

FROM
A VEDIC GRAMMAR FOR STUDENTS
BY
ARTHUR ANTHONY MACDONELL

[Ed: I have added in the metrical markings wherever they were lacking in Macdonell's text, reformatted part of the text, and added some notes to clarify matters. All additions are placed in square brackets]

**APPENDIX II:
VEDIC METRE**

1. The main principle governing Vedic metre¹ (the source of all later Indian versification) is measurement by number of syllables.² The metrical unit here is not the *foot* in the sense of Greek prosody, but the *foot* (**pāda**) or *quarter*³ in the sense of the verse or line which is a constituent of the stanza. Such verses consist of eight, eleven, twelve, or (much less commonly) five syllables. The verse is further more or less regulated by a quantitative rhythm (unaffected by the musical accent) in which short and long syllables alternate. Nearly all metres have a general iambic rhythm inasmuch as they show a preference for the even syllables (second, fourth, and so on) in a verse being long rather than short. In every metre the rhythm of the latter part of the verse (the last four or five syllables), called the cadence, is more rigidly regulated than that of the earlier part. Verses of eleven and twelve syllables are characterized not only by their cadence, but by a cæsura after the fourth or the fifth syllable. While verses of five and eight syllables have no such metrical pause.

Verses combine to form a stanza or ṛc, the unit of the hymn, which generally consists of not less than three or more than fifteen such units. The stanzas of common occurrence in the RV.⁴ range, by increments of four syllables, from twenty syllables (4 x 5) to forty-eight (4 x 12) syllables in length.⁵ A stanza may consist of a combination of metrically identical or of metrically different verses; and either two or three stanzas may further be combined to form a strophe.

¹ Called **chāndas** in the RV. itself.

² Except the two metres Aryā and Vaitālīya which are measured by moræ.

This seems to have been the only metrical principle in the Indo-Iranian period, because in the Avesta the character of a verse depends solely on the number of syllables it contains, there being no quantitative restriction in any part of it.

³ A figurative sense (derived from *foot* = *quarter* of a quadruped) applicable because the typical stanza has four lines.

⁴ [I.e. Ṛg Veda.]

⁵ There are also several longer stanzas formed by adding more verses and consisting of 52, 56, 60, 64, 68, and 72 syllables; but all these are rare: only two stanzas of 68 and one of 72 are found in the RV.

a. Even after every admissible vowel restoration a good many verses of this type exhibit the anomaly (which cannot be removed without doing violence to the text) of having one syllable too few; e. g.

[- ̣ - | ̣ - ̣ -]
tām tuā vayāṃ pito.

There are also here a very few instances of one or even two syllables too many; e. g.

[- ̣ - - | ̣ - ̣ - ̣]¹
agnīm iḷe | bhujāṃ yāvi | ṣṭham

and

[̣ - ̣ - ̣ - | ̣ - ̣ ̣]
vayāṃ tād as | ya sáṃbhṛtaṃ | vāsu.

3. a. The **Gāyatrī**² stanza consists of three³ octosyllabic verses;⁴ e.g.

- ̣ - - | ̣ - ̣ ̣ |
agnīm iḷe | puróhitam
- - ̣ - | ̣ - ̣ ̣ |
yajñsāsya de | vām ṛtvijam
- - - - | ̣ - ̣ ̣ |
hótāraṃ ra | tnadhātāmam

a. A comparatively rare but sufficiently definite variety of Gāyatrī⁵ differs from the normal type by having a decided trochaic rhythm in the cadence,⁶ while the iambic rhythm of the opening is more pronounced than usual; e. g.

¹ [I follow Macdonell in always marking the end syllable according to its natural weight. When placed in square brackets the metrical markings have been added in for clarity's sake.]

² Next to the Triṣṭubh this is the commonest metre in the RV., nearly one-fourth of that Saṃhitā being composed in it; yet it has entirely disappeared in Classical Sanskrit. The Avesta has a parallel stanza of 8 × 8 syllables.

³ The first two Pādas of the Gāyatrī are treated as a hemistich in the Saṃhitā text, probably in imitation of the hemistich of the Anuṣṭubh and the Triṣṭubh; but there is no reason to believe that in the original text the second verse was more sharply divided from the third than from the first.

⁴ By far the commonest variation from the normal type is that in which the second syllable of the cadence is short (̣ ̣ ̣ ̣). This occurs about as often in the first verse of Gāyatrīs as in the second and third combined.

⁵ The only long series of such trochaic Gāyatrīs occurs in RV. viii. 2, 1-39.

⁶ The trochaic Gāyatrī is commonest in Maṇḍalas i and viii, which taken together contain about two-thirds of the total number of examples in the RV.

tuám no ag | ne máhobhiḥ¹
 pāhi viśva | syā árāteḥ
 utá dviṣó | mártiasya

b. The **Anuṣṭubh**² stanza consists of four octosyllabic verses, divided into two hemistichs; e. g.

á yás te sar | pirāsute
 ágne sám ás | ti dháyase
 áiṣu dyumnám | utá śrávaḥ
 á cittám már | tieṣu dhāḥ

a. In the latest hymns of the RV. there begins a tendency to differentiate the first from the second verse of an Anuṣṭubh hemistich by making the end of the former trochaic [—υ], while the cadence of the latter becomes more strictly iambic [υ—]. Although in these hymns the iambic cadence of the first verse is still the most frequent (25 per cent.) of all varieties, it is already very nearly equalled by the next commonest (23 per cent.), which is identical with the normal and characteristic cadence of the first verse in the epic Anuṣṭubh³ (śloka). The scheme of the whole hemistich according to this innovation⁴ then is: υ—υ—|υ—υ—||υ—υ—|υ—υ—|| e.g.

[—υ—|υ—υ—||—υ—|υ—υ—]
 keśí viśá | sya pátreṇa || yád rudréṇá | pibat sahá ||

c. The **Pañkti** stanza consists of five octosyllabic verses⁵ divided into two hemistichs of two and of three verses respectively. In origin it seems to be an extension of the Anuṣṭubh by the addition of a fifth verse. This is indicated by the fact that in hymns consisting entirely of Pañktis the fifth verse of every stanza is (except in i. 81) regularly a refrain (e. g. in i. 80). The following is an example of a Pañkti stanza:—

¹ [In Vedic visarjanīya (ḥ), counts as does one consonant, therefore if there is a short vowel preceeding it, and no consonant following it, the syllable is light/short. Cf. also the 3rd line in the next verse.]

² The frequency of this metre is about one-third that of Gāyatrī in the RV., but in the post-Vedic period it has become the predominant metre. The Avesta has a parallel stanza of 4 x 8 syllables.

³ Where the iambic cadence in the first verse has entirely disappeared.

⁴ This is the regular type of the Anuṣṭubh in the AV.

⁵ The Avesta hits a parallel stanza of 5 x 8 syllables.

[--u-|u-u-||--u-|u-u-]
 itthá hí sóma in máde | brahmá cakāra vārdhanam ||
 [u-u-|--u-|u-u-|u-u-|--u-|u-u-]
 śáviṣṭha vajrinn ójasā | pṛthivyá níḥ śásā áhim | árcann ánu svarājiam ||

d. In about fifty stanzas of the RV. the number of octosyllabic verses is increased to six and in about twenty others to seven, generally by adding a refrain of two verses to an Anuṣṭubh (e.g. viii. 47) or to a Pañkti (e.g. x. 133, 1-3). The former is called **Mahāpañkti** (48 [syllables]), the latter **Śakvarī** (56 [syllables]).

4. B. **Verses of eleven syllables** differ from those of eight in consisting of three members (the opening, the break, and the cadence). They also contrast with the latter in two other respects: their cadence is trochaic¹ (—u—u) and they have a cæsura, which follows either the fourth² or the fifth syllable. The rhythm of the syllables preceding the cæsura is prevailingly iambic, being u—u—³ or u—u—u.⁴ The rhythm of the break between the cæsura and the cadence is regularly uu— or uu⁵ Thus the scheme of the whole normal verse of eleven syllables is:

(a) u—u—,uu—|—u—u| or
 (b) u—u—u—,uu—|—u—u|

a. Apart from corruptions or only seeming irregularities (removable by restoration of vowels) several verses of this type have one syllable too many or too few;⁶ e.g.

[-----,--u-|--u-u-]
 tá no vidvāmsā, mánma vo | cetam adyá⁷ (12);
 [u-u-u-u-|u-
 tam īṃ gíro, jána | yo ná pátnī⁸ (10).

Occasionally two syllables are wanting after the cæsura or the verse is too long by a trochee added at the end; e. g.

¹ The only irregularity here is that time first syllable of the cadence may be short when it coincides with the end of a word.

² This appears to have been the original position of the cæsura because the parallel verse of the Avesta has it there and never after the fifth syllable.

³ Identical with the opening of the octosyllabic verse.

⁴ The fourth syllable here is sometimes short: the fifth is then always long.

⁵ The first of those two syllables is sometimes, but rarely, long in the old hymns of the RV., still more rarely in the later hymns, and hardly ever in B.

⁶ This anomaly also appears in the metre of later Vedic texts and of Pāli poetry.

⁷ The extra syllable in such cases is perhaps due to the verse being inadvertently continued after a fifth syllable cæsura as if it were a fourth syllable cæsura.

⁸ The deficiency of a syllable in such cases may have been partly due to the similarity of the decasyllabic Dvipadā Virāj (8) with which Triṣṭubh verses not infrequently interchange.

[-----,uu-|-u-u-]
 mǎ no mártāya, ripáve vājinīvasū (13);
 [---,uu-|-u-u-]
 ródasī á, vada † tā gaṇasriyaḥ (11);
 [---,uuu-|-u-u-]
 sá dṛlḥé cit, abhí tṛ † ṇatti vāj̄am ár † vatā (14);
 [---,[uu]-|-u-u-]
 píbā sómam, [u] e † ná śatakṛato (10).

7. The **Jagatī** stanza, the third in order of frequency in the RV., consists of four verses of twelve syllables divided into two hemistichs. The following hemistich gives an example of each of the two types of verse:

[u-u-,uu-|-u-u-u]
 anānudó, vṛṣabhó † dódhato vadháh †
 [---,uu-|-u-u-u]
 gambhīrá ṛṣvó, ásam † aṣṭakāviah †

a. There is an eleven syllable variety of the Jagatī verse which is sufficiently definite in type to form entire stanzas in two hymns of the RV. (x. 77, 78). It has a cæsura after both the fifth and the seventh syllable, its scheme being $\underline{u}-\underline{u}-u,-,-,u-u\underline{u}$ †. The following hemistich is an example:

[---u-,--,u-u-u]¹
 abhraprúṣo ná, vácá, prusā vásu †
 [u---u-,--,u-u-u]
 havísmanto ná, yajñá, vijānúsah †

8. D. The **verse of five syllables** resembles the last five syllables of the Triṣṭubh verse in rhythm, its commonest form being $u-u-u$, and the one next to it in frequency $---u$ †²

The **Dvipadā Virāj** stanza³ consists of four such verses divided into two hemistichs; ⁴ e.g.

[u-u-u-|----u-u]
 pári prá dhanva † indráya soma †
 [---u-|----u-u]
 svādúr mitráya † pūṣṇé bhágāya †

¹ [This further supports the theory that in verses with replacement, the light/short syllables that are replaced are the ones following the cæsura; see [The Prosody of the Dhammapada](#) for more on this phenomena.]

² That is, its first syllable is less often long than short.

³ This stanza is somewhat rare, occurring in the RV. not much more than a hundred times.

⁴ The otherwise universal rule that the end of a verse must coincide with the end of a word is three times ignored in this metre (at this end of the first and third verses).

a. Owing to the identity of the cadence a Dvipadā hemistich¹ not infrequently interchanges in the same stanza with a Triṣṭubh verse;² e.g.

[◡----◡|◡-◡-- Dvipadā]
 priyá vo náma | huve³ turáñām |
 [---◡-,◡◡-|-◡-- Triṣṭubh]
 á yát ṛpán, maruto | vāvasānáḥ ||

b. The mixture of Dvipadā hemistichs with Triṣṭubh verses led to an entire hymn (iv. 10) being composed in a peculiar metre consisting of three pentasyllabic verses⁴ followed by a Triṣṭubh; e.g.

[---◡◡|-----|◡-◡-◡-◡]
 ágne tám adyá | ásvaṃ ná stómaiḥ | krátuṃ ná bhadram |
 [◡-◡◡-,◡◡-|-◡--]
 ḥṛdispṛśam, ṛdhiá | mā⁵ ta óhaiḥ ||

II. MIXED STANZAS.

9. The only different verses normally used in combination to form a stanza are the Gāyatrī and the Jagatī. The principal metres thus formed are the following:

a. Stanzas of **28 syllables** consisting of three verses, the first two of which are treated as a hemistich:

I. **Uṣṇih:** 8 8 12; e.g.

[----|◡-◡◡]
 ágne vāja | sya gómataḥ |
 [----◡|◡-◡-]
 íṣānaḥ sa | haso yaho ||
 [---◡-,◡◡-|-◡-◡◡]
 asmé dhehi, jātave | do máhi śrávaḥ ||

¹ With this metre compare the defective Triṣṭubh verse of ten syllables (4 a).

² This interchange occurs especially in RV. vii. 34 and 56.

³ Here the verb, though the first word of the verse (App. III, 19 b), is unaccented. This is because the end of the first and the third verse in this metre has a tendency to be treated like a cæsura rather than a division of the stanza. Cp. note 2.

⁴ These three verses are treated as a hemistich, in the Saṃhitā text.

⁵ The verb is accented because in the Saṃhitā text it is treated as the first word of a separate verse.

2. **Purauṣṇih**: 12 8 8; e.g.

[--00,000|--0000]
 apsú antár, amṛtam | apsú bheṣajám
 [000--|0000-]
 apám utá | práśastaye ||
 [--00|0000-]
 dévā bhava | ta vājínaḥ ||

3. **Kakubh**: 8 12 8; e.g.

[000--|0000-]
 ádhā hi in | dra girvaṇaḥ |
 [0-----,00|0000-]¹
 úpa tvā kámān, maháḥ | sasṛjmáhe ||
 [000--|0000-]
 udéva yán | ta udábhiḥ ||

b. Stanzas of **36 syllables** consisting of four verses divided into two hemistichs:

Bṛhatī 8 8 12 8; e. g.

[0000--|0000-]
 śácībhir naḥ | śácīvasū |
 [0000--|0000-]
 dévā náktam | daśasyatam ||
 [0000,000|--0000-]
 má vāṃ rātir, úpa da | sat kádā caná |
 [0000|0000-]
 asmád rātiḥ | kádā caná ||

c. Stanzas of **40 syllables** consisting of four verses divided into two hemistichs:

Satobṛhatī 12 8 12 8; e. g.

[00000,00|--0000-]
 jánāso agniṃ, dadhi | re sahovṛdham |
 [0000--|0000-]
 haviṣmanto | vidhema te ||
 [00000,00|--0000-]
 sá tvám no adyá, sumá | nā ihávitá |
 [0000--|0000-]
 bhávā vāje | ṣu santia ||

10. There are besides two much longer mixed stanzas of seven verses,² each of which is split up into three divisions of three, two, and two verses respectively in the Saṃhitā text.

¹ [This appears to be a Triṣṭubh line, rather than the required Jagatī.]

² These are the compositions of a very few individual poets.

a. Stanzas of **60 syllables** consisting of six Gāyatrī verses and one Jagatī:
Atiśakvarī 8 8 8, 8 8, 12 8;¹ e. g.

[υυ--|υ-υυ]
suṣumá yā | tam ádribhiḥ |
[----|υ-υ-]
góśrītā mat | sará, imé |
[----υ-υ-]
sómāso mat | sará, imé ||
[----|υ-υ-]
á rājānā | diviṣṛśā |
[----|υυυυ]²
asmatrā gan | tam úpa naḥ |
[υ-----,υυ|υ-υ-υυ]
imé vāṃ mitrā, -varu | ṇā gávāśiraḥ |
[----|υ-υ-υ]
sómāḥ súkrā | gávāśiraḥ ||

b. Stanzas of **68 syllables** consisting of four Gāyatrī and three Jagatī verses:

Atyaṣṭi³ 12 12 8, 8 8, 12 8; e. g.

[υ-----,υυ|υ-υ-υυ]
sá no nédiṣṭham, dádrś | āna á bhara |
[----υ,υυ|υ-υ-υ-]
ágne devébhiḥ, sáca | nāḥ sucetúnā |
[υ----|υ-υ-υ]
mahó rāyāḥ | sucetúnā ||
[υυυ-|υ-υ-υ]
máhi śavi | ṣṭha nas kṛdhi |
[----υ|υυυ-]
saṃcákṣe bhu | jé asiái ||
[υ-----,υυ|υ-υ-υυ]
máhi stotṛbhyo, magha | van suv́riam |
[υ----|υυυ-]⁴
máthīr ugró | ná śávasā ||

a. Besides the above mixed metres various other but isolated combinations of Gāyatrī and Jagatī verses occur in the RV., chiefly in single hymns. There are stanzas of this

¹ Only about ten examples of this metre occur in the RV.

² [Presumably we should read *ú* but *ú* is written.]

³ This is the only comparatively common long metre (of more than 48 syllables) in the RV., where more than 80 Atyaṣṭi stanzas occur.

⁴ [Should we read *āsiái* in the 5th; and *śávasā* in the last line?]

kind containing 20 syllables (12 8);¹ 32 syllables (12 8, 12);² 40 syllables (12 12, 8 8);³ 44 syllables (12 12, 12 8)⁴ 52 syllables (12 12, 12 8 8).⁵

- b. 1. Triṣṭubh verses are quite often interspersed in Jagatī stanzas, but never in such a way as to form a fixed type of stanza or to make it doubtful whether a hymn is a Jagatī one.⁶ This practice probably arose from the interchange of entire Triṣṭubh and Jagatī stanzas in the same hymn bringing about a similar mixture within a single stanza.
2. An occasional licence is the combination of a Triṣṭubh with a Gāyatrī verse in the same stanza. This combination appears as a regular mixed stanza (11 8, 8 8) in one entire hymn (RV. x. 22).⁷
3. The combination of a Triṣṭubh verse with a Dvipadā Yirāj hemistich has already been noted (8 a).

III. STROPHIC STANZAS.

11. Two or three stanzas are often found strophically combined in the RV., forming couplets or triplets.

A. Three simple stanzas (called **tr̥ca**) in the same metre are often thus connected. Gāyatrī triplets are the commonest; less usual are Uṣṇih, Bṛhatī, or Pañkti triplets; while Triṣṭubh triplets are rare. A hymn consisting of several triplets often concludes with an additional stanza in a different metre.

a. It is a typical practice to conclude a hymn composed in one metre with a stanza in another. A Triṣṭubh stanza at the end of a Jagatī hymn is the commonest; a final Anuṣṭubh stanza in Gāyatrī hymns is much less usual; but all the commoner metres are to some extent thus employed except the Gāyatrī, which is never used in this way.

B. Two mixed stanzas in different metres are often combined, the RV. containing about 250 such strophes. This doubly mixed strophic metre, called **Pragātha**, is of two main types:

1. The **Kākubha Prāgatha** is much the less common kind of strophe, occurring only slightly more than fifty times in the RV. It is formed by the combination of a Kakubh with a Satobṛhatī stanza: 8 12, 8 + 12 8, 12 8; e. g.

¹ RV. viii. 29.

² RV. ix. 110.

³ RV. x. 98.

⁴ RV. viii. 35.

⁵ RV. v. 87.

⁶ But the intrusion of Jagatī verses in a Triṣṭubh hymn is exceptional in the RV., though very common in the AV. and later.

⁷ Except stanzas 7 and 15, which are pure Anuṣṭubh and Triṣṭubh respectively.

[-o---|o---]
 á no ásvā | vad aśvinā |
 [-----,oo|---o---]
 vartír yāsiṣṭaṃ, madhu | pātāmā narā ||
 [-----|o---o]
 gómad dasrā | hiraṇyavat ||
 [-----,o---|---o---o]
 suprāvargāṃ, suvīryaṃ | suṣṭhú vāriam |
 [o---|---o---]
 ánādhṛṣṭaṃ | rakṣasvínā ||
 [-----,---|---o---o]
 asmínn á vām, āyāne | vājiniṅvasū |
 [-----|o---o]
 viśvā vāmā | ni dhīmahi ||

2. The **Bārhatā Pragātha** is a common strophe, occurring nearly two hundred times in the RV. It is formed by the combination of a Bṛhatī with a Satobṛhatī stanza: 8 8, 12 8 + 12 8,12 8; e.g.

[-----|o---o]
 dyumnī vāṃ stó | mo aśvinā |¹
 [o---o|o---o]
 krívir ná sé | ka á gatam ||
 [---o---,oo|---o---o]
 mádhvaḥ sutásya, sá di | ví priyó nárā ||
 [-----|o---o]
 pātāṃ gaurāṅ | ivériṇe ||
 [oo---,oo|---o---o]
 píbatam gharmāṃ, mádhu | mantam aśvinā |
 [---o---|o---o]
 á barhīḥ sī | datam narā ||
 [---o---,oo|---o---o]
 tá mandasānā, mánu | ṣo duroṇá á |
 [o---|o---o]
 ní pātāṃ vé | dasā váyaḥ ||

a. Of these two types there are many variations occurring in individual hymns, chiefly by the addition of one (8), two (12 8), three (12 8 8), or once (vii. 96, 1-3) even four verses (12 12 8 8).

¹ [Macdonell places the division one syllable too early in this line.]