

The Knowledge Structure in Sanskrit Kośas

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1 Abstract

The Indian tradition of transmitting knowledge orally is on the verge of vanishing. As the oral transmission demands, Indian traditional educational culture was organised to be *formal and intensive* as opposed to the modern culture which is more *informal and extensive* (Wood, 1985). In traditional circumstances, a child would receive his education largely by oral transmission, mainly through rote-learning. The method employed was through recitation and remembering. A child is taught the alphabet (varṇamālā), he would memorise a few verses, subhāṣitas, and then start reciting a dictionary of synonymous words – the Amarakośa – till it is memorised. It typically would take anywhere between 6 months to a year to memorise a list of approximately 10,000 Sanskrit words arranged as a list of synonyms. The close inspection of the structure of the Amarakośa gives much more insight into the way the words are organised. When a student memorises it, though in the beginning it appears as a linear list of words, as he starts understanding the meaning of the words, reads the commentaries on this text and starts using these words, the linear structure unfolds into a knowledge web with various links.

Many other kośas such as Vaijayantīkośa, Halāyudhakośa, Trikāṇḍśeṣa, Hārāvalī, Abhidhānacintāmaṇī etc. reveal similar structure when explored.

In this presentation, we demonstrate with a few samples the knowledge structure from two important kośas viz Vaijayantīkośa and Amarakośa. And also demonstrate how the modern technology helps us in unfolding the linear structure into a structured knowledge base.