

Lost Meters

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How do we know what's lost?

There are several ways of getting an idea of what is lost in a particular literary or textual corpus:

- ▶ Abridgements or translations
- ▶ References or quotations in other works
- ▶ Fragmentary manuscripts

I am going to look at **metrical handbooks**, which presumably describe forms and genres that were once in use.

We have the following metrical handbooks for Prakrit:

- ▶ *Jānāśrayī Chandōviciti* (6th–7th c.) [in Sanskrit; doesn't quote earlier texts]; see Velankar (1956–1957)
- ▶ *Vṛttajātisamuccaya* of “Virahāṅka” (7th c.?) [in Prakrit; doesn't quote earlier texts]
- ▶ *Svayambhūcchandas* of Svayambhū (9th c.) [in Prakrit; **does** quote earlier texts]
- ▶ *Chandōnuśāsana* of Hēmacandra (12th c.) [in Sanskrit; mostly doesn't quote earlier texts]
- ▶ *Gāthālakṣaṇa* of Nanditāḍhya (date unknown) [in Prakrit; doesn't quote earlier texts]
- ▶ *Kavidarpaṇa* (anonymous, date unknown) [in Prakrit; doesn't quote earlier texts]

The aforementioned sources are largely **secondary**, drawn from other sources (e.g. Hēmacandra's discussion is based largely on Virahāṅka and Svayambhū). Virahāṅka often refers to earlier sources, which include:

- ▶ **Hāla / Sālāhaṇa**: perhaps the compiler of the *Sattasaī*?
- ▶ **Bhuaāhiva**: identified by Gōvinda, the commentator, as Kambala and Aśvatara (?)
- ▶ **Vuḍḍhakaī**: probably Harivṛddha, of whose work on poetics a small number of fragments are quoted by Namisādhu and Ratnaśrījñāna

These must all be pre-7th c. In fact they are probably **much older**, since Virahāṅka includes some of the forms they described just for the sake of completeness, without explaining them in any detail; Gōvinda, his commentator, says that they are no longer used by good poets (*mahākavibahiṣkṛtāḥ*).



All of the aforementioned texts were edited by H. D. Velankar.

At the time when the *Nāṭyaśāstra* was composed (?!), Prakrit was used extensively — much more than Sanskrit — for the *dhruvā* songs, the “soundtrack” to stage plays, which are typically **not** included in the manuscript tradition of any play. Accordingly, Prakrit songs are discussed at length in chapters 31 and 32 of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and in Abhinavagupta’s commentary thereon (although Abhinavagupta was *almost* as clueless as we are about what the text was saying).

These chapters, however, are a **nightmare**, not just for philological reasons (extremely poor manuscript tradition and extremely poor editions) but because the author/compiler apparently lacked the conceptual vocabulary for dealing with Prakrit meters.

Gauging the extent of loss

In **Sanskrit metrical handbooks**, usually hundreds of meters are defined, but only around **twenty** are in common use; the rest are used rarely if at all. **However**, they all, more or less, belong to the same **overarching category**, namely verses of four lines, each made up of a certain number syllables, of which each has a determinate weight (light or heavy).

In **Prakrit metrical handbooks**, not only are the majority of meters either unattested or very sparsely attested, but **the majority of the categories of meters** they describe are similarly unattested.

Gauging the extent of loss

This means that entire **genres** of Prakrit literature are known only from metrical handbooks and from scattered examples and references in other texts.

This allows us to understand that Prakrit, now represented primarily by lyric and narrative poetry, once had a **much broader range of forms** that were decimated first by **Sanskritization** and then by **vernacularization** (although both Sanskrit and the vernaculars adopted some of these forms), including **secular songs** and **hymns** (which may be considered “subliterary” by some).

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Basic principles of Prakrit meter

All classes of Prakrit verse share some basic principles which we can outline here:

- ▶ Normally made up of four lines (*pāa-*); sometimes two
- ▶ Lines have a fixed number of **moras** (*metta-/matta-*, μ)
- ▶ These moras are always organized into **groups** (*gaṇa-*), usually of three, four, or five moras, often with restrictions as to which syllabic patterns can or cannot instantiate the group.
- ▶ These groups define the **rhythm** of the verse by specifying the points at which the **head** of a moraic trochee must, can, or cannot occur.
- ▶ With the exception of the most common meters (*gāthā* and *skandhaka*), **they usually rhyme** (!!)

Classes of Prakrit meters

A: Two-line forms (*gāthā*, *ullāla*, etc.)

B: Four-line forms:

B¹: With *yamaka*: *Galita(ka)*

B²: With *anuprāsa* (rhyme): *Khañja(ka)*, several varieties, including:

- ▶ *Narkuṭa(ka)* and subvarieties
- ▶ *Nirdhyāyikā* and subvarieties
- ▶ *Adhikākṣarā* and subvarieties, etc.

C: A + B¹ (*śīrṣaka*)

D: C × 4 (*dvipadī* etc.)

Classes of Prakrit meters

This classification is **loosely based** on the classification introduced by Svayambhū and followed by Hēmacandra, although they omit **D** (probably an archaic form by that time, because Virahāṅka's discussion is based on earlier sources).

But please note that I am **synthesizing** and **condensing** a lot of material composed over centuries, much of it very ambiguous and contradictory, to produce this high-level classification.

Classes of Prakrit meters

You can see that **C** and **D** are **complex** forms, created by combining constituent parts in particular ways. This means that meters can be referred to not just on account of their metrical pattern, but on account of the role they play in these larger complexes.

Hence another classification could be:

- ▶ meters that are used **on their own** (*gāthā*, *galita(ka)*, etc.);
- ▶ meters that are necessarily used **as part of a larger complex** (*mañjarī*, *avalambaka*, *ullāla*, *gītikā* etc.).

The very large *khañja(ka)* class (**B²**, rhymed four-line verses) appears to include both types; when they are used as the first element in a strophic form (**D**) such verses are called *vastukas*.

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This form is **not lost**, since **116 verses** in Pravarasēna's *Sētubandha* (a 5th-century epic poem composed at the Vākāṭaka court) are composed in it. It seems that it was very common in what Paul Dundas called “the second phase of Prakrit *kavva*,” namely, the poetry produced in the 4th and 5th centuries in and around the Vākāṭaka court. It appears to have fallen out of use after the 7th century.

- ▶ Bhōja and Hēmacandra tell us that there were *galita(ka)* verses in other presumably Vākāṭaka-period poems, viz. *Harivijaya* and *Rāvaṇavijaya* (both now lost).
- ▶ The *Jānāśrayī Chandōviciti* (6th–7th) **begins** an excursus on “meters common among the people” (*anyāḥ kāścij jātayō lōkē pracarantyaḥ*) with a *galita(ka)*.



It basically refers to any four-line meter with *yamaka* at the end (dotted line).

There are *sama* and *ardhasama* varieties.

In the Vākāṭaka poems, it was used for elaborate descriptions of nature, especially the ocean. See Dundas (2022: 78–83), especially for the discussion of *yamaka*.

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The *narkuṭa(ka)* appears to have a four-lined rhyme verse that was primarily used on its own, i.e., not as part of a larger composition, although the *Nāṭyaśāstra* seems to indicate its combination with certain *śīrṣakas* (see below).

Svayambhū puts it in the *khañjaka* class; the *Nāṭyaśāstra* often refers to *narkuṭa(ka)* and *khañja(ka)* together.

Several forms of the *narkuṭa(ka)* were “frozen” as weight-regulated meters and used in Sanskrit (including a form called *narkuṭaka* itself, used in the *Jānakīharaṇa*, 8th c.).

It was used by Vimala(sūri) (5th c.), both in the *Paūmacariyaṃ** and in lost works quoted by Svayambhū, and its use is recommended in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* for songs associated with low characters, especially in comic or romantic contexts.

Indications in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and the *Svayambhūcchandas* suggest that these forms were originally associated with the Magadha region.

* *Paūmacariyaṃ* 52.29 was previously identified, incorrectly, as a *galitaka*; it is a perfect example of the *narkuṭaka*, including the characteristic end-rhyme in -āe.

Other four-line rhymed verses

Several other families of meters fell into class B², and are mentioned by the *Jānāśrayī Chandōvicitī* among other sources, but we know extremely little about them (the *Jānāśrayī*'s examples seem to be made up, and *Svayambhūcchandas* is missing this part):

- ▶ *nirdhyāyikā*
- ▶ *adhikākṣarā*

The *adhikākṣarā* appears to have been adapted into Kannada and Telugu (*piriyakkara*). To judge from its use in those languages, it might have been used for “set-piece” descriptions in longer narrative works.

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With the *śīrṣaka* we move to complex forms. As the name suggests, it consists of two parts:

1. a four-line meter (called a *khañja(ka)* in this context: could take a very wide variety of forms according to the handbooks, but in the surviving examples we only find the *avalambaka*)
2. a “capping” meter (the *śīrṣa*), usually two lines (*gītikā*, *ullāla*, etc.).

Probably this is the model of the Telugu *sīsa*.

Examples of the *śīrṣaka*

The best-known example is the Prakrit song in the first act of Harṣa's *Ratnāvalī*, called a *dvipadīkhaṇḍa* (probably because it is a “part of a *dvipadī*,” discussed presently). There are also several in the *Kuvalayamālā*.

Naresh Keerthi and I found references to a similar song (*dvipadīkhaṇḍa*) in another play, Māyurāja's *Tāpasavatsarāja*, but unfortunately it is not preserved.

In these texts, it is represented as a secular song, sung at festivals and parties.

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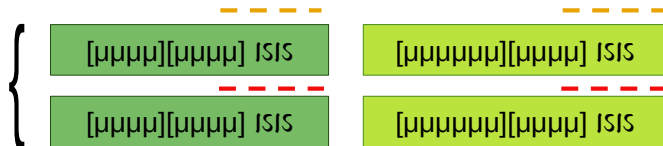
Dvipadī and *Dhruvaka*

These are the most complex Prakrit meters, used for extended songs. The earliest discussions are in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* (albeit in a very confusing way), and they were allegedly discussed by Hāla and Harivṛddha. There are a few surviving examples (discussed by Bhayani 1993), but they appear to have fallen out of use after the 8th or so, and Hēmacandra (probably following Svayambhū) folds them into the *śīrṣaka* category.

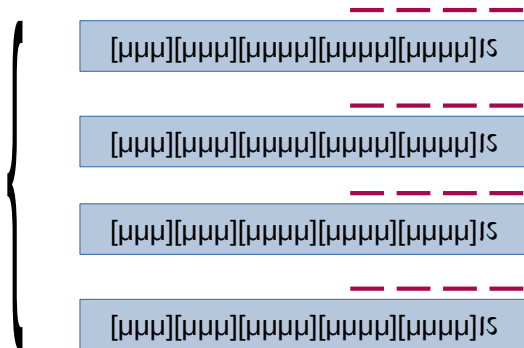
This indicates that they were popular as songs and set-pieces in the **early first millennium**, but Apabhramsha and regional languages took over some of these functions rather early on.

The *Dhruvaka* in the *Kuvalayamālā*

vidārī
(*dhruvaka*):
māgadhikā



vastuka:
mañjarī

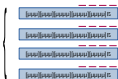


The *Dhruvaka* in the *Kuvalayamālā*

vidārī
(*dhruvaka*):
māgadhikā



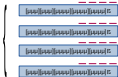
vastuka:
mañjarī



vidārī
(*dhruvaka*):
māgadhikā



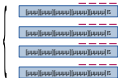
vastuka:
mañjarī



vidārī
(*dhruvaka*):
māgadhikā



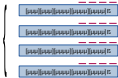
vastuka:
mañjarī



vidārī
(*dhruvaka*):
māgadhikā



vastuka:
mañjarī



vidārī
(*dhruvaka*):
māgadhikā



This is called a *dhruvaka* because the text of the *vidārī* (the shorter verse form) is the same (constant or *dhruva*):

sambujjhaha kiṃ ṇa bujjhaha
ettiē vi mā kiṃci mujjhaha
kīraū jaṃ kariyavvaṃ
puṇa ḍhukkaū taṃ mariyavvaṃ

This seems to be the ancestor of many Indian popular song types, where a **refrain** is introduced and then repeated after every “verse.”

The *Dvipadī* in the *Caūpannamahāpurisacariyam*

vastuka:
mañjarī

[μμμ][μμμ][μμμμ][μμμμ][μμμμ]IS

[μμμ][μμμ][μμμμ][μμμμ][μμμμ]IS

[μμμ][μμμ][μμμμ][μμμμ][μμμμ]IS

[μμμ][μμμ][μμμμ][μμμμ][μμμμ]IS

gītikā

[μμμμ][μμμμ][μμμμμ] [μμμμ][μμμμ][μ(μμ)μ][μμμμμ]Σ

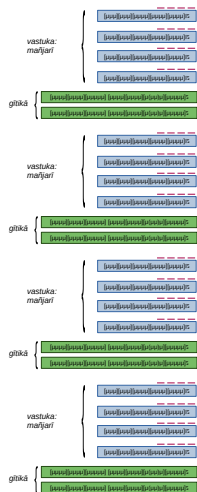
[μμμμ][μμμμ][μμμμμ] [μμμμ][μμμμ][μ(μμ)μ][μμμμμ]s

The *Dvipadī* in the *Caūpannamahāpurisacariyam*

This is a *dvipadī*, i.e., a strophic verse made from two constituents. There is however no repetition of text here, and hence no *dhruvaka* or refrain.

The earliest evidence suggests that there were songs made of up three components, with another form (called *vidārī*, *ēkaka*, or *vistāritaka*) intervening between the *vastuka* and the *gītikā*. But no examples survive.

This is an extended and sentimental description of soldiers taking leave of their beloveds before going to battle.



Some conclusions

- ▶ Prakrit literature was much more extensive and diverse than what has survived.
- ▶ While some forms remained closely associated with Prakrit, others were adapted into Apabhramsha and regional languages.
- ▶ This process corroborates Prakrit's role as a “notional vernacular,” the source of popular (and perhaps subliterary) forms, yet, as a literary language, increasingly distant from popular speech over the course of the first millennium CE.

Thank you!

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