

Vedic Accents

Following the rules of Pāṇini in the formation of a word from its rudimentary elements, the vowels acquire one of three basic pitch accents or *svara*:

- (a) ***udāṭṭa***, raised pitch [1.2.29],
- (b) ***anudāṭṭa***, not raised [1.1.30],
- (c) ***svarita***, a blend of the first two [1.2.31].

The pronunciation of the *svarita* is initially *udāṭṭa* for the period of half a short vowel and *anudāṭṭa* for the rest (i.e. one and a half measures for a long vowel) [1.2.32]. In continuous speech or *saṃhitā*, all *anudāṭṭa* syllables following a *svarita* are called *pracaya* and are pronounced ***ekaśruti*** (monotone, between *anudāṭṭa* and *udāṭṭa*) [1.2.39], however, the *anudāṭṭa* immediately preceding a *svarita* or *udāṭṭa* is pronounced ***sannatara*** (lower than *anudāṭṭa*) [1.2.40]. The Vedas may also be recited entirely in *ekaśruti* (with exceptions) [1.2.36 ff.], nonetheless be aware that the accent may affect the meaning of a word, particularly a compound [6.1.223, 6.2.1] (e.g. *sú-kṛta*, ind. well done; *su-kṛtá*, n. a good deed).

With rare exceptions, a word standing alone has at most one vowel accented *udāṭṭa* or *svarita*, the rest being *anudāṭṭa* [6.1.158]. This is the basis of the Western system of marking Vedic accents in transliteration. Since most vowels are *anudāṭṭa*, this is taken as the basic or unaccented form, and the other accents are marked as:

- (a) acute (´) for the *udāṭṭa* (e.g. *kárma*).
- (b) grave (`) for the *svarita* (e.g. *vākyà*).

Vowel *sandhi*, besides producing a new vowel sound, also blends their accents: if this blending produces a *svarita* accent, it is called an **independent *svarita*** by Western grammarians. Where this independent *svarita* is within a word it is called *nitya* or ***jātya*** (innate), and where it arises due to the joining of words in *saṃhitā* (continuous speech) [8.2.4, 6] it is further classified according to the type of *sandhi*:

- (a) ***Kṣaipra*** (quick) when the first vowel is replaced by its semivowel [6.1.77]; the name arises from the shortening of the time measure from that of a vowel to that of a semivowel. The *svarita* accent replaces an *anudāṭṭa* occurring immediately after the semivowel substitution for an *udāṭṭa* or *svarita* vowel [8.2.4] (e.g. *apsú antáḥ* ⇒ *apsvàntáḥ*).

(U or S_i) + A ⇒ semivowel + S_i (1)
 where U=*udātta*, S_i=independent *svarita*, and A=*anudātta*.

(b) **Praśliṣṭa** (coalescence) when both vowels are replaced by a single vowel [6.1.84 ff]; the single substitute of an *anudātta* at the beginning of a word and the preceding *udātta*, becomes *svarita* optionally [8.2.6] (e.g. *ná evá* ⇒ *nāvá*).

U + A ⇒ S_i (2)

This rule applies to *sandhi* between words, whereas the general rule is that the single replacement of *udātta* and *anudātta* vowels (in either order) is *udātta* [8.2.5].

U + A or A + U ⇒ U (3)

(c) **Abhinihita** (close contact) when a following *a* is absorbed by a final *e* or *o* [6.1.109]; the rule for the accent follows that of the *praśliṣṭa* (e.g. *rayáh avániḥ* ⇒ *rayò'vániḥ*).

An independent *svarita*, when the next syllable has an *udātta* or independent *svarita* accent, is pronounced **kampa** (tremolo) in some traditions: this would apply in the above three examples.

S_i - (S_i or U) ⇒ K - (S_i or U)
 where K=*kampa svarita*.

In *saṃhitā* there is a further *svarita* called **śuddha** (simple, mere); Western grammarians name it the **dependent**, substitute, or enclitic *svarita*. An *anudātta* syllable following one that is *udātta* becomes *svarita* [8.4.66], unless it is in turn followed by an *udātta* or *svarita* [8.4.67].

U - A ⇒ U - S_d (4)
 where S_d=dependent *svarita*.

But U - A - (U or S) ⇒ U - A - (U or S) (5)

These rules combine to produce a rhythm in the sound:

A_s - U - S_d - A_e - A_e caused by the *udātta*, and
 A_s - S_i - A_e - A_e caused by the independent *svarita*,
 where A_s=*sannatara*, and A_e=*ekaśruti*.

The cadence becomes more complex with the reduction of syllables separating the main accents (U and S_i), so as to eliminate the *ekaśruti* or even the dependent *svarita*.

At this point it would be useful to present a practical illustration of these accent changes that arise in continuous speech. The example is taken from the *R̥gveda* (10.125.7): the verse is shown as separate words and then in *saṃhitā* showing the applicable rules.

ahám suve pitáram asya mūrdhán máma yónih apsú antáh samudré,
tátaḥ ví tiṣṭhe bhúvanā ánu víśvā utá amūm dyám varṣmāṇā úpa sprśāmi.

(4) (4) (5) (4) (1, *kampa*) (4)
 | | | | | |
ahám suve pitáram asya mūrdhán máma yónirapsvántáh sàmudré,

(5) (4) (5)(3)(5) (5)(3*) (5) (3)(4)
 | | | | | | | | | | | |
táto ví tiṣṭhe bhúvanānu víśvotámūm dyám varṣmānópà sprśāmi.

(* optionally, rule 2 could apply here and become *kampa*.)

The tradition of Western sanskritists emphasizes grammar and translation, and thus will use the form of separated words in transliteration; it is unusual to find fully accented *saṃhitā* text in transliteration: at best only the *udātta* and *jātya svarita* are marked. India, on the other hand, has an oral tradition which emphasizes pronunciation and rhythm, and thus the marking of accents in *devanāgarī* script is optimized for correct pronunciation; in fact, the written form is a much later development and has given rise to different methods of accent notation. The various traditions are discussed separately:

(a) ***R̥gveda*** has *udātta* unmarked; the *svarita* (*jātya* or *śuddha*) is marked with a vertical line above the syllable (e.g. अ॑), but the *kampa* is indicated by a numeral 1 following the vowel if it is short, or the numeral 3 if it is long, and in both cases there is a vertical line above the numeral and a horizontal line below it; in the case of the long *kampa* vowel the syllable usually also has a horizontal line below it (e.g. अ॒॑ आ॒॒॑ आ॒॒॑). The *anudātta* is marked with a horizontal bar below the syllable: this applies to all *anudātta* syllables before the first *udātta* or *svarita* in a line of verse, after which only those *anudātta* that immediately precede an *udātta* or *svarita* (i.e. *sannatara*) is marked, and the rest of the *anudātta* (i.e. *ekasruti*) are not marked.

Using the sample verse from the *R̥gveda*, the accent marking in transliteration and the original *devanāgarī* is:

*ahaṃ sūve pitarāmasya mūrdhan mama yonirapsva¹ntaḥ sāmudre,
tato vi tiṣṭhe bhuvanānu viśvotāmūṃ dyāṃ varṣmanopā sprśāmi.*

अ॒हं सु॒वे पि॒तर॑मस्य मूर्ध॑न्मम॒ योनि॑र॒प्स्व॑न्तः॒ समु॑द्रे ।
ततो॒ वि ति॑ष्ठे भुव॒नानु॑ विश्वो॒तामूं॑ द्यां व॒र्ष्म॑नोप॒ स्पृ॑शामि ॥

To illustrate the notation when a verse begins with multiple *anudatta* syllables, let the first word have no accent, thus:

ahaṃ sūve pitarāmasya mūrdhan mama . . .

अ॒हं सु॒वे पि॒तर॑मस्य मूर्ध॑न्मम॒ ◦

For the *Rgveda* the current practice in India is, apparently, to pronounce all syllables marked with the underbar (*anudatta* and *sannatara*) as *anudatta*, all unmarked syllables (*udatta* and *ekasruti*) as *ekasruti*, and syllables marked *svarita* as moving from *udatta* to *ekasruti*.

(b) ***Sāmaveda*** accents are marked with a numeral, or numeral and letter, above the syllable: *udatta*, *svarita*, and *anudatta* are marked with the numerals 1, 2, and 3 respectively; the figure 2 is also used to indicate an *udatta* when there is no following *svarita*; *ekasruti* syllables are not marked. Special marking is used for particular accent sequences:

U - U - S ⇒ 1 - unmarked - 2r
U - U - A ⇒ 2u - unmarked - 3
A - S_i ⇒ 3k - 2r

Using the same passage from the *Rgveda* as an illustration, the marking in transliteration and *devanāgarī* would be:

*ahaṃ sūve pitarāmasya mūrdhanmama yonirapsvāntaḥ sāmudre,
tato vi tiṣṭhe bhuvanānu viśvotāmūṃ dyāṃ varṣmanopā sprśāmi.*

अ॒हं सु॒वे पि॒तर॑मस्य मूर्ध॑न्मम॒ योनि॑र॒प्स्व॑न्तः॒ समु॑द्रे ।
ततो॒ वि ति॑ष्ठे भुव॒नानु॑ विश्वो॒तामूं॑ द्यां व॒र्ष्म॑नोप॒ स्पृ॑शामि ॥

(c) *Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa* uses only two accents, *udātta* and *anudātta*: a horizontal line below the syllable indicates *anudātta* (as in the *Ṛgveda*). The relationship to the grammatical accents described by Pāṇini is rather indirect: the *anudātta* marked here are the syllables **before** those which would be marked *svarita* in the *Ṛgveda* with rule (5) not applying.

Using the sample verse from the *Ṛgveda*, the accent marking would be:

अहं सुवे पितॄमस्य मूर्धन्मम योनि॒र॒प्स्वन्तः॒ समु॒द्रे ।
त॒तो वि॒ तिष्ठे भुव॒ना॒नु विश्वो॒तामूं॒ द्यां व॒र्ष॒म॒नो॒प स्पृशामि॑ ॥

Caution: beyond this point, the information to hand is incomplete and should be treated circumspectly.

(d) *Maitrāyaṇī-Saṃhitā* marks the *udātta* with a vertical line above the syllable; the independent *svarita* is indicated by a curve below (ॐ); the dependent *svarita* has a horizontal line crossing the middle of the syllable or three vertical strokes above it (ॐ^m) or a dot below it (ॐ); the *anudātta* is marked with a horizontal line below.

(e) *Kāthaka-Saṃhitā* marks the *udātta* with a vertical line above the syllable; the independent *svarita* is indicated by a curve below (ॐ) only if an *anudātta* follows, otherwise by a hook below (ॐ); the dependent *svarita* has a dot below the accented syllable (ॐ); the *anudātta* is marked with a horizontal or vertical line below (ॐ ॐ).

(f) *Taittirīya-Saṃhitā*, *-Brāhmaṇa*, and *-Āraṇyaka*, and *Atharva-Veda*, and *Vājasaneyi-Saṃhitā* are marked as the *Ṛgveda*, with minor differences, mainly in the marking of the *svarita* before an *udātta*.

Works consulted:

- (a) S.M. Katre, Aṣṭādhyāyī of Pāṇini, Motilal Banarsidass.
- (b) Ś.C. Vasu, The Siddhānta Kaumudī, Motilal Banarsidass.
- (c) A.A. Macdonell, A Vedic Grammar for Students, Appendix III.
- (d) W.D. Whitney, Sanskrit Grammar, para.80–97.
- (e) M. Williams, A Practical Grammar of the Skt. Lang., para.975–985.
- (f) K.V. Abhyankar, A Dictionary of Sanskrit Grammar, M.S. Univ. Baroda.
- (g) Bureau of Indian Standards, ISCII (1991), Annex G.
- (h) The *Bhāṣika* Accentuation System, George Cardona, Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik 18 (1993): 1–40.

| Notation | <i>udātta</i> | <i>svārīta</i> | <i>anudātta</i> | special |
|--|---------------|----------------|-----------------|----------|
| <i>R̥gveda</i> | | अ॑ अ॒ अ॒ अ॒ | अ॒ | |
| <i>Sāmaveda</i> | अ॑ | अ॑ | अ॑ | अ॑ अ॑ अ॑ |
| <i>Śatapatha</i> | | अ॒ | | |
| <i>Maitrāyaṇī-Saṃhitā</i> | अ॑ | अ॒ अ॑ अ॑ | अ॒ | |
| <i>Kāthaka-Saṃhitā</i> | अ॑ | अ॒ अ॒ अ॑ | अ॒ अ॑ | |
| <i>Taittirīya-Brah̥maṇa, -Saṃhitā, -Āraṇyaka</i> | | अ॑ अ॒ | अ॒ | |
| <i>Atharvaveda</i> | | अ॑ अ॒ अ॒ अ॒ अ॒ | अ॒ | |
| <i>Vājasaneyi-Saṃhitā</i> | | अ॑ अ॒ अ॒ अ॒ | अ॒ | |
| <i>Taittirīya-Upaniṣad</i> | | अ॑ अ॑ | अ॒ | |
| <i>Śukla Yajurveda</i> | | अ॒ | | |
| <i>Non-Tait.° Yajurveda</i> | | अ॒ | | |
| ??? Sentence ending | अ॑ | | | |

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