



GURMAT SANGEET AND RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

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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.