

SRI GURU GRANTH SAHIB: ITS STRUCTURE

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INTRODUCTION

Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh Scripture, has the unique distinction of having been compiled by the Sikh preceptors themselves and, thus, the structure can be described as nothing else but methodically flawless. The purpose for the accumulation of canon by Guru Arjun Dev Ji, and later Guru Gobind Singh Ji, was because “as the *Panth* has been revealed unto the world, so must there be the Granth, too”. Some historians allege that the systematisation of *Bani* was prepared with the aim to protect their sanctity from destructive aims.

The steps which were taken by Guru Arjun Dev Ji to purify *Bani* are as follows:

- *Ragas* which expressed excessive exuberance or sadness were rejected.
- The Guru did not make any distinction between *ragas* and *raginis* according to the popular Indian catalogue style because the superfluous *raginis* were also used as *ragas*.
- Poetry of saints containing negative thoughts (eg: ego, discrimination, degradation of human life and renunciation, etc) were excluded.
- Direct language, as the accepted vehicle of literary expression at that time, expressed the Bani in simple metaphors.
- The numerical codification of the collections is such that no interpolation can be made.
- Bhagat *Bani* is clarified in many areas by the Gurus as clearly noted in SGGS.

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THE AUTHORS

An interesting point in the structure of the SGGS can be made about the included lyricists. With no distinction of label, SGGS is not only an anthology of the sacred compositions of the Gurus (Guru Nanak Dev Ji, Guru Angad Dev Ji, Guru Amar Das Ji, Guru Ram Das Ji, Guru Arjun Dev Ji and Guru Teg Bahadur Ji), but also of some medieval Indian Bhagats and Bhattas, furthering its uniqueness with the inclusion of compositions from poets other than the faith of the followers. The composers came from a variety of class and creedal background, from Muslims to Hindus and from upper caste to low caste.

The full list of non-Guru authors is broad, including Bhagats Kabir, Farid and Namdev, Ravidas, Beni, Trilochan, Jaidev, Surdas, Parmanand, Sadhana, Ramanand, Dhanna, Pipa, Sain, Bhikhan, Sundar and Mardana; poets Balwand and Sata; and many Bhattas (poets), such as Bhatt Balh, Bhatt Bhalh, Bhatt Bhika, Bhatt Gayand, Bhatt Harbans, Bhatt Jalap, Bhatt Kalshar, Bhatt Kirat, Bhatt Mathura, Bhatt Nalh and Bhatt Salh.

The lack of discrimination in SGGS is due to the progressive thoughts of Sikhism. Also, the origin of Sikhism took place in a period when India passed through a process of cultural transition. The concepts, signs and symbols of spiritual and material communication used in SGGS are evidence of the historical process of cultural fusion, social and political change which took place in that society. There is a considerable vocabulary reserved in Guru Granth Sahib from areas of religion, philosophy, mysticism, mythology, law and more common concerns of life from Persian, Arabic, Sanskrit, Punjabi and Braj languages.

THE SECTIONS

The structure of the voluminous scripture that is SGGS can be divided into three sections: pre-raga section, raga section and post-raga section.

THE PRE-RAGA SECTION

In the pre-raga section (pages 1 to 13), the pride of place is given to *Japji* (pages 1 to 8), a composition of Guru Nanak Dev Ji. *Japji*, a morning prayer, is one of the most famous spiritual compositions of Sikh scripture. Commencing with philosophically dense ideas, *Mool Mantar* (page 1) is considered the basis of Sikh theology. *Japji* comprises

38 Pauris or stanzas, and then the Salok which is the final verse.

After the *Jappi*, the hymn of evening prayer called *Rahiras* (pages 8 to 12) is scripted in two parts (*So Dar*, which comprises of 5 Shabads, and *So Purakh*, which comprises of 4 Shabads) and then the *Kirtan Sohila* (pages 12 to 13, which comprises of 5 Shabads), a group of hymns to be recited before retiring at night.

THE RAGA SECTION

The second section of SGGS is the raga section (pages 14 to 1353), ordered primarily on the basis of each composition's raga. Thus, the structural formation of the content matter of Guru Granth Sahib has wonderful aesthetic value. The following table is a list of all the *ragas* used in Guru Granth Sahib.

Raga	Page No	Raga	Page No
Sri Raga	14 to 93	Raga Gaund	859 to 875
Raga Majh	94 to 150	Raga Ramkali	876 to 974
Raga Gauri	151 to 346	Raga Nat Narayan	975 to 983
Raga Asa	347 to 488	Raga Mali Gaura	984 to 988
Raga Gujari	489 to 526	Raga Maru	889 to 1106
Raga Devgandhari	527 to 536	Raga Tukhari	1107 to 1117
Raga Bihagara	537 to 556	Raga Kedara	1118 to 1124
Raga Wadhans	557 to 594	Raga Bhairon	1125 to 1167
Raga Sorath	595 to 659	Raga Basant	1168 to 1196
Raga Dhanasari	660 to 695	Raga Sarang	1197 to 1253
Raga Jaitsari	696 to 710	Raga Malar	1254 to 1293
Raga Todi	711 to 718	Raga Kanara	1294 to 1318
Raga Bairari	719 to 720	Raga Kalyan	1319 to 1326
Raga Tilang	721 to 727	Raga Parbhathi	1327 to 1351
Raga Suhi	728 to 794	Raga Jaijaiwanti	1352 to 1353
Raga Bilaaval	795 to 858		

The structure of SGGS can be appreciated by grouping *Sabads* of the same theme together by *raga*, since each *raga* invokes certain feelings. The following table briefly explains the feelings invoked by each of the *ragas*.

Raga	Common Theme
Soohi	Being away from home. The soul being away from the House of Lord and the joy of meeting the true "husband" (ie. Akal Purakh)
Bilaaval	Beautification of soul, happiness

Gaund	Separation, union, surprise
Sri	Maya and detachment
Maajh	yearning to merge with Lord, giving up of negative values
Gauri	Principles, serious, thoughtfulness, composed
Aasa	Hope
Gujri	Prayer (Pooja)
Devghandhari	Merging with spouse, self - realization
Bihaagra	Yearning due to separation of soul and happiness due to meeting the Lord
Sorath	Merits of God
Dhanasari	Mixed theme
Jaitsree	Stability
Todi	Maya, separation
Bairagi	motivation to sing praises of Lord
Tilang	Sadness, beautification
Raamkali	To give up the life of a wandering Jogi
Nat Narayan	Joy of meeting the Lord
Maali Gaura	Happiness
Maaru	Bravery, profound philosophy
Tukhari	Separation and union with Lord
Kedara	Love
Bhairav	Man's state of hell
Basant	Happiness
Sarang	Thirst to meet God
Malaar	State of separated and united soul
Jaijawanti	Vairaag (Detachment)
Kalyaan	Bhakti (Prayer) Ras
Vadhans	Vairaag (Detachment)
Parbhatti	Bhakti (Prayer)
Kaanra	Bhakti (Prayer)

The use of *ragas* as invoking certain feelings increases the delivery power of *Sabad*, as the *raga* complements the message of the *Kirtan*. "Among all *ragas*, that one is sublime, O Siblings of Destiny, by which God comes to abide in the mind." Thus, only the *Sabad's* prescribed *raga* creates the correct atmosphere for which the *Kirtan* must be sung.

Another interesting aspect of *ragas* and *Gurbani* classification is understood by studying daily time-cycles. A *raga* has a preferred timing

associated with it. The timings of ragas also complement the changes in human moods and heart during a twenty-four hour time cycle.

Time Period	Raga
6 AM - 9 AM:	Bhairaagi, Devgandhari
9 AM - 12 PM:	Saarang, Suhi, Bilaaval, Gujri, Gond, Todi
12 PM - 3 PM:	Vadhans, Maru, Dhanasari
3 PM - 6 PM:	Maanjh, Gauri, Tilang, Tukhari
6 PM - 9 PM:	Sri, Basant, Maali Gaura, Jaitsree, Kedara, Kalyaan
9 PM - 12 AM:	Bihaagra, Nat Narayan, Sorath, Malaar, Kaanra, Jaijawanti
12 AM - 3 AM:	No Raags from Guru Granth Sahib
3 AM - 6 AM:	Aasa, Raamkali, Bhairav, Parbhathi

Some *ragas* are also advised to be sung in certain seasons. For example, Basant raga can be sung at any time in Basant (spring) season. Shabads with the theme of happiness are clustered under this raga in Guru Granth Sahib. Also, *Malaar raga* can be sung at any time in the rainy season. Shabads with the theme of separation are clustered under this raga in Guru Granth Sahib.

After their *ragas*, the compilations in SGGS are arranged on their metre: *Sabads*, such as *Chaupadas* (quatrains) and *Ashtpadis* (octets), followed by *Chhants* (six line lyrics), then *Vars* (long narrative compositions) and, finally, poems of Bhagats.

Within each metre, the compositions are further ordered upon the basis of the author. After the Gurus' compositions (the Gurus' compositions are arranged in order of their succession of Guruship and with the term *Mahalla* or Master), the compositions of the Bhagats are ordered with Kabir being given the principle place. The names of the Bhagats and saints are given with their compositions.

The final ordering is based upon the *Ghars* of the Shabads. There are 17 *Ghars* (*Taals* or beats), from *Ghar 1 (Dadra)* to *Ghar 17 (Chrchari)*.

The following table is a list of the Ghars in Guru Granth Sahib.

Ghar Name	Ghar No	Taalis and Maatraas
Dadra Taal	Ghar 1	There are 1 Taalis and the Beat has 6 Maatraas
Rupak Taal	Ghar 2	There are 2 Taalis and the Beat has 7 Maatraas
Teen Taal	Ghar 3	There are 3 Taalis and the Beat has 16 Maatraas
Chaar Taal	Ghar 4	There are 4 Taalis and the Beat has 12 Maatraas
Punj Taal	Ghar 5	There are 5 Taalis and the Beat has 15 Maatraas
Khut Taal	Ghar 6	There are 6 Taalis and the Beat has 18 Maatraas

Mut Taal	Ghar 7	There are 7 Taalis and the Beat has 21 Maatraas
Asht Mangal Taal	Ghar 8	There are 8 Taalis and the Beat has 22 Maatraas
Mohini Taal	Ghar 9	There are 9 Taalis and the Beat has 23 Maatraas
Braham Taal	Ghar 10	There are 10 Taalis and the Beat has 28 Maatraas
Rudra Taal	Ghar 11	There are 11 Taalis and the Beat has 32 Maatraas
Vishnu Taal	Ghar 12	There are 12 Taalis and the Beat has 36 Maatraas
Muchkund Taal	Ghar 13	There are 13 Taalis and the Beat has 34 Maatraas
Mahashani Taal	Ghar 14	There are 14 Taalis and the Beat has 42 Maatraas
Mishr Baran Taal	Ghar 15	There are 15 Taalis and the Beat has 47 Maatraas
Kul Taal	Ghar 16	There are 16 Taalis and the Beat has 42 Maatraas
Chrchari Taal	Ghar 17	There are 17 Taalis and the Beat has 40 Maatraas

THE POST-RAGA SECTION

The post-raga section (pages 1353 to 1430) contains the Saloks, Swayyes and other compositions. At the close (page 1429) is the *Mundavani* (seal) to mark the end of Guru Granth Sahib, so that no spurious compositions can thereafter be added, followed by a Guru Arjun Dev Ji's thanks-giving Salok for the successful completion of the great task by Divine grace. At the end of the post-raga section is the Ragamala (pages 1429 to 1430) which contains a catalogue of most of the ragas used in SGGS.

THE RAHAU (PAUSE)

Within the solid yet structured constitution of SGGS lays many *Shabads*, which contain the *Rahau* within them. The *Rahau* is a very important part of the structure of each, individual *Shabad* because the meaning of the *Rahau* is the main theme of the *Shabad* or the *Gurmat Vichar* ("the right thought").

A few important definitions in Kirtan are required before analysing the implications of the *Rahau*.

Aasthai (or Chorus) – one line that is repeated.

Antra (or Verse) – lines that are changed after recitation of the *Aasthai*.

The purpose of Kirtan is to deliver the Gurus' message sweetly to the listener. As *Rahau* has the central theme of the *Shabad* and contains the spiritual message it is used as an *Aasthai*. Without correct emphasis on the *Rahau* line and appropriate recognition of its meaning, the true message of the *Shabad* cannot be comprehended. The other lines in the *Shabad* are used to extrapolate the contents of the central

theme given in the line of *Rahau*.

The following example was taken from an essay submitted to the British Organisation of Sikh Students and illustrates the importance of the *Rahau*. The Shabad “*Mere Man Eikas Sio Chit Laaye/ Eikas Bin Sabh Dhund Hai/ Sabh Mithiya Moh Maye*” is sometimes sung with an Antra line “*Lakh Khushian Patshahiyaan / Jey Satgur Nadar Karey*” in place of the *Aasthai* (or *Rahau* line).

The *Rahau* line roughly translates to “All happiness is achieved only by Thy Grace. The precious gift of this human life becomes fruitful when one chants the True Word. One who has such destiny written on his forehead enters the Mansion of the Lord’s Presence through the Guru.”

The other line translates to “Hundreds of thousands of princely pleasures are yours to enjoy if the True Guru bestows a Glance of Grace. If God bestows the Name of the Lord, even for a moment, my mind and body are soothed. Those who have such pre-ordained destiny hold tight to the Feet of the True Guru.”

When the incorrect line is used as the *Rahau*, the meaning of the Shabad becomes that we seek thousands of pleasures from our Guru, and only then will we strive towards freeing our minds of attachment/*Maya*.

The intended message is that we need to give up attachment to *Maya* and emotional entanglements and, that if we succeed, then thousands of pleasures will be attained only if God’s Grace falls upon us.

This example accurately depicts the abrupt change in deliverability of the message to our mind from the incorrect interpretation (we hope for blessings, and then make an effort to rid ourselves of *Maya*) to the correct interpretation (we make an effort and then we hope for blessings).

CONCLUSION

SGGS is a spiritual key communicated in the form of *Bani*, containing a message of love, faith, truth and justice. *Bani* is held in great veneration by the Sikhs as recognised by the line “*Bani* is the guru, and the guru is *Bani*.” Furthermore, SGGS is not simply a text touting truth, but also embodies the ongoing spirit of the Guruship, as recognised in Ardaas: “*Agya Bhaee Akal Ki Tabhay Chalaiyo Panth / Sab Sikhian Ko Hukam Hai Guru Manyo Granth.*” In fact, it has been

rightly asserted throughout the ages that “the *Shabad* as revealed by the Guru is the only authentic portrait of the Guru.” It is only fitting that for the Eternal Guru, the structure is also eternal.

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