

The anusvāra ढ and the visarga ह are perhaps the only two sounds that are completely unique to the Saṃskṛta language. Not even the descendent Indian languages employ these sounds independently, i.e. in words that are not originally from Saṃskṛta.

In this monograph, we will discuss briefly the true nature of the anusvāra and describe its various forms as pronounced in the Taittirīya Kṛṣṇa Yajur Veda (TKYV).

Note that the first section of the monograph is essentially a technical document, and as such will involve much technical hashing and employ many technical terms used in phonetics. Those who do not wish to enter into all that may turn to page 3 and read on from the topic “Śuddhānusvāra”. To get a full grasp of the nature of the anusvāra, however, the technical section below *must* be read.

It is impossible to pinpoint the true nature of the sounds under discussion without resorting to technical terms (which is why those terminologies were evolved anyway). Since there are too many vague descriptions of the anusvāra available, I do not want to write *another* vague description and add to that confusion, rendering my monograph pointless.

My monograph will hence be *definite*, as far as my intellect goes. If I have to sacrifice easy understandability for that desired precision, I do it. The only way to learn the precise nature of the anusvāra *without* trudging through the technicalities of this article is to learn it *directly from the native speakers* – just as an English speaker would learn an unusual sound like the German [x], the Parisian-French [ʁ] etc. ‘Native speakers’, in this case, are scholars who have traditionally learnt the Vedas from a guru and who also are experts in the Śikṣā Śāstra (traditional Indian phonetics).

#### THE TRUE PHONETIC NATURE OF THE ANUSVĀRA

The anusvāra ढ is described in the Śikṣā Śāstra as being a voiced sound having only one ‘place of articulation’ - the nāsikā or nasal cavity. In other words, it is a ‘pure nasal’ and distinct from oral or oro-nasal sounds. Now what does this mean, in physical terms?

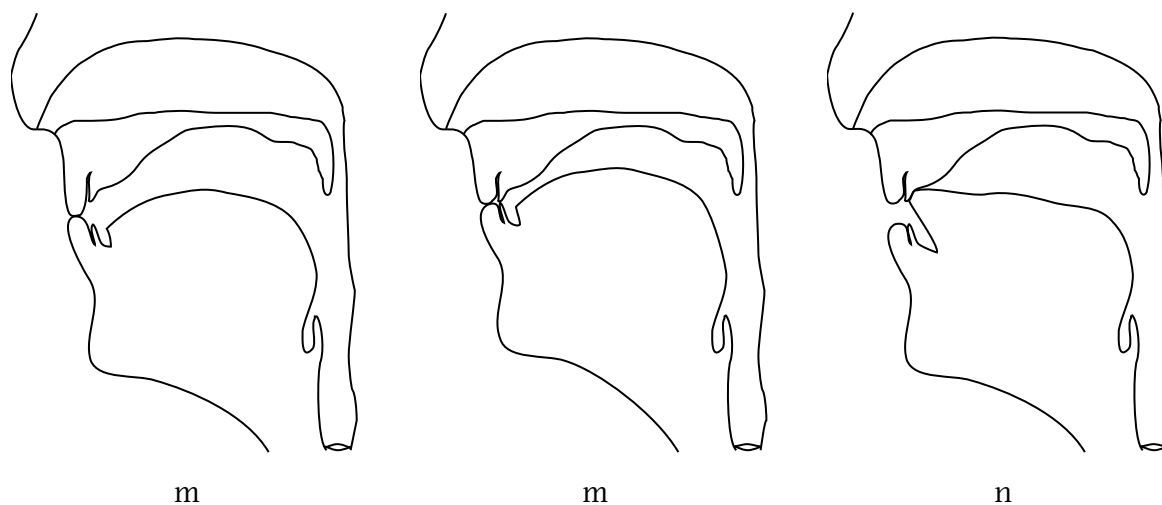
Oral sounds are those in which the air carrying the sound does not undergo *nasalization*, or resonance within the nasal cavity, which is what causes the distinct characteristic in a sound of being *nasal*. In oral sounds, the air is ‘modified’ only within the

oral cavity, and not in the nasal cavity. In oro-nasal sounds, the air is ‘modified’ in both the oral and nasal cavities. So logically, a sound must be a ‘pure nasal’ only if it is ‘modified’ *only* within the nasal cavity and not at all in the oral cavity.

This is, however, physically impossible, since air *cannot* pass into the nasal cavity *without* passing through, and getting affected by, at least a part of the oral cavity. So what does ‘pure nasal’ mean then?

The answer is that though no sound can be *strictly* called a pure nasal by the above definition, the tradition still calls the anusvāra a ‘pure’ nasal because it does not involve any ‘impurities’ which here means articulations that are used in creating other (nasal) sounds such as [ŋ] [ɲ] [ɳ] [ɹ̃] or [m]. This means that there is no stricture in the oral cavity.

This *does not mean* that there is an open stricture, since that would cause only a nasalized vowel. So what *does* this mean? The answer must come only from tradition, which tells us to simply *close* the mouth, without forming any particular stricture. This may seem a ridiculously simple answer, but it is the truth. When the mouth is simply closed, the air does not *pass through* the oral cavity, although it does, unavoidably, *come into contact* with the oral cavity, and then passes through the nasal cavity. Observe:



A question: is this not equivalent to the bilabial nasal [m] then? No. Though many people erroneously pronounce the anusvāra as identical with [m] or even [n], the proper pronunciation is quite different, although it is closer to [m] than to [n]. This is obvious from the diagrams. It may be hard to believe that the minor difference in the articulation of [m] and [ṃ] *painted* above will really cause a difference in pronunciation, but that is just like saying that there is no difference in quality between the long [i:] and short [ɪ] in English – difficult to know for anyone who has not learnt the pronunciation from a native speaker.

Note that I do not name the anusvāra in a formal way similar to “voiced bilabial nasal” or so, since there is no word in modern phonetic terminology to describe this unique mode of articulation peculiar to the Saṃskṛta language which was sadly never considered as subject matter for phonetic study by modern phoneticians.

Anyhow, I believe that the nature of this ‘pure nasal’ is now explained sufficiently in detail and go ahead with describing the various forms of anusvāra used in the TKYV.

#### THE ŚUDDHĀNUSVĀRA

The śuddhānusvāra or ‘pure’ anusvāra is simply the anusvāra as described in detail above. Why it is called ‘pure’ again, seeing as it is already a ‘pure nasal’, will be explained presently.

The śuddhānusvāra denoted by the usual ṃ occurs only before the consonant clusters jñ and ghn.

**Examples:** nakiṣṭaṃ ghnanti (TS 2/1/11/4), imaṃ ghnanti (TS 2/4/1/1), paśos saṃjñāpyamānāt (TS 6/3/8/3), yat saṃjñāpayanti (TS 6/3/11/2), pratyañcaṃ ghnanti (TB 1/3/7/6), saṃjñānena (TB 2/4/4/5), saṃjñānam (Kāṭhaka 1/1/1).

#### THE ĀGAMĀNUSVĀRA

Āgama in Saṃskṛta grammar means “an inserted sound”. The anusvāra of the TKYV, where it *does not* occur before the consonant clusters jñ and ghn as mentioned above, takes a voiced velar stop [g] before it (and a [ɨ] in between to ease the transition), thus rendering the pronunciation [gɨṃ]. (Note that I am using [ṃ] as an IPA symbol though it is not, for want of a better one.)

The anusvāra which *does not* have this extra [g] was called the śuddhānusvāra or ‘pure’ anusvāra in the previous section, to contrast it from the āgamānusvāra here.

The [gɨṃ] sequence of the āgamānusvāra is heard before the trill r = [r], the fricatives ś, ṣ, s and h = [ç] [ʂ] [s̪] and [ɦ] and occasionally before vowels too. It is (provisionally) written as (g)ṃ in transliteration.

**Examples:** pratyuṣṭa(g)ṃ rakṣaḥ (TS 1/1/2/1), tva(g)ṃ śardhaḥ (TS 1/3/14/1), āyū(g)ṃṣi (TS 1/3/14/7), yakṣma(g)ṃ suvāmi (TS 1/3/14/4) uru(g)ṃ hi (TS 1/4/45/1), payasvā(g)ṃ agne (TS 1/4/46/2), mahā(g)ṃ indraḥ (TS 1/4/21/1) and so on.

## THE LUPTA-ĀGAMĀNUSVĀRA

Curiously enough, this is an anusvāra that is not pronounced! This is precisely what the adjective “lupta” (lost) means.

We said just now that when the anusvāra occurs before ś, ṣ and s, (and elsewhere too) it takes a [g] before it as “āgama”. When, however, it is followed by a consonant cluster headed by ś, ṣ, s and h, it actually disappears, leaving behind only the [g] (and the [ɨ]) it brought into the world! We transliterate it (provisionally) as just a (g) without the ṃ, since the ṃ is lost.

**Examples:** karṇā(g)ś cākarṇā(g)ś ca (TS 1/8/9/3), jyotī(g)ṣyavarundhe (TS 7/1/2/1), trī(g)s ṛcān (TS 2/5/10/1), pitṛṇā(g) hyetarhi (TB 1/3/10/7).

Note that there are no consonant clusters in the TKYV headed by r and following an anusvāra, so examples for such cases cannot be given.

## THE DVIRBHŪTA-LUPTA-ĀGAMĀNUSVĀRA

We just learnt that the anusvāra sometimes disappears leaving behind it only the āgama [g] and the transitional [ɨ]. Now if the [g] comes *after a short vowel* – a, i or u = [ə] [i] or [u] – it gets doubled (dvirbhūta), and the cluster is now pronounced [ggɨ].

We transliterate this (provisionally) as (gg).

**Examples:** ta(gg) sṛtam (TA 5/1/6), tva(gg) hyagne (TB 3/6/10/1), asmi(gg)ś cāmuṣmi(gg)ś ca (TB 1/5/2/3), pu(gg)ścalūm (TB 3/4/1/1)

Though ṛ or [ɨṛ] is also considered a short vowel, there are no occurrences in the TKYV of it followed by an anusvāra which is itself followed by a consonant cluster, so no examples with a short ṛ before such an anusvāra are given.

## ADDITIONAL NOTES

Some traditions of the TKYV nasalize the [ɨ] in the [gɨṃ] of the āgamānusvāra. Some other traditions never have an āgamānusvāra and replace all of them with the lupta-āgamānusvāra. That is, for them, the anusvāra always disappears whenever it takes the āgama. The tradition described in the monograph, however, is the one followed by the majority, especially prevalent in the states of Tamiy Nāḍu, Āndhra Pradēśa and Karṇāṭaka.

Feedback and constructive comments are welcomed at:

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