

FROM
THE WONDER THAT WAS INDIA
BY
A.L. BASHAM

[Ed: In this edition I have included the references and the translations in the relevant places, added in the metrical markings, and somewhat reformatted the original text.]

APPENDIX XI: PROSODY

Like those of classical Europe the metres of Indian poetry are quantitative, based on the order of long and short syllables, and not, as in English, on stress. As in classical European languages a syllable was counted as long if it contained a long vowel (**ā, ī, ū, ṛ, e, o, ai** or **au**), or a short vowel followed by two consonants. The favourite stanza form at all times was of four lines or “quarters” (*pāda*), usually equal, and varying in length from eight to over twenty syllables each, with a full cæsura between the second and third quarters. Most of the metres of classical poetry were set in rigid patterns and not divided into feet, but broken only by one or two cæsurae in each quarter. The metres of the Veda, however, and the epic *śloka* metre, allowed considerable variation.

Though most of the Vedic hymns are in stanzas of four quarters there are some with three or five divisions. Of the former, one, called *Gāyatrī*, is common, and is that of the famous Gāyatrī verse:

- ॐ - | ॐ - ॐ -
Tát Savitúr váreṇiam
- - - - | ॐ - ॐ -
bhárgo devásya dhīmahi,
ॐ - - - | ॐ - ॐ -
dhíyo yó naḥ pracodáyāt.

Let us think on the lovely splendour
of the god Savitr,
that he may inspire our minds.

It consists of three sections of eight syllables each, the first four of which are free, while the last four have the cadence ॐ - ॐ ॐ.

The commonest Vedic stanza is *Trishtubh*, consisting of four quarters of eleven syllables each. The quarter normally has a cæsura after the fourth or fifth syllable, and is prevailingly iambic. The last four syllables of each quarter have the cadence - ॐ - ॐ.

For example the first verse of the hymn to Indra (R.V. i. 32):

--○○--○--|--○○--
Índrasya nu víriāṇi prá vocam
 --○○--○○○|--○○--
yāni cakāra prathamāni vajrī
 ○--○○○○○|--○○--
Áhann Áhim, anu apás tatarda,
 ○--○○--○--|--○○--
pra vakṣāṇā abhinat párvatānām.

Let me proclaim the valiant deeds of Indra,
 the first he did, the wielder of the thunder,
 when he slew the dragon and let loose the waters,
 and pierced the bellies of the mountains.

Similar to this, but with an extra syllable in each quarter, was the twelve-syllabled *Jagatī*, with the cadence --○--○--.

In the later hymns of the *Ṛg Veda* a stanza of four eight-syllable quarters, called *Anuṣṭubh*, became popular. This was much the same as *Gāyatrī*, with a fourth line added, but there was considerable variation in the final cadence. For example the first verse of the “Hymn of the Primeval Man” (R.V. x. 90) (not translated in the book):

○--○--|--○○--
Sahásra-sīrṣā Púruṣaḥ,
 ○--○--|--○○--
sahasrākṣaḥ, sahasrapāt.
 ○--○--|--○○--
Sá bhūmiṃ viśvato vṛtvá
 --○--|--○○--
áty atiṣṭhad daśāṅgulám.

From the *Anuṣṭubh* of the Vedas developed the *Śloka*, the chief epic metre of later times. This consisted of four quarters of eight syllables each, the first and third normally ending with the cadence ○--○--○, and the second and fourth with ○--○--.

Certain specified variations were allowed. As an example we quote the first verse of the account of Damayantī’s svayaṃvara:

○○--|--○○--
Atha kāle śubhe prāpte,
 ○--○--|--○○--
tithau puṇye kṣaṇe tathā,
 --○--|--○○--
ājuhāva mahīpālān
 ----|--○○--
Bhīmo rājā svayaṃvare.

Then, when the right time had come,
at the auspicious day and hour,
King Bhīma invited the lords of the earth
to the bride-choice.

The *śloka* metre was widely used for poetry of all kinds, especially for didactic and narrative verse. The courtly poets, however, favoured longer metres, with their quantities rigidly fixed in complicated rhythmic patterns, some with regular cæsurae. Textbooks describe over 100 metres of this kind, many with fanciful names, but only some twenty or thirty were popular. Of these we mention a few of the most common.

Indravajra (“Indra’s Thunderbolt”):

4 × 11 ---◡---◡◡---◡---◡.

example: *Kumāra Sambhava*, I, 15

---◡---|---◡◡---|---◡---
Bhāgīrathī-nirjhara-sīkarāṇaṃ
---◡---|---◡◡---|---◡---
voḍhā muhuḥ kampita-devadāruḥ
---◡---|---◡◡---|---◡---
yad vāyur anviṣṭamṛgaiḥ kirātair
---◡---|---◡◡---|---◡---
āsevyate bhinna-śikhaṇḍi-barhaḥ.

And the wind forever shaking the pines
carries the spray from the torrents of the young Ganges
and refreshes the hunting hillman,
blowing among his peacock plumes.

Upendravajra (Secondary *Indravajra*), a variant of the above, with the first syllable short:

4 × 11 ◡---◡---◡◡---◡---◡.

Quarter lines of *Indravajra* and *Upendravajra* were often combined in mixed stanzas. Such stanzas of varying metres were called *Upajāti*.

Vaṃśastha:

4 × 12 ◡---◡---◡◡---◡---◡.

Indravamśa: like *Vaṃśastha*, but with a long first syllable:

4 × 12 ---◡---◡◡---◡---◡.

Vamśastha and *Indravamśa* were often combined in an *Upajāti* metre, e.g. the verses of Kālidāsa, *Kumāra Sambhava*:

○-○-|-○○|-○-○-
Nirghāta-ghoṣo giri-śṛṅga-śātano
○-○-|-○○|-○-○-
ghano ’mbarāśā-kuharodarambhariḥ
○-○-|-○○|-○-○-
babhūva bhūmnā śruti-bhitti-bhedanaḥ,
○-○-|-○○|-○-○-
prakopi-Kāl’-ārjita-garji-tarjanaḥ.

Like the thundered threat of the angry death-god
a great crash broke the walls of the ears,
a shattering sound, tearing the tops of the mountains,
and wholly filling the belly of heaven.

○-○-|-○○|-○-○-
Skhalan-mahebhamaṃ prapatat-turaṅgamaṃ
○-○-|-○○|-○-○-
parasparāśliṣṭa-janaṃ samantataḥ,
--○-|-○○|-○-○-
prakṣubhyad-ambhodhi-vibhinna-bhūddharād
○-○-|-○○|-○-○-
balamaṃ dviṣo ’bhūd avani-prakampāt.

The host of the foe was jostled together.
The great elephants stumbled, the horses fell,
and all the footmen clung together in fear,
as the earth trembled and the ocean rose to shake the mountains.

--○-|-○○|-○-○-
Ūrdhvīkṛtāsyā ravi-datta-dṛṣṭayaḥ
○-○-|-○○|-○-○-
sametya sarve sura-vidviṣaḥ puraḥ,
--○-|-○○|-○-○-
śvānaḥ svareṇa śravaṇānta-śātinā
○-○-|-○○|-○-○-
mītho rudantaḥ karuṇena niryayaḥ.

And, before the host of the foes of the gods,
dogs lifted their muzzles to gaze on the sun,
then, howling together with cries that rent the eardrums,
they wretchedly slunk away.

Vasantatilakā (“The Ornament of Spring”):

4 × 14 — — ◡ — ◡ ◡ ◡ — ◡ ◡ — ◡ — ◡.

example: Bilhaṇa, *Caurapañcāśikā*, p. 45

— ◡ — | ◡ ◡ ◡ — ◡ ◡ | — ◡ — —
Adyāpi tām praṇayinīm mṛgaśāvakākṣiṃ
— ◡ — | ◡ ◡ ◡ — ◡ ◡ | — ◡ — —
pīyūṣa-varṇa-kuca-kumbha-yugaṃ vahantīm
— ◡ — | ◡ ◡ ◡ — ◡ ◡ | — ◡ — —
paśyāmy ahaṃ yadi punar divasāvasāne
— ◡ — | ◡ ◡ ◡ — ◡ ◡ | — ◡ — —
svargāpavarga-vara-rājya-sukhaṃ tyajāmi.

Even today, if this evening
I might see my beloved, with eyes like the eyes of a fawn,
with the bowls of her breasts the colour of milk,
I’d leave the joys of kingship and heaven and final bliss.

Mālini (“The Girl wearing a Garland”)

4 × 15 ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ — — | — ◡ — — ◡ — ◡.

example: Bhartṛhari, *Śṛṅgāraśataka*, 53

◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ — — | — ◡ — — ◡ — —
Kim iha bahubhir uktair yukti-śūnyaiḥ pralāpair?
◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ — — | — ◡ — — ◡ — —
Dvayam api puruṣānāṃ sarvadā sevanīyam —
◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ — — | — ◡ — — ◡ — —
abhinava-mada-līlā-lālasaṃ sundarīṇāṃ
◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ — — | — ◡ — — ◡ — —
stana-bhara-parikhinnaṃ yauvanaṃ vā vanaṃ vā.

What is the use of many idle speeches!
Only two things are worth a man’s attention —
the youth of full-breasted women,
prone to fresh pleasures, and the forest.

Śikhariṇī (“The Excellent Lady”):

4 × 17 ◡-----|◡◡◡◡◡-----◡◡◡◡◡.

example: Bharṭṛhari, *Vairāgyaśataka*, 82.

◡-◡-----|◡◡◡◡◡-----◡◡◡◡◡-
Yad’ āsid ajñānaṃ smara-timira-saṃskāra-janitaṃ
◡-----|◡◡◡◡◡-----◡◡◡◡◡-
tadā dṛṣṭaṃ nārī-mayaṃ idam aśeṣaṃ jagad api.
◡-----|◡◡◡◡◡-----◡◡◡◡◡-
Idānīṃ asmākaṃ paṭutara-vivekāñjana-juṣāṃ
◡-----|◡◡◡◡◡-----◡◡◡◡◡-
samībhūtā dṛṣṭis tribhuvanam api Brahma manute.

When I was ignorant in the dark night of passion
I thought the world completely made of women,
but now my eyes are cleansed with the salve of wisdom,
and my clear vision sees only God in everything.

Hariṇī (“The Doe”):

4 × 17 ◡◡◡◡◡-|-----|◡-◡◡-◡◡.

example: from a *panegyric of King Pulakeśin II Cālukya* in an inscription at Aihole, Hyderābād, composed by Ravikīrti and dated A.D. 634 (EI vi, 8ff.).

◡◡◡◡◡-|-----|◡-◡◡-◡◡-
Apara-jaladher Lakṣmīṃ yasmin Purīṃ Purabhit-prabhe
◡◡◡◡◡-|-----|◡-◡◡-◡◡-
mada-gaja-ghaṭākārair nāvāṃ śatair avamṛdnati
◡◡◡◡◡-|-----|◡-◡◡-◡◡-
jalada-paṭalānīkākīrṇaṃ navotpala-mecakaṃ
◡◡◡◡◡-|-----|◡-◡◡-◡◡-
jalanidhir iva vyoma vyomnaḥ samo ’bhavad ambudhiḥ.

Radiant as the god Śiva, he besieged Purī, the fortune of the Western sea,
with hundreds of ships, like elephants in rut,
the dark blue sky, scattered with hosts of heavy clouds,
looked like the sea, and the sea looked like the sky.

Śārdūla-vikr̥dita (“The Tiger’s Sport”):

4 × 19 -----|-----.

example: Bhartr̥hari, *Śṛṅgāraśataka*, 12

-----|-----
Keśaḥ saṃyaminaḥ, śruter api paraṃ pāraṃgate locane,
-----|-----
cāntarvaktram api svabhāva-sucibhiḥ kīrṇaṃ dvijānāṃ gaṇaiḥ,
-----|-----
muktānāṃ satatādhivāsa-ruciraṃ vakṣoja-kumbhadvayaṃ
-----|-----
cetthaṃ tanvi vapuḥ praśāntam api te kṣobham karoty eva naḥ.

Your hair well-combed, your eyes reaching to your ears,
your mouth filled with ranks of teeth that are white by nature,
your breasts charmingly adorned with a necklace of pearls,
slim girl, your body, though at rest, disturbs me.

Sragdharā (“The Girl with a Garland”):

4 × 21 -----|-----|-----.

example: Bāṇa, *The Deeds of Harṣa*

-----|-----|-----
Pascād aṅghriṃ prasārya, trika-nati-vitataṃ, drāghayitvāṅgam uccair,
-----|-----|-----
āsajyābhugna-kaṅṭho mukham urasi, saṭā dhūli-dhūmrā vidhūya,
-----|-----|-----
ghāsa-grāsābhilāṣād anavarata-calat-protha-tuṇḍas turaṅgo,
-----|-----|-----
mandaṃ śabdāyamāno, vilikhati, śayanād utthitaḥ, kṣmāṃ khurena.

He stretches his hind-leg, and, bending his spine, extends his body upwards.
Curving his neck, he rests his muzzle of his chest, and tosses his dust-grey mane.
The steed, his nostrils ceaselessly quivering with desire of fodder,
rises from his bed, gently whinnies, and paws the earth with his hoof.

-----|-----|-----
Kurvann ābhugna-prṣṭho mukha-nikaṭa-katiḥ khandarām ā tiraścīm
 -----|-----|-----
lolenāhanyamānaṃ tuhina-kaṇa-mucā cañcatā kesareṇa
 -----|-----|-----
nidrā-kaṇḍū-kaṣāyaṃ kaṣati, niviḍita-śrota-śuktis, turaṅgas
 -----|-----|-----
tvaṅgat-pakṣmāgra-lagna-pratanu-busa-kaṇaṃ koṇaṃ akṣṇaḥ khureṇa.

He bends his back and turns his neck sideways, till his face touches his buttock,
and then the horse, the curls matted about his ears,
rubs with his hoof the red corner of his eye, itching from sleep,
his eye, struck by his dewdrop-scattering mane, waving and tossing,
his eye, to the point of whose quivering eyelash there clings a tiny fragment of
chaff.

In a few rather rare metres the first and third quarters differ in length from the second and fourth. The commonest of these was *Puṣpitāgrā*:

2 × (12 + 13) -----	-----	-----

example: introductory verse to the lyric of Jayadeva's *Gīta Govinda*:

-----|-----|-----
“Aham iha nivasāmi. Yāhi Rādhām,
 -----|-----|-----
anunaya madvacanena c' ānayethāḥ”,
 -----|-----|-----
Iti Madhuripuṇā sakhī niyuktā,
 -----|-----|-----
svayam idam etya punar jagāda Rādhām.

“Here I am dwelling. Go now to Rādhā,
console her with my message, and bring her to me.”
Thus the foe of Madhu commissioned her friend,
who went in person, and spoke to Rādhā thus...

As well as metres of this type there are others, the scansion of which is based on the number of syllabic instants (*mātrā*) in each quarter-verse. The most common of these is *Āryā* (“The Lady”). This is divided into feet, each containing four instants, counting a prosodically short syllable as one and a long syllable as two instants (i.e. --, -u, u-, uu, or uu). The first quarter of the *Āryā* stanza contains three such feet; the second, four and a half; the third, three, and the fourth three and a half, with an extra short syllable after the second foot. The whole of Hāla's *Saptaśataka* is written in this metre; for example:

