

The science of *Nirukti* (Etymology)-a tool for exploring clinical knowledge

Abstract:

Etymology is an integral part of Sanskrit studies. From the vedic period the *nirukta* or etymology was being studied simultaneously with *veda*. On account of its importance to disclose the actual derivative and meaning it was considered as *vedāṅga* and termed as ears of the *Veda*. Ayurveda being an *upaveda* has been groomed by the science of *Nirukta*. The ancient scholar used to start ayurvedic studies after completion of their respective vedic school. The *vedāṅga* studies during the *veda-adhyayan* helped them to become the master of *nirukta* which ultimately benefited them in grasping and exploration of proper ayurvedic knowledge. In the advent of time the study of the science of etymology has gradually declined. Now a days, students are not coming through the same tradition and it is very necessary to provide them proper methodical teaching of *nirukta*, otherwise scientific and in-depth exploration of ayurvedic wisdom in the respective era can not be possible. The current paper is dealt with the clinical importance of the science of *Nirukta*.

Key words: Etymology, *nirukta*, *ayurveda*

Main article:

Background:

Ayurveda, the science of life, has enjoying sovereignty due to its high source of literature and poetry. In ancient days there was a rich tradition of interpreting these literatures from different angles. A number of various schools of interpretation were existed in those days such as *vaiyākaraṇas*, *chandaśāstra*, *niruktas*, *aitihāsikas* etc¹. Among those schools *nirukta*, the science of etymology, was most important which subscribes a naturalistic interpretation of *sūtras*, *śabdās* etc. and has gained the status of *Vedāṅga*².

The ancient *ṛṣis* due to their high intelligence, potential and heavenly qualities used to practice a highly symbolic multidimensional nature of language in *Samhitā*. The then scholars also took it upon themselves to collect and compile the difficult words of *Samhitā* in the form of *Nighantu*³. *Nirukta* is none other than the analysis of those *Nighantus* which helps to unfold the meaning of the verse, mythological concepts, clinical aspects etc. scattered abundantly in *Samhitā* before students. Etymologically “*Nighaṇṭu*” contains the words of *nigūḍārtha* i.e. deep rooted meaning and needs to be explored. *Nirukta* serves this purpose.

In post-Vedic era fourteen different *nirukta* text were existed. Among them *nirukta* of *Yāska* was prime and available one⁴. In the Ayurvedic field no isolated *nirukta* text was found but *nirukta* of *Yāska* is equally important. A good numbers of etymological derivation have also been given in various ayurvedic texts⁵ and commentaries⁶.

¹Mc Donald 'ṛk' pratiśākhya , Introduction.

² *Nirukta* , *Prastāvanā* pp 3

³ Mukhopadhyaya, G.N: History of Indian Medicine, Introduction, vol 1

⁴ *Nirukta* , *Prastāvanā* pp 5

⁵ Suśruta sūtra, 6/3, 21/5 , Caraka sūtra 30/12 etc.

⁶ Cakrapāṇi on Ca. Ci 1/1/4, Ca.Ci 17/ 27-30, Hārāṅcandra on Suśruta 6/3, etc.

Subject:

Words are of three types *Pratyakṣakriya*, *Parokṣakriya*, *Atiparokṣakriya*⁷. *Pratyakṣakriya* words are dealt by *vyākaraṇa*, *Prarokṣakriya* words by the *vyākaraṇa* & *nirukta*, where as *atiparokṣakriya* are only to be interpreted through *nirukta*⁸. Ayurveda *Samhitās* are groomed mainly by the later two categories.

The *vyākaraṇa* and *nirukta* are complimentary to each other. *Vyākaraṇa* deals with the structure of word on the other hand *Nirukta* is all about the interpretation of the meaning conveyed by the word. So *Nirukta* is the practical aspect of *vyākaraṇa* similar to pure science and technology. As *Āyurveda* is a clinical science hence most emphasis should be given on *nirukta* and *nirukti*.

Greek *etymos*—true and *logos*—an account; means true account of word. It signifies true finding a word to its root. The inner meaning of the words comes easily by this root tracing. Exploration of all possible, exact, justified meaning⁹ through *prakṛti* (route) and *pratyaya* (suffix) is called *nirukti*¹⁰ which literally includes the *byutpatti*, the grammatical derivative.

Technical terms are vital force and backbones of any science. The scientific exploration of ayurveda is impossible without exact etymological derivation. The embedded scientific meaning of terms signifies the codified flow of thought process of the compendium. As for example “*ādāna*” when Sun moves around north helix and sunrays gradually becomes stronger, dries up the watery substances of the earth, makes the wind dry and rough and cause diminution of *somatatva* of the body. These annotations are resultant and synthesis of number of verses.

⁷ *Rkpratisakhya*

⁸ *Ibid*

⁹ पदानमवयवार्थाः सम्भाविता निशेषेण निश्चयेन उच्यन्ते (वाचस्पत्यम्)

¹⁰ प्रकृतिप्रत्ययाद्यावयवार्थकथनद्वारा समुदितार्थबोधनम्(वाचस्पत्यम्)

But etymological derivation of the term itself signifies the whole meaning i.e. the seasons which causes lessening of vital force of the body¹¹. Likewise “*visarga*” etymologically connotes the seasons which generates the *āpyāṃśa* and vital force¹². Nothing can be inferred regarding the function by the name of a plant only. As for example “*Apāmārga*” is a widely used plant mainly used for *śiravirecana* but assumption of potential benefit is still out of reach which is revealed from the etymology only, that it is plant which wipes out the diseases from the body i.e. it is having bacterio-cidal effect¹³. Similarly “*punarnavā*” signifies the plant that vitalizes energizes and replenishes the body¹⁴, and “*aṭaruṣaka*” destroys the cough¹⁵. *Apavarga* is synonymous to salvation which signifies the means by which one can leave this world¹⁶ and *apāṅga* signifies the place where eyes turn to bend¹⁷. *Hikkā* is a disease where ‘*hik*’ like sound is produced¹⁸, *udpāna* signifies water is taken with assistance of others¹⁹. *Pāyu* denotes the organ which protects the body through expulsion of fecal matter or by taking the *vasti-auṣadha*²⁰. *Sāhasa* connotes the work which is done suddenly and without accessing the body strength²¹.

¹¹ आददाति क्षपयति पृथिव्याः सौम्यांशं प्राणिनां च बलमित्यादानम् (चक्रपाणि. च.सू.६/४)

¹² विसृजति जनयति आप्यमंशं प्राणिनां च बलमिति विसर्गः (चक्रपाणि. च.सू.६/४)

¹³ अपमृज्जति दूरीकरोति रोगान् इति अपामार्गः (Medinikosa)

¹⁴ पुनर्नवति जीवयति ऊर्जयति इति पुनर्नवा (Medinikosa)

¹⁵ अटं कासाख्यरोगं शेषति नाशयति (Halayudha kosa)

¹⁶ अपवृज्यते संसारः मुच्यतेऽनेन (Halayudha kosa)

¹⁷ अपाङ्गाति वक्रं गच्छति चक्षुर्यत्र (Halayudha kosa)

¹⁸ हिगिति कायति शब्दं करोतीति हिक्क (Cakrapani on Ca. Ci. 17/27-30)

¹⁹ उदकं पीयते येन तद् (Cakrapani on Ca. su. 15/6)

²⁰ पाति रक्षति शरीरं मलनिस्सारणेनेति . यद्वा पिवति वस्त्यौषधमनेनेति (Halayudha kosa)

²¹ सहसा शक्तिमनालोच्य यानि क्रियन्ते तानि साहसानि (Cakrapani on Ca. Ci. 8/14-19)

Discussion and Conclusion:

In short *nirukti* serves the following purpose

- It helps to understand the meaning of the verse
- It complements grammar to interpret the verse
- It gives assistance to analyze the words by separating their component parts.
- It serves the protocol purpose of the verse

Above all it deserves to be studied for the sake of gaining knowledge

From the above it can be concluded that etymology is an integral part of ayurveda without which the proper and exact scientific exploration of Ayurvedic knowledge is impossible.

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