



Cite This Article: Sukhwant Kaur, "Gurmat Sangeet and Recent Developments", International Journal of Interdisciplinary Research in Arts and Humanities, Volume 3, Conference World Special Issue 1, Page Number 155-157, 2018.

1. What is Gurmat Sangeet?

Gurmat roughly translates to English as meaning the tenets/philosophy of the Guru(s). We can take Gurmat to mean the teachings of the Sikh faith, which is catholic in nature and, fundamentally, preaches a truthful way of life. Sangeet could in Western terms be defined as an art form encompassing both instrumental and vocal music. Gurmat Sangeet (popularly known as Kirtan) could therefore be described as the singing and performing of devotional music in accordance with the teachings of the Gurus. In Gurmat Sangeet, raag plays an extremely important role. It has its own distinctive nature and gives each shabad a definitive mood [2]. It's a channel through which the emotions and feelings contained within the shabad can be effectively conveyed. In addition to raags from classical traditions (Hindustani and Karnatak), shabads in the *Guru Granth Sahib* have also been rendered in raags derived from rural folk traditions such as Ghoreean, Suhag and Alohnian. Punjab, the birthplace of Sikhism, is especially rich in folk music. Sikhism divides the human character into two equally important halves: the mun (mind) – representing the selfish/impatient side – and aatma (soul or conscience) – representing the honest and sincere side. The shabads contain examples and lessons for the mind and soul to talk to and understand each other. In understanding and reconciling these two sides one recognises oneself and attains unity with the Creator [2]. Thus man's natural instinct for music is utilised and channelled, through Gurmat Sangeet, towards achieving higher spiritual goals. Though the appeal of Kirtan is generally directed to one's feelings and instinct, the element of intellect is not ignored [1]. The Gurus maintain that ultimately, music is secondary to the shabad. Music is the medium through which the spirit of the shabad is propagated. The main aim of Kirtan is to hymn the glory of God and to get spiritually closer to Him. This can only be achieved by acting upon the lessons/instructions within the shabad, not merely by listening to it. Thus, whilst performing Kirtan, the words and meaning attached to the shabad must have pre-eminence over all else. Although musical and vocal competence is requisite, showcasing musical skills or demonstrations of singing prowess, at the expense of the words of the shabad, are undesirable.

2. Development of Gurmat Sangeet:

The history of Gurmat Sangeet is inextricably linked to the history of the Sikh Gurus - who in addition to being spiritual, social and often military leaders were also expert practitioners and patrons of devotional music. The link between music and spirituality was present from the birth of Sikhism. Guru Nanak would sing his divine shabads whilst his companion Bhai Mardana played the Rabab. He would instruct Bhai Mardana which strings to play for a particular shabad in order to create an appropriate mood and atmosphere. Guru Nanak regarded hymn-singing and hymn-listening with devotion as a link between man and God. He writes:

"Musical sound (nad) originated from God. It's holy in every sense. The best way to worship God is to blend the divine Word with sacred music."

Guru Nanak's view of music and spirituality contrasted greatly with orthodox Muslim rulers of the time, who saw music to be an immoral art. Guru Nanak confronted such views by expressing the true function of music as a vehicle of spiritual inspiration. Upper caste Hindus were also uncomfortable with Guru Nanak's philosophy since it challenged their dominant position in Indian society. Guru Nanak regarded Kirtan as the highest of all deeds and a path to salvation open to all – regardless of caste, gender or social status.

"Singing the Kirtan of the Lord's Praises in the Saadh Sangat, the Company of the Holy, is the highest of all actions." [SGGS p.642]

"Ravi Daas, the tanner, praised the Lord, and sang the Kirtan of His Praises each and every instant. Although he was of low social status, he was exalted and elevated, and people of all four castes came and bowed at his feet." [SGGS p.733]

In all Guru Nanak composed 974 hymns in nineteen raags. Gurmat Sangeet continued to be steadily developed and promoted by Guru Angad, Guru Amar Das and Guru Ram Das.

Guru Arjan's greatest contribution to the Sikh religion was his compilation of the Scriptures into the *Aad Granth*. It contains the hymns not only of the Gurus but also of saints and minstrels belonging to different religions and castes. Guru Arjan installed the Scripture – *Aad Granth* – in Harmandir Sahib at Amritsar in 1604. It contains his 2218 hymns in thirty raags. Guru Arjan maintained a number of musicians who performed Kirtan at his court. Up until the time of Guru Arjan all the musicians performing Kirtan had been paid professionals, but Guru Arjan ordered that every Sikh should learn Kirtan, and not depend solely on the services of professional musicians. Such non-professional singers came to be known as ragis. He personally trained the ragis in hymn-singing in the appropriate raags. Guru Arjan was not only a great singer, but also an eminent musicologist. He devised a stringed musical instrument called the Saranda which he played whilst singing. Guru Hargobind was a great patron of musicians. He established a new class of singers called dhadhis and introduced the new instruments like Dhadh and Sarangi. The dhadh sang heroic deeds of old warriors and inspired the Guru's soldiers. Guru Tegh Bahadur composed 116 hymns in fifteen raags. He introduced a new raag called Jaijwanti and composed four hymns therein. Guru Gobind Singh was a great patron of poets and musicians. Guru Gobind Singh himself created and played the Taus, and introduced another stringed instrument, the Dilruba, to Gurmat Sangeet.

The Gurus democratised sacred music and brought it from the exclusive temple halls to the homes of the ordinary men and women. The Gurus brought awareness of regional music to the masses by singing and composing shabads in folk tunes in addition to classical raags. The Gurus used music to break down religious and cultural barriers during a period of extreme

intolerance and religious persecution. They used both north and south Indian musical styles. They blended Hindu and Muslim music practices and popularised raags such as Asa and Suhi, which have strong Muslim influences.

3. Recent Developments of Gurmat Sangeet:

In development of the great original tradition, the Gurus beginning with Guru Nanak Sahib along with Sangat (congregation) set up some Kirtan centres where musicians (performers of Kirtan) practically and fractionally developed such tradition. Sikh history bears testimony to the fact that after the Second Udasi, Guru Nanak Sahib set up the Sikh Dharamsal (Gurdawara) as an institution where the tradition of Kirtan started by the Guru was specially reiterated. Historical references make it clear that Gurbani was sung twice a day, in the morning and in the evening at Kartarpur.

Sodaru Aartee Gavveai Amrit Vele Japa Uchaaraa (Bhai Gurdas, Vaar 1, Paurhi 38)

- ✓ At this place, first by making Bhai Mardana stay on, Guru Nanak proceeded on his Third Udasi. Bhai Mardana continued to perform Guru Nanak Bani's Kirtan. After Bhai Mardana's passing away, his son Bhai Sajada (Sehjad) used to sing in the Guru's abode. Hence Kartarpur emerged as the first centre of Gurmat Sangeet.
- ✓ In addition, Guru Angad Dev founded Khadoor Sahib and continued with the Kartarpuri standard tradition. Besides Bhai Sehjad, Bhai Saddu Baddu was the famous Rababis at the Guru's abode.
- ✓ Guru Amardas founded Goindwal as a special centre for the propagation of Sikhism, 22 Manjies (Seats) were founded where as Sikh traditions and Sikh ways of life were propagated in different areas. Gurmat Sangeet was also popularised among the Sikh congregations. Bhai Deepa, Bhai Pandha, Bhai Bhula were the famous Kirtaanias of the Guru's period.
- ✓ After Guru Amardas, Guru Ramdas laid the foundation of Chak-Ram Das Pura, which later became famous as Amritsar. Satta and Balwand were the famous Kirtanias of Guru Ram Das's time. Here singing of Asa Di Vaar in the morning, Sodar in the evening and Arti at night, remained in practice. By the time of Guru Ram Das, the Shabad Kirtan tradition of Gurmat Sangeet was fully developed and established under which a unique singing style like Partal came to be practised, not found in any other musical tradition.
- ✓ The Fifth Guru, Arjan Dev Sahib had the onerous responsibility of developing Gurmat Sangeet tradition on a firm footing. By this time the Harmandir had been founded at Amritsar where continuous singing of Shabad Kirtan Dhuni was performed by different Chaukies. At this Centre of Guru Arjan Dev, where Rababi Kirtan Tradition emerged in a distinctive form, common Sikhs were also encouraged to perform Kirtan which is illustrated by the Satta Balwand story of getting annoyed with the Guru. At this time, besides professional Rababis, amateur Shabad Kirtan by Sikh sangat tradition also came into being.
- ✓ After Guru Arjan Dev, Guru Har Gobind introduced Vaar music by Dhadies along with Kirtan.
- ✓ Guru Har Rai and Guru Har Krishan Sahib further propagated Gurmat Sangeet tradition.
- ✓ Anandpur Sahib was founded by Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib where he made the traditional Kirtan an inseparable part of practical tradition. Bhai Saddu and Maddu were the famous Kirtan performers at this great Sikh centre.

From the period of the Gurus, the same technique of training and propagation of Gurmat Sangeet has continued. According to one tradition, Rababi Kirtan performers continued to impart training on individual basis and with professional efficiency. As a result, different Rabab players and their progeny continued to perform Gurmat Sangeet, using the art of music. This tradition was in no way inferior to the contemporary tradition of the Mughal Court. In the world of music, these Rabab performers of the House of the Guru were recognised as Babe Ke. On the other hand, court musicians were known as Babur Ke. Babe Ke held a respectable place among the contemporary musicians because of their association with spiritual music traditions. This tradition of Rababi kirtankars continues till this day. Their particular style of singing and their perfection of Gurbani recitation successfully helps in differentiating their style. Many Kirtan performers became famous as a result of the amateur Kirtan tradition started during Guru Arjun's time. These Rabab performers who were recognised in comparison to the professionals, used to get their training from such musicians who were conforming to Guru's tradition and were well associated with the principles and practices of Gurmat Sangeet. Of these famous Kirtan performers of the Guru period Bhai Deepa, Bhulla, Narain Das, Pandha, Ugrsain, Nagori Mal, Bhai Ramu, Jhaju, Mukand are better known. Under the Gurmat Sangeet training tradition, where Rababis had family traditions, the amateur Kirtan performers had institutional traditions. Though historical sources of the contemporary taksals (institutions) are not available, their functioning at different places bear testimony to the fact that the seeds of this tradition were there in the Guru's period.

4. Conclusion:

The Gurus democratised sacred music and brought it from the exclusive temple halls to the homes of the ordinary men and women. The Gurus brought awareness of regional music to the masses by singing and composing shabads in folk tunes in addition to classical ragas. The Gurus used music to break down religious and cultural barriers during a period of extreme intolerance and religious persecution. They used both north and south Indian musical styles. They blended Hindu and Muslim music practices and popularised ragas such as Asa and Suhi, which have strong Muslim influences. Though the appeal of Kirtan is generally directed to one's feelings and instinct, the element of intellect is not ignored. The Gurus maintain that ultimately, music is secondary to the shabad. Music is the medium through which the spirit of the shabad is propagated. The main aim of Kirtan is to hymn the glory of God and to get spiritually closer to Him. This can only be achieved by acting upon the lessons/instructions within the shabad, not merely by listening to it. Thus, whilst performing Kirtan, the words and meaning attached to the shabad must have pre-eminence over all else. Although musical and vocal competence is requisite, showcasing musical skills or demonstrations of singing prowess, at the expense of the words of the shabad, are undesirable. Sikhism divides the human character into two equally important halves: the mun (mind) – representing the selfish/impatient side – and aatma (soul or conscience) – representing the honest and sincere side.

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