

# **One ‘Sanskrit-Mad’ scholar and the Beginning of the Study of Epigraphy in India**

Sayantani Pal

Department of Ancient Indian History and Culture,

University of Calcutta

[sayantani72@gmail.com](mailto:sayantani72@gmail.com)

*Inscriptions are mute documents and historian  
have to keep on trying to make them speak*

- B.D. Chattopadhyaya (Interview  
recorded by Sahapedia)

[In Conversation with Professor B.D. Chattopadhyaya with the participation of Professor Suchandra Ghosh: The  
Different Aspects of Indian Epigraphy | Sahapedia](#)

<https://youtu.be/6dzmBEPARBQ>

# 3 articles of Charles Wilkins in the Asiatic Researches, Vol. I, 1788

- A Royal grant of Land, Engraved on a Copper plate, Bearing Date twenty three Years before Christ and Discovered among the Ruins of Mongueer
- An Inscription on a Pillar near Buddal
- Translation of a Sanskrit Inscription, copied from a Stone at Booddhagaya by Mr. Wilmot, 1785.

# Munger Copper Plate of Devapala: Different editions

- Charles Wilkins: *Asiatick Researches* , vol.1, 1788
- F. Kielhorn : *Indian Antiquary* XXI, 1892
- A.K. Maitreya: *Gaudalekhamala*, 1912
- L.D. Barnett: *Epigraphia Indica* XVIII, 1925-26



Munger Copper Plate of Devapala,  
Estampage of the obverse  
Epigraphia Indica, vol.18 (1925-26)



## Munger Copper Plate, Reverse



सुपराक्षुपुत्र  
मरुतिविश्वरूप

[illegible]

[illegible]





The Munger Copper Plate and the published transcript  
In Epigraphia Indica Vol.18

### TEXT.<sup>1</sup>

#### First Side.

- 1 Ōm\* svasti | Siddhārthasya par-ārtha-susthira<sup>2</sup>-
- 2 matēḥ san-mārgam=abhyasyatas=siddhis=siddhim=a-
- 3 nuttarām=bhagavatas=tasya prajāsu kriyāt | yas=traidhātuka-sat[t\*]va-siddhi-padavīr-  
atyugra-vīry-odayāj=jitvā nirvṛiti-
- 4 m=āsasāda sugataḥ san=sarvva-bhūm-īśvaraḥ\* || [1\*] Saubhāgyan=dadhad=atulaṁ  
śriyas=sapatnyā **Gōpālāḥ** patir=abhavad=vasu-
- 5 ndharāyāḥ | dṛiṣṭ-āntē sati kṛtinām surājñi yasmin=śraddhēyāḥ Prithu-Sagar-ādayō=  
py=abhūvan || [2\*] Vijitya yēn=ā jaladhēr=vasundha-
- 6 rām vimōchitā mōgha-parigrahā iti | sa-vāshpam=udvāshpa-vilōchanān=punar=vvanēshu  
va(ba)ndhūn=dadrishu(śu)r=mmataṅga-jāḥ || [3\*] Cha-
- 7 latsy=anantēshu va(ba)lēshu yasya viśvambharāyā nichitāṁ rajōbbhiḥ | pāda-prachāra-  
kshamam=antariksham=vihaṅgamānām suchiram=va(ba)bhūva || [4\*]

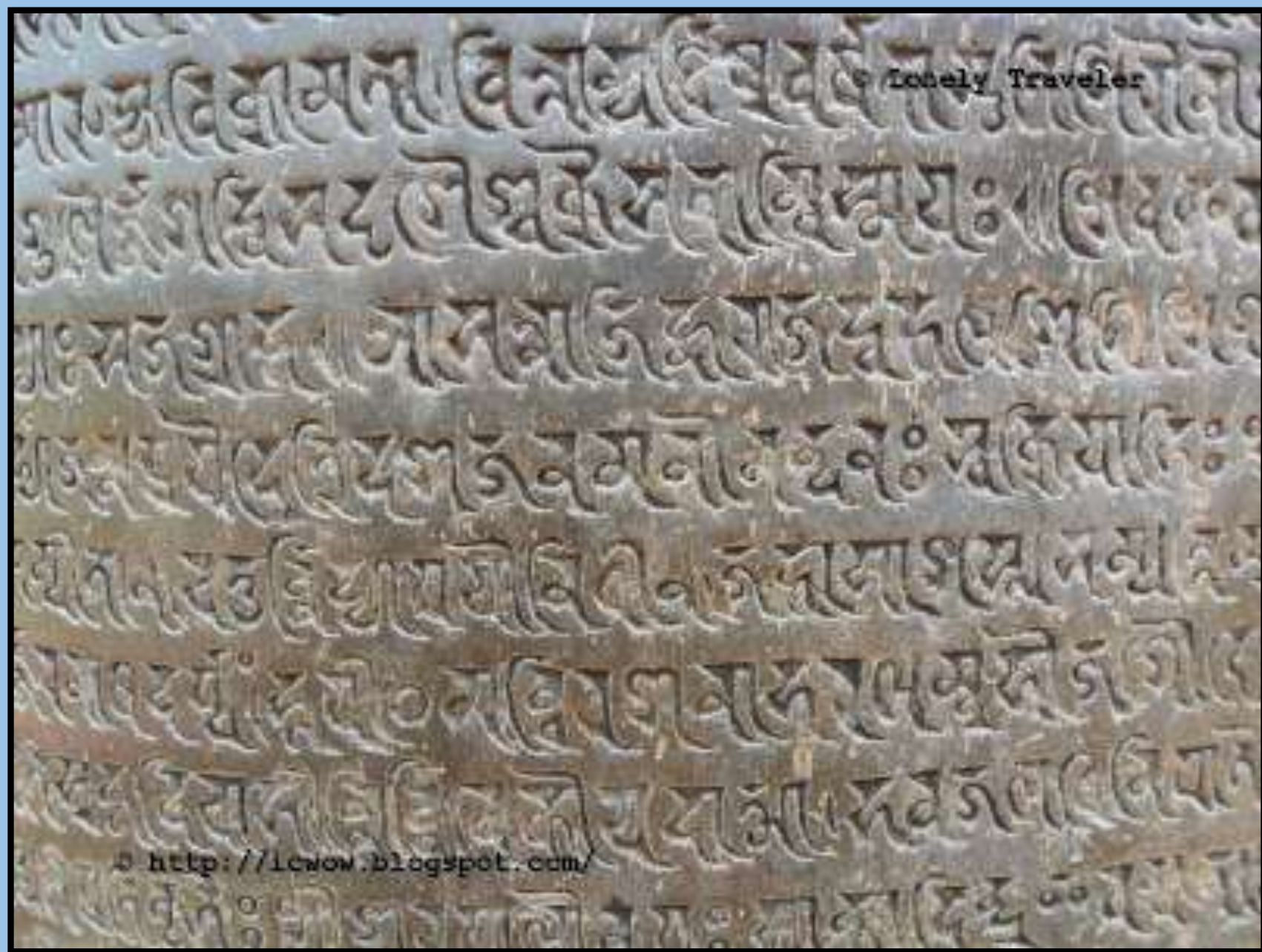
# Badal Pillar / Garuda Pillar, Mangalbari, Naogaon District, Bangladesh



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FRONT VIEW

SIDE VIEW



Drawing of the pillar by Wilkins

# Nagarjuni Cave Inscription , 6<sup>th</sup> century





नं इ क र्च य ङ्ग य कि र्च न्ना ब्रा वि  
क वि नं- टि ह्रा ट बु क म्पु दु र्वा ह  
आ कि पाः प्र मु न ति य लो क्ति आ ल  
ह्रा प्र ली बु न्नि यि प्र क ति सु प ष ति  
ं य मः न क्कः क कु टं म्पु य



# Nagarjuni Hill cave inscription of Anantavarman: Wilkins' copy

[illegible]

श्री ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय ॥ श्रीगणेशाय नमः ॥  
 सावयेम हिमसुरस्यसि रसिन्यसः कनू उर

ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय ॥ ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय ॥ ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय ॥  
 ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय ॥ ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय ॥ ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय ॥

प्र सु न वि यत्ने दू विष्णु न म म ह त्तु अ न भः प दं  
 म त्प ने वि म ले तु नि म न म श श प्र स भः प दं

भुक्तुं प्रियं कृति सुखं ममिदं न दद्यात्पुनः सत्कृतं हि  
 भूतं पित्र कृति सखं ममिदं न दद्यात्पुनः सत्कृतं हि

ननु नः क तु दं य मे च न तु च न श्रुति न दं य मः  
न च न क तु दं य मः न तु च न श्रुति न दं य मः

[illegible]

शुभं कृदि न कृदि कृदि      विष्णुं कृदि न कृदि कृदि  
 स्मृतं नेहि न भक्तिभक्ति      विष्णुं कृदि न कृदि कृदि

ॐ श्रीगुरु नमः ॥ श्रीगुरु नमः ॥ श्रीगुरु नमः ॥ श्रीगुरु नमः ॥ श्रीगुरु नमः ॥

ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय ॥ ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय ॥ ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय ॥

गुणयनकुसुमिहंतान्कषादृष्ट  
श्रममन्त्रभविभवेरन्यन्नमद्वै

उ नि उ रु क ग र ण रु क न र्द ६३ अ ज सं र व  
उ नि र स स रो र ह स स क ल म क्षि य शो भं न य  
ट श्रु ङः कृ त क रे र्द ट स र मे व ७ वृ तो क वि तं  
दे व कः सि र भ ति क द स र शं उ ज न ल म क्षि न

*Unnidrasya saroruhasya sakalāmākṣipyā śobham̐ ruchā*

*Devyāḥ vaḥ sthira bhakti vāda sadṛśim yuñjan phalenārthitam*

Wilkins copy of the inscription of Anantavarman in which each *aksara* is accompanied by a corresponding Devnagari *aksara*

B.—Nagarjuni Hill Cave Inscription of Anantavarman.

1. ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय । नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय । नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय ।  
 2. ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय । नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय । नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय ।  
 3. ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय । नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय । नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय ।  
 4. ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय । नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय । नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय ।  
 5. ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय । नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय । नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय ।  
 6. ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय । नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय । नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय ।  
 7. ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय । नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय । नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय ।  
 8. ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय । नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय । नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय ।  
 9. ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय । नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय । नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय ।  
 10. ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय । नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय । नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय ।

Estampage of the inscription of Anantavarman from which Fleet deciphered it (CII, vol.3)

# Bengali alphabet as they appeared in N.B. Halhed's A Code of Gentoo Law (1776)





	Nagarjuni Hill Cave inscription of Asvata Varman (6th century)	Munger Copper plate of Devapala	Badal Pillar inscription of Narayanapala	Bengali script	Devnagari Script
a			𑂔	ৗ	अ
ā	𑂔		𑂕	ৗ	आ
i			𑂖	ঐ	इ
ī	-	-	-	ঐ	ई
u	𑂗		𑂘	ঔ	उ
ū				ঔ	ऊ
ṛ				ঋ	ऋ
					ॠ
ḷ					ऌ
e			𑂙	঎	ए
ai				ঐ	ऐ
o				ঔ	ओ
au				ঐ	औ

Comparison of *aksaras* in three inscriptions  
deciphered by Wilkins and the modern Bengali  
and Devnagari *aksaras*

## How is a **chanda** identified?

Every **akṣara** (syllable) is identified to be either **laghu** (short) or **guru** (long) as per the following rules of **chandaśāstra**.

1. **laghu** vowels: अ, इ, उ, ऋ, ॠ
2. **guru** vowels: आ, ई, ऊ, ॠ, ॡ, ए, ऐ, ओ, औ
3. **akṣara** is marked **laghu** or **guru** based on the vowel it contains.
4. **akṣara** containing **anusvāra** or **visarga** is always marked as **guru**.
5. **akṣara** that is followed by a **saṃyuktākṣara** (conjunct letter) is always marked **guru**.
6. **akṣara** that appears at the end of the **pada** (line) is always marked as **guru**.

Thus, every line of Sanskrit text can be transformed into a binary sequence of **laghu** and **guru** markers. Specific patterns of such sequences are identified as various **chandas**.

In the case of **akṣaragaṇavṛtta**, (i.e. meters requiring specific sequence of letters), the **akṣaras** are divided into groups of 3. There are 8 ( $2^3$ ) possible sequences of **laghu-guru** markers, each of which has been given a special name, called **gaṇa**.

The following table describes the **gaṇas**,

<b>gaṇa</b>	<b>lakṣaṇa</b>	<b>gaṇa</b>	<b>lakṣaṇa</b>
य	लगा	भ	गलल
र	गलग	ज	लगल
त	गगल	स	ललग
न	ललल	म	गगग

A sequence of **gaṇa** thus formed, is called **lakṣaṇa** of a **chanda**, and can be used to identify the **chanda**.

Language : Sanskrit

Script : Late Brāhmī of the Northern Class<sup>1</sup>

Metre : Verses 1-2, cannot be determined; V. 3 स्रग्धरा;  
V. 4 शाङ्खविक्रीडित; V. 5 स्रग्धरा; V. 6 मन्दाक्रान्ता;  
V. 7 शाङ्खविक्रीडित; V. 8 स्रग्धरा; V. 9 पृथ्वी

### TEXT<sup>1</sup>

- 1<sup>2</sup> ...कुल्यै(?)...स्वै ....।तस.....
- 2 [यस्य ?].....(॥•) [१•]
- 3 . मु<sup>१</sup>(१) व....
- 4 [स्फु]रहं (?) ... क्षः स्फुटोद[']सित.....प्रवितत.....(॥•) [२•]
- 5 यस्य प्र[ज्ञानु]षङ्गोचित-सुख-मनसः शास्त्र-त[त्त्व]।त्यं-भक्तुः  
—स्रग्धो— — — नि— — — नोच्छृ— — — (१•)
- 6 [स•]त्काव्य-श्री-विरोधान्बुध-गुणित-गुणाज्ञाहतानेव कृत्वा  
[वि]द्वल्लोके(१•)वि[ना][शि•] स्फुटबहु-कविता-कोर्त्ति-राज्यं भुनक्ति (॥•) [३]
- 7 [ए•][हे]होत्युपगुह्य भाव-पिशुनैरुत्कर्णितै रोमभिः  
सम्येषूच्छसितेषु तुल्य-कुलज-म्हानाननोद्वीक्ष[त]ः (१•)
- 8 [स्ने]ह-क्यालुक्षितेन बाष्प-गुरुणा तत्त्वेक्षिणा चक्षुषा  
यः पिबामिहितो नि[रीक्ष्य] निखि[लां\*] [पाद्येव\*][मुर्वी]मिति (॥•) [४]
- 9 [ह\*]ष्टा कर्माण्यनेकान्यमनुज-सदृशान्य[द्भु]तोद्भिन्न-हर्षा  
भ[१•]वैरास्वादय[न्तः•] — — — — — [के•]चित् (१•)

Metre  
Sragdhara

Suggestion regarding  
metres of each of the  
verses in a standard  
epigraphic publication.  
D.C. Sircar, 1965

	Nagarjuni Hill Inscription	Munger plate	Badal Pillar Inscriptions	Bengali	Devnagari
ka	क	क	क	क	क
kha	ख	ख	ख	ख	ख
ga	ग	ग	ग	ग	ग
gha	-	घ	-	घ	घ
na	-	-	-	ङ	ङ
ca	च	च	च	च	च
che	-	-	छ	छ	छ
ja	ज	ज	ज	ज	ज
jha	-	-	-	झ	झ
na	-	न	-	ञ	ञ
ta	ट	-	ट	ट	ट
tha	-	-	ठ	ठ	ठ
da	-	-	ड	ड	ड
dha	-	ध	-	ढ	ढ
na	न	न	न	न	न
ta	त	त	त	त	त
tha	-	थ	थ	थ	थ
da	द	द	द	द	द
dha	ध	ध	ध	ध	ध
na	न	न	न	न	न
pa	प	प	प	प	प
pha	-	फ	फ	फ	फ

	Nagarjuni Hill Inscription	Munger Plate	Badal Pillar Inscriptions	Bengali	Devnagari
ba	-	-	-	ब	ब
bha	भ	भ	भ	भ	भ
ma	म	म	म	म	म
ya	य	य	य	य	य
ra	र	र	र	र	र
la	ल	ल	ल	ल	ल
va	व	व	व	व	व
śa	श	श	श/ण	श	श
ṣa	ष	ष	ष	ष	ष
sa	स	स	स	स	स
ha	ह	ह	ह	ह	ह

verse 1

स/ sa    ज/ ja    स/ sa    त/ ta    त/ ta

si ddhā rthā | sya pa rā | rthā su sthi | na ma teh | sa nmā rga | ma bhya sya | tah

si ddhiḥ | si ddhi ma nu kta rā | mbha | ga va ta | sta sya pra | jā su kri | yāt

ya strai dhā | tu ka sa | tva si ddhi | pa da vi | na tyu gra | vi nyā da | yā

ji tvā ni | rva ti mā | sa sāda | su ga tah | sa rva rthā | bhū mi sva | rah

Metre/ Chanda identification: Śāṅḍilya vikṛīḍita

Munger Copper Plate  
Verse 1  
Chanda Identification

# Sanskrit metres used in three inscriptions deciphered by Wilkins

## 1. Munger copper plate of Devapala

Śārdulavikrīḍita, Praharṣiṇī, Vaṁśasthabila, Upajāti, Indravajrā, Aupachandasika, Āryā, Hariṇī, Rathoddhatā, Śālinī, Anuṣṭubh, Puṣpitāgrā, Vasantatilaka

## 2. Badal pillar inscription of Narayanapala

Anuṣṭubh, Vasantatilaka, Śārdulavikrīḍita, Sragdharā, Āryā, Mālinī, Upajāti

## 3. Nagarjuni Hill cave inscription of Maukharī Anantavarman

Śārdulavikrīḍita throughout (J.F. Fleet, CII, 3, p.227, fn.2)



Thank You