

# Kāṇḍa 1: Vāk-Yantra (वाक्-यन्त्र)

## Calibrating the Instrument of Speech

### Lesson 1.1: The Anatomy of Sound – *Uccāraṇasthāna* (उच्चारणस्थान)

Welcome to our first practical lesson. Your background in Marathi gives us a powerful head start, as the basic sounds are familiar. Our goal here, however, is not familiarity, but absolute, conscious precision. The Vedic Rishis were masters of phonetics. They understood that the power of a mantra, its *nāda*, comes from the perfect production of its constituent sounds.

We are not learning an alphabet; we are studying the **anatomy of the human mouth** as a divine instrument for creating specific vibrations. The Sanskrit alphabet, the *Varnamālā* (वर्णमाला), is not arbitrary like ABC. It is a scientific chart starting from the deepest point in the throat and systematically moving forward to the lips.

Today, we master the five primary **Points of Articulation**, the *Uccāraṇasthāna*. For each sound you make, I want you to stop thinking about the letter and start *feeling the point of contact* inside your mouth.

### The Five Articulation Groups (Varga)

Each of the five core consonant groups (*varga*) corresponds to one precise location in the mouth.

Varga (वर्ग) Name	Uccāraṇasthāna (Contact Point)	Consonants (व्यञ्जन)	Feel It
Kaṇṭhya <i>कण्ठ्य</i>	<b>Soft Palate</b> <b>(Throat)</b> From Sanskrit <i>kanṭha</i> (कण्ठ), "throat".	क ख ग घ ङ् ka kha ga gha ḡa	The very back of your tongue rises to touch the soft, fleshy part at the back of your throat. It's the deepest possible sound. The nasal sound ঙ্ (ṅa) is like the 'ng' in "singing".

Varga (वर्ग) Name	Uccāraṇasthāna (Contact Point)	Consonants (व्यञ्जन)	Feel It
Tālavya <b>तालव्य</b>	<b>Hard Palate</b> From Sanskrit <i>tālu</i> (तालु), "palate".	च छ ज झ अ ca cha ja jha ña	The flat blade of your tongue (not the tip!) presses firmly against the hard, bony roof of your mouth. Your Marathi 'च' and 'ज' are perfect examples.
Mūrdhanya <b>मूर्धन्य</b>	<b>Retroflex (Roof of the Mouth)</b> From Sanskrit <i>mūrdhan</i> (मूर्धन्), "head, summit".	ट ठ ड ढ ण ṭa ṭha ḍa ḍha ḡa	<b>This is uniquely Indic and critically important.</b> The tip of your tongue curls backward (retroflexes) to strike the highest point on the roof of your mouth. This produces a much harder, more resonant sound than the dental equivalent. Feel the tongue physically pull back.
Dantya <b>दन्त्य</b>	<b>Teeth</b> From Sanskrit <i>danta</i> (दन्त), "tooth".	त थ द ध न ta tha da dha na	The tip of your tongue touches the <i>back of your upper teeth</i> . This is much softer and gentler than the English 't' and 'd', where the tongue hits the gum ridge *behind* the teeth. For a perfect Sanskrit 'ta', your tongue must make contact with the teeth themselves.
Oṣṭhya <b>ओष्ठ्य</b>	<b>Lips</b> From Sanskrit <i>oṣtha</i> (ओष्ठ), "lip".	प फ ब भ म pa pha ba bha ma	The simplest to feel. The sound is produced entirely by the contact of the two lips.

## Your Abhyāsa (अभ्यास) – Practical Experience

Your "homework" is not to memorize, but to experience these sounds physically and build muscle memory. The goal is for your mouth to produce these sounds perfectly, without conscious thought.

- 1. The Varga Chant:** Close your eyes. Chant the five vargas in order, one after the other.

ka kha ga gha ña ... (feel the throat)

ca cha ja jha ña ... (feel the palate)

ṭa ṭha ḍa ḍha ḡa ... (feel the tongue curl back)

ta tha da dha na ... (feel the tongue tip on the teeth)

pa pha ba bha ma ... (feel the lips).

Notice how the point of contact in your mouth moves smoothly and systematically from the back to the front. You are tracing the architecture of the *vāk-yantra*.

**2. The Critical Contrast (Dental vs. Retroflex):** This is the most vital distinction. Say the following words aloud slowly, exaggerating the tongue movement.

- For Dental 't/d': Say तत् ( *tat* - "that") and ददाति ( *dadāti* - "he gives"). Feel your tongue gently flicking against the back of your teeth.
- For Retroflex 'ṭ/ḍ': Say पठति ( *paṭhati* - "he reads") and दण्ड ( *danḍa* - "stick/staff"). Feel the acrobatics of your tongue curling all the way back to strike the roof of your mouth with force.

**3. The Three Sibilants (The 'S' Sounds):** The precise pronunciation of these is key to the power of many mantras. Each 's' sound corresponds to a specific point of articulation we've already learned.

- श ( *śa* ) is **Palatal** (*Tālavya*). Say "Shiva" ( शिव ). To produce this sound correctly, the tip of your tongue should be down, behind your lower teeth, while the blade of the tongue rises towards the hard palate, like for च. It's the 'sh' in "sheep".
- ष ( *ṣa* ) is **Retroflex** (*Mūrdhanya*). Say "Vishnu" ( विष्णु ). Curl the tip of your tongue up and back as you do for ट and force the air out. It's a much deeper, more resonant 'sh' sound.
- स ( *sa* ) is **Dental** (*Dantya*). Say "Sarasvatī" ( सरस्वती ). The tip of your tongue should be right behind the upper teeth, as with त. It is a crisp, clean 's', like in "sun".

Practice chanting: श... ष... स... Feeling your tongue dance between these three positions.

### Deeper Concept: The Primal Sound अ ( a )

Notice that every consonant character like क, प, त is implicitly pronounced with the vowel अ ( a ).

The pure consonant, a mere point-of-contact, is represented by a *virāma* (विराम) at the bottom, like क ( *k* ), प ( *p* ), त ( *t* ). Philosophically, the vowel अ (the first sound, produced from an open throat with no contact) is seen as the primal, unmanifest breath of spirit (Brahman). It flows into the mouth

and energizes a specific point of contact (क्, प्, etc.) to give birth to a manifest sound (क्, प्).

**Conclusion of Lesson 1.1:** You have now mapped the primary consonant positions of your own instrument of speech. Practice this until it becomes second nature. When you can feel the difference between a dental and a retroflex sound as clearly as you feel the difference between hot and cold, you have successfully calibrated your *vāk-yantra*.

In our next lesson, we will add two more layers of energy to these sounds: **Prāṇa** (the amount of breath) and **Ghoṣa** (the vibration of the vocal cords).