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SOMA IN THE POETIC SETTING*

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SIMILES are known to be an effective mode of expression from very ancient days. The similes of the *Rgveda* have a wide variety, and show the vast field of poetic observation over which they extended. Out of the various types of similes in the *Rgveda* we take into consideration a few illustrative and decorative types for discussion. Some decorative similes show the wealth of the past experience which is recalled, coupled and flavoured with imagination.

The simile appears to be one of the earliest and easiest device employed by an imaginative mind to convey the meaning with ease and grace. In its earliest stage, it aimed only at making a thing much more clear by juxtaposing it with an illustration which is selected for its wellknown quality or property with respect to which it is intended to be compared. This may be called the illustrative simile. The main purpose of this simile is to convey the meaning with ease, force, accuracy and grace. In these similes the faculty of imagination is called upon to play a greater role. The first and foremost purpose of a decorative simile is to rouse the imagination of the reader and to help the reader to create a mental picture of the things compared. The graphic picture thus created in the mind of the reader makes the thing illustrated, more enjoyable and interesting. There are also emotional similes. Such similes rouse feelings which are concerned more with the heart than the head. The traits indicated above are fully borne out by the similes used in connection with Soma which deal with gods, men, women, children, animals, birds, inanimate nature, and other miscellaneous objects.

Gods : Soma is lovely to look at like Mitra (9. 2. 6b). He is pure and loveable like Mitra (1. 91. 3c ; 9. 88. 8c). His streams flow forth like the beaming rays of the Sun (9. 97. 30a). He is like Surya in appearance (9. 54. 2a) ; he is lovely to be looked at like him (9. 101. 12c). He is like the divine Surya (9. 63. 13a). Streams of soma flow forth like the rays of the Sun (9. 64. 7c). He moves forth like Surya (9. 64. 9c). The intoxicating juice gushes forth like the rays of the Sun (9. 69. 6a). Indu

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follows closely the worlds as Sūrya follows Uṣas (9. 84. 2d). He is lovely in appearance like Sura (9. 66. 22c). Wonderful like Sura he flows through the strainer (9. 86. 34b). He overcomes all the enemies like Sura with his allies (9. 11. 1c). He comes roaring like the roaring Maruts (9. 70. 6b). He flows forth like the band of the Maruts (9. 88. 7a). He moves at pleasure like Vāyu with his team (9. 88. 3a). He is most benevolent like the Nāsatyas (9. 88. 3b). Like Pūṣan he is the inspirer of the intellect (9. 88. 3b). He performs great deeds like Indra (9. 88. 4a). Indra-Soma relationship is characteristically described in 9. 86. 16 (*sakhā na sakhyuḥ pramināti saṁgiram*). His voice is heard like that of Indra in the battles (9. 97. 13c). Like Agni in the forest he is released in the tubs (9. 88. 5a). He is swift like the flickering flames of Agni (9. 22. 2c). He deserves to be served respectfully like Aṛyaman (1. 91. 3d ; 9. 88. 8d). He dwells in the tub as Vāruṇa in the ocean (9. 90. 2c). He is the unfailing thinker like god Savitr (9. 97. 48d). He goes to Indra like Dhātā to Sura (9. 97. 38a).

Men : He seeks to conquer like a brave hero marching forth with his warriors (9. 3. 4b). He holds weapons in his hands like a brave man (9. 76. 2a). He fights for cows like a brave warrior (9. 87. 7d). Battling like a brave man he protects us from infamy (9. 70. 10d). He visits all the worlds like a brave chariot-fighter (9. 94. 3b). He goes out for spoil like warriors who stand arrayed (9. 64. 29c). He comes forth roaring like one who is the killer of inimical tribes (9. 71. 2a). Pavamāna flows forth into the fleece resounding like the din of the combatants (9. 69. 2c). He commands wicked foes like an archer his hosts (9. 70. 5d). He sends up the welling wave raising up a great roar like a fighting warrior (9. 88. 5c). He bursts open the stables of cows and steeds like one who is in a coat-of-mail (9. 108. 6d). He sits like a king above their tribes (9. 7. 5c). Soma restfully reclines like a rich king (9. 57. 3b). He has noble laws like a king (9. 20. 5a). He roars besides the cows looking like a king (9. 82. 1b). He is full of wisdom like a king (9. 90. 6a). He goes to the assemblies of men like a reliable or an unfailing king (9. 92. 6b). The Soma juice is annointed with milk like a king by praises (9. 10. 3a). Soma is compared with the devotion of the worshippers (9. 97. 46). People with soma are compared with men with fodder (8. 45. 16). The idea of soma pursuing the evil doer and destroying him gives rise to similes where he is compared with a club at 9. 97. 16 and a creditor at 9. 110. 1. Men wish to obtain sagehood from him like Jamadagni (9. 97. 51d).

Soma is adorned like a fair youth (9. 14. 5b), he decorates his body like a fair youth (9. 96. 20a). This simile is exactly like Shakespeare's smug

bridegroom. Like a youth he moves with damsels (9. 86. 46c). He goes to human beings as a flirt goes to women (9. 38. 4c). Being sung he goes to men like a flirt to his beloved (9. 101. 14c). Pure Indu sends forth his wave as a charioteer his horse (9. 64. 10c). He occupies our hearts like men their residences (9. 107. 10). He enters the cup like men enter the town (9. 107. 10c). He settles in the place of rest like the priest (9. 97. 47d ; 101. 15d). He enters the sacrificial assemblies singing like the priest (9. 97. 47d). He occupies the seat in the cup like the priest the sacrificial seat (9. 92. 2c). He sends up our hymn like the repeater does that of the priest (9. 95. 5a). He urges on our hymns like a boatsman the boat (9. 95. 2b). He approaches the hymn like the kinship of a relative (9. 96. 22d). Like a friend he does not frustrate the request of a friend (9. 86. 16b). The god addresses generations of gods like Uṣanā speaking wise words (9. 97. 7a). He is asked to be merciful towards the poets like a father to his son (10. 25. 3b). He is solicited to be blissful like a father to his son (8. 48. 4b). He strives as the son after the father (9. 97. 30c). Wise men request him to take heed of them first as they do the messenger (9. 99. 56).

Women : The cows greet him as a beloved her lover (9. 32. 5b). Young damsels cry to Soma as to a lover (9. 56. 3b). He milks the great heaven and earth like mothers (9. 18. 5b). He is beautiful to look at like mothers (9. 70. 6a). He gives pleasure to us like a wife to her husband (9. 82. 4a). The splendours of Soma go forth like a woman (9. 96. 24b). Drops of Soma are decorated like a bride dowered by her father (9. 46. 2b).

Children : Soma roars in the tub like a babe that is newly born (9. 74. 1a). They cleanse Soma, the babe, that is newly born (9. 96. 17a). He is adorned with offerings like a child that is newly born (9. 104. 1c). He flows forth like a child that is playing (9. 110. 10b). Like a new-born babe he is gladdened with sacrifices and hymns (9. 105. 1c). He is anointed like a child by the mothers (9. 105. 2a). Soma is cleansed like a dear (newly born) child (9. 107. 13b).

Animals : Soma is compared to a horse in nearly forty places (9. 6. 5 ; 10. 2. 36 ; 1. 64. 3 ; etc.). Soma is cleansed like a horse (9. 43. 1a). He rushes for the prize like a groomed horse (9. 82. 2b). He wins like a horse when cleansed (9. 88. 5). He is cleansed by ten fingers like a strong horse (9. 6. 5a). He is cleansed like a strong horse for wealth (9. 87. 1c ; 109. 10b). He is cleansed like a mighty horse (9. 87. 1c). He is anointed with milk like a horse (9. 32. 3c). Indu neighs like a horse moving for food (9. 43. 5a).

He neighs like a passionate horse in the midst of the herd (9. 77. 5d). He neighs like a horse (9. 97. 18c ; 64. 3a ; 97. 28a). He flows forth in a stream like a mare (9. 107. 8c). He moves through the regions like a horse (9. 108. 7b). He is sent to get food like horses urged by drivers (9. 13. 6a). He is sent across the strainer like a horse eager for food (9. 107. 11b). Like a horse he is released over the strainer (9. 36. 1a). He does difficult things easily like a horse released by warriors (9. 76. 1d). He flows swiftly through the jar like a chariot horse (9. 81. 2b). He flows in a stream like a strong horse (9. 97. 45a). He flows like horses sent to the battle (9. 97. 20b). He is sent to the jar like a horse seeking food (9. 106. 12b). He speeds forward like a horse urged forth for battle (9. 86. 3a). He speeds to the strainer like a sporting horse (9. 86. 26d). He rushes like a horse that is released (9. 87. 7b). Soma juices are sent forth like horses for speed (9. 68. 26b). He speeds for fame like horses (9. 97. 25a). He flows swiftly like chariot horses (9. 81. 2b). Soma drops flow forth like sons of mares (9. 86. 1b). He runs like a strong horse (9. 86. 44d). He moves to get wealth like a horse (9. 96. 20b). He moves for wealth like horses for fame (9. 10. 1b ; 66. 10c). He approaches the tub like a strong horse (9. 93. 1d). Like a strong horse he overcomes enemies (9. 96. 15b). The holy one goes to the feast of gods like a horse (9. 71. 6d). Like able horses Soma juices are sent to the feast of the gods (9. 46. 1b). He seeks treasures like horses in battles (9. 47. 5b). He is serviceable like a horse (9. 101. 2c). They decorate him for the immortals as drivers a horse (9. 62. 6a). He passes under the strainer as a horse puts himself under the pole of a chariot (9. 45. 4b). He is extracted for gods like a horse eager for food (9. 103. 6a). He bestows food like a horse seeking glory (9. 96. 6c). He is yoked like a red steed (9. 72. 1a). Pavamāna has acquired all gifts for men as horses yoked to the chariot do (9. 21. 4c). Like an urged horse he flows for food (9. 70. 10a). He rushes like *Etaśa* (9. 16. 1c).

Soma roars like a passionate bull roaming round the herd (9. 71. 9a). He goes round the vat like a passionate bull round the herd (9. 76. 5a ; 96. 20c).

Soma appears beautiful as he sharpens his horns like a buffalo (9. 69. 3d). He rushes forth like a buffalo whetting the horns (9. 87. 7c). Like a buffalo he goes to the tub (9. 33. 1c). Like a buffalo on the heights he is milked on the strainer (9. 95. 4a). He settles in the tub like a wild buffalo resting in the forest (9. 92. 6d). He moves forth like infuriated bulls (9. 41. 1a).

Indu goes to the ocean ('the wooden tub') like cows to the stall (9. 66. 12b). He is asked to find pleasure in the hearts of men like cows in

the barley fields (1. 91. 13b). He grows mighty like cows in a barley field (10. 25. 1c). Priests sing to him like cows bellowing to their calves (9. 12. 2b). As mother cows gladden the calf so the prayers of the priest gladden him. He flows to Indra like milch cows to the calf (9. 13. 7b). Mothers ('milk streams') caress him like milch cows their newly born calf (9. 100. 7c). He is released towards our prayers as a calf towards the udder of its mother (9. 69. 1b). He is asked to be well united (with milk streams) as if with the cows that are well stationed (9. 61. 21b). Milk streams flow forth to him like cows with milk (9. 77. 1d). Mother cows lick him like a child in first stage of infancy (9. 100. 1d). Soma roars like a youngling to its mother (9. 93. 2a). Hymns growing strong loudly greet Indu like cows in a stall (9. 94. 2c). He flows forth like a darting deer (9. 32. 4b). He is swifter than the mind and is as fierce as the lion (9. 97. 28b).

Birds : Soma flies like a bird to sit in the tub (9. 3. 1b). Indu settles down like a bird, the sheltering nest (9. 62. 15c). He sits in the cup like a roosting bird (9. 72. 5d). He sits in the jar like a bird (9. 96. 23c). Pavamāna flows to the strainer like a bird (9. 86. 13a). He enters the mind of all like a swan entering the flock (9. 32. 3a). He sits among men like a hawk (9. 38. 4b). He sits in the tub like a hawk (9. 57. 3c). He sits in the place of rest like a hawk (9. 62. 4c). He sits in the jar roaring like a hawk sitting in the place of rest (9. 65. 19c). He approaches the golden seat like a hawk its home (9. 71. 6a). He goes round the strainer like a hawk round its place of rest (9. 83. 1a). He sits in the jars like a hawk in forests (9. 86. 35b). The juice flows forth like a hawk (9. 67. 15c).

Soma juices are lovely to look at like beautiful coiling serpents (9. 77. 3c). He glides beyond the skin ('strainer') like a serpent beyond its slough (9. 86. 44c).

Inanimate Nature : Soma flows in streams of sweet juice like Parjanya in showers (9. 2. 9c). Soma juices are like the showers of Parjanya (9. 22. 2b). Pavamāna flows like a shower from heaven (9. 89. 1b). Inexhaustible streams of the juice flow like showers from heaven (9. 57. 1b; 62. 28a). The sound of the mighty Pavamāna is heard like that of the showers (9. 41. 3a). Soma flows down towards Indra like the waters on the steep declivity (9. 6. 4b; 24. 2b). He flows gracefully to us like the waters (9. 88. 7c). Soma showers down the juice like celestial reservoirs (9. 88. 6b). The strong one flows down like rivers over a steep declivity (9. 17. 1a). He swells with welling waves like rivers (9. 107. 12b). Pavamāna flows like the wave of a river (9. 80. 5b). He quickly flows like rivers down a steep descent (9. 67. 1a). The swift strong drops of Soma find their way like the streams of a river down a steep declivity (9. 69. 7a). He swiftly flows into the jars as

rivers slowly wend their way to the ocean (9. 88. 6c). As rivers to the ocean the juice goes to the enclosures, *i.e.* the tubs (9. 107. 9c). He enters the *somadhāna*¹ like rivers the sea (9. 108. 16a). His powers go on the high regions like the sound of the waves of the river (9. 50. 1b). Like a river sending up a wave, he has stirred up the hymns (9. 96. 7a). Soma juices flow to Indra as rivulets to the lake (8. 43. 7b). They flow to him as rivers to the sea (8. 43. 7a). Streams of Soma flow to Indra thundering like the lightning in the clouds of the heaven (9. 87. 8c). He releases the hymn as thunder releases showers (9. 100. 3b). He creates lustre like the thundering of the heaven (9. 61. 16b). Like lightning filling the cloud he fills the heaven and the earth (9. 76. 3c). He moves round the world like *Rasā* (9. 41. 6c). He bestows upon the patrons mighty fame like the light of the Sun (9. 98. 8d). The juices move lightly like the wild winds (9. 22. 2a). He is stirred like the swift wind (9. 97. 52c).

Miscellaneous objects : Soma gives wealth as wages are given to a bard (9. 97. 38d). Soma flows forth through like the war-songs of the bards (9. 10. 2c). Soma juices proceed to wealth like resounding chariots (9. 10. 1a). They rush forth like chariots urged forth to motion (9. 10. 2a). They speed forth like chariots (9. 10. 2a). Soma is harnessed like chariots to get booty (9. 88. 2a) and goes forth like chariots to get booty (9. 90. 1b). He is sent forth like chariots to get booty (9. 92. 1b). The juices are sent forth for the feast of the gods like chariots seeking booty (9. 67. 17d). Soma goes eagerly to Indra like chariots for booty (9. 69. 9b). He is sent forth from both the hands like a chariot (9. 71. 5a). As in a chariot he is clad in the coat-of-mail (9. 98. 2b). Like a skillful speaker he is sent to the chariot race (9. 91. 1a). Soma is playful like a liberal warrior (9. 20. 7a). Soma goes forth as if towards a prize that is staked (9. 32. 5c). He wins food like *Etasa* winning booty (9. 108. 2c). Playful, he flows like the wave of water (9. 108. 5c). He moves to the foes like an offering placed on the fire (9. 52. 3a). Soma lets flow the *madhu* like ghee to Kapardin (9. 67. 11b). The pure juices flow like ghee (9. 67. 12b). He puts on robes of milk like a washed garment (9. 69. 4d). He takes us across our rivals as ferrymen across the river by a boat (9. 70. 10c). He kills men of evil thoughts as thirst a man in the desert (9. 79. 3d). Soma is like a well restrained horse (9. 96. 15c). Like a club he dispels all evils (9. 97. 16c). He shook down many treasures like a

1. Cf. RV 3. 36. 8 ; 9 70. 9 108 16 ; 6 69. 2 ; 9. 97. 33.

tree laden with ripe fruits (9. 97. 53d). He attacks the strainer like men a fountain where people drink (9. 110. 5b). He is enjoyed like the ancestral wealth (9. 48. 7b). Soma juices increase Indra as channels a lake (10. 43. 7b). The juice flows like a mighty stream (9. 86. 44b). Soma goes to the jars as the priest to the chambers containing the victim (9. 92. 6a). He goes to the jar singing like the priest to the place containing the victim (9. 97. 1d). He sits in the cup as semen in the beasts (9. 96. 6c.) He knits the joints closely as straps the car (8. 48. 5b). Men put spirit in him as a carpenter fits a new wheel (9. 21. 6).

Thus, we find that Soma as the most popular and effective offering of the sacrifice has evoked a very large number of similes connected with the various stages of its pressing. We have similes concerned with the washing of the plant in water and Soma flowing across the strainer. Purified Soma reaching vessels is compared to bulls, horse, garment, rivers, king etc. Soma mixed with milk is described as putting on garments, mixed with curds, ghee is compared to the Sun in lustre. For a simile of ethical importance, referring to the influence of Soma in glorifying terms cf. 9. 97. 18. The universal prevalence of the Soma-sacrifice is indicated at 9. 41. 6 (*pariṇaḥ śarmayantya dhārayā soma viśvataḥ sarā raseva viṣṭapam*) where the Soma juice is said to be flowing round like the river *Rasā*.

From the above discussion it would be clear that varied and vast is the field of imagination from which the Vedic poets drew *upamānas*. These pertain to the different spheres of life and nature. Among gods Mitra, Sūrya, Sura and Agni are selected for their beauty in appearance, the Maruts for their roar, Vāyu for swiftness, Indra for his valourous deeds, Agni for flickering flames and brightness, and Varuṇa for his place of habitation. Among men, a king is picked up for his skill, wisdom, sovereignty, faithfulness, truthfulness and noble laws, a brave man is selected for his warlike disposition, valour, skill in archery, for the holding and wielding of weapons and reckless courage, a youth is selected for his love of decoration and damsels, the priest for his entry into the sacred chamber, a father for his loveableness and mercifulness towards the child, a friend for his disinterested service and companionship, and a lover for his attraction for his beloved. Among women a young damsel is selected for her love towards her beloved. A mother cow engages the poet's attention for her affectionate looks, men for their eager welcome of the new-born son, and a child for its crying when first born and for its playful

innocence. Among beasts what mostly engage the attention are the horses and the cows for their serviceableness and usefulness. The horse is selected for its grooming, shampooing, washing, neighing, speed and strength, a buffalo for its instinct to sharpen its horns, a cow for her swelling udders, love for the calf and for her bellowing sound. The poet is greatly impressed by the motherly love of the cow for her calf. A deer is picked up for its darting gait, a lion for its fierceness. The birds engage the attention of the poet for their flight and roosting disposition. Especially, the hovering of a hawk round its nest and the nature of the swan to remain in a group have not escaped the attention of the poet. The serpent is chosen for its beautiful appearance and its casting off the slough. From the inanimate nature the Parjanya is picked up for its showers, rivers for their ceaseless swift motion, the thunder for its grandeur and awe. Besides these, other objects have also been observed and employed poetically by our poets.

Thus, in the *upamānas* of Soma the Vedic poet has stressed its (1) brightness or brilliance, (2) purity and cleanliness, (3) playful yet swift motion, (4) roaring sound while entering the various wooden vessels, (5) love for the milk of the cow, and (6) restless onward motion. Incidentally these points go also to corroborate the fact that in the Pavamāna hymns of the ninth maṇḍala Soma is not the Moon but a drink that is extracted from a plant. The similes also go against the conception of Soma in the sense of the Moon.