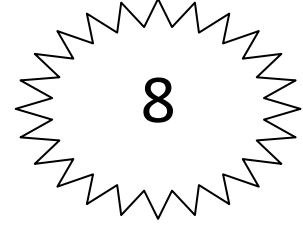


## Rhythmic and Prosodic Elements in Selected Stotrams of Shri Adi Shankaracharya

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### ABSTRACT

शङ्कारूपेण मच्चित्तं पङ्कीकृतमभूद्यया ।

किङ्करी यस्य सा माया शङ्कराचार्यमाश्रये ॥

The rhythmic and prosodic elements of Adi Shankaracharya's Stotrams form a captivating dimension within the realm of devotional poetry. This abstract delves into the intricate interplay of rhythm and prosody in his compositions, which hold a central place in the Vedic and philosophical traditions of India. Adi Shankaracharya, an eminent philosopher and theologian, crafted Stotrams - hymns of praise - as an expression of his profound spiritual insights. This study systematically examines the rhythmic patterns, metrical structures, and prosodic devices employed by Shankaracharya across various Stotrams. By analyzing the deliberate arrangement of syllables, stresses, and pauses, it uncovers how rhythmic cadences evoke a heightened sense of devotion and contemplation. Additionally, the exploration of prosodic features, including phonetic modifications and intonation, elucidates their role in infusing the verses with an emotive and melodic quality. The abstract ultimately underscores how the fusion of rhythm and prosody in Adi Shankaracharya's Stotrams transcends linguistic aesthetics to facilitate a deeper connection between the practitioner and the divine, elevating these compositions to timeless treasures of spiritual expression.

### KEYWORDS

Shankaracharya Stotras, Metres, Rhythm, Prosody, Chaturasra, Khanda, Bhujanga, Shardoola Vikreeditam, Vasanta Tilaka

### INTRODUCTION

Adi Shankaracharya, an eminent 8th-century Indian Vedic scholar and teacher (acharya), is renowned for his profound contributions. His extensive body of work encompasses over 300 texts, including commentaries (Bhāṣya), introductory topical expositions (Prakarāṇa grāṇtha), and poetry (Stotra). Within his writings, Shankaracharya skillfully harmonized the teachings of Advaita Vedanta prevalent during his era, with a profound emphasis on the liberating knowledge of the self at its core. At the heart of Shankara's philosophical endeavors lies the quest for liberating knowledge, which reveals the true identity of the jivatman (individual self) as Ātman-Brahman. Notably, this Indian philosopher and theologian also composed a multitude of stotrams (devotional hymns) that hold a revered place in Hinduism. These stotrams are celebrated for their profound philosophical insights, poetic elegance, and unwavering devotional fervor.

A Stotram, rooted in the Sanskrit language, encompasses the essence of an "ode," an "eulogy," or a "hymn of praise." It belongs to the rich literary tradition of Indian religious texts, designed to be sung with melodic grace, in contrast to the more recitation-oriented shastras. Within the realm of Stotram, one encounters a multifaceted form of expression; it can serve as a heartfelt prayer, an intricate description, or even a profound conversation, all elegantly structured in poetic form. Stotrams range from simple yet deeply reverent poems, expressing adoration and personal devotion to deities, to intricate verses that embed profound spiritual and philosophical doctrines. The term "stuti," derived from the same Sanskrit root ' स्तु ' ("to praise"), bears a similar essence, both essentially encapsulating the act of "praise." Stotrams hold a cherished place as a popular form of devotional literature, with their origins tracing back



to the Vedic period, notably within the Samaveda, showcasing their enduring significance throughout India's rich spiritual history.

Stotrams, often exhibit distinctive rhythmic and prosodic features that enhance their melodic and devotional qualities. They are typically composed in specific chandas (meters) which contribute to the rhythmic structure and musicality of the stotram. Repetition of words, phrases, or entire lines is a common rhythmic device in stotrams to add emphasis, and create a musical cadence, and enhances the overall poetic effect. Many stotrams are meant to be chanted or recited in a repetitive manner. The rhythmic chanting of stotrams can induce a meditative and trance-like state, deepening the spiritual experience. Stotrams often use alliteration (repetition of consonant sounds) and assonance (repetition of vowel sounds) to create a pleasing and rhythmic quality in the verses. This enhances the musicality of the recitation. Some stotrams have a recurring chorus or refrain, which not only adds a rhythmic element but also invites participation from a congregation during group chanting or singing. In some devotional practices, stotrams are sung with specific melodies or musical accompaniment, further enhancing their rhythmic and melodic qualities. The combination of music and lyrics creates a deeply immersive experience. When reciting or chanting stotrams, practitioners often pay attention to breath control and rhythm to maintain a consistent and soothing pace. This rhythmic breathing can enhance the meditative aspect of the practice. The placement of punctuation marks and natural pauses in the verses allows for a rhythmic flow and comprehension of the text during recitation.

Overall, the rhythmic and prosodic features of stotrams are intentionally designed to create an aesthetic, rhythmic, harmonious and spiritually uplifting experience, whether they are recited, chanted, or sung. These rhythmic elements contribute to the profound impact of stotrams in the context of Indian religious and devotional practices and the Stotrams of Adi Shankaracharya are not an exemption.

The rhythmic and prosodic characteristics of a selection of stotras are explored below:

### Sharada Bhujangam and Gurvastakam –

"Sharada Bhujangam" is a magnificent hymn composed by the revered Adi Shankaracharya, dedicated to Goddess Sharadamba at the sacred Sringeri temple. This beautiful hymn is a heartfelt expression of devotion to Goddess Sharadamba and is cherished for its eloquent praise of her divine qualities. This hymn is masterfully crafted in the Bhujangaprayata metre, a poetic form known for its graceful and flowing structure.

Akṣarāṇi	सु	व	क्षो	ज	कु	म्भां	सु	धा	पू	र्ण	कु	म्भां
Laghu (I) / Guru(U)	I	U	U	I	U	U	I	U	U	I	U	U
Ganas	य		य			य		य				
Akṣarāṇi	प्र	सा	दा	व	ल	म्भां	प्र	पु	ण्या	व	ल	म्भां
Laghu (I) / Guru(U)	I	U	U	I	U	U	I	U	U	I	U	U
Ganas	य		य			य		य				





Akṣarāṇi	स	दा	स्ये	न्दु	बि	म्बां	स	दा	नो	ष्ठ	बि	म्बां
Laghu (I) / Guru(U)	I	U	U	I	U	U	I	U	U	I	U	U
Ganas	य			य			य			य		
Akṣarāṇi	भ	जे	शा	र	दा	म्बा	मा	ज	सं	म	द	म्बाम्
Laghu (I) / Guru(U)	I	U	U	I	U	U	I	U	U	I	U	U
Ganas	य			य			य			य		

The "Gurvastakam" is a revered Sanskrit hymn composed by the great philosopher and theologian Adi Shankaracharya. It consists of eight verses (shlokas) that extol the qualities and significance of the guru, emphasizing the profound importance of the guru-disciple relationship in the spiritual journey. This stotram is also composed in the Bhujangaprayata meter.

Akṣarāṇi	श	री	रं	सु	रू	पं	त	था	वा	क	ल	त्रं	
Laghu (I) / Guru(U)	I	U	U	I	U	U	I	U	U	I	U	U	
Ganas	य			य			य			य			
Akṣarāṇi	य	श	श्च	ारु	चि	त्रं	ध	नं	मे	रु	तु	ल्यं	
Laghu (I) / Guru(U)	I	U	U	I	U	U	I	U	U	I	U	U	
Ganas	य			य			य			य			
Akṣarāṇi	म	न	श्चे	न्न	ल	ग्नं	गु	रो	र	इ	धि	प	द्मे
Laghu (I) / Guru(U)	I	U	U	I	U	U	I	U	U	I	U	U	
Ganas	य			य			य			य			





Akṣarāṇi	त	तः	किं	त	तः	किं	त	तः	किं	त	तः	किम्
Laghu (I) / Guru(U)	I	U	U	I	U	U	I	U	U	I	U	U
Ganas	य			य			य			य		

Lakshanam of Bhujangaprayatam according to *Chandolankaramanjari* –

## भुजङ्गप्रयातं चतुर्भिर्यकारैः ॥

Bhujangaprayatam is a Sama-Vritta Chandas and belongs to Jagati Jaati and it has 4 paadas. Each of the padam has 12 aksharas , 20 maatra and य-य-य-य ganas, ie. IUU repeated for 4 times in each paada.

Given a maatra count of 20, it is suitable to align it with Khanda gati. This alignment begins with "ateetam" as the "taka takita" pattern of Khanda gati corresponds with the second aksharam, which is a guru (represented by "taka"), while the third and fourth aksharas, i.e., guru (2 aksharas), followed by laghu (1 aksharam), correspond to "takita," which consists of 3 aksharas. And in the last aksharam of the last avartam of the verse we add one deergham in order to finish the talam. This can be seen in the notation given below –

Lyrics	श ॥	री	रं	सु ॥	रू	पं	त ॥	था	वा	क ॥	ल	त्रं
Notation	; R ॥	G, G,	R ॥	G, G,	R ॥	G, G,	P ॥	G, R,				
Lyrics	य ॥	श	श्चारु ॥	चित्रं	ध ॥	नं	मे	रु ॥	तु	ल्यं		
Notation	S ॥	R, R,	S ॥	R, R,	S ॥	R, G,	R ॥	S, S,				
Lyrics	म ॥	न	श्चेन्न ॥	ल	ग्नं	गु ॥	रो	र	ङ्घ्रि ॥	प	द्मे	
Notation	R ॥	G, G,	R ॥	G, G,	R ॥	G, G,	P ॥	G, R,				
Lyrics	त ॥	तः	किं	त ॥	तः	किं	त ॥	तः	किं	त ॥	तः	किम् ॥
Notation	S ॥	R, R,	S ॥	R, R,	S ॥	R, G,	R ॥	S, S, , ॥				

Here, it's evident that the initial note, Rishabham, commences in 'ateetam,' while the concluding note of the verse, Shadjam, traditionally two aksharas long, is extended with a 'deergham' to complete the avartam. This notation can also be applied to Sharada Bhujangam or any other stotram set to Bhujangaprayatam.



## 2. Dakshinamurty Stotram and Meenakshi Pancharatna Stotram-

In Hindu mythology, Dakshinamurti is revered as an incarnation of Lord Shiva, the supreme deity of knowledge. Dakshinamurti embodies Shiva's role as the guru of all knowledge, bestowing wisdom and jñāna (knowledge). This aspect of Shiva symbolizes the highest form of awareness, understanding, and wisdom. Unlike many stotras dedicated to Hindu deities, which often describe anthropomorphic forms or mythological actions, the Dakshinamurti Stotra takes a more abstract and philosophical approach. The Dakshinamurti Stotra holds a significant place in the body of Adi Shankara's works and is often considered one of his most important compositions. This stotram is set to Shardoola- Vikreeditam metre.

Akṣarāṇi	वि	श्वं	द	र्ष	ण	हृ	श	य	म	न	न	ग	री	तु	ल्यं	नि	जा	न्तर्ग	तं	
Laghu (I) / Guru(U)	U	U	U	I	I	U	I	U	I	I	I	U	U	U	I	U	U	I	U	
Ganas	म			स			ज			स			त			त			ग	
Akṣarāṇi	प	श	य	न्ना	त्म	नि	मा	य	या	ब	हि	रि	बो	द्भू	तं	य	था	नि	द्र	या
Laghu (I) / Guru(U)	U	U	U	I	I	U	I	U	I	I	I	U	U	U	I	U	U	I	U	
Ganas	म			स			ज			स			त			त			ग	
Akṣarāṇi	य	स्सा	क्षा	त्कुरु	ते	प्र	भो	ध	स	म	ये	स्वा	त्मा	न	मे	वा	द्व	यं		
Laghu (I) / Guru(U)	U	U	U	I	I	U	I	U	I	I	I	U	U	U	I	U	U	I	U	
Ganas	म			स			ज			स			त			त			ग	
Akṣarāṇi	त	स्मै	श्री	गु	रु	मूर्	त	ये	न	म	इ	दं	श्री	द	क्षि	णा	मूर्	त	ये	
Laghu (I) / Guru(U)	U	U	U	I	I	U	I	U	I	I	I	U	U	U	I	U	U	I	U	
Gana	म			स			ज			स			त			त			ग	

Meenakshi Pancharatnam, known as the "Five Jewels of Meenakshi," is a revered stotram attributed to the esteemed sage Shri Adi Shankaracharya. This stotram illuminates the divine attributes, form, and immense glory of Goddess Meenakshi, who is the divine consort of Lord Sundareshwar (Shiva). The composition is also skillfully crafted in the poetic meter Shardoola Vikreeditam.

Akṣarāṇi	उ	द्य	द्वा	नु	स	ह	स	को	टि	स	ह	शां	के	यू	र	हा	रो	ज्ज	वा	लां
Laghu (I) / Guru(U)	U	U	U	I	I	U	I	U	I	I	U	U	U	I	U	U	I	U		
Ganas	म			स			ज			स			त			त			ग	





Akṣarāṇi	बिम्बोष्ठी	स्मित	दन्त	पङ्क्तिरुचिरां	पीताम्बरा	लङ्कृता															
Laghu (I) / Guru(U)	U	U	U	I	I	U	I	U	I	I	U	U	U	I	U	U	I	U	U	I	U
Ganas	म	स	ज	स	त	त	ग														
Akṣarāṇi	विष्णु	ब्रह्म	सुरेन्द्र	सेविता	पादात्	त्त्वस्वरुपांशि	वां														
Laghu (I) / Guru(U)	U	U	U	I	I	U	I	U	I	I	U	U	U	I	U	U	I	U	U	I	U
Ganas	म	स	ज	स	त	त	ग														
Akṣarāṇi	मीना	क्षीप्र	णतो	स्मिसन्त	तमहं	कारुण्य	वारांनिधिम्														
Laghu (I) / Guru(U)	U	U	U	I	I	U	I	U	I	I	U	U	U	I	U	U	I	U	U	I	U
Gana	म	स	ज	स	त	त	ग														

Lakshanam of Shardoola Vikreeditam according to Chandolankaramanjari –

### सूर्याश्वैर्यदिमः सजौ सततगाः शार्दूलविक्रीडितम् ॥

Shardoola Vikreeditam is a Sama-Vritta Chandas and belongs to Atidhruti Jaati and it has 4 paadas. Each of the padam has 19 aksharas , 30 mastras and म-स-ज-स-त-त-ग ganas.

Even though the matra count is 30, it doesn't align well with Khanda gati or Trisra gati because of the arrangement of the ganas. It aligns seamlessly with the Chaturasra Gathi 'Kitataka' format, but the matra count of 30 is not in harmony with Chaturasram. To make it suitable for Chaturasra gati, we append a deergham (2 aksharas) to the final note of the paadam, resulting in 32 matras per paada, which corresponds harmoniously with Chaturasra gati in Aadi Talam which has 8 kriyas and 32 aksharas per avartam. This can be observed in the notation given below-

Lyrics	विश्वं	द	र्ष	णदृ	श्यमान	नग	री	तु	ल्यं	निजा	I,	न्तर्ग	तं ॥
Notation	S, S,	R,	G	R	S, R	R, R	S	S	I	R, G,	R,	S	S I, R, S N,; ॥
Lyrics	पश्य	न्नात्म	निमाय	याब	हिरि	वोद्भू	तं	य	था	I,	निद्र	या ॥	
Notation	S, S,	R,	G	R	S, R	R, R	S	S	I	R, G,	R,	S	S I, R, S N,; ॥
Lyrics	यस्सा	क्षा	त्कुरु	ते	प्र	भोध	सम	I	ये	स्वात्मान	मे	I,	वा द्वयं ॥
Notation	S, S,	R,	G	R	S, R	R, R	S	S	I	R, G,	R,	S	S I, R, S N,; ॥
Lyrics	तस्मै	श्री	गुरु	मूर्त	ये	नम	इ	दं	श्री	द	क्षिणा	I,	मूर्त ये ॥





Notation	S,	S,	R,	G	R	S,	R	R,	R	S	S	I	R,	G,	R,	S	S	I,	R,	S	N,;	
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In the notation, one can discern that the concluding note of each paadam, Nishadam, originally consisting of 2 aksharas, is extended by an additional 2 aksharas, to complete the avartam. This notation also seamlessly accommodates the Meenakshi Pancharatnam or anyother verse set to Shardoola Vikredditam Chandas.

### 3. Lakshmi Nrusimha Karavalamba Stotram and Shiva Namavalystakam –

The Lakshmi Narasimha Karavalamba Stotram of Shri Aadi Shankaracharya, often referred to simply as the Lakshmi Narasimha Stotram, is a revered hymn dedicated to Lord Narasimha, known for his benevolence and support to his devotees. The entirety of the Lakshmi Narasimha Karavalamba Stotram is composed in an eloquent manner, extolling the divine qualities of Lord Narasimha and Goddess Lakshmi, emphasizing their grace upon devotees. This stotram is composed in the Vasanta Tilaka meter.

Akṣarāṇi	श्री	म	त्प	यो	नि	धि	नि	के	त	न	च	क्र	पा	णे
Laghu (I) / Guru(U)	U	U	I	U	I	I	I	U	I	I	U	I	U	U
Ganas	त		भ		ज		ज		ग		ग			
Akṣarāṇi	भो	गी	न्द्र	भो	ग	म	णि	रा	जि	त	पु	ण्य	मूर्	ते
Laghu (I) / Guru(U)	U	U	I	U	I	I	I	U	I	I	U	I	U	U
Ganas	त		भ		ज		ज		ग		ग			
Akṣarāṇi	यो	गी	श	शा	श्व	त	श	र	ण्य	भ	वा	ब्धि	पो	त
Laghu (I) / Guru(U)	U	U	I	U	I	I	I	U	I	I	U	I	U	U
Ganas	त		भ		ज		ज		ग		ग			
Akṣarāṇi	ल	क्ष्मी	नृ	सिं	ह	म	म	दे	हि	करा	व	ल	म्ब	म्
Laghu (I) / Guru(U)	U	U	I	U	I	I	I	U	I	I	U	I	U	U





Ganas	त	भ	ज	ज	ग	ग
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The Shiva Namavalystakam is a stotram authored by Adi Shankaracharya, consisting of various divine names of Lord Shiva. This hymn is also crafted in the Vasanta Tilaka meter.

Akṣarāṇi	हे	च	न्द्र	चू	ड	म	द	नान्त	क	शू	ल	पा	णे	
Laghu (I) / Guru(U)	U	U	I	U	I	I	I	U	I	I	U	I	U	
Ganas	त	भ	ज	ज	ग	ग								
Akṣarāṇi	स्था	णो	गि	री	श	गि	रि	जे	श	म	हे	श	शं	भो
Laghu (I) / Guru(U)	U	U	I	U	I	I	I	U	I	I	U	I	U	U
Ganas	त	भ	ज	ज	ग	ग								
Akṣarāṇi	भू	ते	श	भी	त	भ	य	सू	द	न	मा	म	ना	थं
Laghu (I) / Guru(U)	U	U	I	U	I	I	I	U	I	I	U	I	U	U
Ganas	त	भ	ज	ज	ग	ग								
Akṣarāṇi	सं	सार	दुः	ख	ग	ह	ना	ज्ज	ग	दी	शर	क्ष		
Laghu (I) / Guru(U)	U	U	I	U	I	I	I	U	I	I	U	I	U	U
Ganas	त	भ	ज	ज	ग	ग								

Lakshanam of Vasanta Tilaka according to Chandolankaramanjari –

**जेयं वसन्ततिलकं तभजा जगौ गः ॥**

Shardoola Vikreeditam is a Sama-Vritta Chandas and belongs to Sharkari Jaati and it has 4 paadas. Each of the padam has 14 aksharas, 21 maatra and त-भ-ज-ज-ग-ग ganas.

Although the matra count is 21, it does not align well with Trisra gati due to the arrangement of the ganas. It fits seamlessly into the Chaturasra gathi 'Kitataka' format, but the matra count of 21 is not in sync with Chaturasram. To make it suitable for Chaturasra gati, we add a deergham of 3 aksharas to the final word of the paadam, resulting in 24 matras per paada, which harmonizes with Chaturasra gati of Chaturasra Jati







Rupaka talam which has 6 kriyas and 24 aksharas per aavartam. This can be observed in the notation given below-

Lyrics	श्रीम	त्प	यो	नि	I	धि	नि	के	त	न	च	क्र	पा	णे	॥
Notation	S, R,	S	R,	R	I	R	S	R,	R	S	R,	M	R,	S	:: ॥
Lyrics	भोगी	न्द्र	भोग	I	म	णिरा	जित	पु	ण्य	मूर्	ते	॥			
Notation	S, R,	S	R,	R	I	R	S	R,	R	S	R,	M	R,	S	:: ॥
Lyrics	योगी	श	शा	श्व	I	त	श	र	ण्य	भवा	ब्धि	पो	त	॥	
Notation	S, R,	S	R,	R	I	R	S	R,	R	S	R,	M	R,	S	:: ॥
Lyrics	ल	क्ष्मी	नृ	सि	ह	I	म	म	दे	हि	करा	व	ल	म्बम्	॥
Notation	S, R,	S	R,	R	I	R	S	R,	R	S	R,	M	R,	S	:: ॥

Within this notation, it becomes evident that the final note of each paadam, typically consisting of 2 aksharas, is prolonged by an additional 3 aksharas to complete the avartam. This same notation can be applied to Shivanamavalayastakam or any other verse composed in the Vasanta Tilaka Metre.

In conclusion, the rhythmic and prosodic elements woven intricately into Adi Shankaracharya's Stotrams unveil a captivating dimension within the realm of devotional poetry. The deliberate arrangement of syllables, stresses, and pauses within Shankaracharya's compositions orchestrates a symphony of rhythm that resonates deep within the practitioner's being. These rhythmic cadences act as conduits, leading devotees towards heightened states of devotion and contemplation, ultimately forging an intimate connection with the divine. The interplay of rhythm infuses each verse with an innate power to transcend the mundane and usher the practitioner into a sacred space of transcendence. The vibrational resonance created by these elements fosters an environment where the practitioner's innermost sentiments can find voice, allowing for a genuine and heartfelt communion with the divine. Through the fusion of rhythm and prosody, these Stotrams stand not only as aesthetic marvels but as profound catalysts for transformative spiritual experiences, inviting all who engage with them to embark on a journey of profound connection and enlightenment.

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