

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

The pronunciation of the *svarita* is initially *udātta* for the period of half a short vowel and *anudātta* for the rest (i.e. one and a half measures for a long vowel) [1.2.32]. In continuous speech or *saṃhitā*, all *anudātta* syllables following a *svarita* are called *pracaya* and are pronounced ***ekaśruti*** (monotone, between *anudātta* and *udātta*) [1.2.39], however, the *anudātta* immediately preceding a *svarita* or *udātta* is pronounced ***sannatara*** (lower than *anudātta*) [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 *udātta* or *svarita*, the rest being *anudātta* [6.1.158]. This is the basis of the Western system of marking Vedic accents in transliteration. Since most vowels are *anudātta*, this is taken as the basic or unaccented form, and the other accents are marked as:

- (a) acute (´) for the *udātta* (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 *anudātta* occurring immediately after the semivowel substitution for an *udātta* or *svarita* vowel [8.2.4] (e.g. *apsú antáh* ⇒ *apsvàntáh*).

(U or S<sub>i</sub>) + A ⇒ semivowel + S<sub>i</sub> ..... (1)  
 where U=*udātta*, S<sub>i</sub>=independent *svarita*, and A=*anudātta*.

(b) ***Prasliṣṭa*** (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<sub>i</sub> ..... (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 *prasliṣṭa* (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<sub>i</sub> - (S<sub>i</sub> or U) ⇒ K - (S<sub>i</sub> 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<sub>d</sub> ..... (4)

where S<sub>d</sub>= 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<sub>s</sub> - U - S<sub>d</sub> - A<sub>e</sub> - A<sub>e</sub> caused by the *udātta*, and

A<sub>s</sub> - S<sub>i</sub> - A<sub>e</sub> - A<sub>e</sub> caused by the independent *svarita*,

where A<sub>s</sub>=*sannatara*, and A<sub>e</sub>=*ekaśruti*.

The cadence becomes more complex with the reduction of syllables separating the main accents (U and S<sub>i</sub>), 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 *Rgveda* (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 amúm dyám varṣmánā 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 víśvotámúm dyám varṣmánópà 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) ***Rgveda*** 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 आ॒॑ आ॒॑). 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 *Rgveda*, the accent marking in transliteration and the original *devanāgarī* is:

*ahaṃ sūve pitarāmasya mūrdhan mama yonirapsva<sup>1</sup>ntaḥ sāmudre,  
tato vi tiṣṭhe bhuvanānu viśvotāmūṃ dyāṃ varṣmanopā sprśāmi.*

अ॒हं सु॒वे पि॒तर॑मस्य मूर्ध॑न्मम॒ योनि॑र॒प्स्व॑न्तः॒ समु॑द्रे ।  
ततो॑ वि ति॒ष्ठे भु॒वनानु॑ विश्वो॒तामूं॑ द्यां व॒र्ष्मनो॑प स्पृशामि ॥

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<sub>i</sub>    ⇒    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 ।  
ततो॑ वि ति॒ष्ठे भु॒वनानु॑ विश्वो॒तामूं॑ द्यां व॒र्ष्मनो॑प स्पृशामि ॥

(c) **Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa** uses only two accents, *udātta* and *anudātta*: a horizontal line below the syllable indicates *anudātta* (as in the *Rgveda*). 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 *Rgveda* with rule (5) not applying.

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

अ॒हं सु॒वे पि॒त्र॒मस्य॑ मूर्ध॒न्म॒म यो॒नि॒र॒प्स्व॒न्तः॑ स॒मु॒द्रे॑ ।  
त॒तो वि॒ ति॒ष्ठे भु॒व॒ना॒नु॒ वि॒श्वो॒ता॒मूं द्यां॑ व॒र्ष॒म॒नो॒प स्पृ॒शामि॑ ॥

**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<sup>|||</sup>) or a dot below it (ॐ<sup>.</sup>); 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<sup>⌢</sup>); the dependent *svarita* has a dot below the accented syllable (ॐ<sup>.</sup>); the *anudātta* is marked with a horizontal or vertical line below (ॐ ॐ<sup>⌢</sup>).

(f) **Taittirīya-Saṃhitā, -Brāhmaṇa, and -Āraṇyaka, and Atharva-Veda, and Vājasaneyi-Saṃhitā** are marked as the *Rgveda*, 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>svarita</i>	<i>anudātta</i>	special
<i>R̥gveda</i>		अ̇ अ॑ अ॒ अ॒	अ̇	
<i>Sāmaveda</i>	अ̇	अ̇	अ̇	अ̇ अ̇ अ̇
<i>Śatapatha</i>		अ̇		
<i>Maitrāyaṇī-Saṃhitā</i>	अ̇	अ̇ अ̇ अ̇	अ̇	
<i>Kāthaka-Saṃhitā</i>	अ̇	अ̇ अ̇ अ̇	अ̇ अ̇	
<i>Taittirīya-Brah̥maṇa, -Saṃhitā, -Āraṇyaka</i>		अ̇ अ॑	अ̇	
<i>Atharvaveda</i>		अ̇ अ̇ अ॑ अ॒ अ॒	अ̇	
<i>Vājasaneyi-Saṃhitā</i>		अ̇ अ॑ अ॒ अ॒	अ̇	
<i>Taittirīya-Upaniṣad</i>		अ̇ अ̇	अ̇	
<i>Śukla Yajurveda</i>		अ̇		
<i>Non-Tait.° Yajurveda</i>		अ̇		
??? Sentence ending	अ̇			

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