

Rules of chanting in Sanskrit

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Rules of Chanting

In

Sanskṛtam

A compilation

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Guru purnima

July, 2014

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या वर्ण-पद-वाक्यार्थ-गद्य-पद्य-स्वरूपिणी ।

वाचि नर्तयतु क्षिप्रं मेधां देवी सरस्वती ॥

yā varṇa-pada-vākyaārtha-gadya-padya-svarūpiṇī ।

vāci nartayatu kṣipraṁ medhām devī sarasvatī ॥



Dedicated

to all my ācāryas

who taught me

Vedic chanting

Why this compilation?

At the outset as a student I take this opportunity to offer my salutations to Yogacharya Sri Krishnamacharya of Krishnamacharya yoga Mandiram, Chennai, because of whose conviction and efforts Vedic chanting has been made available to the common man and to women all over the globe.

Chanting or recitation of hymns in Saṁskṛtam is an oral prayer, vācikaṁ karma, a means of expressing our devotion to Bhagavān. They are in the form of a simple praise or eulogy called, stuti, sukta stava etc. It can be vaidika, the source being the vedas or from smṛti, smārta.

The vedokta mantras or hymns like the Gāyatri mantra, puruṣa suktam or śrī rudram have to be chanted properly with vedic notations or svaras. This is called Vedic Chanting. The vedokta hymns are called mantras and they are chanted. There are many rules and regulations while chanting or while learning or during personal abhyāsa. The nuances can be grasped and comprehended only when taught by a live Guru. They have necessarily got to be learnt from a competent ācārya who has undergone training from his Guru in the karṇa parampara (intently listen and commit to memory and reproduce exactly the same manner in which the Guru chants). Books are not permitted. Learning by listening through audio Cds or Video Cds or by reading a book is not acceptable in the parampara, tradition.

The ślokas like Bhagavad Gītā are recited and other stotras, ashtottarams, sahsranāmas and hymns can be sung set to any melody as they are smṛti ukta. The stotras are not vedokta . Most of the stotras, ashtottaras and sahsranāmas are found in the puraṇas, itihāsās or have been composed by ācāryas or mahātmas, upāsakas or paṇḍitas, scholars etc.

Since stotras are smṛti poetry or can be prose like gadyams, there is no restriction on reciting or singing them. Unlike the veda mantras there are no svaras, notations. Anyone who can read Saṁskṛtam and pronounce properly can recite the stotras. There is freedom to set it to any raga, melody and can be sung according to manodharma. They are composed in a particular meter, chandas, prosody and those rules will have to be followed. The sandhi rules, euphonic grammar rules of splitting the words in the appropriate places have to be necessarily followed lest the meaning is misinterpreted. It is recommended that one learns from a teacher the proper art of pronunciation and articulation and follow the grammar rules of the Sanskrit language.

Since this is karma, a prayer to bhagavān, the result is perceptible. It calms the mind, soothes, heals emotions, enhances focus and concentration, increases clarity in articulation, boosts confidence and it is a kind of pranayama as the exhalations are longer than our normal breathing. Chanting is also used as in speech therapy. Even mere listening to the chants by others helps. It is a form of meditation leading to absorption of the mind. It is a tool for the preservation of our culture.

This compilation is the result of my years spent with my Vedic chanting teachers and from the notes that I had jotted down while learning the nuances. I hope this will be found useful by the students interested in chanting and recitation.

Your valuable feedback is welcome for the improvisation of the booklet.

Swamini Svātmabodhananda saraswati

Rules of Chanting in *Saṃskṛtam*

Śikṣā, is *veda aṅga*, is phonetics, *uccāraṇa śāstram* an ancillary study for the understanding of the *Vedas*. Phonetics is important because it deals with the science of pronunciation of *varṇas*, letters. A *lipi*, script is different from sound. A letter that is called script, which is purely a drawing – ‘a’ is a drawing. It has nothing to do with what you pronounce. *Śabda*, sound, a word is purely what is heard, while what is written is only a symbol for that sound.

*Śikṣāṃ vyākhyāsyāmaḥ | varṇaḥ svaraḥ | mātrā balam | sāma santānaḥ |
ityuktaḥ Śikṣādhyāyaḥ ||(Taittiriya Śikṣāvallī)*

Varṇa – vowels and consonants

The letters should be pronounced keeping the rules of pronunciation in mind. There should be clarity in pronunciation. All the fine tuning is done to produce a given *varṇa*. How do all the letters originate and come to manifest outside. The whole human voice acoustics called phonetics is covered by *śikṣā*.

The sound is *varṇa*, letter. A *varṇa* is not what is written; it is what is spoken. Language is spoken and not what is written. The script is a symbol on which you superimpose the sound.

You spell the word exactly as you pronounce it. They are phonetically correct. Pronunciation is very important in the study of the Veda or Sanskrit language; if it is not proper the meaning will become different.

Pronunciation of स्वराः, *svarāḥ*, vowels, व्यञ्जन *vyañjana*, consonants, स्वरयुक्त अक्षर *svarayukta akṣara* and संयुक्त अक्षर *saṃyukta akṣara*, conjunct consonants.

Svarah

Simple Vowels are classified into short and long vowels according to the unit length of time taken for pronunciation, उच्चारणम्, *uccāraṇam*. This unit length of time is called *mātra*. *Mātra* is only for a vowel. The length of a syllable is measured by a *mātra*. Each *svara* is well defined. *Mātras* are defined – *hrasva*, *dīrgha*, *plutaḥ* for the vowels.

- ह्रस्व स्वराः *hrasva svarāḥ* Short vowels: one *mātra* – one unit of time for pronunciation.

अ *a* इ *i* उ *u* ऋ *ṛ* लृ *ḷ*

- दीर्घ स्वराः *dīrgha svarāḥ* Long vowels: two *mātras* – two units of time for pronunciation.

आ *ā* ई *ī* ऊ *ū* ऋ *ṛ*

अ + अ = आ $a + a = ā$

इ + इ = ई $i + i = ī$

उ + उ = ऊ $u + u = ū$

ऋ + ऋ + ऋ $ṛ + ṛ = ṝ$

- प्लुत *pluta* is three or more units of time for pronunciation when it is lengthened, prolated. These are not commonly to be met with in classical Sanskrit. This is used in the Vedas.

Diphthong

- मिश्र स्वराः *miśra svarāḥ* Diphthongs – are long vowels because they are a combination of two different vowels. Two *mātras* – two units of time for pronunciation.

ए *e* (अ+इ)(*a+i*) ऐ *ai* (आ+ई)(*ā+ī*)


ओ *o* (अ+उ)(*a+u*) औ *au*(आ+ऊ)(*ā+ū*)

Pronunciation of the vowels involves knowledge of the accents – *anudātta*, the lower note, *udātta*, the middle note, *svarita*, the upper note and *dhīrgha svarita*, the extended upper note. The accent or intonation or tone of voice. This applies only to vowels. These are classified into three. The vowels may be pronounced in a high tone (*udātta*), a low tone (*anudātta*) or a combination of the two, the circumflex (*svarita*). This applies to only veda chanting.

dhīrgha svarita - usually seen marked in the vedic texts at the end of a sentence, or in the middle of the word on a *dirgha svara* followed by a conjunct consonant.

- उदात्त, *udātta* अनुदात्त, *anudātta* स्वरित *svarita* – practically only three tones are recognised by Sanskrit. *udātta*,(high tone) that which proceeds from the upper part of the vocal organs, *anudātta*,(low tone) that which proceeds from the lower part while *svarita* (circumflex) arises out of the mixture or the combination of these two). These accents or tone of pronunciation of vowels are marked only in the Vedic hymns and used in the Veda chanting.

Udātta is left unmarked; the *anudātta* is marked with a horizontal line underneath (_) ; *svarita* is a perpendicular stroke above (|) and *dhīrgha-svarita* has two perpendicular lines above (||). Accentuations are confined to the Vedas. In common pronunciation the tone or intonation of vowels in all Sanskrit words is equal.

- अनुनासिक, अननुनासिक – *anunāsika* (with nasal sound) and *ananunāsika* (without nasal sound) - vowels may be pronounced by making use of the vocal chords in the ordinary way or may be uttered with a nasal twang (*anunāsika*). This is also in use in the chanting of the Vedic hymns. This is marked by this symbol  above the letter. ओँ.
- When the *anuswara* ending word is followed by words beginning with the semivowels **ya, ra, la, va**

Mātrā

– the time required or duration of pronunciation of vowels and the actual position in the mouth where it originates. This is has to be understood for chanting the Vedas; knowledge of length of pronunciation of the vowels – *hrsva*, a short vowel, *dhīrgha*, long vowel, and *pluta*, an elongated vowel which is used in the Vedas.

balam

– *prayatnam*, external and internal effort in the *uccāraṇam* –
mahāprāṇa and *alpaprāṇa*

The difference in the effort of *uccāraṇam* while pronouncing the *Mahāprāṇa* and *Alpaprāṇa* letters have to borne in mind.

***Mahāprāṇa* letters**

- 'Ksha' is treated as a *Visarga* before a word beginning with 'ksha' - pause for a moment and then proceed.
- There should be a litte more stress on 'R' र followed by the
ūṣmāṇaḥ śa श ṣa ष sa स ha ह- sibilants

sāma

- is very important in Veda chanting. Every letter while chanting has only that kind of length of pronunciation. The words are not clumsily uttered by pushing them. Letters cannot be pushed. Neither can it be lengthened extraordinarily nor can be compressed while chanting. *Samah* - *samatā* is evenness. Following the metrical rules, maintaining continuity, following the pauses and stops, appropriate breath control.

Santānaḥ

– *sandhiḥ* (euphonic combination) - two words have to naturally blend while articulating. Knowledge of *sandhi* rules.

Posture

Gambhīratā - in sitting posture. Head neck and back held staring position.
No shaking of the body or the hands or neck. No *ceṣṭā*.

Volume

- Loudly when chanting in a group
- Medium while practising
- murmur while chanting for oneself.

Visarga rules

- *Visarga* change to , ś ṣ s *kāra* respectively when followed by a word beginning with ś ṣ s *kāra*
- *Visarga* is dropped before words beginning with vowels
- *Visarga* at the end of a sentence has to be pronounced. It is an aspirate.
- *Visarga* before a word beginning with *ka, kha* - the *visarga* gets pronounced like a 'ih' sound, *jihvamūlīya*
- *Visarga* before a word beginning with *pa, pha* - the *visarga* gets pronounced like a 'f' sound - *upadhmānīya*

Anusvāra rules

- The *anusvāra* remains in the middle of a *pada* or at the end of a *pada* when followed by *ūṣmāṇaḥ śa श ष sa स ha ह*
- The *anusvāra* changes to the nasal of its class in the middle of a *pada* and optionally at the end of the *pada* because of the
- सूत्र - अनुस्वारस्य ययि परसवर्णः - 8 ॥4 ॥58
- Example - शंकरः - शङ्करः । गंगा - गङ्गा ।
- अंचित - अञ्चित । संजाय - सञ्जय ।
- कुंटितः - कुण्टितः । मंडूकः - मण्डूकः
- दंतः - दन्तः । इंदुः - इन्दुः ।
- चंपा - चम्पा । अंबा - अम्बा ।

Difference in pronunciation have to be noted

- The vowel **ऋ** and the consonant 'ra' र
- The vowel **ॠ** and the consonant 'la' ल
- *ūṣmāṇaḥ śa श ष sa स* - sibilants

Pause/no pause

- *Visarga* before a word beginning with '*ksha*' - क्ष pause for a moment and then proceed.
- Pause before any word beginning with a vowel.
- A word beginning with a conjunct consonant should be chanted along with the previous word with **no pause in between the words.**(*sāma*)

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