

**Comparative study of Gurmat Sangeet and Contribution of Sikh Gurus with special reference to Guru Ramdas Ji****Prof. Sukhwant Kaur**

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**Abstract**

Music lies at the heart of the Sikh tradition and singing or listening to the hymns of the Granth Sahib (i.e. kirtan) for devout Sikhs is a spiritual act. The scripture, in fact, is the world's largest original collection of sacred hymns. Music lies at the heart of the Sikh tradition and singing or listening to the hymns of the Granth Sahib (i.e. kirtan) for devout Sikhs is a spiritual act. The scripture, in fact, is the world's largest original collection of sacred hymns. Music lies at the heart of the Sikh tradition and singing or listening to the hymns of the. Music is a very important part of Sikh worship. This is because Sikhs find that music is a good way for one to learn and absorb scriptures and Sikh beliefs. Shabads (hymns) are sung in a slow and steady tone so that the message contained is clearly understood by the worshippers. The musical recitation of Sikh sacred hymns through 'kirtan,' was formally instituted by Guru Nanak, in the 15th century and became an integral part of how the writings and teachings of the Sikh Gurus would be performed in an accessible form to the public. Sikh music (Shabad kirtan) began in the 16th century as the musical expression of mystical poetry conceived by the founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak. Following him, all the Sikh Gurus sang in the then-prevalent classical and folk music styles, accompanied by stringed and percussion instruments. The classical style was the devotional dhrupad style, where the text was of prime significance and the music played a supporting albeit important role. The Sikh Gurus specified the raags in which they sang each hymn in the Sikh sacred scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib, which is organized by the 60 raags of equal and independent status. Several of these raags are unique to the Sikh music tradition. In addition to using and modifying traditional instruments, the Sikh Gurus developed new stringed instruments like the taus and percussion instruments like the jori.

**Introduction:**

Gurmat Sangeet is a unique musical tradition which is five centuries old. It is part and parcel of the Sikh religion. Nanak, born a Hindu, the founder of the Sikh religion, and his first Guru began the tradition as he and his childhood Muslim friend Bhai Mardana traveled around Asia and the Middle East spreading Nanak's divine message of one loving God. The tradition was continued and refined by every Sikh Guru through to Gobind Singh ji. It continues to this day. With Gurmat Sangeet, the divine message is communicated through Shabad (hymn/s, religious messages or poems) Kirtan (Sikh devotional music). Shabad Kirtan has become an inseparable part of the Sikh way of life. The Kirtan Chauki tradition has been in vogue in the gurdwaras for centuries and the Kirtan tradition as practised on special occasions is an extended form of this tradition. This practical Kirtan tradition is in accordance with the Shabad Guru of the Sri Guru Granth

Sahib. The Bani of the Granth Sahib, written and indexed according to the prescribed Raagas, singing forms, music signs/ headings and the other guidelines issued in the Bani, creates an original and specific musicology. A scientific approach to music can help in recognizing more explicitly the musical tradition according to the Guru Granth Sahib. Such a system of music, enshrined in the Holy Guru Granth Sahib is exactly in accordance with the musical tenets established by the Gurus. What came to be known as "Gur Shabad Kirtan" is a unique confluence of Shabad and Kirtan propounded by Guru Nanak with the aid of the divine music from Bhai Mardana's Rabab. There music and songs to God emerged as a unique system in Indian music which has spread into the musical traditions of the world. In Bani Shabad Kirtan has been assigned a very prominent status as stated in the following couplet. The entire Bani of the holy Sri Guru Granth Sahib has been classified under 31 Raagas and 31 different Raaga forms (Parkaars) thus making a total of 62. Under the Gurmat Sangeet tradition, Raagas are in propagation with their original melodic forms. Sikh musicians, uninfluenced by the changes in Shudh Thaats notes as Bilawal scales from Kafi scale, kept the traditional purity of Gurmat Sangeet in practical form. As a sequel, a tradition which is more than 500 years old, remains very much in existence as the Sikh musical tradition. These original Raaga forms of Gurmat Sangeet are a unique contribution to Indian music's Raaga tradition. Raagas have been given with a view to express the nature of different Raagas in their spiritual context according to the Gurmat.

### **Contribution of earlier Guru's in music**

Guru Nanak Dev Ji was the founder of Sikhism, was born in Western Punjab (Pakistan) in the year 1469. Guru Nanak Dev Ji used to do Kirtan while his disciple Bhai Mardana played the Rabab. Guru Ji composed 961 hymns in 19 main Raags and in 16 Sub-Raags which are included in the Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Guru Ji invented the Raags 'Tukhari' and 'Maajh'. Guru Ji also created a new system of Sub-Raags like Raag Gauri Guareri, Asa-Kaffi, BilawalDakhani etc. The total no. of hymns that they composed is 961 and there were 19 musical measures. Guru Amardas composed his hymns in 17 Ragas and their total number is 874. He wrote 171 Chaupadas, 91 other Padas including Ashtapadas, Chhants, 430 Salokas, 85 Pauris and 97 Pauris of special compositions like Kafi, Patti, Athaniva, Satvara, Anand and Sohilay. The different types of poems and the use of different ragas show his keen sense of welding melody to poetic technique. Guru Amardas composed his hymns in 17 Ragas and their total number is 874. He wrote 171 Chaupadas, 91 other Padas including Ashtapadas, Chhants, 430 Salokas, 85 Pauris and 97 Pauris of special compositions like Kafi, Patti, Athaniva, Satvara, Anand and Sohilay. The different types of poems and the use of different ragas show his keen sense of welding melody to poetic technique. Guru Amardas knew many more ragas than those used by him for his hymns. Guru Amardas has made a reference to Gujri raga. This raga was first formulated by Raja Man Singh Tomar of Gwailor, in honour of his Queen who belonged to the Gujar caste which is supposed to be a comparatively low caste. Bilawal which literally means bliss becomes truly felicitous, when it is used as a medium for meditation: "Beauteous is Bilawal's melody and tune, if through the Guru's word, one fixes his attention on the Lord" (p.849). In Wadahans raga, the Guru makes a pun on the word Wadahans to high-light the efficacy of this raga. Similarly, Ramkali which literally means the bud of God will blossom into the blooming lotus, if it is used for singing the Holy Name: Guru Amardas avoided using ragas like Deepak, Hindol and Megh which are against the spirit of Kirtan. After all Kirtan is intended to lead man to spiritual development and salvation.

## Early life of Guru RamDas Ji

Guru Ram Das was born on 24 September 1534 in a Sodhi Khatri family based in Chuna Mandi, Lahore. His birth name was Jetha. He was born to father Hari Das and mother Daya Kaur, both of whom died when he was seven years old. He was brought up by his maternal grandmother in a village. At age 12, Bhai Jetha and his grandmother moved to Goindval, where they met the third sikh guru "Guru Amar Das Ji". Bhai Jetha thereafter accepted Guru Amar Das as his mentor and served him. The younger daughter of Guru Amar Das Bibi Bhani, married Bhai Jetha, and he thus became part of Guru Amar Das's family. They had three sons: Prithi Chand, Mahadev and Guru Arjan Dev Ji. As with the first two Gurus of Sikhism, Guru Amar Das instead of choosing his own sons, chose Bhai Jetha as his successor and renamed him as Ram Das or "servant of god."

Guru Ram Das became the 4<sup>th</sup> Guru of Sikhism in 1574 He faced hostility from the sons of Amar Das, and shifted his official base to lands identified by Amar Das as *Guru-ka-Chak*. This newly founded town was eponymous Ramdaspur, later renamed as Amritsar– the holiest city of Sikhism. He is also remembered in the Sikh tradition for expanding the manji organization for clerical appointments and donation collections to theologically and economically support the Sikh movement. He appointed his own son as his successor, and unlike the first four Gurus who were not related through descent, the fifth through tenth Sikh Gurus were the direct descendants of Ram Das

## Contribution in Gurbani, Ragas, instruments, etc

Guru Ramdas Ji has had a prominent role in Gurbani. Ram Das composed 638 hymns, or about ten percent of hymns in the Guru Granth Sahib. These hymns are registered in the sacred scripture Sri Guru Granth Sahib. He was a celebrated poet, and composed his work in 30 ancient ragas of Indian Classical Music. Guru Ram Das Ji also introduced a new and distinct marriage code for the Sikhs, via composition of the four hymns known as Laava, and advised the Sikhs to solemnize the marriages of their children by reciting these hymns. Ram Das, along with Amar Das, are credited with various parts of the *Anand* and *Laavan* composition in *Suhi* mode. It is a part of the ritual of four clockwise circumambulation of the Sikh scripture by the bride and groom to solemnize the marriage in Sikh tradition. This was intermittently used, and its use lapsed in late 18th century. However, sometime in 19th or 20th century by conflicting accounts, the composition of Ram Das came back in use along with Anand Karaj ceremony, replacing the Hindu ritual of circumambulation around the fire. His compositions continue to be sung daily in Harimandir Sahib(Golden Temple) . One of the instruments that were contributed was Saranda. Guru Arjan Dev Ji ,the 5<sup>th</sup> Sikh Guru, was a master musician and musicologist. He had a great passion for folk music, and looking at his contribution to the musical heritage of India, we see many compositions which are influenced by folk traditions. The Saranda took birth as a result of his passion for music. However, there are varying statements and opinions by scholars as to who actually created the Saranda. Some say it was the idea of Guru Angad Dev Ji and was developed by Guru Ramdas Ji, the 4<sup>th</sup> Guru. Examining the facts concerning that time period, and the musical interests related to that period, it makes more sense to believe that Guru Arjan Dev ji invented, or developed, the Saranda. He is said to have designed the Saranda (a large bowl-shaped string instrument, played with bow), which he himself played

and used as the ideal accompaniment for the male voice. Other such instruments include Taus that was given to us by Guru Hargobing Ji and Guru Gobind Singh Ji gave us Dilruba and Tambura.

## Relevance in Today's world in the field of Music

Guru ram das as contributed a lot the Sikhism as he was one of the guru of sikh. He organized the structure of Sikh Society. Devotional music, one of the most ennobling arts, is a potent means of God-realization and can transcend the barriers of space and time. Melodious couplets of Kabir Ji and mystic chants of Guru Nanak Dev Ji demonstrate the power devotional music has over the human mind, and its efficacy as a way to seek the ultimate goal of human life. Gurmat Sangeet is an independent music tradition with Indian Music. It began with Guru Nanak. He propagated a spiritual message to people and that propagation is still doing its work. The instruments such us Rabab,Saranda, Taus, Dilruba and Tambura are still used in 21<sup>st</sup> Century and exceptionally incorporated in Gurmat sangeet as well as Indian Music. Gurmat Sangeet turn people's life around. This has earned them respect, employment. It is a strong tool in propagation of Sikhism. Those who practice it get closer to god.

## Conclusion

Sikhs find that music is a good way for one to learn and absorb scriptures and sikh beliefs. Shabads(hymns) are sung in a slow and steady tone so that the message contained is clearly understood by the worshippers. A lot of sikh prayers are said to be music as it is a way of remembering and understanding the words. Music is also a way of introducing people to Sikhism. Wherever Kirtan is sung, the entire atmosphere is transformed into a state of unimaginable bliss. Singing and listening to Kirtan touches the unconscious and is a means of integration. Reaching the unconscious is to reach the innermost self, which lies hidden – the divine spark which once lit, leads to illumination and enlightenment. Through his writings, Guru Ram Das ji shared a common message for the entire humankind, to live a disciplined life full of humility, and to be forever and ever thankful to the True Guru (God). Music is a very important part of Sikh worship.

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