

# MAIN METRES IN THE PĀLI CANON

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(JULY 2008)

For more information on the metres see my Outline of the Metres in the Pāli Canon, and for a comprehensive list of metres used in Pāli (all periods) see my Metre Tables.

## 2.3 SILOKA (ŚLOKA, AKA VAKTRA [=VATTA])

Here is an analysis of the pathyā (normal) structure of the Siloka, which has 8 syllables to the line:

Odd (prior) line: ॐ ॐ ॐ ॐ | ॐ - - x

Even (posterior) line: ॐ ॐ ॐ ॐ | ॐ - ॐ x x 4

In the 2nd & 3rd positions two successive shorts ॐ ॐ are normally avoided, as we can see through changes that have been made in syllabic length. However, there appear to be texts (e.g. Dhammapada) in which this rule is not always applied.

In the odd lines 7 variations (vipulā) occur, besides the normal structure, they are:

		<i>a.k.a.</i>
javipulā	ॐ ॐ ॐ ॐ   ॐ - ॐ x	Anuṭṭhubha
navipulā	ॐ - ॐ -   ॐ ॐ ॐ x	1st vipulā
bhavipulā	ॐ - ॐ -   - ॐ ॐ x	2nd vipulā
mavipulā	ॐ - ॐ -   - - - x	3rd vipulā
ravipulā	ॐ ॐ ॐ ॐ   - ॐ - x	4th vipulā
savipulā	ॐ ॐ ॐ ॐ   ॐ ॐ - x	5th vipulā
tavipulā	ॐ - ॐ -   - - ॐ x	6th vipulā (very sporadic)

There is normally a caesura (word break) after the fifth syllable in the 3rd vipulā, and after the fourth syllable in the 4th vipulā.



## 2.10 VETĀLĪYA (VAITĀLĪYA) AND OPACCHANDASAKA (ĀUPACCHANDASAKA)

The first of these metres, Vetālīya, has 14 measures in the odd lines, and 16 in the even, with the cadence at the end of each line being  $- \cup - \cup \times$ .

Opacchandasaka, the second of the metres, has 16 measures in the odd lines, and 18 in the even. The cadence is similar to Vetālīya, but with an extra long syllable in penultimate position  $- \cup - \cup - \times$ .

The most common forms of the odd lines are:

$- - \cup \cup | - \cup - \cup (-) \times$   
 $\cup \cup - \cup \cup | - \cup - \cup (-) \times$   
 $- \cup \cup - | - \cup - \cup (-) \times$

The most common forms of the even lines:

$- - - \cup \cup | - \cup - \cup (-) \times$   
 $\cup \cup - - \cup \cup | - \cup - \cup (-) \times$   
 $- \cup \cup - \cup \cup | - \cup - \cup (-) \times$

with occasional resolution of a long syllable giving rise to other patterns in the opening.

Through syncope of syllables in adjacent groups we occasionally find different patterns in the openings, so that sometimes

$- - \cup \cup > - \cup - \cup$   
 $\cup \cup - \cup \cup > \cup - \cup \cup \cup$   
 $\cup \cup - - > \cup - \cup -$  etc.

## 2.12 RATHODDHATĀ AND PUPPHITAGGĀ (PUṢPITĀGRĀ)

These are the two fixed metres derived from the above.

**Rathoddhatā** (a Vetālīya even pāda):

$\cup \cup - \cup \cup \cup | - \cup - \cup \times$  x 4

Similarly **Pupphitaggā** (from Opacchandasaka) in the canon is still somewhat flexible:

$\cup \cup \cup \cup | - \cup - \cup - \times$   
 $\cup \cup \cup - \cup \cup | - \cup - \cup - \times$  x 2

with occasional resolution of a long syllable elsewhere. In its post-canonical form the opening of the first line was fixed as  $\cup \cup \cup \cup \cup$  and the second as  $\cup \cup \cup \cup$ .

## 2.13 ĀPĀTALIKĀ

This metre has 14 measures in the odd lines, and 16 in the even, as with Vetāliya, but with a different cadence: – ◡ ◡ – ×.

In the canon the most common forms of the odd lines:

◡ ◡ – ◡ ◡ | – ◡ ◡ – ×  
 – – ◡ ◡ | – ◡ ◡ – ×

the even lines:

– ◡ ◡ – – | – ◡ ◡ – ×  
 – ◡ ◡ – ◡ ◡ | – ◡ ◡ – ×

when it attains to its classical form, it is then known as Vegavatī, and is restricted to:

◡ ◡ – ◡ ◡ | – ◡ ◡ – ×  
 – ◡ ◡ – ◡ ◡ | – ◡ ◡ – × x 2

## 2.14 SVĀGATĀ

In the canon this metre has two dissimilar lines repeated to make up a verse, and the structure was still quite fluid:

Svāgatā odd lines:

– ◡ – ◡ | – – ◡ ◡ ◡  
 – ◡ ◡ – | – – ◡ ◡ ◡

Svāgatā even lines:

– ◡ – ◡ – | – ◡ ◡ – ◡  
 – ◡ ◡ – – | – ◡ ◡ – ◡

In the later period however the even line is fixed and repeated four times, so that the structure is then defined as:

– ◡ – ◡ ◡ ◡ | – ◡ ◡ – ◡ x 4

## 2.16 OLD GĪTI

There are two structures to the metre: the first is the normal form; the second is an extended form, which after the line break, restarts with a full gaṇa, thus:

Normal structure:

𑖀 - | 𑖀𑖀 | 𑖀 - | 𑖀, - 𑖀 | 𑖀 - | 𑖀𑖀 | 𑖀 - | 𑖀 x 2

Extended structure:

𑖀 - | 𑖀𑖀 | 𑖀 - | 𑖀, 𑖀 - | 𑖀 - | 𑖀𑖀 | 𑖀 - | 𑖀 x 2

In the 2nd and 6th gaṇas the pattern 𑖀- sometimes occurs, but -𑖀𑖀 is very rare in any gaṇa.

## 2.17 GĪTI, ARIYĀ (ĀRYĀ), AND THEIR DERIVATIVES

In the gaṇacchandās metres in the Pāli canon, there are two structures to the line, they are:

Gaṇacchandās 1st line:

𑖀 - | 𑖀𑖀 | 𑖀 - | 𑖀𑖀 | 𑖀 - | 𑖀𑖀 | 𑖀 - | 𑖀

Gaṇacchandās 2nd line:

𑖀 - | 𑖀𑖀 | 𑖀 - | 𑖀𑖀 | 𑖀 - | 𑖀 | 𑖀 - | 𑖀

Resolution occasionally produces different patterns e.g. -- > 𑖀𑖀-

Replacement sometimes produces different patterns e.g. 𑖀𑖀 > -- .

-𑖀𑖀 is very rarely found in any gaṇa.

The only difference between the two lines lies in the 6th gaṇa.

**Ariyā**, which is the most common metre in this class, has the first line described above followed by the second, this gives a mattā count of 30 + 27.

**Gīti** has the first line repeated to make up a verse,  
mattā = 30 + 30.

**Uggīti** has the second line followed by the first, mattā = 27 + 30.

**Upagīti** has the second line repeated, mattā = 27 + 27.

## 2.19 HYPERMETRES, VEḌHA & GUBBINĪ

The structure of both of these gaṇacchandās hypermetres is similar and can be defined as follows:

Opening: 𑖀𑖀 | 𑖀𑖀 | 𑖀𑖀

Middle: 𑖀𑖀 | 𑖀𑖀 can be repeated

End: 𑖀𑖀 | 𑖀𑖀 | -𑖀

Veḍha is restricted to compounds, while Gubbinī is not.

