

An Introduction to Sanskrit Chanda

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ABSTRACT

We can generally say, any composition which has a musical sound, is called chanda. Chanda has been one of the Vedāṅgas since Vedic period. Vedic verses are composed in several chandas. The number of Vedic chandas is 21, out of which 7 are mainly used. Earliest poetic composition in public language (laukika Sanskrit) started from Valmiki, later it became a fashion and then a discipline for composition (kāvyā). But here has been a difference in Vedic and laukika chandas. Where Vedic chandas are identified by the number of syllables (varṇa or akṣara) in a line of verse or whole verse and the number of lines in the verse, laukika chanda is identified by the order of the laghu-guru syllables. The number of the laukika chandas is not yet finally defined but many texts have been composed describing the different number of chandas. Each chanda of laukika Sanskrit (post Vedic Sanskrit) consists of four pādas or caraṇas, that is, the fourth part of the chanda.

Keywords: Chanda, Vedāṅgas, Chandaśāstra, pāda, Chandomañjarī.

Introduction:

Veda, the oldest literature in the world, is also called Chandas because the Vedic mantras (compositions) are all metric compositions (Chandobaddha). All the four Saṃhitās (with some exceptions in Yajurveda and Atharvaveda) are of this nature. Therefore, they are called chandas. The great Sanskrit grammarian Pāṇini often used Chandas in the sense of Veda. - विभाषा छन्दांसि।⁽¹⁾ From Veda, the auxiliary literature and, subsequently, the classical literatures are combined with metres. According to Bharata, the exponent of Nāṭyaśāstra, there is no śloka in Sanskrit that is without metre and vice versa. छन्दोहनो न श्लोकोऽस्ति न श्लोकश्चवर्जितः।⁽²⁾ The Aitareya Āraṇyaka says the Chanda is called Chanda because it protects the person and prevents him from committing any sin.⁽³⁾ Taittirīya Saṃhitā says that Prajāpati is surrounded by chanda to protect himself and the gods from fire.⁽⁴⁾ The Chāndogya Upaniṣad says that the gods are shrouded in fear of death by Chanda.⁽⁵⁾ The Śatapathabrāhmaṇa lists the chanda as rasa and reflects the experience of poetic excellence. In Kauṣītakibrāhmaṇa the chanda is also called prāṇa. Probably the Vedic sages have observed that the Chanda is the soul of Kāvya. The Knowledge of the science of metre is just as important as other aspects of poetry. Daṇḍin notes that prosody is like a ship for the person (the reader / scholar) who wants to cross the ocean of poetry. - सा विद्या नौस्तीतीर्षूणां गम्भीरं काव्यसागरं।⁽⁶⁾ As there are more divisions of Vṛtta, a story is needed in which literature understands its nature and relevance to literature and its contribution to culture and society.

Etymology of Chandas:

The word Chanda means "pleasing, alluring, lovely, delightful or charming"(candayati āhlādayati iti), and is based on the root chad (cādi āhlāde) which means "esteemed to please, to seem good, feel pleasant and/or something that nourishes, gratifies or is celebrated". The term also refers to "any metrical part of the Vedas or other composition".

The Origin of Chandas:

Lakṣmīnātha Bhaṭṭa, commentator of Prākṛtapiṅgala, reports in his commentary on the first verse of the work on the origin of Chanda, as suggested by the author of Prākṛtapiṅgala. Once Śeṣanāga appeared in the ground and took the form of a Brāhmaṇa namely piṅgala, to observe the expansion of the Earth planet on one of his domes. With this knowledge his old enemy Garuḍa blocked his way. Then, immediately thinking to flee the path, Piṅgala told him that wait! Do not you know that I'm a great poet? Just look how I can write an unlimited number of metric combinations. If you see me repeat any of them, you can eat me right away. Garuḍa agreed and Piṅgala began to compose using all the different prastāras (extensions) of meters with one to twenty-six syllables. Gradually he approached the shore and jumped into the water. Garuḍa was confused. And from then on, the science of metrics is known to man.

Another legend can be found in relation to the origin of Chanda in relation to Śeṣa and Piṅgala. Once, Śeṣa came out of the water and enjoyed the sunshine while she lay on a rock. When he saw him in such a relaxed state, Garuḍa seized the opportunity and grabbed him. Śeṣa then asked Garuḍa that no one else knows the science of Metris (Chandaśāstra). If you eat me, that knowledge of the metrics will be lost forever with me. Let me pass this knowledge on to you, that at least there will be someone who will teach this science to future generations. Once you have the knowledge from me, you can satisfy your hunger by eating me. Considering the offer of Śeṣa, Garuḍa agreed to a condition that Śeṣa would not try to run away. When both with the state of the other agreed, Śeṣa told the Chandaśāstra on such a fascinating way that Garuda was hypnotized. When he saw the state of Garuda and thought it was a great moment for the flight, Śeṣa then described the metre bhujāṅgaprayāta, saying its name and quickly jumped into the water, because Garuda was no answer. When Garuda realized this, he protested and told Śeṣa that you should not run away from the agreement! Śeṣa answered from a distance: "I have informed you that I go away by saying bhujāṅgaprayāta several times, but you have no reply I took it as your permission to go, I went. And after that the science of the metrics came on this earth.

Traditional Views:

Yādavaprakāśa, commentator of Chandaśāstra of Piṅgala mentions the whole history of Sanskrit prosody in a verse at the end of his commentary. He says: At first the knowledge of chanda was with Lord Śiva and Bṛhaspati, the teacher of all the gods received the knowledge of him. From Bṛhaspati the knowledge was passed on to Indra, the king of the gods, and then to Śukrācārya, the preceptor of the demons, and then to Māṇḍavya. From Māṇḍavya it was moved to Saitava and then to Yāska and finally to Piṅgala. From Piṅgala, the knowledge of chanda is flown to us through the process of the teacher-disciple tradition (guru-śiṣya-paramparā).

Chandaśāstra in Pre-Piṅgala Era:

Like Sanskrit grammar, the science of metrics existed before Piṅgala. However, there is no text provided by any authorities to support this opinion, except for Piṅgala's reference to his predecessors, which was also mentioned by later composers. Some of those who are before the Piṅgala era are recruited here.

1. **Krauṣṭiki:** Piṅgala himself mentions about this authority while explaining the metre skandhodgrīvī. Yāska also mentions Krauṣṭiki in his Nirukta. - द्रविणोदा इन्द्र इति क्रौष्टिकिः ।⁽⁷⁾
 2. **Yāska:** Yāska, the author of Nirukta describes the Vedic metres in Nirukta. Piṅgala also mentions him while discussing the metre urobrhatī. - उरीबृहती यास्कस्य ।⁽⁸⁾
 3. **Tāṇḍī:** Tāṇḍī is described as a sūtrakartā in Mahābhārata. He is also quoted by Piṅgala as the originator of the metre sato brhatī. - सतोबृहती ताण्डिनः ।⁽⁹⁾
 4. **Saitava:** He is quoted by Piṅgala in Chandaśāstra as one of the earliest authorities. Halāyudha quotes one of his verse in his commentary on the above sūtra, though his text is not found. - सर्वतः सौतवस्य ।⁽¹⁰⁾
 5. **Kāśyapa:** Piṅgala also mentions him as the originator of the metre simhonnatā.
 6. **Rāta & Māṇḍavya:** These two ancient authorities of Sanskrit metrics are also mentioned by Piṅgala in Chandaśāstra .
- Yādavaprakāśa, commentator on Chandaśāstra of Piṅgala refers to some other authorities.
7. **Śiva:** The originator of chanda school of Sanskrit, mentioned by Yādavaprakāśa as Bhava.
 8. **Śukrācārya:** The preceptor of the demons is also acknowledged as one among the ancient authorities of Sanskrit Prosody.
 9. **Bṛhaspati:** He is also one among the ancient authorities of Sanskrit Prosody, stands second to Śiva, mentioned by Yādavaprakāśa as Suraguru.
 10. **Indra:** Ancient authority of Prosody, mentioned as Duścyavana.

Relevance of Chandas:

It is said that the chanda is one of the aparā vidyā along with the four Vedas, followed by Śikṣā, Kalpa, Vyākaraṇa, Nirukta and Jyotiṣa. The chanda is recognized as one of the six auxiliary literatures Called Vedāṅga. Chanda is also considered as the foot of Vedapuruṣa. Therefore, knowledge of chandas is essential to understanding the Vedas, Vedāṅgas, and literature as a whole. It is believed that a person reciting the Vedic hymns without knowing their Ṛṣi, Chanda, and Devatā causes sin. Sāyaṇa's view is remarkable in this context:

अविदित्वा ऋषिं छन्दो दैवतं योगमेष च ।

योऽध्यापयेज्जपेद्वापि पापीयाञ्जायते तु सः॥⁽¹¹⁾

He goes on to say that the person who recites the mantra without knowing ṛṣi, chanda, devatā, svara he is called mantrakaṅṭaka. -

ऋषिच्छन्दोदेवतानि ब्राह्मणार्थं स्वरादपि।

अविदित्वा प्रयुञ्जानो मन्त्रकन्टक उच्यते॥⁽¹²⁾

According to Kātyāyana, a person who performs yājñas or teaches Vedas, without proper knowledge of meters (with Ṛṣi), he commits the sin.

Sanskrit Prosody:

The Sanskrit prosody is divided mainly into two, i.e. Vedic and classical, while the metres used in Vedic hymns are Vedic. The metres used in the classical period (beginning from Rāmāyaṇa) are known as classical metres.

The Vedic Metres:

There are 26 vedic meters that start with 1 to 26 letters in each pāda.⁽¹³⁾ It is well known that the classic meters are being developed from these 26 meters. Of these 26 metres, 7 metres (gāyatrī, uṣṇik, anuṣṭubh, bṛhatī, pañkti, triṣṭup, jagatī) are prominent in Vedic uses. These metres also have their subsidiaries. Piṅgala discusses about Devatā, Svara and Varṇa of these seven prominent meters in his Chandaśśtra (CS). The following table shows his interpretation in this regard.

Metre	Deities	Notes	Colour	Gotra
Gāyatrī	Agni	Ṣadja	White	Āgniveśya
Uṣṇik	Savitā	Ṛṣabha	Dappled	Kāśyapa
Anuṣṭubh	Soma	Gāndhāra	Yellow	Gautama
Bṛhatī	Bṛhaspati	Madhyama	Black	Āṅgīrasa
Pañkti	Varuṇa	Pañcama	Blue	Bhārgava
Triṣṭup	Indra	Dhaivata	Red	Kauśika
Jagatī	Viśvadeva	Niṣāda	Pure White	Vasiṣṭha

These seven metres are considered as standard or model metres. They consist of syllables in ascending order of four. Gāyatrī consists of twenty-four, Uṣṇik of twenty-eight, anuṣṭup of thirty-two, etc. The Ṛkprātiśākhya deals with the Vedic metres, which keep this principle in mind.

General Characteristics of Vedic Metres:

- The Vedic metres are calculated according to syllables (akṣaras).
- Each Pāda consists of a certain number of syllables. A syllable is a vowel or vowel with consonant or anusvāra. A Pāda can consist of different numbers of syllables viz. five, six, seven, eight, ten, eleven or twenty syllables.
- According to this principle, a word is not split.
- Constructions with semivowels can also be separated by corresponding vowels.
- Contracted vowels or diphthongs can be read as equivalent to two syllables, e. g. jyeṣṭha as jyayoṣṭha.
- In some cases Anaptyxis (Svarabhakti) can be read as a syllable. For example, indra can sometimes be read as indara.

Nature of a pāda in a stanza in Vedic metre:

In general, a metre has a specific name according to the number of syllables. But sometimes the same stanza is called with the name of another metre from the point of view of the pādas. A stanza can consist of two, three, four, five, six, seven or eight pādas. Sometimes, in one stanza, all the pādas are metrically identical, i.e. have the same number of syllables. This is the case with the metres of simple stanzas viz. gāyatrī, anuṣṭup, pañkti, triṣṭup, jagatī and dvīpadā virāj. Sometimes they do not have the same number of syllables. This is the case with uṣṇik, pura-uṣṇik, kakup, bṛhatī, sato-bṛhatī, atiśakvarī, atyaṣṭi, etc. In general, such stanzas are the combination of gāyatrī and jagatī. By changing the order of the various feet, many subtypes of the metres are formed. Sometimes a stanza of just one or two pādas occurs. The stanza of one Pāda is called Ekapadā, and the other of them is called Dvīpadā. However, they are named after that very metre to which they are similar in terms of the number of syllables in a pāda.

Classical Metres:

The classical metres are divided into three types viz. 1. Vṛtta or Varṇa, 2. Mātrā or Jāti 3. Gadya. The metres, which are calculated by letters, are called Varṇa type, and the type Mātrā is calculated by syllable copies. The Gadya gauges of metres are not accepted by all prosodicists, but authorities such as Gaṅgādāsa, Candraśekhara, Raghunātha and Gopinātha are in favor of this metre.

Characteristics of Classical Metres:

The whole chanda literature has several technical terms with which it is controlled. Individual letters are used to denote a particular instance.

Laghu and Guru:

The letter ga stands for guru letter while the letter la stands for laghu letter. In a verse the letter which is guru is also known as dīrgha (long) and which is laghu is also known as (hraśva). The dīrgha letter consists of two mātrās while the hrasva letter consists of one mātrā. It is said:

गुरुरेको गकरस्तुः लकरो लघुरेककः

क्रमेण चैषां रेखाभिः संस्थानं दर्शयते यथा।।⁽¹⁴⁾

Some authors use the symbols to mark guru and laghu as guru =_or s, laghu = l.

Guru symbols can be identified as the shape of tāṅka, hāra or keyūra, who look like_ and the laghu can be identified as menu, kāhāla (daṇḍa) or śara, which look like l.

The Gaṇas:

All the metres are calculated through specific gaṇas. While the Varṇa type metres have eight gaṇas in general consisting of three letters each; the Mātrā type of metres have five gaṇas. The gaṇas of Varṇa metre are ma-ra-ya-sa-ta-ja-bha-na. All these gaṇas comprise three letters each. The ma-gaṇa has three guru letters (long-long-long s-s-s), ra-gaṇa has long-short-short (s-l-l) letters, ya-gaṇa has (short-long-long l-s-s), ta-gaṇa has long-long-short letters (s-s-l), bha-gaṇa has long-short-short (s-l-l), ja-gaṇa has short-long-short (l-s-l), sa-gaṇa has short-short-long letters (l-l-s), and the na gaṇa has three short letters i.e. short-short-short (l-l-l). The Śrutabodha says in this regard as:

आदिमध्यावसानेषु भजसा यान्ति गौरवम्।

यरता लाघवं यान्ति मनौ तु गुरुलाघवौ।।⁽¹⁵⁾

The names of the five gaṇas of Mātrā metre are ma-sa-ja-bha-na. However some scholars name differently the gaṇas in different names viz. ṭa-ṭha-ḍa-ḍha-ṇa respectively. The symbols of the gaṇas are given according to Mitrānanda, a. of Chandobhāskara below.

According to Mitrānanda : मसजभन

Symbols : ss IIs IsI sII IIII

According to Others : ट ठ ड ढ ण

Trika:

Trika, a technical term used in prosody especially, used to denote the gaṇas who have three letters each in Varṇa type of metres.

Yati:

Yati is a term to represent the pause occurs in a verse. Piṅgala explains yati in his sūtra yatirvicchedaḥ. Gaṅgādāsa says that as per his teacher Puruṣottama several ancient authorities like Śveta, Māṇḍavya were not in favour of the application of yati To quote:

शतेतमाण्डव्यमुरव्यास्तु नेच्छन्ति मुनयो यतिम्।

इत्याह भट्टः स्वग्रन्थे गुरुर्म पुरुषोत्तमः।।⁽¹⁶⁾

Jayakīrtti, author of Chandonuśāsana, expresses his views on yati by saying that sages like Piṅgala, Vasiṣṭha, Kauṇḍinya, Kapila, Kambala are in favor of yati. However sages like Bharata, Kohala, Māṇḍavya, Śveta, Saitava are not.

Pratyayas:

The Pratyayas are the cause of expansion of metres. Generally six pratyayas are found in Sanskrit prosody. They are: Prastāra, Naṣṭa, Uddiṣṭa, Ekadvayādīlaghukriyā, Saṁkhyāna and Adhvyoga. But Mitrānanda, advocates about nine types of pratyayas.

Varṇavṛtta:

The Varṇa type of metres is divided into three: 1. Sama, 2. Ardhasama and 3. Viṣama. If all the four pādas of a verse are equal in correspondence with letters and gaṇa, is called sama, and if first and third pādas are equal and second and fourth pādas are equal, is ardhasama metre. If all the four pādas of a verse are not equal, it is called viṣama-metre.

Daṇḍaka:

The sama-metres are defined starting with one letter in each pada up to twenty-six letters. And if a verse has more than twenty-six letters in each pāda, it is known as Daṇḍaka.

The Sama metres are defined starting with one letter in each pāda to twenty six letters. And if a verse has more than twenty six letters in its each pāda, it is known as daṇḍaka.

Mātrāvṛtta:

The mātrā type of metres is calculated using mātrā or syllabic features. The Trika law is not applicable here. No subdivision is found here, but different groups namely. āryā, gīti, vaitāliya, mātrāsamaka etc. are noted.

Gadyavṛtta:

Since the metres are used in Padyas, there are also metres that are prescribed for Gadyas. Gaṅgādāsa (a. of Chandomañjarī), Raghunātha Dāsa (a. of Vṛttāvalī), Gopinātha Pātra (a. of Kavacintāmaṇi) advocate this type of metres in a particular method. Candraśekhara (from Vṛttamauktika) divides the whole vāṇmaya into two groups, i.e. Padya and gadya. He defines Gadya as the composition that is distracted with Pāda. He divides the Gadya again into three parts viz. cūrṇaka, utkalikāprāya and vṛttagandhi.

Cūrṇaka:

The composition, which is a collection of soft words and composed by use of less compound words, is called cūrṇaka. And it gets more comfortable if written in the Vaidarbhī style (rīti).

अकठोराक्षरं स्वल्पसमासं चूर्णकं विदुः।

तत्तु वैदर्भरीतिस्यं गद्यं हृद्यतरं भवेत्॥⁽¹⁷⁾

Utkalikāprāya:

The Utkalikāprāya is exactly the opposite of Cūrṇaka. The composition with hard letters and compound words is called Utkalikāprāya. Therefore, the Gauḍīrīti can be observed here. However, Gaṅgādāsa does not prescribe any specific rīti.

भवेदुत्कलिकाप्रायं समासाद्यं दृढाक्षरम्॥⁽¹⁸⁾

Vṛttagandhi:

If a Gadya composition has a metrical composition in some places, it is called Vṛttagandhi.

वृत्तैकदेशसम्बन्धाद् वृत्तगन्धि पुनः स्मृतम्॥⁽¹⁹⁾

But Candraśekhara goes one step further and implies his views on Gadya by dividing the cūrṇaka into three parts. 1. āviddhacūrṇa, 2. laliticūrṇa, 3. mugdhacūrṇa. The mugdhacūrṇa is further divided into two, i. 1. avṛttimugdhacūrṇa, 2. atyalpavṛttimugdhacūrṇa. A diagram is given below for a better understanding.

If a gadya composition has metric composition at places, it is called as Vṛttagandhi. But Candraśekhara, goes one step further and implies his views on gadya by dividing the cūrṇaka into three viz. 1. āviddhacūrṇa, 2. laliticūrṇa, 3. mugdhacūrṇa. The mugdhacūrṇa is further divided into two i.e. 1. avṛttimugdhacūrṇa, 2. atyalpavṛttimugdhacūrṇa. A chart is given below for clear understanding.

Conclusion:

Chandas (metre) is considered as one of the six Vedāṅgas. Chanda literature also has a beautiful mathematical tradition that is calculated in terms of modern mathematics. Chandas is holy and pure as the Vedic mantras. Kālidāsa also refers to it as आसीन्महीक्षितामाद्यप्रणवश्छन्दसामिव....रघुवंश- १.२२. It has a great history, from the Vedic period to the classical period. Both sūtra and kārikā forms are available in this literature. All important sastrik texts namely. Vedas, Purāṇas, Upaniṣads, Alaṅkāraśāstras, even astronomical texts emphasize the need for prosody to compose texts of any kind. Some of the lyrics are followed by their respective comments.

References:

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2. Nāṭyaśāstra - 14/45.
3. Aitareyāranyaka - 2/5.
4. Taittirīya Saṃhitā - 5/6/6/1.
5. Chāndogyopaniṣad - 1/4/2.
6. Kāvyaḍarśa - 1/12.
7. Nirukta - 8/2.
8. CS. 3/30.
9. CS. 3/36.
10. CS. 5/18.
11. Ṛgveda- bhāṣya of Sāyaṇa.
12. Ibid.
13. They are ukthā, atyukthā, madhyā, pratiṣṭhā, supратиṣṭhā, gāyatrī, uṣṇik, anuṣṭubh, bṛhatī, paṅkti, triṣṭup, jagatī, atijagatī, śarkarī, atīśarkarī, aṣṭi, atyaṣṭi, dhṛti, atidhṛti, kṛti, utkṛti, prakṛti, ākṛti, vikṛti, saṃskṛti. CS. 1/15-19.
14. Chandomañjarī - 1/9.
15. Śrutabodha - 3.
16. Chandomañjarī - 1/14.
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