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सूचीपत्रम् (CONTENTS)

संस्कृतभाषायाम् (Sanskrit)

1. पूर्वोत्तरभारते संस्कृतसंस्कृत्योर्विकासे आउनीआटीसत्रस्य अवदानम्
✍ डॉ. छबिलाल उपाध्याय // 13
2. राष्ट्रियसंहतिसाधने संस्कृतस्य भूमिका
✍ डॉ. ध्रुवजित् शर्मा // 19
3. डुविताम्रफलके अलंकारस्य प्रयोगम् : एकम् अध्ययनम्
✍ पति महन्त // 24
4. वेदवाङ्मये नारीपदविमर्शः
✍ डॉ. सागरिका भट्टाचार्य // 28

नेपालीभाषायाम् (Nepali)

5. पूर्णिमा हाजरिका : एक सङ्क्षिप्त परिचय
✍ दिक्षिता शर्मा - झर्णा देवी // 36

हिन्दीभाषायाम् (Hindi)

6. पंत की कविताओं में निहित विचार
✍ संगीता सिंह राय // 39
7. शिक्षा की पूर्णता एवं भारतीय संस्कृति का प्रतिनिधित्व
✍ कल्पना देवी // 45

बङ्गभाषायाम् (Bengali)

8. नारी मने विचित्रता : ममनि रयसम गोस्वामीर छोटगब्ले
✍ पापड़ि पाल // 48
9. भारतीय संगीतेर उৎस
✍ सुजाता घोष // 55

असमीयाभाषायाम् (Assamese)

10. गोर्खा सम्प्रदायर् उৎसर-पारर्नादित वैदिक पबम्पराब प्रभार : एक
विश्लेषणात्मक अध्ययन
✍ ड० चन्द्र शेखर उपाध्याय // 58

आङ्गलभाषायाम् (English)

11. Political as well as Ritualistic Significance of
the *Rājasūya* Sacrifice
✍ Dr. Aparna Dhar // 70
12. Authority and popularity of the Manusamhitā:
An Analytical Study
✍ Dr. Dhundi Raj Upadhyaya // 78
13. Status of Women in Ancient India: A Study
✍ Subhash Adhikari // 84
14. The Flora and Fauna in the Vasiṣṭha Dharmasūtra
✍ Dr. Nabanita Sarma // 88
15. The Deva Bhasha Sanskrit: A Study
✍ Bishnu Bhandari // 102
16. Soma: An Important Vedic Plant and God
✍ Dr. Anjana Chakraborty // 107
17. Administration of Justice in the *Mahabharata*: a Brief
Study
✍ Dr. Swapna Borah // 117

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Soma: An Important Vedic Plant and God

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Soma represents a multifaceted state in the whole extent of the Vedic literature. Soma is the name of a plant from which Soma juice is extracted and offered to the Gods. As the ritual plays a very important role in *Rgveda* it is only natural that Soma, the plant, the juice of which is so much used in the ritual is deified as one of the most important of Vedic God Soma. In the *Rgveda* the Soma hold the third position following Indra and Agni from the point of view of the total number of hymns dedicated to them. In the post Vedic mythology, Soma is identified with the Moon. Soma is the lord of all the plants.

The word Soma comes from the root \sqrt{su} which means to extract or to make ready, prepare. Soma is the name of one of the most sacred plants of the ancient world. Being the most important of herbs Soma is said to have born as the lord of plants¹ or as their king. He receives the epithet *Vanaspati*, 'lord of the wood'² and is said to have generated all plants. He with the plants is invoked to remove sin and confers bliss³.

The Soma plant is once in the *Rgveda* described as *maujavata*⁴, which according to later statements would mean produced on Mount Mujavat. Soma is also several times

described as dwelling in the mountains (*griṣṭha*) or growing in the mountains (*parvatāvṛdh*)⁵. Mountains are also called 'Soma backed'⁶, a term which, perhaps by ritual symbolism, is applied to the pressing stones (*adrayah*) in the *R̥gveda*. All these terms point to the abode of the Soma plant being on terrestrial mountains⁷.

Though Soma is a terrestrial plant, it is also celestial⁸, in fact its true origin and abode are regarded as in heaven. Thus it is said that the birth of the plant is on high; being in heaven it has been received by earth⁹. The intoxication juice is the 'child of heaven'¹⁰, an epithet frequently applied to Soma.

A Soma plant is furnished with fifteen leaves which wane and wax with the waxing and the waning of the Moon. Thus one leaf grows every day in the lighted fortnight attaining the greatest number (fifteen) in the night of the full moon and then the leaves begin to decrease in number dropping one by one every day till the bare stem of the creeper is left on the night of the new moon. The growth of the plant depends upon the lunar phases of the Moon. The leaf develops one by one during *Śuklapakṣa* and become fifteen leaves on fullmoon and subsequently lose leaves one by one during *Kṛṣṇapakṣa* and it remains leafless stump at *Amāvaśyā* that is no moon day.

The branches of the Soma plant were used for the extraction of the juice but not the fruits¹¹. The part of the Soma plant which is pressed is called *aṁśu*, shoot or stalk¹².

The Ninth *Maṇḍala* of the *R̥gveda* contains a number of references to the colour of Soma. The colour of the plant and juice as well as of the God is narrated as brown (*babhru*) or ruddy (*aruna*) or most often tawny (*hari*) and in accord with this, it is the rule that the cow, with which in the rite the Soma is purchased, must be brown or ruddy and that any

substitutes used for Soma must be similar to it in colour. The plant is made to yield its juice by being pounded with a stone or pressed with stones, which lie on a skin and seem in contravention to the ritual usage to be placed on the altar. It is quite possible that these variations in colour may have been due to the specific variety of the Soma plant available and the process of extraction and stage of storage. The *R̥gveda* describes it as bright and shining¹³. Soma is narrated as purified with the hands¹⁴, by the ten fingers¹⁵ or figuratively by the ten maidens who are sisters¹⁶. Soma is the lord of the wine of delight, the beverage of immortality. Like Agni he is found in the plants, the growths of the earth and in the waters.

Soma is pressed out by the pressing-stone which has a close symbolic connection with the thunderbolt, the formed electric force of Indra who called Adri. The pressing of Soma with the help of stones was the usual method in the period of the *R̥gveda* the pressed drops are poured upon and pass over the strainer of sheep's wool¹⁷. For it purifies Soma, so that he proceeds cleansed to the feast of the Gods¹⁸. Soma is simply described as flowing in a river of delight to the Seat of the Gods, to the abode of immortality. The purified (unmixed) Soma juice is often called *Suddha* (pure), but much oftener *sukra* or *suci*, 'bright'. This unmixed Soma is offered almost exclusively to *Vāyu* and Indra, the epithet *sucipa* 'drinking clear (Soma)' being distinctive of *Vāyu*, but is admixed with milk for *Mitra-varuṇa* and with honey for the *Aśvins*.

Based on the mixture of water with the juice, the connection of Soma with the waters is expressed in the most varied ways. Streams flow for him¹⁹. The waters flow his ordinance²⁰. He flows at the head of streams. He is lord and king of streams²⁰, lord of spouses²², an oceanic (*samudriya*) King and God²³. The waters are his sisters. As leader of waters, Soma rules over rain²⁴. He produces waters and causes heaven and earth to rain. He streams rain from

heaven²⁵. The Soma drops themselves are several times compared with rain²⁶ and Soma is said to flow clearly with a stream of honey like the rain charged cloud²⁷. So too the *Pavamāna* drops are said to have streamed from heaven, from air, on the ridge of earth²⁸.

Soma bestows not only long life but also immortality. Hence it is mythologically called *amṛta*, the draught of immortality. It is an immortal stimulant²⁹, which the Gods love³⁰ and of which, when pressed by men and mixed with milk, all the Gods drink³¹, for they hasten to exhilaration and become exhilarated. Soma is immortal and the Gods drank him for immortality³². The Gods were originally mortal. They obtained it by drinking Soma, which is called the principle of immortality³³. He confers immortality on the Gods and on men³⁴. He places his worshippers in the everlasting and imperishable world where there is eternal light and glory and makes him immortal where king *Vaivasvata* lives³⁵. In the heavenly world Soma is united with the Fathers (The blessed dead) as the ground of their immortality³⁶.

The Soma drink was considered the most effective of all medicinal preparations. Both weakness and disease disappear in the physical body immediately after one drinks Soma, a unique and divine medicine³⁷. It is medicine for a sick man. Hence the God Soma heals whatever is sick, making the blind to see and the lame to walk³⁸. He is the guardian of men's bodies and occupies their every limb³⁹, bestowing length of life in this world. The juice of the Soma plant and the Soma mixtures were thought to have more magical potency than any other. The Soma draught is even said to dispel sin from the heart to destroy falsehood and to promote truth.

When imbibed Soma stimulates the voice⁴⁰, which he impels as the rower his boat⁴¹. This is doubtless the reason

why Soma is called lord of Speech (*Vācaspati*) or leader of Speech⁴². He is also said to raise his voice from heaven⁴³. Soma has all wisdom and knowledge. He surveys all things with his thousand eyes. Soma also awakens eager thought⁴⁴. He is also spoken of as a lord of thought and as a father, leader or generator of hymns. He is a leader of poets, a seer among priests⁴⁵. He has the mind of seers, is a maker of seers⁴⁶ and a protector of prayer⁴⁷. As the treasure house of all wisdom, he is the source of all thoughts and songs.

Soma is the 'soul of Sacrifice'⁴⁸, a priest (*Brahmā*) among the Gods⁴⁹ and apportions to them their share of sacrifice⁵⁰. Soma's wisdom thus comes to be predominantly dwelt upon. He is a wise seer. He knows the races of the Gods⁵¹. He is a wise man seeing wave⁵². Soma with intelligence surveys creatures⁵³. Hence he is many eyed and thousand eyed⁵⁴. Soma is participated in the ritual. The Soma drinkers are always respected, but if the ritual is not well performed and if there are errors in its performances, the Soma drinkers become unworthy of sacrificial gifts⁵⁵. The power of Soma is at the basis of many uses of Soma in the magical rites.

Soma is a great fighter. He is a victor, unconquered in fight, born for battle⁵⁶. He is the most heroic of heroes, the fiercest of the terrible, ever victorious⁵⁷. He conquers for his worshippers' cows, chariots, horses, gold, heaven, water, a thousand boons and everything. Without reference to his war like character, he is constantly said to bestow all the wealth of heaven and earth, food, cattle, horses, and so forth⁵⁸. Soma himself is occasionally called a treasure or the wealth of the Gods⁵⁹. Soma is a fighter against darkness. He can also afford protection from foes⁶⁰. He drives away goblins and like some other deities but more frequently, receives the epithet of goblin slayer (*rakṣoham*). Soma is the only God who is called a slayer of the wicked. In the later Vedic literature the

statement occurs that *Brāhmaṇs* who drink Soma are able to slay at a glance⁶¹.

Being a warrior, Soma is said to have weapons. Which like a hero he grasps in his hand and which are terrible and sharp⁶². He is said to have obtained his weapons by robbing his malignant father of them⁶³. He is described as armed with a thousand pointed shaft⁶⁴ and his bow is swift.

The conception of Soma comes to be extended to that of a being of universal dominion⁶⁵, who is 'lord of the quarters'⁶⁶, who performs the great cosmic actions of generating the two worlds of creating or establishing heaven and earth, of supporting heaven and of placing light in the Sun⁶⁷.

Soma has a romantic aspect also. He is not only lovable but also a lover and sometimes even a beloved. The daughters of the priest have adorned him as if he were a beautiful youth⁶⁸. There are of course, the fingers. Again ten ladies have sung to him as a maiden welcomes her love⁶⁹. Soma, the red one, blends himself with the cows that yield their fair breasts. Hence the cows themselves stand for milk⁷⁰. Everyone does his best to beautify him. He settles down among men like a hawk moving as a lover to his beloved⁷¹. The fingers are the glittering maids and sisters owing Soma as their lord⁷². He flows on the skin of the sheep like one longing a bride. *Apsarās* that live in the waters of the sea have seated themselves within the vat and flow to Soma⁷³, who is their lover probably. He gives pleasure as a wife pleases her husband⁷⁴ and moves onward like a youth to the youthful maids⁷⁵. He is sung by poets as a lover to his love.

God Soma blesses the woman, who is in search of her husband; so that she obtains proper husband. A king who has lost the support of his people is banished out of his territory. He resorts to mountains. When again the times are favorable

he is installed. Soma calls him back from the mountains, where he might be resting.

In a few of the latest hymns of the *Rgveda*, Soma begins to be mystically identified with the Moon. In the AV, Soma several times means the Moon and in the *Brāhmaṇas* this identification has already become a common place. In the post Vedic literature, Soma is a regular name of the Moon, which is regarded as being drunk up by the Gods and so waning, till it is filled up again by the Sun. In the *Chāndagya Upaniṣad*, the statement is found that the Moon is king Soma, the food of the Gods and is drunk up by them⁷⁶. Even in the *Brāhmaṇas* the identification of Soma with the Moon is already a common place. Thus the *Ait. Br.* remarks that the Moon is the Soma of the Gods⁷⁷. The *Śat. Br.*, that king Soma, the food of the Gods, is the Moon⁷⁸; and in the *Kau. Br.*, the sacrificial plant or juice is symbolical of the Moon God⁷⁹. In the AV, Soma several times means the Moon⁸⁰. Soma is possessed of rays⁸¹. Thus we get the identifications of Soma with the Moon. Soma is directly called to be *Candramās*⁸². The stem of Soma is the lord of fighters. By name it is never deficient in anything. Therefore, he (*darsa*, the slender crescent of the new moon) should never make the worshipper deficient in progeny and riches. The *darsa* or the young Soma plant (Moon) is complete at the point and at the end. He is charming to look at. The stems of Soma are unexhausted and the Gods feed on the unexhausted.

It will thus be noticed that Soma plant is used by the Atharvavedic singer not only for ritual but also for magical and medicinal purposes. Great emphasis is laid on the power of Soma and somehow it is made to connect itself with the various amulets and charms. The identification of the plant with the Moon is complete in the A.V. and this naturally leads to the connection that the moon is the lord of plants and herbs⁸³. Soma, the Moon whose soothing light is praised by

poets the world over, is the outer symbol of *ānanda*, the delight of existence which upholds the universe.

Soma is the lord of the north⁸⁴. There is a charm for securing safety from tigers, robbers, etc. The charm to crush the tigers belongs to *Atharvan* and is born of Soma. The strength of Soma is at the basis of such power of the charm⁸⁵. Soma is described to be always victorious in the battles. The plants with king Soma are praised to relieve one of his sins. Soma is invoked to purify a person from the offence that he might have committed with his eye, mind, speech, during wakeful or sleeping state. The rite of shaving or (*godana*) is performed under the instructions from Soma. Soma increases both power and knowledge⁸⁶.

Foot Notes:

1. *Rgveda* 9.114.2
2. *Rgveda* 9.12.7
3. AV. 2.10.2
4. *Rgveda* 10.34.1
5. *Rgveda* 9.46.1
6. AV. 3.21.10
7. *Rgveda* 9.82.3
8. *Rgveda* 10.116.3
9. *Rgveda* 9.61.10
10. *Rgveda* 9.38.5
11. *Rgveda* 10.85.3
12. *Rgveda* 9.67.28
13. *Rgveda* 9.42.1
14. पवमान महार्णो वि धावसि सूरु न चित्रो अव्ययानि पव्यया।
गभस्तिपूतो नृभिरद्रिभिः सुतो महे वाजाय धन्याय धन्वसि ॥-*Rgveda* 9.86.34
15. मृजन्ति त्वा दश क्षिपो हिन्वन्ति सप्त धीतयः । अनु विप्रा अमादिषुः ॥-*Rgveda* 9.8.4;
16. तमीमण्वीः समर्य आ गृभ्णन्ति योषणो दश । स्वसारः पार्ये दिवि ॥-*Rgveda* 9.1.7
17. परीतो वायवे सुतं गिर दून्द्राय मत्सरम् । अब्यो वारेषु सिञ्चत ॥-*Rgveda* 9.63.10
18. प्र राजा वाचं जनयन्नसिष्यददपो वसानो अभि गा इयक्षति ।
गृभ्णाति रिप्रमविरस्य तान्वा शुद्धो देवानामुप याति निष्कृतम् ॥-*Rgveda* 9.78.1
19. *Rgveda* 9.31.3
20. *Rgveda* 9.82.5
21. *Rgveda* 9.15.5
22. *Rgveda* 9.86.32
23. *Rgveda* 9.107.16
24. *Rgveda* 9.74.3
25. *Rgveda* 9.49.1
26. *Rgveda* 9.41.3
27. *Rgveda* 9.2.9
28. *Rgveda* 9.63.27
29. *Rgveda* 1.84.4
30. *Rgveda* 9.85.2
31. *Rgveda* 9.109.15
32. *Rgveda* 9.106.8
33. *Śat Br.* 9.5.18
34. *Rgveda* 8.48.3
35. *Rgveda* 113.7-8
36. त्वं सोम पितृभिः सम्विदानोऽनु द्वावपृथिवी आ ततन्थ ।
तस्मै त इन्द्रो हविषा विधेम वयं स्याम पतयो रयीनाम् ॥-*Rgveda* 8.48.13
37. *Rgveda* 8.48.11;
38. *Rgveda* 10.25.11
39. *Rgveda* 8.48.9
40. *Rgveda* 6.47.3
41. *Rgveda* 9.95.2
42. *Rgveda* 9.26.4

43. *Rgveda* 9.68.8
44. *Rgveda* 6.47.3
45. *Rgveda* 9.96.6
46. *Rgveda* 9.96.18
47. *Rgveda* 6.52.3
48. *Rgveda* 9.2.10
49. *Rgveda* 9.96.6
50. *Rgveda* 10.85.19
51. *Rgveda* 9.97.7
52. *Rgveda* 9.78.2
53. *Rgveda* 9.71.9
54. *Rgveda* 9.60.1
55. AV. 2.35.3
56. *Rgveda* 1.91.21
57. *Rgveda* 9.66.16
58. *Rgveda* 9.52.1
59. *Śat Br.* 1.6.4.5
60. *Rgveda* 10.25.7
61. *Rgveda* 9.61.30
62. *Rgveda* 9.61.30
63. *Rgveda* 6.44.22
64. *Rgveda* 9.86.40
65. *Rgveda* 9.86.28-29
66. *Rgveda* 9.113.2
67. *Rgveda* 6.47.4
68. *Rgveda* 9.14.5
69. *Rgveda* 9.56.3
70. *Rgveda* 9.61.21
71. *Rgveda* 9.38.4
72. *Rgveda* 9.65.1
73. *Rgveda* 9.78.3
74. *Rgveda* 9.82.4
75. *Rgveda* 9.86.16
76. *Ch. Up.* 5.10.1
77. तदाहुर्यद्वर्षपूर्णमासयोरुपवसति न ह वा अव्रतस्य देवा हविरश्रन्ति तस्मादुपवसत्युत मे देवा हविरश्रयुरिति
पूर्वाम्पौर्णमासीमुपवसेदिति पैङ्गयमुत्तरामिति कौषीतकं या पूर्वा पौर्णमासी सानुमतियोत्तरा सा राका या
पूर्वामावास्या सा सिनीवाली योत्तरा सा कुहूर्याम्पर्यस्तभियादभ्युदियादिति सा तिथिः
पूर्वाम्पौर्णमासीमुपवसेदनिर्जाय पुरस्तादमावास्यायां चन्द्रमसं यदुपैतियद्यजते तेन सोमं क्रीणन्ति
तेनेत्वमुत्तरामुपवसेदुत्तराणि ह वै सोमो यजते सोममनु दैवतमेतदे देवसोमं यच्चन्द्रमस्मादुत्तरामुपवसेत् ।
-Ait.Br. 7.11
78. *Śat Br.* 1.6.45
79. *Kau.Br.* 7.10; 4, 4
80. मुञ्चन्तु मा शपथ्या दहोरात्रे अर्थो उषाः । सोमो मा देवो मुञ्चतु यमाहुश्चन्द्रमा इति ॥-AV. 11.6.7
81. उदेनं भगो अग्रभीदुदेनं सोमो अंशुमान् । उदेनं मरुतो देवा उदिन्द्राग्नी स्वस्तये ॥-AV. 8.1.2
82. मुञ्चन्तु मा शपथ्या दहोरात्रे अर्थो उषाः । सोमो मा देवो मुञ्चतु यमाहुश्चन्द्रमा इति ॥-AV. 11.6.7
83. AV. 11.6.7
84. उदीची दिक्सोमोऽधिपतिः स्वजो राक्षिताशनिरिषवः ।
तेभ्यो नमोऽधिपतिभ्यो नमो रक्षितृभ्यो नम इषुभ्यो नम एभ्यो अस्तु ।
योऽस्मान्द्रेष्टि यं वयं द्विष्मस्तं वो जम्भे दध्मः ॥ -AV. 3.27.4
85. यत्संयमो न वि यमो वि यमो यन्न संयमः । इन्द्रजाः सोमजा आथर्वणसि व्याघ्रजम्भनम् ॥-AV. 4.3.7
86. त्वं सुतस्य पीतये सद्यो वृद्धो अजायथाः । इन्द्र जैष्ठ्याय सुक्रतो ॥
आ त्वाः विशन्त्वाशवः सोमास इन्द्र गिर्वणः । शन्ते सन्तु प्रचेतसे ॥-*Rgveda* 1.5.6-7

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Administration of Justice in the *Mahabharata*: a Brief study

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Introduction:

Vyasa's Mahabharata is one of the greatest epic of the two great epics of Indian literature. It is consisted of eighteen parvans in one lakh solkas. The epic deals with all kinds of knowledge. Hence, the *Mahabharata* claims that, "Everything in the world is contained in this work, and what is not found here will not be found anywhere else." (*Mahabharata*, I.62.53) out of the eighteen parvans, the Santiprava is the largest one. It deals with a wide range of subjects. It is divided into three sections, viz, Rajadharmanusasana, Apaddharma and Moksadharmaparva. In the Rajadharma section, the grandsire Bhishma deliberates on the duty of a king in dealing with internal and external administration along with duties in general. It is in the form of advice to Yudhisthira concerning administration.

The various parvans of the *Mahabharata* are designed to deal with the administrative machinery. It is known to all that, administration is the most important part of a state which is consisted of different departments of the government