

## Catuṣśruti-jāti Rāgas: An Amateur's Investigation

H.V. SHARMA

It is common knowledge that the rāgas of Indian classical music are conventionally divided into three *jāti*s (classes): *sampūrṇa* (of seven *śrutis*), *ṣaḍava* (of six *śrutis*), and *auḍava* (of five *śrutis*). The seven *śrutis* in the *sampūrṇa jāti* are: *ṣaḍja*, *ṛṣabha*, *gāndhāra*, *madhyama*, *pañcama*, *dhaivata* and *niṣāda*, commonly rendered as *sa*, *re*, *ga*, *ma*, *pa*, *dha*, and *ni* respectively. For convenience, they are often represented as S, R, G, M, P, D and N. A set of seven *śrutis* is called *saptaka* (corresponding to the octave in Western music, in which, however, the first note of the Indian scale becomes the eighth note). Among the seven *śrutis*, R, G, M, D and N have their *komal* (soft or lower) and *tīvra* (sharp or upper) variations while S and P are *sthira* (non-variable). Very rarely do *komal* and *tīvra svaras* present themselves side by side in Indian rāgas. An example of such a rare occurrence is rāga Lalit, in which both *komal* and *tīvra* M come into play.

A *ṣaḍava* rāga is obtained by removing any one of the seven *śrutis*, excepting S, because S is not only a constant *śruti* but is the one *śruti* which cannot be absent in any rāga. S is considered the vital *śruti* and *svara* in relation to which the remaining *śrutis* and *svaras* are identified. Similarly, an *auḍava* rāga is obtained by deducting two of the seven *śrutis*. A discarded *śruti* (or the removal of a *śruti* in the process of composing a new rāga) is called *varja*.

Therefore it would seem that the largest number of *śrutis* in a rāga is seven, and the smallest is five. What, then, is a *catuṣśruti* rāga, which, going by the name, would appear to have only four *śrutis*? Do such rāgas exist — or did they exist even in the past — let alone a whole *jāti* of four-note rāgas? As the basis, the rationale, and catalyst for this enquiry (which may seem unwarranted to text-bound musicians), this writer can only cite oral and aural evidence: the testimonies of a few practising musicians, and demonstrations by a long-departed mendicant in the streets of Hyderabad. Certainly, a *catuṣśruti* rāga is an oddity from the point of view of treatises on Indian classical music, and is generally unknown to musicians. None of the treatises mentions such a *jāti*. Even if it be assumed that there was such a *jāti* in the past, left out of the treatises for reasons not known to us, those concerned with music would tend to ask a number of relevant questions. For instance, how could a rāga of a mere four *svaras* be expanded for the purpose of building a melody? If a *catuṣśruti* rāga were to be considered at par with the rāgas that have received approval in the treatises, and by musicians of the past (i.e., if the same principles of music were inherent here), what might have been the method of constructing such a rāga? This article is in the main an attempt to answer such questions.

Some knowledge about the *catuṣśruti jāti* was received by this writer from an octogenarian mendicant, Janab Ghulam Dastagir Sahab of Hyderabad, in the year 1957. According to Janab Dastagir Sahab, there were eighteen rāgas in this *jāti*. He believed that Dhruvapada (or

Dhrupad) songs were composed in these rāgas. By way of example, Janab Dastagir Sahab had demonstrated five rāgas with old Dhruvapada compositions. This writer and his respected and learned guru, Shri Shankarlalji Maharaj, were fortunate enough to listen to Janab Dastagir Sahab's demonstration and his verbal explanations of the details. According to Shri Shankarlalji Maharaj, a Dhruvapada-singer himself and a musicologist, Janab Dastagir Sahab was flawless and most convincing, though his voice failed him now and then because of extreme old age. This writer remembers the āroha and avaroha of all the five rāgas but remembers the names of only three.

Twelve years later, in 1979, keen to explore the catuṣṣruti jāti and its probable number of rāgas, this writer talked to some musicians with a view to conducting a systematic inquiry into this domain. The musicians consulted were Janab Mohammed Ali, a Tarshehnai player and a musicologist; Shri Raghunath Prasanna, a flute and shehnai player and a musicologist in his own right; Janab Mohammed Iqbal, a vocalist; and Shri Abhayanarayan Mallik, now a renowned Dhruvapada-singer. Taking a keen interest in the matter, the four musicians had sat together to evolve as many catuṣṣruti rāgas as they could.

At the time the rāgas were developed, the musicians kept in mind the rules of composing rāgas laid down in various treatises, as well as their personal resources of knowledge. Just as a śādhava or auḍava rāga is formed by judiciously dropping one and two śrutis respectively from a sampūrṇa scale, in a catuṣṣruti rāga, three śrutis were deducted. Care was taken to avoid elimination of two consecutive śrutis from a saptaka, including P. By removing every alternate śruti after S or R in a saptaka, a four-śruti rāga was easily obtained. But this effort produced only three rāgas: S R M D, S G P D, and S G P N. Then, taking advantage of the variability of the śrutis R G M D and N, twenty-four varieties were created. Here is a systematized list of these twenty-four catuṣṣruti rāgas, worked out mechanically:

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|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|------------------|
| 1. S R M D (Š)* | 9. S G M D (Š)* | 17. S G P D (Š)* | 21. S G P N (Š)* |
| 2. S R M D ~    | 10. S G M D ~   | 18. S G P D ~    | 22. S G P N ~    |
| 3. S R M D ~    | 11. S G M D ~   | 19. S G P D ~    | 23. S G P N ~    |
| 4. S R M D ~    | 12. S G M D ~   | 20. S G P D ~    | 24. S G P N ~    |
| 5. S R M D ~    | 13. S G M D ~   |                  |                  |
| 6. S R M D ~    | 14. S G M D ~   |                  |                  |
| 7. S R M D ~    | 15. S G M D ~   |                  |                  |
| 8. S R M D ~    | 16. S G M D ~   |                  |                  |

\*(Š): Śādja of a higher saptaka.

When these technical exercises had been completed, the question remained as to which of these rāgas could be rendered with ease. Singing and playing the āroha and avaroha of each of the twenty-four rāgas, with a little manipulation, it was observed that serial numbers 1, 2, 6, 8, 9, 10, 14, 16, 17, 19, 20, 23 and 24 were easier to render, or relatively so. They were also melodious. Numbers 12 and 18 were melodious too, but were not easy to sing or play. Numbers 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 11, 13, 15, 21 and 22 were neither easy to perform nor pleasing to the ear.

Therefore, the group of musicians put aside the last ten varieties. They were thus left with fourteen catuṣṣruti rāgas, including two difficult ones. It would seem that Janab Dastagir Sahab either chose four of the ten rāgas put aside by the group of musicians — which seems unlikely — or he knew four more rāgas which the present group could not work out on the basis of the method it followed.

The most difficult task was now ahead, and that was to find the *vādi* and *samvādi* svaras. The *vādi* svara is one which is repeated oftener than the other svaras in a rāga, and one upon which phrases in elaboration of a rāga frequently come to rest. The *vādi* and *samvādi* of the various rāgas can be found in any textbook of music and are common knowledge to students and teachers of music. Usually, the fourth svara of a rāga, in ascending order, is the *samvādi*. But this cannot pass for a rule, as the place of *samvādi*, or *vādi*, may vary from one kind of rāga to the other. The best way to find out the *vādi* and *samvādi* svaras is really to listen to rāgas very attentively.

In the catuṣṣruti rāgas produced by our group of musicians, the *vādi* and *samvādi* svaras could all be identified. But in one or two cases the *samvādi* was so faint as to seem almost absent.

These strenuous technical and aesthetic exercises went on regularly for a little over a month. The credit for successfully working out the fourteen catuṣṣruti rāgas goes to the knowledgeable and refined musicians named earlier (and not to this writer). It is they who scrutinized and finalized the list of the fourteen catuṣṣruti rāgas.

The expert group not only followed the classical rules of construction of rāgas, but also relied on an aesthetic principle laid down in the *Bṛhaddeśi* and, with slight variations, in the *Saṅgītaratnākara* and other treatises. The relevant *ślokas* from the *Bṛhaddeśi* are quoted below:

स्वरवर्ण विशेषेण ध्वनि भेदेन वा पुनः ।  
 रज्ज्वत् येन यः कश्चित्सरागः संमतः सतां ॥  
 यो असौ ध्वनिविशेषस्तु स्वरवर्पा विभूजितः ।  
 रज्ज्वत्को जनयितानां स च राग उदाहृतः ॥

The purport of these verses is that a rāga is a musical composition in which the svaras are so disposed that their essential qualities may find expression — and which is sung with embellishments in a manner that pleases the hearts of listeners. It is the last part of the description that gives the clue to the creation and rendering of a rāga.

At various times during the intervening years, the author has shared the findings reported here with a few other practising musicians and teachers, both for corroboration of the method of the inquiry and for the sake of carrying the discussion further. Professor Hafeez Ahmad Khan, Ustad Amjad Ali Khan, Professor Chandrashekhara Narangrekar and Shri Rajan Mishra are among those who have not only supported the validity of the experiment but also shown interest in the investigation. They all believe that the catuṣṣruti jāti did exist in the past.

Some opinions regarding the existence of catuṣṣruti rāgas in the past, their origin and

their decline, are also available from the above musicians and others, though no conclusive proof can be submitted. Professor Chandrashekhar Narangrekar, who heads the Department of Music in the University of Goa, has a theory about how these rāgas came to be dropped from our rāga-lexicon. He points out that there are a few auḍava rāgas in which one of the variable śrutis occurs inconspicuously in the sweep of a meend which beautifies the rāga. These inconspicuous śrutis are also so faint as to seem practically absent in the rāgas in question. Such nominal svaras seem to have been incorporated in some (principally) four-note rāgas at a later stage. Thus, what was formerly a catuṣśruti rāga became an auḍava. Shri Narangrekar gave this writer the example of rāga Hindol in which N formerly occurred in the flow of a meend, and which was later established firmly as a svara of short length. The argument is sound. Consider this example: Bhoop (or Bhoopali) is an old auḍava rāga. But, in its slow avaroha, it takes N and M in slides of meend. At some point of time, an auḍava-saṁpūrṇa rāga called Bhoopkalyan comes into being. Now, Bhoop belongs to the Kalyan thāt, and N and M are the main attributes of Kalyan. The connection is obvious. In the case of Hindol, what was originally a catuṣśruti rāga turned into an auḍava rāga. Why the fifth note was added is, however, not clear to Professor Narangrekar.

The late Mallikarjun Mansur, an acclaimed singer of rare Hindustani rāgas, told this author in 1981 that he had heard a rāga of four śrutis when he was very young; he regretted not remembering the name and form of the rāga.

Rajan Mishra, the elder of the Mishra brothers, strongly believes that there was a catuṣśruti jāti, or at least a few rāgas of that class. He cites the example of rāga Shree, which has only three śrutis and is still considered a classical rāga. He has demonstrated Shree in a performance situation and verbally described the rāga. Shree has a vādi, a samvādi, and an anuvādi svara (a secondary svara supporting the vādi). This encourages one to propose that catuṣśruti rāgas were in practice some time in the past, whatever the number of the rāgas; perhaps they were also brought under a distinct jāti.

An intrinsic factor may have led to the decline of the presumed catuṣśruti jāti: a four-note rāga does not enable elaboration for as long a duration and with as much variety as rāgas of the other jātis do.

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Having stated the grounds for this enquiry, the results of the experiment it involved, and the views of expert musicians on the subject, the author may now (in the absence of reliable historical information) be permitted to indulge in some freewheeling conjecture of his own, suggesting some probable beginnings for the catuṣśruti jāti and its past status. This may serve to provoke enquiry and attract fresh inputs into this investigation from more knowledgeable researchers. Any error in fact or argument may be brought to the notice of the author.

1. The *Sāmaveda*, besides being an auxiliary extension of the *R̥gveda*, also laid down rules for intoning its own hymns, those of the *R̥gveda*, and some of the *Yajurveda*. These hymns were to be intoned (or sung) in three svaras: svarita (a svara on a chosen pitch, usually a low

pitch); *udātta* (a raised half-note above the svarita); and *anudātta* (a full note lower to the svarita). Thus, if S were svarita, R would be *udātta* and N would be *anudātta*. (All works containing sāmavedic hymns indicate the manner of intoning the hymns. A short vertical line over any Sanskrit character combining a vowel and a consonant denotes *udātta* {upper śruti}, and a short bar below such a character denotes the *anudātta* {lower} position in relation to the svarita. Svarita itself is not marked by any sign. The same signs are used to indicate the śrutis of the five variable svaras in Indian classical music. This is standard practice in Indian musical notation till date.)

It is the *Sāmavidhāna Brāhmaṇa* which first mentioned that the seven śrutis form a *saptaka*. But these śrutis were not in the S R G M P D N order known to us today. Instead, the śrutis were in the order of P D N S R G M. The sāmavedic hymns, known as *Sāmans*, were supposed to be intoned in seven scales. Now, it is humanly impossible to sing all the svaras in seven scales. It should be understood here that the initial part of each set of *Sāmans* was to be sung according to the three-note system explained above, at, say, P level. Then, each subsequent set of *Sāmans* was to be sung at increasingly higher levels, i.e., D N S R G and M. If noted down, the seven scales would appear as follows: P D N, D N S, N S R, S R G, R G M, G M P, and M P D<sup>1</sup>. In Indian musicology, each set of these three svaras forms the beginning of a series of scales. The seven svaras are reached in this manner.

'Grāma' is the Sanskrit word for 'scale' in the Western system. If a singer of *Sāman* shifts from one grāma to the next, he has necessarily to add the *udātta* svara of the next grāma. Thus the number of svaras is raised to four. But, gradually, the singer has to drop the first svara of the preceding grāma. The following illustrates this point: P D N (first grāma); P D N S (between the first and second grāmas); and D N S (second grāma). P D N S may indeed become *catuṣśruti* but not a rāga. In order to make a *catuṣśruti* rāga we would have to arrange the śrutis of every alternate grāma serially, up to four grāmas. Then we may jot down the first śruti of every alternate grāma. Thus we obtain a *catuṣśruti* rāga. For example:

SRG, GMP, PDN, NSR (alternate grāmas)  
S     G     P     N     (first śruti of each alternate grāma)

Here, S G P N forms a *catuṣśruti* rāga. (See Nos. 23 and 24 in the list of *catuṣśruti* rāgas.)

This is a conjectural derivation. If the conjecture is right, we could say that the *catuṣśruti* jāti originated from the style of singing the *Sāmans* of the *Sāmaveda*.

2. In Hindustani music, we do not know of any form of classical song which may have existed before the Dhruvapada. However, it is generally believed that there existed a tradition of singing Sanskrit songs in the manner of the Dhruvapada. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* mentions *dhruvagāna* — singing of *dhruvas*, a kind of poetry set to rhythm. From this we may surmise that Dhruvapada — 'words of dhruva' — might have been the earliest form of independent composition sung according to a fixed convention. Dhruvagāna, according to the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, did not always use all the seven svaras<sup>2</sup>. Dhruvas may have been sung even

<sup>1</sup> A dot below a śruti denotes the position of the śruti in the lower *saptaka*.

<sup>2</sup> *Nāṭyaśāstramu* (Telugu translation of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*), P.S.R. Appa Rao, chapter 5, pp. 180-1.

in a smaller number of svaras in Sanskrit plays, though, in the context of *pūrvarāṅga*, they would have been sung using all the seven svaras selectively, or even overstepped a *saptaka* marginally. The contexts here suggest these probabilities. *Catuṣśruti*, *audava*, *ṣaḍava* and *sampūrṇa* may all have coexisted, in relation with or independent of each other, supporting *nāṭya* performances:

Isolated from *nāṭya*, *catuṣśruti* rāgas may have had an independent existence as a *jāti* with no relationship with rāgas of other *jātis* employing a larger number of śrutis. Combination of *jātis* seems to have been a later development.

3. Classical music took off from folk music. At some stage of development, four-note folk music, which is amply available even today, may well have been refined and subjected to the principles of classical composition. Indeed, some of the *catuṣśruti* rāgas are as simple and pleasing as folk melodies, and some are as difficult to perform as the toughest classical compositions.

4. Here is another probability. The human mind tends to drift from long-standing conventions. A musical-minded *sāmagāyaka* (singer of *Sāmans*) or *udgātṛ* (singer of ṛgvedic hymns) might have wished to add one svara at the end or at the beginning of his three-svara (*anudātta*, *svarita*, *udātta*) singing and, later, put in a gap between each pair of svaras. Since such experimentation was taboo in sacred *sāmagāyan*, he may have tried out his innovation in folk song.

Perhaps it is not difficult to retrieve the four-note mode experimentally, especially now that opportunities for experimental work in music are opening up. Every now and then we hear of new rāgas being created, shelving classical principles and rules altogether! At the same time, some fruitful work is also being done. Quite some time ago, someone created a *miśra* rāga, *Basantbahār*, an awkward combination of two unadjustable *sampūrṇa-vakra* rāgas. The *vādi* and *saṁvādi* svaras of this rāga simply cannot be determined! It has no specific point of emphasis, or inflexional or de-inflexional sweep, or a point of shift from one part of the rāga to the other. It does not stand any grammatical test, yet it passes for a classical rāga! On the other hand, there are several *miśra-jāti* rāgas which pass all the tests of music and make good rāgas indeed. *Kaushikikānada* is one of the excellent examples.

Luckily, we have two systems of classical music in this country, *Hindustani* and *Carnatic*. Mutual borrowing is not uncommon. *Shri Ravi Shankar*, the great *Sitar*-player, has added *Keervāṇī*, a *Carnatic* rāga, to the storehouse of *Hindustani* rāgas. *Professor Hafeez Ahmad Khan*, former Vice-Chancellor of *Rampur University*, has adopted *Shaṇmukhapriya*, again a *Carnatic* rāga, into *Hindustani* music. There have been many such meaningful experiments helpful to the growth of classical music.

In this age of experimentation, a professional singer or instrumentalist can, in inventive spirit or to satisfy a creative urge or even for the fun of it, try to make a few rāgas with four śrutis (even without taking a position on the past existence of a *catuṣśruti jāti*, or being aware

of it). One could also try combining a catuṣṣruti āroha with the avaroha of an auḍava, a ṣāḍava, a saṁpūrṇa or a vakrā rāga — and the reverse — for effect and thus, perchance, create new and ‘right’ classical rāgas. This author feels there is no end to rāgas, that music is inexhaustible, and that musicians are free agents in a changing world. With a sound base of knowledge, a creative mind and hard work, we can surely move on to new frontiers of rāga-based music.