

FROM  
**A HISTORY OF INDIAN LITERATURE**  
**(VOLUME III)**

BY  
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**[INDIAN PROSODIC LITERATURE]**

Prosody<sup>1</sup> in India is as old as poetics. Its beginnings go back as far as the Vedic literature. Already in the Brāhmaṇas we find people busy with metres, the harmony of which seems to have [been considered] something mystic.<sup>2</sup> A number of chapters are devoted to prosody in the Sāṅkhyāyanaśrautasūtra. The Ṛgveda Prātiśākhya and metrical portions of Kātyāyana's Anukramaṇīs to the Ṛgveda and the Yajurveda already scientifically treat of the Chandas (that is to say, prosody) that is listed also among the six Vedāṅgas. The most important work of this Vedāṅga is the Chandassūtra of Piṅgala.<sup>3</sup> Although this work is called a Vedāṅga, it touches only a very small number of Vedic metres, its major part dealing with secular poetry. The names of his predecessors mentioned by Piṅgala exhibit a Vedic character; in any case he is a very old writer, a thing that is indicated also by the circumstance that he is a mythical personality and as such is also called "Nāga-Piṅgalanāga". According to tradition he is identical with Patañjali; Ṣaḍguruśiṣya calls him a "younger brother of Pāṇini", and it is probable that he is not too far away in time from Patañjali (about 150 B.C.).

The names and numbers of the metres treated by Piṅgala equally prove that there existed a highly developed secular literature before his time. Besides, the names of many metres prove the existence of extensive love-lyrics. Names of the metres like Kanakaprabhā "brilliance of gold", Kuḍmaladantī "bud-toothed", Cāruhāsinī "beautifully-smiling", Vasantatilakā "Spring-crested", and others, apparently go to explain that originally they were employed in love lyrics, in which beautiful women were praised.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Colebrooke, Misc. Essays II 63 ff.; Weber, Ind. Stud. Bd. 8; F.L. Pullé, F. Belloni-Filippie A. Ballini in SIFI VIII. 1912; H. Jacobi, Über die Entwicklung der indischen Metrik in nachvedischer Zeit, ZDMG 38, 590ff., 40, 336ff.

<sup>2</sup> See Volume I, p. 56, 157 (trans. pp. 62, 180).

<sup>3</sup> See Volume I, p. 245 (trans. pp. 288-89). Text with the commentary Mṛtasaṃjīvanī of Halāyudha (2nd half of 10th century) published in Km. [i.e. Kavyā Mālā] 91, 1908. [The text of this work is transcribed elsewhere on this website (without the commentary at the moment), see [Śri Piṅgala's Chandassāstra](#)]

<sup>4</sup> This circumstance too speaks in support of the assumption that originally it was in the erotic lyrics that metres were used in India, since in this poetry the variety of metres is the greatest. Writers of epics use comparatively smaller number of metres. In the oldest dramas there occur approximately twenty metres.

Besides them, however, there are also metres that are named according to their form and nature, e.g. Mandākrāntā “slowly ascending”, Drutamadyā “swift in the middle”, and others. Many of the names bear resemblance to the voice or habit of animals, e.g. Aśvalalita “horse-sport”, Kokilaka “voice of the cuckoo”, Śārdūlavikrīḍita “tiger-sport”, etc.

In Vedic prosody metre exclusively depends upon the number of syllables, and to a very limited extent the quality [= quantity] of syllables too is taken into account. Of these metres, the śloka of the epics, derived from the Vedic Anuṣṭubh, is of the most frequent occurrence. Otherwise, prosody knows only the metres in which the number of syllables as well as their quantity too is strictly fixed. A large number of metres is formed according to the number of syllables and arrangement of metrical feet. The number of syllables in a quarter stanza (pāda) varies between 5 and 27, so that we have stanzas of syllables numbering from 20 to 108. But theoretically there exist a much greater number of metres that are, in fact, met with here and there. In addition there are a number of metres that are measured according to mora. They are found mainly in Prākṛit poems and seem to have originally belonged to popular ballads.

Like Pāṇini in his grammar, Piṅgala uses algebraic expressions to indicate the feet of metres and for short [light] and long [heavy] syllables.<sup>1</sup> A work of Prākṛit prosody too is ascribed to Piṅgala.<sup>2</sup> It is written in verse and contains a large number of recent prosodical expressions and, therefore, must be younger in age than his Chandassūtra.

We do now know whether the authors of the works of ornate poetry that are before us were regulated according to Piṅgala or according to some later manual.<sup>3</sup> Later than Piṅgala's Chandassūtra is chapter XV of the Bhāratīya-Naṭyaśāstra which deals with prosody and gives numerous examples for individual metres.

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<sup>1</sup> For example *la=laghu*, i.e. “light, or short syllable”; *ga=garu*, i.e. “heavy or long syllable”; *ma* for  $---$ ; *ya* for  $\cup---$ ; *ra* for  $-\cup-$  etc.

<sup>2</sup> Prākṛta Piṅgala-sūtras (text with commentary) published in Km [i.e. Kavyā Mālā] 41, 1894. Cf. Weber, Ind. Stud. 8, 202 ff; Pischel, Prākṛit Spachen (Gundriss) p. 30f; Keith, Catalogue of Prākṛit MSS. in Bodl. c. 48. According to Jacobi (Bhavisattakaha of Dhaṇavāla, p. 5\*) the Prākṛta Piṅgala belongs to the 14th century A.D. at the earliest.

<sup>3</sup> According to Jacobi, Ind. Stud. 17, 442ff., [the] Chandoviciti, which is no more available, [is] a work of Daṇḍin, [that] had become a standard work for poets. P.V. Kane Ind. Ant. 40, 1911, 177 f.) has pointed out that by Chandoviciti (Kāvyaśāstra I, 12) we should understand “prosody” in general and not the title of a work, and that neither Daṇḍin nor Vāmana had written a work on prosody. But it must not be taken to mean that when rhetoricians prescribe the study of prosody for poets they directly mean the work of Piṅgala as assumed by Kane. A Prākṛta-Piṅgalasūtra was published in the Bibl. Ind. 1902, too. Ratnasekhara's Chandakośa a pendant to Prākṛta-Piṅgalasūtra has been dealt with by W. Schubring ZDMG 75, 1921, p. 97ff.

In addition to Piṅgala, Agnipurāṇa (chapters 328-334) also deals with prosody in considerably condensed memorial verses. Strangely enough, a chapter (304) of an astrological work, named Bṛhatsamhitā of Varāhamihira (6th century A.D.), also deals with prosody. Here metres have been associated with planets, and many of the verses convey two different meanings in such a way that they define metres and describe the movements of planets at the same time. Bhaṭṭotpala in his commentary, by way of explanation, has referred to a metrical text, of which the author is mentioned by him simply as “teacher” (ācāryā). Here each metre is defined by means of a stanza composed in the same metre.

Kedārabhaṭṭa’s *Vṛttaratnākara* “Ocean of Metres”,<sup>1</sup> is a work on prosody that has had very wide circulation. This book deals with only non-Vedic metres and in fact describes their 136 types. The work is much quoted, and the large number of commentaries on it, both in print and in MSS. existing in India, prove that it has been very popular there.

Another work, much quoted, is the *Śrutabodha* of Kālidāsa.<sup>2</sup> But its authorship is now and then ascribed by scholars to Vararuci too. There are many extant commentaries written on it. The verses defining the metres serve also as their examples at the same time.

Kśemendra too has written a work on prosody, the *Suvṛttatilaka*,<sup>3</sup> that is divided into three sections. Section one contains a description of the metres, for each of which the writer has provided as example a stanza composed by himself. Section two is on faults and merits of prosody; but here the quoted examples are not only from the writings of the author himself but also from elsewhere. We obtain much useful data for a history of literature from section three, which is devoted to reputed poets of the past and their special fascination for one or the other of the metres.<sup>4</sup>

Of the other works on prosody, Chandonuśāsana<sup>5</sup> of Hemacandra, Vāṇibhūṣaṇa of Dāmodara<sup>6</sup> and Chandomañjarī of Gaṅgādāsa may be referred to briefly.

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<sup>1</sup> Published with a commentary in Bombay, NSP 1908. An English translation of this work appeared in the Pandit, Vol. IX, 45 f., 91ff., 140 ff. Kedārabhaṭṭa was the son of Pavyeka or Pabbeka. According to Krishnamacharya (167) he must have written the *Vṛttaratnākara* in the beginning of the 15th century. [But] since he is very often cited by Mallinātha, who lived in the 15th century, he must have been somewhat older.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Colebrooke, Misc. Ess. II, 65; H. Ewald in the Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes, Bonn 1842, IV, 57ff; Aufrecht, CC. I, 675; Eggeling, Ind. Off. Cat. II, 1082 ff. H. Brockhaus has published it in his book “Über den Druck sanskritischer Werke mit lateinischen Buchstaben” (Leipzig, 1841). It has been printed several times in India, also in Haeblerlin 9-14.

<sup>3</sup> Published in Km., Part II, 1886, 29-54.

<sup>4</sup> So, for example, Pāṇini liked Upajāti, Bhāravi, the Vaṃśastha, Bhavabhūti, the Śikhariṇī, Kālidāsa, the Mandākrāntā, etc. On the use of metres in Indian poets see also Kühnau, ZDMG. 1890, p. 1ff.

<sup>5</sup> Bühler, Hemacandra, p. 33, 82.

<sup>6</sup> Published in Km. 1895, Cf. Eggeling, Ind. Off. Cat. II, p. 301ff.