

Reflection on Elephant Words in Sanskrit

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1. The lexicons of languages include different kinds of words as synonyms, homonyms, hyponyms, and antonyms. Synonyms, so far as the general definition is concerned, are the words with identical meaning. Grammar- the analysis of word into its components thus providing for derivation- conveys different nuances of meaning of the apparent synonyms. Study of context also reflects on the different functional meanings of synonyms. Grammar and context, thus pose a question as to the existence of strict synonyms. Two or more words may broadly mean the same thing, but the consideration of their derivation and context of use may bring out the semantic difference among them. In this short article, an attempt is being made to examine the extent to which the words for elephant in Sanskrit – treated as synonyms in the tradition of lexicons-have commonness of meaning, with particular reference to two words: *sastihayana* and *sindhura*.

2. Amarasimha (6 C.CE), the pioneer of classical Sanskrit lexicography, records 26 synonyms standing for elephant in Sanskrit in his *Amarakosa*. His followers have added copious names to them in their works. *Mâtangalîlâ*, a treatise of elephantology by Nilakantha, contains over 130 words for elephant. *hastin*, *karin*, *dantin*, *dantâvala*, *dvirada*, *dvipa*, *anekapa*, *matangaja*, *gaja*, *nâga*, *kuñjara*, *vârana*, *ibha*, *stamberama*, *yûthapa*, *padmin* are the common words for elephant used predominantly in the Sanskrit literature. Their derivational meaning may be considered in brief as follows: *hastin*, *karin*, *kuñjara* commonly mean ‘prominently with a trunk’, an elephant. *dantin*, *dantâvala*, *dvirada* commonly mean ‘possessing tusk or tusks’. *dvipa* and *anekapa* commonly mean ‘drinking twice or more than once, by trunk and mouth’. *matangaja* has reference to mythological origin of elephant. *gaja* is with reference to joy or excitement. *nâga* and *ibha* are used for elephant with reference to the gait. *vârana* is an elephant on account of controlling the enemy. *stamberama* means ‘delighting in clumps of high grass’. *yûthapa* is ‘the leader of herd’, while *padmin* is ‘fond of lotus’. The above mentioned words, in their derivational sense, mark one or the other characteristic feature of an elephant. But they broadly mean elephant in general. They do not speak of any specific elephant. This is evident from the common context in which they are used. Most of these words appear in compound expressions with words for other animals, especially *aeva* (horse), *karabha* (camel). Consider for example: *gajâûvamahisòâdi* ‘elephant, horse, bull, etc.’ (*Mahâbhârata* 1.1163*), *gajâsvakarabhâdi* ‘elephant, horse, camel, etc.’ (*Kathâkoûa* 64.4), *gajâsvapasuyânânâdikârsâpanadhenuka* ‘aggregate of cow, coin, elephant, horse, animal, vehicle etc.’ (*Varâhapurâna* 126.177). The words *sadri*, *candira*, *chadmara* recorded as elephant words in the lexicons are of uncertain derivation. Since they are not attested in the literature we cannot check the context of their usage. Other two elephant words viz. *sastihâyana* and *sindhura* deserve special consideration.

3. *sastihâyana* is an important word for the elephant in the Sanskrit lexicons.¹ These lexicons give *sastihâyana* as one of the Sanskrit synonyms for elephant without any special denotation. The compound expression *sastihâyana* is to be explained in the analytical phrase as: *sastir hâyanânâ yasya* ‘of sixty years’. It speaks of the age of an elephant. Being a general synonym of *gaja* (elephant), it should mean that the life span of an elephant is of sixty years. However, this is not in confirmation with the description of longevity of an elephant described by Nîlakantha in his *Mâtangalîlâ*, a treatise on elephantology (circa). Nîlakantha says:

- a. *evam varsaatam vimúamasthâya mahîpate /
krtvâ bahuvîdham karma svargam gacchati vâranah // Mâtangalîlâ 5.23.*
‘Thus, o king, living for one hundred and twenty years,
having done various deeds, an elephant goes to heaven.’

If, according to Nîlakantha, an elephant lives for 120 years, then the sixtieth year must be the prime time of an elephant’s life, an age when he is full in condition, strongest and mighty. If the word *sastihâyana* is thus taken to mean an elephant ‘in his sixtieth year, the prime age’, then its first occurrence in the *Mahâbhârata* becomes perfectly appropriate:

- b. *babhañjaturmahâvròksâllatâúcâkarsatustatah /
mattâviva susamrabdhau vâranau sastihâyanau // Mahâbhârata 1.141.23.*
‘They shattered big trees and pulled off creepers
like two crazed sixty-year-old elephants in heat.’

In b., *vâranau* is a substantive noun signifying an elephant. There is no need to use another word for the same thing. This being so, *sastihâyanau* merely qualifies *vârana* meaning ‘sixty-year-olds’. Consider yet another use of the word in the *Mahâbhârata*:

- c. *virâtamanvayuh . . . catvâro bhratarah sùrâh pândavâh satyavikramâhò //
bhîmâsca mattamâtangâh prabhinnakaratâmukhâh /
ksaranta iva jîmûtah sudantâh sastihâyanâh // Mahâbhârata 4.30. 25-26.*
‘They followed Virata.. those four heroic Pândava brothers
whose strength was their truth. Terrifying rutting elephants
with ripen temples, well-tusked sixty-year-olds like gliding clouds.’

¹ Râjanighantu (265.26), Medinîkoœa (107.251), Vaijayantikûa (109.62), Nâmamâlikâ (453), Agastyanighantu (65), Kosakalpataru (1.5958), to name a few.

Further, in Purânas also we find the adjectival use of *sastihâyana* qualifying some substantive noun signifying an elephant. Consider:

- d. *bhadrajâtyâ gajâ ye me madândhâh sastihâyanâh/
mayâ vinâ mitho yuddhe kastânadya niyoksyati // Skandapurâna 6.3.20.*

‘These mine elephants , of *bhadra*-type, maddened with intoxication, sixty-year olds, who will employ them in battle today without me. ’

- e. *sarve... anujagmustu tam nrpam ... vâranaih parvatopamaih ... pracandaih
sastihâyanaih // Brahmapurâna 44.19.*

‘They all followed that king with elephants resembling mountain, big and sixty-year-olds.’

- f. *âcârâyâ dadau râmo hastinam sastihâyanam/ Padmapurâna 4.11.38.*
‘Ram gave to the teacher the sixty-year-old elephant.’

Above, *mattamâtanga* (in c.), *gaja* (in d.), *vârana* (in e.), and *hastin* (in f.) are separately used as substantive nouns for elephant. Without any need to express the animal again, the expression *sastihâyana* evidently stands as the qualifying adjective meaning simply ‘sixty–years- old’. Thus, the derivational meaning and also the context of usage are suggestive of the fact that the word *sastihâyana* initially meant ‘sixty–year- old’. Being exclusively used to qualify an elephant, it became a proper name of an elephant in the due course of time when the lexicons were being compiled.

4. *sindhura* is another important name for an elephant quoted by classical lexicographers.² It is regarded as a general synonym of *gaja* (elephant). The *Vâcaspatya* explains this word as: *sindhur madajalam asya asti* ‘possessing the fluid of intoxication, i.e. *rut*’. Here –*ra* is assumed to be the possessive suffix after the base *sindhu*. *Pânini* in the rule: *ûsasusimuskamadho rah* (A. 5.2.107) introduces the possessive suffix –*ra* after the words : *ûsa* ‘salt’, *susi* ‘hole’, *muska* ‘testicle’ and *madhu* ‘honey’. Thus, deriving the words *ûsara* ‘salty’, *susira* ‘full of holes’, *muskara* ‘possessing testicles’ and *madhura* ‘sweet’ respectively. *Kâtyâyana* adds a *Vârttika* on the rule: *raprakarane khamukhakuñjebhya upasankhyânam*, which derives the word *kuñjara* meaning ‘one who possesses trunk, i.e. an elephant. *sindhura* apparently similar with above mentioned words, particularly *kuñjara*, is not covered under topic of possessive suffixes in the *Pâninian* system. We have to extend this suffix –*ra* to apply after the word *sindhu* to account for *sindhura*. On the other hand, it is possible to account for the word by assuming the agentive suffix –*a*. The *sabdakalpadruma* explains the word *sindhura* as: *sindhuA râti dadâti* ‘giving (out) *rut*’. Here –*a* is assumed as the agentive suffix after the verbal base *râ-* ‘to give’ with *sindhu* as adjoining word. This is according to *Pânini*’s rule: *âto’ nupasarge kahò* (A. 3.2.3). In consideration of the above derivations, the word *sindhura* must mean an elephant who is secreting *rut* from his temple. It indicates the wild or intoxicated state of an elephant. Let us consider the context in which the word is used:

- g. *sadâ madândhahih prasabhâbhigâmibhih prakampyamânâsu saritsu sindhuraih /*

² *Halâyudhakoûa* (2.59), *Vaijayantiksa* (109.61), *Trikândasesa* (8.33), *Hârâvali* (14), *Abhidhânacintâmanòi* (1217), *Viúvalocanakoûa* (309.198), *Koûakalpadruma* (5955), *Nâmamâla* of *Dhananjaya* (89), *Agastyanighantu* (67), etc.

vihâya tîram vihagîbhiruccairakâri pûtkâra ivâravo divi // Neminirvâna 5.42.

‘ while the rivers were being churned by the elephants always mad with intoxication the female birds moving quickly having left the shore made the put- sound in the sky. ’

h. vyomantahsprsi sindhure’sya samarârambhoddhure dhâvati / jânîmo nu ... astam yânti samastabâhubhujâtejahsahasrâmsavah // Naisadhîyacarita 12.36.

‘We know if suns of the warlike valour of all the Ksatriyas go down when his elephants, reaching unto the bosom of the sky, rush on eager for the commencement of battle. ’

i. yadânkusam tiraskrtya dantâbhyâm parikârakam /

mârayet sindhurastasya jayo yantuh parâjayah // Mânasollâsa 4.3.624.

‘When his elephant, having abandoned the goad, hits the trainer by the tusks then there is victory of him and the defeat of the controller. ’

In g., the word *sindhura* is used in the context of *madândha* (blind with intoxication or rut). The usage is appropriated by the fact that the elephants in rut enter into the water of rivers to quench or clean the same. In h., the reference is to the elephant on the battlefield who is excited. Elephant in such a stage is expected to secrete the rut. In i., the word *sindhura* certainly refers to the excited or wild elephant who hits the trainer. Considering the context, it is evident that the word *sindhura* refers to the excited or mighty elephant in rut. This semantic peculiarity of the word *sindhura* is more evident in the compound expressions: *sindhuravâranò* and *sindhuradvesin*. These two words stand for a lion, the rival of elephant. When intoxicated, the elephants become enraged, furious and fight. At this stage an elephant cannot endure the sound of an enemy or rival, particularly that of a lion. Such a rut-maddened elephant is controlled or killed by a lion. The lion is hence aptly called *sindhuravâranò* or *sindhuradvesin*. In the *Yâdavâbhyudaya*, we find *sindhura* in the context of lion’s roar which controls the excited elephant:

j. rurodha simhanâdena yadisimhah sa sindhurân / Yâdavâbhyudaya 22.151.

‘That Yadu-lion controlled the elephants by lion roar.’

Similar examples are sought in the *Yaúastilakacampû* (2.320.26), *Râstraudhamahâkâvya* (7.17), *Kumârapâlacaritasangraha* (16.9), *Prabandhacintâmani* (27.12), and *Mânasollâsa* (2.3.211).

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