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SYNONYMS IN *NIGHAṆṬU*
(A SEMANTIC APPROACH AFTER YĀSKA)

Introduction

In the post-Vedic era six classes of ancillary texts were written namely *Śikṣā* (phonetics), *Kalpa* (treatise on religious practice), *Vyākaraṇa* (Grammar), *Nirukta* (Etymology), *Chandas* (Metre) and *Jyotiṣa* (Astronomy) for the proper understanding of the Vedas. Excepting the *Vyākaraṇa*, *Nirukta* and to a certain extent the *Śikṣā*, the others were concerned with the rituals and proper application of the *mantras*. *Vyākaraṇa*, *Nirukta* and some parts of the *Śikṣā* were important for the study of the Vedic language with an approach characteristic of the concerned text. *Nirukta* played the most significant role for deciphering the meanings of the Vedic words with the help of etymology. The name of Yāska is associated with the *Nirukta*, the only extant text of this school till now.

The beginning of the discussion on phonetics, grammar, etymology, metre and astronomy can be traced back to the early Vedic literature. In course of time these subjects were treated more systematically and in the process six separate schools came into being. Thus the origin of the *Nirukta* school also can be found in the Ṛgveda in the etymologies of *jātavedas* (IX. 10.2), *purohita* (I. 131.1), *mātariśvan* (III. 29.11) and a few more words¹. Such etymologies are found in abun-

1. *jātaveda* – *agnirjanmāni deva ā vi vidān*, VII.10.2.

dance in the Brāhmaṇa literature² also.

Moreover, the attempt of Yāska is not the maiden one in the school of etymology too. Yāska often quoted the views of many of his predecessors either in support of his views or to show any deviation from their opinion. By the time of Yāska, Nirukta already achieved the distinction of a systematised school and that is further corroborated by his statements like 'iti nairuktāḥ' (21 times) or 'iti niruk-tasamayāḥ' (once).

Nighaṇṭu: Its important features

Nirukta, the word means the science of etymology and it is stated in the very first sentence of this book *samāmnāyaḥ samāmnātaḥ, sa vyākhyātavyaḥ, tamimaṃ samāmnāyaṃ nighaṇṭava ityācaksate* – the traditional list of words has been completed and it is going to be explained now. What is this traditional list? It is called Nighaṇṭu where the important Vedic words have been collected together.

This Nighaṇṭu is divided into three *kāṇḍas*, viz. *Naighaṇṭuka*, *Naigama* and *Daivata*. The *Naighaṇṭukakāṇḍa* contains three *adhyāyas* and the *Naigama* and *Daivata* have got one *adhyāya* each. The three chapters belonging to the *Naighaṇṭukakāṇḍa* contain 1210 synonyms distributed in 69 different lists. The single chapter of *Naigamakāṇḍa* contains 279 homonyms arranged in three lists. The *Daivatakāṇḍa* contains 151 appellations of deities collected in six lists and are arranged under three heads, viz, the gods of the terrestrial region, the gods of atmospheric region and the gods of celestial region.

The difference between the *Naighaṇṭuka* and *Naigama* is that the first one contains the lists of different words expressing a particular sense and the second one contains the lists of varied senses, which a

purohita – *devāso dadhire puraḥ*, I.131.1.

mātariśvā – *mātariśvā yadamimīta mātari*, III.29.11.

2. *yadasyāṃ jāyate tad jāyāyāḥ jāyātvam*, AB VII,33.1; *yadvāva sa tatra yathābhājanam devatā amumāvaha amumāvahetyāvāhayati tadeva hoturhotṛvaṃ hotā bhavati*, AB I.1.2; *caksurvai vicakṣaṇam vi hyenena paśyati*, AB I.6.

particular word conveys. The *Naigamakāṇḍa* can also be regarded as the collection of difficult words³.

Lakshman Sarup highlights a striking point regarding the principle behind the arrangement of the synonyms in the first three chapters. He showed that the first chapter deals with the physical things like earth, air, water and objects of nature like cloud, dawn, day, night etc. The second chapter deals with man, his limbs like arm, finger and also with objects and qualities associated with man like wealth, prosperity, anger, battle etc. The third chapter deals with abstract qualities like heaviness, lightness etc.⁴

Two important features of Nighaṇṭu are to be noted here. *First*, the lists of words in Nighaṇṭu are not the exhaustive ones as they contain some of the Vedic words only. So, *vāṇī* (RV III.30.10) and *āyu* (RV IV.23.8) in the sense of water, *haritaḥ* (RV I.115.5) in the sense of rays and some other such words are missing in the list of synonyms.

Secondly, it can be observed that a particular word occurs in different lists of synonyms in different senses. Thus the word *go* is found among the synonyms of the earth, among the synonyms of rays, among the synonyms of cow. The word *dīdhiti* is found among the synonyms of rays as well as among the synonyms of fingers, *avani* occurs among the synonyms of the earth as well as among those of fingers and so on. All of these words deserve to be included in the lists of homonyms but the compiler of Nighaṇṭu missed a number of them in the concerned list.

However, Yāska in his Nirukta mainly explained the Vedic words collected in the Nighaṇṭu. In doing so he sometimes illustrated some unlisted words also and adduces as examples a large number of mantras chiefly from the Ṛgveda and interpreted them with many etymological remarks. So Yāska's Nirukta can also be taken as a very old commentary of the Vedas.

3. *ekārthamanekaśabdāmityetaduktam, atha yānyanekārthānyekaśavdāni tānyato'nukramiṣyāmaḥ, anavagatasamṣkārahāṁśca nigamān; Nirukta* 4.1.

4. Lakshman Sarup, *The Nighantu and The Nirukta*, Introduction, English translation and notes, MLBD, Delhi, 1966, p. 13.

Composition of Nirukta

Nirukta is divided into twelve *adhyāyas*. The first *adhyāya* introduces the reader with four kinds of words, principles of Nirukta, the utility of this Vedāṅga and others. This is purely an introductory chapter. The second and the third chapter elucidate some words of the *Naighanṭuka kāṇḍa* i.e. the words of the first three *adhyāyas* of Nighaṇṭu. The chapters from the fourth to the sixth of Nirukta explain some words of the fourth chapter of Nighaṇṭu, the *Naigamakāṇḍa*. The rest of Nirukta go on commenting on the *Daivatakāṇḍa*, i.e. the fifth chapter of Nighaṇṭu.

It may, however, be noted here that although Yāska, at the very beginning said that *Nighaṇṭu* was going to be explained in his Nirukta, but it is Sāyaṇa who primarily took the traditional list as Nirukta⁵ and then the book elucidated by Yāska as Nirukta⁶. However, it is a matter of deliberation whether Sāyaṇa was right in his conjecture.

Code of Yāska's etymology

Yāska was of the opinion that all words originate from the verbs and in support of his view he quoted the observation of Śākaṭāyana, one of his predecessors – *sarvāṇi nāmānyākhyātājāni* (I.12). There was also a different school according to which all names do not owe their origin to the verbs. Gārgya and a section of grammarians cherish this view, *na sarvāṇīti gārgyo vaiyākaraṇānaṃ caike*. Yāska refuted all the criticisms put forward against the Nirukta school by Gārgya and declared that the words whose accent and grammatical forms are regular and are in accordance with the root, should be derived in ordinary

5. *arthāvavadhe nirapekṣatayā padajātaṃ yatroktaṃ tanniruktam, 'gouḥ gmā jmā kṣmā kṣametyārabhya vasavaḥ vājinaḥ devapatnyo devapatnyah' ityanto yaḥ padānāṃ samāmnāyaḥ samāmnāstasmin granthe padārthāvavadhāya parāpekṣā na vidyate, – Ṛgvedabhāṣyopakramaṇikā.*

6. *pañcādhyāyātmake etasmin granthe paranirapekṣatayā padārthasya uktaṭvāt taṣya granthasya niruktatvaṃ, tadvyākhyānaṃca dvādaśabhiradhyāyairyāsko nirmame, tadapi niruktamityucyate, ekaikasya padasya sambhaviṭā avayavārthāḥ tatra niḥśeṣeṇa ucyante iti vyutpatteḥ, ibid.*

fashion i.e. following the rules of grammar. If the words are not so, then the meaning of the concerned word is to be examined very closely and the derivative meaning is to be supplied by any suitable analogy. At first one should try to find out the analogy of form. However, if here is no such analogy one should try to explain them even by the analogy of a single syllable or letter⁷. So, when Pāṇini and a section of grammarians think *nara* is an underivable word, Yāska says, *nara manuṣyā, nrtyanti karmasu* (V. 1) and derives the word from the root *nṛt* which has 'n' and 'r' common with the word *nara*.

Another principle of etymology as laid down by Yāska is that if the meanings are same the etymologies are same and if the meanings are different then the etymologies are different⁸. He sets an illustration in this regard – *tatra nirṛtirniramaṇād, ṛcchateḥ kṛcchāpattiriti vā* (II.7) – the word *nirṛti* while used to mean the earth, is derived from the root *ram* preceded by *ni*, as the word carries the sense of giving enjoyment. The same word while signifies calamity is derived from the root *ṛ* meaning 'to befall'.

While stating the rules of etymology Yāska noted also the complex ways, the words are formed of, – *viśayavatyaḥ hi vṛttayo bhavanti* (II.1) and indicated in this connection different phonetic peculiarities a word undergoes in its formation. As for example,

- 1) Survival of the initial part of the root only, *pratta* (*pra-dā + kta*), *avatta* (*ava-do + kta*).
- 2) Elision of the initial part, *santi*, *staḥ* < *as*
- 3) Elision of the final form, *gatvā*, *gam* < *gam*
- 4) Elision of the penultimate, *jagmatuḥ* < *gam*
- 5) Modification of the penultimate, *rājā* < *rājan*, *daṇḍi* < *daṇḍin*
- 6) Elision of a letter in some forms, *yāmi* (= *yācāmi*) < *yāc*
- 7) Elision of two letters, *tṛca* (= *tri + ṛca*)
- 8) Alteration in the initial part of the root, *jyotiḥ* (< *dyut*) , *ghana* (< *han*)

7. *tadyeṣu padeṣu svarasaṃskārau samarthau prādeśikena guṇenānvitau syātāṃ tathā tāni nirbrūyāt, athānanvite'rthe'prādeśike vikāre'rthanityaḥ parikṣeta, kenacidvṛttisāmānyena, avidyamāne sāmānye'pyakṣaravarṇasāmānyānnirbrūyāt, na tveva na nirbrūyāt*, II.1.

8. *tāni cet samānakarmāṇi samānanirvacanāni, nānakarmāṇi cennānirvacanāni yathārthaṃ nirvaktavyānīti*, II.7.

- 9) Metathesis, *stoka* (< ścyut), *rajju* (< srj), *sikata* (< kas), *tarku* (< kṛt)
- 10) Alteration in the final part, *megha* (< mih), *vadhā* (< vah), *madhu* (< mad)
- 11) anaptyxis, *dvāra* (< vr), *āsthāt* (< sthā)

So Yāska, as an etymologist was well aware of various phonetic phenomena such as elision, syncope, haplology, anaptyxis, aphesis, assimilation etc. and he explained them in his own way.

However, Yāska could apprehend the result of the application of his rules by an incompetent person without proper training. So his instructions on the rules of etymology ends with his very valuable advice which can be enlisted as follows.

- a) No word should be derived without context
- b) These rules should not be conveyed to a person who is not acquainted with grammar.
- c) These rules should not be taught to any person who has not approached as a student.
- d) These rules need not be discussed with a person who is incapable of understanding them.

A few etymological discussions following Yāska

Yāska's *Nirukta*, as it has been pointed out earlier, is an explanatory note on Nighaṇṭu, the traditional list of the Vedic words. He occasionally recorded the *pratyaya* involved in the formation. But he always showed the root indicating the actual sense of the word and suggested *artho nityaḥ parīkṣeta* (II.1) in this regard. So, *Nirukta* can be designated as *arthānuśāsanam*. In search of a suitable etymological meaning of a word Yāska tried to unfold the multifarious aspect of an object or an idea conveyed therein with his own methodology. While explaining the words Yāska referred to the lists and picked up a few only for illustration. Some more synonyms were also analysed by him in different chapters in different contexts. Some of these illustrations of semantic study of Yaska accruing to all the chapters of *Nirukta* will be discussed now.

Let us consider the etymology of 'pṛthivī' and its synonyms.

Yāska derived *pr̥thivī* from the root *prath* (1.13) and quoted the view of Śākaṭāyana his predecessor in this regard. In this etymology he put more emphasis on the character of vastness of the earth. On the other hand, the synonym 'go' is rooted from 'gam' and according to Yāska (II.5) the word expresses the sense of the earth in two ways, (i) it goes very far and (ii) the people go over it. The first meaning indicates the extensiveness of the earth and the second one signifies the earth as the platform on which the people can move. The word 'aditi', another synonym of the earth, according to Yāska (IV.22), carries two senses viz. (i) imperishable and (ii) mother goddess. Durgācārya, the commentator of Nirukta, attributes these two explanations to two schools respectively, the school of etymologists and the school of legendarians or aitiḥāsika. Yāska, however, explained the word 'aditi' to convey the meaning of atmosphere or heaven. If the characteristic of the imperishability is attached to the earth, then the use of the word 'aditi' will be well acceptable too. In fact, the Vedic poets have probably used the word 'aditi' to represent the earth as an accumulator of energy. Another synonym of the earth as derived by Yāska is 'nirṛti' and the word carries the sense of giving enjoyment and the earth is so named as it gives enjoyment to the creature (II.7).

The next list of synonymous words is that of the word 'svaraṇa' i.e. gold. There are fifteen such words and Yāska took up only one i.e. 'hiraṇya' for etymology and explained it from different angle (II.10). These can be enlisted as,

- 1) It is extended to suit the shape of different ornaments.
- 2) It is circulated from man to man as it was the medium of exchange.
- 3) It is useful as well as delightful.
- 4) It is yearned for by the people.

So, to Yāska, 'hiraṇya' was a very useful and valuable object used for ornaments and as a medium for exchange.

Out of sixteen synonyms of 'antarikṣa', Yāska had taken up two words only, 'puṣkara' and 'antarikṣa' to show their internal connotation. 'Puṣkara' is derived from the root 'puṣ' that means to nourish (V.14). Antarikṣa nourishes and hence it is called 'puṣkara'. How does it nourish? It, as Durgācārya explains, nourishes by offering an open space that is very important for the healthy growth of living

beings. The word ‘*antarikṣa*’ is derived in different ways (II.10);

- a) It is intermediate between the earth and the heaven
- b) It is the end of the earth,
- c) It lies between the two, and
- d) It is the imperishable part of the body.

Of these four etymologies the first and the third one sound alike. The last one interprets the word philosophically. The place of the imperishable power lies in the middle of the body and it is indicated by the *ṛṣis* of the Upaniṣads also – *sa eṣa antaścarate vahudhā jāyamānā* (MU 2.2.6). This imperishable *brahman* is otherwise called *guhācara*.

Let us now take up the word ‘*ahaḥ*’ which has twelve synonyms and Yāska selected three of them only for his etymological analysis. It is shining and so it is ‘*dyu*’ (< \sqrt{dyut} , I.6). It is ‘*ghraṃsa*’ as the water is evaporated during day (< \sqrt{gras} , VI.19) and it is ‘*ahaḥ*’ as the people accomplish their works during this period (*upa-ā-√-hr*, II.20). Days are called ‘*vāsara*’ and ‘*vesara*’ (IV.7) because they consist of two varieties of opposite weather, viz. cold and warm (*dvirsvarāṇi*), they remove darkness (*vivāsanāni*) and they roll on one after another *ad infinitum* (*gamanāni*). Their movement is regulated by the sun (*svar*) and so they are ‘*svasara*’ (V.4).

Out of the twenty synonyms of cloud the first nine words denote both cloud and mountain (II. 21). Due to the similarity in the physical appearance the poets expressed both of them by the same epithet. The word ‘*giri*’ when derived by Yāska takes the same derivative meaning in the sense of mountain as well as in the sense of cloud – *samudgīrṇo bhavati* (< *sam-ud-√gr*, I.20) – that which is vomited up. The water being evaporated from the earth goes up and forms the cloud and thus its etymological explanation as *samudgīrṇo bhavati* can be justified metaphorically. And as for mountain it is as if vomited up in mass by the earth and here too the explanation is metaphorical. Now, from the etymological explanation of nine synonyms of cloud we can very easily appreciate the vision of the Vedic poets also. Clouds contain water so they are ‘*upara*’ and ‘*upala*’ (II.21), it moves in the atmosphere, so it is ‘*vraja*’ (< \sqrt{vrj} , VI.2) and ‘*ahi*’ (< \sqrt{i} , II.17), it showers water so it is ‘*megha*’ (< \sqrt{mih} , II.21) and ‘*odana*’ (< *udakadānam*, VI.34), it covers the sky so it is ‘*vala*’ (< \sqrt{vr} , VI.2). Cloud is also called ‘*varāha*’

because as Yāska interprets 'vara' is his food (V.4). The word 'vara' is just an epithet of water and not the water itself in the true sense of term. That is why the word is not included in the list of synonyms of water in Nighaṅṭu. However, the great importance of water is reflected in the word 'vara'. I would like to draw your attention to another fact that the word 'vani' (VI.2) and 'saraḥ' (X.26) are also derived by Yāska in the sense of water, but they are, however, conspicuous by their absence in the Nighaṅṭu's list of synonyms.

All the five synonyms of speech out of fifty-seven, as explained by Yāska bear a common trait and that is the speech is spoken out. So it is variously called as 'vāc' (< √vac, II.23), 'vāsi' (< √vāś, IV.16), 'vāñi' (< √vad, VI.2) and 'ghoṣa' (< √ghuṣ, IX.9). It is at the same time *dhiṣaṇā* as it carries meaning (< √dhiṣ) and it abides by the direction of 'dhī' i.e. intelligence (VIII.3). A deviation from Nighaṅṭu is noted in the etymology of 'akṣara' (XIII.12). Nighaṅṭu included this word in the list denoting speech. But according to Yāska 'akṣara' is syllable only as it does not perish and it is just like an axle of the speech. As the car rolls on staying on the axle so the speech becomes manifested in cooperation of the syllable.

There are one hundred synonyms of water of which Yāska had taken up ten. They show that water is 'purīṣa' as it fills the rivers etc (< √pūr, II.22) and nourishes (< √pṛ, II.22), it moistens so it is 'udaka' (< √ud, II.24), it besprinkles so it is 'ghṛta' (< √ghṛ, VI.24), it makes sound so it is 'vṛvukam' (< √brū / √bhraṃs, II.22) and 'vusam' (< √brū / √bhraṃs, V.19), it purifies and it is used for bathing and drinking, so it is 'visam' (< √vis, XII.26). But the water with its flowing feature appealed the Vedic seers most and so the water is variously called 'madhu' (< √dham), 'sara' (< √sṛ, IX.22), 'ap' (< √āp, IX.26) or 'ambu' (= araṇamambu < √ṛ, III.10).

There are thirty-seven synonyms of river and Yāska showed etymology of only four out of them. The river makes sound so it is 'nada' (< √nad, II.22), it breaks the banks so it is 'rujānā' (< √ruj, VI.4), it moves so it is 'sindhu' (< √sru, V.27), it carries water and so it is 'sarasvatī' (IX.26). The word sara was taken by Yāska as water and was derived from root 'ṛ', but the Nighaṅṭu did not record it in the sense of water.

There are fourteen synonyms of offspring in the second *adhyāya*

of the Nighaṅṭu and Yāska derived about three of them. The part played by the offspring for extension of genealogy is reflected in two of them viz. 'apatya' (apa-√tan + ya, III.I) and 'tanaya' (√tan, X.7). Another significant feature of the offspring, according to the religious belief, is that he prevents his forefathers from falling down to hell. This sense is incorporated in the word 'apatya' from the root 'a-√pat'. Blind affection of the parents towards their offspring is noted by Yāska in the etymology of the word 'toka' (<√tud) expressing that 'toka' or offspring are frequently criticised by the parents.

Out of the twenty-eight synonyms of wealth only four have been derived by Yāska. The idea that wealth deserves to be given away is reflected in two words 'magham' (<√maṃh) and 'rayi' (<√ra). That the wealth is delightful is conveyed in the word 'ratna' (<√ram, VIII.15). Another synonym of wealth is 'bhoga' conveying the sense that it is to be enjoyed (<√bhaj, I.7). The most appealing etymology in this regard is the etymology of 'reknas'. It conveys that the wealth does not accompany its owner when he passes away and actually it remains (<√ric, III.2) in the earth itself even after its owner's death.

Yāska showed etymology of the three words carrying the meaning of thief. He explained two of them, 'stena' and 'tāyu' as persons on whom sins are heaped together. The word 'tāyu' was also derived from root 'tas' (IV.24) meaning to contract. A thief is subjected to capital punishment, which shortens his life and even after his death his virtues fall sharply owing to his sinful activities. The thief is also called 'taskara' as he performs sinful act (tatkaroti, <√kr, III.14), practices it continuously (<√tan + √kr, III.14) or practices it day and night.

Nighaṅṭu: The earliest koṣa text

Nighaṅṭu is the earliest lexicon as found in the Indian literature. It is not a dictionary in the modern sense of the term, as it does not contain any explanation of the words listed in it. It can be designated as a koṣa-literature and the beginning of the koṣa-literature is no doubt marked by it. Among the later koṣa texts the name of Amarakoṣa by Amarasimha (c 6th century A.D.) deserves to be mentioned first. It is the earliest lexicon of the classical Sanskrit.

Incidentally, it can be pointed out here that a semantic comparison between the sets of synonyms of Nighaṅṭu and that of Amarakoṣa reveals the changing aspect of language. Let us illustrate this point picking up a few examples.

If we look at the synonyms for the earth as found in the two books, *Nighaṅṭu* and *Amarakoṣa*, it can be observed that there are twenty-one synonyms *kṣamā*, *kṣoṇī*, *kṣiti*, *avani*, *urvī*, *pr̥thvī*, *mahī*, *bhāḥ*, *bhāmi* and *gotra* which occur in both the places. It shows that ten other synonyms of the earth have not come down from Nighaṅṭu to Amarakoṣa. This essentially indicates that these words might have become obsolete by the time of Amarakoṣa. On the other hand this later one introduces sixteen more synonyms which were not observed in the Nighaṅṭu, such as, *acalā*, *anantā*, *rasā*, *viśvaṃbharā*, *sthirā*, *dharā*, *dharitrī*, *dharāṇī*, *gyā*, *kāśyapī*, *sarvaṃsahā*, *vasumatī*, *vasudhā*, *vasundharā*, *kuḥ* and *medinī*. However, the word *vasumatī* occurs only once in the Ṛgveda (III.30.11) and that too as an adjective of *dyāvāpr̥thivī* and here it means 'full of wealth'. This epithet in course of time has been evolved as a synonym of the earth and gave rise to two more synonyms, *vasudhā* and *vasundharā* in the classical Sanskrit and those have been recorded in the *Amarakoṣa*. This is the characteristic of a language that a word once used as an adjective becomes coined as a substantive in course of time. The very word *savitṛ* is a glaring example of it. However, the word *vasumatī* is found in the Brāhmaṇa literature (Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa 2.6.10.4; 3.6.13.1; 3.7.7.13; Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 1.4.5.2 and so on) though not recorded in the Nighaṅṭu. Likewise the synonyms *dharāṇī* or *dharitrī* were familiar to the schools of the Yajurvedasaṃhitā⁹ and *viśvaṃbharā* to the Atharvaveda¹⁰ also. However, the new introduction of synonyms in the *Amarakoṣa* reveals the different aspects of the earth as felt and fancied by the later generations. The earth is unchanging so it is *acalā*, *sthirā* and *gyā*, it is enjoyable, so it is *rasā*, it is noisy so it is *kuḥ*, it

9. *dharitrī* – Mādhyandinasamhitā 14.22; Kāthakasamhitā 15.6.2; Taittirīyasamhitā 4.3.7.2 etc. *dharāṇī* – Mādhyandinasamhitā 14.21; Kāthakasamhitā 15.6.1; Taittirīyasamhitā 4.3.7.2 etc.

10. Viśvamvarā – Maitrāyaṇīsamhitā 4.14.11; Atharvavedasamhitā (Śaunaka school) 12.1.6.

endures everything so it is *sarvaṃsahā*.

Let us take another example for illustration. The Nighaṇṭu enlists twenty-five synonyms of *manuṣya* and the Amarakoṣa, on the other hand, only six ones. These six synonyms are *manuṣya*, *mānuṣa*, *martya*, *manuja*, *mānava* and *nara*. Out of them three synonyms, *manuṣya*, *martya* and *nara* are also found in the Nighaṇṭu. The Ṛgveda refers to the two synonyms, *mānava* (IV.54.1) and *manuṣa* (I.37.1) but curiously they are not recorded in the Nighaṇṭu. The word *manuja* of Amarakoṣa bears the meaning, the offspring of *Manu* and this derivative meaning is reflected in the word *manujāta* which was referred to many times in the Vedic literature right from the texts of Saṃhitās. Incidentally, *mānuṣa* and *mānava* are very frequently used synonyms of man even in the present day Indian vocabularies but not found in the Nighaṇṭu. *Pāñcajanaḥ*, a word found in the list of Nighaṇṭu in the same sense occurs in the Amarakoṣa also but to denote the masculine gender only. Other words of Nighaṇṭu have become obsolete.

Let us compare the synonyms of quarters as found in the Nighaṇṭu and in the Amarakoṣa. The Nighaṇṭu records eight synonyms and the Amarakoṣa five ones. The three words of Nighaṇṭu, *ātā*, *uparā* and *āṣṭhā* have become obsolete and not found place in the *Amarakoṣa* while all the other synonyms have been carried down to it.

However, all these indicate that as man forms new ideas or gathers new information about a particular object, he searches for an appropriate word to convey that particular sense. So, it is an undeniable fact that excepting a few technical terms every particular word even being synonym has a great import and important role to play in the field of semantics. Yāska set a systematic tradition of deciphering the meaning of the synonyms by his method of etymology. The extreme stand taken by him may not be always acceptable or appreciable but his attempt was no doubt honest and laudable too. This attempt served as a great stimulant also for the later writer in the field of semantic study, such as, the writer of *uṇādi sātra*, *Devarājajavan* (c 14th century A.D.) a commentator of Nighaṇṭu, and some gifted commentators of Amarakoṣa like *Kṣīrasvāmin* (11th century A.D.), *Vandyaghaṭīya Sarvānanda* (1159 A.D.), *Rāyamukuṭamaṇi* (1431 A.D.) and so on.

Concluding remarks

As a pathfinder in the science of etymology Yāska is hailed in high esteem by the modern linguists. But at the same time he incurred much criticism for his excessive passion and attachment for etymology. From the angle of modern linguistics his approach was crude and to a certain extent mechanical. It is true that he was not successful in all his attempts of etymologies but some of them were absolutely perfect and of course, impressive. It should, however, be put on record that Yāska put up a faithful effort in disclosing the true essence of an object. He observed different aspects of an object from different angles. These observations helped him to achieve the multifarious aspects of an object through the study of semantics. We have already pointed out that Yāska was not the first one to introduce such meaning. The convention of extracting the true meaning of a word was prevalent right from the age of Saṃhitā. Etymological explanation was in abundance in the Brāhmaṇa literature that was the first attempt of interpreting the Vedic mantras.

Yāska's attempt in etymology was quite in tune with the Vedic convention. Vedic mantras are poetical works and not merely the verbosity of the ṛṣis. So when the poet uses a particular word, it had got a definite purpose. The phrase *vāgārthāviva saṃpṛktau* of the great poet Kālidāsa is quite in keeping with the spirit of the Vedic poets also. The Vedic poet had a specific desire (VII.1) in mind when he uttered a prayer and in his prayer he must have used a particular synonym which could best translate his mind. Yāska attempted to read the mind of the seers thereby bringing in light the significance of the concerned word. Thus Yāska could appreciate that when a seer used the word *pṛthivī*, the seer suggested the vastness of the earth and when one used the word *nirṛti* he suggested the pleasure-yielding characteristic of the earth. In the same way if a poet used the word *puṣkara* in the sense of the atmosphere he must have pointed out its aspect of nourishment. Actually a word is inseparably associated with its meaning and the gifted poets use a particular word conveying a particular aspect that is quite in conformity with the context and sentiment. Yāska through etymologies unraveled that sense of a word; the poet wanted to reveal in his mantras. The etymologies of Yāska reflect the various visions of the seers regarding a particular object having different synonyms.

Yāska has been designated first and foremost as an etymologist. The word etymology comes from the Greek word ‘*etumos*’ meaning true and the word ‘*logos*’ means account or knowledge. So etymology means the true account. Next to India, ancient Greece was the only country where a considerable interest in the true account of a word was developed and it was gradually grown into a branch of philosophy. The real interest in this subject was the essence of words we use and the ideas as expressed by the words. Among the Greek philosophers the Sophists took up language as a subject of specialised inquiry. It has been aptly observed in the *Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* that Prodicus (435 BC) “who Plato thought was the best of the Sophists on language, seems to have operated on the hypotheses that there were no genuine synonyms, that where there were two words there were two meanings”¹¹. If that can be remarked as regards to Prodicus we are also justified to remark in case of our Yāska that he not only understood that synonyms had different sets of meanings and ideas of the same object but he demonstrated it also in his etymological approach. We are also justified to observe that the Vedic seers did have those ideas in their mind while using different words to denote same object. So the etymological meanings as given by Yāska though not strictly successful on each and every occasion yet they cannot be regarded as a fancy of his own mind.

An object involved in different functions of its own give rise to different synonyms. One possessed of high literary faculty or aware of the import of the words concerned coins a particular word among the synonyms only to pinpoint a particular aspect of the word concerned that appeals him most at that particular time or aptly suited to the context. These different sets of meanings were perhaps forgotten in course of time partly because of regular and indiscriminate use of the words and partly because of the commentators’ interest in the liturgical application of the mantras. It was Yāska, the etymologist, who took the task of bringing out the true essence of the different nuances of an object or idea. He systematised the study of semantics of the Vedic words following the path set by his predecessors.

11. *The Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, Edited by Paul Edwards, Vol.VII, New York, Reprint,1972, p 359.

Actually it is the later half of the fifth century BC when the study of Semantics started in Greece. Though the exact date of Yāska cannot be ascertained, yet he can be placed in the period between 700 BC and 500 BC. Yāska can also be taken as the precursor of systematic semantic study in India. His contemplation on words can assign him a designation of philosopher too and then his work Nirukta should get a new dimension as a work of philosophy – it is a philosophy of words. The word philosophy has a very wide connotation. It does not necessarily mean to be connected with some spiritual matter only. Even if we accept it to be so, yet one, who extracts the spirit of the word, is also in the true sense a philosopher as he extracts the exact spirit in which a word is uttered.

