Lesson 2.A

The mouth positions (**sthāna**) used by the vowels (**svara**) are also used by the consonants (**vyañjana**). Within these five mouth positions the consonants are further classified according to inner (**ābhyantara-**) and outer (**bāhya-**) methods of articulation or effort (**prayatna**).

Like the vowels, there are more consonants in Sanskrit than in English, and thus diacritical marks are used with the Roman consonants to represent further sounds.

2.A.1 The Five Mouth Positions

The five mouth positions are considered from within the oral cavity itself. The back of the mouth as it narrows to form the throat, is called the guttural position (**kaṇṭhya**): this is associated with the vowel **a**. Moving towards the front of the mouth, next is the palatal position (**tālavya**) used by the vowel **i**; this is followed by the cerebral position (**mūrdhanya**) used by **ṛ**, and the teeth (**dantya**) used by **ḷ**, and finally the two lips (**oṣṭhya**) used by **u**. The compound vowels make use of two mouth positions: **e** and **ai** use both guttural and palatal (**kaṇṭhatālavya**), and **o** and **au** use guttural and labial (**kaṇṭhoṣṭhya**).

kaṇṭhya	**tālavya**	**mūrdhanya**	**dantya**	**oṣṭhya**
guttural	palatal	cerebral	dental	labial
a	**i**	**ṛ**	**ḷ**	**u**

2.A.2 The Twenty-Five Stops: ka to ma

The first twenty-five consonants are calls stops (**sparśa**) because the complete contact (**spṛṣṭa**) in the mouth fully stops the breath (and hence the sound) through the mouth. These are arranged in five sets (**varga**) according to mouth position and named after the first letter in the group, for example the five in the guttural column (**ka-varga**) are stops at the back of the mouth, and the labials (**pa-varga**) are stops at the lips.

The **a** is added for the sake of pronunciation only: being stops, they need a sound (i.e. a vowel) to stop (or start). The same principle is used in English, for example the consonants 'b-c-d' are pronounced 'bee-cee-dee'. In fact, the word 'consonant' itself is derived from the the Latin *cum* (together with) and *sonāre* (to sound).

kaṇṭhya guttural	**tālavya** palatal	**mūrdhanya** cerebral	**dantya** dental	**oṣṭhya** labial
ka	**ca**	**ṭa**	**ta**	**pa**
kha	**cha**	**ṭha**	**tha**	**pha**
ga	**ja**	**ḍa**	**da**	**ba**
gha	**jha**	**ḍha**	**dha**	**bha**
ṅa	**ña**	**ṇa**	**na**	**ma**

The table is also arranged horizontally by rows: the first, for example, comprises **ka**, **ca**, **ṭa**, **ta**, and **pa**.

The first, third and fifth rows are pronounced with little breath (**alpaprāṇa**), and the second and fourth rows with much breath (**mahāprāṇa**).

The last three rows are voiced (**ghoṣa**), i.e. the vocal cords vibrate in producing the consonant, whereas the first two rows are unvoiced (**aghoṣa**).

The consonants in the fifth row are nasalized (**anunāsika**), the others not.

In terms of alphabetical order, these follow after the sixteen **mātṛkā** in order from **ka-varga** through **pa-varga**, i.e.:

... **aṃ aḥ ka kha ga gha ṅa ca cha** ... **pa pha ba bha ma** ...

2.A.3 Pronunciation of the Stops

While the previous section (2.A.2) describes the sounds authoritatively, the following notes may assist with first-time pronunciation.

The unvoiced (**aghoṣa**) stops have an explosive quality to them, whereas the voiced (**ghoṣa**) stops have a gentler quality to them as though releasing the stop more slowly: this can be observed by listening to the difference between **ka** and **ga** when 'sounded' without the following **a**.

The nasal (**anunāsika**) consonants continue to sound through the nose when the breath through the mouth has been stopped by the tongue or lips.

The aspiration (**prāṇa**) gives the native English speaker the most problems. In English there is a tendency to pronounce some consonants slightly aspirated before a long vowel, and this may be used to illustrate the difference between for example, **pa** and **pha**: attend to the 'p' breath when pronouncing the two English words 'pick' and 'peek' — hold the finger tips close to the mouth to feel the difference. This difference needs to be greatly increased to distinguish between the **alpaprāṇa** and **mahāprāṇa** consonants, but the common error is to use so much breath that a vestigial vowel is inserted, particularly for the **ghoṣa** consonants; for example, **bha** can be incorrectly pronounced as '**b**$^{\text{a}}$**ha**'.

Because English pronunciation is acquired by imitating indistinct sounds which are not precisely described, problems occur with the centre three mouth positions. One effect is that 'd' and 't' are pronounced somewhere between the dental (**dantya**) and cerebral (**mūrdhanya**) positions; another effect is that many speakers do not use the palatal (**tālavya**) position for the stops, so that **ca** is pronounced as 'tsha', and **ja** as 'dza'. It may help to consider the palatal stops as a modification or softening of the gutturals so that **ca** is a softer **ka**, **ja** a softer **ga**, and so on.

Some English consonants are similar to those in Sanskrit, and may be used to give a very rough guide to the Sanskrit pronunciation, however, as mentioned earlier, English does not distinguish between dental (**dantya**) and cerebral (**mūrdhanya**).

k — kiss, kiln, back
kh — bunkhouse ('bung-khouse')
g — good, give, bug
gh — loghouse ('log-ghouse')
ṅ — sing, long, tongue

ṭ/t — tub, tap, cart
ṭh/th — anthill ('an-thill')
ḍ/d — day, dog, god
ḍh/dh — redhead ('red-dhead')
ṇ/n — gentle, hand, gain

c — cello, chair, church
ch — coach-horse ('coa-chhorse')
j — just, jolly, joy
jh — hedgehog ('hej-jhog')
ñ — enjoy, canyon, pinch

p — pick, pat, tap
ph — uphill ('up-phill')
b — be, cab, imbibe
bh — clubhouse ('club-bhouse')
m — amble, mumble

When in doubt, the previous section has the authoritative description.

There is a tradition that pronounces **pha** as 'fa', i.e. makes use of both the teeth and lips (**dantoṣṭhya**): the rules of sound and grammar will be easier to understand if pronounced purely with the lips (**oṣṭhya**).

2.A.4 Devanāgarī Alphabet

The previous lesson gave the first six **devanāgarī** characters, here are all sixteen letters of the **mātṛkā** to practise. The Roman transliteration of the four rows is:

a	**ā**	**i**	**ī**
u	**ū**	**ṛ**	**ṝ**
ḷ	**ḹ**	**e**	**ai**
o	**au**	**aṃ**	**aḥ**

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Lesson 2.B

2.B.1 More on Verbs

As well as the division into **puruṣa** (person), the verbs are divided into number (**vacana**): in English there is singular and plural, while in Sanskrit there is singular (**eka-vacana**), dual (**dvi-vacana**), and plural (**bahu-vacana**).

The personal endings are used to indicate both person and number, for example:

	eka-vacana	**dvi-vacana**	**bahu-vacana**
prathama-puruṣa	**tiṣṭhati** he/she/it stands	**tiṣṭhataḥ** they (two) stand	**tiṣṭhanti** they (pl.) stand
madhyama-puruṣa	**tiṣṭhasi** you (sing.) stand	**tiṣṭhathaḥ** you (two) stand	**tiṣṭhatha** you (pl.) stand
uttama-puruṣa	**tiṣṭhāmi** I stand	**tiṣṭhāvaḥ** we (two) stand	**tiṣṭhāmaḥ** we (pl.) stand

Note that when the subject is dual, the dual form of the verb must be used.

A **dhātu** belongs to one of ten classes (**gaṇa**); this classification is according to variations in the formation of the stem (**aṅga**) from the **dhātu**. The verbs used to form simple sentences in this section are all from the first class (**bhvādi-gaṇa**).

As in English, a verb may express time (past, present, future tense) and mood (indicative, imperative, benedictive, conditional, etc.): English makes extensive use of auxiliaries (might, ought, should, had, etc.) to express these, whereas in Sanskrit these are all included in the form of the verb itself. There are ten tense/mood classifications in Sanskrit: these are called **lakāra** or l-affixes because their technical names all begin with the letter **l**. The conjugations given here are all in the present indicative (simple present tense) called **laṭ**.

2.B.2 Exercises

(a) Practise sounding the sixteen **mātṛkā** in their correct order.

(b) Practise reading and writing the sixteen **mātṛkā** in Roman script and **devanāgarī**.

(c) Translate the following sentences into English:

1. **tiṣṭhanti vadataḥ ca**
2. **tiṣṭhathaḥ vadāvaḥ ca**
3. **vadāmaḥ tiṣṭhataḥ ca**
4. **tiṣṭhasi vadathaḥ ca**
5. **tiṣṭhatha vadathaḥ ca**
6. **vadataḥ tiṣṭhāmaḥ ca**
7. **tiṣṭhati vadanti ca**
8. **tiṣṭhasi vadāvaḥ ca**

(d) Translate the following sentences into Sanskrit:

1. We (two) stand and you (pl.) speak
2. You (two) speak and they (pl.) stand
3. You (two) stand and speak
4. They (pl.) stand and I speak
5. He stands and you (pl.) speak
6. They (two) speak and he stands
7. We (pl.) stand and you (two) speak
8. You (pl.) speak and you (sing.) stand

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