

# **Poetic Meters used in the Vedas**

Extracted From

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## Types of Poetic Meters and Counting Methods

Knowledge of poetic meters used in Vedas, is essential for proper recitation of the mantras. In the most accepted method only the vowels used in a mantra are counted and determination of the poetic meter is made based on this count. For this purpose the long vowels represented by two roman letters are counted as one. For example –

agnimeele purohitañ  
yajñasya devam-ritvijam  
hotaaraṇ ratna-dhaatamam

Rigveda 1:1:1

In this example, we have 8 vowels in each of the 3 limbs (phrases) with a total vowel count of 24, making it the gayatree meter.

The poetic meter system is very elaborate and complex. Based on different texts, eight methods of counting the limbs of the poetic meters have been identified. They are daiva, aasura, praaajaapaatya, aarṣha, yaajuṣha, saamna, aarcha and brahma. Out of these aarṣha (created by sages) method of counting is primarily used in the Vedas. There are also 26 different poetic meters identified. These 26 poetic meters are divided into 4 parts.

1. Prag-gaayatree – This consists of 5 meters with vowel counts from 4 to 20. They are maa/uktaa, pramaa/atyuktaa, pratimaa/madhyaa, upamaa/pratiṣṭhaa and samaa/supratiṣṭhaa
2. Prathama saptaka – This consists of 7 meters with vowel counts from 24 to 48. They are gaayatree, uṣṇīk, anuṣṭup, bṛihatee, paṅkti, triṣṭup and jagatee.
3. Dviteeya saptaka - This consists of 7 meters with vowel counts from 52 to 76. They are atijagatee, shakvaree, atishakvaree, aṣṭī, atyaṣṭī, dhṛiti and atidhṛiti.
4. Triteeya saptaka - This consists of 7 meters with vowel counts from 80 to 104. They are kṛiti, prakṛiti, aakṛiti, vikṛiti, saṅkṛiti, abhikṛiti and utkṛiti

A matrix of the 8 systems of counting and 26 poetic meters below should clarify it further.

	daiva	aasu ra	praajaa paatya	aarṣha	yaaju ṣha	saam na	aarcha	brahma
	Start =1 Inter val = +1	Start =15 Inter val = -1	Start =8 Interval =4	Daiva+ aasura+ praajaa paatya	Start =6 Inter val = +1	Start =12 Interv al = +2	Start =18 Interva l = +3	yaajuṣha + saamna+ aarcha
maa/ uktaa				4				
pramaa/ atyuktaa				8				
pratimaa/ madhyaa				12				
upamaa/ pratishṭhaa				16				
samaa/ supratishṭhaa				20				
gaayatree	1	15	8	24	6	12	18	36
uṣṇīk	2	14	12	28	7	14	21	42
anuṣṭup	3	13	16	32	8	16	24	48
brīhatee	4	12	20	36	9	18	27	54
pañkti	5	11	24	40	10	20	30	60
triṣṭup	6	10	28	44	11	22	33	66
jagatee	7	9	32	48	12	24	36	72
atijagatee	8	8	36	52				
shakvaree	9	7	40	56				
atishakvaree	10	6	44	60				
aṣṭī	11	5	48	64				
atyāṣṭī	12	4	52	68				
dhṛiti	13	3	56	72				
atidhṛiti	14	2	60	76				
kṛiti				80				
prakṛiti				84				
aakṛiti				88				
vikṛiti				92				
saṅkṛiti				96				
abhikṛiti				100				
utkṛiti				104				

When the vowel counts in a limb falls short, at times, a technique called vyoohana is used. In this technic the conjugated vowels as e = a+i are counted as two. Also, the vowels lost in conjugation represented by ' are counted as well.

Even when the vowel count is off by  $\pm 2$ , the mantra still falls into the broad category of the same poetic meter. However, based on the difference in count an adjective is added to the name of the poetic meter. Each poetic meter hence can have 5 different categories of adjectives.

1. No adjective – the vowel count matched the exact requirements of the poetic meter.
2. nichṛit prefix is used when the count is short by 1 e.g. poetic meter for a mantra with 23 vowels is nichṛid-gaayatree.
3. viraat prefix is used when the count is short by 2 e.g. poetic meter for a mantra with 22 vowels is viraat-gaayatree.
4. bhurik prefix is used when the count is over by 1 e.g. poetic meter for a mantra with 25 vowels is bhurig-gaayatree.
5. svaraat prefix is used when the count is over by 2 e.g. poetic meter for a mantra with 26 vowels is svaraat-gaayatree.

Besides this, in case the vowel count is not evenly distributed in various limbs of the mantra, an adjective is added to represent that. These are

1. saṅkamatee – when one of the limb contains only 5 vowels.
2. kakummatee – when one of the limb contains only 6 vowels.
3. pipeelika-madhyaa – when in a mantra with three limbs, the middle limb has less vowels than the other two.
4. yava-madhyaa – when in a mantra with three limbs, the middle limb has more vowels than the other two.

### Sub-Classifications of the Poetic Meters

The sub-classes of poetic meters due to the variations in count of vowels and number of limbs is identified by adding an adjective (prefix) to the names of the poetic meters.

#### Sub-classes of Gaayatree

Gaayatree meter normally consists of three limbs and 24 vowels. It however, can have variations with one, two, four and five limbs as well.

S.No.	Adjective	Limbs	Vowels	Comments
1	gaayatree	3	8+8+8 (=24)	All 3 limbs have the same vowel count.
2	paada-nichṛit	3	7+7+7 (=21)	Each limb is nichṛit i.e. has one vowel less.
3	ati-paada-nichṛit	3	6+8+7 (=21)	
4	ati-nichṛit	3	7+6+7 (=20)	
5	hraseeyasee	3	6+6+7 (=19)	ṛikpraatishaakhya has identified it as atinichṛit
6	vardhamaanaa	3	6+7+8 (=21)	ṛikpraatishaakhya has identified 8+6+8 (=22) as vardhamaanaa as well.
7	pratiṣṭṭhaa	3	8+7+6 (=21)	Vowel count in descending order, reverse of vardhamaanaa.
8	vaaraahee	3	6+9+9 (=24)	
9	naagee	3	9+9+6 (=24)	Reverse of vaaraahee.
10	yava-madhyaa	3	7+10+7 (=24)	1 <sup>st</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> limbs have lower vowel count.
11	pipeelika-madhyaa	3	9+6+9 (=24)	Middle limb has lower count
12	uṣṇṇiggarbhaa	3	6+7+11 (=24)	
13	bhurik	3	8+10+7 (=25)	bhurig-gaayatree
14	tripaad viraaṭ	3	11+11+11 (=33)	Maharṣhi Dayaananda has classified this as bhurig-anuṣṭup
15	chatuṣṭhaad	4	6+6+6+6 (=24)	
16	padapaṅkti	5	5+5+5+5+5 (=25) or 3x5+4+6 (=25)	In the 2 <sup>nd</sup> sequence the limb with 4 vowels can occur at any location.
17	bhurik padapaṅkti	5	4x5+6 (=26)	
18	dvipadaa	2	12+12 (=24) or 8+8 (=16)	
19	dvipaad viraaṭ	2	12+8 (=20) or 10+10 (=20)	viraaṭ-gaayatree
20	dvipaad svaraaṭ	2	9+9 (=18)	svaraaṭ-gaayatree
21	ekapadaa	1	8	

### Sub-classes of Uṣṇik

Uṣṇik meter normally consists of three limbs and 28 vowels.

S.No.	Adjective	Limbs	Vowels	Comments
1	uṣṇik	3	8+8+12 (=28)	Also known as paroṣṇik.
2	kakup	3	8+12+8 (=28)	After conjugation pronounced as kakub-uṣṇik

3	pura	3	12+8+8 (=28)	After conjugation pronounced as pura-uṣhṇik
4	kakumnyaṅkushiraa	3	11+12+4 (=27)	rikpraatishaakhya defines this as nichṛit.
5	tanushiraa	3	11+11+6 (=28)	
6	pipeelikaamadhyaa	3	11+6+11 (=28)	
7	chatuṣḥpaad	4	7+7+7+7 (=28)	
8	anuṣṭub-garbhaa	4	5+8+8+8 (=29)	Since this contains 5 vowels in the 1 <sup>st</sup> limb, it is also called saṅkumatee.

### Sub-classes of Anuṣṭup

Anuṣṭup meter normally consists of four limbs and 32 vowels.

S.No.	Adjective	Limbs	Vowels	Comments
1	purastaaj-jyoti	3	8+12+12 (=32)	piṅgala-sootra defines this as tripaad.
2	madhye-jyotiḥ	3	12+8+12 (=32)	This is also called pipeelika-madhyaa. piṅgala-sootra defines this as tripaad.
3	upariṣṭaaj-jyoti	3	12+12+8 (=32)	This is also called kṛiti. piṅgala-sootra defines this as tripaad.
4	kaaviraaṭ	3	9+12+9 (=30)	
5	naṣṭa-roopaa	3	9+10+13 (=32)	The basic nature of anuṣṭup has been destroyed due to irregular counts in the limbs.
6	viraaṭ	3	10+10+10 (=30)	Or 11+11+11 (=33). viraaṭ-anuṣṭup after conjugation.
7	anuṣṭup	4	8+8+8+8 (=32)	Also called chatuṣḥ-paad
8	paadair	4	7+7+7+7 (=28)	It is anuṣṭup by the count of limbs but uṣhṇik by the vowel count.
9	mahaa-pada-paṅkti	6	5+5+5+5+5+6 (=31)	This type is not universally accepted.

### Sub-classes of Bṛihatee

Bṛihatee meter normally consists of four limbs and 36 vowels.

S.No.	Adjective	Limbs	Vowels	Comments
1	bṛihatee	4	9+9+9+9 (=36)	Or 10+10+8+8 (=36)
2	purastaad	4	12+8+8+8 (=36)	
3	uro	4	8+12+8+8 (=36)	Also known as skandho-greevee (shoulders and neck) or nyaṅkusaariṇee

4	pathyaa	4	8+8+12+8 (=36)	Also known as siddhaa or skandho-greevee
5	upariṣṭaad	4	8+8+8+12 (=36)	
6	viṣṭaara	4	8+10+10+8 (=36)	
7	viṣhamapadaa	4	9+8+11+8 (=36)	
8	mahaa	3	12+12+12 (=36)	Also known as sato, oordhva, viraat-oordhva or tripadaa

### Sub-classes of Paṅkti

Paṅkti meter normally consists of four limbs and 40 vowels.

S.No.	Adjective	Limbs	Vowels	Comments
1	sataḥ	4	12+8+12+8 (=40)	Also called sato, bṛihatee, siddhaa, viṣṭaara, siddhaa-viṣṭaara
2	sataḥ	4	8+12+8+12 (=40)	Also called vipareetaa, siddhaa, viṣṭaara
3	aastaara	4	8+8+12+12 (=40)	
4	prastaara	4	12+12+8+8 (=40)	
5	sanstaara	4	12+8+8+12 (=40)	
6	viṣṭaara	4	8+12+12+8 (=40)	
7	aarṣhee	4	12+12+10+10 (=44)	This is not universally accepted.
8	viraat	4	10+10+10+10 (=40)	
9	pathyaa	5	8+8+8+8+8 (=40)	
10	pada	5	5x5 (=25)	or 4+3x5+6 (=25)
11	akṣhara	4	5+5+5+5 (=20)	Also called chatuṣh-padaa akṣhara
12	akṣhara	2	5+5 (=10)	Also called dvipadaa akṣhara
13	dvipadaa	2	12+8 (=20)	Also called viraat, dvipadaa-viṣṭaara
14	jagatee	6	8+8+8+8+8+8 (=48)	Also called vistaara, viṣṭaara

### Sub-classes of Triṣṭup

Triṣṭup meter normally consists of four limbs and 44 vowels.

S.No.	Adjective	Limbs	Vowels	Comments
1	triṣṭup	4	11+11+11+11 (=44)	
2	jagatee	4	12+12+11+11 (=46)	the counts can be in any order.

3	abhisaariṇee	4	10+10+12+12 (=44)	
4	viraat-sthaanaa	4	9+9+10+11 (=39)	Or 2x10+9+11 (=40) with no constraint on the order of limbs. Or 9+10+2x11 (=41)
5	viraat-roopaa	4	3x11+8 (=41)	
6	purastaaj-jyotiḥ	4	8+12+12+12 (=44)	Or 8+11+11+11 (=41) or 11+8+8+8+8 (=43)
7	madhye-jyotiḥ	4	12+8+12+12 (=44)	Or 12+12+8+12 (=44) or 11+8+11+11 (=41) or 11+11+8+11 (=41) or 8+8+11+8+8 (=43)
8	upariṣṭaaj-jyotiḥ	4	12+12+12+8 (=44)	Or 11+11+11+8 (=41) or 8+8+8+8+11 (=43)
9	mahaa-bṛihatee	5	12+8+8+8+8 (=44)	Also called pañcha-padaa. Piṅgala has called this purastaaj-jyotiḥ-jagatee
10	yava-madhyaa	5	8+8+12+8+8 (=44)	Piṅgala has called this madhye-jyotiḥ-jagatee
11	pañkty-uttaraa	5	10+10+8+8+8 (=44)	Also called viraat-poorvaa
12	dvipadaa	2	11+11 (=22)	
13	ekapadaa	1	11 (=11)	

### Sub-classes of Jagatee

Jagatee meter normally consists of four limbs and 48 vowels.

S.No.	Adjective	Limbs	Vowels	Comments
1	jagatee	4	12+12+12+12 (=48)	
2	upa	4	12+12+11+11 (=46)	Any two limbs can be with 12 vowels and the other two with 11. The order is immaterial.
3	purastaaj-jyotiḥ	4	8+12+12+12 (=44)	Or 5 limbs with 12+8+8+8+8 (=44)
4	madhye-jyotiḥ	4	12+8+12+12 (=44)	Or 12+12+8+12 (=44) Or 5 limbs with 8+8+12+8+8 (=44)
5	upariṣṭaaj-jyotiḥ	4	12+12+12+8 (=44)	Or 5 limbs with 8+8+8+8+12 (=44)
6	mahaasato	5	3x8+2x12 (=48)	Not validated by Piṅgala. The order is immaterial. Also called pañcha-padaa.
7	ṣhaṭ-padaa	6	6x8 (=48)	Also called mahaa-paṅkti.



8	mahaa-paṅkti	6	8+8+7+6+10+9 (=48)	
9	viṣṭāara-paṅkti	8	8x6 (=48)	Also called pravṛiddha-padaa
10	dvipadaa	2	2x12 (=24)	
11	ekapadaa	1	12 (=12)	
12	jyotiṣhmatee			Described in nidaana-sootra as a meter where last limb has 8 vowels. Rest 40 can be assumed.

Ancient sages have not identified sub-classifications for the remaining 14 poetic meters from 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> category. The properties of the main poetic meter are enumerated below.

S.No.	Adjective	Limbs	Vowels	Comments
13	atijagatee	5	12+12+12+8+8 (=52)	
14	shakvaree	7	7x8 (=56)	
15	atishakvaree	5	16+16+12+8+8 (=60)	
16	aṣṭī	5	16+16+16+8+8 (=64)	Or 8x8 (=64) or 4x16 (=64)
17	atyaṣṭī	7	12+12+8+8+8+12+8 (=68)	
18	dhṛiti	7	12+12+8+8+8+16+8 (=72)	
19	atidhṛiti	8	12+12+8+8+8+12+8+8 (=76)	
20	kṛiti		(=80)	
21	prakṛiti		(=84)	
22	aakṛiti		(=88)	
23	vikṛiti	11	10x8+12 (=92)	
24	saṅkṛiti		(=96)	
25	abhikṛiti		(=100)	
26	utkṛiti		(=104)	