

## PRE-YĀSKAN VEDIC ACHIEVEMENTS IN LEXICOGRAPHY AND ETYMOLOGY

M. H. F. Jayasuriya

The Nighaṅṭu (Nigh) is generally acknowledged to be the earliest known attempt in lexicography in India.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Yāska's Nirukta (Nir) is credited as being the first work which utilised the science of etymology in its explanation of the Vedic mantras.<sup>2</sup> While it is undisputed that the Nigh is the earliest known glossary of Vedic words, and that Yāska is the earliest commentator of the Ṛg Veda who employed the science of etymology-Nirukta-in his exegetical endeavours, it is nevertheless a fact that lexical and etymological studies were employed in much earlier times, by the authors of the Brāhmaṇa (Brs) texts whenever it was necessary for them to comment on rare and obscure words and grammatical forms which occurred in the mantras that were cited in those texts. Sarup has observed that 'the Nigh is probably not the production of a single individual, but the result of the united efforts of a whole generation, or perhaps of several generations.<sup>3</sup> That these generations go back as far as the Brāhmaṇas, and especially the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, is evidenced from the fact that a large number of the words collected in the Nigh have been explained here and there in the former and often commentators who lived much later cite these instances with the comment *iti śruteḥ*,<sup>4</sup> thereby implying that the first lexicographers and etymologists were the unnamed authors of the Brs. Like in the Nigh, so also in the Brs the treatment is not scientific nor systematic. Nevertheless, it is important as shedding light on the lexical value of some rare, obscure and archaic words and the grammatical

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1. 'The compilation of the Nighaṅṭu is the earliest known attempt in Lexicography. In India it marks the beginning of the kośa literature.....' The Nighaṅṭu and Nirukta, Lakshman Sarup, p. 14
  2. 'Already in early times, Indian scholars busied themselves with the interpretations of the Ṛg Veda. So-called Nighaṅṭus or glossaries, collections of rare and obscure words which occur in the hymns were prepared. The first commentator of the Ṛg Veda whose work is preserved to us, was Yāska, who, on the basis of the Nighaṅṭu, explains a great number of Vedic verses in his work, Nirukta.' *History of Indian Literature*. Vol. I p. 69, Mauritz Winternitz.
  3. Sarup, *Ibid.* p. 14
  4. See item 2. on page 16, item 22, on page 23.