

How did Arithmetic Originate?

Brahmi	↓		—	=	≡	+	୯	୧	୨	୩	୪
Hindu	↓	୦	୧	୨	୩	୪	୫	୬	୭	୮	୯
Arabic	↓	•	١	٢	٣	٤	٥	٦	٧	٨	٩
Medieval	↓	O	I	2	3	୧	୨	6	୧	8	9
Modern		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

Arithmetic is the study of the addition, subtraction, multiplication and division of numbers. The word 'arithmetic' is derived from the Greek word 'arithmos' which means numbers. In the beginning of civilization, man used to count his sheep, cows, oxen and other animals on fingers. In fact, the word 'digit' which is used to denote numbers from zero to nine, finds its origin in the Latin word 'digitus' meaning a finger or toe. Later on, man started counting by putting marks on sticks of wood. But this process ended soon and man started using various signs for each number.

The Egyptians used straight lines for counting one to ten. The Greeks used the letters of their alphabets for this purpose. Just to make the difference clearer, a small sign used to be affixed to the letters. For example, they would write a' for one, b' for two and j' for ten. The Romans used to write the first five digits as I, II, III, IV and V. They used to write X for ten, L for fifty, C for hundred, D for five hundred and M for one thousand. In the Roman language even today numbers are written like this.

The numerals presently in use are called Arabic numerals, because it was from the Arabs that these numerals spread to Europe. Zero is Indian by origin and is called 'shoonya', meaning 'empty' or 'nothing', which became 'sifr' in Arabic, meaning the same. In 1202 an Italian resident prepared the first book of arithmetic based on the Arabic system. The first book on arithmetic in the Latin language was printed in 1478. By that time, the arithmetical methods of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division had fully developed. Mathematicians took centuries to develop the methods now used in arithmetic. Every one who goes to school learns arithmetic. It is a skill necessary in science, business and every day life.