

Sikh Śabad Kīrtan

The Musicology of Sacred Memory

Dr. Janice Eyer Protopapas



Publication Bureau
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Department of Gurmat Sangeet,
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Sikh Śabad Kīrtan
The Musicology of Sacred Memory
by
Dr. Janice Eyer Protopapas

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FOREWORD

Punjabi University is proud to be the first University to have established the tradition of Sikh Sacred music 'Gurmat Sangeet' at an academic level. The Gurmat Sangeet Chair and Department of Gurmat Sangeet, of this University are completely dedicated to Sikh Music Studies.

The research and teaching activities undertaken by the Department have played a significant role in making an impact on scholarship in this field. Along with these efforts, a distinct form of Sikh music tradition has been introduced to the International brotherhood. For the past few years, Punjabi University has always been the hub of attraction for International researchers and music academia. With the special efforts of the Founder & Head of the Department of Gurmat Sangeet, Dr. Gurnam Singh, the researchers from the International academic fraternity have thronged to Gurmat Sangeet Chair and Department of Gurmat Sangeet for their research. Dr. Janice Eyer Protopapas from University of Maryland is one amongst them.

Janice visited Punjabi University from 2005 to 2007. During this period, under the valuable guidance of Dr. Gurnam Singh, she actively participated in all the research and teaching activities of Gurmat Sangeet. After the completion of her Ph.D. work, Janice has submitted her research work for publication to Punjabi University.

Less than ten years of their foray into the field of Gurmat Sangeet, Gurmat Sangeet Chair and Department of Gurmat Sangeet have shown their deep concern towards the academic development of Gurmat Sangeet by publishing such work by International scholars.

I congratulate Dr. Janice Eyer Protopapas for her achievement and Dr. Gurnam Singh for enabling her to do so. I also dedicate this book to the readers and Students who will definitely benefit by it.

Dr. Jaspal Singh

Vice-Chancellor

Punjabi University, Patiala.

PREFACE

The establishment of Gurmat Sangeet Department at an academic level in Punjabi University has given impetus to research in various fields of Gurmat Sangeet. Gurmat Sangeet Chair and Department of Gurmat Sangeet are carrying out the research activities along with teaching. In a short span of ten years, various teaching programmes of under-graduate and post-graduate levels have been initiated. Being a premier academic institution for the development of Gurmat Sangeet, the path-breaking research activities of the Department have also attracted and encouraged researchers to come to Punjabi University. At present, more than twenty scholars from India and abroad are pursuing their Ph.D. program.

Dr. Janice Eyer Protopopas, the author of this book 'Sikh Śabad Kirtan : The Musicology of Sacred Memory' is one of the dedicated researchers from the University of Maryland, and has selected Gurmat Sangeet as the subject for her Ph.D. research work. During this period, she has actively participated in all the Seminars, Conferences, Utsavs and Workshops organised by the Gurmat Sangeet Chair and Department of Gurmat Sangeet. Janice has also taught the post-graduate students. Janice developed a perfect bonding with the Sikh music fraternity to imbibe its rich tradition. The journey of Janice began from Harimandir and her spiritual nature experienced an inherent development, thus transforming her to Gurleen Kaur. She has completely dedicated herself to Sikhism and Guru's music - Gurmat Sangeet.

Janice has established a distinct identity in India and USA with her Shabad Keertan and teaching skills. Its a matter of pride that Janice has submitted her research work for publication to Punjabi University. Dr. Jaspal Singh, Vice-Chancellor has kindly approved and appreciated this noble effort. As a music expert, renowned musician Singh Bandhu S. Surinder Singh and Dr. Jagir Singh have also contributed their valuable opinions. Janice's book will certainly

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prove to be an example for the upcoming researchers in India and abroad particularly for the foreign researchers. The writer has successfully analysed, practised and experienced Sikh Music at a spiritual level on the basis of musicology of Guru Granth Sahib and Shabad Keertan tradition of Sikhism. I hope this publication would deepen the relation of Gurmat Sangeet with World of music and prove to be valuable for all readers, students and researchers.

Department of Gurmat Sangeet,
Punjabi University, Patiala.

Dr. Gurnam Singh
(Supervisor)
Professor & Head
Gurmat Sangeet Chair

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

The performance of devotional music in India has been an active, sonic conduit where spiritual identities are shaped and forged; where both history and mythology are out and remembered daily. For the followers of Sikhism, *Śabad kīrtan*, congregational hymn singing has been the vehicle through which text, melody and ritual act as repositories of memory, elevating memory to a place where historical and social events can be reenacted and memorialized on levels of spiritual significance.

In this volume, I propose to apply an ethnomusicological approach to the study of Sikh *Śabad kīrtan* that includes both a detailed analysis of the musical system as well as exploring the dimension of context in the analysis of musical sound. An anthropological perspective to the analysis of musical sound provides a framework through which to explore the musical system, its performance practice and congregational involvement, thus providing a comprehensive study of *Śabad kīrtan* by employing a performance approach to music analysis.

During the period between 2006 - 2009, I traveled extensively throughout Punjab, India witnessing and participating in *Śabad kīrtan* events. The dynamic involvement of the congregation was undeniable. In each event, hymn singing acted as the centripetal force, engaging the community of listeners in a sonic experience of remembrance and togetherness.

My training in Western classical music on piano led me into a similar study of Hindustani classical vocal music with a special focus on Sikh sacred music (*Gūrmāt Sangīt*). My understanding of both the musical and extra-musical dimensions of *Gūrmāt Sangīt* owes much to Dr. Gurnam Singh, (Head of the *Gūrmāt Sangīt* Department, Punjabi University, Patiala, Punjab, India) who generously shared his knowledge, expertise and deep commitment to this study. I am particularly grateful to administration, students, and staff of Punjabi

University, Patiala, Punjab for graciously hosting me during the course of fieldwork research in *Gūrmāt Sangīt* and supporting the publication of this manuscript. I must single out and give special thanks to Dr. Jaspal Singh, Vice-Chancellor of Punjabi University, and Swaran Singh Bhoparai (former Vice-Chancellor of Punjabi University), who generously agreed to the publication of this manuscript through Punjabi University Press.

This study is a product of many years and many individuals, the names of only a few, which I can mention. I am indebted to all the students and teachers of *Gūrmāt Sangīt* who I encountered throughout my research in both India and the USA. I would personally like to thank all the students and staff in the *Gūrmāt Sangīt Department*, Punjabi University, Patiala who opened up their classrooms and homes and assisted me in the field. Special gratitude goes to Dr. Gurnam Singh whose guidance was an invaluable part of this undertaking. I am also indebted to Satguruji and the *Nāmdhārī* community who welcomed me into their *sangat* and offered me privileged glimpses into a truly extraordinary musical community. I would also like to express sincere gratitude to the students and staff at *Jawaddi Taksal*, with whom I blissfully traveled on the mystical journey of *Gurbānī*.

I am eternally indebted to the Sikh congregation at large; I have been deeply enriched by the wisdom, faith and worship of this community. I offer heartfelt gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Provine whose patience and diligence guided me through the writing and completion of this dissertation. His attention to detail and his critical remarks have made me a better scholar, writer and thinker. My biggest thanks goes to the members of my family who have supported my endeavors throughout my academic career, to my parents through whom I imbibed the *rasa* of sacred music and to my two beloved children, Helena and Yiorgo whose musical spirits continue to amaze and delight me.

I dedicate this book to all those on the path of *Gūrmāt Sangīt* and also in loving memory of both my Hindustani vocal teacher, Shrimati Mangala Tiwari, who imparted the deep knowledge of *rāgā* and *rasa* to me, and Bibi Jasbir Kaur Khalsa, who was a living testimony of Gurū's *Śabad*:

ਸੋਰਠਿ ਮਹਲਾ ੫ ॥
 ਜੀਅ ਜੰਤ ਸਭਿ ਵਸਿ ਕਰਿ ਦੀਨੇ ਸੇਵਕ ਸਭਿ ਦਰਬਾਰੇ ॥
 ਅੰਗੀਕਾਰੁ ਕੀਓ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਅਪੁਨੇ ਭਵ ਨਿਧਿ ਪਾਰਿ ਉਤਾਰੇ ॥੧॥
 ਸੰਤਨ ਕੇ ਕਾਰਜ ਸਗਲ ਸਵਾਰੇ ॥
 ਦੀਨ ਦਇਆਲ ਕ੍ਰਿਪਾਲ ਕ੍ਰਿਪਾ ਨਿਧਿ ਪੂਰਨ ਖਸਮ ਹਮਾਰੇ ॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥
 ਆਉ ਬੈਠੁ ਆਦਰੁ ਸਭ ਥਾਈ ਉਨ ਨ ਕਤਹੂੰ ਬਾਤਾ ॥
 ਭਗਤਿ ਸਿਰਪਾਉ ਦੀਓ ਜਨ ਅਪੁਨੇ ਪ੍ਰਤਾਪੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਜਾਤਾ ॥੨॥੩੦॥੯੪॥

Sorat'h, Fifth Mehla:

*All beings and creatures are subservient to all those who
 serve in the Lord's Court.*

*Their God made them His own, and carried them across the
 terrifying world-ocean. ||1||*

He resolves all the affairs of His Saints.

*He is merciful to the meek, kind and compassionate, the ocean of
 kindness, my Perfect Lord and Master. ||Pause||*

I am asked to come and be seated, everywhere I go, and I lack nothing.

*The Lord blesses His humble devotee with robes of honor; O Nanak,
 the Glory of God is manifest. ||2||30||94||*

(Sōrath, Gurū Arjan, AG, p. 631)

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