**HIMALAYA – getting our pronunciation straight**

As we launch an exciting new undergraduate Certificate in Tibetan and Himalayan Studies at CU Boulder, this is an opportune time to get our pronunciation of “Himal”, “Himalaya”, and “Himalayan” in line with the pronunciation of these words across the HinduKush Himalaya.

Himalaya comes from the Sanskrit “Himal” meaning snow, “Alaya” referring to abode = Abode of Snow”. The British colonial pronunciation is “hima-LAYA or often “hima-LAY-YA”. Those who are from these mountains (or, like me, were raised in them from an early age) the pronunciation is “HIMAL’aya” or, to make sure the “long A” gets properly emphasized, “HIMAAL’aya” .

The Devanagari is crystal clear: **A picture containing text

Description automatically generated**

Devanagari is a fully phonetic script. The long “a” after the “m” in Himal is pronounced “AA”

For those whose pronunciation needs adjustment from “British colonial” to “native speaker” mode, three suggestions:

* Spend a few minutes listening to author and Jaipur Literature Festival (JLF) co-founder Namita Gokhale, a native of the Uttarakhand mountains, in a short video that was recorded here in Boulder prior to the launch of her book *Himalaya*: <https://vimeo.com/234372196>
* Listen to the two very different pronunciations used by Uttarakhandi-American author Stephen Alter (born and raised in the Himalayas and a long-term resident of Landour/Mussoorie) and UK-raised University of Chicago ecologist Trevor Price in their recent JLF/Boulder 2020 session on The Himalayas (e.g. Alter at minute 6 and Price at minute 7) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cACSbayQsuE&list=PLO4JTjY_3Zc98ldoeJpGXJcbgrBzZygi1&index=7>
* For those already familiar with India and the names of its northern States, take your pronunciation of Himachal Pradesh and use it for “Himal”, “Himalaya” and “Himalayan”.

Teachers at all levels and those working in audio media have a special responsibility. The pronunciation they use gets transmitted to their students and audiences who then multiply and spread the virus of mispronunciation/dispronunciation[[1]](#footnote-1) for the next 50+ years.

Thank you for doing your part to help stamp out this piece of British colonial virus….and for letting the beautiful sound of “Himalaya” ring out far & wide.

George F. Taylor II

Boulder, Colorado

November 2020

Comments welcome at [taylor.pss@gmail.com](mailto:taylor.pss@gmail.com)

1. a recent piece by Anand Giridharadas describes the challenges of getting Americans to correctly pronounce his first name “Anand”, challenges he characterizes as “Mayflower mouth and the politics of mispronunciation and dispronunciation”.

   see <https://the.ink/p/kamala-versus-daenerys> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)