NASALIZATION OF THE FINAL ā IN THE RGVEDA

§ 1. The final -ā before a vowel occasionally appears as -āṁ in the Rgveda. This occurs most frequently at the end of an odd numbered pāda (pādas a and c of anuṣṭubh, triṣṭubh, jagatī, pāda a in gāyatrī and all pādas without avasāna in complex metres), but sporadically the same phenomenon is found within a pāda. The material can be divided into three groups: we find nasalized -āṁ before e- and o-, nasalized -āṁ before r-, and -āṁ in the postpositions ā and sācā before any initial vowel. Here are some examples (the semi-colon indicates an odd pāda boundary, the comma indicates a caesura):

4.35.2cd sukṛtyāyā yāt, svapasyāyā caṁ :
   ēkaṁ vicakrā, camasāṁ caturdhā //
1.60.4cd dāmiṁa, ghāpatir dāma ṣaṁ :
   agnir bhuvad, rayipāū rayinām //
7.81.2ab īd usriyāḥ, sjate sūrīyaḥ saccāṁ :
   udyād nākṣatram arcivāt /
5.45.6b āpa yā mātāṁ, ṛṣutā vrajāṁ gōḥ /

The creator of the Padapāṭha (Pp.) already recognized the secondary character of this nasalization and put unnasalized final -ā in his text. Consequently, the Rgveda-Prātiṣākhya (RPr.), which conscientiously notes down all discrepancies between the Samhitā text and that of the Pp., devotes several rules (164–170) to secondary nasalization. The more or less complete material can also be found in Bollensen 1868: 623 and Benfey 1880: 10ff. Attempts to find examples of secondary nasalization outside those listed by the RPr. were unsuccessful,¹ so that the list of occurrences may be considered as definitive.

On the other hand, rules for the distribution of occurrences with and without nasalization have never been found. As Oldenberg admitted (Noten ad 1.33.4), “die Regeln über den Eintritt dieser Nasalisierungen sind so irrational, daß sie ihrerseits Vertrauen zur Überlieferung nicht erwecken können”. All scholars considered nasalization as a device used by the editors to avoid hiatus and confined themselves to indicating a possible source from which the editors could get the idea to nasalize final vowels for that purpose. Bollensen (1868: 622) sought the source of nasalization in

rules of Prakrit versification. Benfey (1880: 10) compared the frequent
nasalization of final vowels in Pāli and Prakrits, whereas, according to
Oldenberg (1888: 469ff, Noten ad 1.33.4), nasalization in hiatus imitated
the secondary nominative singular in -vāṁ(s) before a vowel. Wackernagel
(AiGr. I: 301ff, 314) merely refers to nasalized pronunciation of the final
vowels mentioned by Pāṇini (8,4,57) and the Prātiṣākhyas (RPr. 64, TPr.
15,6) and attested in Middle Indic: “offenbar ist die Nasalirung, die in allen
vokalisch auslautenden Zeilenschlüssen zulässig gewesen wäre, hier eher als
sonst im Text festgehalten worden, um den Hiatus zu mildern” (p. 302).

All these proposals cannot be verified as long as we have not determined
the distribution. We must therefore go back to the material because this is
the only way to find out where the process started.

The material presented below has been taken from the lists of the RPr.,
Benfey and Bollensen and checked with the “electronic” pada-text of the
Ṛgveda, which I am currently preparing on the basis of the machine-read-
able version of the Samhitā text, edited at the University of California
(Berkeley) by G. Holland and B. A. van Nooten.

§ 2. Nasalization at the end of odd pādas
§ 2.1. Nasalization of -ā before e-, o- (RPr. 166)

There are eighteen cases of nasalization:

1.33.4ab gḥanēnāṁː ēkāḥ 6.45.20ab pārthivāṁː ēkāḥ
1.35.6ab upāsthāṁː ēkā 6.46.5ab bharāṁː ōjīṣṭham
1.110.5ab tējanenaṁː ēkam 7.25.4cd ugraṁː ōkāḥ
1.113.1cd savāyāmː evā 8.15.3ab puruṣṭutanāṁː ēkāḥ
1.123.10ab sāsādānaṁː ēsi 8.15.11ab puruṣṭutanāṁː ēkāḥ
2.14.2cd tadbhāyaṁː esā 8.29.6ab yathāṁː esāḥ
4.35.2cd cāṁː ēkam 8.98.10ab bharāṁː ōjaḥ
6.30.1ab vīrāyāṁː ēkāḥ 8.100.5ab rāsyaṁː ēkam
6.34.2ab ṛhvhāṁː ēkāḥ 10.34.5cd ākramaṁː ēmi

While trying to find a common denominator for this list, we can see that
fifteen of the eighteen cases show the same accentual pattern, viz. unac-
cented -ā followed by accented ē- or ō- . I think that this was not noticed
before only because scholars like Bollensen and Oldenberg omitted the
accent marks in their lists. In the following discussion I shall use the accent-
tual terms of the RPr.: udāṭta for an accented vowel; svarita for a vowel