

A Study on Sāmaveda

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Abstract

The Sāmaveda teaches us the way of Vedic chanting in the sacrifices and other events. There are 2.637 verses in this Veda which have been kept as the third Veda in order of the four vedas. There are two major parts of Sāmaveda as *gāna* and *ārcikā*. Again the *gāna* section is divided into two as *grāmageya* and *aranyageya* while the *ārcika* is also divided into two as *pūrvārcikā* and *uttarārcikā*. In this paper, the content of the Sāmaveda is scrutinized considering the subdivisions of the text. It is clear that the modern western and eastern music are based on this Sāmavedic melodies and tones. The Vedic accent and the correct pronunciation connected with meters are taught in this Veda. Here, the focus is on that explanation considering the value of the original Vedic chanting.

Keywords: Sāmaveda, *gāna*, *ārcikā*, *grāmageya*, *aranyageya*

Introduction

Hindus consider the Vedas as a science of immortal divine origin. Some Hindus believe that sages created Vedic mantras through the power of asceticism. Those sages are known as Mantrakāra sages. But others are of the opinion that they should be called “Mantradṛṣṭā”. They believe that with the blessing of God, they saw the mantras which are the life breath of God. It is for this reason that it is said “Sṛtiṃ Paśyanti Munayaḥ”. It is expressed in Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upanishad as follows.

“asya mahato bhūtasya nisvasitaṃ etat yat - ṛgvedo yajurvedaḥ
sāma Vedo'tharvāngiras itihāsa purāṇaṃ vidyā upaniṣadaḥ
ślokāḥ” (Bṛhadāranyaka, chapter 6)

Sage Vyasa states that the Vedas are of four divisions.

“chaturhotraṃ karmasuddhaṃ
prajānaṃ vīkṣya vaidikaṃ
vyadadhāt Yajñasantatyai
vedamekaṃ chaturvidhaṃ” (Sṛīmatbhāgavataṃ verse 1.4.19)

It has also been introduced as Chaturhotra as well.

“ṛgyajuḥ sāmātharvākhyā
vedāscatvāra uddhṛtāḥ
itihāsa purāṇaṃ ca
pañcama veda ucyate” (Sṛīmatbhāgavataṃ, verse 1.4.20)

Ithihāsa and purāṇa are considered as pañcama Veda as shown here. It further indicates that ṛgveda was carried out by the sage Paippala, Sāmaveda by Jaimini, Yajurveda by Vaiśampāyana and Atharvaveda by Sumantu, son of Dāruṇa with the help of their generation of students. History and Purāṇa Veda were maintained by Romaharṣana, the father of Sage Vyāsa.

“ta eta ṛṣayao vedaṃ svam svam vyasyannanekadā śiṣyaiḥ
praśiṣyaistacchiṣyair vedāste sākḥino'bhavat”

(Sṛīmad Bhāgavataṃ, verse 1.4.23)

Research Problem

Sāmaveda possesses different sects and divisions according to many scholars. Scholars will be confused to separate the genres of this Veda during their further studies.

Research Methodology

This is a qualitative research based on the textual study. Primary and secondary sources have been referred.

Branches of Sāmaveda

It is mentioned in ‘purāṇa granthas’ that **Sāmaveda** has thousands of branches.

“ekaśatamadhvaryuśākhāḥ sahasravatmā sāmavedaḥ
ekavinshatidha bāhvṛcyam
navadhā’tarvaṇo vedah” (Mahābhāṣya - Paspasāhnike)

Mahābhāṣyakāra ‘Patañjali’ in his Mahābhāṣya Paspasāhnikādhikarana has stated that Sāmaveda has thousand branches, Yajurveda has one hundred branches, Ṛigveda has 21 branches and Atharvaveda has 09 branches.

Śrī Mahidāsa who wrote the Vedādhyayana which is named as Charaṇavyūha, has also confirmed this fact in the third chapter of that work.

“sāmavedasya kila sahasrabhedā bhavanti. eṣvanadhyāyeṣvadhīyānāste śatrakratu vajreṇābhihatāḥ. śeṣān vyākhyāsyāmaḥ”

It is mentioned that in an age when the study of Vedas was prohibited, Indra’s Vajrāyudha destroyed thousand branches of Sāmaveda and only the remaining parts are described.

Those residual branches he indicates are,

1. Rāṇāyanīyam
2. Chatyayanīyam
3. Jatyamugram

4. Kalvalaṃ
5. Mahā Kalvalaṃ
6. Lāngalaṃ
7. Kauthamīyaṃ
8. Kauthumīyaṃ
9. Jaiminīyaṃ

Among these branches, only three branches namely Kauthumīyaṃ, Rāṇāyanīyaṃ and Jaiminīyaṃ (Talavkāra) exist in India today. Only the Kauthuma branch is prevalent in the state of Tamil Nadu. The following names are mentioned in Charaṇavyūha Paṛiśiṣṭhaṃ as sages who maintained this branch.

1. Rāṇāyanī
- 2 Satyamugri
- 3 Durvāsa
- 4 Bāguri
- 5 Gaurundi
- 6 Gaulgulavi
- 7 Aupamanyawa
- 8 Tarāla
- 9 Gārgisāvarṇi
- 10 Vārṣagaṇya
- 11 Kuthumi
- 12 Śālihotra
- 13 Jaimini are those names.

Evaluations for Sāmaveda

In the Ṛgveda

“pradakṣiṇīdabhi grṇanti karavo
vayo vadanta ṛtutā śakuntayaḥ
ubhevāchau vadatisāmagā iva
gāyatraṃ ca traistubhaṃ cānurājati” Ṛgveda, 2. 43. 1

“udgāteṇa śakune sāmā gāyasi
brahmaputra iva savaneshu śansasi” Ṛgveda, 2. 43. 2

“ime mayūkhā upa seduru - sadaḥ sāmāni cakrustasarāṇyotave”
Ṛgveda, 10. 130. 2

“taṃ sāmānuprāvartata samito navyāhitam” Ṛgveda, 10. 135. 4

In Kriṣṇayajurveda

“yāni devarājānaṃ sāmāni
tairamuṣmillāke ṛdhnoti
Ayajño vā eṣṇo yo'sāmā
caturunnayati chaturakṣarathantaram”

In Taittirīya Saṃhitā

“sāmnā prastotā'nvavaiti sāmavairakṣo hā”

Tai.Saṃhitā, 6.6.9

“udgātṛbhyo haranti sāmadevatyo vai Soumyaḥ”

Tai.Saṃhitā, 6.6.29

“devaloko vai sāmā”

Tai.Saṃhitā, 7.5.6

“sāmavedo brāhmaṇānāṃ prasūtiḥ”

Tai.Saṃhitā, 3.50

In Atharvaveda

“bruhataḥ pari sāmāni” Atharva,8.9.4.

“sāmāni yasya lomāni - yajurhṛudayaṃ uchyate”

Atharva,9.6.2.

“brahmanā parigrhītā sāmṇā paryūḍhā”

Atharva,11.03.15.

“ṛcaḥ sāmāni chandāṃsi purāṇaṃ yajushāṃ cha saha
uchchiṣṭājjañire sarve dividevā diviśritāḥ”

Atharva,11.07.24.

“ṛcāṃ ca vai sa sāmṇāṃ ca yajuṣāṃ ca
brahmaṇasca priyaṃ dhāma bhavati ya evaṃ veda”

Atharva,15.06.09.

In Shukla Yajurveda Kāṇva Saṃhitā

“ ṛcāṃ vāchaṃprapadye mano yajuḥ prapadye

sāma pranamprapadye cakṣuḥ śrotraṃ prapadye”

Atharva,36.1.1.

In Vālmīki Rāmāyana

“nānrgveda vinītasya - nāyajurvedadhārīnaḥ

nāsāmaveda Viduṣaḥ – shakyamevaṃ prabhāshitum”

Atharva,3.29.

In the Mahābhārata

“sāmavedasca vedānām” (14.3.17.)

Bhagavad Gītā

“vedānām sāmavedo’smi” (10.22.)

In Raghuvamśa

“chaturbhujāmsaprabhavaḥ sa teṣāṃ dānapravṛtteranupāratānāṃ
suradvipānāmiva sāmāyonirbhinno’ṣṭadhā viprasasāra vaṭśaḥ”

Raghuvamśa, 16 sarga 3 verse

In this way, the mention of Sāmaveda is seen from the era of Ṛgveda. It explains the popularity of Sāmaveda from thousands of years.

Nature of Sāmaveda

The meaning of creating peace and happiness in the mind lies in the word *sāma*. Sāmaveda brings happiness and peace to God. Deity is appeased by Āhuti (sacrifice) and Udgāthā (singing). The singing was done in Sāmaveda and for the singing of peace there was a group of singers named ‘*Sāmagāṇa*’. The melodic pattern was known as ‘svara’ in music originated in the Sāmaveda.

The Sāmaveda is composed of the combination of the Ṛgveda which is called ‘*ṛc*’ and the ‘svara’ which is called ‘*sāma*’.

“ṛcyadhūḍhaṃ sāmā, tasmāt ṛcyadhyūḍhaṃ sāmā gīyate”
(Chāndogya, 2.1.6.1)

Śankarācārya expressed the same idea as follows:

“ṛcīva sāmā,. tasmāt ata eva kāraṇāt
ṛcyadhyūḍhameva sāmā gīyate idanīmapī sāmagaiḥ”
(Chāndogya Bhāṣya)

As explained in Chāndogya Upaniṣad sāmā means ‘svara’
“kā sāmno gatiḥ iti? svara itihovāca” (Chāndogya 1.8.4.)

One can get ideas about the nature of Sāmaveda with these examples.

It is very clear that the singing part of the Ṛgveda is completed by the Sāma Veda.

Vowels

The vitality of the Vedas rests on the tones. Variations in meaning also occur depending on the variety of vowel usage.

The importance of svaras is emphasized in Nāradyāśikṣā.

“sāma yajuraṅgāni ye yajñesu prayujyate - avijānādi śāstrāṇaṃ teṣāṃ bhavati visvaraḥ” (Nāradyāśikṣā 1.1.4.)

As stated in the Mahābhāṣya, mantras which are not considered svaras or not properly used as svaras are ineffective.

“mantro hīnaḥ svarato varṇato vā mithyā prayukto na tamarthamāha”

It means that the Vedic mantras with correctly applied tones are fruitful.

Singing is twofold: vedic and classical.

Vedic singing (Sāma) is called *mārgī* and classical singing is called “*deśī*”.

Sārangadeva stated in his book *Sangīta Ratnākara* that classical singing was originated from Vedic singing.

“sāmavedoditaṃ gītaṃ - sañjagrāha pitāmahaḥ” (Sangīta Ratnākara 1.1.25)

Both these vedic and classical singings have seven (07) tones.

“saptasvarāstrayo grāmāḥ - mūrchnāstveka viṃśathiḥ”
tānā ekonapañcāśadityetat svara maṇḍalaṃ” (Nāradyāśikṣā 1.2.4.)

However, there is a difference in vowel order in these two sections.

Vedic - Ma, Ga, Ri, Sa, Da, Ni, Pa

Classical- Sa, Ri, Ga, Ma, Pa, Da, Ni

It is explained in *Sūta Saṃhiā* that classical singing brings the pleasure of Lord Śiva and Vedic singing brings pleasure related to everything.

“laukikesvapi gāṇeṣu - prasādaṃ kurute śivaḥ
kiṃ punaḥ vaidike gāṇe - tato gāṇaṃ samāśrayet”

The great sage Yajñavalkya has also made a similar statement.

“gītino yadi yogene - na gacchet paramaṃ padaṃ
rudrasyānucharo bhūtvā tenaiva saha modate”

If he does not attain Parama Pada (Moksha) through singing, he becomes a follower of Lord Śiva and is happy with Him.

Prakṛti and Uttara Ṛk Chantings

Ṛk texts studied and sung in villages are called ‘Grame Geyaṃ’ and Ṛk texts studied and sung in forests are called ‘Arāṇye Gayāṃ’. 1492 basic sāmā chants called Pūrvārchika riks are considered as Prakṛiti sāmās. 1145 sāmā chants called Uttarārchika sāmā are called Uttarārchika sāmā.

Prakṛiti Sāmā chant is divided into 7 parts.

1. Gāyatram
2. Āgneyaṃ
3. Aindraṃ
4. Pāvamānaṃ
5. Arkadvandva Vrataṃ
6. Śukriam
7. Mahānāmnī.

“gāyatram prathamam gānamāgneyam tu dvitīyakam
trītiyamaindraṁ gānam syāt pāvamānam chaturthakam
arkadvandva vratam cheti pañcamam gānamucyate
ṣaṣṭhañca śukriam gānam mahānāmnī ca saptamam
ethāni saptagānāni prakṛti kathitāni ca”

(Online article, Oppiliappan List Archive: Message 00056 Aug 2006
(Retrieved 14.10.2020))

The amounts of Prakṛti Sāma chants are as follows.

1. Gāyatram	01
2. Āgneyam	180
3. Aindraṁ	633
(Bahusāmi	132
Ekasāmi	64
Bruhatī	150
Trīṣṭup	49
Anuṣṭup	76
Indrapucchaṁ	162
4. Pavamānam	384
5. Arka-parva -	89
(Dvandvaparva -	77
Vrataparva -	84)
6. Śukriam -	40
7. Mahānāmnī -	04
Total	1492

The amounts of Uttara Ṛk chants are as follows. This consists of two types as Ūha and Rahasyam (Ūhyam). Also, there are 07 varieties applicable to both these sections. They are as follows:

1. Dāśaratraṃ
2. Sāmvatsaraṃ
3. Ekāhaṃ
4. Ahinaṃ
5. Śatraṃ
6. Prāyaścittaṃ
7. Kṣutraṃ

Category	Ūha chants (grāma)	Ūhyaṃ (rahasyaṃ/araṇyaṃ)
Dāśaratraṃ	222	29
Sāmvatsaraṃ	152	41
Ekāhaṃ	158	23
Ahinaṃ	146	31
Śatraṃ	121	14
Prāyaścittaṃ	50	19
Kṣutraṃ	87	52
Total	936	209

Total is 1145.

It is seen that there are changes in the chants according to the respective yāga (sacrifice) occasions.

There are mainly 03 branches of Sāmaveda.

There are also Brāhminical texts inherent to the three main branches of the Sāmaveda: Kauthuma, Jaiminiya and Rānāyaṇīya. They consider themselves as Sāmaveda Brāhmanās.

08 Brāhmanas Belonging to Kauthuma Branch

1. Tāṇḍya Brāhmaṇaṃ – consists of 25 chapters. It is also known as Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa. The facts on Soma Yāga have been

presented here. 178 types of sacrifices related to it (from Agnistoma Yāga to Viśvasṛjāmayanaṃ Yāga) are represented here with the mantras that are chanted daily.

2. Ṣaḍvinśa Brāhmaṇaṃ – Originally known as Mahā Brāhmaṇa, this also has 26 chapters. The chants which are widely used in sacrifices can be seen here. Those chants are called Subrahmaṇya Āhvanam.
3. Sāmavidhāna Brāhmaṇaṃ – 03 chapters. 25 categories. Sūktās like Śrī Rudraṃ, Puruṣasūktaṃ, Subramaniya Sūkta are found here and there are also Sāma chants like Ariṣṭavargaṃ and Pavitravargaṃ. It is emphasized here that sāma gāyanā are sung for the benefit of everyone.
4. Ārṣeya Brāhmaṇaṃ - Consists of 03 chapters and 82 groups, this book teaches the importance of chanting the sāma gāyanā that carry blessings of sages, chandas and deities.
5. Devatādhyāya Brāhmaṇaṃ – Consists of 04 categories, it describes the deities related to the respective sāma gāyanā. The facts on the origin of Chandas like Gāyatrī, Uṣṇik, Kakubh. Anuṣṭup, Bṛhatī, Paṃktī, Triṣṭup, Jagatī are also given here.
6. Chāndogya Brāhmaṇaṃ - 10 chapters. First two Chapters are named as mantra Brāhmaṇa. In this Brāhmaṇa, Mantras for Vivāha, Puṃsavana, Sīmanthana, Jāta, Nāmakaraṇa, Choulaṃ, Upanayanaṃ, samāvartanaṃ etc. can be seen.
7. Saṃhitopaniṣat Brāhmaṇaṃ - This name is given because gupta or secret matters are presented here. It consists of 05 categories,

the characteristics of student, guru pūjā, the importance of offering land, cows have also been shown.

8. Vamṣa Brāhmaṇam - Describes the line of Gurus from Sarvadatta to Gārgya. The origin of dynasty extends to the Brahma. The Sāmaveda generation has been evaluated here, which shows the importance of the generation of teachers.

Jaiminīya Branch or Talavakāra Branch

This branch of Sāmaveda is named as Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa, Talavakāra Brāhmaṇa. The last part of this which is named as Kenopaniṣadhas introduced as Talavakāra Brāhmaṇa. It is mentioned here that Parabrahma comes in the guise of Ambal. He teaches Brahmanvidyā to Indra.

There are four main priests in Śrota Yāgas as *hotṛ* (who invites the sacrifice by chanting Ṛg hymns) *udgātṛ* (who prepares the soma drink and other offerings and places the sacrifice by chanting sāma) *adhvaryu* (who directs the sacrifice by reciting Yajus texts) *brahman* (who protects the sacrifice from dangers).

Thus, it is clear that the hymns of Sāmaveda were sung by the priest named *udgātṛ*. The hymns which belong to the Kauthuma branch are known as Ārcika because they are taken from the Ṛg (Ṛc/Ṛk) veda.

The original part is known as Ārcika and the remaining part (which was added later) as Uttarārcika.

Jayadeva Thilakasiri, who wrote the book Vedic literature (in Sinhala), says that sāma hymns were not only used for sacrifices but also in festival occasions.

“The very old Sāma hymns were sung in collective gatherings such as national festivals and enjoying parties (priasambhāṣaṇa)” (Page 38, 1958, Vidyālayankāra Press)

Conclusion

The Sāmaveda contains rules on Indian sacrificial methods as well as singing songs and it seems to mark the beginning of Indian music. Scholars like Oldenburg stated that studying Sāmaveda requires knowledge not only of linguistics but also of musicology.

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