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New Light on Vedic Health Drink

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Abstract

According to *Veda*, particularly in *Rg* (ऋग) *Veda*, *Soma* (सोम) had been recognised as ritual drink. There are different concepts on *Soma-rasa* but we tried to establish it is from our traditional *Tāl*¹ (*Borassus flabellifer*) because literal concepts within *Soma* are “distil, extract, sprinkle” can be done by our indigenous *Tāl*. We established from the *Ślokas* of *Vedas* that *Soma* is nothing but *Tāl* extracts.

Keywords: soma, tāl, yajña.

Introduction

Soma was frequently used in *Yajña* (यज्ञ)². So, we have to express somethings on *Yajña* and what we initially get that it indicates sacrifice, devotion, worship, offering in ritual done in front of a sacred fire (*Agni*, अग्नि) along with some *Vedic Ślokas*.

From (अपस्तम्ब यज्ञ परिभाषा सूत्र १-१) *Apastamba Yajña Paribhāṣa-sūtras* 1.1 we find definition of *Yajña* as:

यज्ञं व्याख्यास्यामः ।
स तु यज्ञो देवतोद्देशेन द्रव्यत्यागत्मकः याग इति क्रियाविशेषः ।
स हि निश्श्रेयसाय (निःश्रेयसाय) चोदितः ।
Yajña vyākhyāsyāmah |
Sa tu yajño devatoddeśna dravyatyāgatmakah yāga iti kriyāviśeṣah |
Sa hi niśśreyasāya (niśśreyasāya) coditah |

Yajña, is a special act of offering substances (द्रव्य, *dravya*) devatas reciting mantras. It has originated for *Niśśreyas* (निःश्रेयस) i.e., from spiritual (*Ādhyātmik*, आध्यात्मिक) freedom of all beings.

In *Rg-Veda* III-32/9 (ऋग-वेद ३/३२-९) we find:

¹ Palmyra fruit / Sugar Palm fruit: Grow in clusters on tall palm trees. It has a black to reddish-brown husk. If the top part of the fruit removed, three sweet jelly seeds sockets appear which are translucent, pale yellow / white in colour having mild sweet flavour. The fruit (palmyra fruit) measures 10 cm (3.9 in) to 18 cm (7.1 in) in diameter, has a black and yellowish husk. The sweet jelly seed sockets occur in combinations of two, three or four seeds inside the fruit. The jelly part of the fruit is covered with a thin, yellowish-brown skin. These are known to contain watery fluid inside the fleshy white body.

² *Yajña* is divided two parts (1) rituals-related texts called the ritual works (*Karma-kāṇḍa*, कर्मकाण्ड) and (2) Knowledge (*Jñāna-kāṇḍa*, ज्ञानकाण्ड). According to Chandogya Upaniṣad (छन्दोग्य उपनिषद्): अथ यज्ञ इत्याचक्षते ब्रह्मचर्यमेव तद्ब्रह्मचर्येण हेव यो ज्ञाता तं विन्दतेऽथ यदिष्टमित्याचक्षते ब्रह्मचर्यमेव तद्ब्रह्मचर्येण ह्येवेष्टात्मानमनुविन्दते ॥ ८.५.१ ॥ (*Atha yadyajña ityācakṣate brahmacaryameva tadbrahmacaryeṇa hyeva yo jñātā taṃ vindate'tha yadiṣṭamityācakṣate brahmacaryameva tadbrahmacaryeṇa hyeveṣṭvātmānamanuvindate* ॥ 8.5.1 ॥) – Then *Yajña* [sacrifice] is *Brahmacarya* (*Karma-kāṇḍa*). This is because one who knows the Self attains *Brahmaloka* through *Brahmacarya*. Again, that which is known as *Iṣṭa* [worship] for the desired Self (*Jñāna-kāṇḍa*).

अद्रोघ सत्यं तब तन्महित्वं सद्यो यज्जातो अपिवो ह सोमम् ।
न द्याव इन्द्र तवसस्तु ओजो नाहा न मासाः शरदो बरन्त ॥
Adrogha satyaṅ taba tanmahitvaṅ sadyo yajjāto apivo ha somam |
Na dyāva indra tavasastu ojo nāhā na māsāḥ śarado varanta ||

Most powerful just after birth drinks *Soma*.
Therefore, it cannot be alcohol but may be nectar.

We can also find hue of *Soma-tree* in IX/5-10 of *Rg-Veda* (ऋग-वेद ९/५-१०):

वनस्पतिं पवमान मध्वा समंघ्नि धारया ।
सहस्रवल्शं हरितं भ्राजमानं हिरण्ययम् ॥

Vanaspatiṅ pavamāna madhvā samaṅghni dhārayā |
Sahasravalśaṅ haritaṅ bhrājamānaṅ hiraṇyayam ||

It is *vanaspati* having green appearance with deer-like hue (colour) with thousands of boughs. The plant is leafless and its stalks alone crushed and juice (**Tāl-rasa**) extracted from them mixed with honey and it is having erect appearance. Fruits are Golden fibred yields paste-like glutinous extract.

On fruit we get n VIII/9-19 of *Rg Veda* (ऋग-वेद ८/९-१९):

यदापीतासो अंशवो गावो न दुह ऊधभिः ।
यद्वा वाणीरनूषत प्र देवयन्तो अश्विना ॥

Yadāpītāso aṅśavo gāvo na duhū ūdhabhiḥ | Yadvā vāṇīranūṣata pra devayanto aśvinā ||

Golden yellow stalks of fruit give forth juice (paste-like) which when mixed with water looks like milk

Soma-plant is tree (*Vanaspati*, **वनस्पति**) having thousands of rings with leave scars. Its fruit is black to yellowish brown colour. It will be delicious with honey (*Madhu*, मधु).

All the above properties are found from *Tāl-tree*³ and its fruits.



Extracting *Tāl-rasa* from stalks of

³ Palm-plant / Palmyra-tree. The Palm plants are native to South and Southeast Asia region. It is a robust tree and can reach a height of 30 metres (98 ft). The trunk is grey, robust and ringed with leaf scars; old leaves remain attached to the trunk for several years before falling cleanly. The leaves are fan-shaped and 3 m (9.8 ft) long, with robust black teeth on the petiole margins.



Fibred juicy food

Description

Soma-rasa was a favourite item in Vedic literature.

In the hymn *Rg Veda*:

एमाशुमाशवे भरु यज्ञश्रियं नृमादनं । पतयन्मन्द्रयत् सखं ॥ १/४-७

Emāśumāsave bharu yajñśriyaṅ nṛmādanam |
Patayanmandrayat sakhaṅ || 1/4-7

It is diffusible, used in *Yajña* (यज्ञ).

त्वं सुतस्य पीतये सद्यो बृद्धो अजायथाः ।

इन्द्र जैष्ठ्याय सुक्रतो ॥ १/५-६

Tvaṅ sutasya pītaye sadyo brddho ajāyathāḥ |
Indra jaiṣṭhāya sukrato || 1/5-6

Indra is considered to be greatest of the *Devatās* as you take *Soma* from birth to become mentally and physically alert of all.

Lord *Indra* was fond of *Soma-rasa* since birth i.e., even when *Indra* was a neonate.

आ त्वाः विशन्त्वाशवः सोमास इन्द्र गिर्वणः ।

शन्ते सन्तु प्रचेतसे ॥ १/५-७

Ā tvāḥ viśantvāśavaḥ somāsa Indra girvaṇaḥ |
Śante santu pracetase || 1/5-7

Indra used to take *Soma* just after His birth to extend your knowledge for the beneficiary.

यः कुक्षिः सोमपातमः समुद्र इव पिन्वते ।

ऊर्वीरापो न काकुदः ॥ १/८-७

Yaḥ kuṅṅṅiḥ somapātamaḥ samudra iva pinvate |
Ūrvīrāpo na kākudaḥ || 1/8-7

Indra drinks *Soma-rasa* and it helps to keep water-level of the body.

इन्द्रेहि मत्स्यन्धसो विश्वेभिः सोमपर्वभिः ।

महाँ अभिष्टिरोजसा ॥ १/९-१

Indrehi matsyandhaso viśvebhiḥ somaparvabhiḥ |
Mahāṅ abhiṣṭirojasya || 1/9-1

Indra has been requested to drink *Soma-rasa* to appear as most powerful.

आ त्वा वहन्तु हरयो वृषणं सोमपीतये ।

इन्द्र त्वा सूरचक्षसः ॥ १/१६-१

Ā tvā vahantu harayo vṛṣṇaṅ somapītaye |
Indra tvā sūracakṣasaḥ || 1/16-1

Indra is influenced to drink *Soma-rasa* and requested Him to appear in the *Yajña*-place riding on the horse.

ऊप नः सुतमा गहि हरिभिरिन्द्र केशिभिः ।

सुते हि त्वा हवामहे ॥ १/१६-४

Ūpa naḥ sutamaḥ gahi haribhirindra keśibhiḥ |

Sute hi tvā havāmahe || I/16-4

Indra is invited to come quickly to *Yajña*-place to have *Soma-rasa*.

सेमं नः स्तोममा गह्युपेदं सवनं सुतमः ।

गौरो न तृषितः पिव ॥ १/१६-५

Semaṅ naḥ stomamā gahyupedaṅ savanaṅ sutamaḥ |

Gouro na tṛṣitaḥ piva || I/16-5

Oh! *Indra* come with us to take *Soma*.

Soma was described as honey (*Madhu*, मधु) or harvested food staff (*Śasya*, शस्य) in various hymns in *Rg Veda*. It may be relevant here that even in modern India new-born babies are given to suck honey as their first feed. One can try molasses in lieu of honey: says the scriptures & proverbs. Traditionally, any sweet extract can be equated with honey. One can try molasses in lieu of honey: says the scriptures & proverbs.

Vedic Somarasa is generally accepted as a plant extract. It was from tree, not creeper as popularly believed, growing on centrally located hillocks of the Vedic ages. Rainy season favoured their growth. It was described as foliage (parmi) whose evergreen leaves was held in graceful slanting pairs. Poetic hymns describe *Soma* as the offspring of earth with clouds and the grand child of waters. For getting an aqueous extract of *soma* the plant material was pressed with iron or stony pestles, then vigorously fondled and repeatedly strained through metallic or woollen sieves. The juice would then be placed in wooden or leather containers specially designed for this purpose. Usually, these extracts were freshly prepared in the morning of the day of celebration of the *Yajña*. The female inmates of the house were engaged in this work. In the hymn *Rg Veda* (ऋग-वेद) we see *Soma* is mixed with curd to make it delicious:

सुतपान्ने सुता इमे शुचयो यन्ति वीतये ।

सोमासो दध्याशिरः ॥ १/५-५

Sutapāvne sutā ime śucayo yanti vītaye |

Somāso dadhyāśira || I/5-5

Here it has been expressed that *Soma* (paste-like) has been made delicious mixing it with curd.

तं गोभिरवृषाणं रसं मदाय देववितये । सुतं भराय सं सृज ॥ १/६-६

Taṅ gobhirvṛṣaṇaṅ rasaṅ madāya devavītaye |

Sutaṅ bharaṅ saṅ sṛja || IX/6-6

Mixed Somarasa with products of cow to make it delicious to God (*Devatās*, देवता) – It indicated that drinks are healthy drinks with milk, curd, thickened milk (*Khīra*, क्षीर) etc.

अभि ते मधुना पयोऽथर्वाणो अशिश्रयः । देवं देवाय देवयु ॥ १/११-२

Abhi te madhunā payo 'tharvāṅo aśīśrayaḥ |

Devāṅ devāya devayu || IX/11-2

Oh! Hermits, please prepare *Soma-rasa* with milk for *Indra*.

आदस्य शुष्मिणो रसे विश्वे देवा अमत्सत ।

यदी गोभिरवसायते ॥ १/१४-३

Ādasya śuṣmiṅo rase viśve devā amatsata |

Yadī gobhirvasāyate || IX/14-3

If milk is added to *Soma*, then Gods will be more strength.

The liquid would then be mixed with milk, curd, honey, barley and various other food staff to prepare tasty items like cakes, drinks etc. All these were for offering to *Lord Indra*, *Agni*, *Viṣṇu* and others. The fresh juice from the green stock was yellowish brown which could turn

brilliant white on addition to enough milk products. Sometimes the prepared extract would be thrown in river waters as a part of ritual offerings. The refuse after extraction of juice would go to fire. After the *Yojña* offerings, the remains would be shared by the community and the priests. The *Soma-rasa* was nutritious and addictive to some extent. It pleasantly sharpened the feelings and the intellect. A sense of well-being was expected from this sacred drink which cleansed body and mind.

The *soma* plant has not yet been recognised beyond doubt. The *Soma-rasa* apparently seems to be simply vegetable extract.

But in the hymn *Rg Veda* (ऋग-वेद):

सोमं मन्यते पपिवान्यत्संपिषन्त्यषधिम ।

सोमं यं ब्राह्मणो विदुर्न तस्याश्रति कश्चन ॥ १०/८५-३

Somaṅ manyate papivānyatsaṅpiṣantyaṣadhim |

Somaṅ yaṅ brahmāṅo vidurṅa tasyāśnāti kaścana || X/85-3

Persecuting of *Soma-Tree* we get Somarasa; which adds some occult vision. Weaklings will not be able to tolerate the impact of *Soma-rasa*.

It is postulated that *Soma-rasa* may be symbolic for the neuro-endocrinal secretions of the thousand petaled upper brain of man, (*cerebral cortex*) trickling into the solar *plexus* of nerves in the abdominal cavity. The hymn clearly says that the visible plant extract may not be the real *Soma-rasa* (worthy of its name), rather the ritual of drinking *Soma-rasa* could be some occult manoeuvre known to the *Yojñic* priests only. Body's *Soma-rasa* is inexhaustible. It only rekindles the vitality and puts one in the righteous middle path of the learned Seers. Drinking of *Soma-rasa* makes one soft-spoken and gentle.

History will testify that the cultural traditions of any country may break many times due to various foreign influences. Even then, a delicate thread of connectivity with the past can be discerned. This connection is very difficult to appreciate when one is not born or brought up in that culture. Foreign scholars identify *Soma-rasa* with alcoholic drink because it is very common in their culture. They tend to forget that alcohol is a taboo in this part of the world.

Here, we like to put forward our reasons in favour of *Tāl* (*Borassus flabelliformis Roxb*) as *soma-plant*. In modern days, *Tāl* plant-extracts are quite popular and the fruit juice preparations are essential in *Janmaṣṭami* festival. *Janmaṣṭami* is the birth day festival of *Lord Kṛṣṇa* who may be looked upon as transformation of *Vedic Viṣṇu*. Here the image of *Indra* is also super imposed. *Indra* rules and *Viṣṇu* tends the world. *Kṛṣṇa* has both the qualities. At present, *Indra* is not worshipped commonly. The common liking of both these Vedic Gods was Somarasa and now it is *Tāl*-extract preparations. These preparations are offered to *Śrīkṛṣṇa*. So, it has become an essential ingredient of *Janmaṣṭami* festival: the birth day festival of *Śrīkṛṣṇa*. It is worth recalling that *Indra* was fond of *Soma-rasa* since birth. It was not an adult addition only. *Janmaṣṭami* is a birth day celebration. The *Tāl-rasa* starts from the birth day festival of the connoisseur.

Soma-rasa cannot be alcohol made out of a grape-like creeper; because it is being mixed with barley and milk products for preparation of gastronomic tasty foods. The description of *soma* tree and *Soma-rasa* may be beautifully matched with *Tāl* in this respect (vide supra).

The addictive or intoxicating property is also

compatible with Tāl. Fermentation of the juice (*Tāla-rasa*⁴, तालरस) makes spirituous liquor (*tādi*, तादी). Lastly, we are tempted to believe the transcendence of Somarasa is body's own neuro-hormonal secretion which transcends body and mind with adequate meditation, devotion, worship and austere ascetic practices. The details of all these practices are beyond the scope of this paper.

Plea For Choosing Tāl As Soma

The Palmyra fruit is covered with thin yellow-brown skin having yellowish fleshy body containing jelly portion within. This fruit is rich in Phosphorus and Calcium with zero-fat and negligible Protein.

Nutrients	Per 100 g. ingredient	Nutrients	Per 100 g. ingredient
Water	77 Grams	Protein	1 Gram
Fat	0 Gram	Carbohydrates	21 Grams
Fibre	0 Gram	Calcium	9 Milligrams
Phosphorus	33 Milligrams	Iron	0 Milligram
Thiamine	0.04 Milligrams	Riboflavin	0.02 Milligrams
Niacin	0.3 Milligrams	Vitamin C	5 Milligrams

Palmyra Palm syrup prepared by heating to evaporate water until the total soluble solid reaches 70° Bx⁵. It is widely used as a sweetener for beverages, foods and medicines. This syrup not only provides sweetness to products but also improves food colour, aroma and taste. It contains 10 Vitamins of them most abundant is Vitamin E [Very effective on skin as mentioned in (A)]. It is natural sweetener⁶ but it contains very less amount of Glucose i.e., low glycaemic to reduce diabetes⁷ as well as obesity. It is especially rich in minerals⁸ and Vitamins⁹, 5.61 mg / g amino acid and having Antioxidant¹⁰ and antimicrobial¹¹ [Effective in (B)] activities.

Being rich in minerals and vitamins Sugar Palm Fruits have healthy option in diet and for people suffering from diabetes.

(A) Palmyra Fruit has very good effect on skin: (1) A thin layer of its jelly on the prickly-heat creates (a) soothing effect, (b) immediate alleviates the itchiness. (2) Effective reducing the symptoms of chicken pox as well as enhance the rate of healing. (3) Prevent boils, sensitive skin, redness of face. (4) Poultice or drink from this fruit very effective to treat dermatitis.

⁴ Extracted from the body of the Palmyra-tree (shown in the picture).

⁵ Degrees Brix (symbol °Bx) is the sugar content of an aqueous solution. One degree Brix is 1 gram of sucrose in 100 grams of solution and represents the strength of the solution as percentage by mass. If the solution contains dissolved solids other than pure sucrose, then the °Bx only approximates the dissolved solid content.

⁶ Total sugar content = 77.81 g /100 g. with sucrose = 65.26 g / 100 g; fructose = 6.64 g / 100 g and glucose = 5.91 g / 100 g.

⁷ Predicted glycaemic index of 70.05.

⁸ Sodium, Potassium, Phosphorus, Iron, Zinc and Copper.

⁹ Thiamine, Riboflavin, Pyridoxine, Pantothenic acid and Nicotinic acid

¹⁰ The syrup contains antioxidant properties such as 2,2-diphenyl-1-picrylhydrazyl (DPPH) radical scavenging activity, ferric reducing antioxidant power (FRAP) and hydroxyl radical scavenging activity.

¹¹ Presence of 2,3,4-trihydroxy-5-methyl acetophenone has a wide range of antimicrobial activity against *Escherichia coli*, *Mycobacterium smegmatis*, *Staphylococcus aureus* and *Staphylococcus simulans*.

(B) For stomach problems: (1) Prevention of burning sensation in stomach. (2) Hydration in summer. (3) Replenishes minerals and nutrients lost. (4) Prevent painful urination and tiredness. (5) Effective in digestive problems and other stomach ailments i.e., to treat nausea, vomiting and worm infestation. (6) It used as expectorant and liver-tonic. (7) Used as laxative.

It prevents malnutrition. It has anti-inflammatory and anti-oxidant properties as well as analgesic effects and antipyretic¹² activity.

For all these effects it can be used in different for even to mere children except fermented form *Tāla-rasa*¹³ extracted from tree.

The medicinal value of Palm-fruit had been mentioned in following hymn of *R̥g-Veda*:

स नः पवस्व शं गवे शं जनाय शमर्वते । शं राजन्नोषधीभ्यः ॥ ९/११-३

Sa nah pavasva śaṅ gave śaṅ janāya śmarvate |

Śaṅ rājannoṣadhībhyah || IX/11-3

Residue after extraction of sweet paste-part from Palm-fruit are given to cows, horse for its healthy support and the extract holds medicinal value for human beings.

Results

Going through the medicinal and healthy effect of Palmyra Palm under the physiochemical characteristics analysis we can demand Soma was extraction from *Tāl* and *Tāl-tree*.

Conclusion

In Vedas the word Soma is used differently for drink, plant and its deity. *Indra* and *Agni* are portrayed as consuming Soma in copious quantities. In *R̥g Veda*, *Soma* has been expressed to produce immortality in *Śloka* VII/48/3:

अपाम सोममृता अभूमागन्म ज्योतिरविदाम् देवान् ।

किं नूनमस्मान् कृणवदरातिः किमु धूर्तिरमृत मर्त्यस्य ॥

Apām somammṛtā abhūmāganma jyotiravidāma devān |

Kiṁ nūnamasmān kṛṇvadarātiḥ kimu dhūrtiramṛta martyasya ||

If we drunk *Soma*, then we will be immortal and become coexist with Gods.

Or

Good fruit contents, food is not an intoxicating drink. It is elixir of life to achieve physical strength to achieve control of senses.

In *R̥g Veda* we find *Ślokas* in VIII/79/2-8 expressing power of *Soma*:

अभूर्णाति यन्नग्रं भिषक्ति विश्वं यत्तुरं । प्रेमन्थः ख्यन्तिः श्रोणो भूत् ॥२॥

त्वं सोम तनूकृद्भ्यो द्वेषोभ्योऽन्यकृतेभ्यः । उरु यन्तासि वरूथम् ॥३॥

त्वं चित्ती तव दक्षेर्दिव आ पृथिव्या ऋजीषिन । यावीरघस्य चिद्द्वेषः ॥४॥

अर्थिनो यन्ति चेदर्थं गच्छानिद्वदुषो रातिम् । ववृज्युस्तृष्यतः कामम् ॥५॥

विदद्यत्पूर्व्यं नष्टमुदीमृतायुमीरयत् । प्रेमायुस्तारीदतीर्णम् ॥६॥

सुशेवो नो मूलयाकुरदृप्तकतुरवातः । भवानः सोम शं हृदे ॥७॥

मा नः सोम सं वीविजो मा वि वीभिषथा राजन् ।

मा नो हार्दिं त्विषा वधीः ॥८॥

¹² Analgesic and antipyretic of Ethanolic extract of male flower (inflorescences) of *Borassus flabellifer* L. by dose 150 mg/kg and 300 mg/kg are effective. Oral administration of *Borassus flabellifer* Ethanolic Extract (BEFE) is also effective.

¹³ Microorganisms associate with Palm sap and play major role in fermentation from sweet palm sap to bitter palm sap as *Tādi*.

Abhyūrṇoti yannagnaṅ bhiṣakti viśvaṅ yatturaṅ |
Premandhaḥ khyanniḥ śroṇo bhūt ||2||
Tvaṅ soma tanūkṛdbhyo dveṣobhyo 'nyakṛtebhyah |
Urū yantāsi varūtham ||3||
Tvaṅ cittī tava dakṣairdiva ā pṛthivyā rjīṣina |
Yāvīraghasya ciddveṣah ||4||
Arthino yanti cedarthāṅ gacchāniddaduṣo rātim |
Vavrjyustr̥yataḥ kāmam ||5||
Vidadyatpūvyaṅ naṣtamudimṛtāyūmīrayat |
Premāyustārīdatīrṇam ||6||
Suśevo no mṛlayākuraḍṛptakraturavātaḥ |
Bhavā naḥ soma saṅ hṛde ||7||
Mā naḥ soma saṅ vīvijo mā vi vībhiṣathā rājan |
Mā no hārdi tviṣā vadhīḥ ||8||

Soma covers the naked (heals severe skin diseases) and helps to recover the sick; even paralysed persons are intended to walk. It helps to survive feeble to normal health. It makes healthy body to fight against enemies. It also helps to increase sharpness of mind and by which man can be wealthy. You make our healthy-mind.

This indicates *Soma* holds nutritional as well as medicinal effect on the body.

Getting tally of the Vedic Ślokas and analysis of different products made from *Tāl* we may confirm *Tāl* was ingredient in production of *Soma* for products used from neonatal period to psychoneurotic liquid among the peoples in Vedic periods onward.

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