

वेदभारती

VEDABHARATI

(Prof.Kiran Sarma Felicitation Volume)

Editor

Gokulendra Narayan Deva Goswami

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Editor :

Dr. Gokulendra Narayan Deva Goswami, AES.

K.K.H. Govt. Sanskrit College, Guwahati-781014;

General Secretary, Kamrup Vedadhyayan Mandal

H. No. 1, Kalimandir, West Jyotinagar, Guwahati-781021

Ph : 098641-26426 Email : assamveda@rediffmail.com

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VEDIC SEMANTICS AND YĀSKA

..... Dr. D.N. Pandey

Vedic Semantics is an applied science of etymology that helps in bringing out the appropriate sense of the Vedic mantras. There are a few mantras in *Rgveda* that shed light on the semantic vision on the Vedic seers. The Mantras run thus -

सक्तुमिव तितउना पुनन्तो, यत्र धीरमनसा वचमक्रत ।

अत्र सखायः सख्यनि जनते, भद्रैषं लक्ष्मीर्निहिताधिवाचि ।

अधेन्वे चरति मययैष, वाचं सुश्रुवं अफलमपुष्यम् ।

यस्तित्यैज सचिवुदं सख्यं, न तस्य वच्चपि भगो अस्ति ॥ *Rgveda*- 10:71

Vedic semantics extends its scope variously. From the ritualistic² phenomenon of the Vedic mantras up to the establishment of the concept of Dharma^{2a} : Vedic semantics helps very much.

Vedic semantics is a composite form of etymology³, phonetics⁴ and grammatical phenomenon. The modern semantics that came to being in 18th century had been already observed nicely in the Vedic era by the seers. The seeds of semantics are found scattered in the Brahmanic literature⁵ of the Vedas. It was acarya yaska⁶ who went through Brahmanic literature and with his semantic skill he collected their signs and terms of Vedic semantics to give them a form of treaty on semantics in his *Nirukta*. Although in some extent it is true that the Vedic semantics, however, around the ritualistic phenomena of the Vedas, but at the same time, it gives the reasonable clues too, to reach the inside property of hazy words of any kind of language and literature. Acarya Yāska indeed presents before us a well-arranged system of the Vedic semantics in the form of *Nirukta*. Therefore, the paper takes the Vedic semantics in to account to figure out ins and outs of it.

As we know that there are two streams of semantics -

- (1) The general semantics that applies to all languages and literature.
- (2) The individual semantics or special semantics that applies to a particular language and literature.

According to the first kind of Semantics the purpose of semantics in all language seems the same. Semantics in the view of Western thinkers, is a science of meaning¹⁰ that dive into the well of word-meaning to point out the inside activities that happen between words and word meanings. Because of this merit semantics has been a means of settlements of linguistic complication. This linguistic¹¹ term derives from the Greek word "sema" means- sign. Although there are many evidences in the Vedic literature to prove the Rgvedic-origin of semantics but modern linguists traces its origin back to the seventeenth¹² century when a phrase - "*Semantick philosophy*" appeared to mean divination in the field of linguistics. But soon after this occurrence the "*Semantick philosophy*" developed into considerable form when "American¹³ philological association introduced a concept of "Reflected meanings"-a point in semantics, in 1894.

Above mentioned chronicle development of the semantics drops a hint to make out pervasive nature of modern semantics that occupies the fields of philosophy, language, literature and science. Therefore, it appears that semantics is a central¹⁴ part of linguistics. Semantics goes deeper and deeper into the meaning of a word, an analyse in detail. Because of this technical job of semantics, it is called the device of measurement¹⁵ of meaning in the field of linguistics. Semantics studies the basis plinth of meaning of phrases, linguistic signs, signals of the particular words, symbolic languages, phonetic impact on word meaning, fundamental elements of semantics in the fabrication of synonyms and antonyms, including various world powers in literature based on conventional, indicative and suggestive signs. Hence it comes that semantics generally works on the meaning power of words variously. How a syllable phoneme comes to join another syllable to make a word approved by people in society for the use in practical affairs of life-is probed into by semantics. All these things mentioned above in the context of semantics, are wisely collected and discussed by Acarya Yāska, Pāṇini, Patañjali, Bhartrihari and other scholasts of the Sanskrit language and literature. It was Waterman who realized the credibility of the Sanskrit linguistics and semantics, who's verdict was that without Sanskrit language the¹⁶ assumption of linguistics is useless.

Difference between Grammar and Semantics :

Grammar of any language longs primarily to crystallize the conventional words by the fixed grammatical rules of euphonic combination and compound to see the basic structure and exceptional modes of the grammatical rules applied there for the purpose of semantic operation. For more clearance Grammarians stick to the etymological study of words while semantics begins its job when etymological operation of words has been completed. Semantics sees words, languages, literature etc. with the multi dimensional vision of fact-finding. For that purpose semantics may change its way of investigation as we see in *Nirukta* in the descriptive study of the word *Agni* as, *Aktatva*,¹⁷ *Nitatva*, *dagdhatva* etc. In this contrast vision of semantics, automatically the historical¹⁸, Geographical, psychological¹⁹ and other possible backgrounds in the formation of Nouns and words come to be scrutinized.

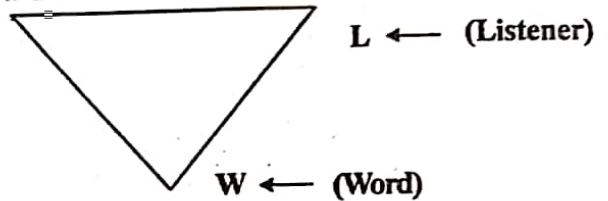
In semantics language of *Nirukta*, word meaning deviates according to contextual signals, phrase etc. that report something special in language and literature. After the study of semantic aphorisms in *Nirukta* a clear idea springs up in mind, that lays partition between Grammar and semantics.

As Yāska says - *vyakaraṇṇ sya kartsnyam*,²⁰ *Svārtha Sādhaḥkañca* = it means *Nirukta* is a complementary of Grammar and the book on semantics. Although scholars may vary on the commentary of the word *Svārtha, Sādhaḥka* : but when they will see this sentence with a semantic vision : the matter must be illuminated. the basic ground of Vedic semantics in the opinion of Yaska : is *Bhava*-verbal root or verb. The word. '*Bhava*' is a semantics term in Sanskrit literature and philosophy used variously by the scholiasts of the *Sastras-Skandasvāmi* takes it in the senses of action, substance, word and existence. By the means of *Bhava*, Yaska tries to establish his treaty of semantics that has been explored in the context of discussion on the meaningfulness of the Vedic-Mantras in *Nirukta*. According to the semantic vision of Yaska if a word *Kākaḥ* is taken in to account for grammatical and semantic operation then a Sanskrit grammarian will spilt the word into verbal root²¹ and suffix so that a common perception of people about that bird may match with the character of *Kākaḥ*. But semantics will here examine all the aspects of the *Kākaḥ* and the

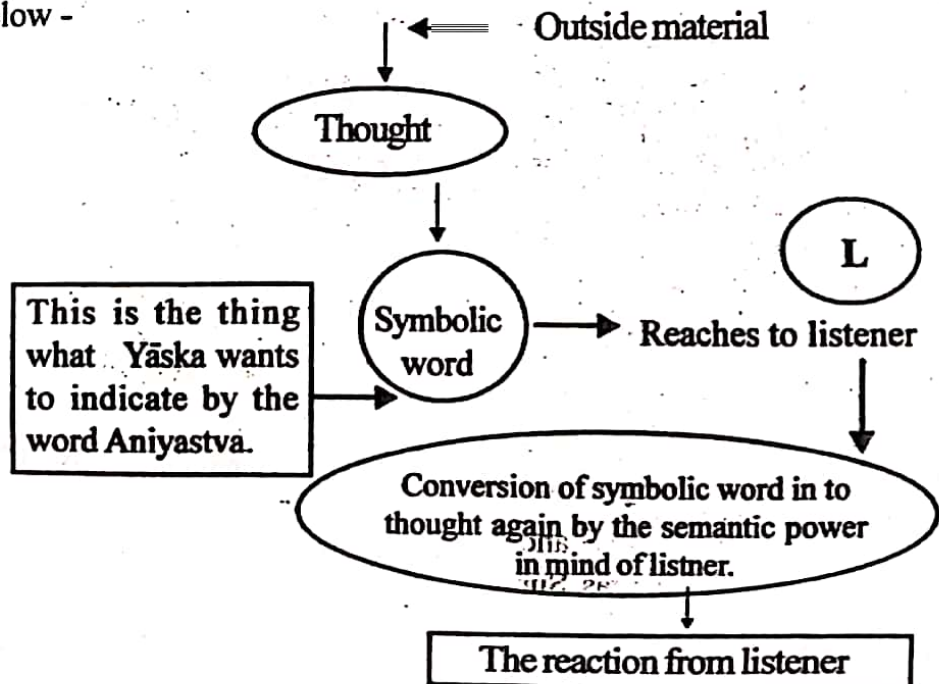
VEDABHĀRATĪ

reason behind the word from the phonetic exercise up to the psychological and historical fact, working behind it. Here the general semantics which applies to all language and literature spanned all over the world, may come a fore to search out the sound similarity, between the words *Kākaḥ* and crow. It is here noticeable that even in English language the same grammatical and semantic process mentioned in *Nirukta* for the investigation of the word "Crow"²² applies. Hence, it comes that Grammar examines the outside meaning power of the word. Acarya Yāska always uses his semantics skill to bring out the ethics, morality and other referential qualities of the words when proceeds to explain the linguistic terms. Hence it appears that the *Nirukta* of Acarya Yāska clearly lays the partition between Grammar and semantics.

The semantics process adopted by Acarya Yāska may be shown as following :- (Speaker) → S



It means in the semantic vision of Acarya Yāska, the use of words in the practical affairs of life, is more comfortable instead of signal's use. To show this very thing he says- "*aniyastvat ca sabdasya sajnakaranam vyavaharartham loke.*" It means a word of a few letters, is more effective, useful and unfailure to convey the message to a person. Here above sketched figure is the theme what Acarya Yāska wants to introduce. It means, thought in mind comes from outside impression of substance and sphere. When thought becomes organized, it needs proper way of expression. For that purpose the sentient faculty in mind makes the thought constricted and finger to transmit it to the organs of speech. Here what Acarya Yāska sticks to prove, is that thought is the subtle from the outside objects; that again comes to be constricted and processed for expression in to the words of few letters. Here this process runs so scientifically that the fact of thought remains unchanged as the signals in computer. Hence he says *aniyastvat ca sabdasya*⁽²³⁾ *sajnakaranam vyavaharartham loke*". By this way communication conduction in practical affairs of life becomes easier; because of the process sketched below -



VEDABHĀRATĪ

It is clear from the study of *Nirukta* that Acarya Yāska had a good idea of semantics. In the IInd chapter of *Nirukta* he shows commitment to distill the right meaning from the Vedic mantras : by any kind of etymology and grammatical operation but in positive way so that the central theme of the Vedic literature may be protected. For that purpose he formulates some rules of etymology.

His etymology is named - *Nirvacana* in his *Nirukta* that appears as the complete treaty on philology aimed at semantics.

The science of *Nirvacana* of Yaska assimilates almost the elements of the modern philology. The treaty on semantics in *Nirukta* is based on the five kinds of *Nirukti* - (etymology), as it is said -

वर्णागमो वर्ण विपर्ययश्च द्वौ चापरौ वर्णविकार नाशौ ।
धातोस्तदर्थतिशयेन योगः तदुच्यते पञ्चविधं निरुक्तम् ॥

These five elements will appear as the basic elements of the modern philology also if comprehended and scaled on the modern philological grounds.

The etymology of Yāska is based on the three linguistic modes - as mentioned below -

1. Phonology based²⁵ interpretation of words.
2. Interpretation of the Vedic words in the light of Grammar.

3. Interpretation of words on the ground of Syllabic Phoneme - as *SATYA* is described in *Nirukta*. These above mentioned three ways of "Nirvacana" streams out as the means of Material, divine and spiritual measurements²⁶ of the Vedic word meanings. Hence it comes that the "*Nirvachana*" of Yaska is the composite form of five kinds of *Nirvacana*, three kinds of vision in the etymology of the Vedic words known as *Adhibhautika*, *Adhidaivika* and *Adhyatmika* and of a semantic skill and vision in the studies of the Vedic words. Now it has been proved by the above mentioned points that the word *Nirukta* and *Nirvacana* are also the philological terms that assimilate almost the elements of the modern philology, for the sake of distillation of the inside property of the Vedic Mantras.

Conclusion :

It is concluded here that the Vedic Semantics has been as Applied Semantics in Indian tradition of the Vedic studies, that opens various way of philology and modern semantics. The symbols of the same, may be easily traced out in the *R̥gveda*, *Śatapathbrahmana* and *Upaniṣads*. Here applied semantics means semantics vision in Vedic Studies.

A glimpse of the Vedic Semantics may be had in *Arthasamgraha* of Laugakṣibhaskara when he (Laugakṣibhaskara) shows the miracle of semantics in the comprehensive study of *Bhavana*. He mentions that "*yajeta*" is split into *yaj* and *ta*. And again "*ta*" is understood semantically as *Lingiva* and *Akhyatatva* etc. to indicate the strong hold the *Bhavana* in *Mimamsa*. So, Yāska is a philologist and the *Nirukta* of Yāska is an oldest book on Semantics.

VEDABHĀRATĪ

Notes & References :

1. *Rgveda*- 10:71:2, 5.6
2. *Ricantvak posamaste*.....RV, 8:2:24
- 2a. *Codanā lakṣaṇartha dharmah Jaiminiyanyayamālā*
3. *Tadyatra svarasamskarau samarthau pradesikana gunenanvitau sistam - Nirukta*, 1.4.14.
4. *ahameva svayamidam vadami - RV* 10.125.5
5. *catvari sringa - RV* 4.58.3
6. *Semantics* - (Palmer) page - 1st, 2nd edition.
7. *Satapatha brahmana* 3,7,5,9,4-22
sva vai ma eti tasmāt somo nam
8. *Nirukta* 1.5.16
yathau etat brahmanena rupasampanna vidhiyante
9. see *Nirukta* - 1.6.20 - *kincit puspa phaleti*. etc.
lingjna atra sma etc. - *Nirukta* 1.6.18
10. see *Semantics* - (Introduction) by F.R. Palmer, Cambridge, Low Price Edition (Second Edition) 1996, Cambridge University.
11. see *Hindi Semantics*, Hardeo Bahari, Preface- Mansadan, New Delhi, 1985
12. *Semantics* - F.R. Palmer (Introduction)
13. *Semantics* - F.R. Palmer (Introduction)
14. *Semantics is a technical term used to refer to the study of meaning, and since meaning is a part of language, semantics is apart of linguistics.*
- *Semantics* by F.R. Palmer (Introduction)
15. *Measurement of meaning is effected by the semantics Differential - "The problem of meaning" - The Semantics of Literature* - page 13, TREVOR EATON, MOTON CO., HAGUE, PARIS, 1966.
16. *Linguistics without Sanskrit could not have gone much beyond Rask-* see chapter II, *Pre-Paninian Linguistic Studies* - D.D. Madhukar, Northern Book Center, 4.221.1, Ansari Road, N. Delhi-2, page-107
17. *Nirukta* - 7.4
18. *tat ka vrtrah ? megha iti nairuktah, tvastr asure ityaitihasikaha - Nirukta*, 2.5.17.
19. *The Semantics of Literature*. p. 14, TREVOR EATON
20. *Nirukta* 1.5.15.
21. *kai+kan- kayanti - Amarakosa* 2.520.
22. *As a verb-to make repeated loud high sound & especially in the morning. "As a noun-a large black bird with a harsh cry-* see *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, p 280."
23. *Nirukta* 1.1.3.
24. 1,1,1, foot notes-II, *Niruktam*, Pandit Mukund Sharma 25; see *Nirukta* - 2.1.1.
26. *This is a semantic term modern Linguistics-* see *The Semantics of Literature*, page-13, TREVOR EATON, The HAGUE, PARIS, 1966.

