

On Nouns with Numerical Value in Sanskrit

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There are many studies on so-called lucky or typical numbers in India, as, e.g., 16, 18 or 108 in place of which the latest one known to me, that of Lienhard,¹ may be mentioned here. These deal with numbers expressed by numerals. Apparently, numerals cannot be used as nouns as, e.g. in English “the eleven” for a soccer team; in German “4711” for eau de Cologne, or in French “soixante-neuf” for a particular kind of sexual activity. In India, however, as with the Pythagoreans in Greece,² there are many nouns with a numerical value because associated with a certain number as *agni* ‘fire’ which can also pertain to the number three for there are three fires. Others, as *kāya*, *tanu* or *deha* ‘body’, do not stand for 25 though the body is twenty-fivefold³ nor does *karṇa* ‘ear’ or *kumbha* ‘frontal globe on the forehead of an elephant’ denote the number two. In this paper the former category will be the subject on the basis of the references of the word ‘number’ in Monier-Williams.⁴

The first to draw the attention to this phenomenon was the astrologer Abu-al-Rayḥān al Bīrūnī (973-1048) who studied Sanskrit in India in 1017 C.E. Writing on the metrical handbooks on astronomy of the Hindus he says: „For each number they have quite a great quantity of words. Hence, if one word does not suit the metre, you may easily exchange it for a synonym which suits. Brahmagupta says: „If you want to write *one*, express it by everything which is unique, as the earth, the moon; *two* by everything which is double, as, e.g., *black* and *white* ...; *twelve* by the names of the sun.”⁵

Both Filliozat and the polymath Kane put up a non-exhaustive list of synonyms up to 49 to be employed to indicate a certain number.⁶ The practice is especially used by astronomers such as the author of the *Sūryasiddhānta*⁷ and Varāhamihira (first

half of the 6th century C.E.), and to write years, as did Guṇabhadra (9th century) in his Uttarapuraṇa 73,76 *kha-catuṣka-dvi-varṣānte* ‘after twenty-thousand’ (two with a tetrad of zeros) years, or Manoharlāl Śastri (20th century) in his preface,⁸ p. 8 vs 5, to Vādirāja’s *Pārśvanāthacarita* composed in Śaka 947 that is *naga(7)-vārdhi(4)-randhra(9)-gamana-saṃvatsare* ‘in the year that consists of mountain, ocean & opening in the body’ read from right to left.

Below a list of Sanskrit nouns attested in Monier Williams as used instead of numbers is given. Items omitted in MW have been incorporated from Filliozat’s list with a superior plus sign (+), from Kane’s list with an asterisk (*). As a rule, there seems to be no relationship between non-synonyms associated with the same number, as, e.g., the earth, the hook and the *kali* die which all denote the number one.

akṣa (die) 5

akṣi (eye) 2

aṅka (hook) 1 or 9

aga () 7

agni (fire) 2

*atidhṛti** (metre of 4x19 syllables) 19

atyasṭi (metre of 4x17 syllables) 17

Atridṛg-ja, *Atri-netra-prabhava*, *Atri-netra-(pra)sūta* (moon) 1

adri (mountain) 7

an-anta+ (heaven, space) 0

an-antā (earth) 1

anala (fire) 3

anila (wind) 49

anuṣṭubh (metre of 4x8 syllables) 8

antarikṣa+ (heaven, space) 0

antya (‘last’) 1.000 billions

abja+ (moon) 1

- abdhi**+ (ocean) 4
*abhra**+ (heaven, space) 0
amara (deity) 33
amṛta ('nectar; water') 4
*ambara**+ (heaven, space) 0
ambu(dhi) (ocean) 4
ambu-vāha (cloud) 17
ambhas (water) 4
aya, āya (die of good fortune) 4
arāti (inner enemy) 6
ari 6 (of the 6th astrological mansion)
arka (ray > sun) 12
arṇava (sea) 4
artha (five things of the Pāsupatas) 5. - See also s.v. sense object
*avatāra** ('descent, incarnation of a deity') 10
aśva (horse of the sun) 7
Aśvin 2
aṣṭi (metre of 4 x16 syllables) 16
ahar+ (day) 15
ahi (snake) 8
*ākāśa**+ (space) 0
ākṛti (metre of 4x22 syllables) 22
*ādi** (beginning) 1
āya (die) 4
*āśā** (direction, quarter) 10
indu (moon) 1
Indra 14
indriya (sense) 5
ibha (elephant ?) 8
iṣu (arrow) 5
Īśu, Īśvara (Rudra) 11

- utkr̥ti* (metre of 4x26 syllables) 26
urvarā+ (earth) 1
ūrmi (wave) 6 (waves of existence: cold, heat, etc.)
rtu (season) 6
r̥ṣi (seer) 7
kara (hand) 2
karanyā+ (with Jains: major observance) 5
karman+, see: action
kalā (moon digit) 16
kali (losing die) 1
ku (earth) 1
kuñjara (elephant) 8 (cf. *kumbhin*)
ku-dhara (mountain) 7
kunda (treasure of Kubera) 9
ku-bhṛt (mountain) 7
Kumāra-vadana (six faces of Kumara/ Skanda) 6
kumbhin (with prominences on its forehead: elephant) 8
 (elephants of the quarters and intermediate quarters)
kṛta (winning die with four dots) 4
kṛti (metre of 4x20 syllables) 20
kona (corner) 4
*krama** (step) 3 (steps of Viṣṇu)
kṣamā (earth) 1
kṣamā-dhara (mountain) 7
kṣiti (earth) 1
kha+* (sky) 0
khe-cara (planet) 9
gagana+* (sky) 0
gaja (elephant) 8 (cf. *kumbhin*)
gāyatrī+ (metre of 3 pādas of 8 syllables) 24⁹
giri, girīndra (mountain) 8
guṇa (quality) 3

- gulpha* (anle) 2
guhaka, guha-vaktra (Skandha's heads) 6
guhyaka 11 (class of divinities)
go (planet earth) 9
graha (planet) 9
*grāma** (scale, gamut) 3
cakra (sign of zodiac) 6
candra (moon) 1
chidra (opening of the body) 9
jagat 48
jagatī+ (metre of 4x12 syllables) 48¹⁰
jala+ (water) 4 and 7
jala-dhara-patha+ (sky, space) 0
jāti+* (metre of 4x22 syllables) 22
Jina 24
jvalana (fire) 3
tattva (true principle in Sāṃkhya philosophy) 24 or 25
tanū+ (body) 1
tarka (logical category : *dravya, samaya*, etc.) 6
tāna+* (note in music) 49
tigma-kara (sun) 12 (cf. *arka*)
tithi (lunar days) 15
tura(ñ)ga (horse) 7 (horses of the sun)
Trinetra (Śiva with three eyes) 3
danta (tooth) 32
darśana (system of philosophy) 6
Dasra (Aśvin) 2
Dānava
diś (quarter and intermediate quarter) 8
*diśā** (direction) 10
deva (deity) 33
deva-suṣi ('divine tube or vital air') 5

- dos**, *doṣan** (arm) 2
dvipa (elephant) 8
*dharā**+ (earth) 1
*dhātu** (element of the body such as skin and blood) 7
*dhṛti**+ (metre of 4x18 syllables) 18
*nakṣatra** (lunar mansion) 27
*nakha** (nail) 20
naga (mountain) 7
Nanda (ancient dynasty) 9
*nabhaś-cara** (planet) 9
naṃyana (eye) 2
nāga 7 or 8 (Nāgas), cf. snake
*Nāsatya** (Aśvin) 2
nidāna (with Buddhists: cause of existence) 12
*nidhi** (treasure) 9
*nṛpa** (king) 16
netra+ (eye) 2
pakṣa(ka) (side) 2
pañkti (row) 5
pañkti (metre of 4 x 10 syllables) 10
payo-rāśi (milk ocean) 4
para (top, maximum) ten billions
parvata (mountain) 7
pavana (vital air) 5
*Pāṇḍava** 5
*Pāṇḍu-suta** 5
pāvaka (fire) 3
pitā-maha+ (grandfather) 1
Pināka-naṃyana (Śiva) 3
*pura** (city burnt by śiva) 3
pūrṇa (zero) 0
prthivī + (earth) 1

- phaṇa-bhṛt* ('snake') 8 or 9
*prakṛti** ('natural condition'?) 21
bāṇa (arrow) 5 (*Kāma* has five arrows)
bāhu+ (arm) 2
bindu (dot) 0
bha-samūha (aggregate of lunar asterism) 27
bhaya+ (fear) 27
*bhuja** (arm) 2
bhujaga(ma) (snake) 8
bhuvana+ (earth, world) 3 and 14
bhū (earth) 1
bhūta (element) 5
bhū-dhara (mountain) 7
bhū-pa (king) 16 (cf. *nṛpa*; *rājan*)
*bhūmi** (earth) 1
bhūmi-dhara (mountain) 7
bṛhaṭī (metre of 8 + 8 + 12 + 8 syllables) 36
makarâlaya (sea) 4
maṅgala+ (good omen) 8
Madana-dahana (Śiva-Rudra) 11
Manu+ 14
mahī (earth) 1
mahī-dhra (mountain) 7
Mahêśa(-netra) (Śiva's three eyes) 3
Mahêśvara (Rudra) 11
mandâkrânta 17 (metre with 4 x 17 syllables as, e.g. of Meghadûta)
mârgaṇa (arrow) 5 (cf. *bāṇa*)
Mârtaṇḍa (Āditya) 12
māsa (month) 12
muni (seven celestial *munis*: 7 stars of Ursa Maior) 7; —
 cf. ṛṣi, seer)

- mūrchanā** (melody) 21
mṛgāṅka+ (moon) 1
yama(la) (twin) 2
yuga (age of the world) 4 or (as a moon position ?) 12
yuj (couple, pair) 2
ratna (jewel) 3+, 5+, 9 or 12
rada (tooth) 32
randhra (hole+; opening) 0 or 9
ravi (sun) 12
rasa (taste, flavour) 6
rāga+ ('colour, melody') 6
*rājan** (king) 16 (cf. *nṛpa*, *bhūpa*)
Rāma 3; — (there are three Ramas)
Rāvaṇa-śiras+* (ten heads of R.) 10
rāśi+ (sign of zodiac) 12
Rudra (*Bharga*, *Madana-dahana*) 11 (there are eleven R.)
rūpa (single specimen) 1
liṅga (twelve Śiva-liṅgas) 12
loka+* (world) 3 and 7
*locana** (eye) 2
*varṇa** (social class) 4
Vasu (deva) 8
vahni (fire) 3 (cf. *agni*)
vājin (horse) 7 (cf. *aśva*)
vāri-dhi (ocean) 4
vikṛti+ (metre of 23 syllables in a quarter) 23
viyant+ (sky) 0 *virāj* (metre of 4x10) 10
virāj (metre of 4x10) 10
vivara (aperture of the body) 9
viśva (for: *Viśvedevāḥ*) 13
Viṣve(-devāḥ) 13
viṣaya (sense object) 5

- Viṣṇu* 1
 Viṣṇu-pada+ (sky) 0
 veda 4
 vyāla (elephant or snake) 8
 vyoman+ (sky) 0
 śakti of Śiva (*mahā-vidyā*) 10
 Śakra (Indra) 14
 śaśāṅka, śaśin (moon) 1
 śāstra+ (manual, treatise) 6
 śikhiṇ (fire) 3 (cf. *agni*)
 śūnya* (emptiness, vacuum) 0
 śaila (mountain) 7
 saṃkhyā* (number) 1 to 9
 samīraṇa (body wind) 5
 samudra (ocean) 4
 sarit (stream) 4
 sarpa* (snake) 8
 sāyaka (arrow) 5 (cf. ???)
 Siddha (Jina) 24
 siddhi* (supernatural faculty in yoga) 8
 sindhu (ocean) 4
 sindhura (elephant) 8
 sura (deity) 33
 sūrya (sun) 12 (sun in 12 signs of zodiac)
 soma+ (moon) 1
 smṛti (sacred tradition) 18 (after the 18 law-givers)
 svara (musical note) 7
 svarga+ (prakṛti metre of 4 x 21 syllables) 21
 haya (horse) 7 (cf. a.va)
 Hara-netra (Śiva's third eye) 3
 hutāśa (fire) 3 (cf. *agni*)

FOOT-NOTES

1. Lienhard 1996: 523-36.
2. For one they say Apollo; for two: strife; for three: Athena, justice, etc. (Plutarch, De Iside et Osiride 381F).
3. ŚpBr IX 1,1,44 and 3,3,19, cf. XII 3,2,2.
4. I sincerely thank Dr Thomas Malten, of Cologne, who was kind enough to have his computer collect the material for this paper for me.
5. Sachau 1910: I 177. For this purpose Filliozat's Appendix I in Renou & Filliozat 1953, p. 708f. and Kane's list 1974: 701ff. can be used as they were drawn up after numbers.
6. Kane, loc. cit. His statement "Any number of synonyms may be employed to indicate the same number" (p. 701) is not (always) covered by MW, e.g. 9 or 14 for ratna is not mentioned as such for mañi.
7. Lāṭa mentioned as such by Alberuni probably was actually its commentator (Winternitz III,2 1967: 683). On the practice see Gangooly 1935: Introductory note, p. lv, and Renou & Filliozat 1953, § 1722.
8. Translated from Nāthurām Premi's Marathi.
9. Shouldn't this be 8?
10. Shouldn't this be 12?

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