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VĀGYOGA SANSKRIT

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# Mantraśikṣā

*Vivek Nath*

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VĀGYOGA SANSKRIT

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क = ka

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MANTRAŚIKṢĀ  
VĀGYOGA SANSKRIT

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#	Foreword .....	7
	Language of the gods .....	11

**PRONUNCIATION ŚĪKṢĀKĀṆḌA**

1.1	Introduction .....	18
	Places in the organ of speech .....	20
	Vowels <i>Svara</i>	
	Basic vowels .....	25
	Consonantal vowels .....	26
	Diphthongs .....	30
	Bindu and Visarga <i>Ayogavāha</i> .....	33
	Time unit <i>Mātrā</i> .....	34
1.2	Vedic accent marks <i>Svara</i> .....	35
	Consonants <i>Vyañjana</i>	
1.3	Classical consonants <i>Sparśa</i> .....	36
	Nasal <i>Anunāsika</i> .....	38
	Pronunciation features consonants according to Pāṇini .....	39
	Semivowels <i>Antaḥstha</i> .....	40
	Fricatives <i>Visargaja</i> .....	41
	Special sounds .....	42
	Pronunciation overview .....	44
	Grammatical sound table .....	45

**RECITATION ŚĪKṢĀKĀṆḌA**

2.1	Stress penultimate vowel and stress hierarchy .....	47
2.2.1-4	Emphasis momentum <i>Guru</i> .....	51
2.3.1-4	Breathing .....	53
2.4.1-6	Sound features <i>Bindu</i> .....	55
2.5.1-4	Sound features <i>Visarga</i> .....	58
2.6	Summary with Examples .....	60
2.7	Juxtaposition principle <i>Samhitā</i> .....	63
2.8	Special pronunciation features according to Pāṇini .....	65
2.9	Excerpt of corresponding text .....	72

MP3

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**SPIRITUAL ARTICULATION  
IN KASCHMIRI ŚAIVAISM ŚĪKṢĀKĀṄḌA**

3.1-2	Introduction .....	77
	Light and reflection <i>Prakāśa &amp; Vimarsā</i> .....	82
	I <i>Aham</i> .....	84
3.3-4	Vitality <i>Vīrya</i> .....	86
3.5-8	Power of the soul <i>Ātmabala</i> .....	87
3.9	Body of light <i>Vidyāśarīra</i> .....	90
3.10	Breath <i>Prāṇa</i> .....	95
	Heart <i>Hṛdaya</i> .....	100
	Touch <i>Sparsā</i> .....	103
3.11	Aesthetic experience <i>Rasa</i> .....	105
	Language <i>Vāc</i> .....	107
	Practical instructions <i>Prayoga</i> .....	116
	Epilog .....	129
	Tattva table .....	128

**SOUND DEVELOPMENT VARṆAKĀṄḌA**

4.1-5	Sound development vowels .....	131
4.6-11	Sound development consonants .....	146
	Sandhi .....	157
	Practical Sentence Sandhi Table .....	159
	Traditional Sanskrit Grammar .....	162
	Vāgyoga .....	166

**WORD DEVELOPMENT PĀDAKĀṄḌA**

	Word root <i>Dhātu</i>	
	I) Noun – II) Verb .....	169
	Stem <i>Prāḍipadīka</i> .....	171
5.1-8	Primary suffix <i>Kṛta-pratyaya</i> .....	172
	Prefixes <i>Upasarga</i> .....	175
5.10	Secondary suffixes <i>Taddhita-pratyaya</i> .....	192
5.11	Indeclinable <i>Avyaya</i> .....	194
	Word meaning <i>Śabdārtha</i> .....	198



## Foreword

Vāgyoga Sanskrit is the prelude to my Mantraśikṣā book series. Before practising with mantras, we should learn their correct pronunciation. This is the purpose of this volume, which introduces the art of mantra recitation. The Mantraśikṣā book series teaches mantras in the garments of individual deities. Vāgyoga Sanskrit is followed by the volume "Sūrya", which contains the exercises for the Mātṛkā, the Sanskrit alphabet, illuminating like the sun, the sound body of the Devatās (light-beings from *√div* to radiate, shine) and teaches their mantras, hymns, stotras and simple pūjās, which are gradually built up. "Sūrya" forms the transition to the other volumes devoted to individual deities and the monograph on Vedic chanting. The light of the Devatās is the goal, Sanskrit the path, here now begins this auspicious journey.

Yoga means to be connected, to form a unity, to see the many in the one. Vāg-Yoga already indicates that this process is accompanied by language, in ancient India by the language Sanskrit. It is the continuation of a very old culture; at all times its sound was considered sacred, just like the content it expresses. Both sound and meaning form the sacred content of a word. The grammar of Sanskrit was therefore considered a sacred science, that analyses the Sanskrit language as a natural phenomenon, not as an artificial construct. This also means that the language came first, the grammar arose as a tool for its understanding. Life, the world and all movements were there first, then we explored them. As a sacred science, the study of Sanskrit promotes natural self-reflection, the process of expanding consciousness as the path of self-knowledge. While we find pyramids e.g. in Egypt, temples or cities in South America and other sites of ancient culture, in India it was always the word that was praised, nothing carved in stone. The ambivalent word, as a tool of consciousness-raising, conveys sacred life. The famous philosopher of language Bhartr̥hari (400 AD) put it in a nutshell: There is no experience without the knowledge it conveys. Knowledge, however, is based on language, and language is based on the sounds of the alphabet. In Kashmiri Śaivism, the sounds of the alphabet are therefore appropriately called the energies that allow consciousness to "be conscious", that is, to hold consciousness in a cognitive. They are, so to speak, the cognitive forces inherent in consciousness and sacred, because consciousness is sacred – it is "God" and His representation is knowledge. India worships God as knowledge and Kashmiri Śaivism in particular understood precisely consciousness as knowledge.

The yoga of Sanskrit is this yoga of divine consciousness, Sanskrit the tool. In consciousness everything shines forth as language and through language it conveys every experience as knowledge.

The term Vāgyoga is first found in the Mahābhāṣya of the grammarian Patañjali (Vyākaraṇamahābhāṣya, Adhyāya 1. 13-15). My revered Sanskrit teacher Śrī Vāgīśa Śāstrī called his Sanskrit teaching the Vāg-yoga, the yoga of language. Vāgīśa literally means "the lord of speech" and Śāstrī means "one who possesses the Śāstras", the ordered or structured knowledge, and is a brahman surname. I owe my education in Sanskrit to Vāg-Guruji, the many years he shared with me, the patience and love I experienced from him. This is called a Saṃskāra, a soul impression that one person makes on another, with words or even the silent state of being between words. I am very grateful to him and also draw on his science of Vāgyoga in this book, although the account is not only patchy but also incomplete. The aim of this book is to devote oneself entirely to pronunciation, recitation and spirituality, to make Sanskrit the tool by which the light of the Devatās shines by itself. This is truly the oldest yoga of India, in the broader sense of the whole spirituality of humanity. I would like to think that especially at a time when artificial intelligence is rapidly increasing, when we now need to learn even less by heart and place even less emphasis on memory and on the actual journey that leads to knowledge, that with Sanskrit we can very well strengthen the centre and the development of the human being from the centre.

Guiding the recitation according to the rules of Sanskrit grammar and into the nature of the soul and consciousness, I explain the importance of rhythm as Śiva's heartbeat and as the foundation of Sanskrit recitation. The rhythm, the intonation and the hierarchy of stress come first, only then is the sound refined. Everything rises and falls in rhythm, Kashmiri Śaivism calls it *spanda*, the blissful relationship of two entities as the "heart frequency" of Śiva.

My book series is called Mantra-Śikṣā, and begins with the Śikṣā-Kāṇḍa, literally the chapter on Śikṣā, the sacred training of correct mantra articulation. Śikṣā is one of the Vedic auxiliary sciences, with long *ī* as that which refers to pronunciation. The second chapter is devoted to sound development and is called Varṇa-Kāṇḍa, the chapter of sounds and their development. The third chapter (Pada-Kāṇḍā) is devoted to the word (*pada*), or word development. It is presented here as a short and interesting journey into the Sanskrit grammar and is intended for those interested or knowledgeable in Sanskrit as well as students. Since the chapter on word formation is a very big subject, I have only touched upon it briefly, nor is it complete. Varṇakāṇḍa and Padakāṇḍa carry the teaching of the Vāgyoga of Mahāmahopādya Śrī Vāgīśa Śāstrī. I have compiled and developed the Śikṣā-Kāṇḍa myself in over thirty years of devotion to the sound of Sanskrit and have tested it much in my own practice and teaching. The chapter on the spiritual articulation of mantra in Kashmiri Śaivism are the fruits. For this I am grateful to Dr Mark Dyczkowski. I have deeply absorbed his language and interpretation of the scriptures.

Since Sanskrit work is inherently spiritual, this spiritual science always envisages spiritual development, with even small corrections in pronunciation often strongly confirming the right path as consciousness is released and becomes experiential. Correct pronunciation has to be learned from a teacher, we hear what we want to hear and cannot control ourselves completely, especially in the beginning. As the Mantraśikṣā book series is accompanied by MP3 recordings, I would like to mention that they are meant to support, but not replace, the encounter with a teacher and their correction or guidance. As pronunciation and recitation are the teacher's tool, the student is the workpiece. The product should be liberation through the realisation of the soul.

This book also contains a treatment of the special pronunciation features according to Pāṇini, which is known to only a few and shows an interesting insight into the quality of the sounds. They are accompanied by excerpts from the Laghusiddhānta Kaumudī, an introductory text to Pāṇini grammar.

I wish you much joy in studying and engaging with Sanskrit! In a world that relates ever more quickly to an external, objective world, we embark here on a deceleration course to allow the actual movement of the soul to shine.

hariḥ om  
Vivek Nath



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## Saṁskṛta

### The Language of Gods and Yogīs

[Statement of Indian philosophies: Language is consciousness and consciousness is language; they are both based on each other.]

Sanskrit is the oldest continuously used language on earth. Its antiquity and permanence borders on miraculous. There is no grammatical phenomenon which it does not cover, and no philosophical concept which it has not already formulated to the end. It is the marvelous language of soul vision; no other language captures the subtleties of the human psyche as precisely and multi-dimensionally as Sanskrit. It was and is the most popular tool of the yogis and gods alike.

If we speak of the Indian culture, we think of yoga - but seldom of mantra and even more seldom of the language which has produced all this. If we look at the Indian in what they think, we will find there the concepts of the philosophical systems, and if we look at what they really practice, we will discover there, everywhere and at all times, the phenomenon of ritual, or at least the recitation of mantras aloud and silently. Both are based on the wonderful language of Sanskrit. The oldest use of the word root  $\sqrt{yuj}$  (*yoga*) is "yoking" to this heavenly vehicle.

Lost to modern man, it was the basis of ancient cultures - the sacred word. In the sonantic culture of India, people lived in sounds and mantras, the states of vibrating consciousness, the deities, mystical experiences and wisdom. Sanskrit was the matrix for their insights; in it the gods and states of pure consciousness came to light. These sound forms of the gods and beings, the great archetypes, had to be practiced and realized. Yoga was a tool on this path, not the goal. The goal was liberation. In many places in the Upaniṣads it is emphatically pointed out: "Speech cannot reach there, nor can thought comprehend it". No word and no language can capture It. For a very long time, Sanskrit was orientated towards the natural intelligence of the universe and was thus able to mature into its best image. The beauty of sounds, as well as the structure and development of language, reminds us of the same intelligence that we find in nature. The Sanskrit language was a slow approach to this perfection, which rests in nature. The name Sanskrit literally means the language "which has reached to formal perfection".

Since every word has a sound component and a meaning component, it is language that contains both the light of perception and lets us experience the movement of sound. Language is the interface of light and movement, of meaning and sound, of inner and outer, and all of this in the most subtle, ethereal way. Consciousness breathes itself through language.

It is often said that Sanskrit is too difficult. On the contrary. There is hardly a more beautiful and holistic spiritual science that can be learned with so much playful joy, inspiration and success as Sanskrit. It is the language of soul vision, the language of the present. When we engage with it, we engage with the most ancient form of yoga, the yoking to the sacred word or concept. Everywhere, dealing with this language, means to share in its special power. It doesn't matter if we just touch a leaf of the tree, we touch the whole tree.

The yoga of speech (*vāgyoga*) is the conscious union of the vital wind (*prāṇa*) with the sound of the spoken word (*śabda*) and its meaning (*artha*) in a unified state of consciousness (*cit*) - the conscious unity of sound, meaning and breath. Mantra is the place where these three are bound. It allows us not only to participate, but also to practice it.

A Sanskrit study begins with the alphabet. Each letter of the alphabet is a mantra, the direct conversion of the power of consciousness into sound. We can experience this when we recite the 49 sounds of the alphabet, each sound equal to an enlightenment. Every sound has a special place in the organ of speech where it develops its strongest resonance and where a special effort leads to its correct pronunciation - in the case of vowels the respective time measure and in the case of consonants the distinction between soft and hard, as well as aspirated and unaspirated sounds. Probably we have never paid any real attention to the pronunciation of individual sounds in our native language, and now here we have a language that allows only the purest, brightest and most resonant sounds, that makes our speech organ vibrate to the highest degree. This is a great experience.

Correctly articulated Sanskrit fills our speech organ with consciousness, and leads to the purification of speech (*vākśuddhi*), the purification of thoughts (*cittaśuddhi*) and the purification of the body (*kāyaśuddhi*). It gives us strength and expands the mind. Each sound of the Sanskrit alphabet is the direct translation of the power of consciousness into sound. By being constantly aware of the correct pronunciation in terms of place and strength of pronunciation, vowel length and resonance, as well as breath, we enter into a flow of self-reflection, our consciousness increasingly absorbed by the direct experience of the articulated word. Mantrayoga is the steady flow of this self-reflection. Reciting mantras in this language has the same effect as Prāṇāyāma. By building up and developing Prāṇa, the breath becomes wide.

Good breathing releases energy blockages. All this leads to a steadily expanding and steadily elevated state of consciousness of the speaker, which remains unceasing as a flow is created which the speaker enters. This is accompanied by a consolidated and aligned mind, because the mantras and thoughts of the texts are of profound sublimity. The speaker thus trains himself in the vision of marvellous concepts on a constantly raised and expanding consciousness. The actual Sanskrit practice is simply the articulation of the sounds, words, texts and mantras. Bringing forth words, externalizing them, manifesting them, and reflecting on them is the most important practice. Almost everything can be learned by chanting. The vibration of language should be the vehicle, as well as the teacher. Therefore the language itself shows the way.

Language has power over us and either binds us to the world or gives us liberation. A few words heard or thought are enough, and our whole inner being contracts or blossoms. Language has an enormous influence on how we feel. Early on we learn to please our parents - or not, depending on what we want to say to them, what they want to hear, what state we want to put them in. We do the same with ourselves. Through words, we either have a limited experience, or we practice the limitlessness of God.

The words in the Sanskrit language penetrate deep into the human being, into the deeper layers of consciousness, where one wants to have transported noble concepts and luminous symbols, the key terms of philosophy, mantras, words of a wonderful reality. Have this experience yourself! Even if we only read a word, it has this effect. What matters is the conscious momentum of perception as we read or speak it.

It is true that the study of Sanskrit or Vedic Chanting awakens *buddhi* (intellect), makes it balanced and aligned. It awakens the higher intellect. Moreover, Vedic recitation, like the repetition of other mantras, generates power. As we chant from the stomach area, we stimulate our vital fire (*jaṭharāgni*). According to Ayurveda, a healthy stomach fire is the cradle of health and beauty. It ignites the stomach fire, as well as the fire of our intellect or our love for God.

To protect the flower on the tree, we start from the roots. The study of Sanskrit protects the roots of yoga. In doing so, we understand yoga not for its own sake, but as a tool to get out of the clutches of egocentricity, to strive towards something higher. Excellence and love for generous service.









## Saṃskṛta Mātrkā

a ā i ī u ū ṛ ṝ ḷ ḹ e ai o au am aḥ

MP3  
# 1.1

ka kha ga gha ṅa

ca cha ja jha ṅa

ṭa ṭha ḍa ḍha ṅa

ta tha da dha na

pa pha ba bha ma

ya ra la va

śa ṣa sa

ha

*ḷa kṣa*

## Pronunciation - Śikṣākāṇḍa

### Introduction

With its 49 sounds<sup>1</sup>, Classical Sanskrit is mainly represented in the Devanāgarī script or in the Romance transliteration script. Because the Sanskrit alphabet has more sounds than the Latin alphabet, additional diacritics are needed to represent each sound in the transliteration.

Diacritical marks in the transliteration:<sup>2</sup>

- stroke for double vowel lengthening: ā, ī, ū, ṛ and Ṛ;
- below point for retroreflection: ṛ, ṝ, ṭa, ṭha, ḍa, ḍha, ṇa & ṣa;
- below point for the breath sound *visarga* ḥ;
- above point for the throat nasal ṅ and the labial nasal ṁ;
- accent for palatal sibilant śa;
- tilde for palatal nasal ñ;

The 49 sounds of the Sanskrit alphabet are the different names of the air element; they are its *spanda-viśeśa*, its "special vibration". During pronunciation, this element of air touches the universal fire (*vaiśvānara-agni*) of the navel cakra. The following verse is taken from a small standard work on recitation:<sup>3</sup>

ātmā buddhyā sametyārthān mano yunkte vivakṣayā |  
manaḥ kāyāgnimāhanti sa prerayati mārutam ||

"The soul recognizes the content with the intellect and thus generates the thought out of the desire to express it. Thoughts, in turn, ignite the stomach fire and wind rises."

<sup>1</sup> The alphabet of the tantric schools has 51 sounds, plus the distinct Vedic cerebral *ḷa* and the double consonant *kṣa*;

<sup>2</sup> Established by the International Congress of Orientalists, Athen 1912;

<sup>3</sup> Pāṇiniyaśikṣā 6. Vers, as well Maitryupaniṣad 7.11;

## Inventory of sounds and pronunciation

Sanskrit has 14 vowels. These 'carry' the two special sounds bindu *am* and visarga *ah*, which are also counted as vowels. The Sanskrit alphabet therefore consists of 16 vowels and 33 consonants (the number of gods in the Veda). The consonants include 25 classical consonants, 4 semi-vowels, 3 sibilants and one breath sound.

Vowels are associated with time and space. To get an idea of how far this perception reached in the Vedic period: There are seven superior worlds and seven subordinate worlds (*loka*) in the Veda - according to the Indian time calculation also 14 *manvantaras*. One *manvantara* corresponds to one lineage of Adam (first man), and 14 *manvantara* corresponds to one day in the life of Brahma, one *kalpa*, of the word root  $\sqrt{klp}$  (to think) and cover 4.32 trillion years.

Hinduism is characterized primarily by an exploration of meta-physical principles, and in the second instance these were related to linguistic principles. Aside from traditional grammars as well as the "philosophy of language", we find a great treasure on this in Kashmiri Śaivism. This tantric philosophical school flourished from the 8th to the 12th century AD, particularly under the influence of the great thinker Abhinavagupta. The vowels in this school were associated with the pure and universal powers of Lord Śiva. They are His powers to be conscious, for the vowels radiate expansively, and behave like consciousness.

All the vowels together are considered to be Śiva-Tattva and all the consonants are considered to be Śakti-Tattva. Their coming together creates the world, or language. In the theistic schools of Tantrism we find a metaphysical model of God with 36 tattvas, in contrast to the atheistic model of Sāṃkhya with 25 tattvas. The vowels are the five highest tattvas, followed by six tattvas of the restriction of these highest tattvas, in which we mainly find the semi-vowels. These are followed by the classical consonants, which in turn correspond to the 25 Sāṃkhya tattvas. As closure sounds, consonants are characterised by touch, materiality or substance. The 25 Sāṃkhya tattvas are gross and subtle, the vowels only subtle. In the metaphysics of Tantrism, the vowels are associated with the light of consciousness and the consonants with the objects on which it shines (see also p.128).