

Sāmaveda

1. Introduction

The mass of knowledge called Veda was divided into four – Ṛgveda, Yajurveda, Sāmaveda and Atharvaveda. Sāmaveda is formed by assigning music to the Mantras in Ṛgveda. The system of music has emerged from Sāmaveda and is called Gāndharvaveda. Originally, Sāmaveda had had one thousand śākhās (branches). Unfortunately only three branches could survive the test of time and the number of learners of Sāmaveda today is meagre. The Mantras of Sāmaveda are used in Yāgas and the priest who recites them is called Udgātā. Sāyaṇācārya did a commentary on Sāmaveda. The Prātiśākhya (grammar) of Sāmasaṃhitā was authored by Puṣpaṛṣi. Śākaṭāyana's "Ṛktantram" is a popular Prātiśākhya.

[More](#)

2. Śākhās

According to Mahābhāṣyam (Paspāśā), Śrīmadbhāgavatam (12-6-76-79), Caraṇavyūhapariśiṣṭam, Sarvānukramaṇī and Viṣṇupurāṇam, Sāmaveda has one thousand śākhās (branches). Even Divyāvadānam, a work on Bauddham enumerates the thousand śākhās.

3. Definition of Sāma

Jaimini in his Pūrvamīmāṃsādarśanam defines a Sāma as "a Mantra associated with music" –

गीतिषु सामाख्या (मी. द.२.१.३६)

gītiṣusāmākhyā(Mīmāṃsādarśanam 2.1.36)

Chāndogyopaniṣat also says that Sāma is dependent on Ṛk –

तस्मादृच्यध्यारूढं साम गीयते (छा. उ. १.६)

tasmādṛcyadhārūḍhaṃsāmagīyate (Chāndogyopaniṣat 1.6)

But this definition is given simply following the popularity of the same among Vedic scholars. In seventh Adhyāya of Pūrvamīmāṃsā, Jaimini clearly defines that both the general term "Sāma" and the names of Sāmas such as "Rathantaram" mean "gīti" (singing / music) only –

साम्नोऽभिधानशब्देन प्रवृत्तिः स्याद्यथाशिष्टम् (मी. द.७.२.१)

sāmno'bhidhānaśabdenapravṛttiḥsyādyathāśiṣṭam (mī. da. 7.2.1)

In second pāda (leg) of the ninth Adhyāya, Jaimini reminds that both the terms, i.e. Sāma and Rathantaram etc. mean "gīti" (singing / music) only –

सामानि मन्त्रमेके स्मृत्यपुदेशाभ्याम् (मी. द. ९.२.१)

sāmānimantramekesmṛtyupadeśābhyām (mī. da.9.2.1)

On the other hand, Atharvasaṃhitā established conjugal relation between Ṛk and

Sāma –

अमोऽहमस्मि सा त्वम् सामाहमस्मि ऋक् त्वम् द्यौरहं पृथिवी त्वम् ताविह सं

भवावः प्रजां जनयावहै (अथर्वसंहिता १४.२.७१)

amo'hamasmisātvamsāmāhamasmīṛktvamdyaurahamprthivītvamtāvihasambha
vāvaḥprajāṃjanayāvahai (atharvasaṃhitā 14.2.71)

I am Svara (accent in the form of a song) and you are Ṛk, I am Sāma and you
are Ṛk, I am heaven and you are earth, so let us get married and have children.

4. Ṛgveda and Sāmaveda

Except seventy five, the Mantras in Sāmaveda are borrowed from the eighth and ninth
Maṇḍalas of Ṛgveda. Since Gānam (music) is important in Sāmaveda there are no
Vikṛtipāṭhas like Jaṭa, Mālā, Ratha, Ghana etc. Only Padapāṭha and Stobhapāṭha are
available.

5. Saṃhitā-Brāhmaṇam-Āraṇyakam-Upaniṣat

Out of the thousand śākhās of Sāmaveda, only three are available - Rāṇāyanīyaśākhā, Kauthumaśākhā and Jaiminīyaśākhā. Sages Rāṇāyani, Kuthumi and Jaimini were the perceivers and propagators of these branches. Kauthumaśākhā has got two Brāhmaṇas – Tāṇḍyabrāhmaṇam and Chāndogyabrāhmaṇam. Talavakārabrāhmaṇam is related to Jaiminīyaśākhā.

There is neither Āraṇyakam nor Upaniṣat to Tāṇḍyabrāhmaṇam. Chāndogyabrāhmaṇam has got no Āraṇyakam but there is Upaniṣat called Chāndogyopaniṣat. The Āraṇyakam of Talavakārabrāhmaṇam of Jaiminīyaśākhā is called Jaiminīyopaniṣadbrāhmaṇam.

There are four Upabrāhmaṇas of Sāmaveda – Sāmavidhānabrāhmaṇam, Devatādhyāyabrāhmaṇam, Saṃhitopaniṣadbrāhmaṇam and Vaṃśabrāhmaṇam.

Finally, there is only one Āraṇyakam for Sāmaveda – Jaiminīyopaniṣadbrāhmaṇam.

6. Sāmasaṃhitā

Pūrvārcika and Uttarārcika are the two parts of Sāmasaṃhitā. A group of Ṛks is called Ārcikam. In Pūrvārcika there are six Prapāṭhakas, each consisting of two Adhyāyas (chapters). There are twelve Adhyāyas in Pūrvārcikam. A group of ten Mantras is called a

Daśati. In the first five Prapāṭhakas, there are ten Daśatis each. In sixth Prapāṭhaka there are nine Daśatis. In brief, there are six Prapāṭhakas, twelve Adhyāyas and fifty nine Daśatis in Pūrvārcikam.

In the first twelve Daśatis the praise of Agni, in the next thirty six Daśatis the praise of Indra, who consumes Soma, and in the last eleven Daśatis the praise of Soma is seen.

Uttarārcikam consists of nine Prapāṭhakas. In each Prapāṭhaka there are two or more portions of which each one is called Adhyāya or "ardha". In each Adhyāya, the Mantras usually are arranged in groups of three. Every first Mantra is seen in the Pūrvārcikam also. In the first five Prapāṭhakas there are two Adhyāyas each and in the last four Prapāṭhakas three Adhyāyas, making a total of twenty two Adhyāyas in nine Prapāṭhakas.

The Mahānāmnyārcikam, which exists between Pūrvārcikam and Uttarārcikam and wherein the praise of Indra is made, has got ten Mantras. Unlike other Mantras these do not have Ṛṣi, Devatā and Chandas.

The six Prapāṭhakas of Pūrvārcikam account for five hundred and eighty five Mantras, whereas one thousand two hundred and twenty Mantras are there in the nine Prapāṭhakas of Uttarārcikam.

Some scholars add the fifty five Mantras of Āraṇyakakāṇḍa and ten Mantras of Mahānāmnyārcikam and put the total number of Mantras of Sāmasaṃhitā at one thousand eight hundred and seventy.

One thousand five hundred and four Mantras are borrowed from Ṛgveda and seventy five are independent Mantras.

7. Dichotomy of Pāṭhas and Gānam

Padapāṭha (splitting into words) and Stobhapadapāṭha are two kinds of Pāṭhas (texts) of Sāmasaṃhitā. Generally any different text of a Saṃhitā, such as Pada, Krama etc. are meant for preserving the original text of Veda. But in the case of Sāmaveda the Stobhapāṭha is for assisting the Gānam (music). While performing the Sāmagānam, some letters are prefixed and suffixed to the Ṛk and such letters are called Stobhākṣaras (letters for Stobha).

अधिकत्वे सति ऋग्विलक्षणवर्णः स्तोभः इति लक्षणात् (सायणः,

सामवेदभाष्यभूमिका)

adhikatte sati ṛgvilakṣaṇavarṇaḥstobhaḥītilakṣaṇāt (Sāyaṇa,
sāmavedabhāṣyabhūmikā)

The Padapāṭha associated with Stobhākṣaras is called Stobhapadapāṭha. "Hoyi, hrīvā" – are examples. The prefixed Stobha is called "Anvayi" and the suffixed one is "anuṣaṅgi".

The Gānam is of two types – Prakṛti and Ūha. Prakṛti is of two kinds – Grāmageya (fit to be sung in a village) and Araṇyageya (fit to be sung in a forest). This is called Gānasamhitā (Prakṛti + Ūha). The Ūha, related to Grāmageya is "Ūhagānam" whereas that of Araṇyageya is "Rahasyagānam". Sarvānukramaṇikā says that there are seven Gānas in Prakṛti

and Ūha consists of seven Tantras. Gāyatram, Āgneyam, Aindram, Pāvamānam, Parvatrayam (three Parvas, viz. Arkaparva, Dvandvaparva and Vrataparva), Śukriyam and Mahānāmī – are the seven Gānas of Prakṛti. The seven Tantras of Ūha are – Daśarātram, Samvatsaram, Aikāham, Ahīnam, Satram, Prāyaścittam and Kṣudram. One should keep in mind the seven Svaras, three Grāmas, twenty one Mūrchanas and forty nine Tānas.

Udgātas sing in the form of Stotra during morning, afternoon and evening at Mandra (slow), Madhyama (medium) and Tāra (top / high pitch) levels. Singing (Gānam) a Ṛk with many Svaras (accents) is called "Sāma". In Prakṛti, generally, a single Gānam is performed for a single Ṛk. In certain cases, there can be upto sixteen Gānas. There are eighteen Gānas for a single Ṛk. Rathantarasāma, Bṛhatsāma, Vāmadevyasāma etc. are the names of different Gānas of a single Ṛk.

i. Rathantarasāma

अभि त्वा शूर नोनुमोऽदुग्धा इव धेनवः।

ईशानमस्य जगतः स्वर् दशमीशानमिन्द्र तस्थुषः ॥ सामवेदः, १.३.१.५.१,

२.१.१.११.१,

ऐन्द्रकाण्डम् ॥

abhitvāsūranonumo'dugdhāivadhenavaḥ ।

īśānamasyajagataḥsvardīśamīśānamindratasthuṣaḥ ॥sāmavedaḥ, 1.3.1.5.1,

2.1.1.11.1,aindrakāṇḍam ॥

ii. Vāmādevyam

कया नश्चित्र आ भुवदूती कया वृधस्सखा।

कया शचिष्ठया वृता ॥सामवेदः, १.२.२.३.५, २.१.१.१२.१॥

kayānaścitra ā bhuvadūtīkayāvṛdhassakhā ।

kayāśaciṣṭhayāvṛtā ॥sāmavedaḥ, 1.2.2.3.5, 2.1.1.12.1 ॥

iii. Bṛhatsāma

त्वामिद्धि हवामहे साता वाजस्य कारवः।

त्वां वृत्रेष्विन्द्र सत्पतिं नरस्त्वां काष्ठास्वर्वतः ॥ सामवेदः १.३.१.५.२,

२.२.१.१२.१॥

tvāmiddhihavāmahesātāvājasyakāraḥ ।

tvāṃvṛtreṣvindrāsatpatimnarastvāṃkāṣṭhāsvarvataḥ ॥Sāmavedaḥ 1.3.1.5.2,

2.2.1.12.1 ॥

8. Five parts of Sāmasaṃhitā

When a Ṛk is modified into a Sāma, by assigning Gānam there will be five parts –
Prastāva, Udgītha, Pratihāra, Upadrava and Nidhana. Here is an example –

अग्न आयाहि वीतये गृणानो हव्यदातये।

निहोता सत्सि बर्हिषि ॥ सामवेदः १.१.१.१.१, ऋग्वेदः ६.१६.१० ॥

agna āyāhi vītaye gṛṇāno havyadātaye।

nihotā satsi barhiṣi ॥Sāmavedaḥ 1.1.1.1.1, Ṛgvedaḥ 6.16.1॥

- i. humagnā3 (Prastāva) – Here, starting with "hum" is called Prastāva.
- ii. om āyāhi vītaye gṛṇāno havyadātaye (Udgītha) – Here, "om" is used in the beginning of the Ṛk. In Ṛgveda "om" is called Praṇava whereas the same is "Udgītha" in Sāmaveda (says Chāndogya).
- iii. nihotā satsi barhiṣi om (Pratihāra) – The Ṛtvik (priest) completes the Ṛk with "om" and this is called Pratihāra.
- iv. nihotā satsi ba (Upadravam) – This is sung by Udgātā.
- v. barhiṣi om (Nidhanam) – This is recited in chorus by Prastotā, Udgātā, Pratihartā etc.

Certain Śabdās in Sāmagānam such as "au, hau, vā, hā" do not have any meaning but are useful in preserving the Geya, i.e. protecting it from deformation.

The difference between Rāṇāyanīya and Kauthumīya branches is related to nomenclature mainly – the former takes up Prapāṭhaka – Ardhaprapāṭhaka – Daśati whereas

the latter counts by Adhyāya-Khaṇḍa. In certain places differences in Svāra (accent) and difference in text is seen.

Kauthumīyas say "hā u" while Rāṇāyanīyas say "hāvu" – also – "rāi" and "rāyi", "no" and "ṇo" etc. Different versions are found in Jaiminīyasamhitā.

9. Sāmavikāras

There are six different types (Vikāras) of Sāma - Viśeṣaṇa, Vikarṣaṇa, Abhyāsa, Virāma and Stobha. Śabarāsvāmī says that there are one thousand Gānas in Sāmaveda –

अर्थैकत्वाद् विकल्पः स्यात् ॥ मीमांसासूत्रम् ९.२.२९ ॥

arthaikatvādvikalpaḥsyāt ॥mīmāṃsāsūtram 9.2.29 ॥

10. Seven Svaras

Nārādīyaśikṣā correlates the seven Svaras of Sāmaveda with the popular Svaras in Gāndharvaveda (sa, ri, ga, ma, pa, da, ni).

यः सामगानां प्रथमः स वेणोर्मध्यमः स्वरः।

यो द्वितीयस्स गान्धारः तृतीयस्त्वृषभः स्मृतः ॥४.१॥

चतुर्थः षड्ज इत्याहवः पञ्चमो धैवतो भवेत् ।

षष्ठो निषादो विज्ञेयः सप्तमः पञ्चमः स्मृतः ॥२॥

yaḥsāmagānāmprathamahṣaveṇormadhyamaḥsvaraḥ ।

yodvitīyassagāndhāraḥṛtīyastvṛṣabhaḥsmṛtaḥ ॥ 4.1 ॥

caturthaḥṣaḍjaityāhvaḥpañcamodhaivatobhavet ।

ṣaṣṭhoniṣādovijñeyaḥsaptamaḥpañcamahṣmṛtaḥ ॥2 ॥

The first Svara of Sāma, called Kruṣṭa, is Madhyama of Veṇu (flute), Prathama is Gāndhāra, Dvitīya is Ṛṣabha, Ṭṛtīyā is Ṣaḍja, Caturtha is Dhaivata, Pañcama is Niṣāda and Ṣaṣṭha is Pañcama, as shown in the table. The seven Svaras, viz., Niṣāda etc. are born out of the three main Svaras, viz. Udātta, Anudātta and Svarita and this aspect is explained in Nāradīyaśikṣā.

Sāmasvara Number	Sāmasvara-name	Veṇu-svara
1	Kruṣṭa	Madhyama (ma)
2	Prathama	Gāndhāra (ga)
3	Dvitīya	Ṛṣabha (ri)
4	Ṭṛtīya	Ṣaḍja (sa)
5	Caturtha	Dhaivata (da)
6	Pañcama	Niṣāda (ni)
7	Ṣaṣṭha	Pañcama (pa)

11. Chandograntha and Uttarāgrantha

In order to provide Ṛkpāṭha (the text of Ṛgveda) that is useful for Sāmagas (those who do Sāmagānam) there are two treatises - Chandaḥ (popularly known as Yonigrantha) and Uttarā. The former contains the list of Ṛks that are the origins of different Sāmas (In Sāmaveda the order of Mantras does not strictly follow the one in Ṛgveda). In Uttarāgrantha Sūktas (groups of Ṛks) called Tṛcas are listed. In a Tṛca the first one is the original Ṛk from Chandaḥ and the other two are from Uttarā.

12. Significance of Sāmaveda

Chāndogyopaniṣat compares Sāmaveda with a flower as it has got fragrance of Gānam –

सामवेद एव पुष्पम् (छान्दोग्योपनिषत् ३.३.१)

sāmavedaevapuṣpam (Chāndogyopaniṣat 3.3.1)

In Anuśāsanaparva of Mahābhārata there is praise of Sāmaveda

सामवेदश्च वेदानाम् (१४.३२२)

sāmavedaścavedānām (14.322)¹

¹ 13.14.159 as per the critical edition of Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute

Śrī kṛṣṇa in Bhagavadgītā says he is personification of Sāmaveda –

वेदानां सामवेदोऽस्मि (१.२२)

vedānāṃsāmavedo'smi (10.22)

13. Recitation during Yāga

Pāṇini rules that during Yajñakarma one should recite Ṛgveda, Yajurveda and Atharvaveda in Ekaśruti (wherein the difference of Svaras, i.e. Udātta, Anudātta and Svarita, is not felt). But with regard to Sāmaveda there is no change, i.e. Sāmagānam would remain as it is during Yajñakarma –

यज्ञकर्मण्यजपन्यूङ्खसामसु (पाणिनिसूत्रम् २.२.३४)

yajñakarmanyajapanyūṅkhasāmasu (Pāṇinisūtram1.2.34)

14. Mantradraṣṭāraḥ / Maharṣayaḥ

There are more than one hundred and fifty Maharṣis (great sages) who have perceived Sāmamantras.

i. Vasiṣṭhaḥ

This Mahārṣi had perceived some Mantras in forty three Daśatis.

ii. Vāmadevaḥ

In thirty six Daśatis of Sāmasaṃhitā there are Mantras perceived by Vāmadeva.

iii. Kaṇvaḥ

Also called Kāśyapa as he was born in the clan of Kaśyapa. He was the son of Medātithi. Kaṇva is Mantradraṣṭa of some Mantras in twenty nine Daśatis of Sāmasaṃhitā.

iv. Vāḷakhilyāḥ

Vāḷakhilyas are sixty thousand and were the children of Santati and Kratu. They are considered important although they are Draṣṭas of less Mantras in three Daśatis.

There are other Ṛṣis such as Kaśyapa, Rebha, Atri, Vatsa, Bharga, Virūpa etc. who are Mantradraṣṭas of Sāmaveda.

15. Devatas of Sāmasaṃhitā

i. Agni

His abode is earth and he is the perceivable God. The altar of Yajña (Yajñavedikā) is his seat. Among Vaidikadevatas Agni occupies the second place after Indra.

ii. Indra

Space is his abode. Indra is the head of Vaidikadevatas. He likes Somapānam very much. Indra's Vajrāyudha (the diamond weapon) is made of the bones of Dadhīci. Providing light, rain and all kind of wealth are his important duties.

iii. Soma

Earth is the abode of Soma. It is a creeper available in plenty in the mountains of North India. Soma grows well in a hill called "Mūjavam". The creeper is crushed with stone tablets and juice is squeezed. The filtered Somarasa is called "Pavamānam". It is customary for Vedic sages to call the combine of Somalata and deity considered as Adhidevatā (chief) by the name "Soma" or "Pavamāna". Somarasa pleases Indra and Devatas and as such it has occupied an important role in Yajña. Having offered to Devatas the performer of Yajña also consumes it. Such a person is called Somapīthī.

iv. Uṣas

She is a female deity having her abode in Antarikṣa (sky). Uṣas shines with her reddish light just before Sunrise.

v. Sūrya (Sun)

Antarikṣam (sky) is the abode of Sūrya. A God perceivable, Sūrya is the Ātmā (soul) of the universe and provides health, glow and strength.

vi. Viṣṇu

Antarikṣam is his abode. Described as omnipresent and Trivikrama, Viṣṇu is the symbol of the universal power.

vii. Puruṣa

Puruṣa is described as the very cause of this universe (Pūrvārcikam 6.4.3.6) and this portion is very popular as Puruṣasūktam.

16. Subject matter of Sāmasaṃhitā

i. Pūrvārcikam

In Pūrvārcikam there are six Prapāṭhakas.

- a. First Prapāṭhaka – Ten Daśatis are there in this. Although Agni dominates the scene, there are praises of Brahmaṇaspati, Indra, Pūṣā and Aṅgīrasa.

- b. Second Prapāṭhaka – It consists of ten Daśatis. Agni, Indra, Savitā etc. are the main deities.
- c. Third Prapāṭhaka – The description of Indra, Varuṇa, Aśvins, Maruts, Āditya, Sūrya etc. are available in ten Daśatis.
- d. Fourth Prapāṭhaka – This is a Prapāṭhaka having ten Daśatis related to the praise of Indra, Uṣas Agni, Viśvedevas, Dyāvāpṛthivis etc.
- e. Fifth Prapāṭhaka – In the ten Daśatis of this Prapāṭhaka there are the praises of Indra, Āditya, Maruts, Viśvedevas, Aśvins, Soma, Pavamāna, Agni, Sūrya and Savitā.
- f. Sixth Prapāṭhaka – Only nine Daśatis are there in this Prapāṭhaka and it is earmarked for Pavamāna, Soma and Indra.

ii. Āraṇyakakāṇḍa

This is the third part of sixth Prapāṭhaka and consists of five Daśatis. All the Devatas of Pūrvārcikam are seen here and Annam (cooked rice or food) is praised as Brahman (Pūrvārcikam 6.10.9)

iii. Mahānāmnyārcikā

There are ten Sāmas in this. The praises of Indra etc. is the subject matter.

iv. Uttarārcikam

- a. First Prapāṭhaka – In the twelve Daśatis of this Prapāṭhaka there are praises of Agni, Mitrāvaruṇa, Indra, Pavamāna and Soma.
- b. Second Prapāṭhaka – Pavamāna, Soma, Agni, Mitrāvaruṇa and Indra are praised in twelve Daśatis in this Prapāṭhaka.
- c. Third Prapāṭhaka – In the fourteen Daśatis of this Prapāṭhaka, Pavamāna, Soma, Agni and Indrāgni are praised.
- d. Fourth Prapāṭhaka – Across the thirteen Daśatis of this Prapāṭhaka there are the praises of Pavamāna, Soma, Agni, Āditya, Indra and Viśvedevas.
- e. Fifth Prapāṭhaka – Pavamāna, Soma, Agni and Indra are praised across the twelve Daśatis of this Prapāṭhaka.
- f. Sixth Prapāṭhaka – A prayer to get rid of sins is the subject matter of this Prapāṭhaka –

The groups of Devatas such as Mitra etc. may protect us. Agni who occupied the seat of Yajña may protect us. I am relieved of sins (Uttarārcikam 6.1.2)

- g. Seventh Prapāṭhaka – In the eleven Daśatis of this portion there are the praises of Indra, Pavamāna, Soma, Agni and Viśvedevas.
- h. Eighth Prapāṭhaka – Praises of Agni, Indra, Viṣṇu, Vāyu, Pavamāna, Soma etc. are there in the thirteen Daśatis of this Prapāṭhaka.
- i. Ninth Prapāṭhaka – Pavamāna, Soma, Indra, Agni, Maruts, Sūrya etc. are praised in nine Daśatis of this Prapāṭhaka.

17. Upaveda

Nāradīyaśikṣā says that Sāmaveda is the root of an Upaveda called Gāndharvaveda, that deals with Indian traditional music. Gāndharvaveda elaborates Sāmagānam also. It proposes Tauryatrikam, viz. Nṛtya (dance), Gīta (singing) and Vādyā (musical instruments), seven Svaras, three Grāmas, twenty one Mūrchanas and forty nine Tānas.

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