state-level enumeration. If we reverse the order (right panel) and begin with L1-Sanskrit, the numbers for L2_L3 also follow a similar order, with the State Official Language (SOL), Hindi, and English in superior positions compared to other possibilities.

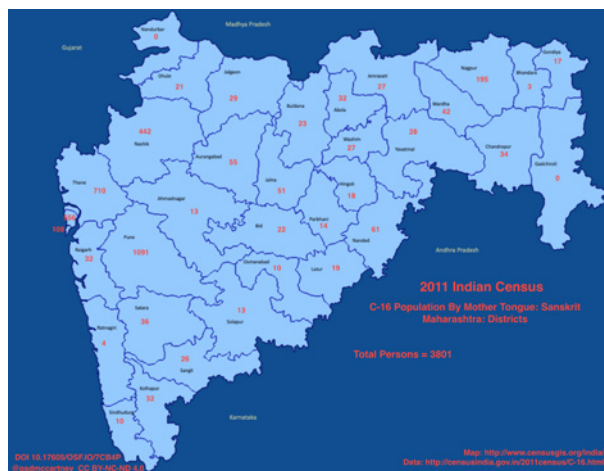


Figure 2 2011 Maharashtra: Districts L1-Sanskrit. (India 2020)

Figure 2 demonstrates the 2011 District-level L1-Sanskrit figures for Maharashtra [fig. 2]. The top five districts are Pune 1091, Thane 710, Mumbai Suburban 555, Nashik 442, and Nagpur 195.

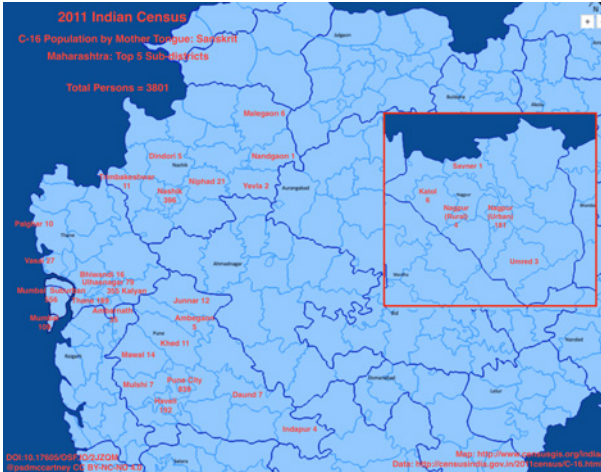


Figure 3 2011 Maharashtra: Sub-districts L1-Sanskrit. (India 2020)

Figure 3 zooms down to the sub-district level to show the top five districts in more detail [fig. 3]. Notice how Nagpur District has been superimposed in the red box. Next, we move onto the state of Bihar.

4.2 Bihar

In Bihar, the highest number of L1-Sanskrit tokens are located in the eastern administrative area of Kishanganj District (210). The top five districts are listed in [tab. 11].

Table 11 2011 Top 5 Districts: Bihar (Office of the Registrar General 2020)

C-16 POPULATION BY MOTHER TONGUE										
State Code – 10 / Mother Tongue Code – 17 / Mother Tongue Name – Sanskrit										
District code	Area name	Total			Rural			Urban		
		P	M	F	P	M	F	P	M	F
000	BIHAR	3,388	1,845	1543	3,041	1,654	1387	347	191	156
210	Kishanganj	1,028	543	485	962	507	455	66	36	30
212	Katihar	604	324	280	598	321	277	6	3	3
211	Purnia	574	326	248	544	309	235	30	17	13
209	Araria	383	220	163	381	219	162	2	1	1
230	Patna	119	67	52	4	3	1	115	64	51

ing other tables. The state's highest returning district is Kishanganj. Beginning with the 'town level' C-16 table for Bihar, we learn that Kishanganj Nagar lists 66 Urban L1-Sanskrit tokens (Office of the Registrar General 2020). We can combine this with the Village Directory of Kishanganj District, Bihar (Office of the Registrar General 2020).¹⁹ The relevant code for Dighalbank's Block is 002. We can sort and filter all the listed towns and villages with this code and then sort further for all the places with a population under 5,000 inhabitants (the town/village population boundary). While we currently are unable to locate with more accuracy, we are, nonetheless, left with a list of 'rural villages' from which Bihar's highest L1-Sanskrit sub-district is potentially comprised of. Let us move on to Madhya Pradesh.

4.3 Madhya Pradesh

Madhya Pradesh returned more L1-Sanskrit Urban tokens (54%) [Rural 851 (451 M/400 F) and Urban 1020 (537 M/483 F)]. This further complicates the fabled 'Sanskrit-speaking' village narrative. However, the highest-ranking sub-district, Pipariya, accounts for 96% (Rural 485/Urban 5) of Hoshangabad District's total 524 (496 Rural/28 Urban) (Office of the Registrar General 2020). Compared to the state Rural total, Pipariya Sub-district equates to 57% of all the 367 sub-districts in Madhya Pradesh and 26% of the state's total. At the village level this can be narrowed down to 114 villages in Pipariya Sub-district (Office of the Registrar General 2020).

If this sub-district does have such a high number of Sanskrit speakers it is certainly unclear as to why these places are not as famous as the three so-called 'Sanskrit-speaking' villages (Jhiri, Sarangpur Sub-district, Rajgarh District; Mohad, Gadawara Sub-district, Narsimhapur District; and Baghuwar, Kareli Sub-district, Narsimhapur District). What is more curious is the fact that the districts these three 'Sanskrit-speaking' villages are located in barely returned any L1-Sanskrit tokens. The internet contains countless sites that assert that everyone, or nearly everyone, in these villages speaks Sanskrit. The district and sub-district L1-Sanskrit tokens are represented in [figs 6-7].

¹⁹ Kishanganj District is comprised of seven 'blocks', which is the same number of sub-districts. The difference between a block and a sub-district is its function. A block is a geographical unit for rural development, whereas a sub-district (*tehsil*) is a geographical unit for revenue collection (Maheshwari 1984).

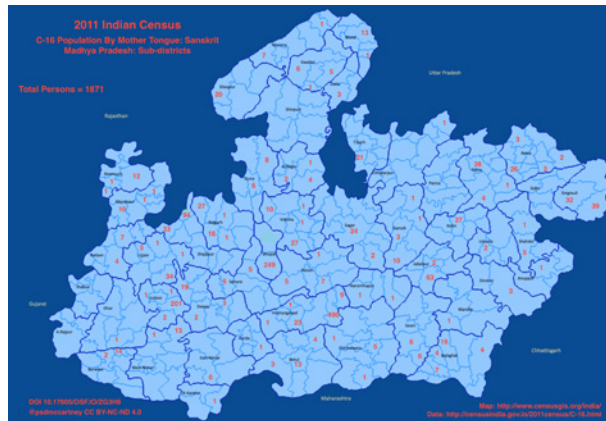
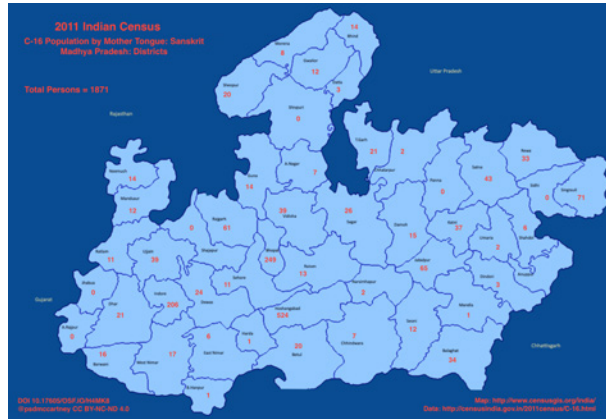


Figure 6 2011 Madhya Pradesh: Districts L1-Sanskrit. (India 2020)

Figure 7 2011 Madhya Pradesh: Sub-districts L1-Sanskrit. (India 2020)

Like Bihar, filtering through the village/town lists for Pipariya Sub-district the towns with 5,000+ inhabitants can be removed. The result is 142 villages, ranging in size from 4,767 (Khapar Khe-da) down to two (Pathi Thekredri) inhabitants. It is this list that the majority of Madhya Pradesh's Sanskrit tokens come from (Office of the Registrar General 2020).

The ST-15 (Scheduled Tribes) table is a subset of the C-16 tables relating to Scheduled Tribes' mother tongues. These are available at the state/district levels. 6.7% of the L1-Sanskrit state total (149/1871) is comprised of people who identify as members of Scheduled Tribes. Of this, 126 tokens are from Hoshangabad District (Office of the Registrar General 2020).

Table 12 2011 and 2001 Madhya Pradesh L1-Sanskrit (Office of the Registrar General 2020)

Total Persons – Sanskrit	L1	L2	L3
2011	1,871	246,940	454,245
2001	381	210,400	960,176
% change	391	17	-53

Table 12 scratches beneath the surface to show the changes between 2001 and 2011 across the L1-L3-Sanskrit range [tab. 12]. This figure reflects the national data. As we have discussed, the L1 change is aspirational. It really makes not much sense, otherwise. How could a 391% increase have occurred in just one decade? The L2 figure is more feasible, however the L3 decline of 53% is a worrying predictor for the vitality of Sanskrit. Could it be that all the Sanskrit village mythology circulating might be harming Sanskrit's role? In relation to the Hindi/English/Sanskrit trinity, in Madhya Pradesh L1-H_L2-E_L3-S comprises 98% of all the L3-Sanskrit possibilities. This decline is also considerable among the Scheduled Tribes of Madhya Pradesh. Table 13 highlights the changes of L1-Bhili/Bhilodi_ and L1-Gondi_L2-α_L3-Sanskrit [tab. 13]. Both have declined dramatically between 2001 and 2011.

Table 13 2011 and 2001 Madhya Pradesh L1-ST_L2-α_L3-Sanskrit (Office of the Registrar General 2020)

	2011	2001	% change
L1-Bhili/Bhilodi_L2-α_L3-Sanskrit	779	1,677	-54
L1-Gondi_L2-α_L3-Sanskrit	661	889	-26

Madhya Pradesh's 2011 L2-Sanskrit total is 246,940. This is comprised of the Scheduled Tribes' total of 13,540 (5% of state total). This 13,540 is predominated by 84% Rural tokens. Of this Scheduled Tribes' total 52% come from a group of 60 ST-L1 languages, including Gond, Arakh, and Agaria (prevalent in Hoshangabad District). The next group of languages include Bhil and Bhilala (15%), and Kol (10%) (Office of the Registrar General 2020). Having located the districts and sub-districts within Madhya Pradesh where L1-L3 Sanskrit tokens were returned, a clearer image of where future fieldwork could be directed emerges. The final state is Uttar Pradesh.

4.4 Uttar Pradesh

Uttar Pradesh is India's most populous state with 199,581,477 people (Office of the Registrar General 2020). While Uttar Pradesh experienced a 57% decrease in L1-Sanskrit tokens, in comparison, the total nationwide increase for L1-Sanskrit is 76% (Government of Office of the Registrar General 2020). What has caused Uttar Pradesh to decrease when other states witnessed large increases? Three districts are worthy of closer scrutiny because of how they changed dramatically between 2001 and 2011. The state capital, Lucknow, reduced by -82%, while Unnao reduced by -95%, and Gorakhpur, the electorate of UP's Chief Minister, Yogi Adityanath, decreased by -99% (Office of the Registrar General 2020). The top ten districts are Kanpur Nagar 932, Sitapur 722, Sultanpur 323, Ghaziabad 128, Saharanpur 85, Ballia 79, Lucknow 55, Varanasi 55, Bijnor 50, and Agra 41 (Office of the Registrar General 2020); figure 8 provides the total Person numbers for each district [fig. 8].



Figure 8 2011 Uttar Pradesh: Districts L1-Sanskrit. (India 2020)

Figure 8 shows the numbers for each district in which L1-Sanskrit tokens were returned. In Uttar Pradesh, 1,697 Male L1-Sanskrit tokens were returned compared to 1,365 Female. Like Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, the Urban L1-Sanskrit (1668) token count is slightly higher than the Rural equivalent (1394). The urban area of Varanasi (Benares), which is considered one of the holiest cities of Hinduism, which is home to the famous Sanskrit university, Sampūrṇānanda Saṃskṛta Viśvavidyālaya (SSV), only returned 54 tokens (36 M/18 F). Similarly, Breton (1976, 306) wonders why the famous traditional seats of Sanskrit learning have fewer speakers of Sanskrit. Notice that Kanpur is the city with the highest number of returned

L1-Sanskrit tokens (Office of the Registrar General 2020). The top ten sub-districts are Kanpur 931, Mahmudabad 482, Lambhua 310, Gha-ziabad 127, Sidhauri 94, Biswan 83, Ballia 62, Varanasi 55, Deoband 51, and Bijnor 50 (Office of the Registrar General 2020). Kanpur is also the highest ranked town. Zooming in, figure 9 shows the unique L1-Sanskrit results for each of the six tehsils in Sitapur District [fig. 9].



Figure 9 2011 Sitapur District within Uttar Pradesh. (India 2020)

In 2001, Sitapur District, Uttar Pradesh (430 kilometres east of New Delhi), reportedly had the highest number of all the districts in the country, at 558 (Priyanka 2014). The 2011 total of 722 (M 378/F 344) is a 28% increase. Sitapur District also represents 24% of the state's total. It splits Rural 1275 (M 676/F 599) and Urban 73 (M 33/F 40). This means that the district of Sitapur provides 46% of Uttar Pradesh's L1-Sanskrit tokens, which, itself, is comprised of 90% Rural from across the district's six tehsils (Office of the Registrar General 2020). When compared with the 2001 results for the same the district the fluctuations are quite remarkable. Where did 2,604 Sanskrit 'speakers' from Biswan tehsil go? Sitapur District has the second highest L1-Sanskrit number in Uttar Pradesh.

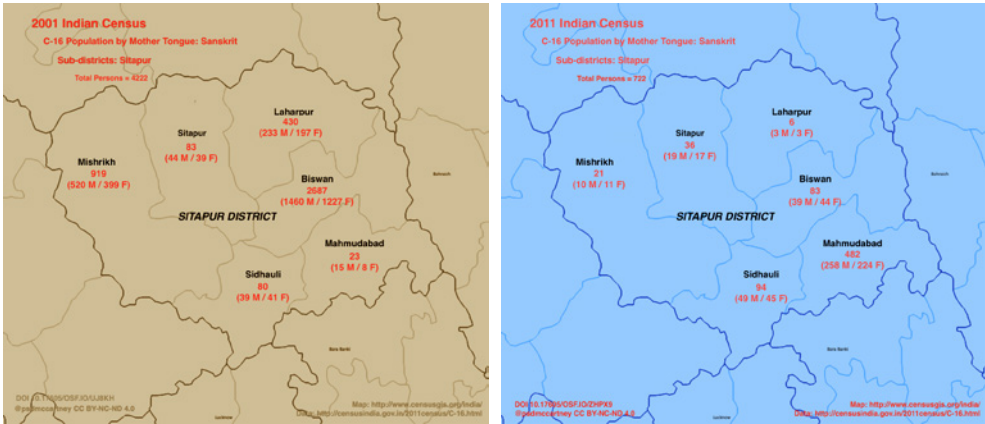


Figure 10 2001 and 2011 Sitapur District: Sub-districts L1-Sanskrit. (India 2020)

Figure 10 shows the 2011 figures for each tehsil of Sitapur District, which indicates that Mahmudabad Tehsil has the most with 482 (M 258/F 224) [fig. 10]; table 14 displays the top five sub-districts [tab. 14]. Three of the list are located in Sitapur Tehsil and Biswan Town is the sixth-highest ranked in the state, as well as the fifth-highest ranked tehsil. Both Biswan and Sidhauri tehsils return more Female than Male tokens. While Lambua returns the same number for both sexes.

Table 14 2011 Top 5 Rural Tehsils (Office of the Registrar General 2020)

Tehsil	Total	Male	Female
Mahmudabad	482	258	224
Lambhua	310	155	155
Sidhauri	94	49	45
Ballia	62	32	30
Biswan	83	39	44

In contrast to Kanpur, Mahmudabad Tehsil (Rural) is the second highest tehsil in the state with 482 (258 M/224 F). If all the L1-Sanskrit ‘speakers’ do not live in towns then is it safe to assume they live in villages? Mahmudabad Tehsil has 341 villages (Office of the Registrar General 2020). The question is, in which villages are L1-Sanskrit ‘speakers’ living?

Table 15 2011 Religious-Political affiliations and Literacy-Sex ratio comparisons (Office of the Registrar General 2020)

State	Tehsil name	Population	Literacy	Sex ratio	Political preference	Hindu %
MP	Pipariya	181,261	63.8	896	BJP	95
MP	Sarangpur	186,082	56.4	950	BJP	84
UP	Kanpur	3,470,334	72.8	860	BJP	83
MP	Indore	2,389,511	73.6	925	BJP	74
UP	Mahmudabad	596,252	47.1	884	Samajawada	74
MP	Huzur	2,107,523	72	920	BJP	72

Finally, table 15 lists some of the main tehsils mentioned above [tab. 15]. They are ranked, first, by the percentage-age of Hindus in each tehsil. Most display a preference for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), regardless of the size of the Hindu majority. The curious thing is that some of the highest L1-Sanskrit tehsils in Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh return literacy and sex ratios well below national and state averages. What does this tell us about the ability of Sanskrit to 'transform lives' and the development grand narrative it serves?

5 Concluding Remarks

This paper compares the 2001 and 2011 Sanskrit census results paying closer attention to the top-ranking states Maharashtra, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. However, the results of this study are unexpected. Further analysis across the remaining states will be released in forthcoming articles. Still, we are able to determine that Maharashtra returned the highest number for L1-Sanskrit; that most of the L1-Sanskrit speakers live in urban areas; that the 'Sanskrit-speaking' village is an aspirational myth not borne out in the government data; that more men claim to speak Sanskrit; that the overwhelming majority also speak Hindi and English, regardless of L1-L3 combinations; that the L1-Hindi/L2-Sanskrit combination amounts for 92% of the total L2-Sanskrit speakers; and that, regardless of the rhetorical and ideological bluster, Sanskrit continues to fall short of its alleged capacity for attaining the #Sanskrit4ClimateAction goals related to key indicators, such as sex, literacy, and health development.

Sanskrit, alongside Yoga, is a key instrument for branding the nation. This is a domestic as well as international project that has a symbiotic relation to the global wellness and leisure markets, which is fertile ground for cultivating banal nationalism. From a language acquisition perspective, the media's preference to provide pithy and inaccurate data from the census seems counterproductive, if not misplaced. While

moods certainly lift with hearing the L1 level rose between 2001 to 2011, the more interesting categories relate to L2 and L3 levels, both of which have reduced, however the L3 level fell by almost 90%.

With this finer-grained analysis, a clearer map of where people who have an affinity to identify as L1-L3-Sanskrit speakers were located at the last census. Regardless of whether they do in fact speak Sanskrit, these data will aid future research related to in-country field work, enabling strategic sorties down to the sub-district tehsil level. Finally, the 2021 Indian census will be the first digitised census the nation will embark on. Hopefully, this allows for data to be enumerated, rationalised, and published much sooner than the seven-year lag that occurred at the last census. Unlike the botched 1941 census, which first introduced self-reporting of data, it is anticipated that this new age of demography in India will not suffer the same fate. From a linguistic perspective, building on demographic data potentiates future exploration of various aspects of language revitalisation and second-language acquisition through in-depth study of particular linguistic features related to substrate interference and imperfect learning of the target language.

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