

Vedāṅgas – Niruktam

1. Introduction

The Vedāṅga, which deals with 'etymological interpretation' is called Niruktam and it is considered as the ears of the Vedapuruṣa. While Vyākaraṇam deals with (the form of) Śabda, Niruktam deals with Artha (meaning). The purpose of the study of this Vedāṅga is Mokṣa. The origin of Thesaurus / Dictionary can be traced to Niruktam and here it is called Nighaṇṭu. The presently available Niruktam was authored by a sage called Yāska. The Vedāṅga discusses four-fold division of Śabda, the constant change of a thing through six stages etc. Niśśeṣeṇa ucyate arthaḥ anena (the meaning is completely explained by this) – is the derivative meaning of the term Niruktam.

2. Origin

Just like any Vedāṅga, Niruktam can be traced to Veda –

तदाहुतीनाम् आहुतित्वम् ॥ ऐतरेयब्राह्मणम् १-१-२ ॥

tadāhutīnām āhutitvam ॥ aitareyabrāhmaṇam 1-1-2 ॥

tat = that, āhutitvam = oblationness, āhutīnām = of oblations.

This is the oblationness of oblations

यदप्रथयत्, तत् पृथिव्याः पृथिवीत्वम् ॥ तैत्तिरीयब्राह्मणम् १-१-३-६, ७ ॥

yadaprathayat, tat pṛthivyāḥ pṛthivītvam ॥ taittirīyabrāhmaṇam 1-1-3-6, 7 ॥

yat = due to which reason, aprathayat = extended, tat = that is, pṛthivītvam = earthness, pṛthivyāḥ = of the earth.

Due to which reason, it extended; the same is earthness of earth.

3. Structure of Niruktam

The treatise of Niruktam authored by Yāska is divided into three Kāṇḍas (parts) and each Kāṇḍa is divided into Adhyāyas (chapters). It is also called Samāmnāya (a group of Vedic Śābdas).

- i. Naighaṇṭukam Kāṇḍam – Nighaṇṭu means a Thesaurus (a book of synonyms) and refers to the first three chapters. The first ever Thesaurus is built by Yāska in Niruktam for Vedic Śābdas. The authors of Nāmalingānuśāsana or Amarakośa, Vaijayantī, Halāyudha etc. followed suit in compiling their Thesauruses for Laukika Śābdas (secular words). So, the designation, i.e. Naighaṇṭukam conforms to meaning.
- ii. Naigamam Kāṇḍam – Nigama means Veda. Since Yāska deals with the Vedic Śābdas all through the four chapters (caturadhyāyātmaka) of the second part, it is aptly called Naigamakāṇḍam.

- iii. Daivatam Kāṇḍam – The name conforms to meaning. The third part of Niruktam exclusively deals with Devatas (Gods), the hymns (ṛcaḥ) associated with them, the things related to different Devatas etc. There are five chapters in this part.

4. Four-fold Categorization of Śabdas

Yāska puts the gamut of Śabdas of both Loka and Veda, under four headings –

तद्यान्येतानि चत्वारि पदजातानि नामाख्याते चोपसर्गनिपाताश्च तानीमानि
भवन्ति ॥ १-१-१ ॥

tadyānyetāni catvāri padajātāni nāmākhyāte copasarganipātāśca tānīmāni
bhavanti ॥ 1-1-1 ॥

tat = the noumenon of the meaning of the Śabda, Nighaṇṭu is being explained
– yāni etāni catvāri padajātāni = which are those four word-groups called,
nāmākhyāte ca upasarganipātāḥ ca = nouns, verbs, prefixes and words with
varying meaning, tāni imāni = that kind of these words, bhavanti = are called
by the name Nighaṇṭu.

Now the noumenon of the meaning of the Śabda 'Nighaṇṭu' is being explained. In
Loka and Veda there are four kinds of word-groups, viz. nouns, verbs, prefixes and nipātas
(which are used with varying meaning). These are called by the term Nighaṇṭu (Thesaurus).

भावप्रधानमाख्यातं सत्त्वप्रधानानि नामानि ॥ १-१-१ ॥

bhāvapradhānamākhyātaṃ sattvapradhānāni nāmāni ||1-1-1 ||

ākhyātaṃ = the verb, bhāvapradhānam = has got the meaning of the root as the important factor, nāmāni = nouns, sattvapradhānāni = have got the thing, which is the resort of gender, number etc. called dravyam, as the important factor.

The ākhyāta (verb) denotes four meanings – the meaning of the root, time, case (kāraṇa) and number. Among these, the meaning of the root is important and others are guṇabhūta (unimportant). The noun denotes four meanings – the meaning, the thing called dravyam (both real and abstract), number and gender. Among them the meaning (also called sattā / svārtha) is important and the rest are unimportant.

5. Definition of an Activity

Yāska defines an activity that is denoted by a verb –

पूर्वापरीभूतं भावम् आख्यातेन आचष्टे, व्रजति पचतीति उपक्रमप्रभृत्यपवर्गपर्यन्तम्

|| १-१-१ ||

pūrvāparībhūtaṃ bhāvam ākhyātena ācaṣṭe, vrajati pacatīti

upakrama-prabhṛtyapavargaparyantam ||1-1-1 ||

bhāvam = the meaning of a verb, pūrvāparībhūtaṃ = which is in the order of prior and posterior, upakramaprabhṛti apavargaparyantam = that has got a

beginning etc. and extends till the end, vrajati pacati iti = like going, cooking,
ācaṣṭe = is denoted, ākhyātena = by a verb.

An activity is one which, has got the properties of prior and posterior, has got a
beginning and extends till the end, denotes the meaning of a root by verbs like going, cooking
etc.

An activity, if desired to be seen as a dravya, can be expressed by nouns also (not only
by verbs) –

मूर्तं सत्त्वभूतं सत्त्वनामभिः ॥१-१-१॥

mūrtam sattvabhūtam sattvanāmabhiḥ ॥ 1-1-1 ॥

mūrtam = if the activity got a concrete form, sattvabhūtam = and thus became
a dravyam, sattvanāmabhiḥ = then it is denoted by Śabdas that denote
dravyam, i.e. having gender and number.

If the activity has taken a different shape and becomes dravyam then it can be
expressed by Śabdas denoting dravyam, i.e. having gender and number. The import is that
activity can be denoted by verbs and nouns as well.

व्रज्या पक्तिः इति ॥१-१-१॥

vrajyā pakṭiḥ iti ॥ 1-1-1 ॥

vrajyā = going, pakṭiḥ = cooking, iti = etc. are examples.

Vrajati (going) is the verb and vrajyā is a noun that denotes the same meaning. Pacati (cooking) is a verb and pakṭiḥ is a noun that denotes the same meaning.

6. Definition of Dravyam

Yāska defines a dravyam –

अद इति सत्त्वानामुपदेशः ॥१-१-१॥

ada iti sattvānāmupadeśaḥ ॥1-1-1॥

adaḥ iti = if a thing is referred to by a pronoun, sattvānām upadeśaḥ = then it is a dravyam.

If a thing is referred to by a pronoun then it is a dravyam (here the word adaḥ is a form of the word 'idam').

गौः, अश्वः, पुरुषः, हस्ती, इति ॥१-१-१॥

gauḥ, aśvaḥ, puruṣaḥ, hastī, iti ..1-1-1..

cow, horse, person, elephant etc. are examples.

7. Dichotomy of Śabdas

In fact, there are only two kinds of Śabdās – verb and noun. The verb denotes an activity which is a subject of inference. On the other hand, a noun denotes a concrete thing. Śabdās denoting property, class are also put under nouns, as they have a dravyam as their resort. An activity can also be denoted by a noun.

8. Ṣaḍ bhāvavikārāḥ (the six transformations of a thing)

Yāska in his Niruktam enumerates six changes a thing undergoes. He says that it was a sage called Vārṣyāyaṇi, who propounded the concept –

षड् भावविकाराः भवन्तीति वार्ष्यायणिः ॥१-१-३॥

ṣaḍ bhāvavikārāḥ bhavantīti vārṣyāyaṇiḥ ॥ 1-1-3 ॥

ṣaṭ = six, bhāvavikārāḥ = changes of a thing, bhavanti = do happen, iti = so, vārṣyāyaṇiḥ = says a sage called Vārṣyāyaṇi.

No 'thing' can exist without change. Right from the birth every 'thing' undergoes six changes, i.e. all other changes, if any, are included in these six.

जायते, अस्ति, विपरिणमते, वर्धते, अपक्षीयते, विनश्यति इति ॥१-१-३॥

jāyate, asti, vipariṇamate, vardhate, apakṣīyate, vinaśyati iti ॥1-1-3 ॥

jāyate = a thing is born, asti = it exists, vipariṇamate = undergoes

transformation, vardhate = increases, apakṣīyate = declines, vinaśyati =

perishes.

A thing is born, exists, transforms, increases, declines and perishes.

9. Upasargāḥ (Prefixes)

The prefixes, such as pra, para, anu, ava etc. are added before a noun and verb. They change the course of meaning –

नामाख्यातयोस्तु कर्मोपसंयोगद्योतका भवन्ति ॥१-१-४॥

nāmākhyātayostu karmopasaṃyogadyotakā bhavanti ..1-1-4..

karmopasaṃyogadyotakāḥ bhavanti = they suggest a specific meaning by getting mixed with the meaning, nāmākhyātaḥ = of nouns and verbs. The word 'tu' implied that they do not denote any meaning on their own.

Upasargas do not denote any meaning on their own but change the course of meaning of the noun and verb.

आ इत्यर्वागर्थे ॥१-१-४॥

ā ityārvāgarthe ॥1-1-4 ॥

ā iti = the upasarga 'ā', ārvāk arthe = is used in the sense of 'upto'

'Ā' is an upasarga which is used in the sense of 'upto'. 'Āparvatāt' means 'upto the mountains'.

10. Nipātāḥ

Yāska defines 'nipāta' –

अथ निपाताः। उच्चावचेषु अर्थेषु निपतन्ति ॥१-२-१॥

atha nipātāḥ. uccāvaceṣu artheṣu nipatanti ॥1-2-1 ॥

atha = next, nipātāḥ = nipātas are being defined, uccāvaceṣu artheṣu = in different kinds of meanings, nipatanti = they are being employed.

Now the definition of nipātas – they are being employed in different meanings.

नेति प्रतिषेधार्थो यो भाषायाम् ॥१-२-१२॥

neti pratiṣedhārtho yo bhāṣāyām ॥1-2-12 ॥

na iti = the nipāta 'na', bhāṣāyām = in Loka (secular language), pratiṣedhārthaḥ = means censure.

The nipāta 'na' is used in the sense of censure in Loka.

आचार्य आचारं ग्राहयति, आचिनोत्यर्थान्, आचिनोति बुद्धिमिति वा ॥१-२-२॥

ācārya ācāraṃ grāhayati, ācinotyarthān, ācinoti buddhimiti vā ॥1-2-2 ॥

ācāryaḥ = the word ācāryaḥ can be derived thus, grāhayati = teaches, ācāram = behaviour, ācinoti = collects, arthān = different things, ācinoti = sharpens, buddhim = intellect, iti vā = in all these senses.

The word 'ācāryaḥ' (a teacher / preacher) can be derived by assigning any one of the meanings – one who teaches behaviour, one who gives many things, one who sharpens the brain.

11. Nouns are born out of verbs

The author of Niruktam thinks that all nouns are born out of verbs –

तत्र नामान्याख्यातजानीति शाकाटायनः नैरुक्तसमयश्च ॥१-४-१३॥

tatra nāmānyākhyātajānīti śākāṭāyanaḥ nairuktasamayaśca ॥1-4-13॥

tatra = in the said four categories of nāma, ākhyāta, upasarga and nipāta,

nāmāni = nouns are, ākhyātajāni = born out of verbs, īti śākāṭāyanaḥ = says

Śākaṭāyana, nairuktasamayaḥ ca = this is also the norm of Nairuktas (i.e those who follow Niruktam).

Among the four-fold Śabdās, nouns are born out of verbs, according to Śākaṭāyana.

And the followers of Niruktam also subscribe to this theory.

न सर्वाणि इति गार्ग्यः ॥१-४-१३॥

na sarvāṇi iti gārgyaḥ ॥1-4-13 ॥

na sarvāṇi = all nouns are not born out of verbs, iti gārgyaḥ = says, sage
Gārgya.

वैयाकरणानां च एके ॥१-४-१३॥

vaiyākaraṇānām ca eke ॥1-4-13 ॥

eke = some, vaiyākaraṇānām = among grammarians, ca = also subscribe to
this theory of Gārgya.

Some grammarians, such as Pāṇini also support the theory of Gārgya, that not all
nouns are produced from verbs.

12. Niruktam – a must to know the meaning

Yāska asserts that it is impossible to know the meaning of Vedic Śābdas without
Niruktam –

अथापि इदमन्तरेण मन्त्रेषु अर्थप्रत्ययः न विद्यते ॥१-५-५॥

athāpi idamantareṇa mantreṣu arthapratyayaḥ na vidyate ॥1-5-5 ॥

athāpi = also, idam antareṇa = without this Niruktam, mantreṣu = in Vedic
Śābdas, arthapratyayaḥ = the cognition, na vidyate = does not happen.

Also without Niruktam one cannot understand the meaning of Vedic Śābdas.

13. Niruktam is a supplement of Vyākaraṇam

Vyākaraṇam deals with svāra (accent) and the analysis (saṃskāra) of Śabdas while Niruktam discusses the meaning of a Śabda. Thus, Niruktam can be supplementary to Vyākaraṇam – rules Yāska –

तदिदं विद्यास्थानं व्याकरणस्य कात्स्न्यम् ॥१-५-१५॥

tadidaṃ vidyāsthānaṃ vyākaraṇasya kārtsnyam ..1-5-15..

tadidaṃ = the Niruktam that is commenced, vidyāsthānam = an independent discipline that is useful in attaining Mokṣa, kārtsnyam = remaining part, vyākaraṇasya = of Vyākaraṇam.

This Niruktam is an independent device useful in attaining Mokṣa. At the same time, along with Vyākaraṇam it makes a complete entity.

14. Meaning is Important

A person who learnt Veda but does not know the meaning is just like a dry tree – asserts Yāska –

स्थाणुरयं भारहारः किलाभूत् अधीत्य वेदं न विजानाति योऽर्थम्।

योऽर्थज्ञ इत्सकलं भद्रमश्नुते नाकमेति ज्ञानविधूतपाप्मा ॥ १-६-१८ ॥

sthāṇurayaṁ bhārahāraḥ kilābhūt adhītya vedaṁ na vijānāti yo'rtham ।

yo'rthajña itsakalaṁ bhadramaśnute nākameti jñānavidhūtapāpmā ॥ 1-6-18 ॥

vedam adhītya = having learnt Veda, yaḥ = which person, artham na vijānāti =

does not know the meaning, ayam = such a person, bhārahāraḥ = while

carrying the load unnecessarily, sthāṇuḥ = is just like a dry tree, yaḥ = which

person, arthajñaḥ = knows the meaning, aśnute it = certainly gets, sakalam

bhadram = all the auspicious things, jñānavidhūtapāpmā = having destroyed

his sin by the cognition, nākam eti = reaches to heaven.

Having learnt Veda, if one does not know the meaning, he is carrying the load unnecessarily, just like a dry tree. One who knows the meaning would certainly get every auspicious thing and having destroyed his sin by the cognition reaches to heaven.

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