

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 ***śannatara*** (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 antáh* ⇒ *apsvántáh*).

(U or S_i) + A ⇒ semivowel + S_i (1)
 where U=*udātta*, S_i=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_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 *prasliṣṭa* (e.g. *rayáḥ avániḥ* ⇒ *rayò'vánih*).

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 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 bhúvanánu víśvotámúm dyám varṣmánópa 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. *ekaśruti*) 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 yonirapsvaṅtaḥ sāmudre,
tato vi tiṣṭhe bhuvanānu viśvotāmūḃ dyāṃ varṣmanopā sprśāmi.*

अ॒हं सु॒वे पि॒तर॑मस्य मूर्ध॒न्मम॑ योनि॒रप्स्व॑न्तः समु॒द्रे ।
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 मूर्ध॒न्मम॑ ◦

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

(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*; *ekāśruti* 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:

³ ¹ ² ³ ¹ ² ³ ^{2u} ³ ¹ ² ^{3k} ^{2r} ¹ ²
*ahaṃ sūve pitarāmasya mūrdhanmama yonirapsvantaḥ sāmudre,
tato vi tiṣṭhe bhuvanānu viśvotāmūḃ dyāṃ varṣmanopā sprśāmi.*

३ १ २ ३ १ २ ३ २३ ३ १ २३क २र १ २
अ॒हं सु॒वे पि॒तर॑मस्य मूर्ध॒न्मम॑ योनि॒रप्स्व॑न्तः समु॒द्रे ।

२ ३ १ २ ३ २ ३ २ ३ २ ३ ३ १ २र
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:

अहं सुवे पित॒रमस्य मूर्धन्म॒म यो॒निर्प्स्वन्तः॒ समु॒द्रे।
त॒तो वि॒ तिष्ठे भुव॒नानु॒ विश्वो॒तामूं द्यां॒ वर्ष्म॒नोप॒ 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) 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 *Rgveda*, with minor differences, mainly in the marking of the *svarita* before an *udātta*.

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Notation	<i>udātta</i>	<i>svārīta</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			

DR. RUPNATHJI (DR. RUPAKNATHJI)