

FROM A.K. WARDER'S INTRODUCTION TO PALI

[pp. 354-361 and 368-372, with extracts from pp. 130, 280, 323, & 342.
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Verse

So far [in Introduction to Pali] we have restricted ourselves (except for a few incidental verses in the reading passages) to the ordinary prose language of the *Dīgha Nikāya*, which is sufficiently typical of the Pāli prose in which most of the Canon is written. We must, however, to complete this introductory survey of Pāli, consider the main features of Pāli verse, which likewise are well exemplified in the *Dīgha*. The Canon contains probably 10,000—20,000 verses. These are mostly collected in books consisting entirely, or almost entirely, of verse, but some are scattered about in the prose texts as in the *Dīgha Nikāya* itself. The verses of the *Dīgha Nikāya* illustrate their most important linguistic and metrical characteristics. The linguistic features to remark are twofold: poetic licence and the use of archaic forms obsolete in everyday speech. The main characteristic of the metres is that they are quantitative, that is that the rhythm is determined purely by the lengths of the syllables, the effect of any stress (“accent”) being negligible.

Poetic licence is most noticeable in the freedom of word order in verse. Since the inflections generally show the relations between the words in a sentence almost any deviation from the prose order is possible without serious change of meaning (the emphasis will be different, and indeed the metrical form provides special possibilities for emphasis by placing words in rhythmically prominent positions), though for beginners it adds [355] greatly to the difficulty of disentangling the meaning. Secondly, the need to fit the sentence to the metre influences the choice of vocabulary, so that unusual synonyms and rare words may be used. Thirdly, superfluous or redundant words may be inserted to fill up lines of verse, especially indeclinables (*nipāta*) of merely emphatic or otherwise vague meaning. A prefix may be dropped or added where the meaning of the sentence will tolerate a slight change of nuance. Fourthly, the making of junction (*sandhi*) is more variable than in prose, and may be decided by metrical requirements rather than grammatical usage. Fifthly, certain syllables may be lengthened or shortened to suit the rhythm of the metre. Vowels linking suffixes to roots (less often prefixes) as well as final vowels are especially susceptible to this treatment, though this form of licence is not of very frequent occurrence.

Examples of poetic licence:-

Lengthened final:

ramatī (3rd singular present of *ram* (I), “delight”)

heṭhayī (aorist of *heṭh* (VII), “harass”)

Shortened final:

gihi (for *gihī*: *gihin* = “house-dwelling”)
santō (perhaps we should write *santa*)
Buddhāna (genitive plural, for *Buddhānaṃ*)
kammāṃ (perhaps we should write *kamma*)
chetva (for *-chetvā*, gerund of *chid*).

Junction between root and suffix lengthened:

satīmanto

—shortened:

jānahi

Junction between prefix and root lengthened:

sūgatitṃ.

Archaic forms are kept alive to a limited extent by being preserved in poems and songs handed down from past centuries. Though not acceptable in ordinary speech, they may be felt appropriate for poetic expression just because of their purely [356] poetic associations. They may also be felt to have greater dignity and power than everyday forms. The obscurity which may result is not always avoided by poets, on the contrary a certain mystification and portentousness may be deliberately sought. We thus meet in Pāli verse with a residue of ancient grammatical forms, among which we may note here some characteristic or frequent ones:-

Nominative plural in *āse*: *sāvakāse* (= *sāvakā*) *gatāse* (= *gatā*)

Imperative 1st plural in *mu* instead of *ma*: *jānemu*

Optative 3rd singular in *e* instead of *eyya*: *ādise* (= *ādiseyya*; from *ā-dis* (I), “dedicate”)

Optative 1st plural in *mu* instead of *yyāma*: *pucchemu*

Use of root aorist, e.g. 3rd plural in *uṃ*: *akarumṃ* (for *akamsu*), *āpāduṃ* (for *āpādiṃsu*)

Another unusual aorist: *abhida* (for *abhindi*)

Future of *hū*: *hessati* (= *bhavissati*)

Infinitive in *tāye*: *dakkhitāye* (= *daṭṭhum*)

Gerund in *(t)vāna* rare in prose: *caritvāna*, *disvāna*, *katvāna*, *sutvāna*

Middle (*attanopada*) forms not current in prose:-

Vande (= *vandāmi*)

amhāse (= *amhā*)

karomase (= *karoma*)

ārabhavho (= *ārabhatha*, imperative)

vademase (= *vadeyyāma*)

āsīne (locative singular of the present participle middle of the verb *as*, “to sit,” itself almost extinct— replaced by *ni-sid*).

We have noted in Lessons 28 and 29 and earlier in this lesson that the denominative, intensive, desiderative, and “root” aorist are more frequent in verse.

Where two parallel forms exist, one with assimilation and consequent obscurity and one with a clear articulation through a linking vowel between stem and suffix, the form with assimilation will usually be more frequent in verse and sometimes extinct in prose:- [357]

dajjā (optative of *dā*, from the reduplicated stem *dad* + the ancient optative inflection *yā(t)*, 3rd singular)

jaññā (= *jāneyya*)

kassāma (= *karissāma*).

Other archaic forms:-

diviyā (= *dibbā*, ablative)

poso (= *puriso*)

tuvaṃ (= *tvaṃ*)

duve (= *dve*)

addakkhiṃ (= *addasaṃ*)

-bhi (= *-hi*, instrumental plural).

Other poetic forms

caviya (= *cavitvā*)

ramma (= *ramaṇīya*).

As examples of vocabulary not used in prose we may list a few words here.

brū (I) *brūhi* (imperative 2nd singular) “say”, “call”

ram (I) *ramati* (also present middle 1st singular *rame*) “delight”, “enjoy”

vid (II) *vindati* “find” (for *labh*)

ambujo fish (“water-born”)

mahī the earth

suro god

have (ind.) truly, surely

ye (ind.) surely.

In scanning Pāli verse the following two rules apply:-

(1) A syllable having its vowel short and followed by not more than one consonant is short (*lahu*).

(2) A syllable having its vowel long, or followed by *ṃ* or by more than one consonant, is long (*garu*).

There are also certain complications arising from minor discrepancies between the standard orthography and the original pronunciation. These arose over variant pronunciations [358] of the semi-vowels *y*, *r*, and *v* in some combinations (more rarely over the nasals). Some examples are:-

-cariya = -- (∪) (*-*carya*)

iriyati -- (∪∪) (**iryati*)

sirīmant (“beautiful”, “fortunate”) = -- (∪∪) (**srīmant*) (but *siri*, “beauty,” “fortune”
= ∪∪)

vya- = ∪∪ (*viya-*, as sometimes written)

velūriyo (“lapis lazuli”) = -- (∪∪) --

ariya usually -- (∪) (**arya*), sometimes = -- (∪∪) (**āriya*)

vīriya = sometimes -- (∪) (**vīrya*) but sometimes -- (∪∪) (*vīriya*, which is sometimes so written)

suriyo = sometimes -- (**suryo*) but sometimes -- (∪) -- (*sūriyo*, which is sometimes so written).

In the word *brāhmaṇo*, *br-* does not function as two consonants, hence a preceding syllable will be short if its vowel is short (**bamhaṇo* ?). Occasionally other conjuncts also fail to “make position” (make a preceding syllable long).

Though all Pāli metres are quantitative, a new style of poetry had come into fashion in the 5th or 4th century B.C. which may be called the “musical” style. In the metres of this style the opposition of long and short syllables, that one long equals two shorts, is exact and inflexible in the same way as a note and two notes of half its value in music. The new metres had in fact taken their rhythms from music. In the older metres, which remained in use, though not uninfluenced by the new, the opposition of quantities is approximate only, so that the number of syllables in a line is still felt to be of decisive importance.

A “verse” usually contains four lines (*pādas*), being a quatrain, much more rarely six lines. Rhyme is not used.

Most important metres:-

“Old” metres (number of syllables per line constant, with only rare “resolution” of a long into two shorts, giving an extra syllable, under the influence of the “new” metres):-

vatta (epic narrative metre: only approximately quantitative) eight syllables per line, the contrasting cadences of alternate lines giving a verse of two dissimilar lines repeated in the epic style; there is a tendency to use this [359] as a line of sixteen syllables not organized in verses, which is very appropriate and flexible for continuous narrative

(very rarely, *vetālīya* and *opacchandāsaka* are mixed) (another metre originally of this class is the *svāgatā*, which being less flexible is usually classified under *akkharacchandās*, see below)

gaṇacchandās (“bar-metre”) (not found in the *Dīgha Nikāya*: strictly musical and exactly quantitative like musical rhythms):

gīti (two or three lines of thirty *mattās* each, each only theoretically divisible into two quarter verses; each of the two lines is organized in eight bars, called *gaṇa*, of four *mattās* each, there being a “rest” of two *mattās* at the end; the characteristic rhythm is |——|——| = 2 bars, though this is simply a base on which variation is very freely made)

ariyā (a line of thirty *mattās*, as in *gīti*, followed by a line of twenty-seven *mattās*, the cadence being syncopated).

Derived metres (these represent a third phase, which subsequently became the dominant style in the literature, along with a somewhat restricted form of the *vatta* for continuous narrative; the tendency is for both the quantity and the number of syllables to be fixed. In the Pāli Canon these metres still retain a good deal of flexibility, whilst in later Indian literature they are given forms absolutely fixed except for the last syllable of each line):- [360]

akkharacchandās (“syllable-metre”)

samavutta (four similar lines):-

upajāti (a form of *tuṭṭhubha*, fixed)

————————————— × 4

rathoddhatā (a form of *vetālīya* line, fixed)

—————————————— × 4

vaṃsaṭṭhā (a form of *jaḡatī*, fixed)

——————————————— × 4

pamitakkharā (derived from *gaṇacchandās*)

——————————————— × 4

rucirā (derived from *jaḡatī* by resolution of fifth syllable)

——————————————— × 4

---|---||---|---
āturass' eva bhesajjaṃ, bhojanaṃ va jighacchato,
---|---||---|---
parinibbāpaya bhadde jalantam iva vārinā.

---|---||---|---
sītodakiṃ pokkharāṇiṃ yuttaṃ kiṅjakkhareṇunā,
---|---||---|---
nāgo ghammābhītaṭṭo va ogāhe te thanūdaraṃ.

---|---||---|---
accaṃkuso va nāgo ca jitaṃ me tuttatomaraṃ,
---|---||---|---
kāraṇaṃ na ppajānāmi sammatta lakkhaṇūruyā.

----|---||---|---
tayaṃ gathitacitto 'smi cittaṃ vipariṇāmitaṃ,
---|---||---|---
paṭigantaṃ na sakkomi vaṅkaghasto va ambujo.

---|---||---|---
vāmūru saja maṃ bhadde saja maṃ mandalocane,
---|---||---|---
palissaja maṃ kalyāṇi etaṃ me abhipatthitaṃ.

---|---||---|---
appako vata me santo kāmo vellitakesiyā,
---|---||---|---
anekabhāgo sampādi arahante va dakkhiṇā.

---|---||---|---
yam me atthi kataṃ puññaṃ arahantesu tādisu,
---|---||---|---
tam me sabbaṅgakalyāṇi tayā saddhiṃ vipaccataṃ.

---|---||---|---
yam me atthi kataṃ puññaṃ asmiṃ paṭhavimaṇḍale,
---|---||---|---
tam me sabbaṅgakalyāṇi tayā saddhiṃ vipaccataṃ.

---|---||---|---
Sakyaputto va jhānena ekodi nipako sato
---|---||---|---
amataṃ muni jigimsāno tam ahaṃ Suriyavaccase.

[370]

---|---||---|---
yathā pi muni nandeyya patvā sambodhim uttamaṃ.
---|---||---|---
evaṃ nandeyyaṃ kalyāṇi missībhāvaṃ gato tayā.

-----|-----||-----|-----
sakko ca me varaṃ dajjā Tāvatiṃsānam issaro,
-----|-----||-----|-----
tāhaṃ⁷ bhadde vareyyāhe⁸ evaṃ kāmo daḷho mama.

-----|-----||-----|-----
sālaṃ va na ciraṃ phullaṃ pitaraṃ te sumedhase
-----|-----||-----|-----
vandamāno namassāmi yassa s' etādisī pajā.

(*tuṭṭhubha*)⁹

-----|-----|-----
pucchāmi brahmānaṃ sanaṅkumāraṃ
-----|-----|-----
kaṅkhī akaṅkhiṃ paravediyesu,
-----|-----|-----
kattha ṭṭhito kimhi ca sikkhamāno
-----|-----|-----
pappoti macco amataṃ brahmalokan ti.¹⁰

-----|-----|-----
hitvā mamattaṃ manujesu brahme
-----|-----|-----
ekodibhūto karuṇādhimutto
-----|-----|-----
ettha ṭṭhito ettha ca sikkhamāno
-----|-----|-----
pappoti macco amataṃ brahmalokan ti.

(*vetālīya*)¹¹

-----|-----|-----
littaṃ paramena tejasā
-----|-----|-----
gilam akkhaṃ puriso na bujjhati
-----|-----|-----
gila re gila pāpadhuttaka
-----|-----|-----
pacchā te kaṭukaṃ bhavissatī ti.

⁷ Unusual junction of *taṃ* + *ahaṃ*.

⁸ Unusual junction of *vareyyaṃ* + *ahē*.

⁹ [from DN 19, Mahāgovindasuttaṃ.]

¹⁰ This *ti* does not form part of the verse.

¹¹ [These examples are drawn from p. 130, quoting DN 23, Pāyāsisuttaṃ; and p. 323, DN 16, Mahāparinibbānasuttaṃ.]

--o-|o---||o--o|o--
sīlaṃ samādhi paññā ca vimutti ca anuttarā,
o--|o---||o--o|o--
anubuddhā ime dhammā Gotamena yasassinā.
o--|o--o||o--|o--
iti Buddho abhiññāya dhammam akkhāsi bhikkhūnaṃ¹²
----|o---||o--o|o--
Dukkhaṃ antakaro satthā cakkhumā parinibbuto ti.

(mixed *vetālīya* and *opacchandāsaka*)¹³

--o-|o--o-||----o-|o--o--
ye taranti aññaṃ saraṃ; setuṃ katva¹⁴ visajja pallalāni,
---o-|o--o-||----|o--o--
kullaṃ hi jano pabandhati, nittiṇṇā medhāvino janā ti.

(*opacchandāsaka*)¹⁵

---o-|o--o-||----o-|o--o--
khantī paramaṃ tapo titikkhā, nibbānaṃ paramaṃ vadanti Buddhā;
o--o-|o--o-||o--o-|o--o--
na hi pabbajito parūpaghāti samaṇo hoti paraṃ viheṭṭhayanto.

(*upajāti*)¹⁶

--o-|o--o-||o--
ekūnatimso vayasā Subhadda,
---o-|o--o-||o--
yaṃ pabbajim kiṃkusalānesī,
---o-|o--o-||o--
vassāni paññāsasamādhikāni
o--o-|o--o-||o--
yato ahaṃ pabbajito Subhadda
---o-|o--o-||o--
ñāyassa dhammassa padesaṃ vattī.
o--o-|o--o-||o--
ito bahiddhā samaṇo pi n' atthi.

¹² Metrical shortening.

¹³ [This example is drawn from p. 280, quoting DN 16, Mahāparinibbānasuttaṃ. The prior lines are Vetālīya, the posterior are Opaccandasaka.]

¹⁴ Poetic form of katvā.

¹⁵ [from DN 14, Mahāpadānasuttaṃ.]

¹⁶ [This example is drawn from p. 342, quoting DN 16, Mahāparinibbānasuttaṃ.]

(*rathoddhatā*)¹⁷

—○—○○○—○—○—
geham āvasati ce tathāvidho
—○—○○○—○—○—
aggataṃ vajati kāmabhogīnaṃ,
—○—○○○—○—○—
tena uttaritaro na vijjati,
—○—○○○—○—○—
Jambudīpam abhibhuyya iriyati.

[371]

(*vaṃsaṭṭhā*)

—○—○—|—○○|—○—○—
sacce ca dhamme ca dame ca saṃyame
—○—○—|—○○|—○—○—
soceyyasīlālayuposathesu ca,
—○—○—|—○○|—○—○—
dāne ahimsāya asāhase rato
—○—○—|—○○|—○—○—
daḷhaṃ samādāya samattam ācari.

○—○—|—○○|—○—○—
pure puratthā purimāsu jātisu,
○—○—|—○○|—○—○—
manussabhūto bahūnaṃ sukhāvaho,
—○—○—|—○○|—○—○—
ubbegauttāsabhayāpanūdano
—○—○—|—○○|—○—○—
guttīsu rakkhāvaraṇesu ussuko.¹⁸

(*pamitakkharā*)

—○—○—|○○○|—○—○—
pubbaṅgamo sucaritesu ahu
—○—○—|○○○|—○—○—
dhammesu dhammacariyābhirato,
—○—○—|○○○|—○—○—
anvāyiko bahujan' assa ahu,
—○—○—|○○○|—○—○—
saggesu vedayitha puññaphalaṃ.

¹⁷ [All the examples from here on are drawn from DN 30, Lakkhaṇasuttaṃ.]

¹⁸ Note the alliteration in this verse - an ornament prominent in early Indian poetic theory.

(*rucirā*)

na pāṇinā na ca pana daṇḍaleḍḍunā
satthena vā maraṇavadhena vā puna,
ubbādhānāya ca paritajjanāya vā
na heṭṭhayī janatam aheṭṭhako ahu.

(*pupphitagga*)

caviya punar idhāgato samāno
karacaraṇāmudutañ ca jālino ca,
atirucirasuvaggudassaneyyaṃ
paṭilabhatī daharo susūkumāro.

(*svāgatā*)

chetvā khīlāṃ chetvā palighaṃ | indakhīlam ūhaccamanejā¹⁹ |
te caranti suddhā vimalā | cakkhumatā dantā susunāgā ||

[372]

(*upaṭṭhitappacupita*)

akkodhañ ca adhiṭṭhahī adāsi ca dānaṃ |
vatthāni ca sukhumāni succhavīnī |
purimatarabhavaṭṭhito |
abhivisaji mahim iva suro abhivassaṃ ||

taṃ katvāna ito cuto divaṃ upapajja |
sukataṃ ca phalavipākam ānubhotvā |
kanakatanunibhataco |
idha bhavati suravarataroriva²⁰ Indo ||

¹⁹ *m* here is junction consonant.

²⁰ The last *r* here is a junction consonant.

(u g g a t ā)

na ca vīsaṭaṃ na ca visāci |
na ca pana viceyyapekkhitā |
ujju²¹ tatha pasaṭaṃ ujjumano |
piyacakkhunā bahujanaṃ udikkhitā ||

abhiyogino ca nipuṇā ca |
bahu pana nimittakovidā |
sukhumanayanakusalā manujā |
piyadassano ti abhiniddisanti naṃ |

piyadassano gihi pi santō |
bhavati bahūnaṃ piyāyito |
yadi ca na bhavati gihī, samaṇo |
bhavatī piyo bahūnāṃ²² sokaṇāsano ||

²¹ In *u(j)ju* the quantity of the first syllable is variable. [Ed. note: we need to read *uju* here, to correct the metre].

²² [Ed. note: we need to read *bahūjanāṃ* here, to correct the metre].