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Classification of Ragas in North Indian Classical Music: A New Approach Based on the Raaga-Rules

Shrikant J Wagh,
Principal, Shroff S R Rotary Institute of Chemical Technology
Ankleshwar, Gujarat, India
Email: sjwagh@gmail.com

Abstract

Classification of raagas in north Indian classical music is an old subject of study of raagas and it has been done in several ways by musicologists. Although it is an old topic of study, it assumes its prime importance when it comes to teaching and learning the Indian Classical Music through any methodology, such as Guru-Shishya system or modern university pedagogical system. Dashavidh classification, Jaati method, raag-ragini classification, Raagang system of classification, raag-samay-chakra method based on the time of singing/playing, and the most widely accepted the Thaati system of classification are some of the well-known and amply described methods of raag-classification in the music literature. The present research paper puts forward a new approach based of the raag-rules. This approach takes fundamental rule of raaga composition as a base and manifests a comprehensive approach to systematically organize all raagas in seven classes. These classes are easy to remember and creates no additional ideology of its own because it does not assume any extraneous concept nor does it import/invoke any self-proclaimed principle. Therefore, it emerges out as an unassuming, explicitly accommodative and an easy system of raaga-classification.

Key words: Raag-classification, Thaati system, Raag-ragini, Raagang

Introduction: The literature in North-Indian classical music is replete with different systems of raga-classification describing its history, central theme or basis and conceptual framework of raga structure fitting into the system in description. The systems are essentially based on some or other presumption. These presumptions have been borrowed from many analogies and similitudes, such as social structure (Raag-Ragini system), number of swaras (notes) used (odav, shadav, sampurna - jaati system), certain main defining/overpowering group(s) of notes (Raagang system), empirical understanding about the effects of notes in definite period of day/night (Purvangpradhan, Uttarangpradhan, Parmel praveshak, Sandhiprakash, Raag-Samay-Chakra system), and nature of the notes, flatness or sharpness, in the raaga (Shuddha, Mishra, Chhayalag, Sankirna). However, it must be noted that there has been no notable major research in classification of raagas after Pandit Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande proposed his system of Thaati Paddhati in the nineteenth century in his book

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“Abhinav Raag Manjiri” and Pandit Vishnu Digambar Paluskar accepted it ^[2]. This system is still being used widely in teaching as well as scholarly discussion despite its several shortcomings. The pros and cons of the Thaata system have been discussed in many texts ^[2, 3]. The main reason for acceptance of this system is, unlike the mathematical Permutation-Combination based system of 72 mel of Pandit Vyankatmakhi, the Thaata system is easy to use. Review of the Thaata system has been elaborately taken by Dr. Mohna Mardikar ^[2] and Dr. Bal Purohit ^[3]. The classification as per the Jaati-gayan given by Pandit Sharangdev in his book “Sangit Ratnakar” (Dashvidh Raag classification, 13th Century) is not considered here for the reason that the Jaati-gayan is now almost extinct.

Music, like any other art form, in general, is always open to changes and modifications, new thoughts, and embraces newer theories and approaches. The present article is a humble attempt to put forward a new approach towards Raaga-Classification concept, because the author feels that there is a need to do so. It would essentially open new research directions and add value to the theory and practice of music teaching and performance.

Observation/Analysis: As stated earlier, the most widely accepted Thaata system gives a structure in ten sets of notes depending on their sharpness and flatness. All of these sets are the parent source of raagas (Janak thaata). But the Thaata is not a composition by itself which can be sung; it has an ascent (aarooha) but has no descent (avaroha). However, the raagas generated from these Thaatas are sung and are, in fact, melodious (shruti-madhur) compositions by themselves, and are also characterized by an aaroh and an avaroha both. The Thaatas have no rules as such; they are arbitrary, but the raagas have strict rules. A Thaata is known by the name of its Aashray-raaga (For Ex. The Thaata Todi is known by the name of the raaga Todi, and all others, for that matter). Thus a raaga is not an arbitrary structure, but an original definite melodious composition of notes abiding certain rules. The point to be noted here is that the Thaata system creates an arbitrary predetermined structure to accommodate definitely composed raagas which have their own framework of rules and regulations (this seems to be quite analogous to the early concept of existence of a medium called ‘ether’ in theory of light propagation).

It is to be, therefore, noted that a raaga is a self-sustaining, self-supporting structure. One of the fundamental principles of raaga formation is that it cannot exclude the Madhyam or the Pancham swara simultaneously, that is, it must have either the Madhyam or the Pancham (or both) note(s) in its aaroha and/or avroha. It is, therefore, felt that if classification of raagas is done taking this principle (unavoidable rule) as a base, it will have no exclusion and all raagas can be invariably accommodated in the classes that are naturally evolved from the rule. The present article is thus based on this principle/rule of raaga. It evidently makes seven classes by combination of Shuddha and Teevra Madhyam (Ma), and Pancham (Pa) as given below.

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Raaga Classes						
Class 1	Class 2	Class 3	Class 4	Class 5	Class 6	Class 7
Ekal shuddha (Ma)	Ekal Teevra (Ma)	Ekal (Pa)	Yugal Shuddha And Teevra (Ma)	Yugal Shuddha (Ma) And (Pa)	Yugal Teevra (Ma) And (Pa)	Triveni Shuddha, Teevra (Ma) And (Pa)
Approx. No. of Raagas 42	Approx. No. of Raagas 11	Approx. No. of Raagas 31	Approx. No. of Raagas 12	Approx. No. of Raagas 246	Approx. No. of Raagas 61	Approx. No. of Raagas 58

There are three Ekal classes (with one essential swara), three Yugal classes (with two essential swaras), and one Triveni class (Three essential swaras). One of the obvious observations from the above table is there are least number of raagas in class 2 (Ekal Teevra Ma) and there are highest number of raagas in class 5 (Yugal Shuddha Ma and Pa). The reason behind this lies in the natural harmony (consonance) that exists between Sa and Ma, and Sa and Pa. On the other hand, there exists no such harmony between Sa and Teevra Ma. This deduction also augments the self-sustaining, self-supporting structure of raaga. Now, any known raaga can be classified in one of these classes. There remains no confusion about the fitment of any raaga. Any type of raaga, such as Mishra, Chhayalag, Sankirna, Parmel-Praveshak, Sandhi-Prakash, or raaga of any jaati, such as Odav, Shadav, Sampurna and their combinations, or raaga of any raagang, such as Malhar, Bilawal, Kalyan, Kanada, etc. can be precisely placed in one and only one class from the above table. Thus, it avoids any dispute about classification of certain raagas, such as Bairagi Bhairav, Madhuvanti, Lalat, Bhatiyaar, etc. for which there exists difference of opinion. Another peculiarity of this system is it can accommodate any new raaga. It has fewer classes than that of the Thaata system, yet able to classify every raaga.

There are many raagas imported from the Karnataki Sangit to Uttar Hindusthani Sangit. Since Karnataki system is based on Pandit Vyankatmakhi's Mel system, it has many more combinations to make raagas. When these raagas are imported into the Uttar Hindusthani Sangit, they may not fit in the Thaata system (For ex. Madhuvanti, Kirwani). The present system has no problem to classify such raagas. Since the system is based on essential swaras of raaga (Ma and Pa), each class has a definite context with the audition quality (geyata), and it opens new windows for further research to create new raagas and/or raag-malika. Many blends of these classes can be thought of from the point of view performing art. It is speculated that singing of anwat/aprachalit raagas may become more attractive and emotion-rich. It is also speculated that the proposed system of classification can evoke formation of new raagas with ease (the table given in the Annexure is suggestive in this regard). Teaching

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raaga sangit, irrespective of system of education – traditional Guru-Shishya parampara or formal university system, is an important domain in its own right. One can easily speculate that the new way described here is much easier to comprehend by students and quite simple to teach for a teacher as there is no further sub-classification nor are there any exceptions to remember and defend. Also, as regards to queries of students about inclusion of certain raagas in certain Thaata, the teacher has no satisfactory answer but ask him to follow the tradition. (For ex. Query such as why shuddha nishad is used in Kafi raaga, although it is the main Thaata-vachak raaga of Kafi Thaata and is characterized by flat Ga and flat Ni, or why shuddha nishad is used in Khamaj raaga, although it is the main Thaata-vachak raaga of Khamaj Thaata and is characterized by flat Ni. There are several queries discussed in literature ^{[1], [2], [3]} about some raagas being classified according to the Samay-chakra)

As regards to the unavoidable application of computer programming to music, the proposed system of classification is much more amenable and flexible for creating libraries of raagas that can be creatively used to make entirely new type of fusion music, electronic music, and Hollywood/Bollywood music through the famous Digital Audio Workstations (DAW) such as Ableton, Logic Pro, Reason, etc. in fact, it can enhance insertion of classical music in light music in a much different way. Entire list of the raagas falling under a class can be studied/experimented/tested with formidable ease to create new music altogether. This provides an unfathomable scope for blending/fusing Indian classical and western classical music to young creative music makers of India and Western world.

Result/Conclusion: Research work has been carried out in an old subject of Raaga Classification which had hitherto been lying in a dormant condition for the last almost 100 years. The fundamental principle/rule of Raaga-making about the essential inclusion of Ma and/or Pa swaras in Raaga structure has been used to make only seven classes in which no raaga can be missed out. It is compared briefly with nuances of the Thaata and other systems. The proposed system is comprehensive, easy to follow, accommodative, research insinuating, and helping novice and veteran at the same time in teaching-learning, practising and performing. A sample table of a few raagas as described in the references ^[4 to 16] according to the proposed classification is attached herewith in Annexure.

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SAMPLE LIST OF RAAGAS IN SEVEN CLASSES						
Class 1	Class 2	Class 3	Class 4	Class 5	Class 6	Class 7
Ekal shuddha (Ma)	Ekal Teevra (Ma)	Ekal (Pa)	Yugal Shuddha And Teevra (Ma)	Yugal Shuddha (Ma) And (Pa)	Yugal Teevra (Ma) And (Pa)	Triveni Shuddha, Teevra (Ma) And (Pa)
Chandrakauns	Gurjari Todi	Hansdhav ni	Shri Vallabh	Darbari Kanhada	Maaru Bihag	Shyam Kalyan
Bhinna Shadja	Sohni	Kalavati	Pancham	Bhimpalas	Puriya Kalyaan	Nand
Raageshri	Marwa	Bhoopali	Sagun Ranjani	Durga	Yaman	Ramkali
Maalkauns	Sohoni	Rewa	Lalit	Bilaskhani Todi	Basant	Bihaag
Abhogi	Puriya	Shivranjani	Ahir Lalit	Vrindavani Sarang	Shree	Hamir
Gorakh Kalyan	Hindol	Deskar	Raag Ranjani	Ahir Bhairav	Multani	Purvi
Bageshri		Bhupal Todi	Bhinnapancham	Patdeep	Madhukauns	Shuddha Sarang
		Shankara	Malati Vasant	Bhairavi	Puriya Dhanashri	Kedar

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