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**A Brief Study in Aspects of Gurmat Music with Respect to Hindustani Classical Music: A Comparative Analysis**

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**Abstract**

Music is a universal art. Indian music has evolved over time into various branches such as classical and folklore. Indian classical music is an ancient tradition. Gurmat Sangeet (Music) is considered as one of its branches. Around the 12th Century, Nayanars and Alvars who were the followers of Shaiv Mat and Vaishnav Mat originated an exhaustive independent form of music known as the Kirtan tradition<sup>1</sup>. The First spiritual leader of Sikhism Shri Guru Nanak Dev while propagating Sikhism used a new form of Kirtan known as “Shabad Kirtan” and established Gurmat Sangeet as an unique form of music. Gurmat Sangeet used to be an inseparable element of Indian classical music but as of now it has established itself as a new form of music. It is also evident from the fact that many different forms of Gurmat Sangeet such as Baramah, Ghodiyani, Alahuniyan, Mundabani, Ashtpadi, Do Padi, etc are inspired by Hindustani classical music. This can also be noticed from the fact that various Musical instruments used in Gurmat Sangeet are similar to the Instruments of Hindustani classical music. Despite the similarities with Hindustani classical music. They are not identical and have prominent differences, Gurmat Sangeet has its uniqueness as a musical form. The central purpose of this research paper is to analyze above mentioned similarities and differences between Hindustani classical music and Gurmat Sangeet and discuss the nuances of Gurmat Sangeet as an independent form of music.

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<sup>1</sup> Varinder Kaur Padam, Gurmat Sangeet Da Sangeet Vigyan, Pg.no.138

**Keywords:** Hindustani Music, Kirtan, Shri Guru Nanak Dev, Shaiv and Vaishnav Mat, Baramah, Raga.

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The appropriate meaning of the word “Sangeet” (Music) is the Geet which is sung properly. Sangeet is made of two words Sam and Geet. Indian music has a rich history, it has been under modifications since the Vedic period. Today’s Hindustani Classical Music is a result of all those modifications that happened over time. In ancient times, Geeti Gayan was prevalent, followed by Prabandh gayan, then the practice of Dhrupad became prominent and in the current period, the form Khyal is extremely prevalent and has occupied the bulk of the practice of Hindustani Classical music. But few aspects of Dhrupad and other forms of classical music such as Holi, Dhamar, etc. are in practice.

Since ancient times, two forms of music have been prevalent. The first is Deshi sangeet and the second is Margi sangeet. The main objective of Deshi sangeet is to sooth the heart and soul of listeners. Any form of music and dance which can serve this purpose comes under this category. Margi sangeet is a form that motivates one to follow the sacred path of religion and Moksha. According to a well-known scholar, Pt. Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande Margi, sangeet is a form of music that was created by Gods like Brahma, practiced by sages like Bharata Muni in front of the God Shiva. Another scholar Padbandhopadhyaya argues that Margi sangeet was nothing but Sam gaan and Bhakti gaan of the Vedic period. On the contrary, the Deshi sangeet which is the music from different places of India later become prominent as Hindustani and South-Indian music. In this context, It is correct to argue that Margi sangeet is related to Gods and diety of Hinduism, while Deshi sangeet is limited to Indian classical music only<sup>2</sup>.

Deshi sangeet was brought into existence by common people with a motive to satisfy their musical needs. Probably that is why its always dynamic. Deshi sangeet is considered in relation to gaan. Margi sangeet existed in Vedic times in the form of Sam gaan and Bhakti

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<sup>2</sup> Sangeet Ratnavali, Ashok Kumar Yaman, Pg.no.180

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sangeet, that is why it is considered as a category of Gandharva gaan. It can be rightfully proposed that over time Margi sangeet modified in the form of Kirtan tradition which is a collaboration of music and religion. In the 12th century, two groups of devotees from southern India known as Nayanars and Alavarkal who were the followers of Shaiv Mat and Vaishnav Mat strongly contributed to the promotion of Kirtan tradition as an independent form. The founder of the Vaishnav lineage was Nimbarak Acharya. He emphasized over worshipping of Radha, and influenced bit other groups such as Varkari, Vallabh, Haveli came into existence<sup>3</sup>. Gurmat sangeet's existence can be understood as the continuation of these traditions.

Hindustani classical music and Gurmat have a plethora of similarities as well as dissimilarities. Sikh religion has adopted and magnificently applied the pre-existing tradition of Naad sangeet and Kirtan as its components. In their adoption, they made some modifications in it. Great Gurus of Sikh religion combined the sacred words of Sikh religion with Kirtan and made a separate form of Kirtan known as "Shabd Kirtan." In Gurmat sangeet, Shabad expresses the teachings and messages of great Gurus of Sikh religion with the help of raag sangeet presented through Kirtan. Therefore, it can be said that Gurmat sangeet follows the philosophy of Margi Sangeet.

The wording used in the Gurmat sangeet is an exact expression of spirituality. In Gurbani, the Shabd (lyrics) are considered more important than the technical nuances of classical music such as swar, taal, Gamak, Meend, etc. On the contrary Hindustani classical music poetry is never considered as the central part of the practice instead these nuances and technicalities are given more importance. Hindustani classical has a general practice where raga is seen as of the supreme importance and all the aspects of the practice such as Alap, Taan, Khatka, Murki, etc are done accordingly. To serve this purpose, Hindustani music does not use specific words for Alap and often Alaps are done in form of "Nome tome" or

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<sup>3</sup> Varinder Kaur Padam, Gurmat Sangeet Da Sangeet Vigyan, Pg.no.139

Akar, which does not have any literal meaning. But it is also argued by scholars that these methods of Alap are modified or deteriorated version of “*tu hari anant*”.

The tradition Gurbani is more specific about the selection of words for alap. It generally uses phrases such as “*Dhann Surag surgande alapat sab tikh jaye*”<sup>4</sup> or “*Omkar eke dhun alapey*”<sup>5</sup> whose evidences are found in the sacred text of Sikhism known as Gurugrantha Sahib. Gurabani sangeet has tradition of reciting the poetry in alaps which depicts positivity.

In Indian classical music, every concert is generally begun by Saraswati Vandana. It is either sung by a group of singers or solo. The rationality behind this practice is that Saraswati is considered as a Goddess of knowledge and music. Gurmat sangeet has a similar practice that has gone through some modifications over time. Till the period of the first four Gurus of Sikhism, the enchantment of “*Ek Omkar*” was prevalent but during the era of the 5th guru, Guru Arjun Dev few changes were made. During that time the tradition of dandaut was introduced.

In place of Vandana, following couplets were introduced.

*Dandaut bandan anik bar sarb kala samrat*

*Dolan te rakho prabhu nanak de kar hath*<sup>6</sup>

In Hindustani classical music, musical instruments are considered important. These instruments are either used as an accompaniment to the main performance or sometimes they are played solo for the main performance. In many concerts, musical competitions are organized based on the performance of a solo musical instrument. In Gurbani music, the most important instrument is Rabab. Apart from it, a musical instrument by the name of “*Saranda*” was introduced by Guru Amardas. In percussion music, instruments from classical

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<sup>4</sup> Shri Guru Granth Sahib, Pg.no. 958

<sup>5</sup> Shri Guru Granth Sahib, Pg.no. 256

<sup>6</sup> Shri Guru Granth Sahib, Pg.no.256

music such as Tabla, Mridang, Pakhawaj, etc are used. In contrast, classical music, Gurbani sangeet does not have a tradition of solo performances.

Gurbani music has a tradition of “Shabad Kirtan” which is sung through “Shabad chounkiyan.” There are four different chounkiyans in Gurbani music. Chaunki of Asavari, Chaunki of Bilawal, Saudar and the Chaunki of Kirtan Sohela<sup>7</sup>. Gurbani music has a special significance for raga Asa. This raga is usually sung in the morning as well as evening. This unique kind of singing is not found anywhere related to Indian religious music. In Hindustani music, all ragas are considered equally important but in light classical music ragas such as Bhairvai, Pilu, Khamaj, etc are used more frequently.

The core philosophy of the sacred text of Sikhism is Guru Granth Sahib. It contains texts which are only linked to religion and worshiping God. Each and every word has its meaning and is significant. Gurmat sangeet follows this philosophy. On the contrary, Hindustani classical music has forms such as “Tarana ” which uses words without any literal meaning. In musical forms such as these artistic capabilities takes the central position and technical nuances such as Bol Baant, Taan, are applied more to make it explicit.

In Gurmat Sangeet terminology, a word “Rahao” is used which occupies the central theme of the Shabad. Gurbani is also found in 1,2,3 and 4 Rahaos. Hindustani classical music does not usually contain a number of antras (part of bandis). In Gurbani music numbers are used to keep the paragraphs of the poetry in order. In the Khyal form of Hindustani music, generally, only a single paragraph is used. However, Dhrupad is performed in 4 parts known as Sthayi, Antara, Sanchari, and Abhog.

In Guru Granth Sahib, 22 Vaars are found and nine of them have Dhuni Sirlekh (composition) noted over them. For instance, the first Vaar of Asa has Dhuni of “Tunde Aas Raje” mentioned upon it. On the other hand, if we analyse Indian classical music in its

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<sup>7</sup> Prof.Tara Singh, Vismaad Naad, Pg.no.25

primordial stage, it used to follow the principle of Ragas and Raginis. We can comprehensively conclude that Bhairav was considered as their most important Raga. In Gurbani sangeet Raga “Shri” is considered as the first and the most important raga of their system. With that being said, Gurbani sangeet follows the same course of ragas as followed by Hindustani music beginning from Raga Kafi to modern Raga Bilawal.

Hindustani music is raga-centric music. Some of its ragas are adapted from south-Indian music. For instance, Raga Shivranjani, Raga Kirvani, Raga Madhuvanti, etc. In Gurbani music, when a South-Indian raga is used, the word “Dakshin” (Southern) is adopted before it to specify that. In Gurbani music following ragas are used. They are Gaudi Dakshini, Vadhans, Bilawal Dakshaini, Ramkali Dakshini, Maru Dakshini, and Prabhati Dakshini<sup>10</sup>. Guru Nanak Dev made an effective and successful attempt of making Hindustani classical music closest to South-Indian Classical music.

In current times the Khyal form has taken the central stage. The literal meaning of Khyal is to imagine. This form is very much prominent in North India. It has two main components the Vilambit Khyal also known as the Bada Khyal and Drut Khyal known as the Chota Khyal. All the nuances of Indian classical music such as Alap, Taan, Bol Taan, Sargam, etc are in it. According to Tulsi Ram Vevangan, Imagination is the life in Khyal and when imagination is combined with human emotions then joyous mood is achieved<sup>8</sup>. The compositions of Khyal in Hindustani music are generally comprised of Shingar ras, Karun ras, Veer ras, etc. In Shri Guru Granth sahib, a khayal named Khayal Patshahi daswi (tenth). It is *Mitar pyare nu haal muridan da kehna*.

Gurmat sangeet with its adoption and amalgamation with Hindustani music has created many different forms of music, most of them in practice. A prime example of it is Padtaal. In Padtaal gayaki, different paragraphs of the composition are sung or played in different talas except for the first paragraph which is always performed in the same tala.

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<sup>8</sup> Ashok Kumar Yaman, Sangeet Ratnawali , Pg. No. 242

Hindustani music does not have any form such as Padtaal. Padtaal gayaki was invented by Shri Guru Ram Das Singh which is prominent in the current form of Gurmat sangeet. Guru Ram Das Singh created a total 19 padtaals.<sup>9</sup>

## Conclusion

In the end, we can conclude that the Gurbani sangeet has made a significant contribution to Indian music. They first followed the Margi sangeet of Hindustani music and then developed as an independent form of music. Gurbani music has contributed quite effectively in lessening the gap between Hindustani classical music and south-Indian classical music by adopting a few of the ragas of South-Indian music in their practice. Even after all of these vibrant practices, rich culture, and the valuable contributions made by Gurbani sangeet, it still has not been able to gain recognition from the international stage as an independent form of music.

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<sup>9</sup> Prof.Tara Singh, Vismaad Naad, Pg.no.25