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 (varaṇamālā), he would memorise a few verses, subhāṣītas, 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, Trīkāṇḍśeṣa, 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.