

Metre in Early Sinhalese and Some Aspects of its Subsequent Development

IN discussing a subject like metre in Sinhalese poetry, it would be appropriate first of all to examine the nature of the early Sinhalese language. But since scholars have sufficiently discussed the tradition of the colonisation of Ceylon together with the nature and development of this early language,¹ such a discussion will be unnecessary here. We may, however, state that the North Indian Āryan speech in its several dialects, prevalent in India during the third century B.C.,² and subsequently, would have greatly influenced this early language. The early inscriptions of Ceylon and the numerous Prākṛit inscriptions of Asoka testify to this effect.³ It can also be true that the Sinhalese language not only assimilated various linguistic features of the Prākṛitic dialects of the mainland from time to time, but also followed their literary patterns as well. "Poems and religious works were written"⁴ in these numerous Prākṛits from early times, and this being so, we may surmise these patterns may have influenced Sinhalese writers.

We may now examine the documentary material belonging to the early period to see whether we can observe any traces of metre in the language. It is possible that a poetic tradition in *Sinhalese literature* goes back to a very early period, probably as far back as the time of Gajabāhu I or immediately after. But unfortunately the source material for a careful study of the art of the poet of the past has to a very great extent been irretrievably lost of us, for, the earliest examples of the poet's art we have, is that of the Sigiri graffiti. But when we examine the style and diction of the early Brāhmī inscriptions, it is rather interesting to observe the sonorous nature of the composition of the words, and the possibility in very many instances, of putting them into metrical form. Of the numerous Brāhmī inscriptions brought to light so far, Paranavitāna draws our attention to three of them, which he considers to be couched in verse.⁵

1. See Geiger, W. A grammar of the Sinhalese Language, 1938 introduction. Jayatilleke, D. B. etc. A Dictionary of the Sinhalese Language, 1935 Introduction.

2. Grierson, G. A. Linguistic Survey of India, 1927 Vol. I. pt. I, p. 121.

3. Muller, E. A. I. C., 1882, p. 3.

4. See Grierson, G. A. op. cit. p. 122.

5. Paranavitāna, S. Brahmi inscriptions in Sinhalese Verse, J. R. A. S. CB., Vol. XXXVI, No. 98. p. 58 ff.

The first of these is found on a rock boulder at Kossagamakanda near Maradankadawala in the Anurādhapura District. Parānavitāna says that, "there is something unusual in the order of the words of the sentence comprising this record,"⁶ and assumes that this has been done for the sake of poetical requirements. "Examining our document on this assumption, we find that it is quite possible to read it as a stanza composed in the well-known Yāgī metre, which is very common in Sinhalese poetical works of the tenth, twelfth and thirteenth centuries and is not yet obsolete."⁷ He gives the inscription in its metrical form as follows :⁸

	Mātrās
Maha-rajhaha Gamiṇi—	9
Abayaha Devana-piyaśa	11
(Ra)ṃa[ṇi] ba(ri)ya Milaka-Tiśa—	11
Vihare kā[ri]te Katiya	11

Here, in the scanning however, as Parānavitāna observes, the last syllable of the first, second and fourth *pādas* should be considered as long due to their position ; and such allowances are made, both in Sanskrit and Sinhalese prosody.⁹

The next is a record, perhaps of the first century of the present era, found at Kirinda in the Māgam Pattu, in the Southern Province. Here again, Parānavitāna says that there is something unusual in the order of words in the sentence, and studying the inscription for a possible metrical pattern he observes it to contain two verses, one in the *Udgīti* metre, found in Sanskrit, Pāli and Prākṛit languages, and the other in the *Yāgī* metre already observed in the previous record.

Parānavitāna gives the transliteration of the two verses he has realigned from the original inscription,¹⁰ as follows :—

	Mātrās
Āpārīmī / tē lōkā / hī Būdhā /	12
Sāmē nātī / āṭhānā / pā / rāmā-dūlā / bē /	15
Sāvā-ññūtā / -pātē ānū / tāre sāthē /	12
Māhā-sārā / nē lōkā / -cākā Būdhā / nāmā sāyā / bhū /	18

	Mātrās
Me-galahi vihare Naka-	9
Uvara[je na]ma Budha saraṇa	11
Gate miciya-diṭṭika bidiya	11
[Yaha]-(maga)-[para] (ya) [ṇa]- bhute	11

The third inscription comes from Tissamahārāma, in the Southern Province. This again, according to Parānavitāna, has two verses like the above, one in the *Yāgī* and the other in the *Upagīti* metres, and Parānavitāna further says that the two inscriptions "commemorate the same event—the conversion to Buddhism of a viceroy of Rohaṇa—one document being set up at the vihāra where the conversion took place."¹¹ The transliteration of the two verses, with the 'maṅgala' word 'siddham' excluded as forming no part of the verses, is as follows :—

	Mātrās
Yā gēdhāmā / sē bāyē / nāmā /	12
Sāgā-vāḍā / mā nē nā / mā / micā-diṭṭi / kā /	15
Jānā āvā / tāyā nē hā / kīyē sāgā-/	12
āsā / tī sōhā rā / jā / k[ī]yā gā mē /	15
Mica-diṭṭi binaka aṭṭi	9
Mathima buda saraṇa gate	11
Nāga-uva-rāje nāma	11
Kaḍa uva-rāja-kālahi	11

Apart from these three inscriptions, Parānavitāna also draws the reader's attention to another pre-Christian Brāhmī inscription, which he considers consists of an incomplete stanza.¹² "It reads as the first half of a stanza in the Āryā metre, more particularly of the variety known as Pathyā, for the first three feet are treated as a *pāda* enabling the last syllable to be scanned as two syllabic instants."¹³ The text of the inscription, transliterated and scanned is as follows :—

	Mātrās
Mācu[dī]rā / jhāsā māṇi / kārāsē /	12
Silā-ṭṭā / kā kātāyā / āgātās[c] / māc[ū]-gātā / s(ē) /	18

Parānavitāna finally ends up his essay by saying that these records "afford us evidence to prove that the period during which the Sinhalese language has had a literary culture of its own goes back to at least two thousand years."¹⁴

6. Ibid. p. 59.

7. Ibid. p. 60.

8. Ibid. p. 60.

9. Ibid. p. 60.

10. Ibid. p. 62.

11. Ibid. p. 63.

12. Ibid. p. 65.

13. Ibid. p. 65.

14. Ibid. p. 66.

In these inscriptions, one observes a poetic pattern in their composition to warrant the assertion that they are perhaps written as such. But it is not quite certain whether the scanning has been done correctly, especially in regard to the *e* and *o*, for it is quite uncertain whether the words involving these letters in the inscriptions were pronounced long or short at the time. From very ancient times there had been no distinction regarding the orthography of the long *ē*, *ō* and short *e*, *o*. This has been due to the influence of Sanskrit and Pāli, where these letters are always pronounced long, except where in Pāli, they are pronounced short when followed by conjunct consonants. Therefore these languages required no special signs to indicate the long *ē* and *ō*. This practice has been followed in Sinhalese as well, till in recent times it was found necessary to deviate from the earlier practice. Thus, the long signs to *ē* and *ō* have been since introduced, when it was found that in the highly developed modern Sinhalese, words with *e* and *o* pronounced long or short conveyed different meanings from one another. Compare for instance *etara minihā* (the man on the other side or bank) and *ē tara minihā* (that fat man); *ahō deviyani!* (Oh, ye gods!) and *ahō dēviyani* (Oh, you queen!); *koṭi* (leopards) and *kōṭi* (a million) *kolaya* (leaf) and *kōlaya* (disease) etc. Thus it was found necessary to introduce long signs for long *ē* and *ō*, though even now the earlier system is quite prevalent, where we write words like *hetuva*, *lokaya*, *kopa* and so on, but pronounce them as *hētuva*, *lōkaya*, and *kōpa* respectively.

Therefore, the absence of long signs to indicate the long *ē* and *ō* in ancient times would in no way mean that words containing these letters were pronounced as short *e* or *o*. Therefore, Paranavitāna's treatment of the above inscriptions is open to doubt. And, in that case, the number of syllabic instants he has allotted to lines containing especially the *e* and *o* may not be correct. Under such circumstances, one could doubt whether Paranavitāna's allotment of a particular inscription to a particular type of metrical verse is justified.

Apart from this objection, it may be perhaps accepted that these inscriptions are in verse. A characteristic of Secondary Prākṛit, which would have influenced the early Sinhalese language, is that it possessed an "absolute fluidity, becoming a mere collection of vowels hanging for support on an occasional consonant."¹⁵ This feature is clearly visible in the early inscriptions.

The arrangement and the assonant nature of the early inscriptions are such, that it would be perhaps worthwhile for us to examine them to see whether there is any likelihood of their having been composed in verse. So far, no scholar appears to have devoted his attention in this direction, except Paranavitāna, who has, as we have indicated earlier, brought to the notice of scholars, three inscriptions he considers to have been drafted in verse. Since the graffiti at Sigiri go back to the sixth century and the subsequent period, we may examine the inscriptions coming down only as far as the verses at Sigiri. Of the inscriptions coming under this period, we could easily leave out the one-lined short ones, though almost all of them, being of an assonant and metrical nature, are easily capable of being constructed into two lines of sonorous verse. There are also two other inscriptions,¹⁶ which, though two-lined, being very short, can be put into only two lines of verse, and hence would be left out. But the fact that all the above inscriptions could be set into either one or two lines of a sonorous and metrical pattern, does indeed indicate the possibility of the poet's art being at work in these inscriptions. We can also leave out fourteen other inscriptions,¹⁷ being either too long for our examination or with the text missing here and there, or both. It may however be possible that these long inscriptions may have been composed in more than one verse.

I shall here consider altogether ten inscriptions, as to the possibility of their being in verse. While admitting that there can be no finality at all in the arrangement of the lines here made, I give below what I consider to be the possible form of the lines of the inscriptions put into verse.

	Mātrās
1 Damarakita tera (śa)	8
Agata-anagata-catudiśa	11
[Sa]gāśa Anikaṭa-Ṣoṇa-pitaha	13
Bariya [u]paśika Ti (śa) ya leṇe ¹⁸	12

"The cave of the female devotee Tiśa (Tissā), wife of the father of Anikaṭa-Ṣoṇa, [is dedicated] to Dhammarakkhita Thēra [and] to the [Buddhist] priesthood of the four quarters, present and not present."¹⁸

16. See E. Z. Vol. I, p. 21; Vol. III, p. 162.

17. See E. Z. Vol. I, p. 146, (b); Vol. III, p. 166; Vol. I, p. 69; Vol. III, p. 166; Vol. III, p. 116; Vol. I, pp. 61-62; Vol. I, p. 148, a, b; Vol. I, pp. 254-255; Vol. III, pp. 177-178; Vol. III, p. 122; Vol. III, p. 250; Vol. III, p. 251. Vol. III, p. 218.

18. See E. Z. Vol. I, p. 18.

15. Grierson, G. A. op. cit. p. 122.

	Mātrās
2 Parumaka-Palikada-puta	10
Parumaka-Palikada-puta	10
Upasaka-Harumasa	8
Leṇe catudisa-śagasa ¹⁹	9

“The cave of the lay devotee Haruma, son of His Eminence Palikada, [is dedicated] to the [Buddhist] priesthood of the four quarters.”¹⁹

	Mātrās
3 Parumaka-Palikadasa	9
Bariya Parumaka-Śirikita	11
Jhita upasika-Citaya	9
Leṇe śagaśa catudiśa ¹⁹	9 ^{19a}

“The cave of the female devotee Cita (Citrā), daughter of His Eminence Śiri-kita (Śri-kīrti ?) and wife of His Eminence Palikada, [is dedicated] to the [Buddhist] priesthood of the four quarters.”¹⁹

	Mātrās
4 Devanapiya maharajaha	10
Gamiṇi-Tisaha puta Devanapiya	13
Tisa-A[baya]ha leṇe agata	11
Anagata catudisa sagasa (di) [ne] ²⁰	13

“The cave of Devanapiya Tisa Abaya, son of the great king Devanapiya Gamaṇi Tisa, is given to the Buddhist priesthood from the four quarters, present and not present.”²⁰

	Mātrās
5 Mahamata Bamadata puta puru-	12
maka Bahike purumaka Puśa-gute	13
purumaka Mite purumaka Tiśc	12
Etehi karite Ariṭa-maha-gama ²¹	13

“In the fifteenth year (?), the sons of the Mahamata Bamadata [namely] His Eminence Bahika, His Eminence Puśaguta, His Eminence Mita and His Eminence Tiśa—by these chieftains was formed the great village Ariṭa.”²¹

19. E. Z. Vol. I. p. 19.

19a. This could be taken to consist of 9, 11, 10, 11 mātrās as well, in which case it resembles; Verses 409, 415 and 428 of Kavsilumina. See the edition of Siddhattha.

20. E. Z. Vol. I. p. 144.

21. E. Z. Vol. I. p. 152.

	Mātrās
6 ²² Devanapiya Tisa maha—	9
rajaha Marumaṇaka Kuḍa-kaṇa	12
Rajaha jeṭa pute	7
Raja Abaye ataragagahi	11
Gaṇa . . takaha aḍi	8
Pilipavata viharahi	9
Biku-sagaya sovaṇa—	8
Koturu(ni) niyate ²³	7

“Hail ! King Abaya, eldest son of King Kuṭakana and grandson of the great King Devanapiya Tisa, dedicated with the golden vase (i.e. having poured water into the hands of the donee with a golden vase), the canal of Gaṇa . . taka in the Ataragaga (country) to the monks (residing) in the Pilipavata monastery.”²³

	Mātrās
7 ²⁴ Sabaraje Ekadorika-Viharahi	13
Pohatakara karavaya Upaladoṇika-vavi	17
Pacasate(hi) kiṇiya paca-satehiya	14
Pasu ovaya biku-sagahaṭaya dine ²⁵	14

“Hail ! King Saba constructed the Sabbath-hall at the Ekadorika Monastery ; and having bought the Upaladoṇika tank for five hundred [pieces of money] and having removed the silt by [spending another] five hundred gave the same to the confraternity of monks.”²⁵

	Mātrās
8 Maharaja (ha Vaha) bayaha	10
Maṇumaraka Tisa-maharajaha	12
Puti maharaji Gamiṇi-	9
Abeya Upala-vibajakahi	11 (a)
Vaḍamanaka-vavi paca-saha(si)	12
Kahāvana dariya kaṇavaya	12
Tubaraba buka-sagahaṭaya catiri	14
Paceṇi pari [bujanaka koṭu dinī] ²⁶	13

22. This inscription was taken on, though there is *one* letter missing in 1.2. The ‘maṅgala’ word ‘siddham’ at the beginning of the inscription has been left out here.

23. E. Z. Vol. III. p. 154.

24. The ‘maṅgala’ word ‘sidha’ has been left out here.

25. E. Z. Vol. III. p. 165.

(a) If this verse is taken to contain 10, 12, 10, 12 mātrās in the four lines respectively, it would be exactly similar to v. 440 of Kavsilumina, as found in the edition of Siddhattha.

26. E. Z. Vol. I. p. 211.

“The great king Gamiṇi Abaya, son of the great king Tisa [and] grandson of the great king Vahaba, having borne [the expense of] five thousand *kaha-vaṇas*, and having caused the Vaṭamanaka Tank in the Upala division to be dug, [granted the same] to the community of monks at Tubaraba, [and thereby secured for them the enjoyment] of the four priestly requisities.”²⁶

	Mātrās
9 ²⁶ Kaḍaha (va)p[i]-gama Dakavahanaka-	13
Vasiya-Nada-tere ceta vadita	12
Akuju (ka) bikujarana samatavaya	14
Cataradorahi patagaḍa ataḍi ²⁷	13

“(Hail) ! The elder Nada, residing at Dakavahanaka in the village Kaḍahavapi enlarged the *cetiya* ; [and] laid the steps at the four entrances having made the chief monks at Akujuka acquiesce [therein].”²⁷

	Mātrās
10 Maharaja Vahayaha rajehi	11
Ameta Isigiraye Nakadiva	12
Bujameni Badakara-atanehi	12
Piyaguka-Tisa vihara karite ²⁸	12

“Hail ! In the reign of the great king Vaha[ba] and when the Minister Isigiriya was governing Nakadiva, Piyaguka Tisa caused a *viḥarā* to be built at Badakara-atana.”²⁸

In his article, “Brāhmī inscriptions in Sinhalese verse,” Paranavitāna puts forward the theory, that of the Brāhmī inscriptions found in Ceylon, only the three inscriptions he has observed in his article, could be considered to have been written in verse, together with a possible incomplete stanza indicated at the end of his article. He has not considered any of the inscriptions we have observed above, probably because he does not consider them to be in verse, since they cannot be assigned to any metrical form according to those observed in Sanskrit, Prākṛit or Sinhalese works on prosody. But we need not be deterred on this account, for it is a fallacy to conclude that all the possible *vr̥ttas* (rhythm) under any metre are recorded in these prosodical works. Any work on prosody could, and necessarily would discuss only a few of these *vr̥ttas*, for they could be counted by the thousands. This fact is particularly so with regard to the Sinhalese prosodical work, *Elu-saṅḍas-lakuṇa*. It would be no exaggeration to say, therefore, that the *vr̥ttas* not enumerated in the work would number many times more than those actually observed in it.

26. E. Z. Vol. I. p. 211.

26a. The ‘maṅgala’ letter ‘si’ at the beginning has been left out.

27. E. Z. Vol. III. p. 215.

28. E. Z. Vol. IV. p. 237. The ‘maṅgala’ word has been left out.

What we have been so far trying to establish is, that the fact that these inscriptions we have observed, cannot be assigned to any particular metre or rhythm observed in these works of prosody, should not be the criterion to decide their metrical nature or not. On the other hand, if they are not a sort of metrical composition, it is rather difficult to understand the assonant nature of the compositions and the particular arrangement of the words in these inscriptions.

Attracted by a particularly assonant and rhythmic nature of these inscriptions together with their peculiar arrangement of the words, I examined the inscriptions Nos. I—10 given above, covering a period of four centuries, from 2nd century B.C. to 2nd century A.D., by breaking them up into *pādas*, without making any special attempt to make them conform to any particular metrical pattern. The only criterion followed in this attempt was the ability to read each line into a rhythmic unit. Inscriptions of the succeeding period could not be included in this analysis, because all the available inscriptions from the 3rd century A.D. to 5th century A.D. had to be left out, either because they were too long for an examination of this nature or because numerous letters were missing from the text, or both. In this analysis, I have given against each *pāda*, the number of syllabic instants, or *mātrās* coming in it. As far as these are concerned, there is absolute authority in poetry to consider a *mātrā* long or short for reason of *yati*²⁹ (or caesura). Therefore the number of *mātrās* given by me against each line could be adjusted to contain one or two *mātrās* more or less in each *pāda*. For example, the last syllable in each line, though short, could for all purposes be considered long and counted as such, without any break of poetic rules. Thus it could even be said that the *mātrās* in 1 could, quite justifiably be counted as 9, 12, 14 and 13 ; of 2 as 11, 11, 9 and 10 ; and those of 10 as 12, 12, 12, 12 etc. It is also permissible according to *Elu-saṅḍas-lakuṇa* that while a long syllable may be shortened, the opposite is also applicable for purposes where a particular number or *mātrās* may be required for a *pāda*.³⁰ On this basis, the last line of 3 could be considered to contain 11 *mātrās* by taking the last *e* of ‘*lene*,’ and the last vowel of the line to be long. Then the verse would contain 9, 11, 9, 11 *mātrās* in the four lines respectively. This is a very important observation for us, for, we see the example from *Asakḍā-kava* given in the *Sidat-saṅgarā* as exception to the rule regarding the use of ‘*ha*’ falling into this precise pattern. We also find other similar instances in literature.³¹ But

29. See *Elu-saṅḍas-lakuṇa*, V. 4.

30. See, *Elu-saṅḍas-lakuṇa*, V. 4.

31. See, *Harṇsa-sandesa*, V. 1.

we find that this *vr̥tta* is not recorded in *Elu-sañ̥das-lakūṇa*. Thus, on the same grounds that justify us in regarding the above as verse, it would be difficult not to recognize these inscriptions also as having been written in verse, although none of them find a place among the categories of verses enumerated in books. This position has been clearly exemplified in the *Elu-sañ̥das-lakūṇa* itself, when its author says that metrical types in Sinhalese contain hundred thousands of millions of poetic *vr̥ttas*, and further goes on to say that if poets were to embark on these, what compositions of theirs would not fall into a *vr̥tta*?³² Thus, although none of the inscriptions in the form arranged above as verses can be identified with any metre or *vr̥tta* recorded in works of prosody, yet the categories into which they may fall could be determined with a fair amount of certainty, for, a careful examination of the verses 1, 2, 3 and 6 would induce us with reason, to consider them as modified forms of verses belonging to the class called *vaktra-chandas*. And 4, 5, 7, 8, 9 and 10 could be considered as belonging to a modified form of *gīti* type found in the *āryā* metre. Just as Indo-āryan words became modified as they passed into Sinhalese, like *āgata* < *aḡata*, *Dhammarakkhita* < *Damarakita*, *saṅghassa* < *sagasa* etc., so when a Sanskrit or Pāli verse is imitated in Sinhalese poetry, a modification of the syllabic numbers of the original appears to have taken place as a natural process.³³ The Sinhalese *yāgī* which is an imitation of *āryā*, from which it also appears to have derived its name, (Skt. *aryā* < P.*ariyā* < S. *āyyā* < *yā*) serves as an excellent example to show the validity of this theory. According to Sinhalese prosody, a *yāgī* contains 20 *mātrās* in the first half, and 22 *mātrās* in the second half of the verse. It appears that this pattern got established itself in Sinhalese poetry, as a result of the fact that the original *āryā* of 30 and 27 *mātrās* in the first and second half respectively, reduced themselves in Sinhalese to 20 and 22 *mātrās*. That *yāgī* is derived from *āryā* can be indicated further by showing that the number of words in a line of *āryā* verse could be put into a line of *yāgī*, with slight changes, necessitated of course, due to the case system in Sinhalese. To take a few examples:³⁴

1. *Sanskrit*

Taruṇaṃ sarṣapa śākam—navaudanaṃ picchilāṇica dadhīni
Alpavyayena sundari—grāmyajano miṣṭam aśnāti³⁵

Beloved, the peasant folk enjoy such delicacies as tender mustard leaves, freshly cooked rice and sour curd, at little expense.

32. See, *Elu-sañ̥das-lakūṇa*, V. 115.

33. I am indebted to Dr C. E. Godakumbura of the University of London for this view which has been first put forward to him by Professor Helmer Smith.

34. I record here my indebtedness to Dr M. Sri Rammandala of the Department of Sinhalese for assistance in this direction.

35. *Vṛttaratnākara*, V. 11.

<i>Sinhalese</i>	<i>Mātrās</i>
Turuṇu habadaḷukoḷa—navabat āmbul dikiri	(20)
Maṇḍa viyadamini soṇḍure—gāmidene rasaṭa valaṇḍā	(22)

2. *Pāli*

Danto dantehi saha—purāṇajaṭilehi vippamuttche
Siṅginikkhasuvaṇṇo—Rājagahaṃ pāvisi bhagavā³⁶

“The tamed with the tamed, with the former matted-hair ascetics, the well freed with the well freed, The Lord, beautifully coloured like a golden ornament, entered Rajagaha.”³⁷

<i>Sinhalese</i>	<i>Mātrās</i>
Dāmi dāmunavun saha—pāraṇi duḷulu midunavun	(20)
Siṅgunik samavanātiye—Rajagaha pivisi bagavat	(22)

3. *Prākṛit*

attā ! taha ramaṇijjaṇ
amhaṇ gāmassa maṇḍani-hūṇaṇ
lua-tila-vāḍi-saricchaṇ
sisireṇa kaam bhisiṇi-saṇḍaṇ³⁸

“Oh mother ! So the mass of lotuses that was so delightful and the ornament of our village, the cold has made like a garden of cut sesamum.”³⁹

Sinhalese

Mavsāṇḍini ramaṇi—apa gamaṭa maṇḍanak baṇḍu
Tala-kāpu-piṭiya men—keḷe sisireni bisini haṇḍa.
(piyum vana)

To reverse the order, let us now see how a Sinhalese *yāgī* would appear in Sanskrit and Pāli respectively.

1. *Sinhalese*

Raja pāmīni bōsat—sat rajuneḍi māḍa viṣi
Viṣi tamā kara kalak—kalak dasaraḷa dammen^{39a}

36. The Vinayapīṭaka, ed. Oldenburg, H., Vol. I. The Mahavagga, Williams and Norgate, 1879. p. 38.

37. The Book of Discipline, Vol. IV, Mahavagga, Translated by I. B. Horner, Luzac & Co. Ltd., 1951, p. 50.

38. Hala, Sattasāi. V. 8.

39. Woolner, A. C., Introduction to Prākṛit, 1939. p. 119.

39a. Kavsilumina, V. 5.

The bosat who had become king, ruled according to the ten regal virtues, suppressing the might of the seven kings, and making his wife well-disposed towards him.

Sanskrit

Rājyasthabodhisatvaḥ—saptanṛpānām uvāsa hṛtadarpaḥ
Nijavaśakṛtāgrakāntaḥ—daśarājadharmaparo suciraṃ.

2. Sinhalese

Paha usbavata tos—vī rivi ē puraverē
Dāka simādurōrechi—vuvan piyum varaṅganā^{39b}

Pāli

Pasādunnatituttḥo—babhūva ravi puravare tasmim
Disvāna sīhapañjara—varāṅganāvadanapadumāni^{39c}

3. Sinhalese

Raṅga nobaṅda kēnam—kē nam nogī tiyugī
Novismū len kavarek—kavarek nohaḷa pudavat^{39d}

Pāli

Ke vā abaddharaṅgā—ke vā thutigītayo na gāyimsu
Ke vā vimhītahadaya—anāhaṭa pujjavatthūnaṃ

This observation reveals two very valuable facts concerning Sinhalese versification, namely,

(a) Indo-Āryan *mātrā* metres are the prototype of the Sinhalese *gī* metre.

(b) The number of *mātrās* of the Indo-āryan *mātrā vṛttas* appear differently in Sinhalese *mātrā vṛttas*.

But, unfortunately we are not in a position to trace each and every one of the Sinhalese *gī* metres to its precise prototype with any certainty as in the case of the *yāgī* for, probably due to very apparent differences seen in the Sinhalese and its original prosodial metres, Sinhalese poets named their verses with names different from the original from which they derived them. Therefore they used such names as, *umatu gī*, *yon gī*, *piyumi gī*, etc. which names are not found in Sanskrit, Pāli, or Prākṛit poetry. But from what has been said so far, it may be asserted beyond doubt that all these *gī* tunes must be imitations of one or the other of the Sanskrit, Pāli or Prākṛit *mātrā vṛttas*, namely,

39b. Muvadevdā-vata, V. 9.

Seeing the lotus-like faces of the noble damsels in the balconies of that great city, the sun was gladdened at the height of the mansions.

39c. This is a Pali upagīta, which contains the characteristics of the second half of āryā metre in both its lines.

39d. Sasadāvata, V. 203.

What being did not dance (for joy) and who did not sing songs of joy? What being did not wonder in mind, and who did not offer objects of worship?

- (a) *Āryā*
(b) *Āryā gīti*
(c) *Vaktra*, and
(d) *Vetāliya*

And all these possible *gī* tunes modelled after the above-mentioned varieties of *mātrā* metres have not been exemplified in the *Elu-sañdas-lakuṇa* as is proved by the fact that verses composed in metres different from those given in it, are found in works both before and after the *Elu-sañdas-lakuṇa*

Further evidence to indicate the fact that the syllabic position of the original verse stands differently in the Sinhalese may be seen from two more examples given below, from tunes other than the *āryā* type.

1. Pāli

Pakkodano duddhakhīrohamasmi
Anutīre mahiyā samānavāso
Channā kuṭi āhito gini
Atha ce patthayasī pavassa deva.⁴⁰

Living on the banks of the mahī river with my cows, I have milked them, and cooked my rice. My hut is thatched, the fire is lit, and O Rain, thou mayest rain if thou wishest.

Sinhalese

	Mātrās
Pisu batimi devu kirimi mam	12
Vasam mihi nadiye samaterē	13
Seviniya kiḷi dālvina gini	12
Vasnē vāsi dān kāmatiyehi nam	15

2. Pāli

Manujassa pamattacārino
Taṅhā vaḍḍhati māluvā viya
So plavati hurāhuram
Phalamiccham va vanasmim vānaro⁴¹

Sinhalese

	Mātrās
Pamadin sarana minisahu	11
Taṅa vaḍḍenuyē māluvā ev	14
Hē palayi beven bevē	11
Pala isnā venehi vaḍḍuru ev	14

40. Fausböll, V. Suttanipāta, Oxford University Press, 1885. p. 3. V. 18.

41. Fausböll, V. Dhammapada, Luzac & Co. London, 1900. p. 74. V. 334.

Examples of this nature could be multiplied quite easily. One observes a very striking similarity in the above verses and the inscriptions I have rendered into metrical form. Both these types are not found mentioned in any of the works on prosody. But that fact cannot in any way exclude these from the domain of poetical composition. It may be mentioned here that in later times, like that of Parakkamabāhu I, not to speak of Nissankamalla, we have inscriptions in poetic form. Reference may be made to a Sanskrit śloka and a Sinhalese inscription considered to be in verse appearing among the inscriptions of Parakkamabāhu I.

Svasti—Idaṃ Laṅkādhināthena
Sri Parākrama Bāhunā
Kāritaṃ viśvalokārthaṃ
Kāryyavyāpāritātmanā.⁴²

“This was caused to be made for the benefit of the whole world by Sri Parākrama Bāhu, Supreme Lord of Lankā, minded of what was fit to be done.”⁴²

The Sinhalese inscription, cut in five lines, would appear as follows in the verse :

Bāṇḍa nī gaṅga vāvu
Siri Lakāda ket karavā
Siyal diya raṇḍavā
Pārākumbā niriṇḍu keḷe mē⁴²

“Having dammed up smaller streams, rivers, [and constructed] tanks in Sri Lankā [and] caused fields to be cultivated [and] all the water to be retained [in the tanks,] King Parākrama Bāhu made this.”⁴²

On the face of all this evidence we have observed, it seems justifiable for us to conclude that even the early inscriptions of Ceylon, at least up to the time we have examined, have been mostly written in verse, which would take our poetic tradition to very ancient times.

Reference may also be made to the statement made by Buddhaghōsa in one of his commentaries regarding songs sung by women working in the fields in Ceylon.⁴³

Coming on to the time of Kumārādāsa of the early sixth century, we have the very popular tradition where he is said to have inscribed the first

42. Archaeological Survey of Ceylon, Seventh Progress Report of 1891, Ceylon Sessional Paper XIII of 1896. p. 63.

43. See, Buddhaghōsa. Paramathajotika, II, P. T. S. p. 397.

two lines of a stanza on a wall of a house he had visited, promising a handsome reward for anyone who would appropriately complete the verse. This was later on said to have been done by Kālidāsa the poet friend of the king. Without going into any discussion regarding the veracity of this popular identification, we may merely say here that it has been questioned by scholars on various grounds. We cannot also bring in any scientific evidence to establish the truth of this incident. All we could say is that there is a strong tradition regarding it. On examining the verse considered to have been the one concerned, we observe more developed features in it than in the Sīgiri verses ascribed to the same period. Therefore all we can say is, we cannot be certain of the authenticity of the verse, for, it appears to be modern.

In the absence of any work written by Mogallāna or the twelve great poets of the time of Aggabodhi I, we have naturally to turn to the next earliest specimens of the poetic art in Sinhalese, the Sīgiri graffiti. Archaeological work at Sīgiri first begun in 1895,⁴⁴ was carried on till 1905,⁴⁵ when for the first time, the existence of these very important lithic records was made known to the public in the report for that year.⁴⁶ Bell, who was responsible for the excavation work at Sīgiri and for bringing these remarkable lithic records to the notice of the public, not only realized their great importance, but also published, according to his own reading, ten such records with his own version of the translation.⁴⁷ He also recognised the antiquity of these records when he says, “The ‘inscriptions’ in Sinhalese date paleographically from the 6th to the 15th century.”⁴⁷ The ten verses published by Bell belong to the period between the twelfth and the fourteenth centuries. The next scholar associated with the study of these graffiti is Paranavitāna, who seems to have directed his attention to these lithic records in about 1929,⁴⁸ that is, twenty four years after they were first brought to light. Paranavitāna, while drawing our attention to the fact that the verses belonging to the sixth and seventh centuries are few, and only a very few of these belonging to a period after the eleventh century are of any particular interest,⁴⁹ tells us that “the majority of the graffiti belonging paleographically to the 8th and 9th centuries consists of stanzas, some of them rhymed, . . .”⁵⁰ Paranavitāna also believes that there must

44. A. S. C. 1895, Ceylon Sessional Paper XL of 1904. p. 10.

45. Ibid. 1905, Ceylon Sessional Paper XX of 1909. pp. 12-14.

46. Ibid. Appendix C, pp. 53-55.

47. Ibid. p. 53.

48. Paranavitāna, S. Sīgiriya Graffiti : Earliest Extant Specimens of Sinhalese Verse, J. R. A. S. CB. Vol. XXXIV. No. 92. p. 314.

49. Ibid. p. 310.

50. Ibid. p. 311.

have been a large number of verses written on the wall, very much more than what appears to be at the present time, and he further believes that the sections of the wall which have collapsed may also have had these verses inscribed on them.⁵¹ In 1939, he has "succeeded in obtaining satisfactory readings and interpretations of over 150 of these notable records."⁵² and towards the latter half of 1940, he claims to have successfully deciphered over 350 verses.⁵³

I have earlier developed the theory that the early inscriptions have been written as poetry. If we were to neglect this theory for a little while, we may say that the earliest extant poetry, where we could bring in conclusive evidence, is found in the Sīgiriya verses. It is unfortunate that Paranavitāna in his essay,⁵⁴ has not dealt with the graffiti belonging to the early 6th and 7th centuries.⁵⁵ Nor has Bell examined these. Therefore our analysis will have to be confined to only these verses, the text of which has been given by Paranavitāna in his essay, for, no other verse is available to us. Paranavitāna has given altogether 42 verses, belonging to the period from the 8th to the 11th centuries.

From these we note that the majority of the verses are *gī* verses. And there are also two four-lined rhymed verses.⁵⁶ We may also consider another verse which has been written as a rhymed verse.⁵⁷ Examining the rhymed ones we note that they have been written to rhyme at the end only, and not at the beginning. It may therefore be possible that at this time, the rhyming was made only at the end of the line. Further, from the very significant majority of the *gī* verses we may conclude that the four-lined verses made their appearance later in poetry. It may be possible that our early poets found it easier and more convenient to write the short *gī* verses without 'elisama' than the four-lined verses. The fact that the term *gī* has been used by the writers more than once,⁵⁸ and 'yāgī' twice,⁵⁹ in their verses, indicates that these terms had come into use at these particular times which shows a developed stage of the poetical art.

In conclusion it may be surmised that the origin of Sinhalese poetry is perhaps as old as the earliest Sinhalese language developed by the first settlers in this country; and, that on inscriptional evidence it could be stated to be at least as old as the earliest inscriptions, and by the time of the Sīgiri verses the poet's art in Ceylon had developed to the extent of having its own terms for various types of versification.

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51. Paranavitāna, S. "Sīgiri Graffiti: Earliest Extant Specimens of Sinhalese Verse"—Journal R. A. S. C.B., Vol. XXXIV, No. 92 of 1939, p. 315.

52. Ibid. p. 314.

53. Ibid. p. 315.

54. Ibid. p. 309ff.

55. Ibid. p. 310-311.

56. Ibid. p. 324.

57. Ibid. p. 316.

58. Ibid. pp. 321, 333, 334, 335 and 337.

59. Ibid. pp. 334 and 335.