

Title:**The Forgotten Measure: The Miti Riyana as a Four-Inch Unit in Buddhist Canonical Tradition**

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Abstract:

This study revisits a forgotten unit of measurement the Miti Riyana (“Hand”) a four-inch standard embedded in Buddhist canonical and commentarial traditions but later obscured by scholastic reinterpretation. Post-canonical sources such as the *Abhidhanappadipik* codified twelve *angulas* (finger-widths) as one *vidatthi* (≈ 9 inches) and two *vidatthis* as one *riyana* or *haththa* (≈ 18 inches). This inflated “*wadu riyana*” was uncritically applied to all textual references by British colonial historians who, lacking sensitivity to Buddhist cultural contexts, imposed implausible dimensions upon Buddhist texts. As Rhys Davids observed, the units codified in the *Abhidhanappadapika* were largely imaginary and never in practical use, yet their acceptance introduced distorted dimensions into Buddhist literature, thereby obscuring the practical measurement realities reflected in the earliest Theravada traditions. By contrast, textual and contextual evidence consistently indicates the Miti Riyana, the four-inch hand span, as the authentic standard. Canonical and Sinhala sources confirm this. The *Madhurattavilasini* records the Buddha’s height as eighteen *riyanas*; interpreted with the 18-inch unit, this yields an impossible 27 feet, whereas the four-inch standard produces a credible six feet. The *Mahavamsa* and the Sinhala *Bodhivamsa* describe the golden bowl that carried the Bodhi branch as nine *riyanas* in circumference, five in height, and three in diameter. Under the inflated scale, the vessel becomes implausibly massive; recalculated with the four-inch measure, it emerges as 36 inches around, 20 inches high, and 12 inches wide, precisely suited for ritual use. Similarly, the *Dathuvamsa* describes a sandalwood pyre of twenty-one *riyanas*; the inflated system gives 31.5 feet, whereas the four-inch measure yields

a realistic seven-foot structure. These consistent recalibrations demonstrate that the Miti Riyana was a genuine unit employed in Buddhist texts. Its recognition challenges long-standing interpretive traditions that exaggerated descriptions and highlights how later scholastic codifications obscured earlier practical realities. Restoring the Miti Riyana as a four-inch standard corrects interpretive distortions and advances methodological clarity in Buddhist studies, historical geography, and archaeology, illuminating how metrology enriches our understanding of early Buddhist cultural and ritual practice.

Keywords: Miti Riyana; Buddhist canonical texts; Abhidhanappadipika; Angula; Vidatthi.