

FROM
A SANSKRIT GRAMMAR FOR STUDENTS

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APPENDIX II:
METRE IN CLASSICAL SANSKRIT

The versification of classical Sanskrit differs considerably from that of the Vedic hymns, being more artificial, more subject to strict rules, and showing a far greater number of varieties of metre.

Classical Sanskrit metres are divided into—

- I. those measured by the number of syllables;
- II. those measured by the number of *mora* they contain.

Nearly all Sanskrit poetry is written in stanzas consisting of four metrical lines or quarter-verses (called *pāda*, ‘foot’ = quarter). These stanzas are regularly divided into hemistichs or half-verses.

Quantity is measured as in Latin and Greek. Vowels are long by nature or by position. Two consonants make a preceding short vowel long by position, Anusvāra and Visarga counting as full consonants. A short vowel counts as one *mora* (*mātrā*), a long vowel (by nature or position) as two.

I. METRES MEASURED BY SYLLABLES
(AKṢARA-CCHANDAḤ)

These consist of—

- A. two half-verses identical in structure, while the quarter-verses I and 3 differ from 2 and 4.
- B. four quarter-verses all identical in structure.

A. THE ŚLOKA.

The Śloka (‘song,’ from śru, ‘hear’), developed from the Vedic Anuṣṭubh, is the Epic verse, and may be considered the Indian verse *par excellence*, occurring, as it does, far more frequently than any other metre in classical Sanskrit poetry. It consists of two half-verses of sixteen syllables or of four *pādas* of eight syllables.

Dividing the half-verse into four feet of four syllables, we find that only the second and the fourth foot are determined as to quantity. The fourth is necessarily iambic (◡—◡◡) while the second may assume four different forms. The first and the third foot are undetermined, except that ◡◡◡◡ is always excluded from them. By far the commonest form of the second foot is ◡—--◡ (in Nala 1442 out of 1732 half-verses).

The type of the Śloka may therefore be represented thus—

..... | ◡—--◡ | | ◡—◡◡ ||

E.g.

[---- | ◡—◡◡ | ◡—◡◡ | ◡—◡◡]
 Āsīd rājā Nālō nāmā | Vīrāsēnāsūtō bālī
 [◡◡-- | ◡—-- | ◡—-- | ◡—◡◡]
 ūpāpannō gūṇair iṣṭai | rūpāvān aśvākōvīdāḥ

It is only when the second foot has ◡—--◡ that the first foot may assume all its admissible forms. When the second foot has any of the other three forms, the first foot is limited, as shown in the following table:—

	I.	II.	III.	IV.
1.	◡— .		
2a.	.—◡—	◡◡◡ .		
2b.	.◡—	◡◡◡	◡—◡ .
3.	.—◡—	—◡◡ .		
4.	.—◡—	—,-- .		

The first (typical) form is called Pathyā the remaining three called Vipulā, are in the above table arranged in order of frequency of occurrence. Out of 2579 half-verses taken from Kālidāsa (Raghu-vaṃśa and Kumāra-sambhava), Māgha, Bhāravi, and Bilhaṇa, each of the four admissible forms of the Śloka in the above order claims the following share: 2289, 116, 89, 85.

In the table a dot indicates an undetermined syllable: a comma marks the *cæsura*. The end of a pāda coincides with the end of a word (sometimes only with the end of a word in a compound), and the whole Śloka contains a complete sentence. The construction does not run on into the next line. Occasionally three half-verses are found combined into a triplet.

B. ALL FOUR PĀDAS IDENTICAL IN FORM.

1. Of the numerous varieties developed from the Vedic Triṣṭubh (11 syllables to the pāda), the commonest are—

- a. **Indravajrā:** --u|--u|u--u|--||
- b. **Upendravrā:** u--u|--u|u--u|--||
- c. **Upajāti** (a mixture of the above two): u--u|--u|u--u|--u||
- d. **Śālinī:** ---|-,u|--u|--||
- e. **Rathoddhatā:** -u--|uuu|--u|--||

2. The commonest forms of Jagatī (12 syllables to the pāda) are—

- a. **Vaṃśastha:** u--u|--u|u--u|--u|--||
- b. **Drutavilambita:** uuu|--uu|--uu|--u|--||

3. The commonest variety of Śakvarī (14 syllables to the pāda) is—

Vasantatilakā: --u|--uu|u--u|u--u|--u||

4. The commonest form of Atiśakvarī (15 syllables to the pāda) is—

Mālinī: uuu|uuu|--,--|u--|u--u||

5. The commonest varieties of Atyaṣṭi (17 syllables to the pāda) are—

- a. **Śikhariṇī:** u--|--,|uuu|uu--|--u|u--||
- b. **Hariṇī:** uuu|uu-,|--|--,|u--|uu--|u--||
- c. **Mandākrāntā:** ---|--,uu|uuu|--,--u|--u|--u||

6. The commonest form of Atidhṛti (19 syllables to the pāda) is—

Śārdūlavikrīḍita: ---|uu--|u--u|uu-,|--u|--u|--u||

7. The commonest variety of Prakṛti (21 syllables to the pāda) is—

Sragdharā: ---|--u--|--,uu|uuu|u--,--|u--|u--||

II. METRES MEASURED BY MORÆ.

A. Metres in which the sum total only of the *moræ* is prescribed (Mātrā-chandhaḥ)

The **Vaitālīya** contains 30 *moræ* in the half-verse, 14 in the first pāda, 16 in the second. Each pāda may be divided into three feet, the second always consisting of a choriambus, and the third of two iambics; while the first foot in the first pāda consists of a pyrrhic, in the second pāda of an anapæst. The half-verse thus contains 21 syllables. The following is the scheme of the half-verse:—

υυ|—υυ—|υ—υυ||υυ—|—υυ—|υ—υυ||

B. Metres in which the number of *moræ* in each foot (gaṇa) is specified (Gaṇa-cchandaḥ).

Aryā or **Gāthā** has $7^{1/2}$ feet to the half-verse, each foot containing 4 *moræ* (30 *moræ* altogether). The 4 *moræ* may take the form υυυυ, — —, — υυ, or υυ—; in the 2nd and 4th they may also become υ—υ; in the 6th they appear as υυυυ or υ—υ. The 8th foot is always monosyllabic; the 6th of the second half-verse consists of a single short syllable. Hence the second half-verse contains only 27 *moræ*.