



Tradition of Vedic Chanting & Rituals : An Intangible Cultural Heritage

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VEDIC CHANTING & RITUALS



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VEDIC CHANTING & RITUALS

Introduction

- The oral tradition of Vedic chanting has been declared an intangible heritage of humanity by UNESCO in Nov 2003
- Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts, The Department of Culture, Ministry of Tourism and Culture, prepared a five-year action plan to safeguard, protect, promote and disseminate the oral tradition of Vedas in terms of their uniqueness and distinctiveness, encourage scholars and practitioners to preserve, revitalize and promote their own branch of Vedic recitation
- UNESCO declared the chanting of Vedas in India an outstanding example of heritage and form of cultural expressions. The proclamation says that in the age of globalization and modernization when cultural diversity is under pressure



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Divisions of Four Vedas

- Towards the close of the Dvapara Yuga, it is believed, the Lord manifested as the sage Veda Vyasa, who in order to save the Veda from extinction, re-edited the Veda dividing it into 4 units :

1. Rik
2. Sama
3. Yajur
4. Atharvana

- Each of the Vedas is divided into Samhita, Brahmana, Aranyaka and Upanishada

Samhita - the text which comprises of hymns used in the sacrifice

Brāhmana - the theological treatises which deal with the sacrificial details and gives the interpretation of the ritual

Aranyakas and Upanishad - deal with a variety of topics related mainly to cosmology and philosophy.



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Salient Characteristics of Vedic Chants

- Oldest form of psalmody (Worship vocalizing)
- Very strict and complex methods of instruction have made it possible to preserve the ritual chant unchanged, despite thousands of years of wars, conquests and social upheavals
- The Rig Veda is chanted on 3 notes
- The Yajur Veda is chanted on up to 5 notes
- The Sama Veda is chanted on 7 notes
- The Sama is the only chant that is considered really musical and is considered to be inferior to the other two Vedas



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Elements of Taittiriya Upanishada

- According to the Taittiriya Upaniṣada, there are six main factors that need to be taken into consideration:-
 1. Varṇaḥ — Pronunciation
 2. Svaraḥ — Notes
 3. Matra — Duration
 4. Balam — Emphasis
 5. Sama — Continuity
 6. Santanaḥ — Punctuation

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Varnaḥ : Pronunciation

- Correct pronunciation of the letters of the alphabet.
- Differentiation between short and long vowels.
- Sandhi — Visarga (ḥ) changes When followed by sa, ṣa, śa, the visarga changes into those letters. When followed by a **p** it changes into **pha**



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Varnaḥ : Pronunciation

Visarga followed
by प फ

धियो॒ यो नः॑ प्रचोद॒यात्॑

dhiyo yo naḥ pracodāt



Visarga followed
by क ख

ब्रह्म॑णः॒ कोशो॑ऽसि

brahmaṇaḥ kośo 'si



Varnah : Pronunciation

- Sandhi — Anusvara (ṁ) changes according to the letter that follows it

Anusvara class

guttural	क	ख	ग	घ	ङ
palatal	च	छ	ज	झ	ञ
cerebral	ट	ठ	ड	ढ	ण
dental	त	थ	द	ध	न
labial	प	फ	ब	भ	म

Anusvara followed by guttural consonants

क ख ग घ ङ

↓

कविं कवीनाम्

— —

kaviṁ kavīnām

↑



VEDIC CHANTING & RITUALS

Varnaḥ : Pronunciation

Anusvara followed by
palatal consonants
च छ ज झ ञ

↓

शं च॑ मे

śaṃ ca me

↑



Anusvara followed by
labial consonants
प फ ब भ म

↓

शिवं॑ ब॒भूव॑

śivaṃ babbhūva

↑



Anusvara followed by
dental consonants
त थ द ध न

↓

शं नो॑ मि॒त्रः

śaṃ no mitraḥ

↑



Anusvara followed by
श ष स ह र

↓

इ॒दं॑ स॒र्वं

idaṃ sarvaṃ

↑



Anusvara followed by
semivowels y or v

↓

तं॑ य॒ज्ञं

taṃ yajñaṃ

↑



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Svaraḥ : The Vedic Accent

- All the Vedic texts as well as in two Brahmanas — Taittiriya (and its Aranyaka) and the Satapatha Brahmana (including the Bṛhadaranyaka Upaniṣad) are described with the accent (svara).
- The Vedic chant is based upon these accents or svaras and consists of basically four notes which are following:

1. **Udatta** - raised pitch
2. **Svarita** - middle/neutral pitch
3. **Anudatta** - low pitch
4. **Nigadha** - deviant note which is based on the Udatta and is like a double Udatta with the second being slight raised above the first





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Mātra : Duration

- Ardha — half — when a word ends in a halanta.
- Hrasva — short (the short vowels a, i, u, ṛ & ḥ)
- Dīrgha — long (ā, ī, ū, e, ai o & au — sometimes indicated by the digit 2 after the letter in a text)
- Pluta — extra long — indicated by the digit 3 after the syllable

Balam : Emphasis

- Alpa prāṇa — soft — these are all the regular vowels and consonants.
- Mahā prāṇa — hard — these are all the aspirated consonants also ṣa and ha.



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Sāma — continuity

- One must ensure a continuity and smooth flow of the chanting.

Santānaḥ — punctuation

- One must pause at the appropriate places - commonly indicated by (|)
- In addition a slight pause is required:—
 - After chanting OM
 - When a word ends in a vowel and is followed by a vowel.
 - When a visarga (ḥ) is followed by kṣa

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Textual Markings

- There are 4 different methods of marking the svaras in the texts :

1. **Anudatta** is marked by a horizontal stroke below the syllable.

2. **Udatta** is marked by a perpendicular stroke above the syllable.

3. Two perpendicular strokes together mean that there is an elongated double raised sound **-Nigadha**.

4. In the Rik, Yajur and Atharva Vedas and the Taittiriya Samhita & Brāhmana the **Svarita** is not marked at all because it is the middle pitch.





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Variant forms Vedic Chant

- Vedic recitation has assumed two distinct forms that evolved to preserve its immutable character:— **Prakṛti and Vikṛti with sub-forms.**
- **Prakṛti**
 - Prodigious energy was expended by ancient Indian culture in ensuring that
 - these texts were transmitted from generation to generation with inordinate fidelity.
 - In the Prakṛti form the words do not change their sequence.
 - The natural recitation in Prakṛiti is expressed by :-
 1. Samhita pathah — continuous recitation
 2. Pada pathah — word for word recitation — 1/2/3/4/5
 3. Krama pathah — words recited in pairs — 1 2 / 2 3 / 3 4 / 5 6 / 7 8 /.....



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■ Vikrti

- The Pada Pathah forms the basis of a number of special recitations known as 'Vikriti' or 'crooked' recitations.
- The text is recited backwards or forwards or the successive words are chanted in specific combinations.
- There are 8 traditional Vikriti combinations which are:-
 1. Jata:- 1 2 2 1 1 2 / 2 3 3 2 2 3 / 3 4 4 3 3 4 / 4 5 5 4 4 5 /
 2. Mala:- 1 2 / 2 1 / 1 2 / 2 3 / 3 2 / 2 3 / 3 4 / 4 3 / 3 4 /
 3. Sikha:- 1 2 2 1 1 2 3 / 2 3 3 2 2 3 4 / 3 4 4 3 3 4 5 / 4 5 5 4 4 5 6 /
 4. Rekha:- 1 2 / 2 1 / 1 2 / 2 3 4 / 4 3 2 / 2 3 / 3 4 5 6 / 6 5 3 4 / 3 4 / 4 5 6 7 8 / 8 7 6 5 4 / 4 5 / 5 6 7 8 9 10 / 10 9 8 7 6 5 / 5 6 /



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▪ Vikrti(Contd....)

5. Dhvaja:- 1 2 / 99 100 / 2 3 / 98 99 / 3 4 / 97 98 / 4 5 / 97 98 / 5 6 / 96 97 / 97
98 / 3 4 / 98 99 / 2 3 / 99 100 / 1 2

6. Danda:- 1 2 / 2 1 / 1 2 / 2 3 / 3 2 1 / 1 2 / 2 3 / 3 4 / 4 3 2 1 / 1 2 / 2 3 / 3 4 / 4 5 / 5 4
3 2 1

7. Ratha:- 1 2 / 5 6 / 2 1 / 6 5 / 1 2 / 5 6 / 2 3 / 6 7 / 3 2 1 / 7 6 5 / 1 2 / 5 6 / 2 3 / 6 7 /
3 4 / 7 8 / 4 3 2 1 / 8 7 6 5 /

8. Ghana:- 1 2 2 1 1 2 3 3 2 1 1 2 3 / 2 3 3 2 2 3 4 4 3 2 2 3 4 / 3 4 4 3 3 4 5 5 4 3 3 4
5 /



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Styles of Vedic Chanting

- In India today there are 3 distinctive styles of Vedic chant:-

1. Maharashtra Brahmins:

- This tradition is characterized by a preponderance of the Sukla Yajur Veda of the Madhyamdina recension
- The Rik Veda of the Sakala recension and Sama Veda of the Kauthuma Ranayaniya recension and very little Atharva Veda

2. Tamil Brahmins:

- The Southern tradition is characterized by the Kṛṣṇa Yajur Veda of the Taittiriya recension, along with the Rik and Sāma Vedas of the same school
- Atharva Veda is non-existent in the south.



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Styles of Vedic Chanting

3. Nambudiri Brahmins of Kerala:

- In the Nambudiri tradition the Rik Veda belongs entirely to the Vāskala recension [Kauśitaki].
- The Yajur Veda is exclusively Taittiriya but the recitation differs from that of the Tamils.
- The Sāma Veda belongs entirely to the Jaiminiya school which is not found elsewhere.



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Vedic Rituals

- Early Vedic ritual was centred upon sacrifice (yajna) performed on plots of land temporarily consecrated for the purpose (vedi), not the worship of images (murti) in permanent temples (mandirs).
- The centrality of sacrifice in ancient times is demonstrated by the membership of the Vedic pantheon in which important gods such as Agni (Fire), the goddess Vac (Speech) and Soma (an intoxicant) were divine forms of parts of the sacrifice.
- As the Vedic period developed, the sacrifice gained in importance so that the performance of the sacrifice in itself was believed to be essential to the maintenance of the cosmos.
- Elements of Vedic ritual continue to this day, especially the importance of fire and fire offerings in lifecycle ceremonies such as marriage.
- There are mainly two types of yajna:-
 1. Haviryajna
 2. Somayajna



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Haviryajna

Agnihotra : The yajna of casting of ghee into the sacred fire as per strict rites

Darshapurnamasa : Sacrifice performed on the new moon and full moon days

Aagraryana : An agricultural rite

Chaturmasya : Holy period of four months

Nirudhapashubandha : Sacrifice for tying up the livestock

Sautramani : Sacrifice performed in order to please Indra

Pindapitriyajna : Sacrifice of rice balls to the Fathers



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Somayajna

Agnishtoma : sacrificial rite extending over several days in spring and forming an essential part of the Jyotiṣṭoma

Atyagnishtoma : special way of pleasing Agni with sacrifices

Ukthya : The object of these sacrifices is eternal happiness

Shodashi : The object of these sacrifices is eternal happiness

Vajapeya : performed to preserve peace in the state. It's the highest form of Soma Yajna

Atiratra : over-night piling up of the fire

Aptoryama : The rite derives its name 'Aptoryāma' from the belief that by its performance one secures whatever one desires

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Opening and Closing prayers in rituals



ॐ स॒ ह ना॑ववतु ।
May He protect us both.
om sa ha nāv avatu

स॒ह नौ॑ भुनक्तु ।
May He nourish us both.
sa ha nau bhunaktu

स॒ह वी॒र्यं॑ करवावहै ।
May we both be courageous.
saha vīryam karavāvahai



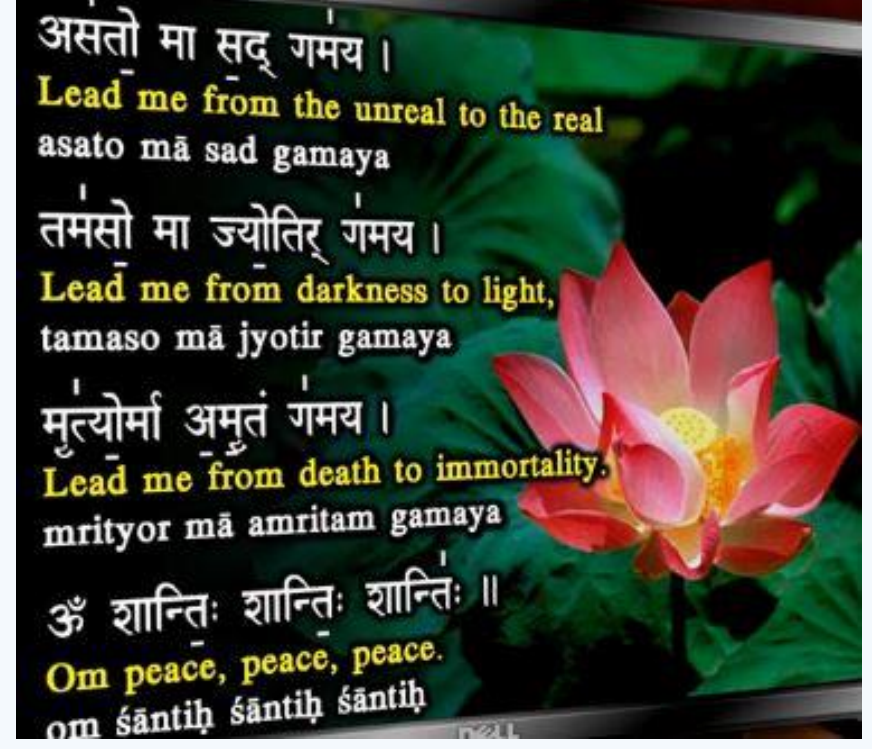
ते॒ज॒स्विना॒वधी॑तमस्तु
May we be brilliant in our studies.
tejasvināv adhītam astu

मा वि॑द्विषा॒वहै॑ ॥
May we never argue.
mā vidviṣāvahai

ॐ शान्तिः॒ शान्तिः॒ शान्तिः॑ ॥
om śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ ॥

VEDIC CHANTING & RITUALS

Opening and Closing prayers in rituals



VEDIC CHANTING & RITUALS

Opening and Closing prayers in rituals

ॐ पूर्णमदः पूर्णमिदं

That (brahman) is infinite, this (world) is infinite.
om pūrṇam adaḥ pūrṇam idaṃ

पूर्णात्पूर्णमुदच्यते ।

pūrṇāt pūrṇam udacyate

From that infinite (brahman)
this infinite (world) arose.



पूर्णस्य पूर्णमादाय

When this infinite (world) came from infinite (brahman),
pūrṇasya pūrṇam ādāya

पूर्णमेवावशिष्यते ।

(brahman) remained infinite.

pūrṇam evāvaśiṣyate

ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

om śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ



Thank you

