

Chapter I

NUMBER

Sanskrit has three numbers, viz. singular, dual, and plural. Dual is used to express those objects which always go in pairs such as "hastau", "netre", etc. Another natural dual is the dual of the pairs of opposites such as "sukhaduḥkhe", "jayājayau", etc. Dual is also used to denote any two objects accidentally brought together.

Plural is used when referring to, more than two things. Plural is often used in addressing persons or speaking of them in a reverential manner. Certain words are always used only in plural. e.g. "prāṇāḥ", "āpaḥ", "dēvāḥ", etc. Names of countries are used in plural. As it would be superfluous to give examples which would illustrate the working of the rules, only the peculiarities regarding the use of number in the epics have been noted below :-

Duality is expressed by the plural

Ajaikapādāhīrbudhnaiḥ..(M.5.114) "by Ajaikapāda and Ahirbudhya"; ṛṣayopy ugratapasō.....bhras̄yante kāmā manyu-
bhiḥ! (R.2.22.23) "Even sages practising severe austerities are led astray by desire and anger"; asmākam kāmabhogānām dātaram (R.6.111.55) "thou who didst prepare for us pleasure and enjoyment".

The following are the instances where singular is used instead of dual.

cakṣuṣā yam prapaśyāmi tasya tejo harāmy aham!
 (M.5.15.18) "Whom so ever I gaze upon I divest him of his
 energy"; avekṣamāṇaḥ sasneham cakṣuṣā prapibanniva! (R.2.45.5)
 "Fondly gazing on those people as though drinking them with
 his eyes".

kṛpasya pādau Sañjaya ¹ pāṇinā¹ sprśeḥ (M.5.30.12)
 "touch Kṛpa's feet, Oh Sañjaya, with your hand".

Singular used in the place of plural

itīva bahudhā vācā bāhūṃ udyamya te janāḥ! (R.2.47.12)
 "Holding up their arms, the people (lamented) in various
 ways as above".

prāṇāḥ is used in singular in the following

bahis¹ cara iva prāṇo babhūva! (R.2.1.19) "was like
 their very life moving outside".

In the following cases the form used actually is dual.
 But since action involves two persons, the instances should
 be regarded as the use of singular in place of usual plural:-

tayor devanam atrāsīt prāṇayor (M.2.61.60) "they
 staked their lives"; prāṇayos tu paṇam kṛtvā (M.5.35.14)
 "staking (our) lives"; prāṇayor vipaṇāvahe (M.5.35.19) "let
 us stake our lives".

¹
 Does this refer to a custom of touching the feet
 only with one hand?