

A Note on Syllable - Quantity in Sinhalese metre

මතෙක් ලුහු ගුරු වේ — දෙ මත් දිගු හා පසු හල්.

Matek luhu guru vē — de mat digu hā pasu hal.

A light syllable is one mātrā. A heavy syllable, namely, a long vowel or a vowel and consonant, is two mātrās.¹

This aphorism on syllable-quantity comes in the second verse of the Sañdās Lakūṇa (13th century A.D.), the earliest extant, but nonetheless current, treatise on Sinhalese metrics. This statement provides a two-term system of quantity which may be stated as follows by generalizing the syllable in terms of C and V² and using the macron to indicate vowel length :

light (luhu) syllables :	V,	CV	= one mātrā.
heavy (guru) syllables :	V̄,	CṪ	} = two mātrās.
	VC,	CVC	
	V̄C,	CṪC	

In this note I propose to make a few observations on this concept.³

The statement of luhu and guru syllables in Sinhalese is identical with the statement of laghu and guru in Sanskrit. In Sanskrit, a laghu syllable (V, CV) is one mātrā and a guru syllable (V̄, CṪ, VC, CVC, V̄C, CṪC) is two mātrās.⁴

So far as Sanskrit poetry⁵ is concerned, this system is applicable without any lapses. Where a laghu syllable is prescribed by metrics, one may have V or CV. Where a guru syllable is prescribed, one may have V̄, CṪ,

1. The mention of only the vowel and the final consonant shows that the initial consonant, if any, is immaterial for the mātrā structure of the syllable.

2. C = consonant ; V = vowel.

3. Quantity, which is a two-term system, is different from length. Length is said to be a three-term system, harasva (short), dīrgha (long) and pluta (extra long). But pluta, they say, cannot be written. It is only the prolongation of a vocalic sound.

4. See also W. S. Allen, *Phonetics in Ancient India*, pp. 83 ff.

5. See A. A. Macdonell, *A Sanskrit Grammar for Students*, pp. 234-5.

UNIVERSITY OF CEYLON REVIEW

In counting the mātrā structure by alletting one mātrā to each light (—) syllable we find that—

- in (1) the light syllables count 7, and therefore CVC=2.
- in (2) the light syllables count 7, and therefore CVC=2.
- in (3) the light syllable counts 1, the two CVC syllables count, as shown in (1) and (2), 4 ; therefore the two CV syllables=4, whence CV=2,
- in (4) the light syllables count 6, and therefore CVC=3.

This observation indicates that a three-term system of mātrā structure should be recognized for non-Sanskritic metres in Sinhalese as—

(C) V	=	1 mātrā.
(C) \bar{V} , (C) VC	=	2 mātrās.
(C) $\bar{V}C$	=	3 mātrās.

On this basis a three-term system of syllable quantity may be set up for analysing Sinhalese as light, medium and heavy, whereby the phonetic distinction of length between such pairs as pan, pān ; gat, gāt ; mas, mās ; etc., can be phonologically stated in terms of the category of quantity.

M. W. S. DE SILVA