

## **Descriptive Analysis of Numerical Terms in Buddhism**

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The Buddha's teachings have a unique characteristic. Starting with his very first discourse, which begins with the statement, "there are two extremes to avoid", the Buddha has resorted to enumeration of items, factors, components and ideas both as an attention-catching strategy as well as for logical analysis and presentation: "what are these four?" "what are these ten" and so forth are questions he would ask his audience and then systematically elaborate each item. The early compilers of the Buddha's statements with such enumerations collected them in groups of discourses dealing with a single item to those dealing with eleven items. This which is one of the five parts of the Sutta Piṭaka is known as the Anguttara Nikāya in Pāli and Ekottarāgama in the Chinese Āgama Sūtras. When Sariputta observed the chaos which followed the death of Jina Mahāvīra, the founder of Jainism, he decided to preserve the Buddha's teachings in tact and prepared in two discourses a substantial volume of headwords under which those teachings could be recalled and retrieved. In this, Sariputta followed the method of enumeration. (i.e. Sangīti and Dasuttara Suttas D 33-34). Thus Buddhism has become a veritable religion of numbers.

It has not been an easy task for students of Buddhism and also scholars engaged in research had no standard reference work which they could readily use when details about such teachings with

enumerations needed analysis. The Pāli Text Society Pāli Dictionary and Malalasekara's Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names have been of limited service. Therefore, this work by Venerable K. Dhammasiri fills a vitally felt need. He has delved into Buddhist literature in general and picked up all terms with a numerical significance. His work has been thorough and he has gone far beyond "numerical terms in Buddhism" to include terms pertaining to arts and secular matters.

Both in English and Sinhala, the "descriptive analysis" as he calls his approach is concise and comprehensive. He gives references to literature from which the contents are drawn. He quotes the original Pāli and it is a great help where the translation into English needs clarification, For example, on p.85, a king, a serpent, a five or a monk should not be despised is his translation of S.169 and SnA 425. But the Pāli original has a qualifying term "daharā" ti, meaning they are young or small.

Venerable Dhammasiri has followed the method of compilation of the Anguttara Nikāya and the Sangīti Sutta. Alphabetical indices in Pāli and English would enhance the value of his book immensely.

Venerable Dhammasiri deserves praise for an innovative effort to develop an extremely useful reference book.

**– Ananda W.P. Guruge**