



Importance of Ragas and Talas in Gurmat sangeet with special refrence to Sri Guru Granth Sahib

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Abstract:

Gurmat Sangeet is a unique musical tradition. It is part and parcel of the Sikh religion. Nanak, born a Hindu, the founder of the Sikh religion, and its 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 recognising more explicitly the musical tradition according to the Guru Granth Sahib. The main part of the Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji, the Sikh holy Book and the perpetual Guru of the Sikhs, consists of 31 Ragas. The Holy Granth starts with the non-raga section that begins with the Japji Saahib as the first entry. This is followed by the Rehras Saahib and ends with the Kirtan Sohila. Tala in Indian music and Gurbani Kirtan refers to a complete and complex system for the execution and transcription of Rhythms and Beats. There exist over 20 different "Talas" or 'Beat Patterns'. The main instrument for keeping rhythm in Indian Music is the Tabla In connection with Tala or musical beats/rhythms and the 'Ghar' in the Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the following can be concluded.

Introduction:

A raga is a musical structure or set of rules of how to build a melody. It specifies a scale, as well as rules for movements up and down the scale; which notes should figure more and which notes should be used more sparingly; etc. The result is a framework that can be used to compose or improvise melodies in so that melodies in a certain raga will always be recognisable yet allowing endless variation. The underlying scale is

a five, six or seven tone-scale. In the seven tone-scale the second, third, fourth, sixth, and seventh notes can be sharp or flat, making up the twelve notes in the Western scale. However, ragas can specify microtonal changes to this scale: a flatter second, a sharper seventh, and so forth. Furthermore, such variations can occur between styles, performers or simply follow the mood of the performer. There is no absolute pitch; instead, each performance simply picks a ground note, and the other scale degrees follow relative to the ground note. Each raga is an array of melodic structures with musical motifs, considered in the Indian tradition to have the ability to "colour the mind" and affect the emotions of the audience.

Each raaga provides the musician with a musical framework within which to improvise. Improvisation by the musician involves creating sequences of notes allowed by the raga in keeping with rules specific to the raga. Ragas range from small ragas like Bahar and Shahana that are not much more than songs to big ragas like Malkauns, Darbari and Yaman, which have great scope for improvisation and for which performances can last over an hour. Ragas may change over time, with an example being Marwa, the primary development of which has been going down into the lower octave, in contrast with the traditional middle octave. Each raga traditionally has an emotional significance and symbolic associations such as with season, time and mood. In Sri Guru Granth Sahib, there are 31 ragas. A Tala literally means a clap, tapping one's hand on one's arm, a musical measure. It is the term used in Indian classical music similar to musical meter, that is any rhythmic beat or strike that measures musical time. The measure is typically established by hand clapping, waving, touching fingers on thigh or the other hand, verbally, striking of small cymbals, or a percussion instrument in the Indian subcontinental traditions. Along with raga which forms the fabric of a melodic structure, the *tala* forms the life cycle and thereby constitutes one of the two foundational elements of Indian music. Tala is an ancient music concept traceable to Vedic era texts of Hinduism, such as the Samaveda and methods for singing the Vedic hymns. There are many other Taals that may or may not have the same number of Taalees and/or Maatraas. Evidently the Indian music has developed and expanded in such a disciplined way that it has Taals of a just a few Maatraas to many Maatraas.

Importance of Raag in Gurmat Sangeet:

The raag forms inscribed as headings in Sri Guru Granth Sahib, along with its ragaita compilation clearly indicates the importance of raags in Gurmat Sangeet. Apart from this, the Bani also guide us through various other musical indications and diverse abstract forms. Leading a life on the path shown by Guru Sahib, the Shabad Kirtan is also an integral part according to Gurmat. In the contemporary times the discipline of 'Shabad Kirtan' has acquired a distinct singing arrangement with traditional development over the period of

time. Though it is defined in various terms like 'Gurbani Sangeet', 'Sikh Sangeet' etc. still the basic process of this arrangement is based on 'Shabad Kirtan'. Under the singing process of Shabad Kirtan, it is embellished with raag. Therefore the whole Bani is inscribed in various raags and raag forms. This usage of raag in Bani is very much diverse from any music tradition because here it functions as a medium to propagate the divine message; at the same time Guru Sahib has used the raag acknowledging its power and preciousness. 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. Raaga references on the Gurbani as headings are a clear indication for singing any piece of Gurbani according to the prescribed Raaga and that has been ordained in Sikh tradition and fundamentals. The compilation of Sri Guru Granth Sahib is also based on raag. In the division of Bani, rather than the banikaars being the basis, it was divided on the basis of raags and except Japuji, Swaiyae, Vaars and Saloks, the whole Bani is inscribed in 31 raags and 31 raag forms. Apart from these, there are some raags, which specifically belong to Gurmat Sangeet; no reference of them can be found in musical scriptures of Indian Music, which clearly indicates the contributions of Gurmat Sangeet in the Indian classical music system.

Raag is such divine power of music which paints the human soul in its own colors. The basic virtue of raag is its musicality. This musicality means 'To paint', which is diverse from its regular meaning. The raag has the power to make the mind concentrate. The basic element of raag is Naad. The basic quality and nature of raag is itself the supreme pleasure which helps in attaining the supreme bliss. This is the main reason, behind raag being used for the attainment of the supreme God. In Indian music, the both abstract as well as technical forms of raag are accepted. The basic difference regarding raag in Indian music and Gurmat Sangeet is clear from the fact that the Bani make the raag as basis for the propagation of the name of the divine. The Bani provides an abstract straightness to the raag. This also serves as the basis of form and identification for the prescription of ragas in the Bani. In Gurmat Sangeet, the usage of raag, the quantity for this usage and the artistic qualities of raag is also based on this. In Gurmat Sangeet all the raags are acknowledged as raag, though in those times the raags in Indian music were classified on the basis of Raag-Ragni classification. But Guru Sahib recognized all raags equally. According to them any raag which is used for the Kirtan of God, and which arouses love in the soul for the welfare is a true raag.

Not only this, there are some such raags in Gurmat Sangeet like Basant, Malhaar etc which are sung according to season in a specific tradition. The raag as heading and the central theme of the Shabad are also uniform because the nature of the raag and the subject of the Shabad present the same kind of emotions.

Gurmat Sangeet:

The singing of Gurbani as a form of worship is an unbroken tradition that was started by none other than Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the founder of the Sikh faith. Bhai Mardana, Guru Nanak Dev Ji's beloved disciple, a fine singer and musician and an accomplished player of the Rabab was instrumental in delivering Guru Nanak Dev Ji's message. Bhai Mardana accompanied Guru Nanak Dev Ji on all of his Udisis or travels throughout the world. Janamsakhi accounts indicate that Gur Nank Dev Ji actively used music as the primary means of disseminating his message during his travels. Bhai Mardana would play his Rabab, people would gather around and Guru Nanak Dev Ji would then share his Bani with them. "Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji started the tradition of kirtan as a means of reaching God." Guru Nanak Dev Ji's use of music as a medium for his message had a lasting and far reaching impact on the practice and traditions of the new faith that he created. Gurmat Sangeet, is an integral part of the practice of Sikhism today, hundreds of years after his passing. The traditions of Raga, Tala and the practice of singing Bani are as prevalent today as they were in Guru Nanak Dev Ji's time, as a result of his directly encouraging his followers to sing the praises of God day and night. "The essence of Gurmat Sangeet is the singing of Gurbani in the manner prescribed by the Guru."

Guru Nank Dev Ji, in his Bani has provided several precise directions and indications on how the Bani is to be sung. First and foremost is the indication of the Raga; this is unequivocally the Raga in which the shabad is to be sung. The word 'Rahao' or pause, signals that the preceding line encapsulates the central theme of the shabad. This is the line that is to be sung as the Sthai or refrain. All other lines in the shabad are to be sung as Antras, usually set to notes different from the Sthai and often employing higher notes in the register, from the set of notes permitted in the Raga the shabad is being sung in.

Guru Arjan's contribution towards the compilation of Sri Guru Granth Sahib as well as the richness of his own compositions, in 30 ragas, is well known. In addition Guru Arjan was instrumental in encouraging Sikhs to participate in and become exponents of Gurmat Sangeet. Before Guru Arjan, accomplished Rababi Kirtanias in the tradition of Bhai Mardana were the primary keepers of the Gurmat Sangeet tradition. According to popular accounts, Bhai Satta and Balvand, who continued to offer Kirtan Seva in Guru Arjan's Darbar, blinded by arrogance on account of their musical prowess, decided that they would not sing any more in the Guru's Darbar. It is said that Guru Arjan then directed members of the Sangat to start Kirtan themselves and not rely on the Rababis. When the Sikhs protested that they were not musically adept, Guru Arjan gave them instruments which miraculously began to play all by themselves! In reality, Guru Arjan's encouragement served to strengthen the tradition of Gurmat Sangeet in the Sikh masses which had begun as

far back as Guru Amardas Ji's time. Guru Arjan led by example; it is believed that he started the practice of singing the complete Asa Di Var, as it appears in its present form not just by professional Rababis but by the common Sangat. Guru Arjan also established a 'Kirtan Di Taksal' literally, a Kirtan Mint for instructing Sikhs in Gurmat Sangeet.

"Guru Arjan paid particular attention to the tunes in which Shabads were sung because it is extremely important that Shabads be sung in those tunes, conforming to the relevant Raga, which evoke the same emotions as the contents of the Shabad."

Conclusion:

When Guru Arjan started the tradition of Ragis singing Gurmat Sangeet, he instructed them in this unique way of singing to ensure that Gurmat Sangeet would always be aligned with the Gurbani that it served as a vehicle. The specific Raga based tunes that have been prevalent since the time of Guru Arjan and have been preserved and handed down from generation to generation of Ragis and Rababis embody the essence of Gurmat Sangeet. But Ragis have often abandoned the nuances of music and Rababis have embraced the musical traditions of contemporary theater, music has been emphasized over Shabad to the point where the very words of the shabad are often unintelligible, however, all is not completely lost yet, some Rababis and a very few Ragis still retain some of the seminal tunes [that are the essence of Gurmat Sangeet]. The practice of Gurmat Sangeet has to strike the appropriate balance between the melody and the words of the Shabad. While the tune is tremendously important, the musical aspects of Gurmat Sangeet can never be allowed to overpower the message of the Shabd being sung. Neither is it acceptable to abandon the discipline and principles of Raga, nor is it acceptable to let it overpower the Shabad. Traditional compositions are the jewel that in a very practical manner, show how exactly Gurmat Sangeet should be practiced. The Rababi tradition is all but extinct. Popular music and the lure of quick easy money has greatly corrupted the Ragi tradition. However there is still a ray of hope because of the continuing efforts of a few dedicated individuals, who continue to serve the tradition of Gurmat Sangeet faithfully.

In summary, Gurmat Sangeet, the primary form of worship in the Sikh tradition represents an unbroken five hundred year old link to the founder of the Sikh faith, Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji. While the tradition has endured, it has to be nurtured and re-energized through the preservation and propagation of the seminal tunes that have literally been handed down from the times of the Sikh Gurus. . The preservation of this tradition should be agenda of Younger generations.

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