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## Music of sāmāgāna

Dr. Rishiraj Pathak<sup>1</sup>

Nikhil Gaur<sup>2</sup>

The sāmaveda is widely regarded as the fountainhead of music. In the entire corpus of world literature, the earliest reference to music is found in sāmaveda. The musical chanting of its mantras, called sāmāgāna, is still practiced today as part of the unbroken traditions going back to time immemorial. It is believed that at some point of time there were about a thousand of these traditions of sāmāgāna. In the present thesis, it is attempted to discuss on the various aspects of this sāmā music, in the context of its various traditions belonging to different schools or śākhās.

### 1. As a source of mūrchanā, jāti and rāga

One of the famous principles of sāmā chanting says – *pratyekaṁ ṣaḍjabhāvena*, meaning, the first note of the sāmāgāna is considered its starting note.<sup>3</sup> In this way, considering each note as the starting note in “m g R S ‘n ‘D ‘P”, we get various sets of notes based on mūrchanās. According to modern sāmā musicologists, the various sets of notes produced by doing mūrchanās based on this principle, gave rise to various forms of chanting, which, in turn, became the basis for later jātis and rāgas.

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<sup>1</sup> Assistant Professor, Dept. of Sanskrit, S.P.M. College, Uni. of Delhi

<sup>2</sup> Translated by.

<sup>3</sup> 'प्रत्येकं षड्जभावेन' (pratyekaṁ ṣaḍjabhāvena), 'this important rule must be well remembered, as it is very useful to fix the vocal pitch of the singer, with the respective tones denoted by the figures, which occur first in the sāmā.' Lakshman Shankar Bhatta Dravid : *The mode of singing sāmā gāna*, pp. 10, 11

Even though till sāmā era, jāti and rāga were not prevalent in music. But still, they already existed in their seed form in sāmāgāna.<sup>४</sup> Krishna Rao Ganesh Mule has demonstrated the different octaves derived by considering each note of the sāmā as ṣaḍja, which are as follows<sup>५</sup> -

	<b>The starting note of sāmā</b>	<b>Set of Notes</b>	<b>Close equivalent rāga in hindustānī music</b>
1	Starting note of sāmā as “P” Starting “P” taken as ṣaḍja	‘P ‘D n S R g m P S R g m P d n S’	Similar to Jaunpuri, Nat Bhairavi or Sindhu Bhairavi śuddhaṣaḍja
2	Starting note of sāmā as “m” Starting “m” taken as ṣaḍja	m P D n S’ R’ g’ m’ S R G m P D n S’	Similar to Khamāj matsarīkṛtā
3	Starting note of sāmā as “g” Starting “g” taken as ṣaḍja	g m P D n S’ R’ g’ S R G M P D N S’	Similar to Kalyāṇ āśvakrāntā
4	Starting note of sāmā as “R” Starting “R” taken as ṣaḍja	R g m P D n S’ R’ S r g m P d n S’	Similar to Bhairavī abhīrudgatā
5	Starting note of sāmā as “S” Starting “S” taken as ṣaḍja	S R g m P D n S’ S R g m P D n S’	Similar to Kāfī uttaramandrā
6	Starting note of sāmā as “n” Starting “n” taken as ṣaḍja	‘n S R g m P D n S R G m P D N S’	Similar to Bilāwal rajanī
7	Starting note of sāmā as “D”	‘D ‘n S R g m P D	Bhairavi of two madhyamās (pancham-

<sup>४</sup>Thakur Jaidev Singh : *bhāratīya saṃgīta kā itihāsa*, pp. 71

<sup>५</sup>Ibid pp. 71,72

Starting “D” taken as ṣaḍja	S r g m M d n S’	prohibited) uttarāyatā
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Consequently, it can be said that –

By presenting the descending notes of sāma in the ascending form, Krishna Rao Ganesh Mule has demonstrated the manifestation of different rāgas through the production of different sets of notes.

1. By considering the sāma notes as the starting notes, this novel theory has been propounded in sāma chanting, which lays a firm foundation for jāti and rāga forms in music.
2. The distinguishing feature of this ordering of notes, is that it provides for both śuddha and vikṛta notes, which points out the variation in notes as the basis for rāgas.
3. This principle of starting notes can be compared to the thāṭa system. It is quite possible that this principle of ‘pratyekaṁ ṣaḍjabhāvena’ of sāma chanting may have been the inspiration for the thāṭa system in Indian music.
4. In this ordering of notes, the similar rāgas can be considered as a possible hint for other rāgas also. Various rāgas also depend on the prakṛti and chalana of the notes. Therefore, we can derive even more rāgas on the basis of these derived rāgas.

## 2. The tānas in sāmagāna

*nāradīya śikṣā* and *vāyu purāṇa* describes the various yajña-related tānas used in sāmagāna. In *bharatabhāṣya*, nānyadeva also describes the 49 sāma-tānas of nārada.

It is to be noted that in *nāradīya śikṣā*, there is a fleeting remark regarding these tānas, but each tāna is not described separately.<sup>6</sup> Apart from this, *vāyupurāṇa* mentions the 49 sāma-tānas by name.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup>sapta svarāstrayo grāmā mūrchanāstveka viṁśatiḥ

tānā ekonapañcāśadityetatsvaramaṇḍalam' *nāradīya śikṣā* 1.2.4

viṁśatiḥ madhyamagrāme ṣaḍjagrāme caturdaśa

tānān pañcadaśecchanti gāndhāragrāmamāśritān *nāradīya śikṣā* 1.2.8

<sup>7</sup>sauvīrī mādhyaagrāmo hariṇāsyā tathaiiva ca lsyātkalopabalopetā caturthī śuddhamadhyamāḥ śārki ca pāvanī caiva dṛṣṭākā ca yathākramam lmadhyamagrāmikāḥ khyātāḥ ṣaḍjagrāmam nibodhata uttaramandrā janani tathā yā cottarāyatā lśuddhaṣaḍjā tathā caiva jānīyātsaptamī ca tām gāṁdhāragrāmīkāṁśvānyānkīrtyamānānnibodhata lāgniṣṭomikamādyam tu dvitīyam vājapeyikam

However, nānyadeva in his *bharatabhāṣya* has described these yajña-related 49 sāma-tānas for the first time in order of their notes.<sup>८</sup> According to nānyadeva, the construction of these 49 sāma-tānas of nārada is based on ṣāḍava and auḍava jāti inmadhyama, ṣaḍja and gāndhāra grāmas, as mentioned below<sup>९</sup> :

- In madhyama grāma – 20 tānas
- In ṣaḍja grāma – 14 tānas
- In gāndhāra grāma – 15 tānas

The yajña-related 49 sāma-tānas described by nānyadeva are<sup>१०</sup> -

- 20 tānas of madhyama grāma
  - 6 ṣāḍava tānas (By excluding ṛṣabha)

1	agniṣṭomika	m P D N S-G
2	Vājapeyika	P D N S-G m
3	pauṇḍarīka	D N S-G m P
4	Āśvamedhika	N S-G m P D
5	Rājasūyika	S-G m P D N
6	bahusuvarṇika (bahusuvarṇaka)	G m P D N S

- 3 ṣāḍava tānas (By excluding ṣaḍja)

7	Ekapāda	N-R G m P D
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ṭṛtīya pauṇḍrakam proktaṃ caturthaṃ cā" śvamedhikam lpañcamaṃ rājasūyaṃ ca ṣaṣṭhaṃ cakrasuvarṇakam saptamaṃ gosavaṃ nāma mahāvṛṣṭikamaṣṭamam lbrahmadānaṃ ca navama prājāpatyamanantaram nāgapakṣāśrayaṃ vidyādgotaraṃ ca tathaiva ca lhayakrāntaṃ mrgakrāntaṃ viṣṇukrāntaṃ manoharam sūryakrāntaṃ vareṇyaṃ ca mattakokilavādinam lsāvītramardhasāvītraṃ sarvatobhadrameva ca suvarṇaṃ ca sutandraṃ ca viṣṇuvaiṣṇuvarāvubhau lsāgaraṃ vijayaṃ caiva sarvabhūtamanoḥaram haṃsaṃ jyeṣṭhaṃ vijānīmastumburupriyameva ca lmanoharamadhātryaṃ ca gandharvānugata śca yaḥ alambuṣeṣṭa śca tathā nāradapriya eva ca lkathito bhīmasenena nāgarāṇāṃ yathā priyaḥ vikalopānītavinasā śrīrākhyo bhārgavapriyaḥ labhiramya śca śukra śca puṇyaḥ puṇyārakaḥ smṛtaḥ lviṣṭatirmadhyagrāmaḥ ṣaḍjagrāmaścaturdaśa tathā pañcadaśecchanti gāndhāragrāmasaṃsthitān l' *vāyupurāna* 86.38-50

<sup>८</sup>'sāmagāne prayujyante tānā yajñopayoginaḥ' (nānyadeva : *bharatabhāṣya*) Thakur Jaidev Singh, pp. 219

<sup>९</sup>'viṣṭatirmadhyamamagrāmaṃ ṣaḍjagrāmaṃ catudaśa .tānāḥ pañcadaśa proktā gāndhāragrāmamāśritāḥ' (nānyadeva : *bharatabhāṣya*) Thakur Jaidev Singh, pp. 219

<sup>१०</sup>Thakur Jaidev Singh : *bhāratīya saṃgīta kā itihāsa*, pp. 221-4

8	Vāyu	-R G m P D N
9	Dāna	G m P D N-R

○ 6 śāḍava tānas (By excluding gāndhāra)

10	Aupādhika	m P D N S R-
11	Mahāvratika	P D N S R-m
12	Brahmacārika	D N S R-m P
13	Prājāpatya	N S R-m P D
14	Godānika	S R-m P D N
15	Hayakrānta	R-m P D N S

○ 5 auḍava tānas (By excluding ṛṣabha and dhaivata)

16	Ajagrānta	m P-N S-G
17	viṣṇukrānta	P-N S-G m
18	araṇyapatra (patra)	N S-G m P-
19	Kokila	S-G m P-N
20	Jīvaka	G m P-N S-

• 14 tānas of śaḍja grāma

○ 2 śāḍava tānas (By excluding pañcama)

1	prastāra (prasvāpa)	G m-D N S R
2	Paiśāca	N S R G m-D

○ 5 auḍava tānas (By excluding gāndhāra and niṣāda)

3	Jīvaka	S R-m P D-
4	Sāvitra	R-m P D-S
5	Ardhasāvitra	M P D-S R-
6	Sarvatobhadra	P D-S R-m
7	sauvarṇa	D-S R-m P

○ 5 auḍava tānas (By excluding ṛṣabha and dhaivata)

8	viṣṇu	S-G m P-N
9	jiṣṇu	G m P-N S-
10	viṣṇukara	m P-N S-G
11	Śārada	P-N S-G m
12	Vijaya	N S-G m P-

○ 2 auḍava tānas (By excluding śaḍja and pañcama)

13	haṃsa	G m-D N R-
14	Vijaya	N-R G m-D

- 15 tānas of gāndhāra grāma
  - 6 śaḍava tānas (By excluding dhaivata)

1	Tumburupriya	G m P-N S R
2	mahālakṣaṇa	m P-N S R G
3	Gandharvānumata	P-N S R G m
4	alambuṣapriya	N S R G m P-
5	Bhīmasenapriya	S R G m P-N
6	Nāradapriya	R G m P-N S

- 4 auḍava tānas (By excluding śaḍja and ṛṣabha)

7	Vinata	G m P D N- -
8	mātaṅga	m P D N - - G
9	Bhārgavapriya	P D N - - G m
10	abhirāma (abhrāgama)	N - - G m P D

- 5 auḍava tānas (By excluding śaḍja and dhaivata)

11	saṃstutya	G m P - N - R
12	Kinnarapriya	M P - N - R G
13	puṣpa (puṣpaka)	P - N - R G m
14	Manohara	N - R G m P -
15	kalyāṇakara	R G m P - N -

It is interesting to note that these sāma-tānas are related to yajñas.<sup>११</sup>

Describing the yajña-related tānas, mahārāja kumbha has explained that these 'yajña tānas' are so called because they provide the fruits of various yajñas.<sup>१२</sup>

In conclusion, it can be said that-

1. Forty-nine tānas have been described in *nāradīya śikṣā*, which were based on the madhyama, śaḍja and gāndhāra grāmas.
2. There are some differences in the names of these 49 tānas, in their mention in *vāyu purāṇa* and *bharatabhāṣya*.
3. The names of these tānas denote their usage in yajñas, as well as their nature, utility and familiarity.

<sup>११</sup>'sāmagāne prayujyante tñā yajñopayoginaḥ' (nānyadeva : *bharatabhāṣya*) Thakur Jaidev Singh, pp. 219

<sup>१२</sup>'yadyajñānāmakastāno yo yo'tra parikīrtitaḥ .taṃ taṃ samyagvidan gānastadyajñaphalamaśnute' (mahārāja kumbha : *saṃgītārāja*), Thakur Jaidev Singh, pp. 114

4. In the sāmā yajñas, various tānas were employed as part of sāmā-gāna. Infact there is a correlation between various tānas and yajñas. This is supported by the fact that many tānas are named on yajñas.
5. These sāmā tānas were in ascending order of notes, whereas sāmāgāna was in descending order of the notes.
6. In these sāmā tānas, a minimum of five and maximum of six notes were used, corresponding to auḍava and ṣaḍava jāti respectively. A possible reason for this might be that usually sāmāgāna was sung with 5 or 6 notes only. Infact in the rāṇāyanīya and jaiminīya śākhās, only 6 notes are used. Only in two of the songs of kauthuma śākhā, we find a usage of 7 notes. Possibly it is due to the rarity of sāmā songs using 7 notes that we do not find even a single 7-note tāna.
7. It can be said with certainty that śaḍava tānas must have been sung with śaḍava gītām of sāmā, and likewise auḍava tānas with the auḍava gītām. Whereas, the sampūrṇa gītām must have been sung devoid of tānas.
8. In the construction of auḍava and ṣaḍava tānas, sometimes ṣaḍja has been excluded. In this way, ṣaḍja has been omitted in all the three grāmas. While there is no problem in excluding ṣaḍja in madhyama and gāndhāra grāmas, but excluding ṣaḍja in ṣaḍja grāma itself poses theoretical as well as practical problems. A solution to these problems remains a matter of exploration.
9. In the *bharatabhāṣya*'s mention of these tānas, the saptaka is not clear. It seems that nānyadeva was in favour of demonstrating only the order of notes, giving the flexibility of choosing the saptaka to the singers of sāmā. It is possible that on the basis of 'pratyekaṁ ṣaḍjabhāvena', the tānas must have been sung considering the starting note of sāmā as ṣaḍja.
10. The presence of vikṛta notes in tānas is also not clear. It seems the usage of śuddha and vikṛta notes may have been upto choice.
11. Were the tānas sung in various tālas? This is a serious question. In the absence of evidence, nothing can be said decisively. However, what we can say for certain is that concept of rhythm was indeed present in sāmāgāna, which must have been the basis for singing these tānas.

### 3. Instrumental music and sāmā

Some references of *flāṭyāyana śrautasūtra* and *nāradīya śikṣā* point out an interesting fact that in ancient times sāmā was performed with vīṇā and veṇu.

A. Accompanied by vīṇā

A reference from *lāṭyāyana śrautasūtra* says that the alābu vīṇā and the śīla vīṇā should be invoked and sāmagāna should be done with them.<sup>१३</sup> In the same context it is said about the two musician wives sitting opposite to the west side of the sāma singer, that one should play the kāṇḍavīṇā and the other the picchorā.<sup>१४</sup> kāṇḍavīṇā was played with the fingernail and picchorā was played with the mouth.<sup>१५</sup> The pair of these instruments was known as apaghāṭilā.<sup>१६</sup> They were expected to be played with a soft sound.<sup>१७</sup>

nārada has also mentioned two types of vīṇā in *nāradīya śikṣā* viz. 1. dāravī vīṇā and 2. gātra vīṇā.<sup>१८</sup> But he has described gātravīṇā as sāmavīṇā.<sup>१९</sup> It seems that during the times of nārada, the gātra vīṇā must have become more prevalent and dāravī vīṇā seems to be have been less common.

B. Accompanied by veṇu (flute)

nārada has established the relationship between sāma and gāndharva notes on the basis of veṇu notes. This attests to the fact that in the times of nārada, veṇu was used as accompaniment with sāmagāna.

Apart from this, the traditional belief of the sāma practitioners is that bhagavāna śrī kṛṣṇa used to play the sāma melodies on his flute.

In conclusion, it can be said that in ancient times vocal instruments like vīṇā and veṇu were also played along with sāmagāna. Apart from the vīṇā and

<sup>१३</sup> alābuvīṇāpi śīvīṇeva pratimantrayeta lābuvīṇe'pi śīlī ca yaṃ mantramadhijagmatastenedamupagāyatām te sāmamahayaiṣyatā' *lāṭyāyana śrautasūtra* 4.2.4

<sup>१४</sup> paścimenopagātīn dve dve ekaikā patnī kāṇḍavīṇāṃ picchorāṃ ca vyatyāsaṃ vādayeta' *lāṭyāyana śrautasūtra* 4.2.5

<sup>१५</sup> upamukhaṃ picchorā vādanena kāṇḍamayīm' *lāṭyāyana śrautasūtra* 4.2.6 | Thakur Jaidev Singh : *bhāratīya saṃgīta kā itihāsa*, pp. 84

<sup>१६</sup> tā apaghāṭilā ityācaksate' *lāṭyāyana śrautasūtra* 4.2.7

<sup>१७</sup> tāḥ pratimantrayeta yāṃ palyapaghāṭilāṃ mṛdukaṃ vādiyīṣyati sārātimapavādyatām dviṣantaṃ taijjanitvagiti' *lāṭyāyana śrautasūtra* 4.2.8

<sup>१८</sup> dāravī gātravīṇā ca dve vīṇe gānajātiṣu' *nāradīya śikṣā* 1.6.1 (1<sup>st</sup> half)

<sup>१९</sup> sāmikī gātravīṇā tu tasyāḥ śṛṇuta lakṣām' *nāradīya śikṣā* 1.6.1 (2<sup>nd</sup> half)



veṇu, no other vocal and percussion instrument has been mentioned anywhere in the content of sāmagāna.

#### 4. A bird's eye view of sāmagāna

Finally, we may summarize the various aspects of sāma music as follows

1. In sāmagāna, there is both a melodic and rhythmic aspects.
2. tālas are not present in sāma music, consequently, in ancient times, only the instruments relating to melody were used as accompaniment, and not the percussion instruments.
3. With just the exception of melody based instruments, there is no scope for any instrument or dance in sāma music.
4. The components of singing are clearly specified in sāma music, their names and respective singers defined properly.
5. vṛndagāna is also prevalent in sāma music, which was performed by different ṛtvijas and yajamānas on the occasion of yajñas.
6. tānas are also used in sāma music, which were performed on various occasions of yajñas. Forty-nine tānas have been described by nārada and nānyadeva.
7. On analysing the sāma notes, it can be said –
  - i. There is no definite relation of the kruṣṭa et al. notes of sāma with the gāndharva notes.
  - ii. From the point of view of sāma notes, a minimum of five and a maximum of seven notes are used in sāma.
  - iii. But from the point of view of gāndharva notes, listening to the singing traditions of sāma at present, it becomes clear that, excepting the kauthuma śākhā's gurjara tradition, a maximum but also minimum of only four notes are used in singing.
  - iv. On the basis of '*pratyekam śadjabhāvena*' principle, a minimum of five and a maximum of six notes are used in sāma, but due to the saptaka and definite place of the notes being uncertain, it does not seem reasonable to compare them with ragas.
  - v. śrutis also have been well known in sāma notes, which were used for the purpose of musical beauty and expression.
  - vi. mīrṇḍa and gamaka are also used in the sāma traditions.

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