

How To Read Diacritics

Sanskrit and Hindi, by extension, are phonetic languages by nature, and so each character is pronounced as it is read (unlike English, for example, in which one has to know the word in order to pronounce it correctly). There are, therefore, more characters than in the roman script. In order to read them correctly diacritical marks are used which are combined with roman letters to represent the extra sounds. There are long and short vowels. An unmarked 'a' at the end of a word should not have much emphasis. Below are the most common used.

a = as 'a' in 'another'

ā = as 'a' in 'car'

i = as 'i' in 'interest'

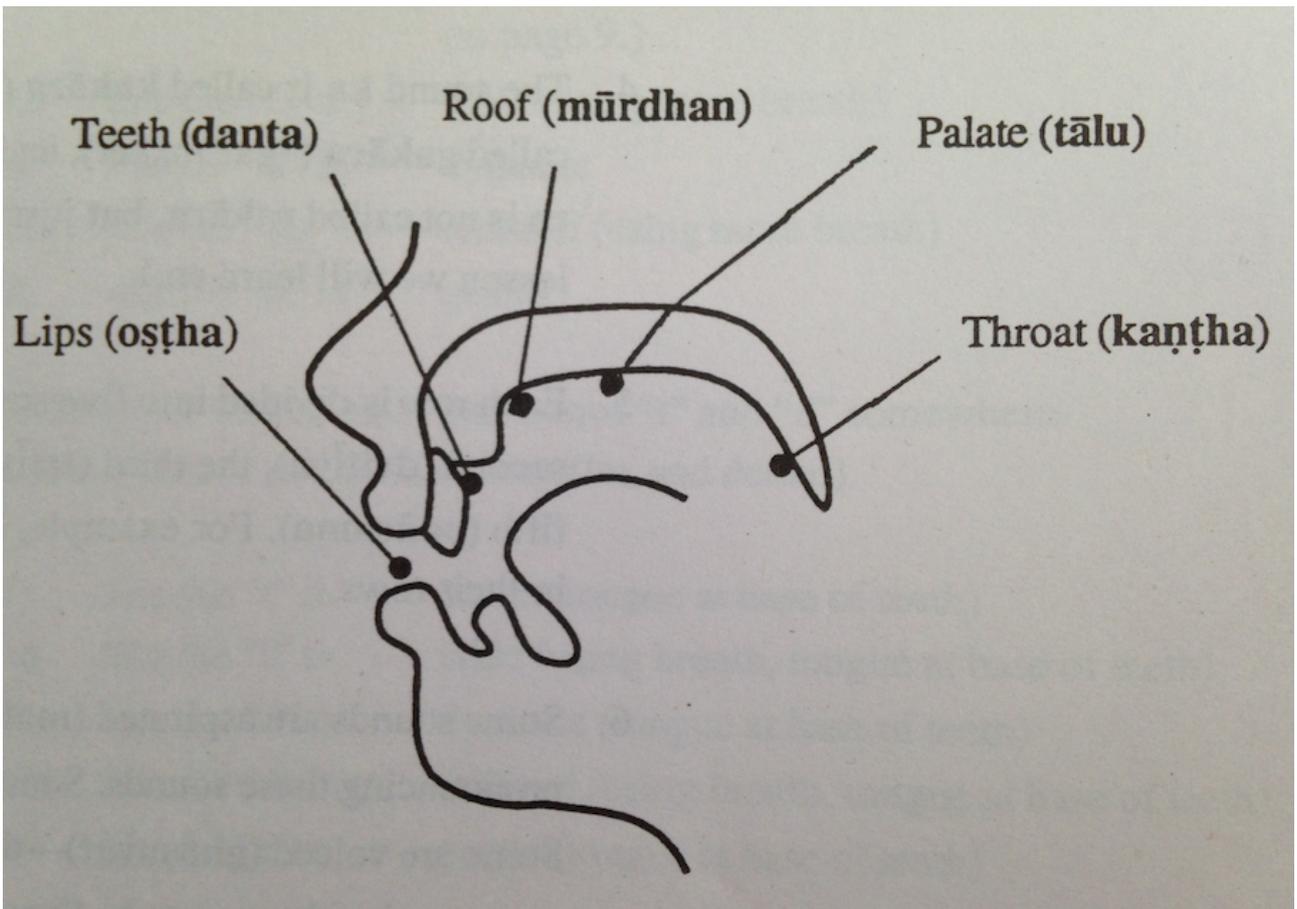
ī = as 'ee' in 'meet'

u = as 'oo' in 'woollen'

ū = as 'oo' in 'choose'

ṛ = as 'ri' in 'river'

The first 25 consonants are set out in a way which expresses the economical and systematic nature of the language.



The above diagram shows the placement of the tongue for the first 25 consonants. By using the tongue and placing it at the points in the diagram you will find that the sounds will automatically

come out correctly. Starting on the far right labelled 'throat' and moving left step by step (towards the lips) the first sound is 'ka'. This is actually 'k' + 'a' = 'ka'. It is written in this way as the consonant by itself only gives the point of attack, but for it to resonate it needs a vowel. Therefore all consonants, in their full format, have an inherent 'a' (unless they are removed and expressed as such). After 'ka' is the aspirated version of the same consonant: 'kha'. The best way to describe how to articulate an aspirated consonant is to push the sound out with a : 'ha'. Here is a list of the first 25 consonants, reading:

	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
Throat:	ka	kha	ga	gha	ṅa
Palate:	ca	cha	ja	jha	ña
Roof:	ṭa	ṭha	ḍa	ḍha	ṇa
Teeth:	ta	tha	da	dha	na
Lips:	pa	pha	ba	bha	ma

Note that 'ca' is pronounced as in the English word 'children' and 'cha', its aspirated counterpart, is like the English 'watch house' (said with speed).

Three types of 'S'. The same rules apply for placement.

'ś' = at the palate as in 'shake'

'ṣ' = at the roof as in 'shell'

's' = at the teeth as in 'smile'

It has been stated that each consonant has an inherent 'a' for resonance. This 'a' can be replaced by any of the other vowels. Sometimes consonants are joined into compounds whereby the inherent 'a' is removed and 2 or more consonants are articulated together. For example 'ka' + 'la' = as in 'kalar' (colour) without the 'a' is written as 'kl' as in 'klīn' (clean).

Finally the nasals (listed in the 5th column) will always have the same point of attack, as the following consonant. A perfect example, thanks to its current popularity in the English language is the word 'Sanskrit'. With diacritically it is spelt like so: 'Saṃskṛta'. Another good example would be 'Shankara' spelt 'Śaṅkara' with the diacritics.

This explanation is by no means exhaustive but I hope it is useful enough for you to read the translation with the correct pronunciation and therefore a deeper understanding of the text.