शतश्लोकि रामायणम् - Shatashloki **Ramayanam**
Sanskrit Learner Series
Episode - 4

Understanding Ramayana helps us learn Samskruta easily. In the previous episode, we learnt the basic aspects of Compound Words and Structure of Words in the forms of Subanta, tiṅanta, avyaya. In this episode, we learn the basics of metre (Chandas) before moving onto the next stanza of Ramayana.

Literature, world over, has two types. 1) Prose and 2) Poetry. It is to be noted that Prose, how much ever great, does not match the elegance of prosody of Poetry. This is more prevalent in Indic Languages, especially Samskruta. Any sentence without any fixed arrangement of letters, words or sentences is Prose. which is termed as GADYAM.

Contrary to this, a sentence with fixed set of letters, words and patterns is referred to as Poetry, known as PADYAM. Padyam is the common vehicle to expressly convey the spurt of an emotion, in ancient literature style. Padyam has a majesty, elegance, magnificence, ease, rhyme to please the ears, tongue and mind.

Padyam and Chhandas

Padyam has its origin in Veda. Padyam derives from the root word पद् Pad (meaning a foot

or section); which in turn owes its existence to the root verb प◻ - गतौ Pada - Gatau. (Gati = Movement). Traditionally stanzas were formed in 2, 3 and 4 numbers. Number of letters (Syllables) in each section determines the name of the metre, called Chhandas. Based on the context and need, the poets will have varying number of section, usually not exceeding 4.

Let us understand some common metres (Set of Chhandas).

Sl#	Name	Number of Letters per Section (Paada)	Number of Paadas (Sections)	Total Number of Letters in the Chhandas
1	Gaayatree	8	3	24
2	Trishtup	11	3/ 4	33/ 44
3	Jagatee	12	4	48
4	**Anushtup**	**8**	**4**	**32**
5	Pankti	8	5	40
6	Bruhatee	12	3	36
7	Shakvaree		7	

They are number of variations, permutations and combinations altering the characteristics of each Chhandas. Some of them are just based on the number of Paadas (Section). Minor alterations of Excess or Deficit of Letters is connoted by a prefix word.

For Example: Gaayatree Chandas is supposed to have 24 letters. If the number is reduced by one letter 24 - 1 = 23; this would be called as Nichrud Gaayatree. Similarly, if the number of letters exceed 24, by one (24 + 1 = 25); it is called Bhurig Gaayatree.

Note:

However, the subsets of rules are specific to each of the Veda Shaakhas (branches of Veda) and subject to exemptions, compiled by our seers.

Chhandas as a generic text is compiled by Rishi Pingala. Rigveda Pratishaakhyam and Naaradeeya Siksha of Rigveda and Samaveda respectively have compiled the patterns in those Vedic Texts. Vedas are called as Chhandas, for this precise reason of being framed in metres/ Chhandas.

Speciality of Ramayana

Ramayana is known as Aadi Kaavya (First Literary work with attribution of Authorship). Prior to the composition of Ramayana, all the Vedic Scriptures were just known as compilations of Mantras and their Explanations (Samhita, Braahmana Texts). Never was there any suggestion that those texts were composed by an author and any attempt to fix authorship was scoffed at every stage.

At the most, the point of concession, to justify the attachment of a name to a particular Vedic Text; was a particular seer was the fore most protagonist and propagator of the text. Hence, his name used to get attached with text of his teaching. Examples: Aitareya, Shaankhaayana, Kaanva etc. named after those Rishis. Even though Rigveda has many hymns (Mantras), with the identification of certain Rishis, along with their names as the extollers, those specific Sooktas were acknowledged with their vision, but not the text in its entirety.

However, the advent of Vaalmeeki was the game changer with the concept of Authorship. He is the first and foremost pioneer to narrate incidents and stories in Metres (Chhandas) which was followed by many scholars and poets of generations to come. Hence, his work is acknowledged as Aadi Kaavya (First Poetical Work) and he is regarded is Aadi Kavi (First Poet).

Anushtup Chhandas

The metre Anushtup is generally used as the principal Chandas, across the spectra of Literature, especially Puraanas and Itihaasa. The ease and flexibility of its composition and convenience of memorisation, along with its innate Rhyme are the important reasons for its adoption.

Anushtup has 4 Sections or Paadas. Each of them consisting of 8 Syllables (Aksharas); form each stanza of 32 Letters.

Akshara or Syllable

Concept of Syllable in the context of Chhandas is different than western languages or other systems of grammar. In the context of Chhandas, one Akshara is represented by a Vowel (Swara). Number of Consonants (Vyanjana) as prefixes does not alter the position.

For Example:

Ta[1]pa[2]sSvaa[3]dhyaa[4]ya[5] Ni[6]ra[7]ta[8]m
Ta[9]pa[10]svee[11] Vaa[12]gvi[13]daa[14]m Va[15]ra[16]m.
Naa[17]ra[18]da[19]m Pa[20]ri[21]pa[22]pra[23]chchha[24]
Vaa[25]lmee[26]ki[27]r Mu[28]ni[29] Pu[30]nga[31]va[32]m.

Concept of Maatra

Maatra is the unit of time, required to pronounce a letter. Typically, two comparisons are given by two texts for this measurement. 1) Lipta or 2) Chhutika.

- Lipta Kaala   =   Time taken by the eye lid to close and open.
- Chhutika Kaala =   Time taken to produce a sound by the middle finger and thumb.

(In Kannada and Telugu, Chutika has deformed as ಚೆಟಿಕೆ and చిటిక respectively.

Alternate measurement system is based on the comparison, that can be made with the sounds of birds and animals, in their natural flair.

1. Chaasha (Blue Jay/ Blue Necked Bird) =   1 Maatra (Hrasva)
2. Vaayasa (Crow)   =   2 Maatras (Deergha)
3. Peacock/ Peahen   =   3 Maatras (Pluta)
4. Nakula (Mongoose)   =   1/2 Maatra

It is relevant to point out the measurement of time is categorised as Hrasva (1 Unit/ Maatra), Deergha (2 Units/ Maatra) and Pluta (3 Units/ Maatra). The naming is also significant. Hrasva means short. Deergha means long. Pluta, usually deployed in Veda to connote a debate; means floating. (As you float on water, you feel light. Similarly longer duration of the vowel gives you similar feel. This is further improvised in the music, when one letter is elongated to give the feel of the musical note.) Pluta is also deployed to call someone loudly, from a distant place. For example - Raamaaaaa..... Raamaaa..... (Loudly).

Music, especially the percussion system is entirely dependent on this concept of measurement (Taala and Maatra), though they have improvised to scientifically and ornately bring down the calculations to sub units of fractions. Thus we understand the basis of Rhythm is based on this units of time measurement called Maatra.

Guru and Laghu

An Vowel (Swara) is categorised as Guru or Laghu based on the time required to pronounced it. Let us observe Three Thumb Rules, given by the Doyen of Grammar, Sage Paanini.

- An vowel requiring one Maatra (Hrasva) is **LAGHU.** Example: **Ma** in Raa <u>Ma</u>
- An vowel requiring two Maatras (Deergha) is **GURU.** Example: **Raa** in <u>Raa</u> Ma
- Any vowel (essentially Hrava) becomes **Guru,** if it is followed by a Samyoga Akshara (conjunct of two consonants.) Example: **La** in La <u>kshmee.</u> (Here two consonants K and sh are forming the conjunct Samyoga Akshara). Hence, La becomes Guru.

Observe:
- Consonants (Vyanjanas) preceding the Vowel (Svara) are discounted in this calculation of Guru and Laghu, except of Samyoga Akshara.
- Consonants are given just to identify the particular Svara.
- English naming sequences and abbreviations also use this identification pattern, to avoid commonality of Vowels. For Example, Bengaluru is codified as BLR, Delhi is DL etc.

Commonly followed rules in Anushtup Chhandas:

पञ्चमं लघु सर्वत्र   ससमं द्विचतुर्थयोः ।

गुरु षष्ठन्तु पादानां सर्वेषामप्यनुष्टुभि।।

Each of the Four Paadas (Sections) of Anushtup will have these traits.

1) 5th Syllable of All the Paadas - Laghu
2) 6th Syllable of All the Paadas - Guru
3) 7th Syllable in 2nd and 4th Paadas - Laghu
Other syllables can be set to the convenience of the composer.

1. **Ta^{1}pa^{2}sSvaa^{3}dhyaa^{4}ya^5 Ni^{6}ra^{7}ta^{8}m**

   1 = Laghu, 2 = Guru, 3 = Guru, 4 = Guru, **5 = Laghu, 6 = Guru*,** 7 = Laghu, 8 = Guru;

2. **Ta^{1}pa^{2}svee^3 Vaa^{4}gvi^{5}daa^{6}m Va^{7}ra^{8}m.**

   1 = Laghu, 2 = Guru, 3 = Guru, 4 = Guru, **5 = Laghu, 6 = Guru, 7 = Laghu**, 8 = Guru;

3. **Naa^{1}ra^{2}da^{3}m Pa^{4}ri^{5}pa^{6}pra^{7}chchha^8**

   1 = Guru, 2 = Guru, 3 = Guru, 4 = Guru, **5 = Laghu, 6 = Guru,** 7 = Guru, 8 = Laghu;

4. **Vaa^{1}lmee^{2}ki^{3}r Mu^{4}ni^5 Pu^{6}nga^{7}va^{8}m.**

   1 = Guru, 2 = Guru, 3 = Guru, 4 = Laghu, **5 = Laghu, 6 = Guru, 7 = Laghu**, 8 = Guru;

* Exception to the general rule of 6th Syllable to be guru, shall be observed here. Anushtup has many variants, which will have different rule base, which shall be learnt in due course of lessons and observation.

With this introduction to understand Chhandas, we proceed to the next stanza .. Konvasmin Saampratam Lokee...

Subham