

CHAPTER 6: NIRUKTA

I. INTRODUCTION TO THE NIRUKTA

The fourth branch of the Vedāᅅga is Nirukta. His Holiness Maharishi Mahesh Yogi has encapsulated the total knowledge of Nirukta in one word, *Self-referral direction*. In his theme of dividing the whole Vedic Literature into streams of texts which are Ṛiᅅhi (the knower) predominant, Devatā (process of knowing) predominant or Chhandas (known) predominant, he has identified Nirukta as a Chhandas predominant text. He writes:

Nirukta is one of the structuring dynamics of Ṛik Veda. It highlights the quality of SELF-REFERRAL DIRECTION involved in structuring Ṛik Veda. With reference to consciousness, Nirukta comprises the specific sets of Laws of Nature that are engaged in promoting the quality of Chhandas within Saᅅhita, providing a structure to the eternally silent, self-referral, self-sufficient, fully awake state of consciousness, which is intimately personal to everyone.¹

H.M. King Nader Rām has correlated Nirukta with the pituitary gland, the neurohypophysis (the posterior lobe of the pituitary), and the sympathetic and parasympathetic systems. The two lobes of the pituitary and their relation to other brain structures are shown in Figure 37. The location and appearance of the pituitary gland is described by Gray:

The pituitary gland, or hypophysis cerebri, is a reddish-gray, ovoid body, c. 12mm in transverse and 8 mm in anteroposterior diameter, and weighing c.500 mg. It is continuous with the infundibulum, a hollow, conical, inferior process from the tuber cinereum of the hypothalamus. It lies within the pituitary fossa of the sphenoid bone, where it is covered superiorly by a circular diaphragma sellae of dura mater. . . . The pituitary has two major parts, neurohypophysis and adenohypophysis, which differ in their origin, structure and function. The neurohypophysis is a diencephalic downgrowth connected with the hypothalamus.

The adenohipophysis is an ectodermal derivative of the stomatodeum. Both include parts of the infundibulum. . . .

Neurohipophysis. Axons arising from groups of hypothalamic neurones . . . terminate in the neurohipophysis. . . . Some smaller parvocellular neurones in the periventricular zone. . . . produce releasing and inhibitory hormones, which control the secretory activities of the adenohipophysis via its portal blood supply. The neurohormones stored in the main part of the neurohipophysis are vasopressin and oxytocin.

Adenohipophysis. The adenohipophysis . . . consists of epithelial cells of varying size and shape arranged in cords or irregular follicles, between which lie thin-walled vascular sinusoids supported by a delicate reticular connective tissue. Most of the hormones synthesized by the adenohipophysis are trophic. They include the peptides, growth hormone (GH) . . . and prolactin. Glycoprotein trophic hormones adrenocorticotrophin . . . thyroid-stimulating hormone; follicle-stimulating hormone, . . . and luteinizing hormone. β -Lipotropin is released from the pituitary, but its function in humans is uncertain. β -Endorphin is another cleavage product released from the pituitary.²

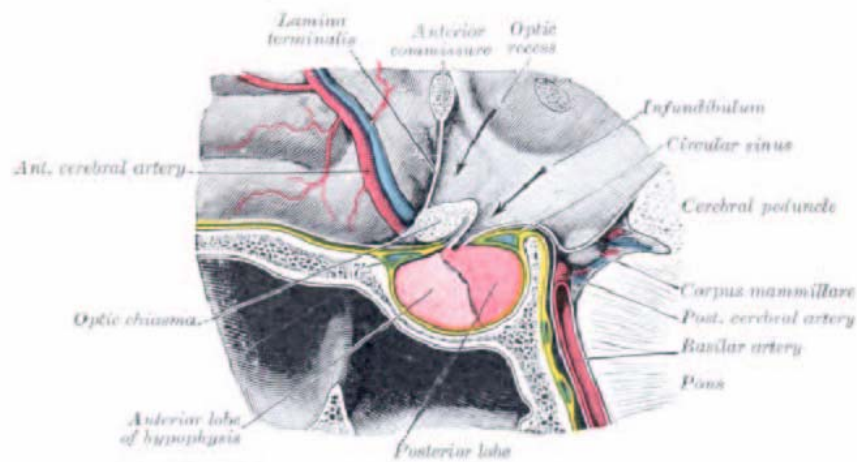


Figure 37: Anterior and Posterior Lobes of the Pituitary Gland, shown in sagittal section.

Gray, Henry, *Anatomy of the Human Body*, Fig. 721, p. 814.

King Nader Rām explains how self-referral functions in the physiology:

In the physiology, Nirukt is represented by the pituitary gland, the neurohipophysis, and the sympathetic and parasympathetic systems. These are activated by the limbic system and the hypothalamic releasing factors. They

expand the response and bring it back towards the organs and organ systems of the physiology through a feedback loop that maintains homeostatic balance. There are 13 factors involved in this self-referral expansion, corresponding to the 13 chapters of Nirukta.³

Two of the factors that King Nader Rām describes are the cholinergic and adrenergic factors that activate the parasympathetic and sympathetic systems. Two other factors, Oxytocin and Vasopressin, are released by the posterior lobe of the pituitary gland, also called the neurohypophysis. The pituitary gland releases the remaining nine, Follicle-stimulating hormone, Luteinizing hormone, Thyrotropin, Growth hormone, Prolactin, Melanocyte stimulating hormone, β -lipotropin, Adrenocorticotropin and β -endorphin.⁴

Nirukta is a dictionary, a textbook to systematically unfold the meanings of words.⁵ The self-referral direction is shown in the text of Nirukta by reversing the direction of expansion found in Vyākaraṇa. Whereas Vyākaraṇa started with the root, and systematically expanded it until it was fully articulated as a verb or noun, in Nirukta, Yāska starts with the expressed word, and points out the root from which the word was derived.

Vyākaraṇa, Vedic grammar, presents the rules for structuring speech from its source in the verbal roots, the *Dhātu* of the language. By knowing the collection of verbal roots, and knowing the procedure for expanding on those roots to create all the verb forms, and the nouns, and adjectives, and indeed all the words that make up speech, one can see how meaning is imbibed in each word, as it progresses from the root, undergoing specific transformations and appending of affixes until finally it emerges as an expressed word. This is the expansion of the root into the expressed word: The roots and their principal tendencies, and the shades of meaning associated with each affix and each transformation, all function together in an integrated and systematic way to construct the meaning of words and sentences. When one understands in detail how words are

constructed from roots, then in order to understand any particular word, one traces the word back in the reverse direction, reversing the trend of expansion, and goes back to the root. The connection of each word with its source, its root, unfolds the meaning of the word.

There are, however, many words in Sanskrit whose connection with verbal roots is unclear; hence the meaning of the words may be clouded. This circumstance creates a call for a dictionary in which those words whose verbal roots are not obvious by inspection, can be explained. This demand is fulfilled by Nirukta.

II. THE TRADITIONAL WORD LIST CALLED THE *NIGHANṬU*

The starting point of Nirukta is a list of words, handed down by tradition, whose meaning requires special explication. This word list is called the *Nighanṭu*. *Yaska* says, “A traditional list (of words) has been handed down (to us). It is to be (here) explained. This same list is called *Ni-ghanṭavas*.”⁶

The *Nighanṭu* is itself a kind of dictionary. It is not simply a list, and the words that it organizes in its five chapters are not arranged in alphabetical order. The words are intelligently organized to divulge their meaning by context within the collection of words. The system underlying the sequential presentation of words in the *Nighanṭu* will be explained below. The beginning and ending paragraphs of the *Nighanṭu* are as follows:

अथ निघण्टुः ।

अथ प्रथमोऽध्यायः ।

गौः । ग्मा । ज्मा । द्मा । द्वा । द्वामा । द्वाणी ।
 द्दितिः । अवनिः । उर्वी । पृथ्वी । मही । रिपः ।
 अदितिः । इळा । निर्ऋतिः । भूः । भूमिः । पूषा ।

गा॒तुः । गो॒त्रेति॑ पृथि॒व्याः १
 हे॒म । च॒न्द्रम् । रु॒क्मम् । अ॒र्यः । हि॒र॒ण्यम् । पे॒शः ।
 कृ॒श॒नम् । लो॒हम् । क॒र्न॒कम् । का॒ञ्च॒नम् । भ॒र्म ।
 अ॒मृ॒तम् । म॒रुत् । द॒त्रम् । जा॒तरूप॑मिति॒ हि॒र॒ण्यस्य॑ २

अ॒म्ब॒रम् । वि॒यत् । व्यो॑म । ब॒र्हिः । ध॒न्व । अ॒न्त॒रि॒क्षम्
 । आ॒का॒शम् । आ॒पः । पृथि॒वी । भूः । स्व॒य॒म्भूः ।
 अ॒ध्वा । पु॒ष्कर॑म् । स॒गरः । स॒मु॒द्रः । अ॒ध्व॒र॒मित्य॑-
 न्तरि॒क्षस्य॑ ३

concluding paragraph

श॒ये॒नः । सो॒मः । च॒न्द्र॒माः । मृ॒त्युः । वि॒श्वान॑रः । धा॒ता
 । वि॒धा॒ता । म॒रु॒तः । रु॒द्राः । ऋ॒भ॒वः । अ॒ङ्गि॑रसः ।
 पि॒तरः । अ॒थ॒र्वा॒णः । भृ॒ग॒वः । आ॒प्त॒याः । अ॒दि॑तिः ।
 स॒र॒मा । स॒र॒स्व॒ती । वाक् । अ॒नु॒म॒तिः । रा॒का ।
 सि॒नी॒वा॒ली । कु॒हूः । य॒मी । उ॒र्व॒शी । पृथि॒वी ।
 इ॒न्द्रा॒णी । गो॒री । गोः । धे॒नुः । अ॒घ्न॑चा । प॒थ्या ।
 स्व॒स्तिः । उ॒षाः । इ॒ळा । रो॒द॒सी ५
 अ॒श्वि॒नौ । उ॒षाः । सू॒र्या । वृ॒षा॒क॒पा॒यी । स॒र॒ण॒यूः ।
 त्व॒ष्टा । स॒वि॒ता । भ॒गः । सू॒र्यः । पू॒षा । वि॒ष्णुः ।
 वि॒श्वान॑रः । व॒रु॒णः । के॒शी । के॒शि॒नः । वृ॒षा॒क॒पिः ।
 य॒मः । अ॒ज॒ एक॑पात् । पृथि॒वी । स॒मु॒द्रः । अ॒थ॒र्वा ।
 म॒नुः । द॒ध्य॒ङ् । आ॒दि॒त्याः । स॒प्त॒ऋ॒ष॒यः । दे॒वाः ।

विश्वेदेवाः । साध्याः । वसवः । वाजिनः । देवपत्न्यो
देवपत्न्य ६

इति निघण्टौ पञ्चमोऽध्यायः⁷

Word lists such as the *Nighaṇṭu* allow one to gain knowledge of a word by association, from the context or sequence of the words, like in a thesaurus. A simple example of how words can divulge their meaning simply by association in a word list may be found in the *Bhāva Prakāśa Saṁhitā*: There is a section called the *Bhāva Prakāśa Nighaṇṭu*, in which lists of words are organized in verses. Here is a series of words from the *Bhāva Prakāśa Nighaṇṭu*, all of which have the meaning, “water.”

पानीयं सलिलं नीरं कीलालं जलमम्बु च
आपो वावारी कं तोयं पयः पाथस्तथोदकम्
जीवनं वनमम्भोऽणोऽमृतं घनरसोऽपि च १⁸

pānīya — to be drunk, drinkable, a beverage, water

salila — flowing, surging, fluctuating; flood, surge, waves, water

nīra — water

kīlāla — a sweet beverage (also a heavenly drink similar to Amrita, the food of the gods), blood, water

jala — water, any fluid

ambu — water

āpas — water

vār — water; stagnant water, a pond

vāri — water, rain, fluid, fluidity

kaṁ — water (*Maitrāyaṇī Saṁhitā*)[MW]

toya — water

payaḥ — any fluid or juice, milk, water, rain

pātha — water

udaka — water

jīvana — vivifying, giving life, enlivening, ‘life giving element’, water

vana — water (*Nighaṇṭu*)

ambha — water, the celestial waters
 aṇa — not held up, not pent up, not fixed
 amṛta — nectar, ambrosia, water
 ghanarasa — cloud-fluid, water

The qualities of water are seen from many different angles: Creating a list of synonyms, without any further commentary helps to eliminate a great deal of confusion about the meaning of words. In the *Nighaṇṭu-kośha*, the first three chapters, called collectively the *Naighaṇṭuka Kāṇḍa*, are divided into small groups of words, and each group is summed up with the word *iti*. The word *iti* is followed by a single word which characterizes the set to which all those words belong. These are broadly speaking, synonyms. For example:

गौः । ग्मा । ज्मा । क्ष्मा । क्ष्मा । क्ष्मा । क्षोणी । क्षितिः । अवनिः ।
 उर्वी । पृथ्वी । मही । रिपः । अदितिः । इळा । निर्ऋतिः । भूः । भूमिः ।
 पूषा । गातुः । गोत्रेति पृथिव्याः १

1. gauḥ gmā jmā kṣhmā kṣhā kṣhamā kṣhoṇī kṣhitiḥ avaniḥ urvī pṛthvī mahī ripaḥ aditiḥ iḷā nirṛtiḥ bhūḥ bhūmiḥ pūṣhā gātuḥ gotra-iti pṛthivyāḥ.

In this first collection of words in the *Nighaṇṭu-kośha*, all are words meaning “*Pṛthivī*,” earth.

The collections of words in the fourth and fifth chapters in the *Nighaṇṭu* do not end with *iti* and a single word description. The collections in these chapters are not synonyms, so it is more difficult to make use of the list to grasp the meaning of a word. Chapter 4 is called the *Naigama Kāṇḍa*, and it lists groups of homonyms. Chapter 5 is called the *Daivata Kāṇḍa*, and concerns deities.⁹

III. NIRUKTA AS A DICTIONARY FOR THE WORDS IN THE *NIGHAṆṬU*

The Nirukta provides an explanation for all the words in the *Nighaṇṭu*. For the first three chapters of the *Nighaṇṭu*, which may be called collections of synonyms, where each collection of words already has a descriptor, Yāska, the author of the Nirukta, does

not find it necessary to comment on every word, although he comments on most of them. For chapters 4 and 5 of the *Nighaṇṭu*, which are collections of difficult Vedic words, Yāska comments on every word.

Yāska's commentary has two components: First, he suggests various derivations or etymologies, that is roots or verb forms from which the word may have evolved. These derivations are suggested by giving the third person singular present indicative form of the verb, as for example, *bhavati* to indicate the root *bhū*.¹⁰ Second, he presents quotations from the Vedic *Samhitās*, so that one can see the use of the word in context. Here is an example from chapter 4, explaining the word *damūnā* (Nirukta 4:4)¹¹ The quotation following the explanation is from Ṛik Veda V.4.5. and Atharva Veda 7.73.9.:

दमूना दममना वा । दानमना वा । दान्तमना वा । अपि वा
दम इति गृहनाम । तन्मनाः स्यात् । मनो मनोतेः ४
जुष्टो दमूना अतिथिर्दुरोण इमं नो यज्ञमुप याहि विद्वान् ।
विश्वा अग्ने अभियुजो विहत्या शत्रूयतामा भरा भोजनानि ॥

One of the difficult words on which Yāska comments is *Vyoman*. He quotes the *Ṛicho Akṣhare* verse:

ऋचो अक्षरे परमे व्योमन्यस्मिन्देवा अधि विश्वे निषेदुः ।
यस्तन्न वेद् किमृचा करिष्यति य इत्तद्विदुस्त इमे समासते ॥
ऋचो अक्षरे परमे व्यवने यस्मिन्देवा अधिनिषरणाः सर्वे ।¹²

The word *vyoman* is proposed to be derived from *vi-avane*, that which favors separation or division, i.e. space. The Vedic quotations are traditionally presented in their accented form, and so can be easily distinguished from Yāska's commentary. It is more difficult to ascertain by inspection which words are the subject of commentary; however, at the end

of each chapter, the words commented upon in that chapter are listed. These examples show how Nirukta functions as a dictionary, and they also serve as a brief introduction to the overall structure of the Nirukta.

The text has been translated into English. The first chapter and the first four sections of the second chapter deal with linguistic, grammatical and etymological principles.¹³ The remainder of chapter 2 and all of chapter 3 describe synonyms. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 describe homonyms. Chapters 7 and 8 discuss the Devatā associated with *Yagya*, “to whom panegyrics are addressed,” as the text explains.¹⁴ Chapters 9 through 12 discuss the specific Devatā associated with the regions of life.¹⁵ The last chapter, called *Pariśhiṣṭa* or appendix, treats the exceptions and omissions. The text begins:

श्रीयास्कमुनिविरचितं निरुक्तं प्रारभ्यते
अथ प्रथमोऽध्यायः

समाम्नायः समाम्नातः । स व्याख्यातव्यः । तमिमं
समाम्नायं निघण्टव इत्याचक्षते । निघण्टवः कस्मात् ।
निगमा इमे भवन्ति । छन्दोभ्यः समाहृत्य समाहृत्य समा-
म्नाताः । ते निगन्तव एव सन्तो निगमनान्निघण्टव उच्यन्त
इत्यौपमन्यवः । अपि वा हननादेव स्युः । समाहता भवन्ति
। यद्वा समाहता भवन्ति । तद् यानि चत्वारि पदजातानि
नामाख्याते चोपसर्गनिपाताश्च तानीमानि भवन्ति । तत्रैत-
न्नामाख्यातयोर्लक्षणं प्रदिशन्ति । भावप्रधानमाख्यातम् ।
सत्त्वप्रधानानि नामानि । तद् यत्रोभे भावप्रधाने भवतः

पूर्वापरीभूतं भावमाख्यातेनाचष्टे । व्रजति पचतीति । उपक्र
मप्रभृत्यपवर्गपर्यन्तं मूर्तं सत्त्वभूतं सत्त्वनामभिः । व्रज्या
पक्तिरिति । अद इति सत्त्वानामुपदेशः । गौरश्वः पुरुषो
हस्तीति । भवतीति भावस्य । आस्ते शेते व्रजति तिष्ठतीति
। इन्द्रियनित्यं वचनमौदुम्बरायणः १

concluding paragraphs

मा ते राधाँ सि मा त ऊतयो वसोऽस्मान्कदा चना दभन् ।
विश्वा च न उप मिमीहि मानुष वसूनि चर्षणिभ्य आ ॥
मा च ते धनानि मा च ते कदाचन सरिषुः सर्वाणि प्रज्ञाना-
न्युपमानय । मनुष्यहितोऽयमादित्योऽयमात्मा । अथैतद-
नुप्रवदति । अथैनं महान्तमात्मानमेषर्गणः प्रवदति ।
वैश्वकर्मणो देवानां नु वयं जाना नासदासीन्नो सदासीत्तदानीम्
। इति च । सैषात्मजिज्ञासा । सैषा सर्वभूतजिज्ञासा ।
ब्रह्मणः सार्ष्टिं सरूपतां सलोकतां गमयति य एवं वेद । नमो
ब्रह्मणे । नमो महते भूताय । नमो यास्काय । ब्रह्म-
शुक्लमतीय ब्रह्मशुक्लमसीय ४८

इति परिशिष्टम्¹⁶

Notes:

¹ Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, (1994), p. 88.

² Gray, (2005), p. 380-382.

³ King Nader Rām, (2000), p. 111.

⁴ King Nader Rām, (2000), pp. 111-113.

⁵ Maharishi Mahesh Yogi described Nirukta as a dictionary in his lecture, “Vedic Literature: the radiant flowers of the garden of knowledge,” Feb. 14, 1974, Interlaken, Switzerland.

⁶ Translation by Sarup, Lakshman, *The Nighaṇṭu and the Nirukta*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984), translation page 5.

⁷ Sarup.

⁸ *Bhāva Prakāśha Samhitā*, Nighaṇṭu chapter 13, verse 1.

⁹ Sarup, p. 13 of Introduction.

¹⁰ It is a special citation form which uses the third person singular active form of the verb, even when the verb does not occur in the active. Thus the word always ends with the suffix *śhtip*, i.e., “ti” with initial and final markers, and it is declined like a noun.

¹¹ Sarup, p.76. Sanskrit text.

¹² Nirukta, Chapter 13, verse 10. Page 226 in Lakshman Sarup’s edition. YāskaMaharishi Mahesh Yogi has commented extensively on this verse, as for example in *Maharishi Technology of the Unified Field: Integration of Modern Science and Ancient Vedic Science Creating Unified Field based Perfect Civilization for all Mankind in This Scientific Age*. (Fairfield, Iowa: Institute of World Leadership, 1984) pp. 17-25.

¹³ Sarup.

¹⁴ Sarup, p. 113 (translation).

¹⁵ This is explained further in King Nader Rām, (2000), p. 111.

¹⁶ Sarup.

VEDIC LITERATURE
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