

# A Brief Study of Chandas in Sanskrit

**Mr. Santanu Chakraborty**

Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of Sanskrit, Mansarovar Global University, Madhya Pradesh

## Abstract:

Sanskrit prosody or Chandas refers to one of the six Vedangas, or limbs of Vedic studies. It is the study of poetic metres and verse in Sanskrit. This field of study was central to the composition of the Vedas, the scriptural canons of Hinduism, so central that some later Hindu and Buddhist texts refer to the Vedas as Chandas. The Chandas, as developed by the Vedic schools, were organized around seven major metres, and each had its own rhythm, movements and aesthetics. Sanskrit metres include those based on a fixed number of syllables per verse, and those based on fixed number of morae per verse. Extant ancient manuals on Chandas include Pingala's Chandah Sutra, while an example of a medieval Sanskrit prosody manual is KedaraBhatta's Vrittarnakara. The most exhaustive compilations of Sanskrit prosody describe over 600 metres. This is a substantially larger repertoire than in any other metrical tradition.

**Keywords:** Chandas, Prosody, Metrics, Syllable parsing, Vedic metres, classical metres.

**State Aided College Teacher, Department of Sanskrit, Raja Rammohun Roy Mahavidyalaya, WestBengal**

## 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 Samhitās (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. 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. The AitareyaĀraṇyaka says the Chanda is called Chanda because it protects the person and prevents him from committing any sin. TaittirīyaSamhitā says that Prajāpati is surrounded by chanda to protect himself and the gods from fire. The ChāndogyaUpaniṣad says that the gods are shrouded in fear of death by Chanda. 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. 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"(candayatiāhlādayatiiti), and is based on the root chad (cādiāhlāde) 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".

## Research Methodology:

This paper is based on Qualitative Research Methodology.

## The Emergence of Chandas:

LakṣmīnāthaBhaṭṭa, 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.

## Meaning of the word Chandas:

The science that deals with versification is known as Prosody or Metrics which is understood in Sanskrit as Chandahsastra. There are references in the Rigveda, which states that metres were created from the gigantic Puruṣa. The conventional meaning of the word chandas is metre. Apart from this meaning, the word chandas stands synonymous for Veda-s. As the Veda-s were composed in Gayatri and other metres, Veda-s are also known by this name. Panini in his Astadhyayi refers to Vedas as Chandas. 'Bahulamchandasi' is a very famous example from the Astadhyayi.

In Vedic literature, the word 'chandas' is used in different sense too. They are metaphorically understood as cattle, directions, soma juice etc. KausitakiBrahmanarefers to chandas as pranah i.e., life and the TaittiriyaBrahmana mentions that chandas represent the region of the Sun. There is some reason due to which the chandas are associated with different objects, both animate and inanimate.

Chandas are given great importance in Vedic rituals. A Vedic chant recited in a particular chandas for a specific ritual would accrue the desired result. That is why the specific chandas are associated with specific fruit, abstract or concrete e.x.,  
gayatrausvistakṛtahsamyajyekurvitatejahkamobrahmavarcasakamah/  
tejovaibrahmavarcasamgayatri. Thesvistakṛta offerings metre for achieving lustre of Brahman. Thus

mantras chanted in the Gayatrimetre are of immense importance in the ritual of svistakṛta offering. Without the Gayatrimetre, the sacrificer would not achieve the lustre of Brahman. Here Gayatri is equated with the lustre of Brahman. According to R. Sadashivmurthy, chandas as metres is the conventional meaning of this word. Whereas chandas as Veda-s is the attributive meaning and chandas as cattle etc., are the figurative meanings of this word. Moreover, in classical literature and vernaculars, chandas stands for desire as well as uncontrolled behaviour.

## Definition of Chandas:

Many ancient texts have attempted to define 'chandas'. The Rksarvanukramani of Katyayana says: yadaksaraparanam tacchandaḥ (II.6). This means that which is measured 4 Chandas as Vedanga by

syllables is chandas. The Brhatsarvanukramani of the Atharvaveda says: chando'ksarasamkhyavacchekamucyate. This means that the distinctive characteristic of chandas is the number of syllables counted. The Chandahsastra of Pingala says: matraksarasankhyaniyatavakchandah. Chandas stands for speech determined by the number of syllabic instants. These definitions indicate that the number of syllables is the defining factor of chandas.

### Significance of Chandas:

According to S. S. Dange, chandas had an immense importance in the sacrifice. Pratar-anuvaka (morning chant) is to be recited by the hotr priest in the latter half of the night, even before the sound of birds is heard. During this time, there is no other sound heard except that of the recitation of mantras that is arranged in the seven metres viz; Gayatri, Usnih, Anustubh, Brhati, Pankti, Tristubh and Jagati. The gods that are invoked are Agni, Usas and Asvins and there has to be at least one sukta in each of the seven metres addressing the deities. The SatapathaBrahmana says that the gods which are arriving early are the metres (III.9.3.8). Metres had a spiritual significance in Vedic sacrifice. The sacrificial ukha (the fire pan) was to be fumigated by the metres. It is baked by the means of metres for they are the strength. They are the divine 6 Chandas as Vedanga purifiers and by means of the metres, many sacrificial implements would be purified. Individual metres are said to be the various limbs of sacrifice. At times they are imagined to be man or identified with Prajapati. Thus Gayatri is said to be the mouth of the sacrifice according to the MaitrayaniSamhita of the KrsnaYajurveda (III.1.1) and also the breath of Prajapati. The metre Usnih is the eye; Anustubh is the voice, Brhati is the mind; Pankti is the ear; Tristubh is the generative breath and Jagati is the downward breathing. These are the seven metres which go increasing by four syllables each, which are produced in Agni says the SatapathaBrahmana (X.3.1.1). Metres are regarded as the cattle of the gods. Just as, harnessed cattle carry men from one place to another; harnessed metres draw the sacrifice for the gods mentions the SatapathaBrahmana (IV.4.3.1). The JaiminiyaBrahmana (III. 313, 314) equates metres with horses of gods. The gods having yoked these horses to these chariots went to the heaven. They yoked the Gayatri as the horse at the right side, the Tristubh as that of the left side and the Jagati as the supporting horse. The TaittiriyaSamhita (I.5.12.5) has a beautiful imagery of the chariot of metres for Prajapati. Gayatri and Jagati became the wheels; Usnih and Tristubh as the side poles; Anustubh and Pankti the horses and Brhati the seat. Prajapati went riding this chariot. S.S.Dange comments that the whole idea is of speedily Chandas as Vedanga 7 searching the heaven on part of the sacrifice. Hence, at times, metres are identified with birds, as they are speedier than horses. Metres play a significant role in the sacrifice and are therefore related with Agni. The KathakaSamhita of the KrsnaYajurveda regards them to be the beloved form of Agni. The MaitrayaniSamhita of the KrsnaYajurveda identifies metres with Prajapati (IV.5.3). The Vedic texts say that even for defeating the asuras, at times devas took the help of metres. According to the TandyaMahabrahmana (XII.13.27) devas and asuras were in possession of metres. The monosyllabic metre was the lowest one in possession of the devas, the heptasyllabic metre was their highest possession. The ennead (nine) syllabic one was the lowest of the asuras and the fifteen syllables was the highest. They entreated Prajapati who had assumed the form of Anustubh metre to join them. He joined the devas and they flourished and the asuras perished. Thus, metres are the form of controlled and structured divine sound. Having possession of this divine sound which is all encompassing the gods prospered. The yajamana performing the yajna using the chandas will also flourish on the lines of gods is the message which these myths want to convey.

**Chandasra and Texts on Chanda:**

The Chandasastra is said to be the first systematic treatise on chandas. It was written in about 150 B.C. by Pingalacharya.<sup>3</sup> According to the 'History of Indian Literature', the SankhyayanaSrautasutra contains several chapters on prosody. Other Sanskrit texts dealing with prosody or metrics mentioned are RgvedaPratisakhya,,Katyayana'sAnukramanis and NidanaSutra related to Sarnaveda.

Apart from these, chapters 14, 15 and 32 of Bharata'sNatyasastra and chapters 328-335 of Agnipuranaalso deal with metrics. Among the later works on metrics (1) Srtabodhaof Kalidasa (2nd cent.A.D.), (2) Suvrtatilaka of Ksemendra (11th cent.A.D.), (3) Chandomañjariof GangaDasa(12th cent.A.D.), and (4) Vrttaratnakaraof KedaraBhatta (15th Cent.A.D.)are important. Minor works on prosody or metrics include the following:

1. ChandaKaustubha of Radhadamodara and BaladevaVidyaBhusana
2. Chando'nusasana of Jayakirti
3. Chando'nusasana of Hemachandra
4. Chandasekhara
5. ChandomañjarÍ-SañjÍvanÍ
6. Chandoratnavali
7. Chandoviciti of Jayadeva
8. PingalaChandovicitiBhasya of YadavaPrakasha
9. Vrttacandrodaya of Virahanka
10. Vrttamauktika of Chandrasekhara.

In this work we have referred to Chandomañjari of GangaDasa. This is a very popular work on metrics in which the author has dealt with almost all the popular chandas used by the classical poets.

**Sources describing Sanskrit meters:**

Ollett (2013) recently summarized the history of the Indian science of poetics. The standard classical works include Pingala's ` Chandahsastra (c. 200 BCE) (Joseph 2011), Jayadeva'sJayadevachandas (c. 600 CE), Jayakirti'sChando'nusasana (11th c.), Hemaçandra'sChando'nusasana(12th c.) (Velankar 1949), and Kedara- bhatta's.Vrttaratnakara (11–12th c.)(Kedarabhattacha(1942) among others.Pingala'sChandahsastra provides definitions of various kinds of meters in a sutra text consisting of eight chapters. After a general introduction to prosody in the first chapter and before discussing the origin of meters in the closing chapter, Kedarabhattacha describes four types of meters in the central four chapters of his Vrttaratnakara .Jayadeva introduced the brilliant mnemonic technique of composing the definition of a metrical pattern in the very metrical pattern to be defined. For example, the definition of the Indravajra meter given in (2) below (p. 332) consists of a verse quarter in that meter. Such a definition is said to be endowed with the object to be defined as well as its definition and is thus termed in Sanskrit lakshyalaksanasamyukta . Later poetic works on Sanskrit meter employ this technique of definition as well.

Apte, Gode, and Karve (1957–1959) incorporated in Appendix A 'Sanskrit prosody' the list of Sanskrit metrical patterns compiled by Velankar (1949) from several of the classical Sanskrit poetic treatises. The second part of this appendix, called 'A classified list of Sanskrit meters,' contains 769 metrical definitions. MIT presently recognizes 661 of these, including all of the fixedsyllable (varnavrta) meters except those of the dandaka variety. Although MIT includes several meters based upon the number of morae, it has yet to include the bulk of these.

## Sanskrit Prosody:

Sanskrit prosody is metrical. Numerous metrical patterns of several general types are based upon varying sequences of light and heavy syllables that constitute a verse quarter or a line constituting half a verse. After explaining the factors that determine syllable weight, we describe basic units for the two major types of meter, that based upon numbers of syllables (varnavrta) and that based upon number of morae (matravrta).

## Relevance of Chandas:

It is said that the chanda is one of the aparāvidyā 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.

## 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, paṅkti, triṣṭup, jagatī) are prominent in Vedic uses. These metres also have their subsidiaries. Piṅgala discusses about Devatā, Svāra and Varṇa of these seven prominent meters in his Chandaśāstra (CS). The following table shows his interpretation in this regard.

Metre	Structure	Mapped sequence	Varieties	Deitie	Notes	Colour	Gotra
Gayatri	3 verses of 8 syllables	6*4	11	Agni	Sajda	White	Agnivesya
Usnik	2 verses of 8,1of 12syllables	7*4	8	Savita	Rsabha	Dappled	Kasyapa
Anustubh	4 verses of 8 syllables	8*4	12	Soma	Gandhara	Yellow	Gautama
Brihati	2 verses of 8,1verses of 12,1verses of 8 syllables	9*4	12	Brhaspati	Madhyama	Black	Angirasa
Pankti	5verses of 8 syllables	10*4	14	Varuna	Pancama	Blue	Bhargava
Tristup	4 verses of 11 syllables	11*4	22	Indra	Dhaivata	Red	Kausika
Jagati	4 verses of 12	12*4	30	Visvadeva	Nisada	Pure White	Vasistha

	syllables						
--	-----------	--	--	--	--	--	--

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, Brihati of Thirty-six, pankti of Forty-Four, Tristubh of Forty-Four, Jagati of Forty-eight Syllables. The Ṛkprātiśākhya deals with the Vedic metres, which keep this principle in mind. Beyond these seven metres, ancient and medieval era Sanskrit scholars developed numerous other syllable-based metres (Akshara-chandas). Examples include Atijagati(13×4, in 16 varieties), Shakvari (14×4, in 20 varieties), Atishakvari(15×4) in 18 varieties), Ashti (16×4, in 12 varieties), Atyashti(17×4, in 17 varieties). Dhriti(18×4, in 17 varieties), Atidhriti(19×4, in 13 varieties), Kriti( 20×4, in 4 varieties) and so on.

### General Characteristics of Vedic Metres:

1. The Vedic metres are calculated according to syllables (akṣaras).
2. 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.
3. According to this principle, a word is not split. iv. Constructions with semivowels can also be separated by corresponding vowels.
4. Contracted vowels or diphthongs can be read as equivalent to two syllables, e. g. jyeṣṭha as jyayoṣṭha.
5. In some cases Anaptyxis (Svarabhakti) can be read as a syllable. For example, indra can sometimes be read as indara.

### Classification of Chandas:

Works on Chandahsastra have classified chandas into different categories. Broadly chandas have been classified as vaidika and laukika. The commentator Halayudha on Chandahsutra of Pingala has classified chandas as a) laukika b) vaidika and c) laukikavaidika. Bharatamuni has divided metres into three categories viz; a) divya b) divyetaara and c) divyamanusa.

Apart from the above mentioned classification, YudhisthirMimamsak classifies chandas a) those which are based on the number of matras or more known as matra-chandas b) those which are based on the number of syllables as aksarachandas.

The chandas in the Veda-s are based on the number of akṣaras i.e. syllables. Some scholars regard varna and akṣara as synonymous. Akṣaras or varnas are classified into svaras (vowels) and vyanjanas (consonants). Svaras which are hrasva, dirgha and pluta give rise to one matra, two matras and three matras respectively. Vyanjanas are measured as those having half a matra. One matra is that time which is required to blink an eyelid. Vedic chandas are further classified as those following the specific number of syllables wherein the number of feet or padas in the metres is also significant. It is been observed that such mantras frequently occur in the Yajurveda. There are chandas which are based on the specific number of syllables as well as specific number of feet or padas. Rgveda is replete with such chandas.

As per Vedic chandas, the number of akṣaras is measured by the svaras in a word and not by the number of vyanjanas. Although a word may have conjunct vyanjanas, its value depends on the svaras present in it. The matric division of the svaras is further developed into laghu (light) and (guru) heavy. The rules clarifying laghu and guru syllables are mentioned in the Pratisaakhyas. A syllable is laghu only if the vowel is hrasva and followed by one consonant before another vowel is encountered.

**Classical Metres:**

A syllable in Sanskrit prosody is a vowel following one or more consonants or a vowel without any. A short syllable is one ending with one of the short (Hrasva) vowels which are a, i, u, r, !. The long vowels are a, i, r,eai, o and au.

A sloka is defined in Sanskrit chandas as a group four quarters(padas). Indian prosody studies recognize two types of stanzas such as vritta stanzas, Jati stanzas. Vritta stanzas have three forms: Samavritta, Ardhasamavritta, Vishamavritta.

The metres found in classical Sanskrit poetry or sometimes alternatively classified into three kinds:-

1. Syllable verse (aksaravritta or aksharavritta) metres depend on the number of syllables in a verse. This style found in the great epic- Ramayana and Mahabharata.
2. Syllabo- quantitative verse(varnavritta) metres depend on syllable count.
3. Quantitative verse (matravritta) metres depend on duration.

Most of Sanskrit poetry is composed in verse of fourline each. Meters of the same length or distinguished by the pattern of laghu and guru.

**Gana:**

In metres regulated by syllables, each metrical line or quarter of a verse is divided into groups of three syllables each. Each group is distinguished from the others by its own particular arrangement of syllables. These groups are called ganas or syllabic feet.

**The Ganas**

Sanskrit prosody	weight	symbol	style	Greek equivalent
Na-gana	L-L-L	u uu	da da da	Tribach
Ma-gana	H-H-H	— — —	Dum Dum Dum	Molossus
Ja-gana	L-H-L	u — u	da DUM da	Amphibrach
Ra-gana	H-L-H	— u —	DUM da Dum	Cretic
Bha-gana	H-L-L	— u u	DUM da da	Dactyl
Sa-gana	L-L-H	u u —	da da DUM	Anapaest
Ya-gana	L-H-H	u — —	da DUM DUM	Bacchius
Ta-gana	H-H-L	— — u	DUM DUM da	Antibacchius

The mnemonic also encodes the light 'la' and heavy 'ga' unit syllables of the full scheme.

**Influence in India :**

The *Chandas* are considered one of the five categories of literary knowledge in Hindu traditions. The other four, according to Sheldon Pollock, are *Gunas* or expression forms, *Riti*, *Marga* or the ways or styles of writing, *Alankara* or tropology, and *Rasa*, *Bhava* or aesthetic moods and feelings.

The *Chandas* are revered in Hindu texts for their perfection and resonance, with the Gayatrimetre treated as the most refined and sacred, and one that continues to be part of modern Hindu culture as part of [Yoga](#) and hymns of meditation at sunrise.

**Outside India:**

The Sanskrit *Chanda* has influenced southeast Asian prosody and poetry, such as Thai *Chan*. Its influence

ence, as evidenced in the 14th-century Thai texts such as the *Mahachatkhamluang*, is thought to have come either through [Cambodia](#) or [Sri Lanka](#). Evidence of the influence of Sanskrit prosody in 6th-century Chinese literature is found in the works of ShenYueh and his followers, probably introduced through Buddhist monks who visited India.

## Conclusion

In Vedic sacrificial ritual a mantra embodied in any chandas plays as an important part. They represent the desire of the human being to connect the divine with the mortal existence. Chanting a mantra in a specific chandas is the articulation of the highest form of Speech. This specification has got lot of importance and is associated with various fruits. This specification is culminated into a specific discipline called the 'Chandahsastra'.

Chandahsastra gave rise to a variety of vrttas, which is a hallmark of Sanskrit prosody employed in Classical Sanskrit literature. The twenty six metres of Vedic prosody have become twenty six metrical classes in the classical prosody. They are divided into two classes viz; ganavrttas and matravrttas. These have been influenced by foot division from the Vedic Chandahsastra. The avasana or pause in Vedic metre has evolved into yati in the ganavrttas. However, measuring the length of the syllable appears to be unimportant in Vedic literature, but is significantly important in Classical Sanskrit literature.

The above discussion indicates that Classical Sanskrit prosody evolved from Vedic prosody. Classical Sanskrit prosody got poetry from the divine realms of sacrifice to the mundane human world of literary beauty. This is how the divine speech became accessible in the world of human beings.

## References:

1. Atharvaveda- ed. by S. D. Satavalekar, Aundh, V. Samvat 1995
2. AtharvavediyaBrhatSarvanukramani, ed. by VishvaBandhu, VishveshvaranandIndological Institute, Hoshiarpur, 1966
3. Chandahsastra by Pingalanaga, NirnayaSagar Press, Mumbai, 3rd Edition, 1938
4. Chando'nukramani by Saunaka, ed. by Umesh Chandra Sharma, Vivek Publications, Aligarh, 1981
5. Chandomanjari ed. by Anantaramasastrivetala, ChowkhambaVidyaBhavan, Kashi, 1940
6. DevatadhyayaBrahmana with the commentary of Sayana, ed. by B. Ramachandra Sharma, Kendriya Sanskrit Vidyapith, 2nd Edition, 1983
7. Natyasastra by Bharata, ed by Pts Batukanatha Sharma and BaladevUpadhyaya, Chowkhamba Sanskrit Sansthan, Varanasi, 1929
8. Nidanasutra by Patanjali, ed. by K. N. Bhatnagar, MeherchandLachmandas, 1971
9. Nirukta of Yaska, Nirnayasagar Press, Mumbai, 1930 10. Rgvedanukramami by VenkataMadhava, RamalalKapur Trust, 1976