



# Hari Kirtan

## Takes us close to the Almighty

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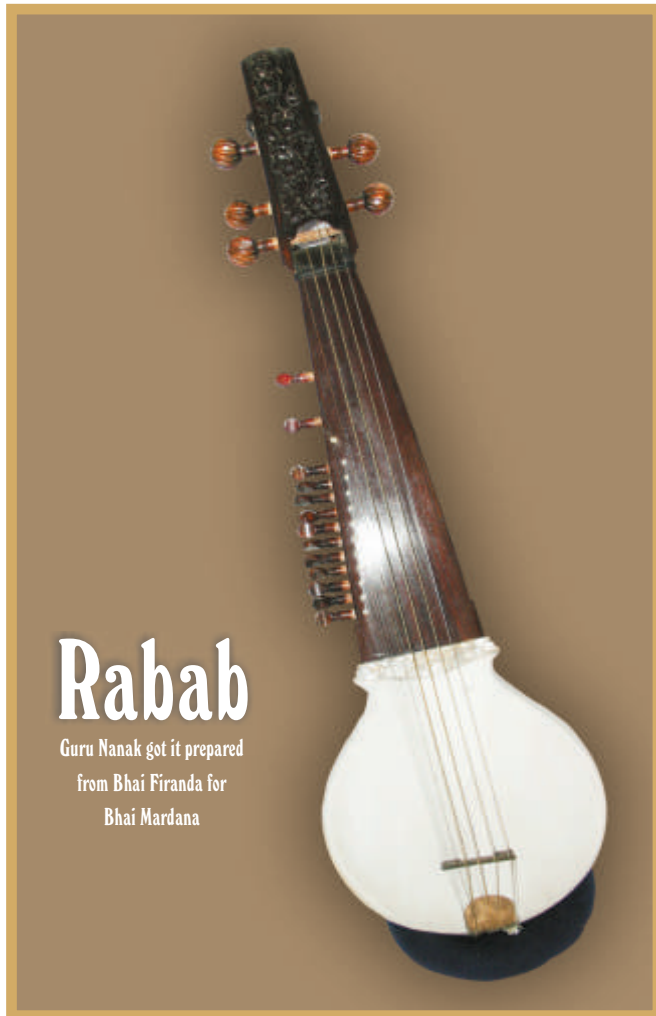
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## Saranda

Guru Arjan Dev sang with a Saranda

Guru Nanak, the dispeller of darkness, performed miraculous deeds of benevolence to liberate the people from the vagaries of religious hypocrisies and barren pieties. He led them on the path of purity and truth and blessed them with the wondrous gift of Hari Kirtan, a simple means of attaining Oneness with the Almighty.



The prevailing faiths had laid down arduous paths of Hatth Yoga and other crooked rituals to get close to God. They also aimed at attaining super-powers to display miracles and indulged in idle speculation of metaphysics. Guru Nanak clarified that 'miracles are the relishes for others' and taught us that the merger of human soul in the larger soul of the Almighty is the

true goal of life.

Instead of singing absurd songs and meaningless couplets, Guru Nanak had envisaged the Gurbani in the musical format of the classical Indian tradition. By performing Gurbani Kirtan several human beings became visionaries and innumerable dacoits, thieves and cruel emperors became human beings in the true sense of the word.

### **Universal Vision of the Almighty**

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Assuming power, the primal Being Himself has entered into the world in the form of True Guru (Guru Granth Sahib 1395). Guru Nanak sang Gurbani in a very refined and rich voice while Bhai Mardana played the rabab. This, we can say, was the beginning of Gurmat Sangeet. He sang the Gurbani in 19 ragas. Following him, Guru Angad Dev, Guru Amar Dass, Guru Ram Dass, Guru Arjan Dev and Guru Tegh Bahadur also sang their own verses of Gurbani in different ragas. The entire Gurbani has been arranged in Guru Granth Sahib in 31 ragas. Guru Gobind Singh further enriched and expanded the orbit of Gurmat Sangeet by writing many shabads of Gurbani in several more poetic and musical traditions.

### **Springs of Spiritual Music**

The sprouting of a raga is the outcome of God's own spiritual gift which flourishes in an individual. For this reason, a Brahm Giani and a Visionary do not need to learn the art of singing. Ragas grow like springs from within the spirit of a blessed singer. For instance, there is no record in history that any of the Gurus learnt the art of singing from some one else. It confirms that all the Gurus were themselves the springs of singing spiritual music.

In the context of the above observation, innumerable instances have been recorded from the life of Sant Attar Singh of Mastuana. One day, while in Tarn Taran, Sant ji was engrossed in the singing of Kirtan. Bhai Deedar Singh came to the congregation. The raga being sung by Sant Ji was not according to the time of the day. It occurred to Deedar Singh that Sant Ji does not have the

**Involvement in the 'anhad naad' (unheard melody) of the Word  
is the primary objective of the Gurmat Sangeet**

knowledge of the raga. He recites Kirtan without keeping in mind the time of the day specified for a raga. Sant ji quickly completed the shabad and sang another shabad which was according to the specific time of the day. Deedar Singh was spellbound. When Sant Ji completed the Shabad, he casually observed, "Bhai, humble servants who sit on Guru Nanak's door do not need to learn ragas. This blessing is showered on them in their sleep".

Once Sant Ji was traveling from Baramula to Srinagar. Famous scholar, Bhai Kahan Singh happened to be there. He has portrayed the scene in his own pen as under: "The entire Sikh sangat has heard the delightful Kirtan sung by Sant Ji in his unique melodious voice. There was deep impact of his singing on the minds of the entire sangat. Knowing that I was a connoisseur of ragas, he said softly in my ear that I sing these shabads to involve the entire sangat in the spirit of the Kirtan. If you so desire I shall sing a shabad in a proper raga. Saying this, he sang one shabad in raga Marwa in four taal and another shabad in raga Poorya in three taal. He sang these shabads in such exquisite tune and voice that his godly spiritual voice still rings in my ears. Sant ji was a spiritual genius, a perfect Bhakt of the Almighty, an incessant reciter of Naam, a perfect connoisseur of ragas, dedicated to selfless service, generous and large hearted, broad minded and a symbol of humility. Such super-human personalities emerge on the horizon of the world for the welfare of the people only on rarest of rare occasions."

Once Sant Ji went to Sialkot, where his dera used to be at Babe Di Ber. Next day early in the morning a programme of Anand Karaj had been arranged. Bhai Jawala Singh Ragi performed the Asa Di Vaar Kirtan. Usually Sant Ji experienced a powerful urge to perform Kirtan so that every pore of his body was involved in his singing. But on that day Sant Ji sat in a samadhi, eyes closed, like an ardent listener, involved in the delightful Kirtan. When Asa Di Vaar Kirtan was completed, Sant Ji opened his eyes and said, "Bhai, this is dedication of mind." Bhai Jawala Singh stood with folded hands, his head bent in reverence before Sant Ji and said, "This is just your blessings and kindness. When we were young we used to perform Kirtan when you had visited Tarn Taran and stayed at Mai Ram Kaur's Bunga. One day you directed and fixed your kind sight on me and it is that one benevolent sight of yours that brought in me the talent of Kirtan."

When Sant Ji went on a tour of the Malwa area of Punjab, where villagers used to sing indecent songs and sayings in their gatherings around the chaupals, he used these very popular tunes to sing Gurbani and involved the entire sangat in singing these

shabads. Simple people of villages followed these familiar and simple tunes and got involved in Gurbani. Before this tour, Sant Ji often performed Kirtan in ragas.

### **The unheard melody**



**The seeker engaged in Hari Kirtan rises above the gross world of selfishness and attains indescribable divine peace**

**By listening to the Gurbani Kirtan in ragas one experiences the breeze of Heavenly grace blowing gently**



# Taaus

Guru Gobind Singh got Taaus prepared for Kirtan

The tradition of Gurmat Sangeet is quite different from that of the other systems of music. Its main aim is to transform the obviously audible music to inaudible inner spiritual music, the unheard melody, which also involves the progressive enrichment of the soul by absorbing the Words of the Gurus. Involvement in the unheard melody of the Word is the primary objective of the Gurmat Sangeet. In other musical systems it is the raga which dominates, and the listener only enjoys its intricacies and its sweetness of sound, without his soul being involved.

Prays Nanak, touching the Guru's feet,  
Unheard melody plays for the mortal. (922)

Guru Nanak often said, "Mardana, play the rabab, Almighty's message is being revealed through the Baani." Thereafter he would start singing Gurbani and Mardana would tune his rabab according to the raga. During the time of Guru Angad Dev, Bhai Shajada would play rabab while Guru Ji sang Gurbani in ragas. During the time of Guru Amar Dass and Guru Ram Dass the rabab players from the family of Mardana, Bhai Banu and Bhai Saloo played on rabab and Guru Ji sang Gurbani in ragas.

In Guru Arjan Dev's darbar Bhai Balwanda and Bhai Satta played rabab while Guru Sahib sang Gurbani in ragas. They also performed Kirtan in Guru Ji's darbar. Guru Arjan Dev got a unique string instrument made, called Saranda, with which he performed Kirtan in Darbar Sahib, Amritsar. Guru Sahib laid the path for the Sikh tradition that Gursikhs must play the

musical instruments themselves and should not depend upon a professional ragi for Kirtan.

During the time of Guru Hargobind, Bhai Babak was the regular rabab player performing in Darbar Sahib. Although Guru Hargobind did not contribute any Gurbani himself, but to infuse enthusiasm among the warriors, he got heroic ballads written which were sung by the ballad singers. He also sang Hari jas with rabab. After that the Gursikhs started singing Gurbani accompanied by string instruments.

Guru Gobind Singh performed Kirtan while playing another unique musical instrument called Taaus. He used to sing Hari jas Kirtan on rabab also. Following this the Gursikhs adopted string instruments for performing Kirtan in the company of Saadh Sangat.

Sant Baba Sham Singh of Amritsar performed Kirtan on stringed instruments for nearly 78 years at Harmandir Sahib, Amritsar. During the Twentieth Century, i.e. after a few years, the ragis started performing Kirtan with Harmonium.

It is believed that Harmonium was developed from piano during the middle of the Nineteenth Century by an Italian musician.

instruments were commonly used. These prolific instruments touched the heart of the listeners and positively inspired them spiritually. The Englishmen took these string instruments such as Saranda, Rabab and Taaus and preserved them in a museum in England. They distributed Harmonium in Punjab and actively campaigned for its popularity in North India. Even in Harmandir Sahib, Amritsar, Kirtan started being performed with the Harmonium.

### **Distinction of String Instruments**

The sound of string instruments, especially that of rabab, resembles the human voice. No other musical instrument has this quality. The word rabab is derived from the Arabic language. It is also believed that many years back Abu Naseer, a Persian instrumentalist, was considered to be a distinguished the rabab player of Baghdad. When he played on rabab the listeners used to be spellbound by the spiritual trance of his rabab. According to the Encyclopedia of Music, rabab in ancient times was called Narad Veena or Rawan Veena which was considered to be the favourite instrument of Narad Rishi and Mother Saraswati.

Rabab, which is now in common use, was got prepared by Guru Nanak under his personal instructions and according to his proposed design by his favourite follower, Bhai Firanda. This rabab was presented by Guru Nanak to his personal companion, Bhai Mardana, who played on rabab when ever Guru Ji sang Gurbani revealed by the Almighty. When Bhai Mardana played on rabab, the sound of 'Toon hi Nirankar, Toon hi Nirankar' (Thou art the Almighty, Thou art the Almighty) was heard.

Bhai Mardana had two sons, Bhai Rajada and Bhai Sajada, who played on rabab in the Darbar of Guru Nanak at Kartarpur. Bhai Rajada and Bhai Sajada were also the rabab players in the Darbar of Guru Angad Dev. Bhai Sajada's sons, Bhai Banoo and Bhai Sailoo were the rabab players in the Darbar of Guru Amar Dass and Guru Ram Dass. Next generation offsprings, Bhai Balwanda and Bhai Satta were the rabab players at the time of Guru Arjan Dev, who got an exquisite string instrument evolved, called Saranda, which he used while performing Kirtan at Darbar Sahib.

During the time of Guru Hargobind, Bhai Babak was a rebock player of great eminence and proved to be a brave fighter during the crusades of the Guru. Meer Abdullah, a resident of Sur Singh, District Amritsar, was an eminent player of sarangi and his companion, Bhai Natha of Sultanwind, near Amritsar used to play Dhad, a light two faced tambourine. These two ballad singers used to sing heroic ballads to inspire the Sikh warriors. A distinguished warrior of the Sikh nation, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia learnt the art of singing ballads in his early years and went to the

Darbar of Mata Sundri at Delhi and became famous for performing Kirtan with rabab. He was later made the Chief of Sarbat Khalsa.

During the time of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Bhai Mansa was a rabab player of great distinction and performed without expecting any rewards. He was satisfied by the generous blessings of the Guru at Darbar Sahib. Baba Sham Singh, who possessed a high level of spiritual vision, was born in 1803. His mother Krishan Kaur and father Darbari Ji were from village Sahpur, Distt. Sargodha (now Pakistan). At the age of five he lost his father. His mother came to the Dharmshala of Seva panthis in Amritsar. Here Baba Sham Singh acquired knowledge and insight of Gurbani in early his age. He learnt Gurbani Kirtan with Saranda from Baba Naudh Singh and performed Asa Di Vaar as well as Sodar Kirtan at Darbar Sahib, Amritsar for 78 years. This great Brahm Giani lived upto the age of 123 years and followed Gurmat principles. He died in 1926.

From ancient Al Rabab was evolved the European rebock which was played by hanging from the shoulder in the fashion of Sarangi. From this new string instruments such as violin, guitar and mandolin came into being. Rebock is also considered to be the source of Sarod. Researches into the musical laboratories have established that the sweet sound of string instruments appeals to the mind and soul of the listener so that his psychological and physical ailments get cured.

The tune generated by harmonium dominates the voice of a singer while the tune of the string instruments tends to follow the singer, allowing the singer's voice and his tune to be fully appreciated. In this way the string instrument helps the singer to sing the song in his selected tune.

### **Special Features of Hari Kirtan**

Singing God's praises in the saint's company  
Is the highest of all the deeds. (642)

The most exalted is the singing of  
The Lord's praise in this age of Darkness. (1075)

In the age of Kalyug, Kirtan has a special role to play. Although Naam Simran is an allied act which leads towards the steps that take the seeker in the direction of Sach Khand, a common individual finds it hard to concentrate his mind on Naam over a long enough period. Only the fortunate ones get their spiritual selves engrossed in Naam Simran, the divine remembrance. Even when they succeed in doing so, the spontaneous inspiration

is disrupted after some time. For this reason, Guru Ji has blessed the Saadh Sangat with invaluable art of Kirtan so that when their minds tend to wander away from Naam Simran, they would get involved in Kirtan.

In Kalyug individuals have extrovert outlook which makes them frivolous and they tend to seek more and more worldly comforts. Their minds tend to splinter easily. Only rare, fortunate individuals with virtue of truthfulness can hope to rise above the worldly temptations and turn inward looking. They then get involved with the Shabad-Guru and enjoy its spiritual bliss.

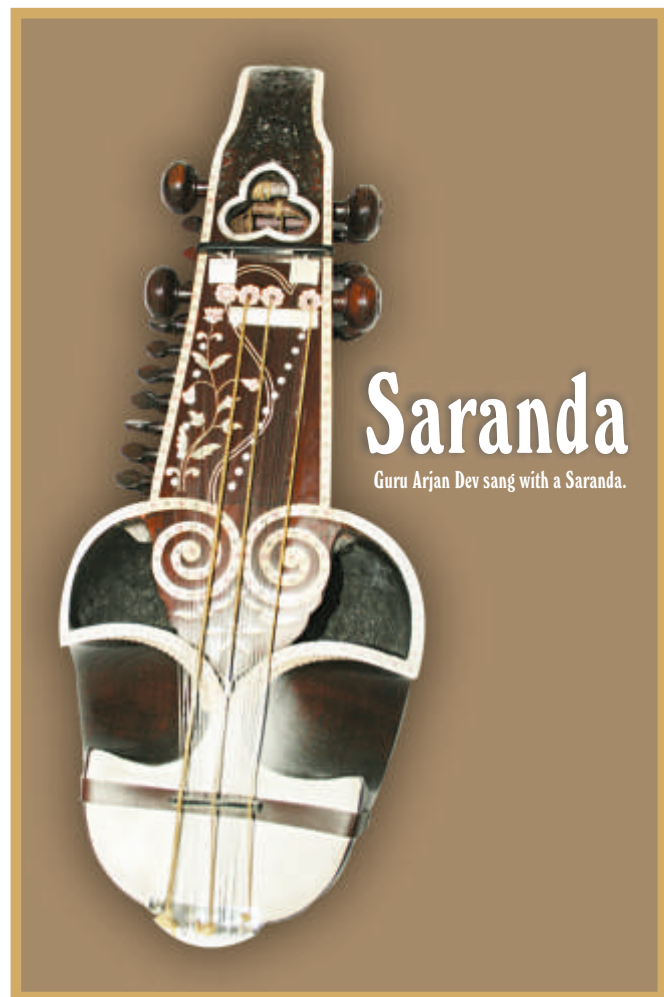
Guru Nanak's doctrine - Guru's Word sung by a songster fills the soul of the Gursikh - (Shabad Guru Surat Dhun Chela) leads the individual from the worship of his body to spontaneous involvement with the marvelous vision of the Word. It leads him further towards the path reaching the Almighty. The achievement of the state of one-in-all and all-in-one is so hard to materialise that an individual will find it impossible to ascend to that state in a single step. That is why the Gurus led the Gursikh to ascend this path, step by step, taking him ultimately to the 'Khalsai' nectar, the goal of spiritual bliss. There all search ends because the Word merges with the Panth.

One who experiences the spiritual bliss is one with the Lord,  
Then between the Lord, myself and thou there is no distance.  
(Sarab Loh Granth)

In order to help the Gursikh in ascending the steps towards spiritual bliss, the Gurus have laid special stress on Hari Kirtan. When the human mind hankers after worldly desires as well as gloats in selfishness, it is not easily brought within the orbit of Naam Simran. However, the honey of Kirtan has a special role to play. By listening to the Gurbani Kirtan in ragas one experiences the breeze of heavenly grace blowing gently, opening the doors of one's inner self. In this state, the Gurbani, the song of soul, gradually turns the worldly man into a true seeker, fully drenched in the glow of Naam.

For the above reason, Hari Kirtan assumes extra-ordinary significance for the seeker, who is marching on the path of divine spiritual bliss. The path of 'Shabad Guru Surat Dhun Chela' guides the mind of the seeker from the earthly life to invisible spirituality.

The seeker engaged in Hari Kirtan is continually raised above the gross world of selfishness to indescribably divine peace. Hari Kirtan is the eternal melody for the seeker who involves himself to rise above what is visible to what is described as inner



glory. This godly melody leads him to the world of Nirakar. Hari Kirtan has been established as the prime route of the soul, which hears the unheard melody and merges the subconscious with the Word.



The most exalted is the singing of  
The Lord's praise in this age of Darkness.