

When “Unheard Sound” (Re)Sounds:
Affective Listening, Ethical Affects, and Embodied Experience in Sikh Sabad Kīrtan

By
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Abstract

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In Sikh religious practice, listening to sung sacred poetry (*sabad kīrtan*) is the chief means of worship and a central part of everyday life for Sikhs around the world. While it is the sacred-text (*sabad*) that is held as primary and inviolable, and music is regarded as secondary and flexible, it is the musical rendering of *sabad* that is the most widely practiced worship activity. In this dissertation I explore the combined role of *sabad* and music in the lived experience of congregants participating in *sabad kīrtan*. Based on ethnographic research, I propose that *sabad kīrtan* listening is a primarily affective practice that also constitutes an epistemic site where ethicality is experienced as embodied sensation rather than as mentalist reasoning; that *sabad kīrtan* occasions are listening ecologies where affect becomes imbued with ethicality. My investigation explores how music heightens those ethically-imbued affective experiences—that is, the ways in which music works on the sensorium to deepen such sensations. I focus on three types of sensations that I found to be particularly intensified among congregants in different *kīrtan* occasions, namely feelings of affection, and of awe, and the experience of aura. I analyze the role of musical sound from the three main contemporary musical genres of *sabad kīrtan* – the most popular “light” genre, the fast growing AKJ (Akhand Kīrtani Jatha) genre, and the historical, in revival, “classical” genre. Thus, highlighting the contributions of diverse musical means in rich experiences among congregants, I critique the objectification of musical sound in recent scholarship on *sabad kīrtan*, and the binarized authenticity discourses among some Sikh musicians as well as scholars focused on the classical genre. I argue that the multifaceted affective work of musical sound is contextual even within a tradition, i.e., in its different musical sub-collectivities. Shifting the focus from musicians to listeners, I draw attention to the crucial interpretive work of reception in the representation of traditions and assessment of change over time, proposing what I term “multiple authenticities in motion.”

To my mother

Contents

Contents	ii
List of Figures	iv
Acknowledgments	vi
Chapter One: Introduction	1
Listening to Sabad	3
Listening Contexts	4
Diverse Musical Genres and Styles of Sabad Kīrtan	5
Field Site	16
Body-sensorial Ethnography	17
Analytical Framework and Perspectives	
Affective Listening	18
Listening to “Unheard Sound”	21
Ethical Affects	23
Relaxed Attentiveness	27
An Affective Ecology	28
Sensory Experiences	
Awe, Aura, Affection	33
The Taste in the Body	35
Making Time	37
Scope of Study	39
Chapter Outline	40
Chapter Two: Time vistas: ‘Awe’-some Technologies of the Light Genre	43
Awe as Ethical Affect	43
Awe, Ethics, Temporality in Cognitive Studies	45
Awe, Ethics, Temporality in Sabad Kīrtan	47
Oneness in the Multiple	59
Time Vistas of Awe	60
Conclusions	61
Chapter Three: Ethical Sensations: Affective Attunements in the AKJ Genre	63
The AKJ (Akhand Kīrtani Jatha) and its Marked Affection for the Guru	63
AKJ Kīrtan	66
Sounding the Divine	73
Affective Attunements, Ethical sensations	80
Dynamic Affects, Dynamic Attending	82
Conclusions	85

Chapter Four: (Spell)Bound by Bandish: Embodiment in the Time of Aura, and Communities of Gurmat Sangīt	86
The Aura of Gurmat Sangīt	86
Aura and Access	87
The Aura in the Musicology in Guru Granth Sahib	88
Musical Performance of Aura	94
Body-sensorial Musical Knowledge, the Social Sensorial, and Sensorial Social	99
The Sensorial in Language	111
The Body-sensorial in Gurmat Sangīt versus North Indian Classical Music	112
Conclusions	113
Chapter Five: Multiple Authenticities in Motion: Styles and Stances in Sikh Sabad Kīrtan	115
Musical Diversity in Practice and Theory	116
The “Classical” Genre and its Others	118
Multiple Authenticities	122
Authenticity as Stance	126
Conclusions	128
Concluding Thoughts	129
Bibliography	132
Appendix A: Rāg, rāg-variants and ghar number designations in the Guru Granth Sahib	152
Appendix B: Scholarship on Sikh Sabad Kīrtan	154

List of Figures

- 1.1 The Guru Granth Sahib
- 1.2 Gurdwāra San Jose, California, USA
- 1.3a Main Hall, Gurdwāra San Jose, California, USA
- 1.3b Bowing to the Guru Granth Sahib
- 1.4 Ensemble in the light genre, Bhai Harjinder Singh Srinagar Wale
- 1.5 Vājā (harmonium)
- 1.6 Tabla
- 1.7 AKJ ensemble with kartāl in the foreground and congregation in the background
- 1.8 Tānpura
- 1.9 Instruments historically used in sabad kīrtan, now increasingly adopted in the classical genre (rabāb, saranda, dilruba, tāus, jori, mridang)
- 1.10 Features of the three main musical genres of sabad kīrtan
- 1.11 Typical contemporary sabad performance structure in the three main musical genres of sabad kīrtan
- 1.12 Dholaki, kartāl and chhainé
- 1.13 The Sikh Khanda
- 1.14 The Guru Granth Sahib on pedestal, with attendant
- 1.15 Parshād at Gurdwāra San Jose
- 1.16 Dhādi ensemble of Bhai Lakhwinder Singh Johal
- 2.1 Awe, temporality and ethicality in cognitive studies
- 2.2 Awe, temporality and ethicality in Sikh sabad kīrtan
- 2.3 Rhythmic layers in jhaptāl
- 2.4 Wave representation of jhaptāl
- 2.5 Sant Anoop Singh's ensemble at Gurdwara San Jose, California
- 2.6 Langar at a gurdwāra in Delhi
- 3.1 Articles of Faith (Panj Kakkār – Five Ks)
- 3.2 Amrit Sanchār
- 3.3 Bhai Randhir Singh (1878-1961)
- 3.4 AKJ ensemble and congregation, led by Amanpreet Kaur
- 3.5 Congregation, AKJ samāgam
- 3.6 AKJ ensemble and congregation including kartāl player
- 3.7 Chorus melody of “Mat Bistras Re Man”
- 3.8 A phrase diminution in Chorus Line 1
- 3.9 Further phrase diminution
- 3.10 Wāheguru chant, with open hand tabla bāyān strokes
- 3.11 Nagāra drums
- 3.12 Tabla detail
- 3.13 Ethical affect, AKJ samāgam
- 3.14 Langar at Gurdwāra Guru Nanak Nishkam Seva Jatha, Birmingham, UK
- 3.15 Dynamic attending in AKJ kīrtan

- 4.1 Broad layout of sabads in Guru Granth Sahib
- 4.2 Poetic/musical forms in rāg sections in Guru Granth Sahib
- 4.3 Poetic/musical forms, authors, and ghar-number designations in the Sīrirāg section in the Guru Granth Sahib
- 4.4 Rabāb belonging to Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708)
- 4.5 Gurmat Sangīt Ensemble led by musician-scholar Dr. Nivedita Singh (on tānpura)
- 4.6 Gurmat Sangīt ensemble led by rāgi Bhai Balbir Singh (elder on vājā)
- 4.7 Pakar and mukh ang in pedagogical material in the Bay Area
- 4.8 11th generation rāgi Bhai Avtar Singh and ensemble including his son Bhai Kultar Singh with author at podium
- 4.9 Melodic structure of Rāg Kedāra
- 4.10 Chorus of “Sarni Ayo” in Rāg Kedāra, Punjtāl
- 4.11 Chorus line 1 of “Sarni Ayo” in Rāg Kedāra, Tīntāl
- 4.12 Three subtle variations in pakar in first chorus line of sabad “Har Gun Gavoh” in Rāg Kedāra
- 5.1 11th generation rāgi Bhai Gurcharan Singh, with author

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Chapter 1 Introduction

In Sikh religious practice, listening to sung sacred poetry (*sabad kīrtan*) is the chief means of worship and a central part of everyday life for Sikhs around the world. While it is the sacred-text (*sabad*) that is held as primary and inviolable, and music is regarded as secondary and flexible, it is the musical rendering of *sabad* that is the most widely practiced worship activity. In this dissertation I explore the combined role of *sabad* and music in the lived experience of congregants participating in *sabad kīrtan*. Based on ethnographic research, I propose that *sabad kīrtan* listening is a primarily affective practice that also constitutes an epistemic site where ethicality is experienced as embodied sensation rather than as mentalist reasoning; that *sabad kīrtan* occasions are listening ecologies where affect becomes imbued with ethicality. My investigation explores how music heightens those ethically-imbued affective experiences—that is, the ways in which music works on the sensorium to deepen such sensations. I focus on three types of sensations that I found to be particularly intensified among congregants in different *kīrtan* occasions, namely feelings of affection, and of awe, and the experience of aura. I analyze the role of musical sound from the three main contemporary musical genres of *sabad kīrtan* – the most popular “light” genre, the fast growing AKJ (Akhand Kīrtani Jatha) genre, and the historical, in revival, “classical” genre. Thus, highlighting the contributions of diverse musical means in rich experiences among congregants, I critique the objectification of musical sound in recent scholarship on *sabad kīrtan*, and the binarized authenticity discourses among some Sikh musicians as well as scholars focused on the classical genre. I argue that the multifaceted affective work of musical sound is contextual even within a tradition, i.e., in its different musical sub-collectivities. Shifting the focus from musicians to listeners, I draw attention to the crucial interpretive work of reception in the representation of traditions and assessment of change over time.

In this introductory chapter I first discuss the importance of listening in Sikh practice and provide comparative descriptions of the three main musical genres of *sabad kīrtan*. Then I layout the interconnected analytical perspectives that inform my analysis – listening as a multidimensional, synaesthetic perceptual phenomenon, the role of affect and affective transmission, the significance of intersubjectivity and ecology, and the epistemic potential in the experiential body.

Sabad kīrtan, and it can be said, Sikhism itself,¹ began with the songs of Guru Nanak (1469-1539), who traveled widely with his Muslim companion and *rabāb* (lute) accompanist, Bhai Mardana (1459 -1534), singing his songs of piety, ethics and social justice. Followed by nine successors (1504 – 1708), the ten Sikh Gurus (spiritual guides with the status of prophets) shaped Sikh ideation, practice, and music. They wrote their song-texts in *pothis* (manuscripts), and sang in diverse musical genres and styles, accompanied on stringed instruments and drums. They institutionalized liturgical singing, using initially *rabābīs* (Muslim hereditary musicians who

¹ For “A very short introduction,” see Nesbitt (2016).

sang while self-accompanying on the rabāb) and then also *rāgīs* (Sikh musicians, literally one who sings rāg), and instituted the singing of religious *vārs* (heroic ballads) by *dhādīs* (singers who sing with the hourglass shaped handheld drum, *dhadd*.)

In 1604, the fifth Guru, Arjan Dev (1563 – 1606) compiled, and canonized as sacred, about 5,800 song-texts into the *Adi Granth* (original book). In 1705, around 100 song-texts of the ninth Guru, Tegh Bahadar were added by the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh (1666-1708), who, in 1708, gave this updated compilation the institutional status of the henceforth only legitimate Guru (spiritual guide) of the Sikhs, the *Guru Granth Sahib* (respected spiritual-authority book; Figure 1.1).² His edict was that henceforward no human should be given the status of a Guru. It is only from the wisdom enshrined in the *Guru Granth Sahib* that Sikhs must derive their inspiration and understanding of a Sikh way of life.

Thus, *sabad* is revered as “*sabad-Guru*” or “*Gur-sabad*” (spiritual-enlightener-sacred-word) -- the divine word received and documented by the Gurus as sacred verse in the *Guru Granth Sahib*.³ When referring to these sacred verses, Sikhs use, as did my interlocutors, two other related terms -- *bāni* (literally, utterance) and *Gurbāni* (literally, Gurus’ utterance). *Bāni* is used to refer to the canonical sacred poetry in general and also to named textual compositions of *sabads* (such as *Jap* and *Sukhmani*). *Gurbāni* also refers to canonical sacred poetry in general. The term *gurbāni kīrtan* is used along with the term *sabad kīrtan*. Throughout this thesis, I will use the term *sabad* since it refers to one song unit, and *kīrtan* typically consists of singing individual *sabads* as song units.

Figure 1.1

The *Guru Granth Sahib* (primary scripture and song-text book)

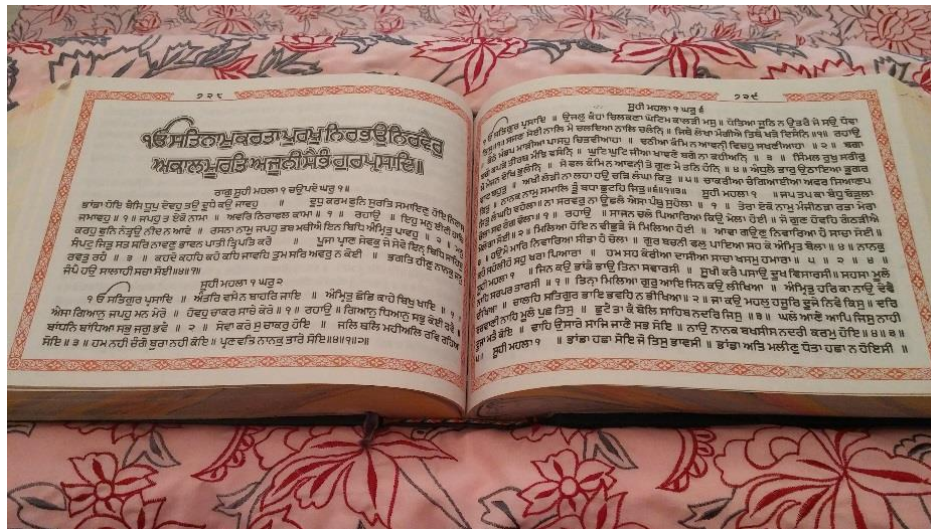


Photo by author; author’s copy (*bīr*, literally fixed) at her home

² Sahib is pronounced as sāhib. I will use the acronym GGS at times in this dissertation.

³ As stated in a *sabad* of the founding Guru, Nanak (1469-1539): “As the divine word comes to me, so I express it, O Lālo” (*Jaisee mai āvai khasm ki bāni, taisara karee gyān ve lālo*), GGS: 722.

Listening to Sabad

The practice of listening that is so crucial to the practice of Sikh worship is centered on the sabads comprising the Guru Granth Sahib. The key components of a liturgical service in a gurdwāra are the ceremonial opening reading of a sabad from the Guru Granth Sahib (*hukum vāk*, literally spoken order), recitation (*pāṭh*) of sabad compositions (*bāni*), sabad kīrtan, collective prayer (*ardās*) and the closing reading of a sabad from the Guru Granth Sahib. An additional optional activity is philosophical discourse on the opening sabad of the day, *bāni* in general or a historical topic. On occasions marking historical events, an important expressive practice is the singing of non-scriptural ballads (*dhādi vār*).

It is notable that while most of the almost 6,000 sabads in the Guru Granth Sahib (1604, 1705) are texts from six of the ten Sikh Gurus (1469-1708),⁴ it also includes a few hundred verses of sixteen poet-saints (*bhagats*) from Muslim and Hindu backgrounds, most prominently Kabir, Farid, Namdev and Ravidas. In addition to sabads in the Guru Granth Sahib, Sikh listening also includes sabads in the subordinate scriptures. These are collections of poetry of the tenth and last Guru, Gobind Singh, and those of two bards, Gurdas Bhalla (1551 - 1536) and Nand Lal Goya (1633-1713). All these scriptures contain only poetry, no prose.

Singing (*gāvāi*), listening (*sunāi*) and repetition (*japna*) are believed to be the most effective means for divine worship. They are emphasized in the very first sabad composition, Jap (literally, chant or repeat) in the Guru Granth Sahib. Considered to contain the gist of this scripture, its 38 verses, called *pauri* (step), lay out the steps to a spiritual path for realizing the divine (*wāheguru*). Verses 8-11 are on listening, its significance and benefits. For example, Verses 8 and 11 (GGS:3) state:

ਸੁਣਿਐ ਸਿਧ ਪੀਰ ਸੁਰਿ ਨਾਥ ॥	Listen, spiritual leaders, teachers, heroic warriors, yogic masters.
ਸੁਣਿਐ ਧਰਤਿ ਧਲ ਆਕਾਸ ॥	Listen to the earth, its foundation, the atmosphere.
ਸੁਣਿਐ ਦੀਪ ਲੋਅ ਪਾਤਾਲ ॥	Listen to the oceans, the worlds, the subterranea.
ਸੁਣਿਐ ਪੇਹਿ ਨ ਸਕੈ ਕਾਲੁ ॥	Listening, fear (of time, death) departs.
ਨਾਨਕ ਭਗਤਾ ਸਦਾ ਵਿਗਾਸੁ ॥	Nanak, devotees are forever blossoming,
ਸੁਣਿਐ ਦੂਖ ਪਾਪ ਕਾ ਨਾਸੁ ॥੮॥	Listening, suffering and vices are destroyed. (8)
ਸੁਣਿਐ ਸਰਾ ਗੁਣਾ ਕੇ ਗਾਹ ॥	Listening, one dwells with virtues.
ਸੁਣਿਐ ਸੇਖ ਪੀਰ ਪਾਤਿਸਾਹ ॥	Listen, religious leaders, spiritual teachers, emperors.
ਸੁਣਿਐ ਅੰਧੇ ਪਾਵਹਿ ਰਾਹੁ ॥	Listening, the blind find the path.
ਸੁਣਿਐ ਹਾਥ ਹੋਵੈ ਅਸਗਾਹੁ ॥	Listening, the unreachable is grasped.
ਨਾਨਕ ਭਗਤਾ ਸਦਾ ਵਿਗਾਸੁ ॥	Nanak, devotees are forever blossoming,
ਸੁਣਿਐ ਦੂਖ ਪਾਪ ਕਾ ਨਾਸੁ ॥੧੧॥	Listening, suffering and vices are destroyed. (11)

⁴ All of whom used the pen name of the first Guru, Nanak, in recognition of continuity of spirit. The authorship of each sabad is however stated in sabad headings as discussed in Chapter 4.

Jap is chanted as part of the daily morning ritual in worship services and at home by many Sikhs. Thus, as devotees are engaged in the process of listening to sabads in various ways, the sabad themes themselves reinforce the importance of listening.

It is important to point out here that listening to kīrtan involves responsorial singing. The extent of this varies depending on the musical genre used. Some genres are fundamentally call and response. Listening to kīrtan can thus be said to approximate “musicking” (Small 1998). I will use this expanded notion of listening throughout, since this is how the term is understood in practice. In everyday speech in Punjabi, the language of most Sikhs, kīrtan is something one does (*karna*) and listens to (*sunana*). When the singing is being clearly led by a singer/ensemble, then the singer/ensemble is referred to as doing the kīrtan, and the congregation is said to be listening, even if the singing is highly participatory. When it is only group singing, as in a processional, then the congregation (*sangat*) is referred to as doing the kīrtan. Congregants go to listen to kīrtan, expecting to participate in responsorial singing.

Listening Contexts

The primary worship and listening context of sabad kīrtan is the *gurdwāra* – literally, a gateway to the Guru Granth Sahib, and through it to the ten Gurus, and ultimately to the divine guide, *wāheguru* (wondrous Guru) (Figure 1.2). In the main sanctuary of the *gurdwāra* called the Guru’s *darbār*, i.e. the Guru’s court, the Guru Granth Sahib is placed center stage on a raised pedestal and is the presiding entity (Figure 1.3a). The musicians typically sit on a side-stage. The congregation sits on the floor facing the Guru Granth Sahib. As people enter the sanctuary, they walk down the center aisle and bow before the Guru Granth Sahib before sitting down (Figure 1.3b).

Figure 1.2
Gurdwāra San Jose, California, USA



Image from Gurdwāra San Jose Facebook

Figure 1.3a
Main Hall, Gurdwāra San Jose, California, USA



Image from Gurdwāra San Jose Facebook

Figure 1.3 b
Bowling to the Guru Granth Sahib



Photo by author

Kīrtan listening occasions are organized at private homes too, to celebrate a life cycle event or host a special touring ensemble. A room is cleared and cleaned, and set up as a Guru's darbār, again with the Guru Granth Sahib presiding, and musicians seated on the side.

Sabad kīrtan audition also takes the form of everyday listening to recordings in casual settings -- at home, in the car, while working out. For many Sikhs, listening to kīrtan is the only religious activity they practice. It would be fair to say that listening to sabad kīrtan is an integral part of the fabric of Sikh life.

My project focuses on kīrtan audition in congregational settings at a gurdwāra or at a home, though of course, the experience of participants is intertextually related to their listening to recordings of kīrtan in non-congregational settings, and also to pāthh and kathā.

Diverse Musical Genres and Styles of Sabad Kīrtan

My investigation is complicated by the fact that sabad kīrtan is sung and enjoyed in a variety of musical genres and styles, elite and popular, old and contemporary. Sabad kīrtan is sung not only in multiple but changing musical genres and styles which I describe and discuss briefly below to show that musical diversity and innovation are fundamental to Sikh kīrtan practice. The analyses in Chapters 2, 3 and 4 foreground the subjectivity of musical sound, importantly, even within a given tradition. In Chapter 5, I show how this musical diversity and subjectivity connect with Sikh ideation, and enable multiple and dynamic approaches to musical authenticity.

Here it is useful to explain my use of the terms musical genre and style. Among Sikh practitioners and participants the word used for different types of kīrtan is style, either the English word or *shaili* (style) or *dhang* (manner). I am using the term genre to indicate that certain styles are part of a larger named category. My aim is to use the terms in a way that consistently captures an organizational scheme in which each identifiable musical genre encompasses any number of identifiable musical styles. Thus, for example, in my usage the classical musical genre of sabad kīrtan includes *dhrupad*, *khyāl* and *thumri* styles. In the study of Indian art music, each of these has been identified as a genre by other scholars (e.g., Wade 2004 | 1987). My usage has no conceptual contradiction with that. It is rather a different order of classification that works for the Sikh sabad kīrtan practice. It also indexes an important difference that kīrtan is not a performance of dhrupad, khyāl or thumri idioms, but uses them with different performance structures and to different purpose than the purposes and structures of art music. It is important to note also that even though the labels in use for different categories (what I am calling genres) of sabad kīrtan are based on key identifiable attributes (such as rāg-based, or call-and-response), a strict musical typology is not possible for sabad kīrtan since many musical characteristics run across the categories and are variably used. This in itself indicates musical diversity as a fundamental feature of sabad kīrtan. Still, certain typical key distinctive musical characteristics can be identified, and some of these will be the

basis of my analyses in Chapters 2, 3 and 4. At the same time, I will argue against binarized and static conceptualizations of authenticity in Chapter 5.

Kīrtan performances typically occur either as part of the daily liturgy in gurdwāras or as stand-alone events at gurdwāras or private homes. The length of each performance varies according to programming needs, with a variable number of sabads performed. When the performance is an individual event or the end of a liturgical session, it is customary to close the singing with six verses from the sabad composition Anand (Bliss).

Kīrtan is typically sung with the accompaniment of one or more melodic instruments and drums. The typical contemporary professional ensemble (*jattha*) has three musicians, with two singers (*rāgis*) self-accompanying on *vājās* (*harmoniums*, small portable box-shaped organs with hand pumped bellows at the back) and a drummer on *tabla* (pair of hand-played drums) (Figures 1.4 – 1.6). In accordance with the guideline in sabads of serenity and equipoise (*sahaj*; discussed below), clapping or dancing to sabad kīrtan, as well as large movements of possession and trance, are not considered appropriate, though the clapping of kartāl (literally, hand clapper; a wooden shaker with metal jingles; Figures 1.7 and 1.12) is typical in the more participatory genres (described below).

Figure 1.4

Ensemble in the light genre, led by Bhai Harjinder Singh Srinagar Wale, with vājās and tabla
[He is the most well-known and listened to rāgi of the last several decades. Image shows his initial ensemble with his brother Bhai Maninder Singh on vājā and Bhai Harnam Singh on tabla.]



Image from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UMbDnSStt1M>
(from video added by Shabad Gurbani)

Figure 1.5
Vājā (harmonium) [with bellows open]



Photo by author; author's instrument

Figure 1.6
Tabla⁵



Photo by author; author's instrument

A sabad is typically sung in chorus-verse-chorus form, following the scriptural text, as summarized in the first column in Figure 1.11. Each line of the sabad is typically sung twice and in most styles, the congregation is encouraged to sing along with the repetition. In professional styles, solo improvisation is used to further emphasize the sabad text, and singing is interspersed with complementary melodic material on the accompanying melodic instrument. Tabla accompaniment is active, with variations in rhythmic structure and tempo, and executions of accentuating patterns that highlight the semantic and affective aspects of sabads.

⁵ See also Figure 3.12.

The most widely practiced contemporary performance genre is the light genre. It is what one is most likely to hear in a gurdwāra, and dominates recorded media as well. It includes popular Indian styles such as *ghazal*, *gīt*, and *filmi gīt*.⁶ These styles are modal though not in (recognized) *rāgs* (melodic modes of the Indian [classical] musical system). They use short *tāls* (metric cycles) such as the 8-beat *keharwa*, and 6-beat *dādra*.⁷ Kīrtan performance in this genre includes many variations in the performance structure. One such particular style that uses a combination of rhythmic forms is analyzed in Chapter 2 where I show how this heightens affect through its effect on temporal experience. The light genre has seen continuous stylistic innovations over the years. For example, there has been a blossoming of varieties and virtuosity in melodic and rhythmic improvisation by singers and instrumentalists alike. A detailed study of this would be a fruitful topic for further research.

Another significant musical genre of *sabad kīrtan* is the AKJ; AKJ stands for Akhand Kīrtani Jatha, a distinct community of Sikhs and the genre specific to them. It is a highly participatory genre sung in call and response. The musical styles used draw mainly from the light genre, but its performance structure is most distinct. The primacy of the call and response format means that solo improvisations are minimal. The performance typically starts in a slower tempo than the light genre, and also intensifies to a faster tempo.⁸ In this particular attribute there is a greater likeness to the *khyāl* idiom of classical music. However the intensification occurs gradually in cycles of ebb and flow in tempo, volume and rhythmic intensity. The ensemble itself generally consists of one singer self-accompanying on a *vājā* and a *tabla* drummer, but becomes extended via active participation from surrounding congregation members, some of whom also play *kartāl* that are typical to this genre (Figure 1.7).⁹ This genre, and its particular use of timbre in conjunction with volume and pulse in heightening affective intensity, is discussed in Chapter 3.

⁶ Gīt is a general term for songs, but in this context is used to index folksong styles. *Filmi gīt* are songs from Indian films, dominated by Bollywood. These form the main popular music that Indians listen to. *Ghazals* are love poetry sung in light-classical styles. Contemporary melodies make relatively frequent use of dissonant notes (*vivādi*) for added affect.

⁷ See, e.g., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BtalwqcSyX8>.

⁸ The likeness of this genre to Sufi *qawwālī* is recognized by many practitioners and observers.

⁹ See, e.g., https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6_oiwylkZ28.

Figure 1.7
AKJ ensemble with kartāl in the foreground and congregation in the background



Image from akj.org

The classical musical genre of *sabad kīrtan* is considered the historical genre of *sabad kīrtan*. It currently includes the *dhrupad*, *khyaḷ* and *thumri* idioms, with *rāg*-based melodies and longer *tāls* such as the 12-beat *chautāl* and *iktāl*, and the 16-beat *tintāl*.¹⁰ The classical musical genre of *kīrtan* has seen a strong revival in the last two to three decades, gaining currency under the label *gurmat sangīt*. While most contemporary ensembles are the same as in the light genre, many have adopted instruments with historical importance, namely lutes such as *rabāb*, *saranda*, *tāūs* and *dilruba* (Figures 1.9 and 4.5 - 4.7), in addition to or instead of the *vājā*. Some also use historical drums, the *jori* (which is distinct from the more familiar *tabla*; Figure 1.9). Most use the drone, *tānpura* (Figure 1.8) instead of, or along with, the *vājā*. This genre and the particular role of its musical structural elements in heightening affect is discussed in Chapter 4.

¹⁰ See, e.g., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7jvLTRAG2fs>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3jrN2oymNyw> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5u63zAxsHB8>.

Figure 1.8

Tānpura and electronic tānpura

[The tānpura is a four- to six-string, fretless plucked lute for continuously playing two or three reference notes. The electronic tānpura is commonly used now.]



Photos by author; author's instruments; images not to scale.

Figure 1.9

Instruments historically used in sabad kīrtan, now increasingly adopted in the classical genre

(The rabāb is a three- to six-string, fretless plucked lute; the saranda is a short-necked bowed lute with three played strings; the dilruba is a bowed fretted lute with four main strings; the tāus is a bowed fretted lute with a peacock-shaped body and four main strings. Jori is a tabla-like pair of cylindrical wooden drums with fresh dough on its bass drum-head instead of permanent ink paste; mridang is a double-headed barrel drum.) [Images not to scale]

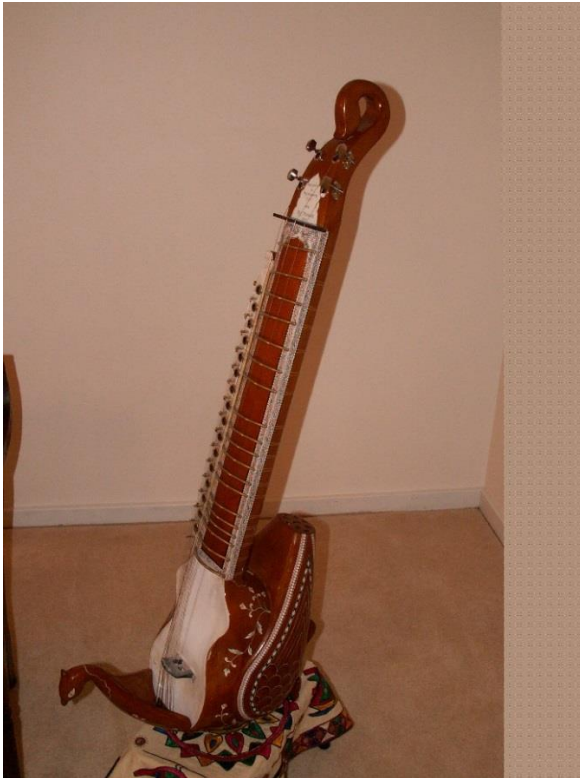
Rabāb, saranda and dilruba



Images from

http://webstarpatiala.com/gurmat_online_course_latest/coursesweb/music_instrument_gs.html

Tāus and jori



Bhai Avtar Singh's tāus



Bhai Swaran Singh's jori (with metal bass drum)

Photos by author, August 5, 2005

Mridang



Image from
http://webstarpatiala.com/gurmat_online_course_latest/coursesweb/music_instrument_gs.html

The tables in Figures 1.10 and 1.11 are comparison charts of the three main musical genres in terms of their ensembles, instruments, key musical features, and basic performance structure. These should be understood with the caveat that there is no strict standardization, and in fact tremendous variation in these features.

Figure 1.10

Features of the three main musical genres of sabad kīrtan

Musical genre of sabad kīrtan	Light (most popular)	AKJ (increasingly popular)	Classical Or Gurmat Sangīt (historical, in revival)
Melodic material	Modal but not rāg-based	Modal but not rāg-based	Rāg-based
Metric organization	Short tāls	Short tāls	Longer tāls
Instruments	Vājā, tabla; Optional: kartāl, chhaine	Vājā, tabla, kartāl, chhaine	Variable Melodic: vājā (mostly) and/or dilruba, rabab, taus, saranda; Drum: tabla (mostly), or jori; Pitch referent: tānpura (mostly), surmandal
Ensemble	2 singers self- accompanying on vājās, 1 tabla player	1 singer self- accompanying on vājā, 1 tabla player	Variable Mostly: 2 singers self- accompanying on vājās, 1 tabla player, 1 electronic tānpura box Variations: additional accompanists on tānpura and/or stringed melodic instruments, or one or both singers self- accompanying on tānpura and/or melodic instruments; Rarely: jori instead of tabla
Participatory singing	Optional, with repeated lines sung by ensemble	Call-and-response	Optional, with repeated lines sung by ensemble

Figure 1.11

Typical contemporary sabad performance structure in the three main musical genres of sabad kīrtan

Customary minimum in any genre/style	Light genre (most popular)	Akhand kīrtan genre (increasingly popular)	Classical genre (historical, in revival)
Optional prelude ¹¹	Metered chanting of divine name and/or Unmetered introduction of tonal field (<i>alāp</i>) ¹² using first chorus line, another sabad couplet, or “aa” sound	Metered chanting of divine name in call-and-response (this also occurs at various points during the performance; see Chapter 3) or unmetered introduction using another sabad couplet	Introduction of the rāg tonal field -- unmetered (<i>alāp</i>) or metered (see fn. 12) using one of more of the following: sabad heading (See Chapter 4), Core Verse, ¹³ first chorus line, another sabad couplet, or “aa” sound
Chorus	With optional <i>alāp</i> and/or motivic variation; tabla begins with a flourish; often plays in double time	Sung in call-and-response; optional motivic variations in repetitions; none or minimal <i>alāp</i> ; tabla begins with a flourish	With optional <i>alāp</i> and/or motivic-variation/rhythmic-play (<i>laikāri</i>) in rāg and tāl; tabla often plays an opening rhythmic composition
Optional instrumental interlude	Vājā interlude with complementary melodic material; if tabla began in single time, shifts to double time; tabla often executes variations in rhythmic pattern	Minimal vājā interlude or none	Instrumental interlude typically with repetition of chorus melody; may include <i>alāp</i> and/or motivic-variation/rhythmic-play (<i>laikāri</i>); tabla may play a composition
Verse 1	With optional <i>alāp</i> or motivic variation; vājā interlude with complementary melodic material; tabla may shift rhythmic pattern of tāl (see Chapter 2)	Sung in call-and-response; optional motivic variations in repetitions; none or minimal <i>alāp</i>	With optional <i>alāp</i> and/or motivic-variation/rhythmic-play (<i>laikāri</i>) in rāg and tāl; instrumental interlude typically with repetition of verse melody
Chorus	With optional <i>alāp</i> or motivic variation; tabla plays in double time; tabla often executes variations in rhythmic pattern	Sung in call-and-response; tabla plays in double time; motivic variations in repetitions; none or minimal <i>alāp</i>	With optional <i>alāp</i> and/or motivic-variation/rhythmic-play (<i>laikāri</i>) in rāg and tāl; tabla often plays a rhythmic composition; tabla might switch to double time
Verse 2, and so on ...		Gradual increase in tempo throughout	
Chorus	With optional <i>alāp</i> or motivic variation; tabla plays in double time	Sung in call-and-response; tabla plays in double time; motivic variations in repetitions; none or minimal <i>alāp</i>	With optional <i>alāp</i> and/or motivic-variation/rhythmic-play (<i>laikāri</i>) in rāg and tāl; tabla often plays a rhythmic composition

¹¹ In the older classical styles, a metered prelude before the first sabad in a session was a standard feature and consisted of an instrumental portion (*shān* -- honor) followed by a vocal (accompanied with instruments) part (*manglācharan* -- propitious offering). Variations of these, used in varying degrees, can be heard in all genres.

¹² *Alāp* is an unmetered elaboration of the melodic material of the explicit or implicit mode being played. For an explanation of the Indian music system, see Wade (2004 | 1987).

¹³ See the Mool Mantar (Core Verse) on p. 21.

Other recognized categories of kīrtan are processionsals such as *nagar kīrtan* (town processional)¹⁴ and *prabhāt pheri* (dawn rounds), *istri satsang* (women’s gathering), and *jotiyan de sabad* (simple tunes spanning about half the octave).¹⁵ These are often led by non-professionals and the drum used is a *dholaki* (small double-headed barrel-drum; Figure 1.12). Processionals include idiophones such as *chimta* (about three-foot long fire tongs with jingles), *kartāl* and *chhainé* (cymbals), and typically do not have melodic instruments.

Figure 1.12
Dholaki, kartāl and chhainé



Photo by author; author’s instruments

Musicians in the diaspora have also introduced new styles that draw from musics and instruments from their location, such as guitars and violins in the West, and even the didgeridoo in Australia. Some in the diaspora also sing with English text interpolated for the benefit of those for whom it is the first language.¹⁶

Musicians from the European-American Sikh community known as the 3HO (Happy, Healthy, Holy Organization) sing in styles that take from American popular and folk musics, using Western harmony and also “world music” styles with instrumentation from diverse cultures. Their presence in gurdwāras in the Bay Area has been minimal. Their gatherings occur in worship rooms in their community housing (*āshram*), and some of their liturgical practices are different from those in the gurdwāras.¹⁷

¹⁴ See Khurana (2011) for a diaspora analysis of the *nagar kīrtan* in Yuba City, California.

¹⁵ See also Mansukhani 1982.

¹⁶ See also Purewal 2013.

¹⁷ See also Khalsa 2012.

Recognition of this diversity of musical genres and styles and its effectiveness has led me to interrogate the issue of musical authenticity in *sabad kīrtan* practice (Chapter 5). That in turn led me to argue against binarized and static conceptualizations of authenticity based on objectification of musical sound that has been prevalent in the recent scholarship on *sabad kīrtan*; to argue against the analysis of musical features of *sabad kīrtan* in terms of sound detached from its ritual context.

Field Site

For the ethnographic investigation of affective listening to *sabad kīrtan*, I considered two possible field locations. One, in Punjab, India, where most Sikhs are located, and the other in the San Francisco Bay Area where I am located and which has a thriving *kīrtan* scene supported by its roughly 300,000 Sikh residents.¹⁸

In general, *sabad kīrtan* and its associated listening practices are as important in the diaspora as in India.¹⁹ Diasporic communities typically begin congregating in homes to recite and sing, and as the congregation enlarges, they move on to renting a space, and finally buying a building or constructing a *gurdwāra*. The Sikh concept of *seva* (service) encourages them to contribute funds and materials, and volunteer labor toward this purpose.

The majority of *kīrtan* practice in the diaspora is generally similar to that in India; this is certainly true of the Bay Area. A major reason for this is the strong diasporic ties to Punjab, and the immigration and circulation of musicians and media. Most *gurdwāras* who can afford it have a resident *rāgi* ensemble that is trained in India. Touring ensembles are common and much looked forward to by the congregation. *Gurdwāra* San Jose, for example, the largest *gurdwāra* in North America, has the resources for, and hosts for weeks at a time, visiting *rāgi* and *dhādi* ensembles as well as *kathā* performers.

A similar situation has been noted by other scholars for other diasporic locations too.²⁰ However, innovative styles have come up in the diaspora and continue to be explored with various degrees of success. The most successful has been Bhai Dya Singh of Australia who has a “world music” style ensemble with didgeridoo, violin and guitar, and interpolates short English translations of *sabad*-texts in his singing.

I chose the Greater San Francisco Bay Area as my field site. A major reason for this was the fact that I had a wide and deep network as a long term resident, amateur *kīrtan* singer and active community-service member in the area. Also crucial was the fact that the Bay Area has vibrant *kīrtan* congregational scenes in six *gurdwāras* as well as in private homes.²¹

Gurdwāra San Jose was a particularly suitable site for concentrated fieldwork (see Figures 1.2 and 1.3). It is a huge complex, serving a congregation estimated at around 15,000. On a typical Sunday around 5,000 congregants attend over the course of the day and evening. The main sanctuary has a chair-seating capacity of 2,585, and the *langar* hall, 980, which

¹⁸ Not counted as a separate category in the US Census. See <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/20/us/20bcintel.html> accessed 11.20.14

¹⁹ For example, O’Connell (2000) for Canada, Mann (2000) for the US, Hirvi (2010) for Finland, Townsend (2011) for Southern California, Jacobsen (2012) for Europe, and Khabra (2012) for UK and Singapore.

²⁰ See Li (2015) for Hong Kong and Austin, Texas, and the works cited in fn. 19.

²¹ There are *gurdwāras* in San Jose, Fremont, El Sobrante, Hayward, Milpitas, and Santa Clara.

translate to much larger floor-seating capacity. The gurdwāra is open daily from 3:30am to 9:30pm, longer on special occasions (such as the Gregorian Calendar New Year's Eve), and sometimes all night (such as for *raien sabāi* – all night kīrtan). Kīrtan, other programs, and *langar* (free community kitchen) run continuously on Sundays and special occasions, with shorter schedules on other days. Special occasions include marking historically significant events such as the Sikh New Year (April 14), birth and death anniversaries of the ten Gurus, and the anniversaries of the June 1984 attack on the Sikh holiest gurdwāra by the Indian army and of the October 1984 state sponsored anti-Sikh pogroms in India.²² At Gurdwāra San Jose, additional programs such as wedding and death ceremonies are conducted in a smaller sanctuary and are scheduled as requested by families and depending on availability. Weddings usually occur on Saturday mornings, and death ceremonies on Saturday afternoons. Though these are typically attended by invitees only, all programs in the gurdwāra sanctuaries are open to the public, as is the case in all gurdwāras. Kīrtan is an integral part of all these programs, and is sung in various genres and styles. People are free to walk in and out as it suits them. It is normal for people at the gurdwāra to sit and chat in the langar hall, wide hallways, courtyards and lawns. There are many quiet areas suitable for conversation and recording.

Body-sensorial ethnography

My choice of field site turned out well for my project. My initial interviews with people I knew closely and who trusted me and were therefore freely expressive, reiterated the significance of the experiential aspects of sabad kīrtan. As ethnomusicologist Harris Berger has emphasized, “People engage with texts to make them meaningful and must actively bring them into their lived experience. In other words, the meaning that scholars seek to study is *not* the product of texts; it is the product of *texts in experience*” (2009: ix).

Sitting closely in kīrtan occasions among friends who had very different musical tastes for kīrtan enabled me to hone my skills for sensing feelings and their transmission. It taught me to “listen” to the music and the interlocutors in different ways, and to perceive “audibility” in its somatic-kinesthetic dimensions. It made me aware of my location and participation in a sensory field of intersubjective flows of intensities.

I have chosen the phrase body-sensorial to foreground the composite embodied nature of the experiences of sabad kīrtan listening and participatory singing, and also their intersubjective and intertemporal constitution. The experiences are multisensorial, synaesthetic, affective, cognitive and somatic all at once, and they are engendered in an intersubjective setting. As anthropologist David Howes states, “Sensation is not just a matter of physiological response and personal experience. It is the most fundamental domain of cultural expression, the medium through which all the values and practices of society are enacted” (2006: XI). Kīrtan listening bodies are present and engaged, in what anthropologist Thomas Csordas has called “somatic modes of attention”—“culturally elaborated ways of attending to and with one's body in surroundings that include the embodied presence of others” (1993:138).

²² Which killed, within four days, thousands of Sikh citizens in Delhi and other parts of India in addition to rape of Sikh women and destruction of property of Sikhs on a massive scale, leading to a sharp surge in migration to the US, Canada and Europe. See Grewal 2007.

They are “about cultural patterning of bodily experience, and also about the intersubjective constitution of meaning through that experience” (140-41).

I have been amazed at the effects of the body-sensorial ethnography on my own experiences of participation in kīrtan in different musical genres. As someone raised on Indian classical music and trained from a very young age to sing sabad kīrtan in the classical genre, my tastes were rather limited. It is now simply delightful to be able to enjoy sabad kīrtan in the many musical genres and styles in which it is sung, and to partake in the variety of shared sensations in ways that I had not imagined. I think this expanded taste was also essential to ultimately understanding the affects in circulation in different kīrtan occasions and what my interlocutors were expressing in interviews and conversations. As ethnomusicologist Michelle Kisliuk has emphasized about field experience in performance ethnography, “we ourselves [become] fundamentally affected” (1997:43). Ultimately then, this is an ethnography of experience and empathy in many dimensions such as aesthetics, sentiments, history, memory and ethics.

Analytical Framework and Perspectives

Affective Listening

Scholarship on listening has recognized many different ways of listening, with various levels of attention and consciousness.²³ It has investigated listening as a complex phenomenon that is embodied, synaesthetic, situated and performative.²⁴ Edited volumes on listening and sound have offered a rich array of perspectives.²⁵ The seminal work of several scholars has inspired and provided insights for my analysis.

Anthropologist Steven Feld (1982) has perceptively explored the epistemological potential of listening in the Kaluli sonic ecology, and how sound, symbols, myth and metaphor come together as plurisensory modalities to provide meaning and ways of knowing the world. This knowledge is experiential knowledge, sensorial and bodily, and intersubjectively produced. Listening with the body as a mode of knowledge is central to my thesis and references to metaphors by interlocutors and in sabads will be an important part of the analysis. Thus, rather than seeing language and embodiment as separate modalities, my investigation will explore their interconnection -- language as an expression of the sensorial and, in turn, the sensorial pointing back to language.

Ethnomusicologist Judith Becker (2004:29) has analyzed the concept of “deep listening” as an active process that evokes intense emotional responses. Her analysis aims to move beyond narrow perceptual and cognitive approaches, utilizing emotion as a bridge between humanistic and scientific approaches. She explores both the cultural and the biological (neuro-chemical) determination of emotion, including the arousal of the autonomic nervous system. As

²³ For example, Rouget 1985, Silverman 1988, Bull 2000, deNora 2000, Hirschkind 2001, 2006, Smith 2001, Sterne 2003, Becker 2004, Thompson 2004, Kapchan 2009, 2013, Erlman 2010, Cavicchi 2011, Herbert 2011, and Kassabian 2013.

²⁴ For example, Feld 1982, Connor 1997, Schmidt 2000, Chion 1994, Hirschkind 2006, Nancy 2007|2002, and Gautier 2014.

²⁵ For example, Bull and Back 2003, Drobnick 2004, Erlman 2004, Smith 2004, Clarke 2005, Pinch and Bijsterveld 2012, Stern 2012, Born 2013, Thompson and Biddle 2013, Novak and Sakakeeny 2015.

she writes, “Deep listening, and trancing, as processes, are simultaneously physical *and* psychological, somatic *and* cognitive.” (emphases in original). She recognizes deep listening also as something that develops into an embodied inclination and disposition that she, drawing on sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1977), terms “habitus of listening” (71). The roles of affect and habitus are central to my investigation and my approach is also multidisciplinary, drawing insights from cognitive studies. However, I have chosen the term affective listening rather than “deep listening” because sabad kīrtan listening spans various levels of attention and as I will discuss below mostly occurs in the form of relaxed attention. As compared to Becker’s study of the highly intense experiences in trance, my project explores the subtle intensities that are mobilized in the kīrtan listening bodies.

Music perception scholar Eric Clarke (2005) has put forth an ecological model of listening perception, recognizing the importance of “mutualism,” the affordance between music listening and its environment. Based on the ecological perceptual theory proposed by James Gibson (1966; 1979), Clarke argues for the relevance of factors such as institutions, technologies, socio-cultural practices, emotions and ideologies. He argues against the information processing approach to musical perception as based on unrealistic hierarchical processing stages that are primarily mental reconstructions of the externally given musical structure, disconnected from any ecological function. He shows the limitations of claims of autonomy of art music through the idea of mutualism between listeners and their environment, and also the principle of adaptation in the ecological model. For him, perception of musical meaning occurs through the recognition of a whole host of sources that are specified in sound, i.e. all the ways that sounds specify the surrounding world.

The mutualism between listening and its ecological settings is a key foundation of my analysis. The subjectivity of listening perception is a particularly important basis of my argument for the effectiveness of diverse musical genres in sabad kīrtan, and against the objectivized representation of musical sound in much of the current scholarship on sabad kīrtan (see Appendix B for a discussion of this scholarship). It informs in particular my analysis of music structural elements in Chapter 4 on the classical musical genre of sabad kīrtan, and in Chapter 5 on multiple and dynamic musical authenticities in sabad kīrtan.

Of most direct bearing for my investigation of Sikh congregants’ listening experiences has been anthropologist Charles Hirschkind’s (2006) groundbreaking analysis of Islamic sermon audition in Cairo. His study brings together a number of analytical insights centrally relevant to my investigation. Arguing for a shift out of the European hierarchy of the senses, and also from thinking of listening as compartmentalized cognitive activity, Hirschkind explicates that listening engages the entire body, “the human sensorium in its entirety” (28). Further, he foregrounds the importance of relaxed attentiveness to sound. Listening, in Hirschkind’s conceptualization, is both attention to an acoustic event and contextualized “subterranean” practice that conditions the human sensorium through attunement and sedimentation. It is an embodied practice that builds sensorial memory and knowledge. Importantly, embodied listening is a process whereby affective intensities accumulate in the body. Drawing on cultural theorist Brian Massumi’s (2002) conceptualization of affect as subconscious emotional movements in the body, Hirschkind draws attention to the affective instincts, intensities and responses that get etched in the listeners’ bodies. Listening thus engenders dispositions and also action tendencies at visceral levels that are not necessarily tied to deliberate thought.

This approach to listening as embodied and affective is particularly useful for my analysis of the lived experience of sabad kīrtan for devotees. The typical account of my interlocutors of their listening was one of an immersive affective experience. Kīrtan practice does not draw on mentalist processes as the fundamental technique. Even though many sabads employ reasoning as a means of persuasion, and some musicians interpolate their (spoken) exegesis in their *performance*, the major emphasis is on affective immersion of congregants. For listening to be effective, it is considered important that the heart be engaged. Listening must be practiced with feeling, particularly love, affection and regard (*bhāo*), as expressed for example in the sabad, ਗਾਵੀਐ ਸੁਣੀਐ ਮਨਿ ਰਖੀਐ ਭਾਉ -- sing, listen, hold love in the heart and intention (GGS:2). Kīrtan performers typically preface their singing with an invitation to the congregants to listen (*sravan karo*) with love (*prem*) and devotion (*shardha*). Listeners' responsorial singing also contributes significantly to the embodied and affective capacities of listening, as I will describe in Chapter 3 for the most participatory musical genre of sabad kīrtan, the AKJ.

The body-sensorial nature of listening is emphasized in sabads through a rich palette of metaphors. As cognitive linguist George Lakoff and philosopher Mark Johnson have proposed in their conceptual metaphor theory (1980), bodily experience, which is the basis of knowledge, gets mapped onto the domain of linguistic expression. More recently ethnomusicologists Thomas Porcello, Louise Meintjes, Ana Maria Ochoa and David W. Samuels (2010) have argued for the recognition of the sensorial and social properties of language, and language as an embodied expressive practice.

Metaphors in sabads such as *bhaj* (vibrate), *dhun* (resonance), and *run jhunkar* (vibration) address the entire sensorium, and the somatic basis of the listening process. They point to analyses such as that by Friedner and Helmreich (2012), in the context of deaf studies, of sound as vibration in a material medium rather than just in the hearing ear. Listening in this sense occurs in a "sound body," "a material body that resonates (with) its environment, creating and conducting affect" (Kapchan 2015: 41). And it creates "sound knowledge," that is nondiscursive and affectively transmitted (42).

Listening to "Unheard Sound"

The most significant sound metaphor in sabads is *anhad*, literally, without limit, often understood as a metaphor for cosmic sound. It relates to the Sikh ontology of the divine word, sabad. Sabad is understood as revealed word (*dhur ki bāni*), and as the manifest form of limitless divine vibrations, *anhad*. Sabad is thus understood to make physically perceptible divine vibrations that are otherwise not heard.

But there is another significant aspect to this that bears foregrounding, and this has to do with ethicality. In Sikh conception the divine is not only infinite but replete with moral virtues, as shown for example, in the opening verse of the Guru Granth Sahib, popularly known as the Mool Mantar (Core Verse):

ੴ ਸਤਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਕਰਤਾ ਪੁਰਖੁ ਨਿਰਭਉ ਨਿਰਵੈਰੁ ਅਕਾਲ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਅਜੂਨੀ ਸੈਭੰ ਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ ॥

Oneness, from which all is manifest, truth, creative principle, fearless, without enmity, timeless, incondensable, uncaused, realized in grace through the Guru.

As another example, in ਸੋ ਦਰੁ (*So Dar*), the second named sabad composition in the Guru Granth Sahib which is part of the daily evening ritual, the divine is conceptualized in terms of munificence and largesse. The first two lines of this composition foreground that the divine is found in diversity:

ਸੋ ਦਰੁ ਤੇਰਾ ਕੇਹਾ ਸੋ ਘਰੁ ਕੇਹਾ ਜਿਤੁ ਬਹਿ ਸਰਬ ਸਮਾਲੇ ॥	Which is that door, that home, where you take care of all?
ਵਾਜੇ ਤੇਰੇ ਨਾਦ ਅਨੇਕ ਅਸੰਖਾ ਕੇਤੇ ਤੇਰੇ ਵਾਵਣਹਾਰੇ ॥	Diverse and countless are your sounds that play there, numerous your instruments.

Guru Granth Sahib: 8

In other words, divine vibration, *anhad*, is a metaphor for ethical potential. Sabads also directly link *anhad* to divine moral potentialities:

ਸਤੁ ਸੰਤੋਖੁ ਵਜਹਿ ਵਾਜੇ ਅਨਹਦਾ ਝੁਣਕਾਰੇ ॥	Truth and contentment sound, when boundless unheard sound vibrates.
ਸੁਣਿ ਭੈ ਬਿਨਾਸੇ ਸਗਲ ਨਾਨਕ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਪੁਰਖ ਕਰਣੈਹਾਰੇ ॥	Perceiving the divine, all fears dispel, Nanak.

Guru Granth Sahib: 781

The metaphors of *bhaj* (vibrate), *dhun* (resonance), and *run jhunkar* (vibration) are thus endowed with ethical connotations. The resonance of sabad in a body is a means of sounding and making material (in the Butlerian sense) divine ethical potentialities. It is a way of shaping “sonic bodies” (Henriques 2011) that are “‘knowing,’ knowledgeable and they ‘make sense’ (xvi) and “sound judgment” (xxix).

The ethicality is important because resonance can be a limiting factor that can become the basis for exclusion and othering. As sound studies scholar Veit Erlmann (2015) reminds us, “An account of something such as resonance must therefore situate itself in a kind of echo chamber together with other things, signs, discourses, institutions and practices” (181). Sabad and sabad *kīrtan* as resonance of and with *anhad* seek to partake of its limitless potentialities, diversity and inclusiveness. Sound in the form of sabad *kīrtan* then becomes a way of comprehending divine virtues, that is, ethical knowledge. The time spent listening to sabad *kīrtan* becomes a way of experiencing divine time, that is, a time of ethical potentialities.

This is not to say that Sikhs in general are shining examples of such potentialities (see also Scope of Study below). Rather it is to say that sabad *kīrtan* is a means of subterranean gradual intensification of such ethical orientation. And this many Sikhs I talked to recognize and verbalize in words such as, “it is a journey,” “it is a path.” One interviewee expressed for example, how over time listening has made him “stronger” in upholding his values (January 24, 2015).

Sounding *anhad* is also said to bring wellness, through sensations of peace, equanimity, and bliss:

ਸਾਂਤਿ ਸਹਜ ਆਨੰਦ ਨਾਮੁ ਜਪਿ ਵਾਜੇ ਅਨਹਦ ਤੂਰਾ ॥	Chanting the divine name, unheard sound resounds; peace, equanimity and bliss ensue.
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Guru Granth Sahib: 618

Thus, through the notion of anhad and the divine, vibration is linked to ethicality and wellness, and furthermore, through the social idea and practice of sādḥ sangat (virtuous company), to societal ethics and wellness.

By translating anhad as “unheard” sound in the title of this dissertation, my purpose is to foreground a dominant theme in the sabads and in Sikh discourse -- the inattention to ethical values caused by immersion in everyday mundane concerns, and the sounding of sabad kīrtan as re-sounding of divine moral virtues. Sabad kīrtan then is seen as both a subset of the boundless unheard sound, and a means of accessing it by sounding it and embodying it as sound (valid). It is repeatedly stressed in sabads that the human body is formed as a special opportunity to enact divine virtues. For example:

ਬਿਨੁ ਗੁਣ ਕਾਮਿ ਨ ਆਵਈ ਢਹਿ ਢੇਰੀ ਤਨੁ ਖੇਹ ॥

Devoid of moral virtues, the body is of no use,
after all it just crumbles into a pile of dust.

Guru Granth Sahib: 20

The idea of apprehending anhad expands the conceptualization of listening. As the verses from the composition Jap indicate (see fn. 2), listening is not only audile. It is becoming resonant with and re-sounding larger concerns. Listening is becoming expansive. It is heeding moral virtues. The following sabad from the composition titled Bliss (ਅਨੰਦੁ - *Anand*) indicates the link between listening, moral virtue, the body and divine experiential states:

ਏ ਸੁਣਹੁ ਮੇਰਿਹੇ ਸਾਚੈ ਸੁਨਣੈ ਨੇ ਪਠਾਏ ॥

O my ears, you were formed to hear only the Truth.

ਸਾਚੈ ਸੁਨਣੈ ਨੇ ਪਠਾਏ ਸਰੀਰਿ ਲਾਏ ਸੁਣਹੁ ਸਤਿ ਬਾਣੀ ॥

To hear the Truth, you were formed with the body;
to listen to the utterance of Truth.

ਜਿਤੁ ਸੁਣੀ ਮਨੁ ਤਨੁ ਹਰਿਆ ਹੋਆ ਰਸਨਾ ਰਸਿ ਸਮਾਣੀ ॥

Hearing which, body and intention are transformed, absorbed
in divine experience.

ਸਚੁ ਅਲਖ ਵਿਡਾਣੀ ਤਾ ਕੀ ਗਤਿ ਕਰੀ ਨ ਜਾਏ ॥

Of the True, unseen, wondrous, indescribable.

ਕਰੈ ਨਾਨਕੁ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਨਾਮੁ ਸੁਣਹੁ ਪਵਿਤ੍ਰੁ ਹੋਵਹੁ

Says Nanak, listening to the Immortal Name, become pure;

ਸਾਚੈ ਸੁਨਣੈ ਨੇ ਪਠਾਏ ॥੩੭॥

you were formed to hear only the Truth. (37)

Guru Granth Sahib: 992

In fact, the verses on listening in the composition Jap are directly followed by verses on the wonderful state of one who has heeded (ਮੰਨੈ – *Mannai*).

I see listening in Sikh practice as a multidimensional and multisensorial phenomenon that creates body-sensorial knowledge of the divine and divine virtues. By choosing the term affective listening my purpose is to foreground the subterranean intensities that move and accumulate over time; that move across bodies, and across modes of expression, perception and experience. As psychologist Daniel Stern (2015:53) emphasized, “an affect experience is not bound to any one modality of perception.” I see kīrtan occasions as affective listening ecologies where several such connections come together, then dissolve, to be renewed the

next time, and again; not in the same exact manner, but still leaving traces that accumulate and feed back into the ecology.

Ethical Affects

In my field observation, I could sense that sabad kīrtan participation elicits various kinds of feelings among congregants such as relaxation, joy, longing, pathos, peacefulness, inspiration and courage, and brings emotional, psychological and social benefits to them in different ways. What became particularly interesting to me was the different ways in which their feelings often took on an ethical hue. I could sense in kīrtan occasions a general subtle presence of ethicality in demeanor, words and gesture of participants as they socialized when the kīrtan ended. At times congregants' conversations more explicitly included themes of feeling joy at becoming morally strengthened but also feeling rueful about the tensions between the moral ideals in sabads and their everyday lives.²⁶ At times these were tensions with the means of livelihood in a profit-oriented capitalist economy, and at times with anxieties about worldly success. For example, a family man in his forties working a sales job expressed how the requirements of the sales pitch stood in tension with the ideal of truthfulness espoused in sabads (March 28, 2015). Another interlocutor who is an avid kīrtan participant, lamented that despite understanding the ideal of letting go of excessive attachment to worldly things, she finds herself worrying about such matters much too often (May 1, 2015). On the other hand, an interviewee expressed how regular kīrtan listening helps her let go of things that don't go her way, to seek less control (January 18, 2015).

It is important to emphasize that most interlocutors mentioned that during kīrtan listening they typically did not think about such issues; it was later that they felt greater awareness of the message in the sabads.

To investigate how sabad kīrtan participation works on the sensorium to heighten such ethical sensations, I draw from Charles Hirschkind's analysis of ethical affects. Hirschkind foregrounds that the themes of most of the Islamic sermons that circulate in the form of cassette recordings among Muslims are centered on ethical issues that draw from the sacred verses of the Quran. These sermons instruct Muslims to exercise ethical discipline in their everyday lives, and live lives of social responsibility. Repeated listening then becomes an important mode of ethical shaping of subjectivity, of the moral cultivation of the self. For the devout, it also becomes a form of "pious relaxation" (68). Further, the "relaxed attentiveness of this auditory practice invests the body with affective intensities" (82) that draw from the ethical themes in sermons such as humility, awe, regret and fear. These ethical affects get sedimented in the body as "latent tendencies of ethical response" (82), as a "substrate of affective orientations that undergird right reasoning" (125). Thus, "[A]nimated or 'played' by the

²⁶ This is not to say that all Sikhs relate to all the moral themes in the sabads. One particularly outstanding example among my interlocutors is of a successful professional who told me candidly that he was fed up with the recurrent theme of humility in sabads, that there was of no use for it in his life, and that he only enjoyed sabad kīrtan for its musicality, and therefore only when it was musically well performed. But he also told me that he had felt differently at a different stage in life. (March 1, 2015). He also continued to be a regular attendee along with his wife and two pre-teen children at his local gurdwāra in the San Francisco Bay Area.

rhythms, lyrical intensities, sound figures, echoes, and resonances of the recorded performances, the sensorium acquires a moral orientation” (125).

A key part of my analysis is the process whereby ethical affects get mobilized in listening bodies in a mode of relaxed attentiveness. Hirschkind’s project is to show how the engagement with ethical reason in sermon audition is moved by affect. My purpose is to show how affective kīrtan listening becomes imbued with ethicality. I focus on three types of intensities I found heightened in kīrtan occasions, that of the feeling of awe (wonder) of the divine, the experience of the aura (a unique quality) of the divine and the Sikh Gurus, and the experience of affection (love and liking with warmth and regard) for the divine. I show the role of musical sound in heightening these. And I do this for three different musical genres of sabad kīrtan focusing on their distinctive musical attributes.

In sabad kīrtan audition the major source of ethical sensations is the wisdom contained in the sabads, understood as the wisdom of the Guru (*gurmat*; where Guru is a collective term for the ten human Sikh Gurus and now also the primary scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib, as spiritual guides). The ethical sensations accumulate in repeated listening processes of relaxed attentiveness. The Guru’s wisdom, laid out in the sabads, stresses the importance in daily life of truthfulness (*sat*), contentment (*santokh*), compassion (*dya*), and generosity (*dān*). It emphasizes that egotism (*haume*) and perceptions of self/other duality (*dooja*) are fundamental problems to be overcome. It directs one to put these virtues into daily practice, in everyday actions:

ਉਠਤ ਬੈਠਤ ਹਰਿ ਹਰਿ ਧਿਆਈਐ ਅਨਦਿਨੁ ਸੁਕ੍ਰਿਤੁ ਕਰੀਐ ॥

As you go about, meditate on the divine name,
make every day one of good actions.

Guru Granth Sahib: 621

The Sikh notion of everyday ethics as wisdom and its daily practice matches well Varela’s (1999) exposition, drawn from understandings of Buddhist concepts, of ethics as “closer to wisdom than to reason” (3), and common ethical behavior as spontaneous action in ordinary situations, rather than deliberate reasoning or judgment. The moral cultivation of the self in Sikh practice is not through intellectual enterprise but through a honing of intuition, *sahaj*, which I discuss below.

Sikh literally means student, implicitly of the Guru. A Sikh is described in sabads and understood by Sikhs as one who follows the teachings of the Guru. The term *gursikh* is used in sabads and in general parlance for a Sikh who is particularly oriented to the Guru’s wisdom. It is also used to describe a Sikh who follows the edict of donning the five articles of faith prescribed by the tenth and last Guru, Gobind Singh.²⁷ These too relate to everyday ethics. Another term in use is *gurmukh* (oriented to the Guru) as against *manmukh* (oriented to the self).

The Guru’s wisdom is considered important for the Sikh way of life because the purpose of human life in Sikh belief is to enact divine virtues in this world, the social world. Sikhism rejects asceticism (and celibacy, for the clergy as well), recommends a householder’s life and full participation in the socio-economic arena. Practices of an integrated life are encapsulated in

²⁷The articles of faith and their symbolic meanings are given in Figure 3.1 in Chapter 3 on the kīrtan of the AKJ community of Sikhs who are particularly devoted to this edict.

the tripartite edict: *nām japō, kirt karō, vand chakō* – constantly remember the divine, earn an honest living, share your earnings. The inseparability of sacred and secular concerns is represented in the Sikh concept of *miri-piri*, temporal-spiritual, symbolized in the *khandā* (Figure 1.13).

Figure 1.13

The Sikh Khandā

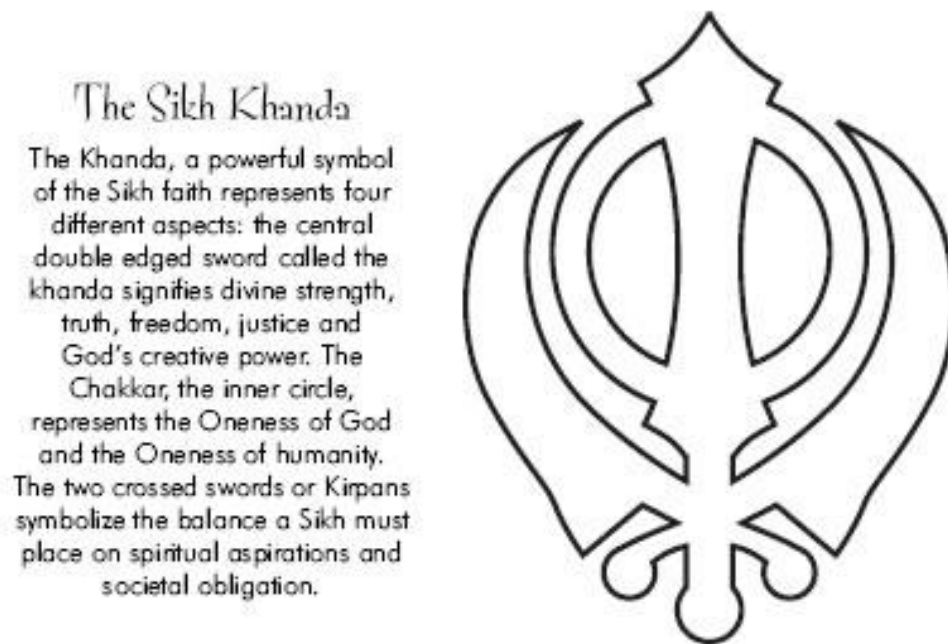


Image from <http://peacetreeinternational.org/khanda-sikhism/>

Alongside it is stressed that human life can be robbed of this pursuit by five vice-thieves: lust, fury, greed, attachment, arrogance (*kām, krōdh, lōbh, mōh, ahankār*). These soil intention (*man*) on a daily basis, and only daily remembrance of divine virtues can cleanse intention and restore it to its divine form (*jōt saroop*). The intentional body²⁸ (*man-tan*) must be engaged in divine remembrance. A similar idea, as explicated by Hirschkind (2006), is found in the Islamic practice of the process of cultivation of ethical dispositions through the practice of repeated sermon listening with the heart/body.

Singing and listening in the Sikh context inform virtuous action more broadly, frequently indicated by the term *ajap jāp* (chantless chant) – an automatic silent remembrance of divine virtues. The word *jap* (repeat) is also interpreted as to repeat in action. Some of my interlocutors emphasized the action aspect as compared to verbal and silent chanting and listening. But for most both are crucial, and the chanting and listening are means of enabling action. Through such terms and interpretations, singing and listening to *sabad* is connected to

²⁸ In the Heideggerian phenomenological sense, in which a person is an embodiment of perceptual capacities, and what Merleau-Ponty has termed bodily intelligence.

enactment of *sabad*. These terms point to the complex interplay of music which becomes a reference to non-musical context as a means of elaborating the demands of a life attuned to the divine and divine virtues.

Relaxed attentiveness

The most effective technique in Sikh belief for developing everyday ethical practice is that of *sahaj*, a mode of intuition, natural ease and equipoise. *Sahaj* is cultivated through constant remembrance of the divine name and virtues. It is a fundamental bodily technique recommended in the *sabads*, and practiced in *kīrtan* occasions and other worship activities. It is a mode of intuitive ease and equanimity for accomplishing all tasks including bringing one's attention to divine attunement and practicing divine virtues. The experience of divine bliss (*anand*) too occurs in this mode, so that one is in a state of easeful bliss (*sahaj anand*).

Sahaj explicitly informs the approach to singing and listening to *sabad kīrtan*:

ਰਾਗ ਨਾਦ ਸਬਦਿ ਸੋਹਣੇ ਜਾ ਲਾਰੈ ਸਹਜਿ ਧਿਆਨੁ ॥ Melody, sound, *sabad* are beautiful, if intuitive
attention ensues.

Guru Granth Sahib: 849

In its practical aspects in *sabad kīrtan* occasions, *sahaj* as a “technique[s] of the body” (Mauss 2007:66 [1935]) is an aesthetic sensibility regarding the comportment of musicians and the congregation; a “somaesthetic” (Shusterman 1999) in which large physical gestures and movement are not seen as beautiful or efficacious. *Sahaj* shapes norms of expression, gesture, posture, technique, and style.

As a “technique[s] of the senses” (Howes 1990, quoted in Howes 2005:22) *sahaj* is a cultural practice of apprehending sensations with easefulness and intuition, where intuition is a whole body intelligence that is based on a continuity of experience, in a Bergsonian (2004 | 1912) sense. *Sahaj* can be thought of as a condition of the body in which attending to sensations takes place.

While *sabad kīrtan* participants listen with different levels of attentiveness at different times, depending on individual and environmental factors, the overall tenor of listening in *kīrtan* occasions can be described as one of relaxed attentiveness. The term relaxed attentiveness has been used in behavioral sciences to denote a bodily state in which relaxation and attention (which requires some tension in the body) are balanced for the performance of a task (McKim 1974). In the *kīrtan* listening context, this relaxed attentiveness can be seen as an aspect of *sahaj*.

Sahaj shapes response and experience. It conditions the field of intersubjectivities. It shapes the environment, the space of practice. In a feedback loop, listening itself becomes conducive to inculcating *sahaj*.

ਸੁਣਿਐ ਲਾਰੈ ਸਹਜਿ ਧਿਆਨੁ ॥ Listening, intuitive and easeful attention ensues.

Guru Granth Sahib: 3

Sabads in the Guru Granth Sahib repeatedly stress its broad relevance and significance as habitus (Mauss 1979 [1950]) to be cultivated to the extent that it becomes second nature. One can see in kīrtan occasions this “habitus of listening” (Becker 2004:71). A habitus of sahaj is not only the ability to listen and attend intuitively and with equipoise, but also the ability to act with natural ease. A habitus of sahaj is both an aesthetic and an ethic in everyday action. While it can be understood through Bourdieu’s conceptualization as a “durably installed generative principle” (Bourdieu 1977:78), it is not completely unconscious, since it is often explicitly emphasized, in the sabad text or discourse.

In this dissertation I explore the ways in which affective listening with sahaj, with relaxed attentiveness, mobilizes ethical affects, investigating the affordances of particular musical mechanisms of the three main musical genres of sabad kīrtan. In my analysis musical sound does not have any objective ability to invest certain affective intensities in listening. Rather it is the overall contextual setting in within which these musical genres do their work which is crucial: the processes at play are contextual, cultural and subjective, as I discuss in the following section. What makes diverse musical means effective in deepening affective sensations is precisely their successful participation in what I term a Sikh affective ecology.

An Affective Ecology

Earlier I discussed the importance of the ecological setting; here I emphasize a significant aspect, affect. The notion of “affective ecology” has been used in sound studies to denote an ecology of affect mobilization and contagion (Goodman 2010), where affect is defined broadly as the capacity to affect or be affected (Massumi 2002). I see an affective ecology as one where certain affects not only become emergent but are sustained over time and across events. And these affects have significant affordances.

Sabad kīrtan is an important part of the Sikh affective ecology which sustains it and which in turn it helps sustain. It partakes of the aura of, and awe and affection for the Guru and wāheguru, and also serves to heighten these sensations. This ecology is a nexus of sound, memory, objects, place, people and events that mutually construct an affective dynamic. Key to these are the Guru Granth Sahib, the memory of the Gurus, the gurdwāra and the congregation (*sādh sangat*).

Sikhs hold the Guru Granth Sahib and the ten Gurus in deep love and reverence. In Sikh teachings, the Guru is needed to show the path to the divine.²⁹ The sabads themselves reiterate this.³⁰ A good proportion of the sabads are in praise of the Guru, and even explain the qualities

²⁹ As mentioned above, the term Guru is used to denote the human Gurus and the Guru Granth Sahib collectively. At times, in the sabads and in common speech, Guru is also used to refer to wāheguru. This usage of the term Guru individually or collectively for all three is a reference to them as spiritual and ethical guides, and is a term imbued affect.

³⁰ ਬਿਨੁ ਗੁਰ ਰੋਗੁ ਨ ਤੁਟਈ ਹਉਮੈ ਖੀੜ ਨ ਜਾਇ ॥

Without the Guru, the disease of egotism and its pain is not removed.

ਗੁਰ ਪਰਸਾਦੀ ਮਨਿ ਵਸੈ ਨਾਮੇ ਰਹੈ ਸਮਾਇ ॥

With the Guru's grace, the divine dwells in intention, it remains immersed in the divine name.

of a true Guru. The Guru is also loving, caring and non-discriminatory. In worship occasions the congregation is typically addressed as the beloved of the Guru (*Guru-pyāri sangat*).

These feelings are inculcated from a young age, transmitted socially and through morally inspiring life-narratives (*janam-sakhi*) of the Gurus.³¹ These are available now in illustrated books and comics in Punjabi, Hindi and English, and animated films in Punjabi. Using human actors to portray the Sikh Gurus in films or plays has been considered inappropriate as it risks exaltation of humans to the status of a Guru which goes against the edict of the tenth Guru. All these create an aura of the ten Gurus as divine-like beings and nuances the love and admiration for the Guru with feelings of awe.

Sikh celebrations consist mainly of honoring the Gurus. *Gurpurabs* – Guru's days, mostly mark three significant days in the lives of the ten Gurus – birth, assuming *Guruship*, and death. The tenor of these celebrations is similar – remembering the Gurus with awe for their immense moral virtues, experiencing their aura, and transmitting deep affection for them for their guidance on accessing the divine and divine virtues. Two annual celebrations with particularly distinctive themes and affective tenor are Vaisakhi and Hola Mahalla (defined below).

Along with the Guru, virtuous company (*sādh sangat*) is posited in the *sabad* ideation as a necessary condition for realizing the divine and divine virtues, and recommended as a fundamental component of a Sikh way of life. It is the context for worship and *kīrtan* in particular.³² The divine is itself believed to be revealed in virtuous company,³³ since it is in the company of the virtuous that the love for the divine is seen to intensify.³⁴ The belief is that it is in the company of the virtuous that the divine is never forgotten, and where every moment becomes divine time.³⁵ The intersubjective and ecological potential of virtuous company is considered powerful enough to support one through terrifyingly challenging times, and even turn around those immersed in vices.³⁶

ਗੁਰ ਸਬਦੀ ਹਰਿ ਪਾਈਐ ਬਿਨੁ ਸਬਦੈ ਭਰਮਿ ਭੁਲਾਇ ॥੧॥

Through the Guru's *sabad*, the divine is obtained; without the *sabad*, one is lost in doubt.

Guru Granth Sahib: 36

³¹ See Johnson 2014.

³² As in the *sabad*, ਸਾਧਸੰਗਿ ਨਾਨਕੁ ਗੁਣ ਗਾਵੈ ਸਿਮਰੈ ਸਦਾ ਗੋਪਾਲਾ (GGS: 611) -- *Sādhṡang Nānak guṇ gāvai simrai saḡā gopālā* -- Nanak sings of divine virtues in the company of the virtuous, forever remembers the divine.

³³ As in the *sabad*, ਭਏ ਪ੍ਰਗਾਸ ਸਾਧ ਕੈ ਸੰਗ (GGS: 287) -- *bḡaé pargās sāḡh kai sang* – The divine is revealed in virtuous company.

³⁴ As in the *sabad*, ਨਾਨਕ ਪ੍ਰੀਤਿ ਲਗੀ ਤਿਨ੍ਹਰ ਰਾਮ ਸਿਉ ਭੇਟਤ ਸਾਧ ਸੰਗਾਤ (GGS: 454) -- *Nānak prīṡ lagī ṡinḡ rām sio bḡetaṡ sāḡh sangāṡ* – It is in the company of the virtuous that divine love develops.

³⁵ As in the *sabad*, ਨਿਮਖ ਨ ਬਿਸਰਉ ਮਨ ਤੇ ਹਰਿ ਹਰਿ ਸਾਧਸੰਗਤਿ ਮਹਿ ਪਾਇਆ (GGS: 495) -- *Nimakh na bisarau munn ṡe har har sāḡhṡangāṡ mēḡ pāiā* – In virtuous company, the divine is found and never forgotten.

³⁶ ਸਾਧ ਸੰਗੋਣ ਤਰਣੈ ਨਾਨਕ ਮਹਾ ਸਾਗਰ ਭੈ ਦੁਤਰਹ ॥ (GGS: 1358) -- In virtuous company, Nanak is carried across the terrifying world-ocean.

ਜਿਉ ਕਾਸਟ ਸੰਗਿ ਲੋਹਾ ਬਹੁ ਤਰਤਾ ਤਿਉ ਪਾਪੀ ਸੰਗਿ ਤਰੇ ਸਾਧ ਸਾਧ ਸੰਗਤੀ ਗੁਰ ਸਤਿਗੁਰੂ ਗੁਰ ਸਾਧੇ ॥ (GGS: 1297) -- Just as heavy iron on a wooden raft, the sinful are carried across (the world ocean) in the company of the virtuous and the True Guru.

The significance of such virtuous company for the experiences deepened during kīrtan can be understood in terms of Alfred Schutz's (1967) conceptualization of "social phenomenology," and Edmund Husserl's (1970) concept of "life worlds" as intersubjectively perceived "we-subjectivity" of shared experience. Relevant are also Eric Clarke's (2005) ecological model of mutualism between listener and environment, Alfred Schutz's notion of mutual tuning-in (1976), and Tom Cochrane's concept of joint attention (2009).

The gurdwāra, being a site where the congregation gathers to listen to and experience the Guru's wisdom, thus provides an ecological setting for the requisite intersubjective affordances. It is a space in a physical sense where congregants are situated but also one in a phenomenological sense (ala Merleau-Ponty) of having the power to engender a particular relationship among the congregants. Sikhs also meet in smaller private gatherings in their homes to sing *sabad kīrtan*, recite *sabad* compositions that have particular liturgical function (*pāth*), or discuss their meanings (*vichār*).

Gurdwāras, whenever possible are constructed as grand buildings with beautiful architecture. In the main sanctuary of the gurdwāra called the Guru's *darbār*, i.e. the Guru's court, the Guru Granth Sahib is placed center stage on a raised pedestal, under an ornate canopy, covered with ornate scarves, with an attendant seated or standing behind it with an ornate fly whisk, thus giving the Guru the honor and respect due to an emperor (Figure 1.14). In *sabads* the divine is posited as the true emperor (*sacchā pātshāh*), but the term is also used by Sikhs to refer to the ten Gurus. The system thus challenges the hegemony of rulers, and offers an alternative authoritative site of socio-political life or a "counterpublic" (Hirschkind 2006:106-108) centered on "its own affective, gestural and kinesthetic conditions," with its own discursive practices and pious dispositions. However, this counterpublic is also "fragile because the practices that constitute this arena are subject to rival and more powerful discursive framings that are tied to the market." In other words, the ability of congregants to extend to their lives the ethical affects heightened in this space becomes limited by the countervailing forces of the capitalist political economy. Still, the gurdwāra is there for congregants to repeatedly come together as a counterpublic as and when they wish.

Figure 1.14
The Guru Granth Sahib on pedestal, with attendant, at Gurdwāra San Jose



Photo by author

Gurdwāras (plural of gurdwāra) are also sites of multisensorial experiences. Apart from the ornate and grand sights of the building, the darbār, and the Guru Granth Sahib, and sounds of sabad kīrtan and recitation, fragrant and flavorful food is an integral part of the gurdwāra experience. *Parshād*, a sweet dense pudding made of whole wheat flour, sugar and clarified butter (*ghee*), is part of every liturgical session. A bowl of hot, fragrant parshād sits at the “foot” of the Guru Granth Sahib, and is distributed to the congregation at the end of the service. Congregation members and all visitors can also as they wish walk up to the bowl and receive a handful from the attendant (Figure 1.15).

Figure 1.15
Parshād at Gurdwāra San Jose



Photo by author

Additionally, langar, a free community kitchen that runs in parallel with worship services is a standard feature of gurdwāras. At larger gurdwāras, such as Gurdwāra San Jose, volunteers prepare and serve morning tea with snacks, breakfast, lunch, afternoon tea with snacks, and dinner.³⁷ Private kīrtan gatherings at homes follow this food service tradition with parshād distributed at the end of the service, and then langar (tea, lunch or dinner, depending on the time) prepared and served by friends and family.

Gurdwāras are free and open to all irrespective of religious and personal belief, and socio-economic class. The architecture of gurdwāras reflects this with doors on as many sides of the building as possible. Gurdwāras do not require membership. While they run on donations and volunteer service, there is no requirement, monitoring or pressure to donate or volunteer. No person entering a gurdwāra or the langar hall is questioned or subjected to any gaze, but people are expected to observe the etiquette of respectful attitude by listening quietly in the sanctuaries, covering their heads, being barefoot, and sitting on the floor alongside others, without special treatment, except for the elderly and handicapped. The importance of this Sikh ethic of openness is reflected in the fact that the open door policy has not changed despite

³⁷ The kitchen at the holiest gurdwāra, the Harmandir in Amritsar (Punjab, India), popularly known as the Golden Temple, operates almost round the clock and serves food to an estimated daily count of 100,000 people from all backgrounds and faith traditions. It has been described as the “largest free kitchen in the world” (<http://www.goodnewsnetwork.org/worlds-largest-free-kitchen-feeds-100000-a-day-in-golden-temple/>).

several incidents in the U.S.A. of vandalism, physical assaults and even fatal shooting of congregants by white supremacists.³⁸

The ambience in a gurdwāra is typically serene but not austere. There is a relaxed quality about it. People walk in and out of the service in the darbār as it suits them, and little children and crawling babies receive quite a bit of leeway to move about.

The affective tenor of devotion at gurdwāras becomes particularly charged during performances of historical ballads, dhādi vār. These are non-scriptural secular heroic narrative songs.³⁹ These songs of heroism and resistance are sung mostly at religious historical occasions at gurdwāras and *mele* (festivals) such as Vaisakhi⁴⁰ and Hola Mahalla,⁴¹ to remember a history of resilience in the face of oppression, and infuse feelings of *josh* (courageous enthusiasm) and *chardi kala* (courageous optimism) in the community. The ensemble performs standing, and consists of an orator who also directs, and three musicians – two singers self-accompanying on the dhadd-drum and a *dhadd-sārangi* player (Figure 1.16). Similarly discourse (katthā) based on these historical themes arouses deep sensations of devotional love, fervor, awe and inspiration among congregants.

Thus the Sikh affective ecology in multiple ways transmits the aura of the Guru, and generates feelings of awe and affection for the Guru. It promotes intersubjective heightening of sensations through the notion and practice of sādḥ *sangat*, which may aptly be described as an “aggregation of the affected” (Born 2012: 262, self-quoted in 2013a:44). Listening in such an environment, becomes a process in which sonic performances “resonate both within the sensorium of the sensitive listeners and outside, around them and in between them” (Hirschkind 2006: 8).

³⁸https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wisconsin_Sikh_temple_shooting .

³⁹ See Pettigrew (1991) and Nijhawan (2003). A related genre “*halē dā divān*” of the distinct Namdhari sect is discussed in Protopapas (2012).

⁴⁰ Institution of the Khalsa (see Chapter 3); also Punjabi spring harvest festival and New Year.

⁴¹ Spring celebration of martial arts.

Figure 1.16
Dhāddi ensemble of Bhai Lakhwinder Singh Sohal



Image from Gurdwāra San Jose Facebook

Sensory Experiences

Awe, Aura, Affection

The overall atmosphere in a typical sabad kīrtan occasion is most often described as peaceful, by participants as well as visitors. The sensations of divine experience that sabads themselves point to connote peace, and these therefore find expression in discourse and practice as well. These feelings are those of *anand* (a subtle experience of bliss) and *sukh* (comforting, contented feeling of being in ease and free of suffering). The mode is one of engagement with relaxation. The technique, as mentioned above, is that of sahad (intuitive ease and equipoise). Sabads speak of feelings such as love and longing and for the divine, regret of forgetting the divine, admiration for the divine and the virtuous, and the bliss of divine union.

Within the overall feeling and atmosphere of peacefulness in kīrtan occasions, the circulation of certain intensities is often perceptible in kīrtan occasions. Not strong emotions, but subtle affects. The kind one feels in the atmosphere, in the way that social and political scientist Teresa Brennan (2004:1) has written in the opening sentence of her book, *Transmission of Affect*: “Is there anyone who has not, at least once, walked into a room and “felt the atmosphere”?”

During the course of my fieldwork I became increasingly conscious of the circulation among congregants in kīrtan occasions of three types of sensations – awe, aura, and affection.

It became clear to me that these had significant productivities for the goals of sabad kīrtan, which are to become attuned with the sabads, and through that experience, with the divine and divine virtues, and to bring these into daily action.

While affects are experienced by kīrtan participants as composite and not separated feelings, different kīrtan occasions often elicit one or the other more strongly. I could sense this in the atmosphere and it was also palpable in the congregations' words and gestures during kīrtan occasions in different genres of sabad kīrtan. As Teresa Brennan (2004:51) has argued about transmission of affect in groups, "The specific waves of affects generated by different cultural constellations could lead to a different ... group phenomena. ... affects can be compounded by interactive dynamics that some groups will carry more affective loads than others will." I want to foreground that different group dynamics lead to the relative intensification of different affects. These "groups" are the congregations in kīrtan occasions in different musical genres. My focus is on three phenomena or intensifications -- awe, aura and affection -- that enable me to investigate the sensory dimensions of experience.

My usage of the terms awe, aura and affection draws from Sikh ideation and practice. Awe in Sikh conceptualization is expressed in the terms *vismād* (awe, wonder) and also *achraj* (amazement). In sabads it is most often expressed as a response to the moral greatness of the divine. The Sikh affective ecology portrays the divine with awe inspiring attributes of infinity and ethical principles. The Sikh term for the divine, wāheguru, meaning wondrous Guru, is literally an expression of awe (*wāh* being an exclamation in response to awe). Awe is also generated for the ten Gurus and other valiants in Sikh history. Awe, in such a setting, is an ethical affect.

My use of the term affection is largely in the sense of love, but also to foreground the flavor of care, warmth and regard. This is how I sensed it in my fieldwork, and my interlocutors who spoke in English also used this term along with love. In Punjabi, in sabads and speech, the words most often used are *prem* (love) and *pyār* (love, affection). Like the ten Gurus, wāheguru is also conceptualized as affectionate, caring and non-discriminatory. Metaphors used in the sabads for wāheguru include father, mother, brother, friend and beloved, and one who nurtures.

Aura, as Walter Benjamin discussed it, is a special property of historical art objects that engenders a particular appreciative response from the subject. However, rather than an objective quality of an object, aura is generated as a particular quality of the engagement of a subject with an object. The auratic experience arises from a simultaneous experience of distance and proximity. My interest is in exploring the role of auratic experiences in sabad kīrtan occasions. In the Sikh affective ecology, aura is produced through unique features relating again to the greatness of wāheguru and the Gurus. These great entities are both accessible and inaccessible at the same time. Wāheguru is understood as inaccessible in entirety, but also seen as within, close by and everywhere. The ten Sikh Gurus lived centuries ago but that temporal and spatial distance is sought to be reduced through the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib which is understood as an embodiment of their wisdom. Yet that wisdom in its totality and depth is beyond reach and even harder to make proximate in practice.

The Taste in the Body

A key metaphor used in sabads for experience is that of *ras*. Literally juice or extract, *ras* also means taste, emotion and relish. *Ras* is a primary metaphor for the sensation of divine experience (*har ras, rām ras*). It is the sensation through which the divine becomes known, but not intellectually. *Ras* has to be drunk (*pīyo, pīya*, as in *Rām ras pīya re*) and eaten (*khāe*, as in *har ras khāe*). Ingesting divine *ras* makes it part of the body. It breaks the duality between the self and the divine, between human and divine moral virtues. The divine becomes known by sensing it in the body, and developing a taste for this experience and its flavors. These flavors are those of love (*prem ras*) and moral purity (*amrit ras*).

Ras is importantly a standard part of the discourse in the *sabad kīrtan* context. Thus, a program announcer will typically say: You have been listening to *ras*-imbued (*bhinna*) *kīrtan*, or Let us now appreciate (*māniye*) the *ras* of *kīrtan*. In fact, the connotations of the verb *māniye* provide further insights into the nature of *ras* and its importance. *Māniye* is to agree and heed, and accept with regard. To accept *ras* in the body is to allow it to affect the body.

Ras is a total bodily experience that draws from the multisensorial. It does not allow sensory discrimination. It can also be thought in terms of synaesthesia, “the joining of the senses” (Lawrence Sullivan 1986). The synaesthetic nature of *ras* comes forth in many *sabads*.⁴²

⁴² As an example:

ਆਨ ਰਸਾ ਜੇਤੇ ਤੈ ਚਾਖੇ ॥

If you keep tasting other *ras*,

ਨਿਮਖ ਨ ਤ੍ਰਿਸਨਾ ਤੇਰੀ ਲਾਖੇ ॥

your thirst will not subside.

ਹਰਿ ਰਸ ਕਾ ਤੂੰ ਚਾਖਹਿ ਸਾਦੁ ॥

But if you taste the divine *ras*,

ਚਾਖਤ ਹੋਇ ਰਹਹਿ ਬਿਸਮਾਦੁ ॥੧॥

Tasting, you will stay immersed in awe. (1)

ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤੁ ਰਸਨਾ ਪੀਉ ਪਿਆਰੀ ॥

Rasna, drink the beloved Ambrosial Nectar,

ਇਹ ਰਸ ਰਾਤੀ ਹੋਇ ਤ੍ਰਿਪਤਾਰੀ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥

imbued with this *ras*, you will find contentment. (Pause)

ਹੇ ਜਿਹਵੇ ਤੂੰ ਰਾਮ ਗੁਣ ਗਾਉ ॥

Tongue, if you sing of divine virtues,

ਨਿਮਖ ਨਿਮਖ ਹਰਿ ਹਰਿ ਹਰਿ ਧਿਆਉ ॥

if every moment you remember the divine,

ਆਨ ਨ ਸੁਨੀਐ ਕਤਹੂੰ ਜਾਈਐ ॥

if you don't hear otherwise, go elsewhere,

ਸਾਧਸੰਗਤਿ ਵਡਭਾਗੀ ਪਾਈਐ ॥੨॥

among the virtuous, you will also become fortunate. (2)

ਆਨ ਪਹਰ ਜਿਹਵੇ ਆਰਾਧਿ ॥

Tongue, worship night and day,

ਪਾਰਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਠਾਕੁਰ ਆਗਾਧਿ ॥

worship the Unfathomable, the Supreme.

ਈਹਾ ਉਹਾ ਸਦਾ ਸੁਹੇਲੀ ॥

Everywhere, always, feel soothed,

ਹਰਿ ਗੁਣ ਗਾਵਤ ਰਸਨ ਅਮੇਲੀ ॥੩॥

the priceless *rasna* singing divine virtues. (3)

ਬਨਸਪਤਿ ਮਉਲੀ ਫਲ ਫੁਲ ਪੇਡੇ ॥

Like flourishing vegetation, flowers in fruition,

ਇਹ ਰਸ ਰਾਤੀ ਬਹੁਰਿ ਨ ਛੋਡੇ ॥

imbued with this *ras*, you will not leave it again.

ਆਨ ਨ ਰਸ ਕਸ ਲਵੈ ਨ ਲਾਈ ॥

No other *ras* will compare,

ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਗੁਰ ਭਏ ਹੈ ਸਹਾਈ ॥੪॥

says Nanak, once the Guru becomes the support. (4)

Guru Granth Sahib: 180

As anthropologist David Howes writes, “When the senses are ignored or when they are studied in isolation, all the interplay of sensory meanings – the associations between touch and taste, or hearing and smell – and all the ways in which sensory relations express social relations are lost” (2003: 17). The synaesthetic properties of auditory experience in particular has been emphasized by scholars such as Steven Connor (1997). In his view the synaesthetic ability of audition aids in sensory transformation and intrasensory communication.

Ras leads us to think beyond schematic neural conceptualizations and representations of sensation to the more complete body-sensorial. *Ras* as a liquid points perhaps to the body’s fluid systems, the glandular systems (endocrine and exocrine), the circulatory and lymphatic, and their workings along with the neural system in sensation. Among my interlocutors, references to *ras* were made with metaphors such as feeling drenched (*bhij*).

Teresa Brennan (2004) has argued for the important role of the biochemical system in the transmission of affect, in the social transfer across bodies within groups. Like Masumi, Brennan distinguishes affect from emotions which are sensations that are experienced with thought, and are expressed with and linked to particular words. For Brennan, affects are felt in the atmosphere and experienced socially as energies travelling across and among bodies. She argues for biochemical and physical communication of affect, and affective entrainment through chemical and nervous entrainment of people in a group. Sound, sight, touch, smell all elicit such responses in a group. Focusing on negative aspects of affect, Brennan contends that because affects are devoid of thought, they lack discernment. This is exactly where the ecological setting is particularly important. My analysis of *sabad kīrtan* investigates experiences and transmission of affects among congregation members in a context of an affective-ethical ecology. Brennan’s insights are useful for both my field methodology of body-sensorial ethnography, and my analysis of transmission of affects, ethical sensations and temporal perceptions as more than cognitive replications of objectified neural schemas.

The concept of divine *ras* in the context of Sikh *sabad kīrtan* captures a gestalt that emerges from myriad sensations -- aesthetic, ethical and affective, all oriented toward a divine experience and awareness. Additionally, when the divine is constructed in ethical terms, this consciousness takes on that tenor too. Some of my interlocutors were quite clear about this. For one, *rām ras* was “when I feel compassion” (January 25, 2015). For another, “it is when you feel like doing something good ... it is about good deeds” (April 11, 2015).

Among my interlocutors, references to *ras* came up mostly in reference to the AKJ genre, both in terms of personal experiences and as a marker of effective *kīrtan*.

Such references to *ras* are typically not made for other programs in the *gurdwāra* such as *pāth*, *kathā* or even the singing of *dhādi vār*. It indicates that *kīrtan* listening is considered to have the special capacity to generate *ras*.

A related term, *rasna*, is also revealing. Literally, it means that which apprehends *ras*. *Rasna* has been typically translated as the tongue that literally sings of divine virtues, and also understood as a “knowledge-sense” (*gyān indrī*) along with the heart (*man*), ears (*kan*) and eyes (*netar*). I want to bring together these various conceptualizations with an additional insight from *sabad kīrtan* practice. In *kīrtan* occasions, the lead singer will typically invite, encourage or persuade congregational participation by saying: Everyone recite/repeat (*japo*), let no *rasnā*

stay empty (*khāli*). While japo as recite leads to a translation of rasna as tongue, japo as repeat also has a connotation of repeating in action, that is, with the body. Additionally and importantly, the adjective empty points to a vessel -- the body. Therefore, rasna as that which apprehends ras is the sense of ras that is sensed as a whole bodily sensation.⁴³ Rasna points to what Daniel Heller-Roazen's (2007: 238-251) has conceptualized as an "inner sense" -- a sense of sensing, and "the inner touch" as a unifying "common sense" by which the self comes to sense itself. Combining this with the understanding of rasna as a sense of knowledge points again to knowledge as something sensed and known by the entire body.⁴⁴

Making Time

A final perspective on the experience of sabad kīrtan that I found to be significant is the perspective of time. That people made time for kīrtan listening was evident from the many kīrtan occasions I attended. But what also became manifest was how kīrtan listening made time for the congregants. As has been well discussed in scholarship now the experience of time is not an objective experience but contingent on a whole host of factors. Our bodies do not experience time in the way that clocks mark time, but rather subjectively, in multiple ways, and variably. The multiple temporalities we experience "are constantly adapted and transformed according to multiple individual, social, and cultural circumstances and purposes, converging, interacting, or conflicting with each other" (Balkenhol 2012: 7).

Philosopher J. T Fraser devoted considerable time and energy to multidisciplinary investigations of time, founding the International Society for the Study of Time, convening a number of conferences, and editing a corresponding series of volumes entitled *The Study of Time*. These have informed my analysis of time in sabad kīrtan. In Volume II, music composer George Rochberg (1975: 136-147) foregrounds music as a vibratory phenomenon that shapes the flow of time through its patterning of vibrations, and this process as an intuitive capacity of human consciousness.⁴⁵ He discusses music as a durational vibratory form that links human form and experience to vibrations and time of the physical universe. "Man creates in music a palpable, perceptual metaphor of the universe in a passionately colored succession of expressive events which become a transformation of the raw data of physical reality" (136). Such insights have informed in particular my analysis in Chapter 3 of the potential, in the AKJ genre, of the immersive vibrations of the auditory field of wāheguru chanting.

In this dissertation my purpose in foregrounding sabad kīrtan as a sounding of *anhad* (unheard sound and infinite vibration) is also to draw attention to the link between the time made and experienced in kīrtan listening and infinite or divine time, *su vela*. In Sikh ideation *su*

⁴³ So a sabad-text such as *Rasna japti tuhi tuhi* – (My) rasna chants, you, you -- can be said to refer to the repetition in sound, action and experience.

⁴⁴ Pointers to the body, and knowledge as affect, also come from other ways of inviting congregational involvement. At the beginning of a *kīrtan* performance, the lead rāgi might say: Come, let us become filled with love. The filling again refers to a container, the body. Kīrtan listening thus aspires to fill all participating bodies with divine experience.

⁴⁵ However, my analysis moves away from the kind of conceptualizations, also in Rochberg, of music as a mental process and as manifestation of neural schemas, to a more whole body approach.

vela, literally that time, is the time of divine experience.⁴⁶ That time is said to be now, every moment, and every day. During divine experiences, moments, hours, days, all merge into a unity of experience. In *Subjective Time*, Arstila and Lloyd eds. (2014) bring together perspectives from multiple disciplines such as philosophy, psychology, anthropology and music studies. The phenomenological view they present is that the “specious present” is experienced in the flow of consciousness that includes “retention” or “primary memory” of traces of the past, and “protention,” “the immediate anticipation of the just-next” (2). Such insights have informed in particular my analysis in Chapter 2 of the extended present created in kīrtan in a style of the light genre.

Musicking in particular has been recognized as having the capacity to reconfigure experiences of time in multiple ways. In Volume III of the *Study of Time*, Lewis Rowell (1978: 578-613) states, “Music is not only an art that employs or occupies time; I suggest that music is also a model of time” (579). In his monumental work, *The Time of Music*, musicologist Jonathan Kramer proposes, “If we believe in the time that exists uniquely in music, then we begin to glimpse the power of music to create, alter, distort, or even destroy time itself, not simply our experience of it” (1988: 5). He goes on to say, “Time is a *relationship* between people and the events they perceive. It is an ordering principle of experience” (ibid). My investigation in the chapters on the different musical genres of sabad kīrtan explores the different ways that such reconfiguring of the “ordering principle of experience” occurs within the context of Sikh ideation.

However, my analysis resists the objectification of musical time to that of the musician or composer, and the analyst’s objectified hierarchical representation of sounds in music, even within a cultural setting. Thus, my approach is different from the kind seen for example in Rowell’s (1981:198) statement in his very insightful article, “Making Audible Time,” that his purpose is to investigate, “what it takes to transport the listener from the external world of clock time to the internal time which a piece of music creates and which is shared by composer, performer, and listener. And how-by means of specific actions, energy, duration, speed of pulsation, patterning, and a variety of other clues - we are brought under the control of an audible, hierarchical time that is more palpable, more insistent, more clearly articulated, and more flexible than the world of everyday time to which we eventually return.” My field observations indicate subjectivity in the perception of musical sound that can allow for a multiplicity in the experience of time. Thus, I see in Rowell’s quote above, ‘flexible’ as the operative word in the context of sabad kīrtan.

Scope of Study

This investigation explores how ethical affects are heightened in sabad kīrtan occasions through an interplay of music, sabad, ideation and memory. The conclusions drawn are limited to congregants’ experiences in kīrtan occasions. The study does not make claims about the ethical behavior of Sikhs outside of these kīrtan occasions. In fact, many of the ideals of Sikhism such as class and gender equality are difficult for Sikhs to practice in their everyday lives because Punjabi society is traditionally patriarchal and class conscious.⁴⁷ While kīrtan is a

⁴⁶ Similarly, there is *so dar* (that door/place) of divine experience. See p. 21.

⁴⁷ See Nesbitt 2016.

powerful affective force in Sikh everyday life, the affective means of neoliberal capitalism can be said to be even more powerful. Still, I would venture to say that repeated participation in affective-ethical listening in kīrtan occasions could, to varying degrees, influence decisions and actions in everyday life. As anthropologist Kathleen Stewart (2007) has argued, affective intensities are “beginning[s] dense with potential;” they point to “the inchoate but very real sense of the sensibilities, socialities and ways of attending to things that give events their significance” (129). And they can “surge” or become “submerged” (4).

My initial mode of ethnographic research was that of planned interviews, but I quickly realized that casual conversations were yielding deep insights too, and made that a significant part of my fieldwork.

My interlocutors varied across age, gender, educational and professional background, income level, and their Punjabi and English proficiency. In this study I do not make systematic comparisons across these attributes. Overall, I spoke with more women than men, and also found them more forthcoming about their feelings.

Some first generation Sikh American millennials I spoke with, while being primarily English speakers, were deeply engaged with the meanings in the sabads. But there were some for whom the sabad had only indexical references to Sikh values. I also spoke with interlocutors who were in the age range of 40-60 years, who expressed their lack of knowledge of sabad meanings. But all held an affective relationship to sabad, and almost all did not want to hear English translations being sung.⁴⁸

The concentrated period of my fieldwork was from December 2014 to August 2015, but since my field was close by I continued to draw on information from conversations through the dissertation writing period. I have also drawn from my previous fieldwork (particularly in 2005, 2006, 2008, 2009, 2012 and 2013 with hereditary rāgis) and my experiences as a long-term active participant in the sabad kīrtan scene in the Bay Area.

All interlocutors’ quotes used in this dissertation, unless otherwise stated, are from interviews and conversations with Bay Area congregants at kīrtan occasions at gurdwāras and private homes, as well as at cafes, and on the phone and in emails. Most are from the period between December 2014 and June 2016. Since a good proportion of interlocutors did not want to be named, I have not used names throughout.

The analysis I present in the chapters can be generalized, but for every kīrtan music genre, style and occasion described, one can find a variation or some alternate view. This is the nature of this devotional practice, and of course, of people’s experiences.

This study joins the scholarship on devotional musical practices in North India that has analyzed the role of music in heightening devotion (Slawek 1986, Graves 2009, Schultz 2013). In particular, ethnomusicologist Anna Schultz, based on ethnographic work with musicians, has investigated how in Marathi *rashtriya* kīrtan devotion propels the political goal of religious nationalism. My investigation explores how devotion heightens ethical affects, and is a reception study. Our investigations therefore seek to uncover the work of devotion in relation to secular life from different angles.

Regarding Sikh kīrtan in particular, while the centrality of sabad kīrtan in Sikh life has been widely noted, sabad has been largely studied as prose, and kīrtan has been largely studied

⁴⁸ Townsend (2011) reports the same for Southern California.

as detached music with a focus on the musicological features of the classical genre and questions of authenticity (see Appendix B for a review of the literature on sabad kīrtan). The lived experience of sabad kīrtan for Sikhs has not been investigated through ethnographic research. Reception study has been absent except for two studies by religious studies scholars. Joy Barrow (2001) has described the kīrtan experiences of an AKJ group in Southall near London. More recently, Charles Townsend (2011) has explored the various ways that sabad kīrtan is constructive of Sikh identity for congregants in southern California. Though not through an ethnographic account, ethnomusicologist Janice Protopapas (2011, 2013) has discussed memory and emotion in sabad kīrtan. My study complements these with a focus on ethicality, and a music analytical and phenomenological approach.

Chapter Outline

This Introduction has set out the project and introduced the perspectives brought to bear in the rest of the dissertation. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 focus individually on the three main contemporary musical genres of sabad kīrtan. Recognizing (through ethnography) that rich experiences are found among kīrtan participants across these distinct genres, each chapter focuses on their distinctive musical attributes, and highlights the affective intensities these elicit in conjunction with the Sikh ideational complex. These chapters are presented as microanalyses of musical mechanisms in these genres as they interact with Sikh ideation to produce heightened experiences for kīrtan participants. Each of these musical genres, and sabad kīrtan, is much more than the microanalysis presented there. The intent and hope is that such specific analyses and presentations provide insights that supplement writings with broader brush strokes. Chapter 5 builds on this recognition of rich experiences described in the earlier chapters to address the issue of “authenticity” in sabad kīrtan practice, an issue that has dominated the contemporary literature on the musical aspects of sabad kīrtan.

Chapter 2, “Time vistas: ‘Awe’-some Technologies of the Light Genre,” analyzes a particular style of the light musical genre of kīrtan. It shows how rhythmic variety, jointly with the sabad lyrics and Sikh cultural values, intensifies awe, a plurality of time experiences, and everyday ethical orientation. This analysis draws from investigations in cognitive studies on awe, experiences of time, and prosociality, as well as on music analytical studies on rhythmic variety and temporal perception.

Chapter 3 “Ethical Sensations: Affective Attunements in the AKJ Genre,” analyzes the particularly intensified affectionate devotional energy in the musical genre of sabad kīrtan prevalent in the particularly strengthened affective ecology of the AKJ distinct Sikh community. It shows the role of the distinctive cyclical chanting of the divine name and its sonic properties of timbre, volume and pulse, in opening up the ethical potentialities through sensations of “relaxation” and “emptiness.” This analysis draws from affect studies on affective transmission, cognitive studies on dynamic attending, and anthropology and philosophy for conceptualizations of ethical sensations.

Chapter 4, “(Spell)Bound by Bandish: Embodiment in the Time of Aura and Communities of Gurmat Sangīt,” argues that shared experiences of an aura of the Gurus’ music, and shared sensations of codified musical features are significant factors that bring together participants particularly to the historical “classical” or gurmat sangīt styles of sabad kīrtan. It elaborates on

the sense and sensations of historical memory, and of sounds and their structures, bringing attention to the somatic nature of musical knowledge and aesthetics. The chapter foregrounds the productivity of aura in creating musical communities and engendering access to embodied knowledge of music as well as moral teachings of the Gurus. This analysis draws on cultural anthropology for discussion of aura, music-analytical studies on musical structure, philosophy on practical somaesthetics, and Sikh studies on history and culture.

Chapter 5, “Multiple Authenticities in Motion: Styles and Stances in Sikh Sabad Kīrtan,” elucidates the multiple ways in which Sikhs experience authenticity in the diverse and continually changing styles of sabad kīrtan. Using the lens of “stance,” this chapter argues for understanding authenticity as an approach, and kīrtan as a multidimensional composite experience of sound, memory, affect, aesthetics and ethics. Refuting scholarship that finds authenticity in “music” alone, and furthermore, only certain music, the chapter underscores the futility of detaching music from the whole and perils of scholarly paradigms in which kīrtan is translated/interpreted as “music” (sangīt) in terms of only of bare sonic elements.

Together, these chapters explore the potentialities of affective listening and the role of musical mechanisms in the transmission of ethical values by means of devotional song. They aim to shift attention away from musical mechanisms as objective techniques to their subjective, intersubjective and ecological potentialities. They foreground body-sensorial knowledge not only of music and affect, but also ethics which is often relegated to the realm of objective cognitive reasoning. Importantly, they offer perspectives from reception on the lived experience of sabad kīrtan for Sikhs, on its meaningfulness and significance in their lives.

Chapter 2

Time vistas: 'Awe'-some Technologies of the Light Genre¹

It was another of those eagerly awaited days when my friend Meher's² home in California would be transformed from a quiet, private sanctuary for a single woman to a public oasis of soul-quenching experiences for friends, acquaintances, even strangers, all sincerely welcomed into the overflowing space of two medium-sized rooms and a narrow hallway. As usual, she had invited a renowned touring Sikh ensemble to perform *sabad kīrtan* that would enliven her house into a resonant *kīrtan* chamber. I had arrived early to set up my recording equipment and get a good spot to sit, but other guests with the same ideas started filtering in well before the start time, giving me the chance to chat with them before, as I would also do after the program.

It was at this occasion that I most deeply comprehended what I was becoming increasingly aware of as my research progressed – how much awe finds expression in the gesture and word of the Sikh congregation during their participation in *kīrtan* occasions and in their sensations of ethicality. Further, musical mechanisms have a definite and significant role in eliciting these feelings and expressions. Across the board, my interlocutors expressed the relative effectiveness of *kīrtan vis-a-vis* readings of *sabad*-texts. They expressed far more pronounced feelings of awe, as also other emotions, after *kīrtan* than after a reading of the same *sabad*-text.

The intimate setting of Meher's home no doubt contributed to the transmission and intensification of sensations. Also the fact that many attendees were regulars at the programs at her home which occur a few times a year, and these congregants have become a social group. Another factor was the fact the esteemed *rāgi* that evening had earned the status of a *sant*, a highly spiritual person and one who embodies ideal Sikh values such as service and humility.

The eagerly awaited *rāgi* was Sant Anoop Singh Una Wale (from Una, Punjab) who sings *sabad kīrtan* in the light music genre. He has developed a style in which the performance structure is particularly rich in rhythmic variety. He weaves together spoken, chanted and sung sections, and further unmetered and metered chanted sections. These contrasting rhythmic patterns add a layer of variety on top of the rich rhythmic presentations of individual *sabads*.

In this chapter I explore how this rhythmic variety contributes to a soundworld in which ideation, experiences of time, and feelings of awe and ethicality come together. I show how rhythm, time, emotion, and ethics entwine in this practice; how within the Sikh religious context, the temporalities of music are elaborated in devotional and ethical directions.

Awe as Ethical Affect

In his analysis of ethical affects in the context of Islamic sermons, Charles Hirschkind (2006) discusses emotions as the basis of ethical orientation. Sensations of fear, awe, regret

¹ By technology I mean the entire gamut of means used to serve a purpose. This is close to economist W. Brian Arthur's (2009): "a means to fulfill a human purpose."

² This is a pseudonym since my friend wished to remain anonymous. To respect her privacy I have also not used photographs from her residence. This event took place in May, 2015 in the Bay Area.

and humility, as they intensify in the body from sermon audition, orient it toward the sermon's ethics. These create the "felicity conditions (in Austin's [1994] sense) for the act of supplication" (85). "[A]n active fear of God" and Judgement Day in particular is "one of the primary affective conditions for virtuous conduct" (74). The horror of death and the eschaton, told through evocative stories and rich imagery that create experiential immersion for the listener, are both alluring and disciplinary. Fear makes the flesh tremble, then the possibility of forgiveness relaxes the body, bringing joy. These are powerful "soma-ethical" affects that accumulate and intensify in the body for ethical orientation.

In Sikhism, the very word for the divine, *wāheguru*, builds on an expression of wonder and awe – *wāh* (wow)! Another word used in *sabad* for the divine is *bisman* (awe-inspiring):

ਬਿਸਮਨ ਬਿਸਮ ਭਏ ਬਿਸਮਾਦ ॥

Awe-struck by the awe of the awesome (divine).

Guru Granth Sahib: 285

Sabads further support this with an extensive exegesis on *wāheguru*'s awesome attributes. The Mool Mantar (core verse) which is the opening verse of the Guru Granth Sahib, and repeated many times in it, is a string of nine awe-inspiring attributes of *wāheguru* – oneness, from which all is manifest, truth by name, creative principle, fearless, without enmity, timeless, incondensable, uncaused. Thus, *wāheguru* is conceived as a composite of vastness and morality. Many *sabads* elaborate on this theme. *Wāheguru* is an ocean of moral virtues (*guni gahīr*), and benevolent (*meherbān*), as well as all-knowing (*antarjāmi*), all-pervading (*sarabvyāpi*), incomparable (*anoop*), and imperishable (*avināsi*). *Wāheguru* is also too vast to be known in entirety. *Wāheguru* is infinite (*be-ant*), immeasurable (*atol*), unfathomable (*agādh*) incomprehensible (*agam-agochar*) and indescribable (*kahan na jāee*). These terms permeate the speech of devotees as well.

Often, in the *sabads*, the attitude to the divine is expressed as *wāh-o*, *wāh-o*! It expresses the feelings of awe (*vismād*). These feelings have the flavor (*svād*) of love (*rang*), attraction (*man mohyo*), adoration (*bal-bal jāee*), and enrapture (*ote-pote*). Moved by such emotions the self becomes devoid of ego (*ahnbudh*), fear of death (*jam ki phāsi*) and vices (*bikār*), and capable of virtuous acts (*sach karni*).

Thus, *vismād* is described as the experience of the heart from an encounter (*darsan*) with the divine's overwhelming greatness and moral capacities. The recognition of divine capacities is received with awe. Awe is therefore a moral response. Its psychological contours are those of moral contours.

Vismād is also considered to be a state in which unheard sound (*anhad*) and its limitless resonances are perceived. Thus there is a special link between listening and awe. Awe is an affective state of awareness to which listening aspires.

In the life of Sikhs, the response of awe for *wāheguru* is inculcated from early childhood. In addition to imbibing it from their elder's attitudes, children also obtain it through a number of active means. The Mool Mantar (core verse) often serves as a lullaby. Children learn to chant it and access its affordances at times of emotional need. Numerous children's books and comics tell marvelously inspiring tales of a heroic, loving, protecting and benevolent *wāheguru*. *Kīrtan* events are family events with babies, children, youth and the elderly, all present together. Children are encouraged to perform at important occasions, and tolerance levels for competence are immensely generous. The purpose of inculcating the response of awe is to be

moved to align one's embodied capacities to divine wisdom (gurmat, discussed in the Introduction).

Awe, Ethics, Temporality in Cognitive Studies

The Sikh concepts of awe and ethical orientation toward the Guru's wisdom as well as my ethnographic field research with Sikh kīrtan participants find resonance in cognitive studies on awe and its implications for prosocial behavior. In drawing on these studies however I do not mean to vouch for their general and widespread applicability, but only to say that their theorization and findings corroborate what is at play in the Sikh theological context and affective ecology. In the context of religious traditions that I see awe as an emotion that provides orientation for ethics.

The analysis of awe in cognitive studies is recent. Psychologists Fredrickson and Cohn (2008) argue that research on positive emotions has lagged behind that on negative emotions due to factors such as the focus on psychopathology, the attribution of specific action tendencies to negative emotions, and relative procedural difficulties such as challenges to evoke and measure positive emotions in experimental studies.³ More recent research however has found thought-action tendencies induced by positive emotions, and shown that they broaden habitual modes of thinking and acting.

Psychologists Keltner and Haidt (2003) review awe-related concepts such as the sublime and power that have been studied with various disciplinary approaches, and provide the following summary. "Across disciplines, theorists agree that awe involves being in the presence of something powerful, along with associated feelings of submission. Awe also involves a difficulty in comprehension, along with associated feelings of confusion, surprise and wonder" (303). Based on this, they propose a prototype conceptual definition of awe as experiences of "vastness and accommodation", where "[V]astness refers to anything that is experienced as being much larger than the self, or the self's ordinary level of experience or frame of reference," and "[A]ccommodation refers to the Piagetian process of adjusting mental structures that cannot assimilate a new experience" (303-4). Piagetian theories of cognition posit accommodation as a process of *revising* mental schemas in response to new perceptual stimuli, in contrast to assimilation as a process of interpreting new data in terms of *existing* mental schemas (Shiota et al 2007). Thus, in this definition of awe, vastness is coupled with cognitive accommodation which is distinct from cognitive assimilation in that it consists of an expansion of existing mental structures to incorporate new information. This matches well the Sikh feeling of *vismād* for the vast (*apar-apāra*) and incomprehensible (*agam-agochar*) divine, and the emphasis in *sabad* on expanding one's embodied faculties toward *gurmat* (Guru's wisdom), with the modification that these sensations are more than mental schemas.

³ Zentner et al (2008) provide another reason, arguing that "an accurate description of musical emotions requires a more nuanced affect vocabulary and taxonomy than is provided by current scales and models of emotion" (513). In their study in Geneva on the identification of emotions most, and least, frequently induced by music, they offered the participants of their study 515 "verbal descriptors of felt affect in French," and point out that awe may have been absent in their list simply due to the lack of a French word for awe. Interestingly, they found that music-induced happiness-related feelings took the form of bliss or enchantment, as in wonder.

Further, in cognitive studies, effects associated with awe include a diminished sense of the self (since it is focused on greatness outside the self), a greater proclivity to revise one's mental schemas, and hence, the potential to "transform people and reorient their lives, goals, and values" (Keltner et al 2003:312). Of particular relevance here is the awe-related feeling of "elevation" arising from sources with virtues or moral beauty, which leads to "a desire to become a better person or lead a better life" (305). When such a source also has the attribute of vastness, as the divine does, there is a variety of awe flavored by feelings of elevation. The general applicability of this argument may be challenged but it does seem to fit the Sikh ideational context.

This conceptualization of awe and its associated effects finds empirical support in studies such as by psychologists Shiota et al (2007). Their working definition of awe is "an emotional response to perceptually vast stimuli that overwhelm current mental structures, yet facilitate attempts at accommodation" (944). This point is significant: the stimulus should not be so overwhelming as to become insurmountable or impossible to accommodate. Shiota et al further elaborate that vastness does not only relate to physical size, but to any aspect that "challenges one's accustomed frame of reference in some dimension," such as time, number, exceptional beauty, or complexity of detail. Relevant here also is philosopher Edmund Burke's (1767) observation that the sublime can be inspired by infinite repetition such as that found in waves and other natural patterns. The theme of wondrous nature is also found in many sabads.

On the effect of awe on the sense of self, experimental studies (e.g. Shiota et al 2007) find that awe leads not only to a smaller sense of the self, but the content of self-concept changes too, so that one sees oneself less individualistically and more as part of a greater whole. Experimental studies also find that these changes in self-concept "promote more selfless, other-oriented behaviors" (Piff et al 2015:895) such as generosity and willingness to help others. Again, while the general applicability of these findings is open to question, such effects may be found in religious traditions where humility is emphasized. Additionally, my purpose is not to make claims about Sikhs as particularly ethical people, but rather only about their experience and gestures in kīrtan occasions, and awe as one of the intensities mobilized toward this end.

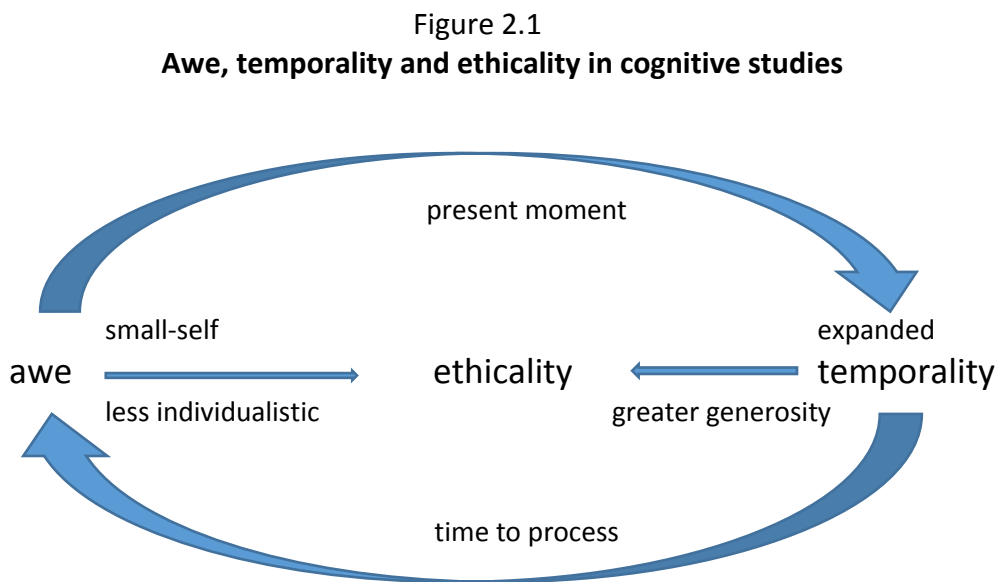
Awe has also been shown to affect time experience. Rudd et al (2012) find that the experience of awe expands perceived time availability (i.e. people feel less pressed for time), and explain this due to the ability of awe to bring people into the present moment, but also from a feedback loop: processes of accommodation occur when time feels expansive.⁴ Drawing from psychologist Robert Ornstein's (1969) hypothesis that time perception depends on the extent of information-processing involved in an activity, musicologist Jonathan Kramer (1988:339) posits that "changing amounts, rates, or complexity of information can alter subjective impressions of duration," and describes his own experience of "timelessness" from participating in a musical production with a large amount of information stimulus, due to sensations of "an extended present" (380-81). Interestingly, Kramer assigns the same "internal temporal qualities," of extended present and timelessness, to both what he terms time dilation

⁴ This is based on the socioemotional selectivity theory (SST), according to which people feel motivated to acquire new knowledge when more time seems available (Carstensen, Isaacowitz, & Charles, 1999).

(time experience larger than clock time) and time contraction (time passing faster than clock time), from musicking.

Additionally, experimental studies such as Rudd et al (2002) relate experiences of time to ethical disposition, showing that an expanded temporal effect of awe, including that elicited by music, induces feelings of reduced impatience, an increased willingness to volunteer time, higher preference for experiential as opposed to material goods, and greater satisfaction with life. Similarly, psychoanalyst Peter Hartocollis (1976) argues that “when one is not concerned with time, one is likely to see oneself as happy The concept of time as a dimension of reality that defines self from object (“succession of events”) is canceled and replaced by a sense of unity The person who experiences it is allegedly able to have a broader sense of reality concerning himself as well as the world around him” (370). These studies lend further support to the research on the effect of awe on mobilizing ethical sentiments, but through their effects on experiences of time.

Figure 2.1 summarizes the arguments from the above mentioned studies.



Awe, Ethics, Temporality in Sabad Kīrtan

In Sikh practice, as discussed in the Introduction, the kīrtan context of listening (in its broader sense) is considered the most effective venue for inducing the experience of wāheguru, and associated responses such as that of awe (*vismād*). The mode of experience recommended is that of intuitive contemplation (*sahaj dhyān*). The deepened experience of wāheguru’s overwhelming moral greatness and capacity are believed to occur in states of equipoise, balance and intuition. It is the attuned consciousness (*sabad surat*) that apprehends it. Kīrtan -- the musicking of sacred *sabad*, both provokes the moral response of awe and is the context in which it is cultivated, where the deepening of awe occurs. These effects unfold within the Sikh ideational and contextual world and are furthered substantially by the meanings in *sabad*,

which are critical in evoking feelings of awe toward the divine, the founding Gurus, and the wisdom in their sabad-texts they canonized in the Guru Granth Sahib.

An important competency of Sikh musicians is to themselves embody awe towards wāheguru, the Sikh Gurus, and the Guru Granth Sahib. Attempts by a musician to direct awe to himself (most professionals are male) would introduce a contradictory element in his technology-mix. Thus, the most effective strategy for the Sikh musician is to project a persona (Auslander 2006) of small-self compared to these spiritual/ethical giants.⁵ Additionally, the very idea of institutionalizing the scripture as Guru was to eliminate that authority from any individual as mediator. While listening to exegesis of sacred sabad-texts is widespread, each Sikh is encouraged to develop a personal understanding of their teachings.

As for the role of musicking, while music itself is not valorized in sabad,⁶ kīrtan is, especially in a congregational setting.⁷ And as much as kīrtan is considered a technique for experiencing the divine, it is also understood as an expression of that experience.⁸ Thus my approach is to analyze the role of music in conjunction with the ideation in the sabad and foregrounding congregational participation. I am not attributing to musical sound the objective ability of producing awe. In fact, such exercises in the context of Western art music have been questioned, notably by musicologist Wye Allanbrook (2010) who has critiqued the practice of identifying certain musical gestures as sublime, a concept close to awe. Musicologist Konecni (2005) has argued that music induces “aesthetic awe” when performed in vast architectural spaces of exceptional beauty, with superb acoustics, such as European medieval cathedrals. While I do not investigate issues of space here (and that is an important aspect of the experience), my analysis below briefly covers the role of sound amplification.

Musicking heightens sensations of awe, I argue, due to its effect on the experience of temporality, and that too, in conjunction with ideational factors. I show how wāheguru constructed in Sikh sacred verses as an awe-inspiring and ethically virtuous concept is rendered more awesome by means of the temporal transformations effected by music.

Other studies on religious music and temporality have similarly investigated the interplay of music and ideology. In the context of Christian theology, Jeremy Begbie (2000) explores “music, time and eternity,” focusing on composer John Tavener’s loosely connected block construction as “evoking a sense of motionlessness, and exceptional slow pace as eliciting a contemplative ambience,” and arguing that he used “restraint of directionality, plurality, change and motion ... for specifically theological reasons” (143). Discussing the Hindu-Buddhist concept of eternal time, ethnomusicologist Judith Becker (1978) argues that the endless cyclical repetition at constant speed, rhythm, texture, and dynamic level in the gamelan piece *Langen Bronto* evokes the experience of timelessness for Javanese musicians and listeners. In the

⁵ It is possible for a countervailing effect of arrogance, due to virtuosic skill, to be present in different degrees. What is important to emphasize for the analytics is that for Sikh musicians the embodiment of awe and small-self is both an inculcated practice of the heart and a performance technique.

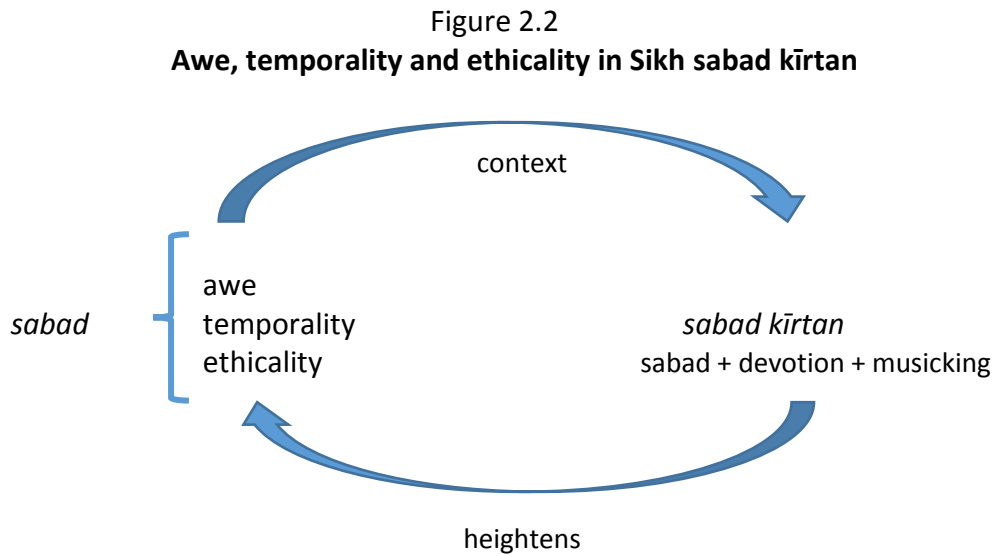
⁶ This point is further elaborated in Chapter 5.

⁷ E.g., “*Sādh sang har kīrtan gāieh*” (GGS: 179 – Sing kīrtan of the divine in the company of the morally virtuous.) Thus, morally virtuous behavior in congregational settings is a performance expectation and technique for congregants as well.

⁸ E.g., “*Ja ke hī-ai pragat prabh hoa andin kīrtan rasan ramo-ī*” (GGS: 208 – It is the divine-enshrined hearts that are engrossed in kīrtan day in and out.)

context of Sufi music, ethnomusicologist Regula Qureshi (1994) discusses how the music in a *qawwali* event uses contrasting temporal modes to encapsulate and convey the Sufi dual conceptualization of time. At a more macro level, anthropologist Fadwa El Guindi (2008) discusses the rhythm of Islamic sonic prayer and its effect on ordinary and sacred time, within the larger concept of Arabo-Islamic rhythm which builds on relationality between various aspects of life, and underlies “the lived temporal-spatiality in Muslim life” (165).

In the Sikh realm, the notion of time is intertwined with emotions such as awe for the divine and with divine moral virtues. I propose here that listening (in the expanded sense of musicking, as discussed in the Introduction) is a significant means by which a transposition of the temporal plane takes place, and is given an expression in which there is release from mundane temporality. In the *kīrtan* occasion, the experience of time transforms into one in which ethical implications are in accord with a higher (divine) power, and no longer at the mercy of other demands. Figure 2.2 summarizes the interplay of awe, temporality and ethicality in the experiences of *sabad kīrtan*.



I concentrate here on the role of one musical mechanism, that of rhythm. This is not to say that other aspects of sound are not important or relevant. In fact they together create a gestalt experience for the congregant. However, I was struck by the rhythmic variety offered in the *kīrtan* performance at Meher’s home. Rhythm, as the organization of durations, and perceptual changes in it, can be expected to have a substantial effect on the temporal experience of congregants. I explore here how the endless variety of smaller-scale rhythms in speech, chant, song, accompaniment and congregational participation, set within larger-scale rhythms of form and performance structure, creates a plurality of experiences of time for the participants, and this in turn heightens the feelings of awe, small-self, and ethical orientation that *sabads* promote.

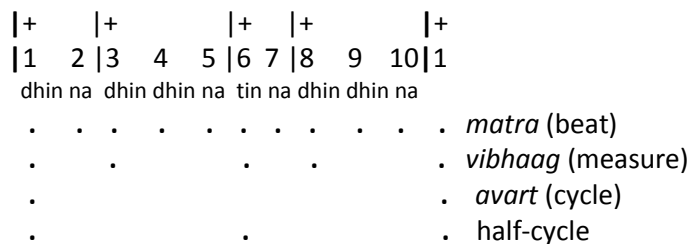
Sabad kīrtan employs a large variety of rhythmic techniques. The varieties of rhythmic articulations perceptible in a *kīrtan* event can be thought of in terms of music philosopher Victor Zuckerkandl’s (1959) conceptualization of the “rhythmic life” of an entire musical piece

as a “multilayered wave complex” (118) with interacting time patterns emanating from elements such as pitch-phrasing and dynamics. As he writes, “the tones have the freedom to do something with the [meter’s] wave: to simply string along with it, to stress it, to make it a thing of importance, to minimize and hide it, to cross its regularities with all sorts of irregularities, to put it in question, to contradict it openly, to produce all sorts of combinations and possibilities by doing the same or different things in different areas” (119). The melodic improvisation called *alāp* spanning several metric cycles of drum accompaniment is a particularly good example of this, but shorter melodic variations within a melodic line also are significant part of the rhythmic life of a song rendition.

To these rhythmic sources of the melodic material we can also add those of timbre and texture, and all these elements for the accompanying drum as well, and any additional percussion instruments such as cymbals and shakers. In the context of Indian musics in which metered songs are sung with continuous accompaniment of a drum articulating a *tāl* (metric cycle) and a variety of drum patterns, there are additional layers of rhythm.

The North Indian drum, *tabla*, uses a large variety of drum strokes that vary in pitch, timbre and dynamics (See Chapter 3 pp. 75-76 for more detail). Ethnomusicologist Martin Clayton (2000:7-27) foregrounds the “multi-dimensional concept of metric organization in North Indian music” (16) and uses Lerdahl and Jackendoff’s (1985) metric theory to posit that “[E]ach *tal* has three distinct and interacting levels of pulsation, the *matra*, *vibhag* and *avart*” (pulse, measure, and cycle, respectively; 19), and in the case of symmetrical *tāl* such as *jhaptāl*, a fourth level as well, at the half cycle. *Jhaptāl* is a 10-beat cycle in which each half is a symmetrical 5-beat pattern consisting of a two-beat and a three-beat measure. Thus, the four levels in *jhaptāl* can be represented by dots, as in Figure 2.3, adapted from Clayton. Similar representations can be made for the most common *tāls* used in the light genre of *sabad kīrtan*, *keharwa* and *dādra*.

Figure 2.3
Rhythmic layers in *jhaptāl*



The drum strokes are played using different combination of fingers, palm and heel of hand, applied with varying pressure on two complexly constructed drum heads. As ethnomusicologist Rebecca Stewart (1974) has detailed, the striking patterns thus offer not only metric accents but also those from the associated pitch, timbre and dynamics. Similarly, Clayton (2000:69-70) identifies these as the three main types of audible accents of the *tabla*

stroke patterns. When a drummer changes the stroke patterns, rhythmic changes occur along all these attributes, and create a rich multilayered rhythmic wave-complex.

While it is the smaller (*dāyān*) drum which can be tuned to specific pitches, the eminent tabla maestro, Zakir Hussain has also talked⁹ about the tonal capabilities of the larger, bass (*bāyān*) drum of the tabla-pair, which is not tuned to a single pitch, but can be played with varying hand pressure to produce different tones.¹⁰ In fact the maestro routinely entertains his audiences by playing the entire octave on it, and even simple jingle tunes.¹¹ Interestingly, it is the machine technology of sound amplification that has enabled this range of tonal expressions to be communicated to audiences, as he himself has discussed. These tonal variations on the *bāyān* add to the rich rhythmic complex beyond the stroke patterns, and are amply utilized in the light musical genre of *sabad kīrtan*.

Furthermore, the varying pitch and timbre of the two heads of a drum, and therefore of strokes, create other overlapping rhythmic patterns. Thus, in Clayton's example, while two halves of *jhaptāl* are metrically symmetric, it is important to note that the pitch and timbral pattern of the two halves is not symmetrical. Its standard *theka* (drum pattern that articulates the *tal*) -- *dhin na, dhin dhin na, tin na, dhin dhin na* -- has contrasting timbral rhythms from *dhin* and *tin*, and can be represented with a dot under beat 6 in the notation in Figure 2.3. The rhythm of the distinctive tone and timbre of this higher pitched *tin* occurring once in every cycle is in cross pattern to that of the conventionally most emphasized beat 1 (*sam*) of the cycle (*tāl*). Varying the emphasis with which each of these is played can shift the position of the perceptual cycle. Speed also matters for perception. When *tāls* are played at double speed, perceptions of the rhythmic patterns change. Clayton (2000:79-80) argues that at extreme speeds (low and high) there is a perceptive collapse of certain levels of pulsation, and demonstrates it for the 16-beat *tīntāl*.

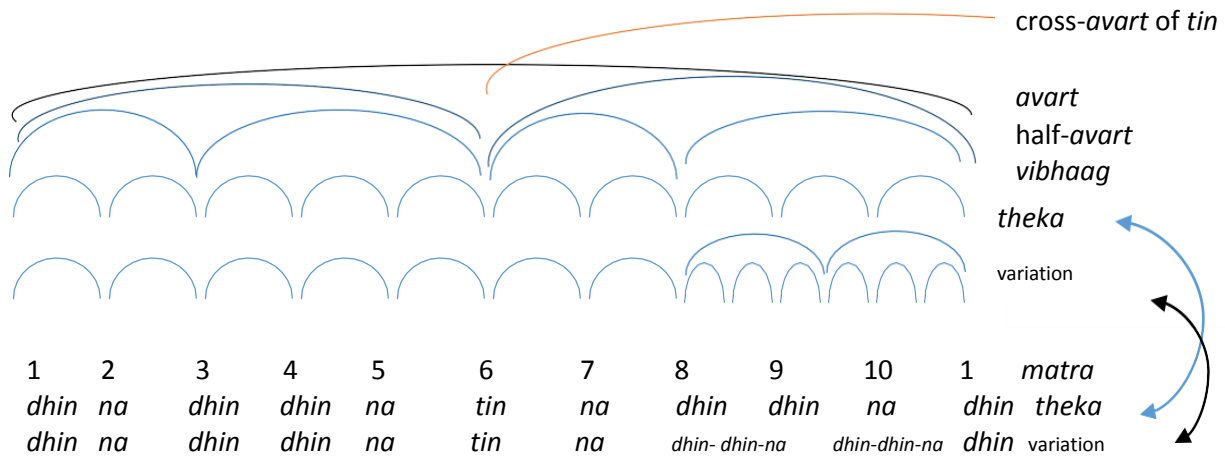
The rhythmic components of the drum patterns in *jhaptāl* mentioned above can be represented in terms of Zuckerkandl's wave representation as follows (Figure 2.4), which indicates how complex and variable the entire rhythmic life of a song performance could be.

⁹ E.g., in the lecture "The Changing Role of the Tabla Player in Hindustani Classical Music: Zakir Hussain in Conversation with Bonnie Wade." UC Berkeley, March 10, 2015, as UC Berkeley Regents' Lecturer for Spring 2015. <http://southasia.berkeley.edu/changing-role-tabla-player> (accessed October 1, 2015)

¹⁰ Thus, in the *jhaptāl* example above, each *dhin* could have a different tone, and many rhythmic variations could be generated through tonal variations. E.g., the *dhin dhin* of the second measure could be played with a tonal pattern that would impart a distinct rhythmic component to this measure.

¹¹ For a discussion of the concept and role of "stroke-melody" with reference to drums in the South Asian context, see Wolf (2014). My point however is to foreground the particular capability and role of the tonality of the bass drum/head itself.

Figure 2.4
Wave representation of jhaptāl



In Sikh sabad kīrtan, as in other Indian devotional musical genres, these aspects of drumming are salient contributors to the rhythmic life of a piece. The drumming is very active and employs a large variety of striking patterns, and tonal, timbral and dynamic accents. In the light genre in particular, which uses short tāls such as 8-beat *keharwa*, 6-beat *dādra* and 4-beat and 2-beat *thekas* (patterns), the drummer engages in many variations of phrasing, tone, dynamics and timbre. As Jonathan Kramer (1988) posits, “The highly variable temporality of music ... can come from the interaction of meter and rhythm” (97). *Laikāri* (rhythmic play) within metric cycles, as a staple in many Indian musics, thus offers rich potential as stimulating playground for complex time experiences.

It is important to note here, however, that the temporal patterns in shorter tāls and *laikāri* used in the light styles of kīrtan are more easily grasped by listeners as perceptual units, that is, they conform to their “psychological present” (Fraisse 1982). Drawing on psychologist James Michon’s proposition that the perceptual present is commonly 2-3 seconds long, Clayton (2000: 35-37) recognizes that most tāls are much longer in duration. The short tāls popular in the light musical genre of kīrtan thus are effective means of varied temporal experiences that fall within or close to perceptual grasp. As Clayton points out, various mechanisms of perception and memory are likely to be at play. My purpose in referencing the psychological present is to recognize that excessive complexity, for example of very long tāls, may not necessarily be more effective in inducing sensations of plurality of temporalities.¹²

It is pertinent to note again that each sabad kīrtan occasion is a unique performance of sabads and their renditions. Sabad kīrtan is an oral tradition that supports not only a wide variety in genres and styles, but also in performance structure within styles, and in each musician’s choices across performances of the same sabad with respect to melody, form, and performance sequence. This imparts a novel and exclusive quality to each song and event (beyond the level of interpretation of a fixed melodic composition). It also precludes boredom

¹² In *kīrtan* in the longer tāls, discussed in Chapter 4, the particularly emphatic articulation of the *sam*, the first beat, may well be a means of marking the *tāl* cycle for better perception of the duration of cycles and variations.

and fixing of expectations, and stimulates anticipation of the unknown. It makes every kīrtan event unique, and accords every sabad rendition its own “integral time” -- “[T]he unique organizations of time intrinsic to an individual piece: time enriched and qualified by the particular experience within which it is framed” (Epstein 1985:58).

In my musical analysis below I investigate the contribution of the factors discussed above to experiences of expanded time and feelings of awe, addressing rhythms from sources such as:

- pitch patterns in singing and vājā self-accompaniment by lead and second-lead singers
- accompanying tabla-drum striking patterns
- timbre of the two singing voices, vājā , tabla, kartāl and electronic tānpura
- the texture of the sabad-performance
- the form (as a composite of the above elements) of a sabad-performance

For my analysis, I examine part of the hour-and-half long performance in a style of the light genre by the renowned rāgi Sant Anoop Singh at Meher’s house. The inferences I draw below are based on a consolidation of the various experiences of the congregation members as they expressed them in conversations, and also on my observations of their states and demeanors, both before and after the program.

Figure 2.5
Sant Anoop Singh’s ensemble at Gurdwāra San Jose, California



Image from Gurdwāra San Jose Facebook

The waiting time at Meher’s house had passed quickly, and soon the place was bustling with the musician’s entourage, setting up instruments and the sound system. Their kīrtan ensemble consisted of the standard threesome – lead singer (head-rāgi) and second lead (side-rāgi), both self-accompanied on the vājā , and a tabla-player (tabla-*vadak*). They wore traditional, modest attire – white long shirts and pants, and turbans. Also accompanying them this time was Sant Anoop Singh ’s teenage son, dressed in chic jeans and shirt, sitting behind them and softly playing a kartāl. An electronic tānpura hummed softly throughout the performance.

The flow of the performance consisted of sequencing spoken, chanted and sung sections in different ways. A chant, rather than being a continuous repetition of a single rhythmic pattern, was presented in different rhythmic configurations. A sabad was presented as a composite of spoken, chanted and sung components. At the metric level too, there was ongoing variation with shifts in meter across chants and songs, as well as between metered and unmetered chanting and singing, thus providing a rich palette of periodicities. The sequence of items in that particular performance is summarized in the chart below, and elaborated in the following paragraphs.

Performance Map

- **Recited speech:** greeting and directions for participation by the head rāgi
- **Chant:**
 - Unmetered, melodic call and response – divine attributes (Mool Mantar – Core Verse)
 - Metered, melodic call and response – divine name (wāheguru)
 - Repeated rhythmic pattern, non-melodic, congregation only - divine name (wāheguru)
- **Song section (x5)**
 - Recited speech: song-lyrics explanation by head rāgi
 - Chanted: repeated rhythmic pattern non-melodic, congregation only - divine name (wāheguru)
 - Sung: song with congregational participation
 - Chanted: repeated rhythmic pattern, non-melodic, congregation only - divine name (wāheguru)
- **Recited speech:** appreciation of congregation; importance of social service in Sikh ideology; request for funds for charitable projects (school, college and hospital) in Punjab, India
- **Chant:** divine name (wāheguru)
 - Metered, melodic, call and response
 - Unmetered, melodic, ensemble only
 - Repeated rhythmic pattern, non-melodic, congregation only
- **Recited speech:** final thanks to congregation
- **Song:** concluding standard sabad

In the following analysis, I highlight the variety of rhythms in the music, and explore how the temporal experiences it generates makes manifest a complexity that calls forth awe for the divine and divine moral virtues. It bears repeating that these unfold in the context of Sikh ideational beliefs and devotional practices.

Sound check: “*wāheguru-satnām*” (wondrous guide-truth by name)

Sant Anoop Singh devoted considerable time to microphone and speaker placement as well as adjustment of sound controls. The sound check consisted of each singer repeating the phrase, *wāheguru-satnām* (wondrous guide-truth by name), in a serene chant-like manner, till Sant Anoop Singh was satisfied with the settings – a thunderous volume and high reverb. Even before the program had begun, the larger-than-life, resonant sound of *wāheguru* had occupied the space,¹³ in steady, confident rhythm, with machine technology in service.¹⁴ The time of the sound check had folded into divine time. This experience of an awesome divine became more and more palpable in the comportment of the ideationally primed congregation as the program progressed.

Recited speech: “*Aao, pyār nāl bhar jāiye*” (Come, let us become filled with divine love.)

Starting with the customary greeting, Sant Anoop Singh addressed the congregation (*sangat*), reminding them to be thankful for this blissful “time” (he used English) of singing divine virtues. He asked all to sit with a straight back, eyes closed, and to let go of intellect (*buddhi*) and shrewdness (*sayānap*), and become immersed in divine love (*har-prem*). His soft lilting voice against the gentle rhythms of the *tānpura*, was tenderly inviting. The evocation of divine love with its connotation in Sikh ideation of being eternal, set the stage for a timeless experience. The congregation was responsive, eager for the journey.

Chanted (unmetered, call and response): *Mool Mantar* (Core Verse)

Sant Anoop Singh began singing with a slow, unmetered, *alāp*-like rendition of the word *wāheguru* twice, staying within a few notes of the tonic. He then continued in the same fashion with the *Mool Mantar* (Core Verse encapsulating divine attributes), asking the congregation to repeat after him. Each word spanned only two or three notes, but he articulated them with an emphasis on syllables that imparted an accented rhythmic quality to it, giving perceptible weight to each divine attribute. His *vājā* playing contributed its own rhythm, leading at times, following at others, and the congregation members had their own unselfconscious micro-variations of the leading rhythms. The heterophonic sound complex was thus a multiplex of rhythms, expressive of many inner experiences of time, generating a sensation of plurality and vastness, and deepening the sense of awe. Contributing to this was the articulation of the eight adjectives for the divine, such as timeless (*akāl*) and incondensable (*ajooni*).

Lewis Rowell, in his essay, “The Creation of Audible Time” (1981) has explored how the opening of a musical performance frames the experience of time made audible through music. The *kīrtan* opening with congregational heterophonic sounding of divine attributes seemed to frame a complex temporal experience. It seemed that while each subjective time experience was being ushered toward a common divine time experience, the vastness of the latter also

¹³ As Peter Doyle (2005) has shown acoustic effects such as reverb and microphone placement play a significant role in the construction of an imagined world.

¹⁴For a similar point for *qawwālī* on the concert stage, see de Groot 2010.

afforded a vast array of diverse individual experiences. There seemed to be a mutual tuning-in of “inner time” (Alfred Schutz 1976), but not as Schutz has postulated to an external time of a musician. Rather than the unifying of the fluxes of inner time to a musician’s time or an objective outer time, I want to foreground here an experience of a unification qualitatively with a vast divine time which is understood as not only eternal and replete with virtuous potentialities, but also a complex of diversity, and accepting of difference (*bhāo dooja nāhi* – without feelings of othering)¹⁵ and with the potentialities of numerous individual negotiations and improvisations.

That *sabad kīrtan*, an affective mobilization of ideation through musical sound, produces these orientations to a divine world becomes evident in the words and gesture of congregants in such *kīrtan* occasions. While in general Sikh communities are as class and status conscious as any other, it is in such *kīrtan* occasions that they become inspired and oriented toward the performance of egalitarian ideals, as I will further explore below.

The intertextual role of the Mool Mantar is relevant too. As the Core Verse in the Guru Granth Sahib, it has a rhythmic presence in the Sikh scripture, occurring at the beginning and then repeatedly many times in *sabad*-section headings (and over five hundred times in its diminutive form). Most Sikhs know it by heart and often chant it at moments of need to benefit from its affordances. These connections across time deepen the sensation of extended and expanded moments, similar to what Ruth Stone (1985:145) has described as “expandable moments” – “like a seed growing.

Chanted (metered, melodic, call and response): wāheguru

The Mool Mantar *alāp* flowed into a metered melodic chanting of “wāheguru” in call and response, with the side-rāgi leading the congregation in response. The two rāgis on vājās, the tabla player and kartāl player, all joined in. The melody, which was contained in the lower tetrachord (*poorvāng*) had a loose chorus-verse form, with several variations. The tāl was the 8-beat keharwa, but the tabla player moved from one *theka* to another and back again, in no particular order or pattern. Similarly, the singers, the tabla player and the kartāl player moved to double time and back without following a fixed pattern. Each also executed variable rhythmic patterns (the singers in pitch phrasing) in the last measure at different times. Sometimes variations in the tabla and kartāl tempo-levels and rhythmic patterns coincided, providing greater intensification.¹⁶ The frequency of this increased as the tempo gradually increased slightly, and the tabla player played in double time continuously, which changed the rhythmic feel of the tāl, as discussed before. The side-rāgi who had a higher pitched voice than the head-rāgi, sang an octave higher every now and then, adding another layer of timbral rhythm. The overall effect was one of multiple and variable rhythmic flows, that seemed to

¹⁵ *Kīrtan* occasions, and *gurdwāras* in general, are remarkably inclusive. At *gurdwāras* it is common to see non-Sikhs enjoying *kīrtan* for whatever it brings them, and also *langar*. This is especially apparent at the holiest Sikh *gurdwāra*, the Harmandir, in Amritsar, Punjab. At San Jose *Gurdwāra* I have often seen non-Sikhs in the main sanctuary as well as the *langar* hall. Some are regulars, and include millennials, elders and families.

¹⁶ In general though, significant intensification is less a feature of the light genre than of the AKJ genre analyzed in Chapter 3. It is pertinent to note here that the large variety of Indian *kīrtan* practices from various traditions have distinct ways of articulating what may seem like common features, such as intensification.

further the experience of multidimensional time, and through that the experience of awe of a multidimensional and vast wāheguru.

Chanted (repeated rhythmic pattern, non-melodic, congregation only): wāheguru

After about five minutes of the metered, melodic wāheguru chanting, Sant Anoop Singh shifted to a non-melodic chant in a repeated rhythmic pattern, unaccompanied by instruments. He instructed the congregation to chant (japo) and he and the ensemble stopped singing and playing. As the congregation chanted, he directed: “*sāre*” (everybody), and then “*ucchi*” (louder). Thus, he shifted both the onus and the empowerment to the congregation to make divine sound and time, and to embody them. Embodiment of divine attributes is one of the most salient and emphasized aspects of Sikh ideology and practice, defining divine union itself.

Importantly also, this repetition of the divine-name, in a rhythmic pattern, non-melodic, and by the congregation only, punctuated the beginning and end of each song. Each iteration seemed to have a cumulative effect on the sense of timelessness, creating the experience of an eternal divine presence, and was akin to what Kramer (1988) has described as -- “temporal continuum of the unchanging, in which there are no separate events and in which everything seems part of an eternal present” (454).

The Sikh concept of time is relevant here: it is that of the present. It is believed that now is the time to experience the limitless divine - *mil vela hai eh* (GGS: 20, this is the time to meet), and every moment (*ghari*) is that time as well. Since the purpose of life in Sikh belief is defined as divine union, to be achieved by remembrance and enactment of divine virtues, each moment that is spent otherwise is considered a lost opportunity – “*ik dam sācha veesarai sa vela birtha jā-ey*” (GGS: 506, any breath that Truth is forgotten, is wasted time).

The maintenance of divine sound and time beyond sounded kīrtan moments is underscored in musical metaphors such as unheard sound (anhad), and “chantless chant” (ajap jāp) with its connotations of daily enactment of divine moral virtues.

Even though each iteration of wāheguru chanting was separated by the singing of a sabad for about ten minutes, for the kīrtan participants each finite period seemed to fold into an infinite time, one that made more proximate the apprehension (darsan) of the divine and the response of awe (vismād), and their connections with ethicality. It is this experience of darsan, vismād and time that the kīrtan participants later expressed variously as: “Wāheguru is so great, I cannot even describe it.” “I felt I was with (*de kole*) wāheguru.” “I felt that I was in a very open space (*khulli jagah*).” “I lost awareness (*pata nai lagya*) of time.” The spatial metaphors used by the congregants say a lot. The adjective khulli connotes spaciousness and accommodativeness, and in certain contexts, generosity (e.g. khulla *hath*, open hands).

Recited speech: Sabad vyākhyā (explanation of sacred song lyrics)

Almost thirteen minutes into the program, the congregation by now seemed gently but surely primed to receive guidance from the sabad lyrics. Sant Anoop Singh read each line (from his smartphone) and explained the meanings. In the chorus line, the song asked to engage in worship and let go of egotism and selfishness (“*Kar bandagi, chhād, mai mera*”). Again, his voice was soft, sincere, and mildly cadenced, backed by the gentle rhythms of the tānpura drone.

Chanted (repeated rhythmic pattern, non-melodic, congregation only): wāheguru

Sung: sabad: “*Kar bandigī chhād mai merā, hirḍai nām samhār saverā*” (Worship, let go of egotism and selfishness, holding the Name within your heart, improve each new day)

While the congregation was still chanting, the tabla-player fine-tuned his drums, and Sant Anoop Singh began playing the melody of the chorus line on the vājā. The tabla player joined in with a rhythmic flourish (a standard practice in many Indian musics), and as he moved into the theka, the tāl became clear – the 6-beat *dādra*, with two measures of three-beats each. The congregation got the cue to end their chanting. Anticipating the beginning of singing, the kartāl player entered in the second measure with a rhythmic flourish, then continued playing at the measure marks (beats 1 and 4). The side-rāgi joined in completing the ensemble sound. There was thus a rhythmic buildup of texture, timbre and volume.

By the completion of one round of the chorus section, the tabla player had already switched between two variations of rhythmic patterns in the second measures, and moved into a third as the rāgis launched into complementary melodic material on the vājās while resting their voices. Free of lyrics, the vājā material was rhythmically denser, as was the tabla theka variation in the second measures, paving the way for the upcoming verse in higher register. The kartāl player continued to steadfastly mark measures. In the second round of the chorus, the side-rāgi suddenly sang a phrase an octave higher, the contrast with the low voice of Sant Anoop Singh creating an ethereal feel. The kartāl player decided to mark the end of each subsection of the chorus with a rhythmic flourish. In the following round of vājā interlude, the tabla player moved to a rhythmically denser theka.

In the next round of vājā interlude, the tabla player executed a variation of the whole theka (two measures) instead of the variations thus-far over one measure only. As the music progressed, there was an increased frequency of the usage of the *vivādi sur* (dissonant note),¹⁷ adding a feeling of moving beyond limitedness. In the last verse, the side-rāgi launched into a sabad-alāp (unmetered melodic elaboration using sabad lyrics) against the tabla theka, while the kartāl player withdrew. In the last round of the chorus, Sant Anoop Singh repeatedly sang the theme phrase, “*Kar bandagi*” (Do worship), while the side-rāgi offered another unmetered elaboration of the theme. Exploring the high register the alāp, set against the rest of the music, seemed to offer new vistas, or in Kramer’s (1988) terminology, “multiply-directed time” -- “temporal continuum in which progression is seemingly in several directions at once” (453).

In the last part of the song, Sant Anoop Singh drew the congregation into the singing in two rhythmically contrasting ways. First, singing wāheguru in metered call and response, in which the tabla contributed to the higher energy with a theka variation that was even more rhythmically dense. And towards the end, singing the chorus lines first softly in slow, free rhythm without instrumental accompaniment, and finally moving into meter with the whole ensemble playing.

Thus, while there was a mild build-up of rhythmic intensity over the song rendition, the detailed process was not predetermined, but emerged from the individual and collaborative

¹⁷ As in the Indian contemporary ghazal genre, *sabad* kīrtan in the “light” style has a propensity for this. And even though the music may not be in a (recognized) *rāg* with its defined pitch hierarchies and allowances, it is modal, and the implicit *vivādi sur* is perceptible, and recognizable at least by a trained ear.

choices of the ensemble members, informed no doubt by an overall understanding of the leader's preferences.¹⁸ Importantly also, the ending came back to the gentle rhythms of the beginning, connecting the experiences into an endlessly continuable cycle.

Chanted (repeated rhythmic pattern, non-melodic, congregation only): wāheguru

Sung: sabad

Sung: sabad

Sung: sabad

Sung: sabad

Sung: concluding sabad (six verses from the sabad composition, Anand – Bliss)

The following sabads similarly took the congregation from one cycle to another, each progressively intensifying their experiences. Voices around me sounded thicker, some had become more confident, others calmer. An energy seemed to have steadily built up – strong and inspiring, loving and soothing. It was the musicking that had provided the means for the colors of awe to develop and deepen. As some of the congregants later expressed: “I was in bliss (*anand*).” “I am so fortunate to get this blessed time. Great, great (*dhan dhan*) wāheguru, the true emperor (*saccha pātshāh*).”

By the end of Sant Anoop Singh's performance, it felt as though the entire perceptual present of the congregation had been infused and filled with the awesomeness of wāheguru, and time had folded into a vast, perpetually extending wāheguru time. Despite the assortment of rhythms, the overall feeling created among the kīrtan participants seemed to be that of oneness. Not because each person had heard or sung in the exact same manner, or experienced the various temporalities in the same way. But rather it was in the multiple that the vastness of oneness seemed to be experienced, for the words and gestures of the congregants revealed that they had felt validated and expansive, as in the spatial metaphor of open space. And, as in: “This is the most soothing time.” “I feel so strengthened.”

Oneness in the Multiple

The palpable sense of oneness that had emanated from what seemed like a plurality of temporal experiences can be understood through the Sikh principle of oneness - *ik* (literally one). Presented in the Guru Granth Sahib as the numeral 1, it is the first entry in the scripture, the beginning of the Mool Mantar (core verse), and is privileged with a constant presence, occurring in sabad section-headings over 500 hundred times across the 1,430 pages. Within sabad lyrics, it occurs hundreds of times as the words *ik*, *ek*, *ekai*, and is elaborated upon in different ways, including a critique of the practice of its opposite, *dooja*, meaning duality and othering. As an attribute of the divine, and a condition of divine union, it infuses all matters divine with the principle of oneness.

This principle of oneness is that of parity. Put forth by the Sikh founding Guru, Nanak (1469-1539), and elaborated upon by the following nine Gurus, it encapsulates his ethics of parity in a number of dimensions: (i) parity across all human beings - *Manas ki jaat sabe ekai pehchanbo* (DG: 51,¹⁹ recognize all mankind as one race), (ii) equal opportunity of access to a

¹⁸ For a general discussion of dynamics between leader, supporter and follower, see Brinner (1995).

¹⁹ This is the Dasam Granth, an anthology of poetry attributed to the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh.

divine principle, irrespective of one's societal position (especially caste) – *khatri brahman sood vais kau japai har mantra japaini* (GGS: 800, all social castes can meditate on the divine name), and (iii) parity of the divine principle across all faith traditions irrespective of its names (Allāh, Rām, Wāheguru) – “*hindu turk ka sahib ek*” (GGS: 1158, the divine master of Hindus and Muslims is at par). This oneness is understood as inclusive, infinite and eternal.

The very comprehension of oneness requires the acceptance of the multiple, of understanding the multiple as part of its limitless possibilities and potentialities. The practice of engaging with the multiple is the practice of inculcating oneness. To apprehend this oneness as divine and become enraptured in its awe is to partake in the ethics of oneness.

Kīrtan is one such venue of practice – of multiple rhythms and multiple temporalities, pointing to the vastness of oneness. Kīrtan is thus both the expression and the experience of oneness in the multiple.

Time Vistas of Awe

At Meher's house that evening, as the concluding *sabad* drew to an end, the congregation, in conventional gesture, got up in turn and gave tips (*bheta*, literally, offering), and I could not help but notice that they were much larger tips than usual. Sant Anoop Singh had been quite successful in eliciting feelings of generosity (*dān*) in the congregation for the construction of schools and hospitals for the less advantaged.

Not only that, bodily rhythms all around had been discernably altered. As people moved around and socialized after the program, they moved more gently, seemed to be calmer, to have grown in grace and acquired a certain largesse. The kīrtan experience of divine time seemed to continue to flow - a time not only eternal, but inclusive, of differences and of a vast array of virtuous qualities and potentialities, a time of oneness in the multiple. “Vastness” and “accommodation” – the makings of awe, still seemed to be in the air. It was still “*su vela*” (that time) – in *sabad* that time when “*darsan karna*” -- when the incomprehensible, awesome divine becomes more apprehendable (literally, when one obtains vision of the divine).

That time also includes *langar* time – another practice of the principle of oneness, this one expressed in collective dining in the spirit of equality. This means that all are seated at the same level and no one (except those with special needs) is accorded preferential treatment of any sort. Additionally, *langar* is open to all irrespective of their beliefs, status, race and gender. Dining together in this spirit is particularly significant for a community (as Punjabis, and Indians) that is class, status and race conscious, and patriarchal.²⁰

While it is the *gurdwāra* and kīrtan occasions that typically include *langar*, the concept of *langar* has spread globally in the form of stand-alone community service events. In the diaspora, Sikh groups regularly organize *langar* at homeless shelters and for disaster relief.

²⁰ See, for example, Nesbitt (2016).

Figure 2.6
Langar at a gurdwāra in Delhi



Image from www.thynkfeed.com

As people enjoyed the delicious food prepared earlier in the day at Meher's house by a team of volunteers, they shared their daily concerns and supported each other. The awesome word *wāheguru* was there in the mix, and enlisted time and again for inspiration and strength in everyday dealings, whether that was courage (*nirbhau* – fearlessness) to navigate issues at work, or truthfulness (*sach*) in personal relationships.

There was also talk of when and where the next *kīrtan* event was going to be. The talk expressed the urge to experience again divine time and awe in greater intensity through musicking than otherwise possible, to capitalize on repetitions to make sensations more continuous, and to diminish sensations of separation. As a *sabad* says, "*ik gharhi na milte, ta kaljug hota*" – a moment's separation is like an era of vices. Thus, where moments of connection generate an experience of eternal time of virtuous possibilities, moments of separated time magnify into an era where vices prevail. But *sabad* also recommends, "*kaljug mein kīrtan pardhāna*" – in the era of vices, it is *kīrtan* that is supreme. For the time in *kīrtan* is the one that induces the experience of the divine; it is the time of *sabad*-attuned consciousness (*surat dhun*) which renders the time of divine wisdom (*satguru mat vela*, GGS: 943).

Conclusions

In this chapter, I have elaborated on one aspect of how rhythm, time, emotion and ethics become entwined in the Sikh *kīrtan* practice and experience through what I term "time vistas of awe." I have investigated how musical sound contributes to the experience of oneness; how a rich variety in musical rhythms contribute to a plurality of experiences of time, and how this multiple folds into a vast oneness through the Sikh ideation of *Ik* (One). I have explored how in *sabad kīrtan* occasions musical sound, words, bodies and food come together in the

construction of an ethical world; how mundane temporalities, emotions and issues are transformed onto a plane that is in accord with divine concerns.

Sant Anoop Singh was of course a skillful performer. And no doubt his mix of technologies had numerous components. In this chapter I have focused on one of them – awe, and experiences of time, intensified by means of the musical rhythms of kīrtan. That evening seemed to be uncannily like a perfectly unfolding lab experiment – awe elicitors, awe responders, time experiences, and ethical responses, all flowing seamlessly.

Yet, such scenarios are commonplace across sacred and secular spaces. By using the Sikh sabad kīrtan context, I hope to have contributed to the understanding of the role of musical rhythm, and experiences of time in particular, in such widely used “awe”-some technologies for uplifted and expansive experiences.

In the next chapter I explore the affordances of the AKJ genre of sabad kīrtan, focusing more closely at their distinctive cyclical chanting of the divine name, wāheguru, its sonic properties and the potentialities this opens up for ethical sensations.

Chapter Three

Ethical Sensations: Affective Attunements in the “AKJ” Genre

It was past midnight and just as I was beginning to feel a sense of my fading, a volunteer appeared, passing out handfuls of robust Californian almonds mixed in with a few slender, delicately sweet Indian raisins. Just what I needed! I was in the smaller sanctuary of the gurdwāra in San Jose, participating in an all-night kīrtan occasion. And as I have come to learn, that caring gesture of the volunteer I experienced is but one among many at play in such occasions, and is part of a larger ethical orientation that I have come to see as clearly motivated and moved by sabad kīrtan.

I had been there for almost five hours. The kīrtan had been non-stop with one singer after another building the affective energy. The intensity had peaked around midnight with more frequent congregational chanting of the divine name saturating the air with a certain flavor, that of love and affection for the divine. The sabad themes earlier had been on coming to the divine sanctuary. As midnight approached they were about ras -- about divine experiential states.

The kīrtan occasion was part of a weekend-long gathering, an annual event in the Bay Area that is linked to many such events worldwide. This musical genre was that of the AKJ (Akhand Kirtani Jatha), a distinct community of Sikhs. This genre is distinctive for its long sessions, call-and-response singing, and cyclical build-up of devotional intensity. Heightened feelings of devotion at such gatherings pour into volunteer actions that sustain these regular non-commercial events. Participants in this genre often expressed how kīrtan is nourishment that strengthens them to follow the Guru’s teachings.

In this chapter I explore the musical mechanisms in this genre as a means for heightening the conditions for ethically attuned subjectivities, focusing on the cyclical sounding of the divine name (wāheguru) with a particular sonic field of timbre, volume and pulse. Emphasized timbral expression is a distinctive feature of this genre that has not received attention and my analysis foregrounds it. I investigate how this cyclical sounding plays a role in intensifying the embodied states of affective attunements, and how such attunements in turn are experienced as what I term ethical sensations.

The AKJ (Akhand Kīrtani Jatha) and its Marked Affection for the Guru¹

The AKJ is a distinct community of Sikhs that took shape at the turn of the twentieth century in the socio-political conditions of colonial Punjab, the homeland of Sikhs. The group began as a grass roots movement in response to concerns that the Guru’s teachings, in particular the formalized Sikh daily code of conduct (*rahit*) established by the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh, was not being followed (Barrow 2001). The eighteenth century, after the death of Guru Gobind Singh, was a chaotic period for Sikh institutions and the Sikh moral tradition, which unfortunately continued to worsen during the period of the Sikh kingdoms in the

¹ As discussed in the Introduction, the term Guru is used variously by Sikhs to refer to either one of the ten Sikh Gurus, the primary scripture Guru Granth Sahib, the divine, wāheguru, and some or all of these collectively. This is based on the understanding of a continuity of spirit (*jōt*) between the human Gurus, and between divine wisdom and theirs, and of Guru Granth Sahib as the embodiment of this wisdom.

nineteenth century.² Corrupt priests (*mahants*) administered many places of worship.³ There was also concern over increased Christian and Hindu proselytization in Punjab. Starting from the end of the nineteenth century, Sikh revival movements sought to reinstall practices that they understood to be consonant with the Sikh moral tradition, especially in its connection with the teachings of Guru Gobind Singh.

The AKJ group was thus motivated by deep devotion to Guru Gobind Singh and their memory of his formalization of Sikh practice. The key basis of this process of formalization was the idea of Khalsa (literally, the pure), a Sikh (of any gender) who would be devoted to the moral tradition of the Gurus in word and action, and embody the strength and courage to live up to these values. To formalize this, Guru Gobind Singh institutionalized for the Khalsa five articles of faith that symbolized various ethical aspects (Figure 3.1). He also institutionalized an initiation ceremony (*amrit sanchār*, literally, transmission of ambrosial nectar; Figure 3.2) which consists of the devotee drinking amrit received from a group of five highly spiritual Khalsas (*panj pyāre*, literally the five beloved; those who embody the spirit of Guru Gobind Singh). The amrit is prepared at the ceremony by the five beloved with water and sugar puffs in an iron bowl. It is stirred with a *khanda* (double-edged iron sword; see Figure 1.13) while chanting sacred verses. By ingesting the amrit, the devotee is believed to be infused with love for the Guru and the spirit of a *sant-sipāhi* (warrior-saint), one who has the courage to uphold moral values in daily conduct, and stand up for one’s own and others’ rights. The amrit ceremony is also known as *khande di pahul*, literally awakening by the khanda.

Figure 3.1
Articles of Faith (Panj Kakkar – Five Ks)



Articles of Faith

5 K’s – mandatory articles of faith


<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Kesh - ❖ Kachera ~ ❖ Kanga - ❖ Kara - ❖ Kirpan - 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uncut hair: Sikhs do not cut hair or beards to remain in the image that God gave us. Under-shorts (boxers) to represent modesty and fidelity (virtuous character) Comb, made of wood - to keep uncut hair neat and clean. Bracelet, made of steel worn on right hand –a reminder of noble actions, a symbol of eternity. Ceremonial small blunt knife symbolizing freedom, liberty and justice. 	   
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Image from <http://slideplayer.com/slide/1559824/>

² See Singh, Nripinder (1990) for a detailed account.

³ See Tan (1995) and Nesbitt (2016).

Figure 3.2
Amrit Sanchār

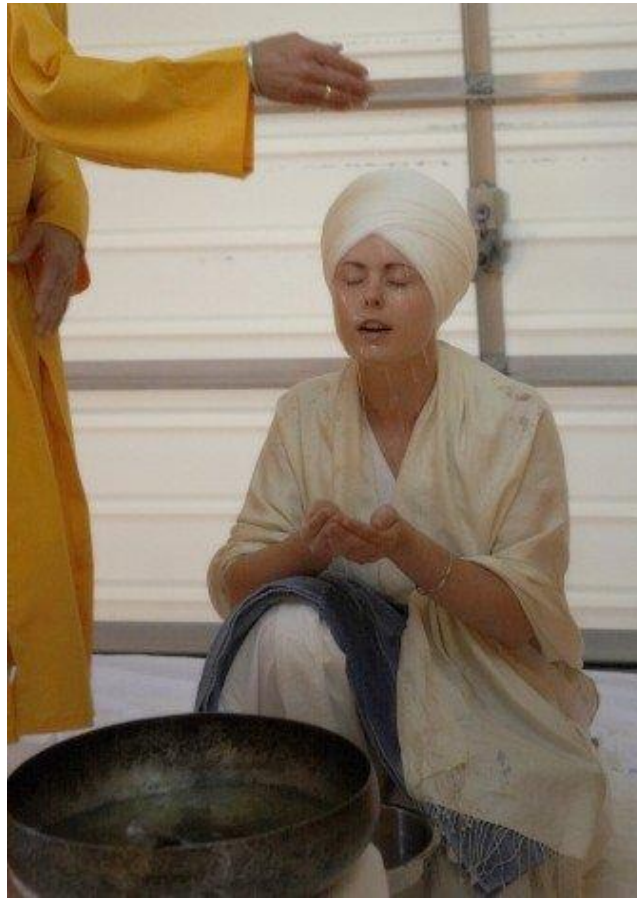


Image from sikhiwiki.org

The name of the AKJ group derived from the fact that kīrtan was their main means of revitalizing the teachings of the Gurus. Motivated groups began organizing kīrtan programs at various locations and came to be known as kīrtani jathas, literally kīrtan groups. The term akhand, literally unbroken, indicates that their singing was continuous, without interruptions with exegesis or announcements. This followed from their belief in the spiritual power of continuous singing of sabad, and chanting of the divine name, wāheguru.

This model continues today and AKJ members get together regularly in all-weekend gatherings known as samāgams (literally, coming together of the similar) organized worldwide. These consist of a series of kīrtan sessions at gurdwāras or homes of highly committed Khalsas. These events are non-commercial, completely mounted by volunteers. Local AKJ members get together in advance to organize and distribute responsibilities, from picking up arriving members and hosting them in their homes, to arranging the sound and recording equipment, to cooking and cleaning.

All kīrtan sessions and associated langar services are open house, welcome to anyone who wants to attend with respectfulness to their etiquette and sentiments. Thus the affection for the Guru unfolds in the form of an affective assembly of devotees and volunteers with a

great spirit of generosity. In between kīrtan sessions, friends catch up, go sightseeing or shopping, or just flop down for rest.

The AKJ is a large community now, in India and in the diaspora. Embodying the Khalsa form and values is key to this community. The amrit ceremony is deeply meaningful to them, and a key part of their deep experiences during kīrtan, as religious studies scholar Joy Barrow (2001) has also described based on her ethnographic study of the AKJ community in Southall, near London.

AKJ Kīrtan

Many attribute the beginnings of this group and this kīrtan genre to a highly spiritual Sikh, Bhai Randhir Singh (Figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3
Bhai Randhir Singh (1878 – 1961), on vājā



Image from akj.org

The AKJ genre has grown tremendously in popularity.⁴ A cursory look at their events listed on their major websites, akj.org and akhandkirtanijatha.com, shows the global reach of their kīrtan programs. In addition to the samāgam programs, at some gurdwāras certain times have been scheduled for AKJ sessions. At the Gurdwāra San Jose, for example, the early morning kīrtan session, *Asa ki Vār*, is sung one Sunday a month by local AKJ members. A weekly Sunday evening slot is also reserved for them.

My field research in the Bay Area shows a high proportion of millennials among the musicians and attending congregation,⁵ along with young families and elders. The congregation was also not limited to those who see themselves as members of this group. Many of my interlocutors said that they enjoy kīrtan in different genres, and appreciate the experience from the special devotional energy of this group.

The majority of musicians who sing in this genre and participate in the AKJ kīrtan events are non-professional musicians who do not receive remuneration. Their belief is that this should be a non-monetized activity. Those who have adopted it as a profession are looked upon negatively by some as commercializing what should be an act of devotion and service. The non-professional musicians come from a wide range of professional backgrounds. The lead singer, Prabhjot Singh, who leads the monthly Sunday session at the Gurdwāra San Jose is a medical doctor, for example. Harpreet Singh, whose singing I analyze below, runs a Montessori school. Barrow (2001:97) noted that her informants from the group she studied were mainly IT and business management professionals, and university students including some undertaking post-graduate research.

The distinctive competency area of this genre -- embodying, performing and leading a gradual and smooth buildup of affective intensity among the congregation, requires considerable devotion, talent and practice. During the long kīrtan sessions, musicians take turns, typically starting with the younger and less experienced, and ending with the most competent. Since the affective energy accumulates over a kīrtan session, successive musicians start and end at different levels, aiming to keep the progression smooth. The role of the congregation is significant in this smooth progression. In fact, typically the musicians who are leading at any particular time, emerge from the congregation and go back into it. Virtuosity levels, while they vary, are often very high.

⁴ Purewal (2013) has discussed its growth in the diaspora to be the result of the migration and the mobilization of sentiments of identity post-1984 (pogroms against Sikhs in India).

⁵ Similarly, Barrow (2001) and J. Singh (2014) note from their fieldwork that most attendees in the UK are under the age of 30.

Figure 3.4
AKJ ensemble and congregation, led by Amanpreet Kaur⁶
AKJ Samagam, February 21, 2015, San Jose Gurdwara



Photo by author

The AKJ genre has a significant participation of female lead singers. The fact that most musicians are non-professional is a likely contributing factor, but there is also a strong sense of gender equality due in particular to the formalization of ideal Sikh practices by Guru Gobind Singh. Adopting the articles of faith instituted by him, a greater proportion of women wear turbans (though topped with scarves that match their attire⁷). They believe that the Sikh articles of faith were accorded by the tenth Guru equally to men and women. Donning the turban enables them to assert parity with men in both the representation of the Sikh visible identity as well as the symbolism of leadership. They wear less make-up and jewelry as assertion of their inner beauty and strength. I was told that piercing of ears is deforming the body given by wāheguru; that the body is beautiful as it is given, regardless of what anyone might think. Women are also remarkably comfortable with (any amount of) facial hair,⁸ and are not shy in this assertion of their natural self even as lead singers in programs that are video-recorded freely by attendees. Keeping uncut beard is part of the Sikh symbols of faith too, of acceptance of one's natural self. In the AKJ congregations I observed, this adherence enables an open recognition and acceptance of gender diversity, along this aspect at least. A woman with a full beard and a flowing feminine scarf -- a person who just does not fit the normative binarized

⁶ The tabla player is her brother, Amritpreet Singh, and beside her is her mother, Harjinder Kaur, a well-known AKJ lead singer. Harjinder Kaur's brother is also an AKJ lead singer.

⁷ The traditional attire is a long shirt (*kamiz*) with loose pants (*salwar*) and a large flowing scarf (*chunni* or *dupatta*).

⁸ Though I was told that for some it is a source of considerable stress. I was told of awkward moments within this space too, for example, when young children point to them and ask their parent: is that a girl or a boy?

notions of gender, can partake in the dignity and self-empowerment of leading a kīrtan congregation to divine experience.⁹

Figure 3.5
Congregation, AKJ Samāgam, February 21, 2015, Gurdwāra San Jose, California



Photo by author

The akhand kīrtan genre has a number of distinctive features. Call and response participatory singing is an essential feature. Kīrtan sessions typically range from a few hours to all night. The singing is not interrupted by announcements or discourse. Thus, neither the names of musicians nor the program is announced. The musicians typically sit surrounded by members of the congregation, and often not on the stage, but in the congregation space. The typical ensemble is similar to that of the light genre, but mostly smaller, consisting of a lead singer self-accompanying on the vājā, and a tabla player. Sometimes there is a second lead, with or without a vājā. The use of kartāls (shakers) played by congregation members sitting in proximity with the ensemble is also a typical feature of this genre and its sound texture (Figure 3.6 and 1.12). Chhaine (cymbals; Figure 1.12) are also sometimes seen, being played by congregation members.

The manner of playing these instruments is distinctive. The vājā is played more percussively, adding rhythmic emphasis to the words being sung. While the singing itself is melismatic, key words are emphasized with accents. The vājā is used primarily to play the melody as it is being sung rather than as interlude. The tabla is especially active. Compared to other genres, the drummer does not execute variations on the theka (stroke patterns of the tāl) as much, concentrating instead on following the sabad phrasing with matching thekas, and

⁹ The ethics at play here are clearly supported by history and memory, symbol and sound, and I see this as an important and fruitful topic for further research.

managing the patterns of energy flows in partnership with the singer and perceiving the needs of the congregation. The drumming is a significant component of the energy buildup. This constitutes playing at a gradually increasing tempo and playing increasingly in double time. Musicians have mentioned to me that sometimes tabla players start dominating the lead singer in the flow and pace of the performance, pushing to greater intensity and tempo. Due also to the call and response singing pattern of this genre, the overall sound texture contrasts with even the light genre and especially with the classical musical genre (which I discuss in the next chapter).

Figure 3.6
AKJ ensemble and congregation including kartāl player



Image from akj.org

Each line of a sabad is sung at least twice in call and response (i.e., a total of 4 times at least), and often many times. A special feature of the performance structure is that the chorus and then each verse-chorus unit move through cycles of variations in rhythmic density, tempo and volume. As the sabad progresses, cycles often follow a pattern of phrase diminution, starting with complete lines of song text, and moving on to repetition of key phrases. When the time seems ripe, cycles climax with the chanting of the divine name, *wāheguru*. This chanting is known as *wāheguru-simran* (meditation) or *gurmantar* (literally, Guru-phrase). As the cycle progresses toward *wāheguru-simran* the tabla moves to playing in double time. Kartāls typically follow suit. The percussion is thus a fundamental contributor to rhythmic density. The tempo increases steadily through this process, within and across each cycle; i.e.,

each successive cycle begins at a slightly higher tempo than the previous one and also ends at a faster tempo. The overall effect is one of a whirling spiral that takes the participants into deeper experiential states. The process is gradual and smooth, and a skillful art.

In the following transcriptions (Figures 3.7 to 3.10) I show an example of a typical singing progression in a cycle, in a sabad performance at the 2014 Bay Area Samāgam by Harpreet Singh, an accomplished AKJ singer with a mellifluous voice.

Figure 3.7
Chorus melody of “Mat Bisras Re Man”

Mat Bisras Re Man

Guru Nanak Dev Original tonic: F#

♩ = 145

Chorus Line 1

mat bi - s ra - s re ma - na raa m bol

Chorus Line 1 Variation

mat bis ras re ma - na raa m bol

Chorus Line 2 Chorus Line 2 Variation

ap - ram - pa - ra a - ga - m a go ch - ra a - p - ram

Chorus Line 3

pa - ra a - ga - ma a - go cha - ra gur - mukh har aa - p tu -

la - ey a tu - la tol

Figure 3.8
A phrase diminution in Chorus Line 1 of “Mat Bisras Re Man”

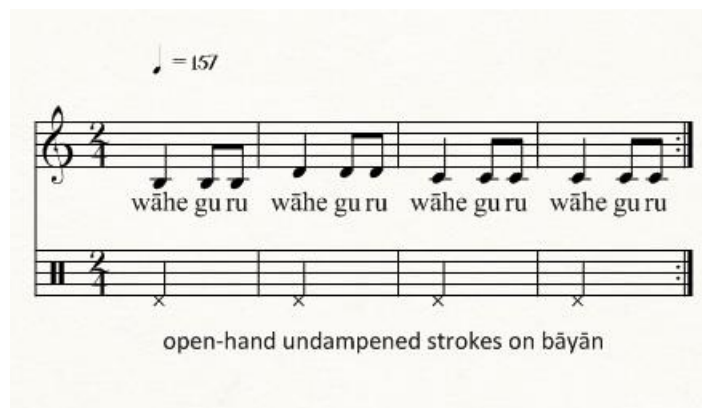


Figure 3.9
Further phrase diminution in Chorus Line 1 of “Mat Bisras Re Man”



Figure 3.10
Wāheguru chant, with open hand tabla bāyān strokes

[Note: In these moments wāheguru is pronounced as wāi-guru, so that the initial portion becomes one syllable.]



In addition to this pattern of energy intensification, other features of the performance add as well to the affective force in this genre. Continuing with the example of Harpreet Singh’s performance: his voice often became gently thick with sentiment, especially at key words in the sabad, another feature more often heard in the AKJ genre. He often changed the pickup points for different lines (Figure 3.7), and the congregation seemed to navigate each change

flawlessly, indicating practice in this skill. Harpreet Singh often started the chorus and verse lines with a *tihāi* (thrice repeated cadence phrase), which added emphasis and momentum. He sang the chorus and verse lines with beautiful melodic variations that were short and not too complicated (Figure 3.7). His singing was melismatic, using the ornamentations *mīnd* (glides) and *āndolan* (gentle oscillations around a note) that are popular in North Indian musics, including Bollywood, and have gained affective force through their aesthetic valorization and normalization.

The palpable buildup of energy and intensity is a hallmark of this musical genre of *sabad kīrtan*. Such intensification has also been discussed and analyzed for other *kīrtan* traditions in India (Slawek 1986, Henry 1988, Schultz 2004, Graves 2009). In my analysis here, I wish to focus on the sonic features of the culminating *wāheguru-simran*, and also its cyclical occurrence during a *sabad* rendition, in order to understand the congregants' listening experiences during these heightened moments that they mentioned as their favorite. In particular I want to foreground the timbral aspects of this sound, and its affective force. The use of timbre has been an important but overlooked characteristic feature of this genre, which has been recognized mostly for its all night sessions and generation of spiritual ecstasy.¹⁰ Through my analysis here, I draw attention to this significant distinctive aspect of this sound and its affective force.

Sounding the Divine

In my ethnographic interactions Sikh participants talked about *wāheguru-simran* as their favorite part: "That is when I get completely into it" (January 25, 2015). "That is when I am lost to the world" (May 10, 2015). "I feel *wāheguru* is hugging me" (July 24, 2016). "It automatically goes to your tongue. It is a priceless internal effect. I am meditating without even realizing it" (June 11, 2016). "I feel positive, uplifted, stress free" (January 18, 2015). When I asked what it was about the musical sounds of *wāheguru-simran* that particularly moved them, most replied with, "everything." When I prodded further, some would say, "I like all the instruments, all the sounds" (January 25, 2015), or "it all goes well together" (February 1, 2015). The most specific answers I got was with respect to the *tabla*: "I like the loud *tabla*" (January 25, 2015). "I love the feel of the *tabla*" (May 10, 2015).

The *wāheguru-simran* moments (Figure 3.10) are parts of the *kīrtan* especially sonically marked, by the instruments and the singing. The *tabla bāyān* (lower bass drum) typically marks this section by shifting to a regular open hand (*khulla hath*) resonant stroke on the downbeat.¹¹ Such an open hand stroke is generally used only occasionally in the rest of the *sabad* for emphasis as well, and indeed as a signal to the lead singer that time is getting ripe for *wāheguru-simran*. During *wāheguru-simran* the *tabla* becomes a major driving force of the energy build up, especially when its volume surges. The call and response singing shifts to simultaneous chanting with the lead singer. The word *wāheguru* is typically chanted using two or three pitches around the tonic or sub-tonic. I was told that the *simran* technique is to say

¹⁰ While there are no musicological studies on the AKJ, sociological studies on *kīrtan* in the diaspora (Purewal and Lallie 2013; Singh, Jasjit 2014) typically mention these attributes in describing the music of AKJ. It is pertinent to note again that AKJ is not only a diasporic genre.

¹¹ At times I saw open hand dampened strokes as well, and at times closed hand strokes too. But I was told that the open hand resonant stroke is more typical.

wahē on the inhale and *guru* on the exhale.¹² The *vājā* often shifts to playing these pitches of the chant as a chord, in a forceful tone, quite percussively and loudly, with the bellows pumping on the downbeat. Together the *tabla*, *kartāls*, *vājā* and voices generate an enormous engulfing sound that seems to permeate all bodies and materials present; as phenomenologist Don Ihde (2007:76) termed it, “an auditory field” of immersion. As an interlocutor put it, “the whole body feels it” (May 10, 2015).

The notion of “sound dominance” put forth by sound studies scholar Julian Henriques is apt here.

Sound dominance is hard, extreme and excessive. At the same time the sound is also soft and embracing and it makes for an enveloping, immersive and intense experience. The sound invades or even pervades the body like smell. ... There’s no escape, no cut off, no choice but to be there. Even more than music heard normally at this level, sound allows us to block out rational process making the experience imminent, immediate and unmediated. ” (2003:451-2).

Regarding volume in particular, sound technology consultant Barry Blesser (2007) has argued that loudness is a dominating sonic experience. Loud music overpowers the senses. With loud music, other sounds become inaudible. Below I will argue that this inaudibility makes space for the audition of unheard divine sound (*anhad*) and its ethical hues.

Timbral articulation by instruments and voices is a significant feature of the *wāheguru-simran* sound complex, and the role of the *tabla* timbre is especially important. Of all the sounds, it was that of the *tabla* that interlocutors mentioned most. It often becomes the loudest sound but that loud sound also has a particular timbre. Its emphatic sounding is reminiscent of the *nagāra* drum, a three- to five-foot (in diameter) kettle drum played in Guru Gobind Singh’s *darbār* (court) during Mughal rule as a symbol of sovereignty (Figure 3.11). It is now played in *gurdwāras* to sound the arrival and departure of Guru Granth Sahib from the *darbār* (sanctuary), or at key points in the liturgical prayer (*ardās*) when the memory of Sikh martyrs is invoked. The intertextual connection of its sound with that of the *bāyān tabla* drum is thus significant.

¹² This is similar to the Sufi *zikr* (remembrance) practice of sounding the divine.

Figure 3.11
Nagāra drums

At the Gurdwāra Harmandir complex,
Amritsar, Punjab, India

At Gurdwāra San Jose, California, USA



Image from www.sikhscholar.co.uk

Photo by author

The tabla is a complex drum pair on which a number of different pitches and timbres can be produced.¹³ This is due to its layered drum heads, with layers of skin as well as a tuning paste covering part of the drum heads (Figure 3.12). Additionally, each drum of the pair is different in size, shape and construction. The dāyān (smaller drum) can be tuned accurately to pitches, but not the bāyān (larger bass drum). By using different combinations of fingers and palms of hands, their different placements on one or both drum heads, and different dampening and bouncing techniques, a variety of strokes and stroke combinations can be produced which vary by pitch, timbre, and stress (Stewart 1974). Different stroke patterns

¹³ See for example Patranabis et al (2015).

when strung together in different ways form various tāls (metric cycles). Thus a tāl, an arrangement of stroke patterns, as played on a tabla is a sort of melody.

Figure 3.12
Tabla detail

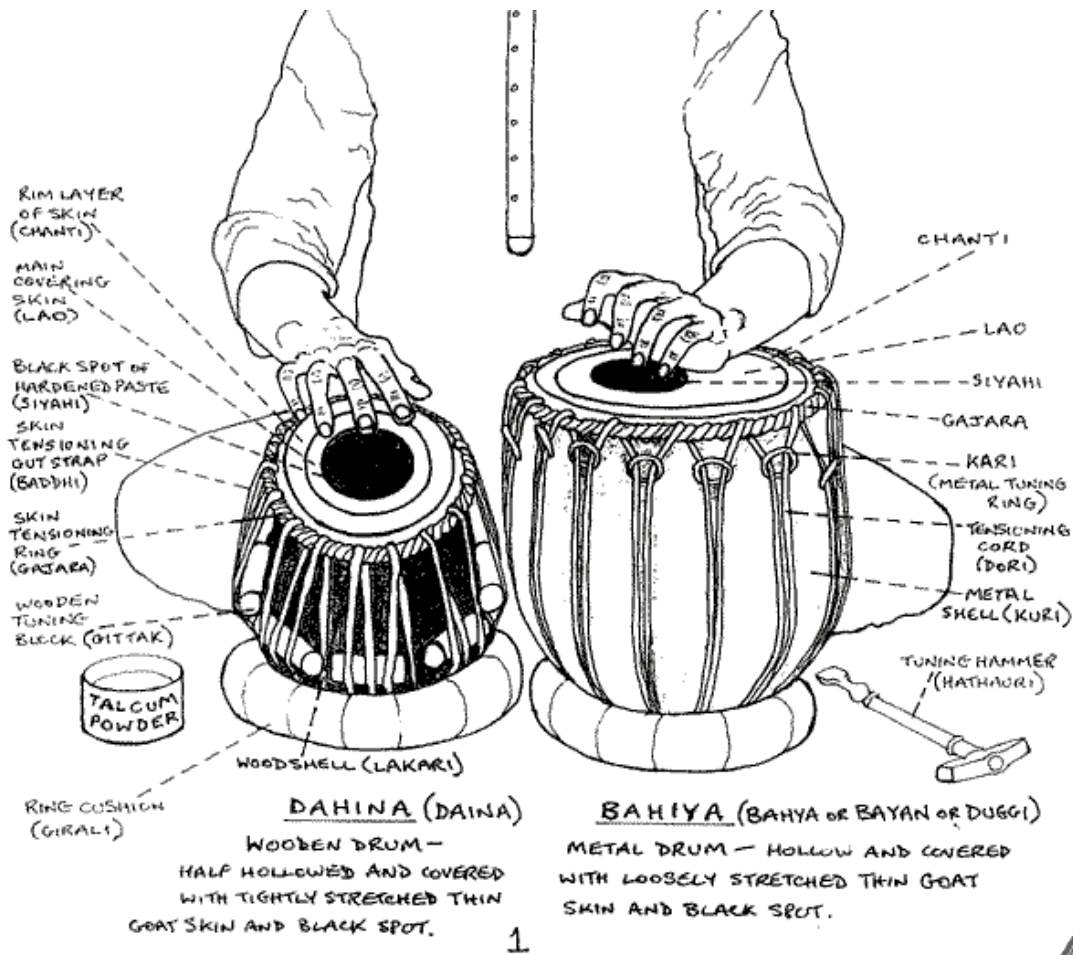


Image from www.davidbruce.net

During wāheguru simran the tabla shifts to a short repeated pattern, typically using as discussed above, an open hand undampened stroke on the bāyān drum that is played with increasing volume as the sabad rendition progresses. This open stroke has great potential for playing loudly since the entire forearm is utilized. During charged wāheguru-simran the timbre of the loud booming open bāyān stroke becomes dominant. The more “melodic” form of the tāl is replaced with the emphatic sounding of a booming resonating timbre.

A similar change often takes place for the vājā as well. The melodic playing is replaced by a repetitive, emphatic, horn-like and chordal sound, and it is this timbre that is sounded through the chant. As the charge builds up, voices in the congregation tend to shift in timbre

too, some to more guttural sounds, some to a greater rolling of 'r' in wāheguru, and many other less pronounced variations. Often the word wāheguru sounds truncated to just wah or just gur. Religious studies scholar Joy Barrow (2001:103), in her ethnographic account, states, "The sounds were rather like those made by a person who is unable to articulate words but expresses his or her wishes through sounds."

Thus, as compared to the call and response signing and listening to sabad lines with melodic and rhythmic variations, the joint congregational wāheguru-simran is more timbral in expression, as well as percussive, emphatic and loud.

Music perception scholar Cornelia Fales (2002:91), in her discussion of the characteristics of timbre, describes it as "a parameter of music that we experience phenomenally, but without informational consciousness." She argues that the experience of timbre is pre-attentive, involving a phenomenal as opposed to a reflective consciousness. This elusive nature of timbre, Fales contends, enables it "to operate with little direct scrutiny by a listener, creating effects that are intense but also hazy in definition, difficult to articulate, and freely attributable to other features of the musical context." In my analysis, I do not want to draw a stark binary between precognitive and reflective, but rather to acknowledge different degrees of consciousness in experiences, and also to focus on their affective potential.

Timbre is a significant means of affective expression and its transmission, in the way that Steven Feld and Charles Keil (1994:120) have discussed it (timbre) as a compelling "vital force." Timbre adds to the affective force in the wāheguru-simran. Like timbre, affect has been characterized as a subconscious experience, most notably by cultural theorist Brian Massumi (2002:35), who further contends that "[A]ffects are virtual *synesthetic* perspectives anchored in (functionally limited by) the actually existing, particular things that embody them." I see the timbre in wāheguru-simran as propelling the subconscious and synesthetic experiences of affect. These phenomenally experienced timbral expressions, I propose, become conduits for experiences of an ineffable divine.

The experience of divine *ras* (discussed in the Introduction) in this genre was a major factor that my interlocutors cited as their reason for participating or preferring this musical expression of sabad. Most expressive was a middle aged Khalsa, and an active attendee and amateur musician who sings alongside her husband's ensemble: "One becomes drenched (*bhij jāidāe*). Compared to this in the classical way of singing one feels dry" (November 22, 2015). Another Khalsa in her mid-thirties devoted to the Khalsa lifestyle with her husband and their two young children told me: "The most powerful experience of simran for me is on Vaisakhi occasions when those who have just taken amrit join the kīrtan. They come into the room led by the panj pyāre. Everyone stands up. If any among them can sing they lead the kīrtan. In that simran the amrit just comes into my mouth by itself. I can taste it. It is sweet" (January 24, 2015). Such an intense experience has also been reported by Joy Barrow (2001:102) who was told by an informant that during the wāheguru chanting "*amrit* from inside his very being came into his mouth in a physical sense and he swallowed it." Barrows quotes him as saying, "When you repeat the name you taste this nectar, sweeter than anything you've ever known. You take sips of it on your tongue, same as the amrit, but you keep drinking it all the time."

A chance observation at the Gurdwāra San Jose is worth the mention here. At this gurdwāra (as in many others), the programs occurring in the main sanctuary are simultaneously relayed in the langar hall, on a TV monitor and several speakers built into the ceiling. One day

(June 11, 2016) while I was eating there, I noticed a young woman (in her late twenties I would guess) enjoying the kīrtan as she ate her meal. The kīrtan was in the AKJ genre, and going through cycles of intensity and wāheguru-simran. As the wāheguru-simran would begin, her eyelids would gently drop and her body gently sway as she slowly finish chewing her food. It was as though the food she was tasting, savoring and ingesting was being transformed into a deep experience of wāheguru. Her response to the sounding of wāheguru chants was automatic, with great ease. Her countenance was serene, deep in experience, oblivious to the noisy hustle bustle of the langar hall with a couple hundred people socializing as they ate.

It can be said that the sound of wāheguru chants has become encoded with the affective content ascribed to Guru and wāheguru in Sikh theory and practice.¹⁴ At the same time, this sound has also been working on the devotees' sensory apparatus, molding it into what Charles Hirschkind (2001:624) has conceptualized as a "responsive sensorium." Thus, in this kīrtan experience, the wāheguru sound has become the means of what Thomas Csordas (2014: 140) has called "culturally and performatively defined sensory-semiotic continuum."

The aesthetics of the AKJ musical genre has its share of critics however. I have heard from congregants views ranging from polite indifference to stronger reservations. Some say it is too loud and noisy. Others are uncomfortable with the head and body movements that often accompany ecstatic musicking even though these are quite restrained. Some say that the movements approximate dance movements which is not recommended in Sikh devotional practice. Some have commented that that the AKJ musical aesthetic is contrary to the Sikh aesthetic and technique of sahad (described in the Introduction). But then others contend that the intense kīrtan produces internal sahad. I have also heard some musicians invite the congregation to sing responsorially with a roar (*gaj ke*), though in most cases this is used to elicit affirmation during discourse (*kathā*). But it does indicate an ethic of speaking up.

During my pre-field-research days, when I myself could not appreciate the AKJ genre, a friend commiserated with me, saying, "Why do they shout? Has wāheguru gone deaf?" Later during my field research, I repeated this comment to another friend who loves this genre. Her retort was insightful: "It is not wāheguru who has gone deaf. It is we who have gone deaf!" She elaborated: "We have become incapable of hearing the message in the sabad; that is why it has to be pounded into us. We need the repetitions. We need the intense persuasion. We need the sounds of kīrtan to fill our bodies so we can hear wāheguru." (October 10, 2014)

These comments on filling the body with meaningful sound reiterate what is emphasized and recommended in sabads, that the human body is formed to vibrate (*bhaj*) with divine virtuous energy, to repeat (*jap*) it in intention and action, and to become resonant (*dhun*) with the vibrations (*run jhunkar*) of unheard divine sound (*anhad*). During the course of an interview, I asked my interlocutor, "When you refer to wāheguru, what is your conceptualization of wāheguru?" Her answer was, "Honestly ... when I think of wāheguru to me it is a vibration I feel it. Sometimes ... when I reach that stage ... especially in AKJ kīrtan ... I feel something going through my body." (January 25, 2015)

In the AKJ sounding of wāheguru-simran, the kīrtan participants are immersed in the sound and become what Henriques (2011: xv-xviii) has called "sonic bodies," "bodies placed

¹⁴ Similar effects have been discussed in Richard Wolf's (2000 and 2014) analysis of timbre in Muslim ritual drumming and Rolf Groesbeck's (2003) in South Indian temple drumming.

inside sound,” bodies that are in “auditory immersion,” and are “‘knowing’, knowledgeable, and they ‘make sense’” and create “sound judgment.”

This is resonant with Jean Luc Nancy’s (2007) discussion on the phenomenology of sound as not merely acoustic phenomenon but resonant meaning, sounding and resounding in the subject and back to itself, in the world and the other. Nancy foregrounds the listening experience as a process of making ontological sense of being in and of the world. He posits the listener as a resounding chamber in a resounding world, making sense of inside and out, of self and other, of singular and plural. For Nancy, resonance is the key feature of music. It is both the experience of timbre and the timbre of experience. It makes for presentiment, sensibility and contagion.

In the Sikh context the divine vibrations of anhad become perceived, known, and material through sabad and its enactment. Kīrtan is a means for aligning the vibrating body (*mori run jhun*, literally, my vibration) with divine intention. The vibrating and intentional body is strongly linked to ethical affect and even ethical action, a process akin to Stefan Helmreich’s (2015) discussion of transduction. Quoting Henrique’s analysis of transduction as a “transformation of sonic to kinetic energy” experienced by “the human body [that] can be considered as a sensory transducer,” he points to “sound as meaningful and material, reaching across (while also exceeding) sensory, cognitive registers” (224).

Sitting cross-legged on the floor in the gurdwāra, I could often feel the physical vibrations from the emphatic open-hand beating of the bāyān tabla (bass drum) during wāheguru-simran. It has an interesting parallel to Freidner and Helmreich’s experiment at a MIT conference with a transducing platform on which hearing and deaf people experienced low frequency vibrations through the floor “that rendered hearing and feeling as overlapping, kindred sensory modes”. For Helmreich what is significant about transduction as an analytic is that it “affords a way into thinking about the infrastructures through which the vibrating world is nowadays apprehended”. Those infrastructures he says “include such technologies such as dance floors, hydrophones, stereos, cochlear implants, and the situated bodies of persons positioned to enjoy and make aesthetic sense of such phenomena as thumping and humming bass frequencies” (226).

Somehow none of my interlocutors specifically mentioned the physical sensation of vibrations transmitted through the floor, just as they never mentioned the experience of any other specific component or aspect of sound except volume and a general feel. What seemed to be at work for them was a gestalt experience, a sound immersion that they “transductively” connected with divine presence. As Helmreich writes about his sound immersion in a submarine soundscape, “the transmutation and conversion of signals across media, which when accomplished seamlessly, produces a sense of presence, of ‘immersion’ (225), and of transduction as a process that “summons up experiential realness, that is the sense of being in the unmediated auditory presence of a sensation or feeling” (226). Helmreich also quotes philosopher of media Adrian Mackenzie’s conceptualization that “to think transductively is to mediate between different orders, to place heterogeneous realities in contact, and to become something different” (227).

Affective Attunements, Ethical sensations

Affective attunement is a central Sikh performative technique. One's consciousness must be attuned to the teachings in the sabad-texts (sabad surat), and not just intellectually, but affectively. Further, this process is considered most efficacious in the company of the virtuous (sādh sangat), that is, by means of intersubjective experiences in an affective-ethical ecological setting. As Teresa Brennan (2004) argues in her book, *Transmission of Affect*, a person is not an "affectively contained" being (2), but subject to affective energy in the social and physical environment (see also the Introduction).

In AKJ events, social contagion of affect is especially marked. As mentioned above, musicians do not sit separately, but surrounded by the congregation, which participates actively in call-and-response singing and wāheguru chanting. A musician and regular participant reiterated to me the role of the congregation, especially those sitting right behind the musicians, in the transmission of affect. He said that while anyone is free to sit behind the musicians, when there are people one has special affinity with, the effect is much more pronounced. He also said that sometimes singers engage in wāheguru chants to just show off. "There is no ras then," he said. "Ras cannot be created, it just happens" (June 11, 2016).

These comments are revealing of several insights. They point to the efficacy of subconscious affects as opposed to consciously determined intention in furthering the emergent phenomenon of ras both within and across bodies. They point to the significant role of intersubjectivity and sociality in heightening the body-sensorial knowledge of the divine and divine virtues.

The role of the social in AKJ events is also apparent in the ancillary activities. Annual samāgams last all weekend and are highly social events where members and friends from different areas, even different countries and continents, get a chance to meet and catch up. All events that participants meet regularly in are family events. Staying, cooking, eating and musicking together, and socializing at the same venue, they repeatedly create and participate in affective and caring settings. The affective timbre of these gathering comes from the shared love for the Sikh Gurus and their teachings such as the ethics of seva (service) and sangat (virtuous company). As mentioned earlier, this community of Sikhs came into being motivated by the passion in particular for the tenth Guru.

The notion of "affect attunement" was developed by psychologists such as Daniel Stern in the context of infant-mother intersubjective experiences (Stern 1985). The sabad-texts repeatedly use metaphors of family and friend for a caring and nurturing divine, and of child for the devotee. Participants in kīrtan scenes often refer to fellow participants as family and friends, even though they may not meet outside of those occasions. In the kīrtan occasions all ages are intermingled and participate in the same space. Young children can be seen up close to the musicians, often in their parents' laps, playing kartāls. Some sit next to the tabla player watching each move closely. On a couple of occasions I have seen them closely copying the tabla strokes on their thighs. Tired infants are rocked, and young children patted to sleep to the beat of the music. Floor seating enables them to rest comfortably, especially during all night sessions. Langar, stocked and staffed by volunteers, runs continuously in an adjacent dining hall, and, sometimes volunteers distribute mixed nuts in the sanctuary itself, as I experienced

that night. Kīrtan occasions are thus laden with affect and affective gestures, and the sociality is that of an “aggregation of the affected” (Born 2012: 262, self-quoted in 2013a:44).

Feminist philosopher Nel Noddings (1984:1) has argued for “human caring and the memory of caring and being cared for ... as the foundation of ethical response,” and ethical affect as a process in which feeling and cognition are intermingled. Sabad kīrtan occasions with caring gestures such as those described above can thus be said to be affective-somatic-cognitive means of socially experiencing ethical sensations.

Figure 3.13
Ethical affect, AKJ Samāgam, 2014, Gurdwāra Fremont, California



Image from akj.org

As described in sabads, the divine ras (*har-ras*) that flows in the body has the color (*rang*) and taste (*svad*) of divine moral virtues. When devotees immerse themselves in these experiences through kīrtan, they comprehend morality as an embodied and phenomenal experience rather than a set of rules. This manner of apprehending morality finds resonance in the notion of moral experience discussed by psychological anthropologists such as Thomas Csordas (2014) and Steven Parish (2014).

The spirit of caring also extends more actively to the wider society. For example, another Khalsa community of Sikhs known as Guru Nanak Nishkam Seva Jatha (literally, the selfless service group), a registered charity with a range of community service activities, serves langar around the clock at its gurdwāra in Birmingham, UK.¹⁵ As can be seen in Figure 3.14, a diverse set of people are being served.

¹⁵ http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Guru_Nanak_Nishkam_Sewak_Jatha; accessed July 27, 2016.

Figure 3.14

Langar at Gurdwāra Guru Nanak Nishkam Seva Jatha, Birmingham, UK



Image from

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Langar_\(Sikhism\)#/media/File:Langar.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Langar_(Sikhism)#/media/File:Langar.jpg)

Dynamic Affects, Dynamic Attending

A second feature of the sounding of wāheguru-simran in AKJ kīrtan that I wish to draw attention to is that the sonically marked affective moments are engaged in cyclically. This rhythmic engagement with intensified affective moments adds to the transmission and deepening of sensations of affect as a group. As Brennan (2004:70) argues, aural rhythm has an important role in the transmission of affect. It has a “unifying, regulating role in affective exchanges between two or more people. The rhythmic aspects of behavior at a gathering are critical in both establishing and enhancing a sense of collective purpose and a common understanding.” In the AKJ kīrtan events the cyclical sounding of wāheguru add significantly to affective and cognitive attunements that occur through other rhythmic components of kīrtan and kīrtan events, including those of the caring social gestures mentioned above.

There are implications for the shaping of attention as well. What we see in each cycle of wāheguru-simran is a move from song-text, with greater cognitive content,¹⁶ to the divine name with greater affective content. And this is paired with a musical move from greater emphasis on more consciously apprehended melodic and rhythmic aspects of song, to emphasis on less consciously experienced timbre and volume during the wāheguru chants. The contrast between these is accentuated by the overhead projection of sabad-texts and their meanings in Punjabi or English the same, a common feature in gurdwāras in the diaspora

¹⁶ However, it is worth emphasizing, still not in the manner of reasoning one would find in sermon (kathā) and discourse for example.

now,¹⁷ which at times becomes a point of attention and focus when the sabad-text is being sung. But the wāheguru moment does not provide opportunities for these cognitive engagements, this type of focused attention. In fact, it provides a different kind of opportunity, a different kind of knowing.

It is worth emphasizing again that rather than a binary conceptualization, I am positing a difference in degrees of engagement with cognitive and conscious processes, and a subjective one, varying also by time, place and space. During kīrtan listening, congregants while attending to meanings of sabads more consciously at times, are still mainly in affective immersion. My interlocutors were clear about this for kīrtan in all genres, and I could see in kīrtan occasions that the attention to overhead projection was intermittent.

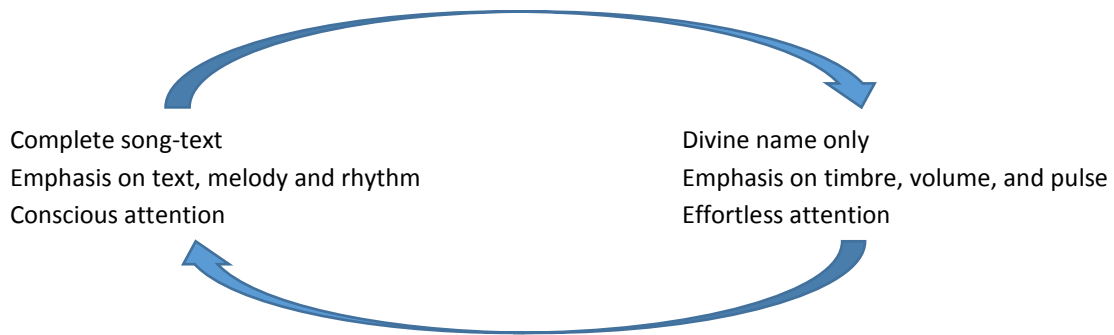
The wāheguru-simran cycles then are alternations between components in the musicking event that are more cognitively demanding of conscious attention, and those that provide a relief into what cognitive sciences have termed “effortless attention” (Bruya 2010). In Bruya’s conceptualization, attention with effort involves a selective narrowing down of the sources of information competing for consideration. When this competitive process settles down so that there is a predominant source of information, then the attention is in a state of effortlessness. I propose that the sonic dominance of wāheguru chants eliminates competition from other sources of information.

This cyclical pattern addresses the cognitive mechanisms of what psychologist Marie Jones (1989) has called dynamic attending. Jones’s research on the dynamic aspects of attending has foregrounded the tuning in of neural oscillations to external temporal events. While her work is on more micro level attunement to rhythmic and metric accents, I apply that idea here to a more macro level rhythmic event of alternating between components that demand more conscious attention and those that don’t, and again without reducing experience to neural schemas.

In AKJ kīrtan, the beginning of each cycle (Figure 3.15) reinvigorates more conscious attention which is directed toward sabad-text, melody and rhythm, whereas the end of the cycle elicits cognitive relaxation in which a loud and insistent timbral expression of an ethical divine does its work more on the subconscious, intensifying affective attunement and ethical sensations. Thus the musical mechanism in the AKJ cyclical style is such as to give pronounced timbre recurring opportunities to render its immediate, subconscious, phenomenal, imaginative and interpretive effects on experiencing the divine and divine virtues. Through this alternating emphasis on text-melody-rhythm versus timbre-volume-pulse, an affective-somatic-cognitive process unfolds working to mold the subterranean sensorium.

¹⁷ Van Doel (2008) reports the use of overhead projectors in gurdwāras in New Delhi.

Figure 3.15
Dynamic attending in AKJ kīrtan



These moments of effortless attention are what my interlocutors expressed as experiences of states of relaxation, blank-mind, bliss, and sensations of a divine, during wāheguru-simran. As one interlocutor said, “This is when I am lost to the world. My mind goes blank” (January 25, 2015). Similarly, describing her field experience in the 1990s of listening to AKJ kīrtan in Southhall, UK, Joy Barrow (2001: 103) writes about the wāheguru chants, “My perception was of a primal sound that was coming from within their very being. It was not constrained by the need to resort to the cerebral and articulate words that could be understood by other people; it was direct from their inner being and by-passed their brains so that there was no interference between their inner being and its expression.”

Such states of “blank mind” are valorized in the sabad-texts in the concept of emptiness (*sunṅ*), an attribute of the divine, and for the devotee, a state in which one’s consciousness is in intuitive alignment with the divine, and is free from intentions spurred by mundane desires. The sonic dominance of wāheguru-simran renders inaudible the usual loud calls of everyday worldly entanglements and instead makes audible divine unheard sound (*anhad*). To repeatedly experience this emptiness is to practice reorienting the self toward the divine. The sensation of emptiness thus opens the space for ethical potentialities. As an interlocutor said: “For me it is a space of peace and wisdom” (June 24, 2016).

Philosopher and neuroscientist Francisco Varela (1999) has discussed a similar productivity of the experience of emptiness combining insights from Buddhist traditions and neurobiology. Using cognitive studies on neural mechanisms of organisms which show decentralized, networked and ecological processes,¹⁸ he argues that the self at any point is not

¹⁸ The following excerpt from Varela (1999: 45-46) explains this point:

Consider, for example, *Aplysia*, a water mollusk with a “small” nervous system (a few thousand neurons). When *Aplysia* brings its siphon in touch with a surface (or when the siphon is independently touched) it contracts its gill. ... A recent study had determined that in *Aplysia* the gill-withdrawal reaction activates a significant proportion of the entire nervous system. This ensemble of activated neurons arises in a coordinated mutually influential manner, and their co-activation abates after the a few seconds. Thus the neurons of even this invertebrate ganglion must be conceived as a network of overlapping ensembles which arise in various coherent configurations depending on the animal’s context.

The lessons learned from such humble mollusks can be applied to animals with larger and more complex nervous systems, in short, to animals with brains.

concrete but emergent. Ethical know-how, he proposes, is a realization of the non-concrete sense of the self. States of emptiness achieved through meditation are freedom from the habitual drive for identity constitution in an ego-centered and separated sense of the self. Varela argues that experiences of states of emptiness can awaken wisdom and compassionate energy, and thus are means for ethical learning.

Similarly, I see the moments of relaxation and emptiness in AKJ kīrtan as states in which sedimentation of affective and ethical dispositions occurs. As one interlocutor who is a school teacher said, “When my mind goes blank ... that is when the sabad gets ingrained. ... The repetition is important. Just like in teaching” (January 25, 2015). The repeated cycles are means of developing habitus -- of inculcating intuitive, embodied affective and ethical capacity. As discussed in the Introduction, Sikh thought and practice underscore the habitus of a mode of intuitive ease – saḥaj that does not rely on extreme measures to realize the divine. There I related saḥaj to a mode of relaxed attentiveness. Here, the mode of effortless attention can be thought of as special state of saḥaj. Repeated immersion in the sounding of wāheguru in akhand kīrtan enables this special mode of saḥaj to develop. Many interlocutors expressed to me that they can feel that the more they participate the quicker they can ease into “anand” (bliss) and experience “nām” (the divine; literally Name) and partake of divine amrit ras.

Conclusions

In this chapter I have explored the cyclical sounding of the divine name in the AKJ genre as a special site where “unheard sound” (anhad) resounds. The means I have focused on here is the cyclical creation of fields of sonic dominance that renders inaudible the clamor of worldly entanglements, and instead produces sonic bodies immersed in divine sound, phenomenally sensing divine virtues. I have foregrounded in particular the distinctive timbral nature of this sound, an important aspect that has not received recognition in scholarship. In these affectively attuned bodies ethicality is experienced as an embodied experience rather than a set of rules. The dynamic attending engendered by the cyclical pattern of sabad singing and wāheguru chanting provide opportunities for sedimenting effects.

Thus, similar to the light style discussed in the previous chapter, the AKJ genre offers sacred musicking as a site of affective-somatic-cognitive preparation and structuring of the body for everyday ethical living. For the style I investigated in the light genre, I argued for heightened sensations of ethicality in an ecology of intensified awe for the divine and divine virtues generated in the feelings of time expansion produced by means of varieties of rhythms. That divine time, *su vela*, is generated in the AKJ too, particularly during the wāheguru chants in kīrtan, and also in various affective-ethical gestures in their annual meets. For the AKJ genre I have argued for heightened sensations of ethicality in an ecology of intensified affection produced particularly by means of vibration and transduction of a prevailing “wāheguru sound.” In the next chapter I turn to the third major genre of sabad kīrtan to explore its particular musical means focusing on codified music-grammatical features of rag-based music.

Chapter Four
(Spell)Bound by Bandish:
Embodiment in the Time of Aura, and Communities of Gurmat Sangīt

The Aura of Gurmat Sangīt

An email (May 19, 2013; italics mine) circular on a list serve about a touring rāgi's kīrtan performance schedule in the Bay Area reads:

We are fortunate to have the opportunity to listen to Bhai Sahib's Kīrtan as he is the 12th generation of Kīrtanaye from Guru Kaal. Bhai Sahib ji gave up a professional career to embrace the tradition of his forefathers, thus continuing the unbroken line of practitioners of Gurmat Sangeet, who have been serving the Panth for 12 generations. We all have a chance now to listen to him and go *back to Guru's times*. Attached is the Jatha's tentative program at the Gurdwara Sahib San Jose and Santa Clara and private homes. Please take this as a request from all the host families to join them at their homes in singing Guru's praises.

The devotees who will attend these programs are diverse. Some are serious students and practitioners of the gurmat sangīt genre of sabad kīrtan. Some are eager aficionados. Some are simply curious. And some enjoy sabad kīrtan in all genres. But what draws them all in particular, I suggest, is the aura of kīrtan from the Guru's time.

A flier (July 2014) for a program of "Classical Kīrtan" by another ensemble describes the members thus:

They are well versed in Indian classical music and they have also learnt from various stalwarts of Indian classical music, some of which include Ustad Vilayat Khan, Pandit Shiv Kumar Sharma, Pandits Rajan and Sajan Mishra and Pandit Ramji Mishra.

Programs such as this are aimed more directly at Sikhs with a special appreciation for Indian classical music. Some are students of Indian classical music and/or kīrtan in the classical styles. But many are again drawn simply by the aura of kīrtan in the classical genre that is understood as related musically to the Gurus' times.

Another email (February 15, 2016) on a different list serve reads:

Devenderpal Singh of Indian Idol, once again will be doing Kīrtan at Fremont gurdwara. See details below. He has been learning classical music since age 5. He was born in Patna Sahib, moved to Jawwadi Taksal in Ludhiana where he learned GURMAT Sangeet and received classical training from Principal Sukhwant Singh. Appeared on Indian Idol and became favorite of the famous singer, Lata Mangeshkar and Asha Bhonsle and millions of fans all across the world. A sabat Surat Sardar who is creating good name for himself and the community. He has earned the respect of all the top singers and artists due to his talent and his humility.

This one is aimed at the wider audiences who listen to Bollywood music and kīrtan in the light styles. The value of highlighting classical music and gurmat sangīt is in signaling the competencies of the artist and the high quality of training received. The performance itself is not expected to be completely or even mostly in the classical genre.

These ways of marking sabad kīrtan performances indicate particular ways of arousing interest among congregants that is related to the aura of the Guru's music.

Aura and Access

Due to Walter Benjamin's celebrated essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," his take on aura has become widely understood as "the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it [something] may be" (1969:222), and related to that, modernity's release from the auratic as emancipatory. However, scholars have discussed Benjamin's ambivalence toward the experience of aura as evidenced in his other writings where he acknowledges its positive role on perception and sensibilities.¹ As much as Benjamin saw the emancipatory potential in the loss of aura, he also saw its role in the communities where it arises. Drawing on the latter, anthropologist Pamela Smart (2000-1) presents "the possibility that techniques of mystification may be mobilized in the interests of accessibility rather than alienation [distancing]" (20). Further, she discusses the potential of shared engagement on the part of audiences to foster a "public."

In this chapter, without denying the potential of power dynamics in aura, I give recognition to positive experiences of enchantment that ensue amongst worshipers when partaking in an inspirational ethos. Based on ethnography with Sikh listeners to historical *rāgs* and musical compositions of *sabads*, I argue that these contribute to the sensorial conditions for the devotees' shared experiences of temporal transportation from the mundane and of a sense of community. I foreground what has been expressed by Pamela Smart as "a sense of the auratic that is not confined to the presence of the object but to the possibility of transport" (11).

In Sikh affective notions, aura finds place in concepts that relate to spiritual energy such as *prakāsh* (illumination, arising) and *tej* (effulgence). Most significant in the *gurdwāra* context is the *prakāsh*, the distinctive presence, of the *Guru Granth Sahib*. Liturgical sessions begin with a ceremonial opening of and reading a *sabad* from the *Guru Granth Sahib*. This endows the atmosphere with a spiritual charge that emanates from the spiritual status and moral teachings in the *Guru Granth Sahib*, which are those of the ten Sikh Gurus (1459-1708). This aura shapes the congregants' speech, gesture, sensation and experience. Certain ethical values get foregrounded, such as humility, respectfulness, and truthfulness.

It is in such an auratic context that congregants listen to *kīrtan*, whatever its musical genre. However, in the *gurmat sangīt* genre there are additional sources of aura relating to its musicological features which I detail below.

I argue in this chapter that auratic experiences generated in the *gurmat sangīt* genre engender affective listening and body sensorial knowledge that enable certain affordances through codified music grammatical elements. When drawn into the Sikh affective ecology, these amplify as social sensorial intersubjective experiences and also become means of creating a sensorial social.

It is important to clarify that I am not claiming that such processes work only in the *gurmat sangīt* genre of *sabad kīrtan* or only in *sabad kīrtan*. My purpose is to show how they work in this particular context; how the particular musical means of this genre work on the devotees' experiences. This is also an important support for my argument about the effectiveness of diverse musical means in *sabad kīrtan*.

¹ Notably, Holdengraber 1992, Foster 1993, McCole 1993 and Wolin 1994.

The Aura in the Musicology in the Guru Granth Sahib

The term *gurmat sangīt* denotes a musical genre of Sikh *sabad kīrtan* in which the *sabad* are sung in *rāgs*, particularly those designated in the *Guru Granth Sahib*.² As discussed in the Introduction, currently this genre includes *khyāl*, *dhrupad* and semi-classical music styles with music-grammatical similarities to those in North Indian *rāg* music.³ While the most common styles in contemporary *sabad kīrtan* practice are those of the light genre, *rāg*-based *kīrtan* has a special historical and canonical status. This derives from the fact that the vast majority of the *sabads* in the *Guru Granth Sahib* are arranged by *rāg* in 31 *rāg*-sections that make up 1,349 of the 1,430 pages.

Figure 1.10 (in the Introduction) provides a comparative view of this genre vis a vis the light and *akhand kīrtan* genres, in terms of the melodic material, metric organization, instruments, ensemble and extent of participatory singing. Figure 1.11 shows the comparison in terms of the performance structure of a *sabad*.

The musicological details of the *Guru Granth Sahib* are accorded great importance in the *gurmat sangīt* genre, and constitute an important source of the aura experienced by *kīrtan* participants. This aura is due to a combination of enchantment from the known and understood aspects of the musicology of the *Guru Granth Sahib* and the mystification from what has been forgotten and is not understood anymore.

A significant part of the music-grammatical information embedded in the *Guru Granth Sahib* is contained in *sabad* headings that consist of musical designations in addition to naming the author. Each *sabad* in the *Guru Granth Sahib* bears a heading (*śīrlekh*) that minimally indicates its poetic/musical form and the author.⁴ The *sabads* in the *rāg* sections also have a *rāg* designation, and most of these also bear *ghar*-number designations that are considered to be some sort of musical indication.⁵

Figure 4.1 provides the broad scheme of organization of the roughly 6,000 *sabad* in the *Guru Granth Sahib*, along with examples of *sabad*-headings. I use the term poetic composition for named textual compositions of *sabads*, what is called *bāni*, such as *Jap* that occurs in the beginning of the *Guru Granth Sahib*, and *Mundāvāṇi* and *Rāgmāla* at the end. I use the term poetic/musical form for named poetic/musical forms of *sabads* such as *pade* and *salok*.

² Further research is needed on the history of this term, its meanings and denoted practices. Kaur (2011) provides a brief account that I summarize in Chapter 5.

³ For explanations of Indian classical music and its idioms, see Wade (2004|1987).

⁴ Except the first *sabad* composition in the *Guru Granth Sahib* named the *Jap*, and last called the *Rāgmāla*. However, the *Jap* contains the *chhāp* (literally, stamp; author's name within the poetry typically in the last verse) of Nanak in several of its 38 verses.

⁵ See discussion of *ghar* on pp. 91-92.

Figure 4.1
Broad layout of sabads in the Guru Granth Sahib

Page numbers	Section types	Example of sabad heading
1-13	Poetic composition as main heading: 4 poetic compositions sabads in 3 of them also have rāg designations these do not have ghar-number designations	ਸੋ ਦਰੁ ਰਾਗੁ ਆਸਾ ਮਹਲਾ ੧ So Dar, Rāg Āsā, First Guru [poetic composition, rāg, author]
14-1353	Rāg as main heading: 31 rāgs, with 31 named rāg varieties sabads in these sections also have poetic/musical form designations most of these sabads also have <i>ghar</i> -number designations, with the Gauri section as notable exception	ਰਾਗੁ ਸਿਰੀਰਾਗੁ ਮਹਲਾ ਪਹਿਲਾ ੧ ਘਰੁ ੧ Rāg Sīrīrāg, First Guru, First Ghar [rāg, author, ghar]
1353-1430	Poetic composition/form as main heading: 8 poetic composition/form types these do not have rāg or ghar-number designations	ਸਲੋਕ ਭਗਤ ਕਬੀਰ ਜੀਉ ਕੇ Salok of Bhagat Kabir Jīo [poetic form, author]

Figure 4.2 provides names and brief descriptions of different poetic/musical forms in the rāg sections.

Figure 4.2
Poetic/musical forms in the rāg sections in the Guru Granth Sahib

Poetic/musical form	Description
<i>Pade</i>	Verse-chorus form
<i>Salok</i>	Couplets
<i>Chhant</i>	Four verses of six lines each (mostly); no chorus
<i>Paṛtāl</i>	Verses with metrical and rhythmic variations
<i>Vār</i>	Heroic ballad
<i>Sohilā</i>	Song of praise
<i>Birahare</i>	Songs of separation
<i>Ghoṛiāñ</i>	Wedding songs
<i>Alāhñiāñ</i>	Songs of death
<i>Rutī</i>	Song of seasons
<i>Bārahmāh</i>	Song of the twelve months
<i>Thitī</i>	Song of lunar dates
<i>Pahre</i>	Songs of the times of the day
<i>Din raein</i>	Songs for day and night
<i>Paṛī and Bāvañ Akharī</i>	Acrostic songs using letters of the Gurmukhi alphabet
<i>Āratī</i>	Song honoring divinity
<i>Sadd</i>	Invocation

In the case of the sabads in the *pade* (plural of *pad*; singular not used in GGS) poetic/musical form (see Figure 4.2), which constitute about 40% of all sabads, this designation is sometimes left out from the sabad heading. *Pade* occur in verses numbering 2 (*dupade*), 3

(*tipade*), 4 (*chauade*), 5 (*panchpade*), 6 (*chhepade*), 8 (*ashtpadāñ*) and 16 (*solhe*). Since verses are sequentially numbered in each *sabad*, it is easy to tell the *pade* form even if it is not explicitly stated in the heading.

To give a more detailed and specific sense of the poetic/musical forms, authors, and *ghar*-number designations, Figure 4.3 lays out the *sabad* arrangement in the first *rāg* section in the *Guru Granth Sahib*, *Sīrīrāg*.

Figure 4.3

Poetic/musical forms, authors, and *ghar*-number designations in the *Sīrīrāg* section in the *Guru Granth Sahib*

Poetic/musical form	Author	Ghar number
<i>Pade</i>		
	First Guru (Nanak)	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
	Third Guru (Amardas)	1
	Fourth Guru (Ramdas)	1
	Fifth Guru (Arjan)	1, 2, 6, 7
<i>Ashtpadāñ</i>		
	First Guru (Nanak)	1,2
	Third Guru (Amardas)	1
	Fifth Guru (Arjan)	5
<i>Pahre</i>		
	First Guru (Nanak)	1
	Fourth Guru (Ramdas)	1
	Fifth Guru (Arjan)	1
<i>Chhant</i>		
	Fourth Guru (Ramdas)	2
	Fifth Guru (Arjan)	
<i>Vanjārā</i>		
	Fourth Guru (Ramdas)	
<i>Vār</i>		
	Fourth Guru (Ramdas)	
<i>Pade</i>		
	Saint-poet Kabir	
	Saint-poet Trilochan	
	Saint-poet Beni	
	Saint-poet Ravidas	

Thus, the first *rāg* section of *Sīrīrāg* bears the *sabad*-heading, *ਰਾਗੁ ਸਿਰੀਰਾਗੁ ਮਹਲਾ ਪਹਿਲਾ ੧ ਘਰੁ ੧* (*Rāg Sīrīrāg*, First Guru, First House). The *sabad*-heading indicates that the following *sabads* (till a changed heading appears) were sung in *Sīrīrāg* and are the composition of the first Guru, Nanak (1669-1539), in the First *Ghar*, and in the default poetic/musical form, *pade*. Each of the following 22 *sabads* bear a shorter form of this heading, *ਸਿਰੀਰਾਗੁ ਮਹਲਾ ਪਹਿਲਾ ੧*, i.e. *Sīrīrāg*, First Guru. This changes for the 24th *sabad* in the *Sīrīrāg* section to *ਸਿਰੀਰਾਗੁ ਮਹਲਾ ੧ ਘਰੁ ਦੂਜਾ ੨*, i.e. *Sīrīrāg*,

First Guru, Second Ghar, and subsequently to Third Ghar, going up to the Fifth Ghar. After the 33 sabads in Sirīrāg by the first Guru in various ghars, the sabad entries proceed to sabads in Sirīrāg by subsequent Gurus, again listed by ghar numbers. After all the sabads by the Gurus in Sirīrāg and in *pade* form have been listed, the process is repeated for other poetic/musical forms. After this there is a section of sabads in Sirīrāg by *bhagats* (saint-poets from other faith traditions). This scheme continues till all the sabad entries in Sirīrāg in different poetic/musical forms, by various authors, and in various ghars, have been listed. Then a new rāg section begins, following the same format.

Following is the first sabad in Sirīrāg with its heading, as given in the Guru Granth Sahib. Sabads are typically written verse-chorus-verse form, but sung in chorus-verse-chorus form. The chorus lines are marked as ਰਹਾਉ (*Rahāo*, translated as Pause). Some sabads have two chorus lines, in question-answer form. Thus, chorus lines are numbered as well.

ਰਾਗੁ ਸਿਰੀਰਾਗੁ ਮਹਲਾ ਪਹਿਲਾ ੧ ਘਰੁ ੧ ॥

Rāg Sirīrāg, First Guru, First ghar.

ਮੇਤੀ ਤ ਮੰਦਰ ਊਸਰਹਿ ਰਤਨੀ ਤ ਹੋਹਿ ਜੜਾਉ ॥
ਕਸਤੂਰਿ ਕੁੰਗੁ ਅਗਰਿ ਚੰਦਨਿ ਲੀਪਿ ਆਵੈ ਚਾਉ ॥

If I had a palace made of pearls, inlaid with jewels
scented with musk, saffron and sandalwood, a sheer
delight to behold

ਮਤੁ ਦੇਖਿ ਭੂਲਾ ਵੀਸਰੈ ਤੇਰਾ ਚਿਤਿ ਨ ਆਵੈ ਨਾਉ ॥੧॥

seeing those, I would lose my sense, my awareness
would not grasp your Name. (1)

ਹਰਿ ਬਿਨੁ ਜੀਉ ਜਲਿ ਬਲਿ ਜਾਉ ॥

Without the divine, my life is scorched and burnt

ਮੈ ਆਪਣਾ ਗੁਰੁ ਪੂਛਿ ਦੇਖਿਆ ਅਵਰੁ ਨਾਹੀ ਥਾਉ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥

Consulting my Guru, I see, there is no place like this.

(1) (Pause)

ਧਰਤੀ ਤ ਹੀਰੇ ਲਾਲ ਜੜਤੀ ਪਲਪਿ ਲਾਲ ਜੜਾਉ ॥

If my palace floor, my bed were studded with gems

ਮੋਹਣੀ ਮੁਖਿ ਮਣੀ ਸੇਰੈ ਕਰੇ ਰੰਗਿ ਪਸਾਉ ॥

if adorned beauties were enticing me with sensual
gestures

ਮਤੁ ਦੇਖਿ ਭੂਲਾ ਵੀਸਰੈ ਤੇਰਾ ਚਿਤਿ ਨ ਆਵੈ ਨਾਉ ॥੨॥

seeing those, I would lose my sense, my awareness
would not grasp Your Name. (2)

ਸਿਧੁ ਹੋਵਾ ਸਿਧਿ ਲਾਈ ਰਿਧਿ ਆਖਾ ਆਉ ॥

If I could work miracles, summon wealth

ਗੁਪਤੁ ਪਰਗਟੁ ਹੋਇ ਬੈਸਾ ਲੋਕੁ ਰਾਖੈ ਭਾਉ ॥

become invisible and visible at will, be held in awe

ਮਤੁ ਦੇਖਿ ਭੂਲਾ ਵੀਸਰੈ ਤੇਰਾ ਚਿਤਿ ਨ ਆਵੈ ਨਾਉ ॥੩॥

seeing those, I would lose my sense, my awareness
would not grasp Your Name. (3)

ਸੁਲਤਾਨੁ ਹੋਵਾ ਮੇਲਿ ਲਸਕਰ ਤਖਤਿ ਰਾਖਾ ਪਾਉ ॥

If I were to become an emperor, raise a huge army,
sit on a throne

ਹੁਕਮੁ ਹਾਸਲੁ ਕਰੀ ਬੈਠਾ ਨਾਨਕਾ ਸਭ ਵਾਉ ॥

issue commands, collect taxes, says Nanak, all those that
pass away like a puff of wind

ਮਤੁ ਦੇਖਿ ਭੂਲਾ ਵੀਸਰੈ ਤੇਰਾ ਚਿਤਿ ਨ ਆਵੈ ਨਾਉ ॥੪॥੧॥

seeing those, I would lose my sense, my awareness
would not grasp Your Name. (4)

What the ghar number designations in sabad headings indicate has been forgotten. When I asked 11th generation rāgi Bhai Avtar Singh what ghar meant, he replied that there is

need for research on it and that he never had occasion to ask his father and teacher.⁶ This indicates that it never came up in the course of their training and practice. Some *rāgis* consider *ghar* to be *tāl*, but most do not know what it is. And there is no operative use of it. There seems to be consensus however that it is a musical indication.

From my research so far I have proposed that it indicates *rāg* variants that were not named.⁷ A significant clue for this conclusion was my finding (in 2008, not reported anywhere else to my knowledge) that the *sabad* headings in *Rāg Gauṛi* have 11 named variants⁸ and no *ghar* numbers, as can be seen in Figure A.1 (in Appendix A), which lists the *rāgs* of the *Guru Granth Sahib* along with their named variants and *ghar* number designations. In my research I posed two questions that challenge the interpretation of *ghar* as *tāl*. First, why would the word *tāl* which was common then and also found in poetry headings in anthologies of other traditions, not be used itself, as was the term *rāg*? Second, why would *tāl* not be specified for all *sabads*, especially those in *rāg Gauṛi*, the longest *sabad* section in the *Guru Granth Sahib*? However, I have not received any response to my interpretation or questions, or even acknowledgment of my research in scholarly writing, except in Fenech and McLeod (2014:123-124).

The 31 main *rāgs* include those that are unique to the Sikh tradition (e.g. *Tukhari*), those particular to Punjab (e.g. *Majh*, *Asa*), some rarely heard in contemporary Hindustani music practice (e.g. *Bihagra*, *Vadhans*), and others commonly heard in Hindustani and Sikh practice (e.g. *Kalyan*, *Sarang*, *Malhar*, *Kedara*). Due to the long period of disruptions in practice during the extremely unsettled conditions for Sikhs during the 18th century, the knowledge of many named *rāg* variants was largely lost and had to be recently reconstructed.

The performative aspects of most poetic/musical forms have also been forgotten. As is evident from Fig. 4.2, some are defined by their verse structure, some by prosodic structure, some by named (functional) folksong forms, and some by themes.⁹ Another notable aspect is that the so called “folk” forms, such as *ghoṛīāñ* and *alāhñīāñ*, were sung in *rāg* as well. These point to the challenge of assigning binarized “classical” and “folk” categories to the musical forms in the *Guru Granth Sahib*.

Musicians performing in all genres and styles, including the *gurmat sangīt* genre which is attentive to musicological details, typically sing various *sabads* in the same manner irrespective of these designations. For example, the typical singing format of *sabads* is the chorus-verse-chorus format, and this is used to sing even *sabads* that do not have chorus lines. The notable exceptions to the loss of repertoire in designated musical forms are the poetic/musical forms *vār*, *partāl*, and *alāhñīāñ*, for which there is extant memory of tunes and performance structure, but for the latter two forms only among a few hereditary musicians.

A *vār* is a ballad-form, and is a composite of different verse types. Of the 22 *vārs* in the *Guru Granth Sahib*, the historical manner of singing of only one *vār*, *Asa ki Vār*, is known. The singing proceeds as a sequence of musical units of different verse types, each sung in strophic

⁶ Interview, August 5, 2005, San Leandro, California.

⁷ See Kaur (2008), and Fenech and McLeod (2014: 123-24).

⁸ The eleven named *Gauṛi* varieties are *Gauṛi Guāreri*, *Gauṛi Dakhañi*, *Gauṛi Cheti*, *Gauṛi Bairāgan*, *Gauṛi Dīpki*, *Gauṛi Pūrbi-Dīpki*, *Gauṛi Pūrbi*, *Gauṛi Mājh*, *Gauṛi Mālva*, *Gauṛi Māla*, and *Gauṛi Soraṭh*.

⁹ Singh, Jagir (2001) provides some discussion in Punjabi and Protopapas (2011) in English. Further research is needed on the poetic/musical forms in the *Guru Granth Sahib*.

form, but the units differ in their melodic and rhythmic articulation, alternating between recitation and singing.¹⁰

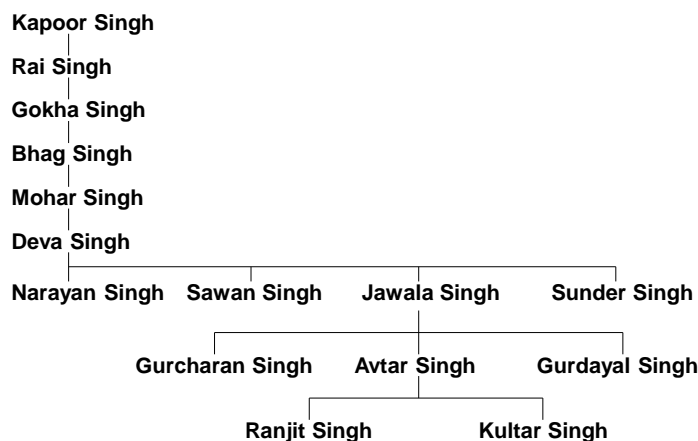
Sabads in partāl form have a distinct prosodic and performance structure. The verse lines are very long compared to the chorus lines, and have internal rhyme with assonance and alliteration. The verses are sung in a different tāl from the chorus. Some singers sing each verse in a different tāl.¹¹

The historical manner of singing alāhñān (laments) is generally not known except by a few hereditary musicians, such as the family lineage from Saidpur, Punjab, who trace their musical ancestry back to the Gurus' times.¹² Alāhñān are sung in slow speed but do not have a mournful tone, commensurate with the lyrics which reiterate the larger philosophy in the Guru Granth Sahib that each human body is formed for a limited time for the purpose of divine enactments, after which it is recalled and subsumed into a larger universal energy.

¹⁰ For a brief discussion in English of the three unit types, see Protopapas 2011:178.

¹¹ For a brief discussion in English with transnotation of a composition in Western staff notation, see Protopapas 2011:123-127.

¹² The most well-known member of this family was the tenth generation rāgi Bhai Jawala Singh (1892-1952) followed by his two sons Bhai Gurcharan Singh (b. 1915) and Bhai Avtar Singh (1925–2006) whose son Bhai Kultar Singh is the current direct lineage bearer. A cousin, Bhai Baldeep Singh, is also a musician (but not a rāgi) who holds combined knowledge from this family and other elder musicians who are no more. While Bhai Avtar Singh and Bhai Kultar Singh trained only with their fathers, Bhai Baldeep Singh also trained with the Dagar family of Hindustani dhrupad singers. According to Bhai Avtar Singh, his grand-uncle, “He used to ask too many questions (*baut saval karda si*), so I told him to go to the Dagers.” (pers. comm., July 28, 2005, San Leandro, California). The family tree, as given to me by Bhai Kultar Singh in July 2005, when his brother was also performing with their father, is as follows:



Musical Performance of Aura

Sabad kīrtan performances in the classical/gurmat sangīt genre use a number of ways of heightening the atmosphere of aura. These include in particular, singing sabad headings as preludes or performing sabad preludes in the historical manner with shān and manglācharan (see Chapter 1, fn. 11), using historical instruments, and singing historical melodic compositions.

As shown in Figure 1.11, sabad preludes in the gurmat sangīt genre are now sung in a variety of ways. Often this includes the sabad heading and/or the Core Verse and/or another divine invocation, in alāp form in the designated rāg.¹³ In the Guru Granth Sahib, a phrase of divine invocation is written at the beginning of each section and its subdivisions (see Figure 4.1). This is in addition to headings for each sabad. This phrase has two versions, a longer one, and its diminutive form. The longer version is the opening verse of the Guru Granth Sahib that is popularly known as the Mool Mantar (Core Verse). It consists of nine attributes of the divine:

ੴ ਸਤਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਕਰਤਾ ਪੁਰਖੁ ਨਿਰਭਉ ਨਿਰਵੈਰੁ ਅਕਾਲ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਅਜੂਨੀ ਸੈਭੰ ਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ ॥

Oneness, from which all is manifest, truth by name, creative principle, fearless, without enmity, timeless, incondensable, uncaused, realized through the Guru's grace.

The diminutive form of this phrase is:

ੴ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ ॥

Oneness, from which all is manifest, realized through the Guru's grace.

Singing an opening alāp with this invocation of divine, elevated and invisible entities infuses the atmosphere with aura right away. The singing of the sabad heading adds to this aura in different ways. On the one hand it provides a connection with the material sonic conditions of the divine inspiration received by the Gurus. However, since those very sounds cannot be known, and since the stated musical indications are mostly unfamiliar and without practical meaning to most of the congregation, the ultimate effect also entails some degree of mystification.¹⁴

Musicians performing sabad kīrtan in the gurmat sangīt genre also increasingly tend to use historical instruments, those that Sikh memory remembers to be developed and used by the Gurus (Figures 4.5 and 4.6). These include stringed melodic instruments such as the rabāb, sarandā, tāūs, and dilruba, and drums such as the *mridang* and *jori* (see Figure 1.9). The enchantment of these instruments has been intensified by the online circulation of the image of Guru Gobind Singh's rabāb held at Gurdwāra Mandi Sahib in Himachal Pradesh (Figure 4.4).

¹³ The sabad heading is not sung in other genres. Singing the Core Verse is also less common in the other genres. In the particular light style discussed in Chapter 2, the singing did begin with the Core Verse, but not to introduce the tonal field of the following sabad, and instead to engage the congregation with unmeasured chanting in call and response.

¹⁴ Sikhs also repeatedly hear the Core Verse and sabad headings in recitations (pāthh) from the Guru Granth Sahib and their exegesis (kathā) which are other significant worship activities. It is customary in recitation of sabads to read them with the entire sabad heading. So these musical terms are familiar yet mysterious.

Figure 4.4
Rabāb belonging to Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708)



Image from
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_rabab_of_sri_Guru_Gobind_Singh_ji.jpg

Figure 4.5
Gurmat Sangit Ensemble led by musician-scholar Dr. Nivedita Singh (on tānpura)
(with vājā, tabla, and dilruba; ensemble included rabāb and violin not in this picture)



Image from vismaadnaad.org

Figure 4.6
Gurmat Sangīt ensemble led by rāgi Bhai Balbir Singh (elder on vājā)
 (with dilruba, surmandal, vājā, tānpura, tabla, tāus and rabāb)



Image from vismaadnaad.org

Also particularly valued among some practitioners of gurmat sangīt are historical musical compositions, some of which are believed to date back to the Sikh Gurus' times (1469-1708). Whereas in the contemporary terminology of gurmat sangīt, musical composition is often referred to as *bandish* as in North Indian Classical vocal khyāl music, prior to the prevalence of the term gurmat sangīt as a musical genre since the 1980s, rāg-based musical compositions of sabad were typically referred to as *rīt*.¹⁵ Given that rīt literally means custom or tradition, its usage for rāg-based melodies is indicative that rāg-based singing of sabads was indeed a traditional mode.¹⁶

The publication of anthologies of hundreds of musical transcriptions, such as *Gūrbāni Sangīt* (Music of Guru's Word, 1961) and "*Gūrbāni Sangīt: Prāchīn Rīt Ratnāvalī*" (Music of Guru's Word: A Treasure Trove of Ancient Compositions, 1979) with the stated purpose of archiving old compositions before they were forgotten, indicates both an appreciation of these among some Sikhs, as also that kīrtan practice generally was moving away from these to compositions in newer styles.

In an unpublished 4-volume manuscript in Punjabi that I translated into English in 2005-6 (also yet unpublished) at the request of the author, 11th generation rāgi Bhai Avtar Singh (who passed away in November, 2006), he discusses the derivation of rāgs form from rīts.¹⁷ The same

¹⁵ E.g. in various anthologies of musical transcriptions such as Aibtabad (1961), and Singh, Avtar and Gurcharan Singh (1979).

¹⁶ Overlooking this important factor leads textual scholar Mann (2001) to doubt that rāg had any historical practical significance despite its presence in sabad headings, and following him, Li (2015:101) to do the same.

¹⁷ As is well known in the more recognized North and South Indian classical music traditions, bandish and *kriti*, i.e., musical compositions, are blueprints for rāgs.

process was used collaboratively by him and his elder brother Bhai Gurcharan Singh to place their musical transcriptions of *rīts* into various *rāgs* in their 1979 anthology of ancient compositions.¹⁸ The brothers were ten years apart and singing partners for 45 years from 1946 to 1991. They had learned the historical compositions from their father Bhai Jawala Singh who was a highly regarded tenth generation *rāgi* (see fn. 12) through a pedagogical system where learning *rāg*-based *kīrtan* was based on compositions rather than grammatical rules of *rāgs*.

These historical compositions have been a rich source indicating *rāg* varieties from the Sikh tradition that are different from those remembered and practiced in North Indian Classical music. Some examples of these distinctive *rāg* varieties are: Basant of Kalyan Ang¹⁹ and Basant of Bilawal Ang (as compared to Basant of Poorvi Thāt in North Indian classical music), Srirāg of Kafi Ang (as compared to Srirāg in Poorvi Thāt prevalent in North Indian classical music), Kānara of Kafi Ang and Gara Kanara (as compared to Darbari Kanra prevalent in North Indian Classical music). Interestingly, these *rāg* varieties are not named in the *sabad* headings in the *Guru Granth Sahib*, and may well be some of the varieties that my interpretation of *ghar* as *rāg* variants has pointed to.

Thus historical compositions not only have the aura relating to themselves, but also significantly in their capacity to indicate the *rāg* varieties distinctively and historically in the Sikh tradition. In the summer of 2005 I collaborated with Bhai Avtar Singh to produce a program at Gurdwāra San Jose of his performance of historical compositions along with my commentary (Figure 4.7).²⁰ I advertised the historical aspect of his performance widely. As a result of this aura, he enjoyed an audience of unprecedented size (estimated 2,000), and told me it was the best performance experience of his life. In that program he sang a *sabad* in a variety of *rāg* Kanra that he believed to date back to the *Guru*'s times. He also sang two *partāl* *sabads* and a *sabad* in the *alāhṇīān* form. The ability of historical *rīts* to generate aura in the congregation was palpable at that event.

¹⁸ This was communicated to me by Bhai Gurcharan Singh in Delhi in July, 2012 when I spent three weeks going each weekday to his home for interviews lasting one to one-and-a-half hours each.

¹⁹ Ang means branch, and is used similarly to *thāt* (scale type) in Indian Classical music.

²⁰ I produced a DVD of this performance, titled *Pracheen Reetan* (2006), i.e., ancient compositions. The DVD was published by the Sikh Music Heritage Institute, www.sikhmusicheritage.org.

Figure 4.7

11th generation rāgi Bhai Avtar Singh and ensemble including his son Bhai Kultar Singh on vājā
with author at podium
July 30, 2005, Gurdwāra San Jose²¹



Photo courtesy Sikh Music Heritage Institute

Further, I suggest that rāg-based musical compositions in general, historical or recent, enjoy an elevated status. This is due to rāg being understood as a mode used by the Gurus themselves. The audience for rāg-based compositions, whether contemporary bandish or historical rīt, is dedicated and growing albeit to date relatively small, compared to the light genre in particular.

In contrast to the term rīt, the term *dhun* is used in earlier anthologies of musical notations for what are called folksong melodies. A similar term *dhuni* occurs in sabad-headings of 9 of the 22 vārs in the Guru Granth Sahib.²² The headings instruct to sing them to particular tunes of other (presumably) well-known ballads (heroic narrative songs) of the time named after particular valiants. For example, ਗਉੜੀ ਕੀ ਵਾਰ ਮਹਲਾ ੫ ਰਾਇ ਕਮਾਲਦੀ ਮੋਜਦੀ ਕੀ ਵਾਰ ਕੀ ਧੁਨਿ ਉਪਰਿ ਗਾਵਈ (Gaurī Kī Vār, Fifth Guru: Sing to the tune of the vār of Rai Kamaldi Mojdi). All these tunes have been forgotten except the dhuni of Tunda Asraj, instructed to be used for the vār in Rāg Asa. If there is one standardized tune in Sikh kīrtan, it is that used in this vār. This tune likely remained in circulation because this vār was used for inspiration by Sikh armies throughout the period

²¹ In 2005 the current main sanctuary and langar hall were not constructed yet and the program took place in the small sanctuary.

²² These 9 vār headings are listed in Singh, Gurnam 2001:11.

when Sikhs were engaged in wars of resistance against Mughal authorities and when Sikh institutions generally suffered great damage leading to disruptions of practice.

It is important to note some features of these 9 vār headings. These are the only instances in the Guru Granth Sahib where a musical designation is given in the form of an instruction. This therefore raises the question of whether the role of other musical designations is that of a similar instruction or in contrast only an indication of the Gurus' practice. Further, all the vārs are in rāg sections (Majh, Gauri, Asa, Gujri, Vadhans, Ramkali, Sarang, Malhar and Kanhra). This, as previously mentioned for song forms generally labeled as folk, points to the difficulty of creating binarized classical/folk categories in analyzing sabad kīrtan practice.

The dominant trope among my interlocutors who supported the practice of gurmat sangīt typically invoked the aura of the music of the Gurus. Musicians and listeners alike are able to tap into the association of rāgs, compositions and instruments with their beloved and revered Gurus, and a sense of a history, to create an ambience of enchantment. It is this aura that sparked their attention and sensitized them to this expressive and experiential mode. Many among the congregation are not interested in Indian classical music per se, and do not enjoy it as an art form. As one interlocutor said, "My Guru loved rāg, I also want to love rāg" (September 25, 2015). As is the case with most Sikhs, it is the light genre that they enjoy more. But many are making an effort to cultivate a taste for rāg-based kīrtan. For some this is related to the desire to be associated with high culture, but for most it is driven by the love and admiration for the ways of the Gurus, and the desire to access their experiential modes and states.²³

I propose that such affect-infused experiences of aura engage the heart and endow it with receptivity (as a resource with potentialities). Further, shared aura intersubjectively opens up spaces for collective and deepened experiences. The congregation becomes primed to access the Gurus and their moral teachings through their experiential states. As an interlocutor said, "I felt as though the Guru was singing" (February 21, 2015). The temporal and spatial distance from the Gurus is navigated through the sensorial experiences of aura, and further possibilities that it opens up, to which I now turn.

Body-sensorial Musical Knowledge, the Social Sensorial, and Sensorial Social

In this section I argue that repeated congregational listening to rāg-based kīrtan generates, through repetition and social contagion, a body-sensorial feel and liking for particular emphasized aspects of the music, and that this social sensorial process in turn produces kīrtan collectives, i.e., the sensorial social. My approach is similar to that of Adam Chau (2008) who, analyzing the practice of producing "social heat" (*honghuo*) in Chinese temple festivals, highlights "the importance of the social production of a heightened sensory ambience as well as the sensorial production of sociality" (485).

Since the 1990s, a global wave of valorization of gurmat sangīt has led to a rapid growth of performance of sabad kīrtan in this musical genre, and of training centers, youth

²³ In general, congregants, especially those who resist discourses of superiority from gurmat sangīt practitioners, valorize the Sikh ethic of non-elitism. I discuss this in Chapter 5.

competitions, and annual meets.²⁴ Many gurdwāras have made special efforts to include this genre in their programming, and a fair number among the congregation have developed a special regard and liking for it. As compared to other musical genres in which sabad kīrtan is practiced, in gurmat sangīt certain musical elements are foregrounded and the attendees of special programs in this genre tend to form a sort of local musical community.

Enthusiastic participants in the gurmat sangīt styles of sabad kīrtan vary significantly in their intellectual or analytical knowledge of constituent musical elements. Many in the congregation cannot recognize rāgs and their structure or pitches by name, nor do they seem to have any interest in these technicalities. However, I started to notice that they seemed to be able to tell whether the musicians are performing kīrtan in rāg, and to have clear preference for this, and even judgments about the performance. Their listening did not seem ignorant. I was intrigued and wanted to explore this.

Ethnomusicologist Dard Neuman (2012) has argued, for the context of Hindustani classical music, that traditional rāg pedagogy consisted of deferred imparting of nomenclature to emphasize embodied knowledge and automatism through repetition of unnamed note patterns. While my investigation pertains to listeners rather than performers, and the knowledge I am referring to is of the experience from listening to key melodic patterns rather than of their pitch characteristics, my interest is also in embodied processes. Additionally, I wish to recognize the role of intersubjective sensorial experiences in furthering such embodied knowledge. I suspect for Hindustani classical music too that in the traditional pedagogy such intersubjective processes likely served as communicative and mnemonic tools in a mode of transmission that minimized intellectual components.

In order to understand the processes at work in kīrtan occasions, I sat among congregants numerous times, tuning myself into the sensorial energy that got animated through rāg-based musical sound. I noticed the very small body movements (mostly head and torso) in response to key repeated musical phrases and the slightly more emphasized movements during repeated moments of rhythmic resolution. During conversations after the programs I observed that among many congregants while there was very little mention of musical technicalities, there were comments such as: “She sang that rāg really well” (April 18, 2015). “I really like the rāg that they sang” (February 28, 2015). These comments were typically embedded in discussions of particular sabads. When I tried gently to see if I could get specifics on the music, such as the name of the rāg, it was clear that they did not know it. They did not seem to be interested in such specifics. Their interest was clearly in their experiences. But it was also clear that they were making connections between particular experiences across listening occasions.

²⁴ Li (2015) provides a detailed account of the annual meet, Adutti Gurmat Sangeet Samellan, since its inception in 1991, and locates it as the launching point of the concerted revival of *gurmat sangīt* in post-partition Punjab. I have myself participated in this revival in the diaspora. In 2006, five years before I began my ethnomusicology doctoral studies, I was approached by the then head of the Sri Hemkunt Foundation, New York, which had for twenty years been organizing annual Sikh youth speech international competitions, to start and head a similar chapter in kīrtan competition. The rules I formalized were based on my understanding then of historical rāg-based kīrtan. I served in that position for one year, and that competition is now in its tenth year, and I occasionally serve as a judge in the local rounds.

This was fascinating to me that their experiences seemed to be building some sort of musical knowledge, i.e. a recognition of related sensations and experiences; in fact often to such an extent that they seemed to have acquired what can be called somatic recognition of their experience from particular rāgs. At times, this acuity translated even to preferences across rāgs. Interlocutors told me that a sabad was sung in their favorite rāg without having a name for that rāg or being able to articulate its pitch characteristics. Instead of the rāg's name, they referenced the sabad lyrics. This acuity was expressed most often for seasonal rāgs such as Basant and Malhar since sabad in these rāgs are heard repeatedly throughout the spring and monsoon season respectively.²⁵

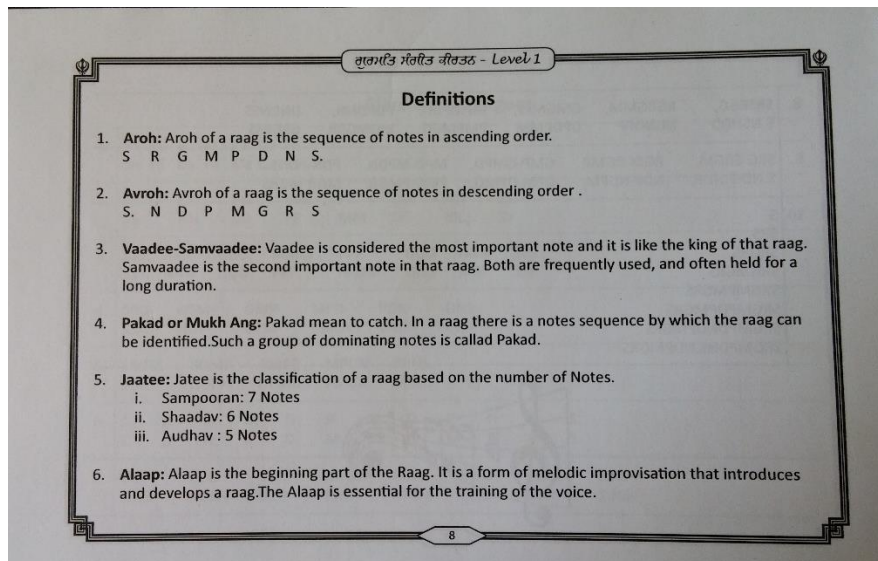
Based on these observations of and conversations with congregants, I propose that what particularly brings the gurmat sangīt communities together is not just, and mostly not, intellectual knowledge of these musical elements but the sensorial knowledge of their experience and somatic responsiveness to them within a shared auratic context. Of course, body-sensorial knowledge and shared experiences of aura are at work in all genres of sabad kīrtan, as discussed in the Introduction. But, given that gurmat sangīt in particular rests on, and emphasizes, certain defined music-grammatical rules, this affords a particular discussion of somatic musical knowledge and experience.

Rāgs are based on characteristic melodic movements; for many rāgs, however, some characteristic turn of melody makes the rāg immediately recognizable to a knowledgeable listener. In classical music this characteristic phrase is termed a *pakar* (Wade 2004 | 1987:63).²⁶ While traditionally in Sikh practice, the term *mukh ang* (main part) has been used for the characteristic phrase, the term *pakar* is increasingly popular, indicating, similarly to the use of the term *bandish*, interactions with North Indian classical music. Figure 4.8 shows the presence of *pakar* (spelled as *pakad*) in pedagogical material used by the most significant gurmat sangīt instructor in the Bay Area in the last two decades, Dalbir Singh. It is common practice now in gurmat sangīt to define the *pakar/mukh-ang* of the 31 rāgs and their 31 named variants in the Guru Granth Sahib. In addition to these, kīrtan in the gurmat sangīt styles also uses other rāgs and variants and it is customary to note the *pakar* whenever possible. Singh, Gurnam (2000, 2001) provides the *mukh ang* of the 62 rāgs and named rāg variants in the Guru Granth Sahib in native notation written in English and Hindi, and Protopapas (2011: 213-229/Appendix B) provides their transnotation into staff notation.

²⁵As a side, it is interesting that in the diaspora, in the Bay Area at least, Malhar is sung in July, the peak of monsoons in India, but typically dry weather locally.

²⁶ Wade also points out that not all rāgs have *pakar*. This is the case in the Sikh kīrtan context too, and Bhai Avtar Singh mentions this in his unpublished volumes for some of the composition-derived rāg-variants. However all rāgs are based on characteristic melodic movements.

Figure 4.8
Pakar and mukh ang terminology in pedagogical material in the Bay Area
 Booklet cover and definitions page



Photos by author

My participant-observation, participant-experience, and sensory ethnography lead me to focus on two micro-structural elements of bandish in rāg-based sabad kīrtan – pakar/mukh-ang and *sam*. These are the moments when the sensorial knowledge seemed to be most explicitly expressed in (slight) bodily gesture, not surprisingly, of both musicians and the congregation.²⁷ This leads me to argue that these heightened sensorial moments are also significant intersubjective experiences with social ramifications.

I wish here to expand on processes of recognition of the feel of pakar/mukh-ang and foreground sensorial recognition. The pitches of a pakar have a defined rhythmic movement

²⁷ Some musicians use larger and more emphasized hand gestures, but typically congregations do not like that.

that are articulated with timing nuances. I suggest that these rhythms and nuances move in the body and move the body (though not necessarily visibly) of the musician and also the listener who, in the participatory context of *sabad kīrtan* often sings aloud with the *bandish*.²⁸ I will argue below that a high frequency of occurrence of *pakar* in a *sabad* rendition, and its emphasized articulation, are significant bases of sensorial knowledge of and aesthetic enjoyment from *rāg* in *gurmat sangīt* congregations.

Typically, the *pakar* is articulated repeatedly in a *rāg* rendition, both in the composed piece -- the *bandish*, and the improvised elaborations. In *sabad kīrtan*, the presentation format makes for a high frequency of occurrence of *pakar* (and also emphasized *sam*, discussed below) in a *sabad* rendition. The entire *sabad* is presented in chorus-verse-chorus form, with each line repeated twice. The number of verses range in number from two to eight, and each verse is followed by the chorus. Often the accompaniment on the melodic instrument consists of repeating the melodic line that was just sung. Improvisation is typically not extensive.

In *sabad* melodies in which key *sabad* phrases are paired with *pakar*, this brings greater attention in performance to the *pakar*. Such an effect is greater when the *pakar* in the melody ends on the *sam*. *Sam* is the first and most emphasized beat of a *tāl*. In a *bandish* musical phrases are often sung so as to end on the *sam*. In the case of vocal music, the musical phrase is often paired with a meaningful textual phrase. In a performance the *sam* is a point of rhythmic resolution for the ensemble, articulated with emphasis. Because its presence in a performance is recurrent, it is a key structural element. Being a significant point of release of tension, it is a key affective element.

In an experimental study on “Incidental Learning of Modal Features of North Indian Music,” Martin Rohrmeier and Richard Widdess (2012) found that after a ten minute exposure, musician and non-musician Western listeners unfamiliar with Indian *rāg* music could learn to recognize modal features of *rāgs*. The authors call this incidental learning because “it happened unintentionally (i.e. without explicit testing, search for rules, examining, etc.) when participants paid attention to the *rāga* they were exposed to” (862). Attention was generated in the experiment by using a phrase segmentation task that asked participants to press a key whenever they heard a musical phrase end. This study indicated the effect of repetitions of characteristic melodic phrases on listeners, though I am not arguing for the same kind of learning of phrase recognition in the *sabad kīrtan* context.

To make my point about body sensorial knowledge and experience of *pakar* and *rāg*, I chose a popular *rāg* in the *gurmat sangīt* genre, *Kedāra*.²⁹ The melodic structure of *rāg Kedāra* is shown in Figure 4.9. Its *pakar* has a phrase with the augmented and natural forms of the fourth scale degree, a phrase that can be considered the kernel of the *pakar*. I have notated the ascending and descending patterns from two books, both by renowned *rāgis* of the *gurmat*

²⁸ I am not claiming here a process that is necessarily unique to *sabad kīrtan*, but rather trying to understand it in this particular context. Two scholars of Indian Classical Music, Martin Clayton (2007) and Laura Leante (2013) have studied audience gestures as they listen in a group experiment context. Among other differences, my conceptualization of body sensorial movement is different from theirs, as I will discuss later in the chapter.

²⁹ Other popular *rāgs* that would lend themselves to such analysis include *Kalyan* and *Kanra*, in addition to the seasonal *rāgs* *Basant* and *Malhar* mentioned above.

sangīt genre, to indicate that variations exist in the codification of rāg structures. The pakar was given in only one of the books.

Figure 4.9

Melodic Structure of Rāg Kedāra

[Note: the notation does not represent note values].

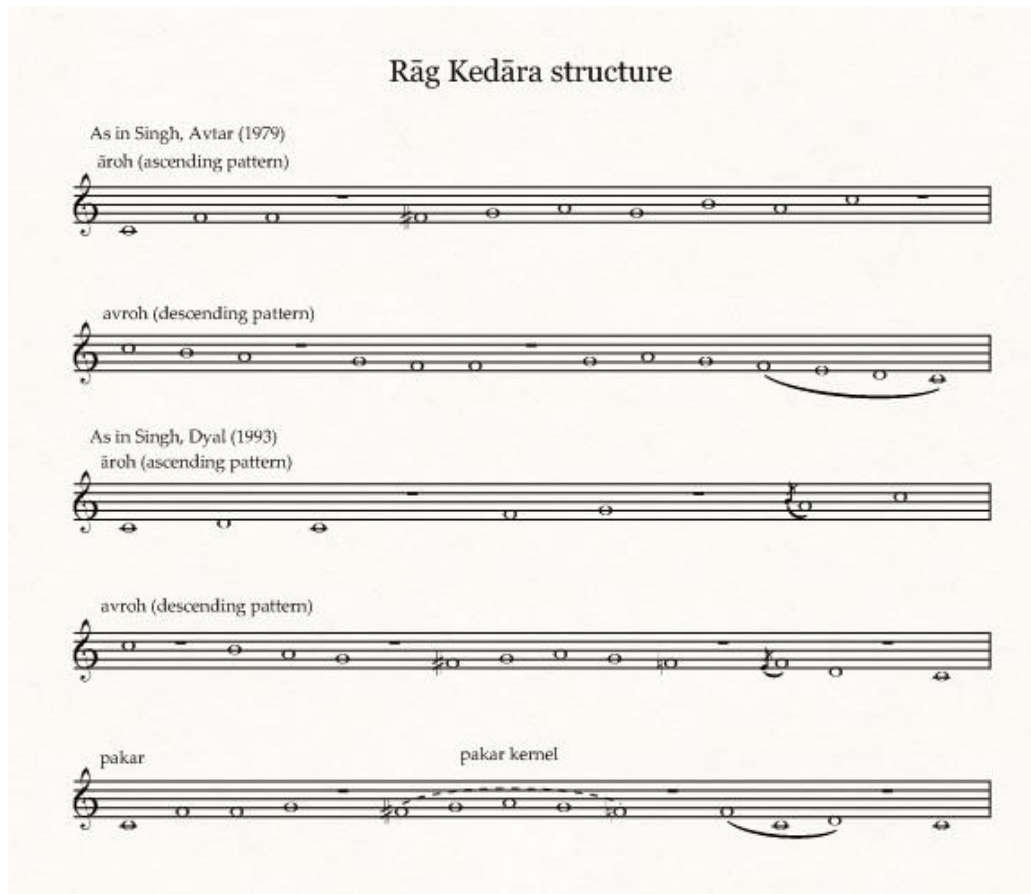


Figure 4.10 is a transcription of the chorus of a popular *sabad*, *Sarni Ayo*, in rāg Kedāra as sung by 11th generation rāgi Bhai Avtar Singh who sings in a style of the gurmat sangīt genre he learned from his father that he identifies as *dhrupad*.³⁰ In this melody, the *pakar* occurs in two of the three lines of the chorus, and as is standard practice, the two occurrences have subtle differences. I counted that in this *sabad* rendition of about 10 minutes,³¹ the *pakar* is rendered six times within the first minute.

³⁰ Interview, August 5, 2005, San Leandro, California.

³¹ CD, *Wirsa*, Vol. 4. Published by T-Series.

Figure 4.10
Chorus of “Sarni Ayo” in Rāg Kedāra, Punjtāl,
showing repeated occurrence of pakar

[Note: My transcription does not aim to capture all the gamak (ornamentations) such as *mīnd* (portamento) and *āndolan* (gentle oscillation) in the singing. The drum notation shows the 5 sections of the 15 beat tāl, differentiating between emphasized and non-emphasized beats (*tāli* and *khāli* respectively). The emphasized beats are notated with a vertical bar under the cross symbol. The sam is marked with a + sign.]

Sarni Āyo Nāth Nidhān, in Rāg Kedāra, Panjtāl

Guru Arjan Dev

Chorus

♩ = 155

Line 1

pakar kernel

sa - r - ni ā yo nā - th ni - dhā n

Line 2

pakar kernel

nā - ma pī - ta la - gi ma - na bhī - tā - ra

Line 3

mā - ga - n kao har dā n

In Figure 4.11, I have transcribed the same sabad in a melody in which the pakar ends on the sam. This is a melody I have myself used to sing this sabad. In fact, the idea for this chapter stems from my experiences of congregants’ responses to my singing this sabad many times over several years in the Bay Area. Congregants’ would sometimes say something like: I like the sabad *Sarni āyo* that you sing, it is a beautiful rāg. I would wonder then what kind of

associations they were making between a tune and a broader tune type (a rāg) or way of singing.

Figure 4.11

**Chorus line 1 of “Sarni Ayo” in Rāg Kedāra, Tīntāl,
showing pakar ending on sam**

Sarni Āyo Nāth Nidhān, in Rāg Kedāra, Tīntāl

Guru Arjan Dev

♩ = 130

pakar kernel

sar - ni ā - yo nā - th ni - dhā n

sam

beats 9 13 1 5

In addition to repeated occurrence in the bandish melody, the pakar also gets repeated with variation in melodic variations of the chorus and verse lines. AS an example, I show in Figure 4.12 shows three subtle variations in pakar in three variations of the first chorus line of another sabad “Har Gun Gāvoh” in rāg Kedāra in a similar melody to the one above. In this rendition of about nine minutes,³² within the first minute, the pakar was sung eight times, and within the first five minutes, twenty-two times.

Listeners of kīrtan in the gurmat sangīt get to hear different Kedāra sabads in the same Kedāra tune or the same Kedāra sabad in different Kedāra tunes.³³ The point is that listeners get to hear the pakar in many different related tunes for sabads bearing the heading of a particular rāg.

³² As sung by Bhai Sarbjeet Singh Durg at Adutti Gurmat Sangeet Samellan 2011. Recording posted at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ihztd2X5bkU>, accessed April 7, 2016.

³³ For example, a different melody in rāg Kedara for the sabad Har Gun Gāvoh can be heard at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JsUU2MP3MZU>. Further, another sabad in this melody can be heard at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SbAHtH7gfPY>. (Accessed April 7, 2016)

Figure 4.12

Three subtle variations in pakar in first chorus line of sabad “Har Gun Gāvoh” in Rāg Kedāra

Har Har Har Gun Gāvoh, in Rāg Kedāra, Tintāl

Guru Arjan Dev
Chorus Line 1
Original in C#

♩ = 140

beats 9 13 1 5

9 13 1 5

9 13 1 5

In the melodies in Figures 4.11 and 4.12, the pakar also ends on the sam; so it is also the *mukhra* (literally face; musical phrase that ends on sam) of the piece. Thus, as anacrusis the pakar here gets specially marked for attention. It occurs periodically as moments of particularly heightened attention and sensation.

I also want to draw special attention to the pairing of key sabad phrases with the pakar and sam, and its body sensorial implications. In “Sarni āyo” (Figure 4.11), the particular affective-sensorial experience is of coming to a divine shelter (sarni āyo) riding on the notes of the pakar and reaching the divine (nāth) on the sam. In a congregational setting this becomes a shared sensorial journey and arrival at destination that is infused with ethical affects from sabads in general. In “Har gun gāvoh” (Figure 4.12), the congregants similarly experience a shared understanding of the importance of singing divine virtues (har gun gāvoh), with the

word sing (gavoh) falling on the sam. Thus, the perceptual present of the congregants is filled with a composite sensorial experience of sabad+pakar or sabad+pakar+sam.³⁴

I suggest that this also explains why the majority of kīrtan listeners do not like extensive rāg and tāl elaborations such as one hears in classical music, preferring to stay close to the perceptual present of such heightened sensations of sabad+music. Many interlocutors expressed their preferences as: “I like classical but not too classical” (January 25, 2015). “If it is too classical it breaks the connection with the sabad” (February 1, 2015). “I don’t like it when they do too much of *sa re ga* [solfege] stuff. I like to listen to sabad. I like that feeling.” (January 1, 2016) The implication is that many would not like to listen to the pakar being sung in solfege, but they really like it when it is sung with sabad. This can be seen as a resistance by congregants to processes that steer toward what musicologist Pierre Schaffer (1966, as discussed in Godoy 2006) has described as “reduced listening” (focusing on sound features alone) to the “sonorous object” (a fragment of sound, typically in the range of a few seconds, often even less, perceived as a unit). Congregants do not wish to focus on the musical sound of pakar alone. Instead they want “a total acoustic experience, by means of music” (Qureshi 1990:485) by which I mean here an affective embodied listening experience that includes sabad as an essential part.

Interlocutors often expressed to me that they did not initially understand and like gurmat sangīt but their interest was sparked because of its link to the Guru’s music. Further, after listening and singing along for some time they began to both “get it” and like it. They typically did not receive any instruction or even explanation of the musical particularities. It was an outcome of repeated participation within an auratic context.

I suggest then that in the congregations’ listening to sabad kīrtan in the gurmat sangīt genre, affective listening is a receptive mode for the experiences from repetitions, within and across kīrtan occasions. Repetition and listening practice imbue the experiences with heightened quality. Repetitions leave traces in the body that become etched and sedimented. The body begins to recognize the experience of the pakar and rāg, and develops a facility for that recognition.

My approach to understanding how the body learns to grasp the feel of a pakar is similar to music philosopher and musician Tiger Roholt’s emphasis on “embodied comprehension” (2014: 105) of groove rather than analytical perception of the phenomenon. He argues that groove can only be understood through its feel in the body, and distinguishes it from conceptualizations such as that of embodied cognition (Vijay Iyer 2002) which are based on neural representations of musical patterns. Drawing from Merleau-Ponty’s (1945|2012) phenomenological understanding of perception, Roholt argues against a representational or schematic approach, which is that the body understands by reproducing the structure of the sound in the neural system. By insisting on the notion of a “feel” Roholt seems to be arguing for what I am positing in this dissertation as composite affective-cognitive-somatic processes.

³⁴ This is not to say that such sensory experiences do not occur in melodies that are not in rāg. Those melodies could also have pakar-like melodic phrases. However, in general, since those melodies are not constrained by the codified melodic movements of a rāg, this feature may or may not be there. In the case of rāg based melodies there is also the effect of reinforcement over various melodies in the same rāg, as in the above examples. This reinforcement is particularly strong in sabads in seasonal rāgs such as Basant and Malhar in which sabad-texts speak to those seasons, metaphorically indexing ethics.

These, I suggest, are not matters simply of schematic neural connections, but the workings of the entire experiential body.

My approach further also emphasizes the body in its ecological context. As Eric Clarke (2005) argues in his ecological model of listening, music is not just aural stimulus but ecologically based composite perceptual information. Critiquing the information processing approach to musical perception, based on unrealistic hierarchical processing stages that are primarily mental reconstructions of an externally given musical structure, Clarke hypothesizes perception as “a self-tuning process, in which the pick-up of environmental information is intrinsically reinforcing, so that the system self-adjusts so as to optimize its resonance with its environment” (19). In the *sabad kīrtan* context, the environmental reinforcement is from the experience of the *sabad* rather than of the *rāg* itself, even while using key structural elements of *rāg*.

Thus my approach is also different from that of studies in which hand gestures of listeners are seen as reproducing the pattern of movement in the melodic structure. Ethnomusicologist Laura Leante (2013) conducted an experiment-based study of listeners to an *alāp* excerpt of a North Indian classical music recording of *rāg Shree*. The *alāp* excerpt was chosen to exclude the effect of semantic associations of verbal text. *Rāg Shree* has a characteristic melodic gesture that is an upward glide from the flat second scale degree to the fifth (*komal re* to *pa*). At the end of the session, Leante elicited listeners’ descriptions of their experiences during listening, and analyzed the hand gestures they made as they described the performance. She reports that these included arm movements such as “an upward straight gesture of the arm, as in the act of reaching out” (173), and also hints of such movements in descriptions such as “a mother is feeding her child and is visualizing him/her grow” and “a rising sun” (186). Comparing these gestures with those of musicians in a previous study, Leante concludes that listeners, like musicians, embody the characteristic melodic phrase of *rāg Shree* and express it in hand movements as well as metaphors. My study is instead based on real time observations of listeners in many organic *sabad kīrtan* settings. Significantly in these, verbal text (*sabad*) are a key part of the experience. Arm movements that mimic melodic phrases are typically not seen, or appreciated, in the Sikh *kīrtan* context. While hand and arm movements can be seen among some *gurmat sangīt* musicians, the gestures by most are instead very slight movements of the body that indicate heightened perception of and responses to sound.

My conceptualization of embodied affective listening and the body sensorial or somatic knowledge is broader than the notion of embodied music cognition which is based on a representational, hence analytical, approach. The evidence I have from listeners in the *sabad kīrtan* context does not support a musical-sound-only representational account of bodily understanding and experience. One major reason is that even the aural stimuli are a combination of musical sound and the sound of *sabad*. Then, there are a whole host of ecological factors that shape perception, not least the ethical affects foregrounded in *sabad kīrtan* context. Relevant also is the bodily technique and approach of *sahaj* which, with its emphasis on balance (as discussed in the Introduction), demands a consideration of these various factors. In fact, my interlocutors’ responses that they did not like too much *solfege* singing expresses a resistance to a process that reduces their perception and experience to musical sound only. My point is that though *pakar* has a significant effect on embodied experience, it is not an isolatable schematic process that engenders a mimetic gestural

response. I should emphasize that I am not arguing against this conceptualization for music performance, but for listening which is aimed not at gaining performance skills but toward affective immersion in conjunction with semantic content from text.

In addition to the subtle body-movement marking of *pakar*, the marking of *sam* is also noticeable in *sabad kīrtan* in the *gurmat sangīt* genre, and is more common and more pronounced. And it is in the *gurmat sangīt* genre that body gestural marking of *sam* with small hand gestures, head nods and facial expressions is most discernable as compared to other genres of *kīrtan* in which it is mostly not visibly marked among participants at all. The satisfaction and enjoyment of meeting at *sam* is palpable among musicians and the congregation alike. Even though many in the congregation often do not understand it in technical terms they sense it through contagion from musicians and other congregants.

Ethnomusicologist Martin Clayton's (2007), in an experiment-based study of an Indian classical music performance, found gestural marking of *sam* by the audience. He analyzed it in terms of shared periodic attention, and pointed out the participatory rather than responsorial nature of this marking. From my observations in *sabad kīrtan* settings, the same seems to be at play, but with a significant difference, which is that typically, attention here is inextricably linked to the *sabad*. This accords a special role to the *sabad mukhra* (text phrase that ends on *sam*) in listeners' apprehension and experience of the *sam*. My analysis, additionally, foregrounds the body-sensorial aspect of attention and experience.

Drawing from the interlocutors' comments, I also wish to emphasize that repeated participation in the experience and feel of *pakar* and *sam* over time develops a disposition and a taste for the experience in the body of the participants. My conceptualization here of aesthetics as a bodily sensation and valuation has resonance with philosopher Richard Shusterman's notion of "somaesthetics" that foregrounds "the body's crucial roles in aesthetic perception and experience" (1999:310) and focuses on the aesthetic quality of experience rather than the aesthetics of an object. I propose that *pakar* and *sam*, rather than objective aesthetic entities, are subjective, and culturally and ecologically situated sensory modes of experiencing beauty.

Additionally, it is important to foreground also that these experiences are intersubjectively and socially deepened. My argument is that the sensorial apprehension of musical gravitational constraints such as *pakar* and *sam* is heightened, and their embodied recognition and taste fostered in social settings. Their experience deepens through what Thomas Csordas (1993:138) has called "somatic modes of attention" in "intersubjective milieus." In social settings they are experienced as intersubjective resonances. As anthropologist Elizabeth Hsu (2008) emphasizes, "sensory experience is socially made and mediated" (433). She argues that "[t]he senses are socialised in at least two respects. First, we generally can only perceive those sensations that are socially and culturally patterned (linguists distinguish therefore between phonetics, the study of sound, and phonemics, the study of meaningful sound in a given language). Second, a particular social situation often elicits specific sensory experiences." (437) This is not to say that there aren't variations in experience but rather that over time there is often contagion and alignment of certain experiences among many in a group.

Equally importantly, in a complementary and reciprocal manner, the social is sensorially constructed. My interlocutors typically cited their feelings, rather than intellectual knowledge,

as the reason for participation in kīrtan occasions in gurmat sangīt styles. It is shared sensations of appreciation of certain musical features like bandish, pakar and sam in particular, and shared experiences of aura of the Gurus' music that brings together participants of gurmat sangīt styles of sabad kīrtan. These are not merely intellectual ideas, but viscerally felt phenomena. A sabad kīrtan occasion is a coming together of synchronizing vibratory bodies. It is a sensing of each other's emotions for the Gurus, their music, and their moral teachings.

I suggest then that the musical communities of gurmat sangīt thus created become, in the context of sabad kīrtan which aims to inculcate ethicality in the devotee, grounds for transformative experiences from mundane concerns to divine moral virtues. Devotees wish not only to sing and play instruments like their Gurus but also aspire to their divine moral qualities. The somatic and intersubjective experiences of aura and musical sensations open up, within the Sikh ideational context, the potential for embodied ethicality.

The Sensorial in Language

While we have become accustomed via musical terminology to think of bandish, pakar, and sam as objective music structural elements, I wish to foreground how this language itself expresses sensorial and social aspects of these musical elements. My approach finds resonance in the argument put forth by Porcello, Meintjes, Ochoa and Samuels (2010:61) that language, rather than simply a mentalist exercise, can have sensory and social properties, calling for increased recognition of "language as an embodied expressive practice." I propose here that an investigation of the meanings of these "musical" terms help to understand their body-sensorial and social role in music. One might conjecture that recognition of the sensorial and social aspects of music may well have resulted in the adoption of this language for musical terminology. Indeed, the word for music, sangīt, itself locates it in sociality, the prefix 'san' for 'git' (song) standing for 'together'. As Raymond Gibbs (2005:9) has argued, "People's subjective felt experiences of their bodies in action provide part of the fundamental grounding for language and thought. Human language and thought emerge from recurring patterns of embodied activity."

Pakar/mukh ang and sam are two music-structural and gravitational constraints of a bandish/rīt that also express the embodied nature of these constraints. Pakar is literally a catch, an *ang* is literally a limb, a part of a body. Musically they represent melodic phrases that help catch a rāg and embody it. These phrases are not just embodiment of the rāg in a mechanical or detached metaphorical sense, but in real sensorial sense. They are culturally and socially engendered body-sensorial catch. As much as a pakar enables listeners to sensorially catch a rāg, it also somatically catches the listeners. It sensorially feeds into aesthetic enjoyment and valuation.

Sam literally means congruent or at par. Musically it is the first beat of a tāl and the point at which all musicians must meet. Sensorially, it is a point of congruent sensation, a coming together of sensory experiences, of collective satisfaction. It is point of "consensus," not only as an agreement at an intellectual level, but also at a sensorial level. It makes shared sense not only mentally but also somatically.

A bandish is literally a constraint or a plan. Music-structurally it is a composition. Body-sensorially, it is a binding, a structuring, though not objective and determinate, but subjective

and intersubjective. As participants repeatedly tune in to interrelated tunes they become habituated and disposed to them. They bodily inculcate an aesthetic value for them, sensing them, and over time finding beauty in them.

Of course this is true for tunes in general, but my point is that the constraints of a bandish such as pakar and sam work particularly as hooks. The repetition of pakar and sam within and across bandish in a particular rāg, heighten their effects on the sensorium. Similarly expressive is the use of the term *sādhāran* (ordinary) bandish for melodies in light styles of sabad kīrtan. A tune is considered ordinary because of a particular lack of a valued quality of being linked to other bandish and to a meta-melodic form called rāg through features like the pakar; in other words, it is ordinary because it does not generate intertextual experiences as does a bandish in a rāg.

It is also interesting to compare the linguistic meanings of rīt and bandish, both denoting in musical terms, a composition. As mentioned earlier, rīt means custom, and bandish means a constraint. Thus both have connotations of some sort of structuring, shaping, forming, and even binding. Rīt additionally has connotations of durability.

The Body-sensorial in Gurmat Sangīt versus North Indian classical music

It is easy for the similarity of music-grammatical elements in gurmat sangīt and Indian classical music to create an impression that they are the same or that gurmat sangīt is a mere copy, or an inferior version, of Indian classical music. It has led scholars to both characterize Sikh music as essentially North Indian classical music,³⁵ and Sikh musicians and musician-scholars to painstakingly argue for the distinction of gurmat sangīt.³⁶ It has also led some to distinguish the historical styles of musical lineages as the distinctive Sikh music and other rāg-based styles as modern inventions.³⁷ But all these arguments have been based on an objectified consideration of musical sound.

My argument here is that experientially gurmat sangīt and Indian classical music are distinct musics. Thus, for example, while it can be said that the pakar catches practitioners in both, that the sam creates feelings of congruence in both, and bandish bind communities in both, the experiences and outcomes are distinct. The kīrtan participant wishes to be, and is, “caught” in the Sikh affective ecosystem of wāheguru, Guru and sādh sangat. As argued in cognitive sciences, perceptions and sensations are not objective, but subjectively and ecologically shaped. The lyrics, function, ideology and ecology of a sabad kīrtan occasion is fundamentally distinct, and different from that of North Indian classical music. Similar musical elements generate different somatic sensations. When I asked musicians and congregation members the difference between gurmat sangīt and North Indian classical music, they typically cited the difference in feelings and experience. One is simply not a substitute for the other for them. As 11th generation rāgi Bhai Avtar Singh put it, “The musical material is the same – rāg and tāl -- but the buildings are different.”³⁸

³⁵ Most notably Linden (2015).

³⁶ E.g. Singh, Gurnam (2000, 2001) and Surinder Singh of rajacademy.org.

³⁷ In particular Singh, Baldeep (2011), Cassio (2011) and Khalsa (2014).

³⁸ Interview, August 5, 2015, San Leandro, California.

A difference between *sabad kīrtan* and Indian classical music that scholars and musicians alike often cite is that the former is *sabad-pradhān* (sabad-dominant) whereas the latter is *sangīt-pradhān* (music-dominant).³⁹ I wish to foreground that this difference entails significant sensorial differences. In the *sabad kīrtan* context, the semantic content of *sabad* is key and must be maintained in the musical expression. Hence, the proportion of instances where *pakar* and *sam* are articulated in conjunction with clearly articulated *sabad* text is very high. In contrast, the proportion of joint articulation with song lyrics is much lower in the *khyāl* styles of Indian classic music in particular where words are at the mercy of the music and can be partially sounded. In *sabad kīrtan*, the joint articulation of intelligible canonical sacred word with music is a different experiential phenomenon which heightens the conviction in the import of the *sabad* along with the aesthetic pleasure of *pakar* and *sam*. The body is moved to “catch” both and become “at par” with both – *sabad* and music structural element.

In that sense the *thumri* light-classical idiom has a similar emphasis on the joint expression of words and musical sound. But *thumri* and *kīrtan* have contrasting aesthetics from their contrasting contexts and lyrics, which in *thumri* are often sexually charged. Still, recontextualized usage of this idiom in *kīrtan* is popular in both the classical and light genres of *sabad kīrtan*.

As discussed in the Introduction, Sikh *sabad kīrtan* listening, irrespective of the particular musical genre and style, is a site that aims to mold the sensorium toward an ethically conceived divine. The love for and conviction in the Gurus and their *sabad* enshrined in the *Guru Granth Sahib*, and their moral teachings are critical pieces of the technology -- the means for achieving the goal. Music is an additional piece of the technology that heightens the experiential states of devotees, not because of its features objectively, but because of their subjective, intersubjective and ecological potential. The sensations of awe, aura and affection contribute significantly to the affective ecology wherein all these affordances unfold.

Conclusions

In this chapter my aim has been to foreground the productivity of aura as the potential to transport temporally and foster community. In the context of Sikh *sabad kīrtan* in the *gurmāt sangīt* genre, *rāg*, *bandish*, and *rīt* enjoy elevated status due to their association with the singing modes and compositions of the revered Gurus. I have argued that by reducing the felt temporal and spatial distance with the Gurus, these musical means engender experiences of enchantment that open the heart and body both to heed their teachings and to deepened aesthetic sensations. Furthermore, these shared intersubjective experiences foster feelings of community.

Aura is also heightened by the rich and extensive musicological terminology from the *Guru Granth Sahib* that is foregrounded in the *gurmāt sangīt* genre of *sabad kīrtan*, due to the mysteriousness of much that has been forgotten in practice as well as by the fascination of the little that is still known.

Additionally, my goal has been to bring attention to the sensorial and sensorial-social role of music-structural elements of the *gurmāt sangīt* genre through the analysis specifically of

³⁹ Ethnomusicologist Regula Qureshi (1990) has used the term “textual-musical idiom” for musical practices in which text is the primary focus.

two gravitational constraints, pakar/mukh ang and sam. I have argued for embodied and intersubjective processes of listening that generate collectivities of sensibilities and dispositions. In doing so I have attempted to shift the attention from pakar/mukh ang as an objective cognitive “catch”/“body part” to a subjective body-sensorial and social “catch,” – something that is embodied, and recognized and caught not merely intellectually, but sensorially, and which in turn catches one sensorially and socially. Similarly, I have attempted to shift the focus from sam as a technical and intellectually apprehended metric rule, to a sensorial coming together and social meeting point. Further, thorough these key, and objectifiable, features of a bandish/rīt, I have foregrounded them as sensory and social binding, not simply a composition or aesthetic object. In doing so I have built upon the literal meanings of bandish as constraint or plan, and of rīt as ancient custom, but in the sense of sensorial structuring, habituation and durability.

Through this analyses of gurmat sangīt, I have offered insights also for communities of Indian classical music styles, that these are not simply brought together by shared objective intellectual knowledge, but rather are generated and sustained by the subjective and intersubjective social sensorial. Additionally, I have also argued that the particulars of the sensorial in gurmat sangīt are distinct from that of Indian classical music, determined in each in conjunction with their respective functions, ideologies, and ecologies.

Like previous chapters on other genres of sabad kīrtan, I have in this chapter explored the role of musical elements in deepening the affective-cognitive-somatic and socially enhanced experiences in Sikh kīrtan.

Chapter Five

Multiple Authenticities in Motion: Styles and Stances in Sikh Sabad Kīrtan

In ethnomusicology and related fields, an encounter in fieldwork with discourses of authenticity is an alert to issues of representation and the need to take the reach of one's conceptualization and analysis beyond the authorizing voices of a limited number of stakeholders. Unfortunately, this has not been the case for recent scholarship on the musical aspects of Sikh sabad kīrtan. In this chapter, I argue that bringing in multiple voices of listeners and musicians enables both a better understanding of this devotional practice as well as an expanded and dynamic conceptualization of authenticity.

Since Walter Benjamin's (1969|1936) seminal essay on how mechanical reproduction has created different ways of experiencing authenticity, the notion of authenticity has been subject to extensive scholarly analysis and deconstruction.¹ The conventional discipline of anthropology, with its quest for identifying true features of bounded cultures, was especially implicated in creating and even thrusting authentic tradition upon its subjects – of marking the real, the original, and the heritage, and by implication, its binary opposites, the fake, the copy, and the invented (Handler 1986, Clifford 1988). The ways in which the scholar and the expert come together in the political economy of authenticity to assert value for an object or practice have been well critiqued (Appadurai 1986, Field 2009). Recognizing the problems of binary conceptualizations of authenticity, anthropologists have moved to more nuanced analysis that is attentive to the “co-existence of different simultaneous understandings of the authentic” (Theodossopoulos 2013:397). On music in particular, Michelle Bigenho (2002:16-23), in her analysis of Bolivian music, has conceptualized multiple and overlapping ways of thinking about authenticity.²

Ethnomusicology and popular music studies have similarly been concerned with issues relating to the framing of authenticity for musical practices.³ Allan Moore argues that authenticity, rather than being about music, is often about performers' authentication of themselves. To consider the authenticity of a performance, he recommends a “shift from consideration of the intention of various originators towards the activities of various perceivers, and ... [a] focus on the reasons they [perceivers] might have for finding, or failing to find, a particular performance authentic” (2002:221). Richard Middleton (2006:206) argues that authenticity is about both: “a quality of selves and of culture; and they construct each other.” For him “the question here is not so much what or where authenticity is, but how it is produced.”⁴

¹ Theodossopoulos (2013:339-40) provides a solid list of references.

² Multiple dimensions of authenticity are also analyzed by Bruner (1994), Steiner (1999), Price (2007), and Field (2009).

³ For a discussion in the context of music revival, see Bithell and Hill (2014: 19-24). Also see Fiol (2010) and Weiss (2014).

⁴ Related to this is Michelle Kisiuk's (1998) cautioning against the traditional Western colonial approach of constructing a premodern Other -- a culture that is static and circumscribed --, and argues for the recognition of flux in culture. Instead of the usual scholarly approach of theorizing “internally coherent ... systems,” she pushes for incorporating “research experiences that might contradict coherency” (146). Arguing against binaries such as traditional versus modern and pure versus degraded, she recommends a dialectic approach, one that does not “reify or freeze what is alive and moving” (147).

In this chapter, I join this conversation on the conceptualization of authenticity through an investigation of participants' views in the dynamic context of Sikh sabad kīrtan. My analysis foregrounds opinions about authenticity as windows into what is valued by different stakeholders including congregation members. Investigating the terms of their engagement with various aspects of this devotional practice, I employ ethnomusicologist Harris Berger's (2010) concept of "stance" to understand what I see and posit as "multiple authenticities in motion." My analysis shows that sabad kīrtan is much more to its participants than specific musical sounds. In contrast to recent scholarship on sabad kīrtan that takes a binarized approach to authenticity and finds it in objectified musical features (and furthermore only certain musical features) while ignoring other key components of sabad kīrtan, I underscore the futility of detaching musical sound from the whole and the perils of scholarly paradigms in which kīrtan is translated, interpreted or analyzed as music (*sangīt*) in terms only of mechanical sonic features.

Musical Diversity in Practice and Theory

The variety of musical genres and styles in which sabad kīrtan is sung today is rich, as described in the Introduction. Additionally, all the three main genres have enjoyed continued changes and innovations, at home and in the diaspora. In the classical genre, the contemporary *khyāl* style has become much more popular than the older *dhrupad* style. The *khyāl* style can be heard in the AKJ genre as well. New instruments have been introduced such as the violin, mandolin, *sitar*, and the trapezoidal zithers, *surmandal* (twenty-one- to thirty-six-string, plucked) and, in the diaspora, the *santoor* (ninety-three-string, struck). The variety in performance structure has increased in both the classical and light genres. The light genre has continued to draw from innovations in Bollywood, popular *ghazal* (secular love song), and Sufi *qawwālī* (devotional song). Perhaps the circulation is two-way in some cases. In the diaspora, local instruments have been introduced, such as the didgeridoo in Bhai Dya Singh's Australian ensemble, and guitars, more generally, in the West. New genres continue to emerge too, and styles within them. For example, the kīrtan sung by the European-American Sikh community called the 3HO (Happy, Healthy, Holy Organization) includes styles that take from American popular and folk musics, use Western harmony, and incorporate instrumentation drawn from a diversity of cultures.⁵

In addition to live sabad kīrtan, production of live audio and video transmission, and recorded sabad kīrtan is a very large industry. Its economic force has had a strong influence on performers and listeners alike, reinforcing a faster pace of circulation of new styles.⁶ Focusing on just the musical sound, one can discern similarities with musical genres and styles across North India and even that category labeled "world music." It would be fair to say that Sikh sabad kīrtan is musically a diverse, open, changing, and broad-based practice.

Along with noting the diversity in practice, it is important to also note the musical diversity embedded in the sabad titles and themes of sabad-texts in the *Guru Granth Sahib*, since much of the authenticity discourse refers to this primary scripture-cum-song-text book. As

⁵ See also Purewal and Lallie 2013.

⁶ Similarly, musical diversity, circulation and questions of authenticity are found in other devotional practices in India. See Slawek (1986), Ho (2006) Graves (2009), Schultz (2013).

performance studies scholar Diana Taylor (2003) has argued, the archive and the repertoire are both modes of transmission that work together in the practices of a tradition. Given that the Guru Granth Sahib is not just any archive but compiled and given sacred status of Guru by the Sikh Gurus themselves, its role in transmission is crucial.

As detailed in the previous chapter, the musical designations specified in sabad headings contain the names of many rāgs and rāg-variants, musical forms (the manner of singing most of which has been forgotten), and “ghar” numbers (literally, “house”) varying from one to seventeen (the meaning of which has also been forgotten, but my research has suggested that it likely stands for different ways of singing rāgs in different locales).⁷ The various musical designations in sabad headings speak to both regional and stylistic diversity and resist a classical-folk binarization. These headings also do not use the musical genre and style terminology in common use now, which implies that musical change and innovation, along with diversity, have been key features of sabad kīrtan practice since the time of the Gurus. What is considered sacred and fixed in this devotional practice is the sabad-text canonized by the Sikh Gurus.

It is also important to note that although sabad headings bear musical designations, the lyrics of many sabads view music as a double-edged sword that can easily lead to distance from divine virtues. It is not music per se but singing of divine virtues that is valorized. Thus, sabad-texts differentiate between music and kīrtan (singing divine virtues). The following sabad-text illustrates this point.

ਗੀਤ ਰਾਗ ਅਨ ਤਾਲ ਸਿ ਕੂਰੇ ॥	Songs, rāgs, cymbals, are false.
ਤ੍ਰਿਹੁ ਗੁਣ ਉਪਜੈ ਬਿਨਸੈ ਦੂਰੇ ॥	They lead to worldly entrapment and distance from the divine.
ਦੂਜੀ ਦੁਰਮਤਿ ਦਰਦੁ ਨ ਜਾਇ ॥	Caught in duality, the pains of entrapment will not dissipate.
ਛੂਟੈ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਦਾਰੂ ਗੁਣ ਗਾਇ ॥	But the Guru-oriented are emancipated by the elixir of singing divine virtues.

(Guru Granth Sahib: 832)

Sabad-texts reiterate the importance of focusing on divine ethical principles and bringing them into daily practice. They emphasize that sonic expressions are valuable only if they enable divine contemplation in a mode of intuition and equipoise (sahaj), as for example in the following sabad-text:

ਰਾਗ ਨਾਦ ਸਬਦਿ ਸੋਹਣੇ ਜਾ ਲਾਗੈ ਸਹਜਿ ਧਿਆਨੁ ॥

Rāg, sound, sabad are beautiful, when they bring intuitive contemplation (of the divine).

(Guru Granth Sahib: 849)

Rather than valorizing sound itself, the concept of infinite “sound” (anhad) repeatedly points to a vibratory energy connecting all. It is anhad that is divine energy and experience:

⁷ For details on musical designations see also Singh, Gurnam 2001, Kaur 2011, and Protopapas 2013, and on ghar specifically, Kaur 2008 and Appendix A, and Fenech and McLeod 2014.

ਪ੍ਰਭ ਕੈ ਸਿਮਰਨਿ ਅਨਹਦ ਝੁਨਕਾਰ ॥	Remembering the divine, boundless “sound” vibrates.
ਸੁਖੁ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਸਿਮਰਨ ਕਾ ਅੰਤੁ ਨ ਪਾਰ ॥	The peace from divine remembrance is endless.

(Guru Granth Sahib: 263)

Significantly also, as another aspect of diversity, a central theme of the sabad-texts is the valorization of equality and the rejection of othering.

ਦੂਜਾ ਕਉਣੁ ਕਹਾ ਨਹੀ ਕੋਈ ॥	Whom should I call the other, there is none.
ਸਭ ਮਹਿ ਏਕੁ ਨਿਰੰਜਨੁ ਸੇਈ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥	The One Immaculate pervades all. Pause
ਦੂਜੀ ਦੁਰਮਤਿ ਆਖੈ ਦੇਇ ॥	It is the duality-entrapped understanding that speaks of the other.
ਆਵੈ ਜਾਇ ਮਰਿ ਦੂਜਾ ਹੋਇ ॥੨॥	One who harbors duality loses divine direction. 2
ਧਰਣਿ ਗਗਨ ਨਹ ਦੇਖਉ ਦੇਇ ॥	The earth, the sky, see no other.
ਨਾਰੀ ਪੁਰਖ ਸਬਾਈ ਲੇਇ ॥੩॥	In women, men, all, the divine permeates. 3

(Guru Granth Sahib: 223)

As testament to this ideation of equality, the sacred poetry in the Guru Granth Sahib includes hundreds of songs by sixteen poet-saints from Hindu and Muslim faith traditions, most prominently Kabir, Farid, Namdev and Ravidas (from the lowest Hindu caste). Sabad lyrics also explicitly state that different faith traditions are equally valid paths to divinity. The sacred poetry of the Sikh Gurus also uses words from several languages in addition to medieval Punjabi, including forms of medieval Hindi and Persian. These features of the revered scripture-cum-song-text book enable, in the minds of Sikh musicians, listeners, program organizers, and gurdwāra administrators, a justification of diverse musical practices. As a rāgi said to me (interview, July 10, 2015) of another style that did not appeal to him, “That is their relish (*mauj*), this is ours,” revealing an attitude of acceptance of diversity in musical practice.

The “Classical” Genre and its Others

Despite this history, ideation, and practice of musical diversity in the performance of sabad kīrtan, the last two to three decades have seen an increasing adoption of discourses, claims, and assertions of authenticity and exclusion. Importantly, authenticity discourses are limited to relatively small, though growing, circles of practitioners and scholars associated with the classical genre. Importantly also, despite their limited presence in the sabad kīrtan world of these discourses of musical difference, superiority, and authenticity, they have received disproportionate attention in scholarship. Other musical genres and their various styles have not been represented, nor have the voices of congregants. These other voices expand the notion of authenticity from the binarized and static view prevalent among practitioners and scholars associated with the classical genre.

The adherents of the classical genre base their authenticity claims on the fact that sabads are arranged in the Guru Granth Sahib by rāg, giving this genre historical precedence going back to the Gurus’ times (1469-1708). The classical genre has enjoyed a strong

resurgence since the 1990s under the name of *gurmat sangīt* (literally, music as per the Guru's wisdom), but its beginnings date back about a century to the socio-political scenario of colonial Punjab.

The term *gurmat sangīt* seems to have emerged at the turn of the twentieth century, based on the resurgence of the idea of *gurmat* as part of Sikh revival movements under conditions of increased Christian and Hindu proselytization in Punjab, the homeland of Sikhs. The death of the tenth Guru in 1708 was followed by a chaotic period for Sikh institutions and the Sikh moral tradition, which unfortunately continued to worsen during the period of the Sikh kingdoms in the nineteenth century (Singh, Nripinder 1990). Corrupt priests (*mahants*) administered many places of worship (Tan 1995 and Nesbitt 2016:74-76). Starting from the end of the nineteenth century, Sikh revival movements sought to reinstall practices that they understood to be consonant with *gurmat* as the basis of a moral tradition, especially in its connection with the daily code of conduct (*rahit*) established by the tenth Guru. As part of this revival, *gurmat sangīt* came into being, as did the AKJ genre. Although the two genres are very different musically, they focused on the same purpose: revitalizing the teachings of the Gurus.

The Sikh literati focused on *gurmat sangīt* to promote in *sabad kīrtan* music that did not have associations deemed harmful for spirituality. Leaders of the revival focused on Sikh educational centers and institutions and the need for starting programs of music study that would promote music consonant with the import of the *sabad* texts and that were attentive to the musical designations and guidelines in the *Guru Granth Sahib*. This led to a focus on the musicology and pedagogy of *gurmat sangīt*. Along with an associated term *gurbāni sangīt* (literally music for the Gurus' Word), these terms appeared in the titles of books including anthologies of musical notations of *rāg*-based compositions published in the early to late-mid-twentieth century.⁸

During the first half of the twentieth century, political developments set the stage for further institutionalization of *gurmat sangīt*. In 1947, Punjab was divided between India and Pakistan, giving rise to Sikh anxiety over loss of homeland. Sikh separatist movements developed, some of which turned militant and were brutally repressed by the Indian government. Three key violent events took place between June and October, 1984: the Indian military's attack with tanks on the Sikh holiest *gurdwāra*, *Harmandir* in Amritsar, Punjab, to eradicate harbored militant leaders, but in the process killing hundreds of innocent worshippers; the subsequent retaliatory assassination of the Prime Minister by her two Sikh bodyguards; and as punishment for that, state-sponsored pogroms that killed of thousands of Sikhs over four days. The Sikh need to secure identity and establish institutions became ever more acute. The institutional developments that ensued included a major revival of *gurmat sangīt* as the distinct music of the Sikhs. Key to this revival was the institution of an annual three-day event of *gurmat sangīt* in Ludhiana, Punjab (Li 2015), and the establishment of the department of *gurmat sangīt* at Punjabi University, Patiala, led by Dr. Gurnam Singh of Punjabi University, Patiala. The revival entailed codification of the forms of the *rāgs* in the *sabad* headings in the *Guru Granth Sahib*, and this process opened the grounds for disagreements and contestations, with musicians and scholars vying for the voice of authority and positions of power (Khalsa 2014 and Li 2015).

⁸ For example, Singh, Prem (1922), Aibtabad (1961) and Singh, Avtar and Gurcharan Singh (1979).

Delhi-based musician, Bhai Baldeep Singh (2011), who heads the Anād Conservatory in Sultanpur Lodhi, Punjab, has argued that authentic rāg-forms, musical styles and pedagogy are those remembered and orally transmitted by his family and a few other lineages dating back to the Gurus' times. His family (see Chapter 4 fn. 12) sings mainly in a dhrupad style and remembers many historical musical compositions for sabads. For Bhai Baldeep Singh only such historical musical sounds can convey the intent of the Gurus. He calls this historical musical tradition *gurbāni kīrtan parampara* (lit., the tradition of kīrtan with the Gurus' word) and distinguishes it from gurmat sangīt, which he considers to be a modern invention using the newer khyāl style, new rāg forms, and modern pedagogy. Ethnomusicologist Francesca Cassio and South Asian Studies scholar Nirinjan Khalsa concur with him. Cassio (2015) draws on the study of authenticity in early Western classical music to argue for an authentic and "autonomous" Sikh medieval dhrupad style and unique rāgs and tāls.⁹ Khalsa (2014) argues that it is only the gurbāni kīrtan parampara as defined above that can maintain the "soteriological" nature of the Gurus' sacred poetry.

Most practitioners of gurmat sangīt, however, do not agree with this limitation of the notion of authenticity to the authority of a few memory bearers, though authenticity still remains for them a matter of musical sound. For Dr. Gurnam Singh (2001, 2014), Chair of the Department of Gurmat Sangeet, Punjabi University, Patiala, the key point is that gurmat sangīt is a unique musical tradition based on distinctive rāgs and musical forms that distinguish it from other classical Indian music. And for London-based musician Prof. Surinder Singh, who heads the Raj Academy Conservatoire in London, the important point is that not singing kīrtan in the rāgs designated in sabad headings is tantamount to disregarding the orders of the Gurus.¹⁰

This focus on musical sound has tended to obscure the difference between sabad kīrtan and its classical musical genre. Some practitioners and scholars have come to use the terms gurmat/gurbāni sangīt and sabad kīrtan interchangeably. For example, religious studies scholar Pashaura Singh (2006: 141) writes, "The sacred music of the Sikhs is the heart of their devotional experience. It is commonly referred to as Gurmat Sangīt or "music in the Guru's view." Thus, what for most practitioners is a musical genre of sabad kīrtan has in fact been asserted by some adherents of the classical genre as coterminous with the entire devotional practice of sabad kīrtan itself. Cassio (2015:23) has even reversed the understanding of the majority of practitioners and congregants of their practice by glossing "kīrtan [as] a genre of Gurbāni Sangīt." A singular focus on musical sound has led South Asian historian Bob van der Linden to argue that that pre-twentieth-century Sikh kīrtan is essentially the same as Indian art music (2015) and that the post-twentieth century developments are inventions represented as

⁹ Some musicologists (for example, Taruskin 1984) have severely critiqued this view of authenticity with respect to European "early music." For a discussion of the methodological problems in Cassio (2015) see Appendix B.

¹⁰ Whether the Sikh Gurus meant the musical designations in sabad headings (discussed in Chapter 4) to be prescriptions or simply documentation of what they themselves did, is a matter of interpretation. It is complicated by the fact that there are nine instances of sabad headings, of vār titles specifically, where there is clear instruction to sing particular named tunes (dhuni). These were then-prevalent, well-known melodies. The rest of the thousands of sabad headings are not in the form of an instruction. Additionally, since all except the Asa Ki Vār melody has been forgotten, these few instances of clear musical instructions of the Guru cannot be followed by anyone.

authentic (2013).¹¹ Similarly, ethnomusicologist Wai Chung Li has assessed the post-1990 gurnat sangīt revival as “combined authentic, invented, and westernized” (2015:3).

The objectification of musical sound in this scholarship and the privileging of one musical genre rests on a methodology that excludes, except peripherally in Li’s case, the study of reception and the views of the large cadre of rāgis who sing in the popular light genre and the increasingly popular AKJ genre. Linden’s works do not include ethnographic research and Cassio’s are based on very limited ethnography with elite musicians holding similar views. This scholarship thus raises significant questions regarding representation.

For the majority of sabad kīrtan practitioners and congregants who sing and enjoy it in multiple, and changing, genres and styles, the various judgments, exclusions, and othering in this body of thought and research create feelings of being misunderstood and misrepresented. Most of my interlocutors have said that they enjoy and even need kīrtan sung in different styles. As one said, “It depends on my mood. And when I am driving, I definitely need something that won’t be so calming as to make me sleepy. For working out, something energetic” (pers. comm., December 14, 2013). Some have mentioned liking faster-paced kīrtan when they were younger, but more meditative styles now. Some parents have also mentioned how their children need more modern styles than they do to keep their interest.

One trope in significant circulation, that critiques Other (non-gurnat sangīt) genres of kīrtan is, that due to listening to Bollywood songs the congregation has become addicted to “*kan ras*,” literally pleasures of the ear. It makes me think of what my maternal grandfather, who lived his daily life staunchly by ethical principles (adherence to righteousness), used to say in defense of his lack of enthusiasm for kīrtan: “music is *kan ras*.” I was too little to comprehend and parse his views then, and happily followed my grandmother in ignoring him and actively participating in the weekly ladies’ kīrtan sessions (*istri satsang*) in their local gurdwāra. Now I think that he was right in that every music entails perceptual enjoyment for those who enjoy it, but he missed the point that this is the very reason that music is enlisted for divine experiences. In sabad kīrtan, by pairing music with sabad, sensory enjoyment is directed to divine experiences. As I have discussed in the previous chapter using the simple examples of the musical elements *pakar* and *sam* of rāg music, these do their work exactly through pleasing sensations. In other words, even gurnat sangīt works on the principle of *kan ras*. In fact rāg music, as do other musics, offers up a smorgasbord of sensory delights in the form of rhythmic and melodic play. The words and gestures of those who enjoy rāg music clearly indicates this.

The 11th generation rāgi Bhai Gurcharan Singh (Figure 5.1), who hails from the family that is committed to singing in rāg in ancient style (see Chapter 4, fn. 12), surprised me with his answer to my question, “Is it ok for rāgis to draw from Bollywood songs?” “Absolutely,” he said. In fact he thought it was a great idea. “Bollywood songs are composed by extremely talented composers,” he said. “These are beautiful compositions.” But he also added that rāgis should not copy a tune exactly, rather use ideas from it.¹² I want to draw attention to this caveat since it relates to the concerns outlined above that gave rise to and propelled, the notion of gurnat sangīt. There was concern among Sikhs that when sabad are sung exactly to popular Bollywood tunes the strong association of that tune with the context of the film interferes with the

¹¹ For a discussion of the methodological problems in Linden (2013, 2015) see Appendix B.

¹² Interview at his residence in New Delhi, July, 2012.

experience of the sabad. A term often used was “*sasti* tune” – cheap tune. What Bhai Gurcharan Singh is saying is that such an association can be prevented by not using the exact tune, and that partial musical phrases and other musical elements and techniques can be more successfully recontextualized in the service of the sabad. So it is not about the “music” per se, but the ethical, philosophical, and socio-political that gets referenced through sound that is of concern and is sought to be regulated.

Figure 5.1
11th generation rāgi Bhai Gurcharan Singh
with author, discussing his musical notations in progress, June 22, 2008



Photo taken at author’s request by family member at his home

The ethnomusicological literature that speaks to recontextualization is relevant here. In his study of kīrtan in Banaras (1986), Stephen Slawek studies the nature of the kīrtan event and the characteristics of its musical repertory, their relationship to the surrounding culture and musics, and, looking for tune typologies for the variety of prevalent song forms, concludes that even though melodies in kīrtan are derived from other sources, their recontextualization into the kīrtan frame of reference instills them with kīrtan specific associations. Additionally, he makes the point that melodies gain kīrtan-specific musical characteristics such as instrumentation and intensification through tempo and volume increase.

Multiple Authenticities

My ethnographic research on sabad kīrtan singing, listening, and programming shows that authenticity of musical sound per se is not a concern for Sikhs at large.¹³ In general, Sikhs do not care about fixed musical compositions and styles for rendering sabad-texts. As an interlocutor said (pers. comm., September 25, 2010), “Music is like a cup which we use to drink from. The cup does not have to be made in one particular way.” Another metaphor often used by interlocutors is that of a vehicle, and clearly they would not use period vehicles from the

¹³ I have interacted with a large number of Sikhs in several parts of India and the United States, including in the latter case both residents and visitors. See also Khabra 2012, Townsend 2014, and Li 2015:186.

Gurus' times for travel now. Thus, while there is willingness to accord historical musical styles of kīrtan due respect, by and large an inclination does not exist to judge other styles as inauthentic or inferior. Rather most Sikhs recognize their need for contemporary tunes and styles that draw their attention and connect them to the sabad-texts and their meanings, and through that to uplifted and divine experiential states.

In contrast to the claims and judgments about gurmat sangīt made by the scholars and practitioners mentioned above, the views of those I call Others (singers, listeners, programmers, and institutional leaders outside the classical circles) more often express the validity or appropriateness (*thīk*) of different performances of kīrtan and often do not concern particular musical features. One such performance feature is the sincerity (*saccha dil*, literally, true heart) in the expression of the Gurus' words (sabad-texts), that is, the sincerity to their ideals and moral teachings. For my interlocutors, sincerity of expression in sabad kīrtan was related to the concept of truthfulness (*sacch*). In sabad-texts, the normative of truthful conduct (*sacch āchār*) is predominant, as articulated in the most often quoted line by Sikhs in many such contexts.

ਸਚਹੁ ਓਰੈ ਸਭੁ ਕੇ ਉਪਰਿ ਸਚੁ ਆਚਾਰੁ ॥

Truth is highest; higher still is truthful conduct.

(Guru Granth Sahib: 62)

Singing with sincerity to the teachings in sabad-texts thus indicates an “ethics of style ... the process by which style becomes the vehicle for a multifaceted discourse about value and meaning” (Rommen 2007:45). As Clifford Geertz (1973) argues, musical activity is meaningful action. And building on this, Timothy Taylor (2015) contends that musical performances make overt what is of value to performers and audiences. In discussions on the importance of sincerity in kīrtan performance, sincerity is often expressed and perceived through embodied humility and equipoise and a lifestyle and voice that expresses conviction in the sacred teachings.

A second significant theme relating to validity of styles is about the love (*prem*) and devotion (*shardha*) with which sacred song is rendered. This reflects yet another dominant theme in the sabad-texts: understanding (*sōjhi*) of the divine is not possible without love. Thus love is seen as an important part of the technique of sabad kīrtan. Devotees seek to become immersed in divine love and experience. They enjoy styles of kīrtan that deepen such experiences. Rather than particular musical features, they are more concerned with experiential states.

A third significant theme relates to the critical perspective in sabad-texts against socio-economic inequality and upper-class excesses. Validity is often seen by Sikhs in terms of a commitment to that ethic. It is found in non-elite modes of musical expression, their accessibility to the congregation, and community feelings generated through call and response participatory singing.

In addition to these norms, some performances are judged inappropriate because they detract from or hinder connection with the sabad-text and with devotional feeling. These include incorrect pronunciation or unclear enunciation of sabad-texts and indexing of secular contexts.¹⁴ My interlocutors have mentioned as distractions excessive body movements,

¹⁴ See Khabra (2012:165) for similar views in a gurdwāra in Hong Kong.

showmanship, the prominent use and display of very unfamiliar instruments or musical styles from different cultures (for example, one time, an upright bass), and the exact use of popular melodies from Bollywood songs used in sexually seductive scenes. Lack of melodiousness was also mentioned by many as detracting from their devotional experience.

These various views and opinions indicate that while musical features are important, *sabad kīrtan* is much more to the participants than objectively apprehended musical sound. It is an enactment and experience of faith, memory, ethics, and aesthetics, all intertwined. As philosopher Stephen Davies writes,

Because a given thing can be variously categorized, it can be assessed for different kinds of authenticity. One and the same item might be a painting, an heirloom, and a representation of Venice, and can be assessed for its authenticity under each of these headings. Because some categorizations are more fundamental or salient, some judgements of authenticity will be more basic or important. Finally, authenticity comes in degrees and might also be indexed to take account of variability in items of the relevant character." (2012:13)

The discourses and views on *sabad kīrtan* can be read through various scholarly conceptualizations of authenticity. The approaches of the adherents to the various styles of the classical genre are similar to what Bigenho has termed "cultural-historical authenticity" (one that is based on representation) and "unique authenticity" (relating to originality and ownership) (2002: 18, 20). Their claims are also based on authorizing, and akin to what Moore (2002) has analyzed as authentication of the musician. These discourses point to Benjamin's argument that removing art from its ritual context subjects it to narratives of authenticity as art.

Counter claims by the Others mentioned above can be read as "authenticity of emotionality" (Taylor 1997:24), "authenticity of execution" (Moore 2002:218), or "experiential authenticity" (Bigenho 2002:17). These approaches resonate with folklorist Regina Bendix's (1997:14) view that, "authenticity [is] at best ... a quality of experience: the chills running down one's spine during musical performances, for instance, moments that may stir one to tears, laughter, elation – which on reflection crystallize into categories and in the process lose the immediacy that characterizes authenticity."

The tendency in scholarship to translate, interpret, or analyze *sabad kīrtan* as music stripped down to its sound alone contrasts sharply with my interlocutors' views and understandings. The singers, instrumentalists, listeners, teachers, and program administrators I talked to made a point that ethnomusicologists have long recognized – that music is not a bounded object but a distributed entity (Born 2013b) or an activity and process (Taruskin 1995, Small 1998). As anthropologist Georgina Born (2013a: 139) sums it up, an ontology of music is constituted through its particular social relations and historical trajectories. Music cannot be understood in isolation but rather as an "assemblage," a "constellation of ... heterogeneous mediations" (139). The accompanying social contexts are in continuous flux too. Thus, authenticity is not of a fixed object in a fixed context, but involves the experiences of ever-changing agents and their practices in ever-changing contexts.

These concerns take on a special meaning in the context of *sabad kīrtan*. The meaning of *kīrtan* is to sing of divine virtues (*kīrat*). As is clear from Sikh interlocutors' views, the process of *kīrtan* practice is not about particular musical sounds but instead experiences of inspiring and divine energy, of becoming immersed in divine love, of understanding the import of *sabad-*

texts, and of strengthening conviction in the ethical norms in the sabad-text so that all these become part of the everyday.

These point to sabad kīrtan as a significant carrier of the Sikh moral tradition rather than a particular musical tradition. Several of my interlocutors with great knowledge of the sabad-texts quoted lines in which singing, playing instruments, and dancing (all of which together comprised sangīt in the ancient sense of the word) are used as metaphors for ethical action. Apart from the gurmat/gurbāni sangīt genre, no other genre or style of performing sabad kīrtan uses the word sangīt to represent itself. In fact, with the spread of the classical genre, there has been an increased adoption of the term gurmat sangīt kīrtan (for example, see Figure 4.8).

The interpretation and analysis of sabad kīrtan as musical sound detached from its performance context in order to ground theses of distinction, (in)/authenticity, or invention, but occludes attention to, and insights from, the lived experience of sabad kīrtan participants, that is, this approach has tended to neglect the way this devotional practice musically performs what is meaningful and of value to participants, as well as its social significance. While Hobsbawm and Ranger's (1983) idea that cultures that seek legitimacy through a perceived connection with a past are "invented" has sprouted a large literature ascribing this attribute to cultures around the world, there has also been sharp critique of such scholarship from indigenous scholars and practitioners (Briggs 1996). In analyzing these debates, Briggs draws attention to a significant problem in what he calls the "inventing" scholarship, due to Western scholars' cultural capital, Foucauldian panopticon position, and assumption of disinterested status. These give scholars "discursive domination" exercised through constructions of "gaps and links" and "intertextually focused metadiscursive practices" (449) that "refigure the lived experiences of subaltern communities" (453). Briggs discusses how the discursive authority of scholars become hegemonic forces in the hierarchy of representation of traditions, and seriously compromise the political voice and rights of subaltern communities.

Musical changes in sabad kīrtan foreground the difference between innovation (adding something new) and invention (creating something completely new, especially in the pejorative sense of fake). They typically have a thread such as has been captured in William's (1977:122) notion of the "residual" in traditions, "effectively formed in the past, but still active in the cultural process not only as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present ... certain experiences, meanings, and values which cannot be expressed or substantially verified in terms of the dominant culture." Innovations can be seen as essential parts of traditions – crucial means for staying relevant in changing socio-economic-political conditions. There has been a dearth of scholarship that focuses on the lived experience of sabad kīrtan. In this vein, religious studies scholar Joy Barrow (2001:103) describes the deep experiences of the participants in the AKJ genre of kīrtan:

At one such amrit kīrtan, which I attended there, was an audible recitation of the gurumantra on the breath. ... On one occasion this lasted several minutes. ... My perception was of a primal sound coming from within their being. ... I had a sense that a direct communion with God was taking place, and was conscious of a heightened awareness of God's presence at this time.

In his study of the relationship of Sikh identity to sabad kīrtan, religious studies scholar Charles Townsend (2011: 215) writes, "In my interviews it has been common to hear Sikhs, both

young and old, gush with enthusiasm about the beauty of Gurbani [sabad] Kīrtan and its powers over one's consciousness." Finally, my own recent work (2016), based on ethnography with sabad kīrtan listeners, analyzes how particular sounds from the three main musical genres of sabad kīrtan, in conjunction with Sikh ideation and history, heighten embodied affective, temporal, and ethical experiences of participants.

Authenticity as Stance

The views by the Others mentioned above point to authenticity as something that refers to a sense of "self-congruency" (Ferrara 1998). Kīrtan participants express their understandings of kīrtan as congruent with Sikh values and with being Sikh. I discussed the issue of authenticity with a rāgi who sings kīrtan in both the classical and light genres (what he calls styles) but predominantly in the latter. He trained in gurmat sangīt at a Sikh institution in Punjab and obtained certification to sing at the holiest gurdwāra, Harmandir, in Amritsar. In our discussion, I posed the question, "Which style feels most authentic to you." The reply was, "It feels most authentic when it sprouts from within (*jad andron phutdi hai*)" (July 10, 2015).

Recognizing authenticity as a quality of experience, and thinking of the multiple ways it is present in Sikh sabad kīrtan experiences leads me to think of authenticity in relation to space-and-time-dependent individual and group experiences. As ethnomusicologist Timothy Rice (2003) has argued, time and place, along with metaphor, are fundamental to musical experience and therefore to a subject-centered musical ethnography. The quality of such an experience can be seen in terms of Harris Berger's (2010:21) phenomenological notion of stance: "the affective, aesthetic, or valual quality" of a person's engagement with expressive practices. As Berger emphasizes, the experience of expressive culture is "shaped as much by a person's social life as by her agency" (ibid:25). I see authenticity, as employed by Sikh kīrtan participants, as such an aspect of experience. The authenticity these participants express is a shared stance resulting from shared understandings of practices.

One's stance on authenticity can also alienate or distance Others. Claims of authenticity can be seen as Berger's idea of "stance-on-power" -- one's relationship to the social world of the expressive culture, and beyond. Such stance-on-power is also found in other expressive traditions and their discourses around classical versus folk music. Writing in 1998 in the context of South Indian Music, ethnomusicologist Matthew Allen observes the dominant conception in "classical discourses" of the classical as "of the classes" and the "reflective few" and the non-classical as "of the masses" and the "unreflective many" (ibid:26). In fact, the "classical"- "folk" dichotomy has been considered a problem by ethnomusicologists for several decades now. Harold Powers went to the root of the problem in his 1981 *New Grove* entry on India: "a simple, virtually unadorned Telegu devotional song in an accepted south Indian raga is 'classical', while an elaborate rendition on the sitar of the tune for a Bengali devotional kīrtan is not" (1981:IX, 72). Indeed, many Sikh musicians who do not sing in recognized rāgs, and therefore are considered outside the gurmat sangīt category, render virtuosic melodic and rhythmic improvisation.

Scholarship can also add fuel to stances on power. Ethnomusicologist Peter Manuel (2015) has proposed bringing "conceptual order" to a wide variety of musics by judging elite art and devotional musics (including sabad kīrtan defined as gurmat sangīt) by the same yardstick

of a particular understanding of musical “complexity,” “sophistication,” and explicit music-theoretical formulation. However, in my view, this pushes kīrtan into a fundamental musical hierarchy that is at the crux of the issue of authenticity as a stance-on-power. Stripping down devotional musical practices to just these criteria and placing them against art musics does not do justice to devotional musics. It places devotees in a particular musical hierarchy, as evidenced in Manuel’s analysis in which he assesses sabad kīrtan to be in the “intermediate sphere in North Indian music culture” between “classical” and “folk” (82) with “contradictory incentives -- whether to codify for connoisseurs, or to perform in an intuitive and populist manner for the unwashed masses” (105). And it creates incentives among practitioners to climb up the hierarchy so defined. Efforts to “classicize” through theorization is a pan-Indian phenomenon. Elitist discourses by practitioners, institutional administrators and scholars alike contribute to the desire for “distinction” (Bourdieu 1984|1979).

A stance-on-power can reveal a dynamic between individual politics and the social ideology of the expressive culture in question that can be analyzed in terms of Berger’s (2010:121) notion of “expressive political nexus” which refers to the connection between the performance stance-on-power and its representation of a social world, ideology, or call to action. For many Sikhs, the bellicose stance of superiority from some practitioners of the classical genre is seen as what Berger calls “regressive political sentiments” -- that is, a “slippage” (ibid:126) between the performed stance and the representation of gurmat (the Gurus’ wisdom in the sabad), with its call to humility and everyday egalitarian practices.

Exclusionary discourses apart, the recent revival of rāg-based kīrtan is based on some continuity of practice along with innovation and influences from circulation, just like the other musical genres and styles of sabad kīrtan. Any flourishing musical culture has elements of change, improvisation, and innovation (Drewal 1992, Roach 1996, among many). Sikhs intuitively recognize that cultures must innovate to remain relevant. Through their views of authenticity, they also recognize the multiple dimensions of kīrtan and their own changing sensorium. As Benjamin (1969:222) argues, “During long periods of history, the mode of human sense perception changes with humanity’s entire mode of existence. The manner in which human sense perception is organized, the medium in which it is accomplished, is determined not only by nature but by historical circumstances as well.” Further, Charles Hirschkind (2001, 2006) draws attention to the need for “a recognition of the way in which practitioners of a tradition, through innovation and adaptation, attempt to cultivate and sustain the sensory conditions (the modes of attention and inattention) that make that tradition viable within modern contexts” (2001:641). He stresses that “modern lives have been shaped by the maintenance of continuities with past practice, as well as by revivals, reworkings, and rediscoveries, including rediscoveries of buried sensory experiences” (ibid:642). In my view, the many styles of Sikh sabad kīrtan aim to do just this: work with ever-changing sensoria, but at the same time enlist them, shaping them for devotional purpose. These diverse stylistic innovations are enabling conditions for the maintenance of a devotional and moral tradition.

The multiple ways that Sikhs find authentic experiences in the plurality of musical styles should also be understood in terms of the diasporic condition of Sikhs. They migrated outside India especially after the 1984 genocide. Following the bloody partition of Punjab at the creation of Pakistan in 1947, they also migrated within the subcontinent from West Punjab to East Punjab and to other parts of India. The founding Guru of Sikhism, Guru Nanak (1469-1539),

himself travelled far and wide to learn and spread his message, and the regional varieties of rāgs and musical forms in which he sang (as documented in the Guru Granth Sahib) testify to innovation as a fundamental principle in his communicative toolkit.¹⁵ Given this history, Berger's concept of stance, in its recognition of fluidity across time and space in the quality of the subject's experiences, is quite useful for my analysis of authenticities. Aesthetic and valual qualities of experiences from sabad kīrtan participation change over time and, accordingly, new styles afford authentic experiences, i.e., stances change.

Conclusions

In this chapter I have argued for a broad and dynamic conceptualization of authenticity. Drawing on insights from various disciplinary approaches, and based on ethnographic research on the discourses and understandings of authenticity and musical diversity in Sikh sabad kīrtan, I have used Berger's concept of stance to argue for an understanding of multiple and moving authenticities. This argument enables authenticity to be seen as part of a complex quality of experiential engagement encompassing embodied affective, aesthetic, and ethical values, and shaped by people's diverse social lives as well as their own agency. Importantly also, since stances are constituted with reference to both past experiences and anticipated futures, multiple authenticities themselves indicate threads in history and become further ground for acceptance of diversity. In the case of Sikh sabad kīrtan practices, these multiple authenticities can be seen in motion in performances in gurdwāras worldwide as well as in the global circulation of media.

I have also taken issue with defining and analyzing sabad kīrtan as music or sangīt narrowly interpreted in terms of detached musical sound and argued that these misrepresent its meaning and lead to restrictive conclusions regarding authenticity and invention. Foregrounding the importance of the ethical dimensions of the experiential aspects of sabad kīrtan singing and listening, I have drawn attention to it as a devotional practice of sung sacred-poetry that is musically open and broad based, and in which particular musical sounds are not considered sacred (hence the problem also with the term Sikh sacred music). I have argued this for contemporary practice based on ethnographic study. I also linked this musical openness to practices and ideation historically, based on the evidence available in the scriptures themselves, the most important and only first-hand documents available on practices of the founders of the tradition. On the basis of these important considerations, I have highlighted the multiple authenticities in motion in the context of Sikh sabad kīrtan as an excellent example of how diversity and dynamism have enabled it to flourish as a multidimensional composite experience of sound, memory, affect, aesthetics and ethics.

¹⁵ For a map of his travels over 24 years (1500-24), eastward to Assam, southward till Sri Lanka, northward up to Tashkent, and westward to the Arabian Peninsula, see Appendix B, Figure B.1 (image taken from www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/File:Guru_Nanak_Udasis.jpg ; accessed May 20, 2016).

Concluding Thoughts

In this dissertation I have examined Sikh *sabad kīrtan* listening as an epistemic site where divinity and ethics are experienced as unified embodied knowledge. I have proposed that congregants participate in, experience, and contribute to a listening ecology in which affect is imbued with ethicality, where morality is viscerally experienced as embodied sensation rather than discursive reasoning. I have explored how sacred text and musical sound bring together people, memory, ideation, words, and gestures in the construction of an affective-ethical world. I have analyzed how specific musical features combine with Sikh ideation to heighten ethical affects; to engender devotional experiences with hues of everyday ethicality; to usher divine communion which has sensations of divine moral virtues, so that in affective listening, “unheard sound” (re)sounds.

Given that Sikhs enjoy listening to *sabad kīrtan* in multiple genres and styles, I have covered the three main musical genres in my analysis, highlighting their distinctive features in heightening congregants’ experiences. For a style in the vastly popular light genre, I have analyzed how a plurality of musical rhythms heightens sensations of awe and temporal expansion, and how this works with Sikh ideation to amplify an inclusive sense of oneness that is also furthered by the sociality of open house worship and collective dining. I have highlighted the increasingly popular AKJ (Akhand Kīrtani Jatha) genre of *sabad kīrtan* as a site of circulation and heightening particularly of affection. I have analyzed their distinctive divine-name chants as a sound complex of timbre, volume and pulse that creates auditory fields of immersion for devotees in which vibration transmits ethical affects, and cycles of effortless attention enable their sedimentation. Sociality plays an important role here too, in the form of full scale volunteer activities that mount annual all-weekend meets without a trace of commercial interest. The third musical genre of *sabad kīrtan* I have analyzed is the historically important and resurgent classical genre, also known as *gurmat sangīt*. I have argued that affective listening here is propelled especially by auratic experience, and repeated listening to codified music-grammatical elements develops soma-aesthetic enjoyment that creates a sensorial social that comes together to affectively experience memory, ideation and divine virtues.

This consideration of diverse musical means for rich experiences in *sabad kīrtan* has led me to question the objectified signification of music in the scholarship on *sabad kīrtan*, and associated with that, binarized conceptualizations and claims of authenticity and distinction. I have argued that for congregants *sabad kīrtan* is much more than particular musical sounds, and in fact no musical sound is sacred for them. Rather, musical innovations that take the changing human sensorium into account are essential for the flourishing of *sabad kīrtan* as a popular devotional activity. They provide the conditions for maintaining *sabad kīrtan* as the chief means of worship and a central part of everyday life for Sikhs around the world.

This project has indicated the agentive work of listening in both shaping practice and defining its scope. The voices of diverse listeners in this study have contributed to an understanding of the *sabad kīrtan* tradition that reaches beyond current scholarly representations of the views and practices of a few musicians. It has enabled a definition of the

tradition that is much broader than its classical genre alone as much of the scholarship has so far put forth. It has foregrounded that *sabad kīrtan* is not a music tradition but a devotional practice in which music enhances the affective mobilization of ethicality.

The ethnographic approach in this study has also revealed new insights into the rich meanings and experiential aspects of several metaphors in *sabad* and speech. It has foregrounded *anhad* as unheard and limitless ethical potentiality, of *ras* as bodily taste and experience of this ethical knowledge, and *rasna* as a unifying sense of this bodily knowledge.

Recognizing listeners as a critical locus of the production of embodied and experiential musical knowledge, my research shifts attention out of musical sound as aesthetic object to the subjective aesthetic experience from musical sound. More broadly, by putting the spotlight on reception, this study draws attention to the fact that representations of little known minority traditions are often circumscribed by power hierarchies within the tradition as also the hegemony of scholars. Importantly too, the recognition of embodied knowledge in listeners rather than only performers sheds light on how historical texts and the projects within them are kept relevant through musical renderings.

A theme that has emerged through the various analyses of musical genres in this investigation is the role of rhythm in heightening the affective force of music. The style of light genre analyzed offered the listeners a rich variety of rhythms created by changes in texture, timbre, meter and form. In the AKJ genre the dominant experience came from cycles of immersion in sonic fields of timbre, volume and pulse. The classical genre emphasized repetitions of codified melodic phrases and points of rhythmic resolution. Further, these musical rhythms were embedded in the rhythms of sociality -- weekly, monthly or annual events of musicking and collective dining, and associated volunteer activities.

The combination of phenomenological and ecological approaches in this study contributes to the scholarship on sound, sense and affect studies in several ways. It highlights the epistemic potential of sound and the listening body immersed in sound. It points to both the subjective and intersubjective nature of embodied knowledge. In particular, my study shows the role of timbral expressions as conduits for the transmission of affect and knowledge.

Significantly, my approach to understanding audition suggests a broadened notion of embodied knowledge beyond its conceptualization as embodied cognition in which external sonic structures are taken to be replicated as internal neural patterns. I resist such an objectified model of perception through an ecological approach and also an investigation of the Sikh metaphor and experience of *ras* which points to listening as a process in which perceptual knowledge is ingested and circulated throughout the body as a unified whole body sensation.

Through these interventions, this study lends insight into the localized nature of affect and musical means even within a tradition. Different sub-collectives that are particular articulations of a larger, more general listening ecology, are soundworlds in which distinct musical means are used to foreground different affects. These sub-collectives are overlapping yet distinct. They point to diversity as an essential condition of human existence.

My project has revealed several promising avenues for research. The musical innovations in the light genre offer scope for detailed investigation. The complex interplay of

gender norms and Khalsa ideals in the AKJ (Akhand Kirtani Jatha) community of Sikhs promises to yield insights into modes of navigation of identity, aesthetics and ethics. The important role of the AKJ kīrtan in the Sikh revival movement deserves in-depth analysis. In fact, the diverse musical practices of sabad kīrtan as part of grass-roots activities in colonial Punjab points to the potential for nuancing, even a revision, of the dominant understanding in Western academia of the Sikh revival movement as musically elite, modernist, and disciplining.

Going forward I see the role of rhythm as a fruitful direction for further exploration, thinking perhaps along philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefvebre's (2004|1992:66) statement, "Musical rhythm does not only sublimate the aesthetic and a rule of art: it has an **ethical** function. In its relationship to the body, to time, to work, it illustrates *real* (everyday) life." I also see as fertile ground the exploration of rhythms in the sabad-texts and their interplay with that of music. Since sabad kīrtan is understood as a practice in which sacred texts are more important than musical sound, the rhythms in the words, phrases, lines and verses -- sonic, semantic and semiotic -- and their affordances with musical sound, are significant for the experiences of devotees. Their analysis will be part of my next project.

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Appendix A

Figure A.1

Rāg, rāg-variants and ghar number designations in the Guru Granth Sahib

Number	Rāg	Named rāg-variant	Ghar number variants
1.	Sīrīrāg		1-7
2.	Mājh		1-4
3.	Gauṛī	Gauṛī Guārerī	
		Gauṛī Dakhaṇī	
		Gauṛī Chetī	
		Gauṛī Bairāgaṇ	
		Gauṛī Dīpkī	
		Gauṛī Pūrbī-Dīpkī	
		Gauṛī Pūrbī	
		Gauṛī Mājh	
		Gauṛī Mālvā	
		Gauṛī Mālā	
		Gauṛī Soraṭh	
4.	Āsā		1-17
		Āsā Kāfī (<i>ghar</i> 8)	
		Āsāvārī Sudhang (<i>ghar</i> 16)	
		Āsā Āsāvārī (<i>ghar</i> 17)	
5.	Gūjri		1-4
6.	Devghandhārī		1-7
7.	Bihāgrā		1-2
8.	Vaḍhans		1-2, 4
		Vaḍhans Dakhaṇī (<i>ghar</i> 3)	
9.	Soraṭh		1-4
10.	Dhanāsrī		1-9, 12-14
11.	Jaitsrī		1-4
12.	Ṭoḍī		1-5
	Bairārī		1
	Tilang		1-3
		Tilang Kāfī	
	Sūhī		1-7, 9-15
		Sūhī Lalit	
		Sūhi Kāfī (<i>ghar</i> 10)	
	Bilāval		1-13
		Bilāval Dakhaṇī	
		Bilāval Mangal	
	Gonḍ		

		Bilāval Gonḍ	1-2
	Rāmkalī		1-3
		Rāmkalī Dakhaṇī	
	Naṭ Nārāin		
	Mālī Gauṛā		
	Mārū		1-8
		Mārū Kāfī (ghar 2)	
		Mārū Dakhaṇī	
	Tukhārī		
	Kedārā		1-5
	Bhairau		1-3
	Basant		1-2
		Basant Hindol (ghar 2)	
	Sārang		1-6
	Malār		1-3
	Kānaṛā		1-11
	Kaliān		1-2
		Kaliān Bhopālī	
	Prabhātī	Prabhātī Bibhās	1-2
		Prabhātī Dakhaṇī	
		Bibhās Prabhātī	
	Jaijāvantī		

Appendix B Scholarship on Sikh Sabad Kīrtan

A historical view of the dominating concern with the “classical” genre

Despite the wide recognition among Sikhs and scholars of the centrality of sabad kīrtan in Sikh life, scholarly literature on sabad kīrtan is small, especially in the Western academy. In the recently published Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies (Singh and Fenech 2014), only one of the fifty-one chapters is on sabad kīrtan, and comprises ten of its 645 pages. Notably also, it discusses sabad kīrtan as gurmat sangīt, and makes no mention of the more popular light and AKJ genres. This exclusive concern with the “classical” genre is representative of the scholarship on sabad kīrtan which has been focused on discussions of original and authentic idioms, rāgs and compositions.

Known textual sources that would allow even very rough conjectures about the range of musical genres historically used for sabad kīrtan are few, and this is a wide open research area. The organization of sabads in the Guru Granth Sahib in rāgs and poetic/musical forms indicates that sabad were sung in rāg-based melodies in various poetic/musical forms as noted. However, this does not indicate rāg-based musical idioms as we know them now as part of classical Indian music. Neither does it preclude the practice of singing in ways that were different from the musical designations in the sabad headings. As noted in Chapter 4, there are only nine instances of sabad headings which are in the form of a musical instruction rather than a designation. It is telling that singing sabads in non-designated rāgs is a standard practice even among gurmat sangīt practitioners including the 11th generation brothers, rāgis Bhai Gurcharan Singh and Bhai Avtar Singh who learned such compositions from their father.

It is also important to bear in mind that the text of many sabads present a cautionary view of singing in rāg, as I have shown in Chapter 5 and argued in more detail in an earlier article (Kaur 2011). These views must be considered along with the indications in sabad headings when considering the range of musical practices that would have been acceptable to the Sikh Gurus.

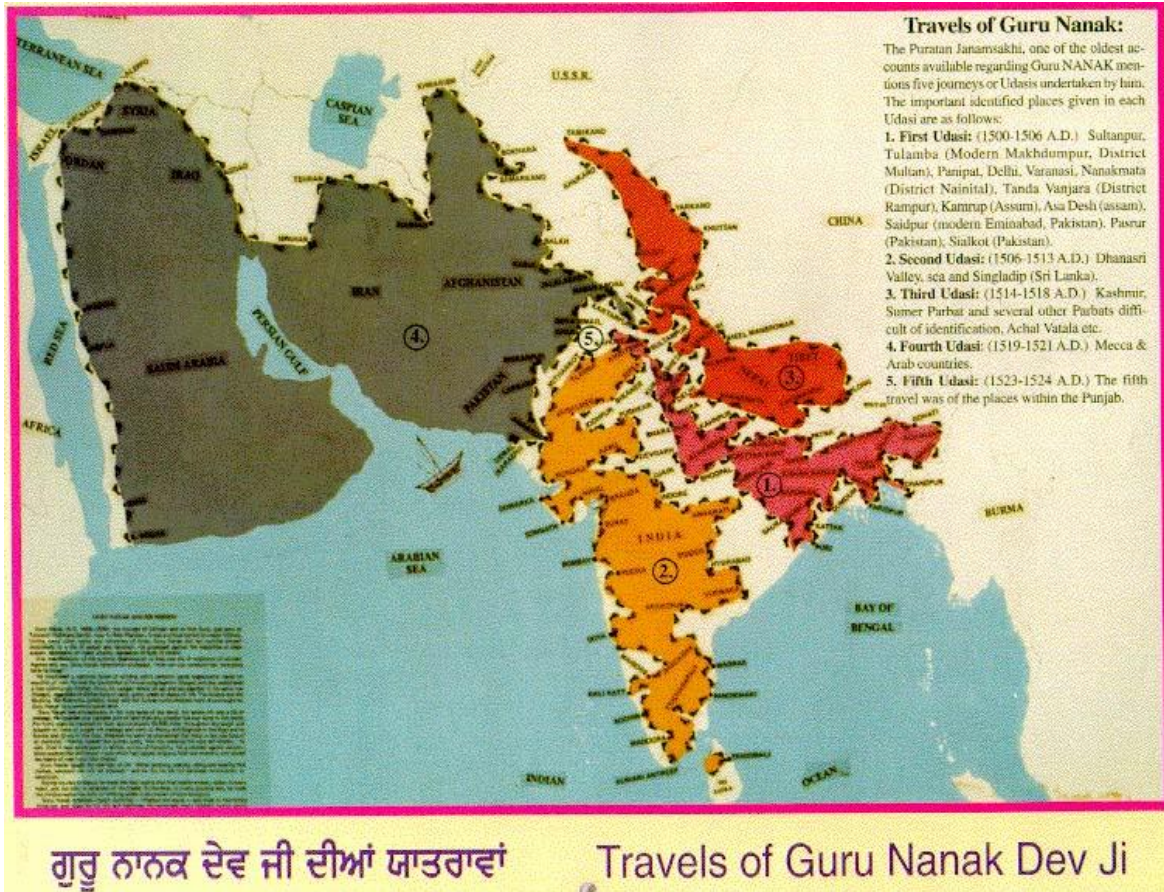
If one thinks about Guru Nanak’s travels across South and Central Asia over twenty-four years (Figure B.1), it is easy to imagine that he used a wide variety of genres and styles to communicate his songs (sabads) to diverse audiences. In fact, Sikh memory and the writings of Bhai Gurdas (ca.1558-1633), specifically vār (verse) 1:32, note Guru Nanak (1469-1539) as dressing in the manner of his audience (*neel bastar*, blue clothes) for greater effectiveness. Likely then, he also adopted diverse musical means as part of his communicative toolkit. Guru Nanak and the successive Gurus are remembered in Sikh memory as engaged in chartering a moral tradition, not a fixed music tradition. Their aim was to maximize the practice of singing and listening to sabad. Likely they sanctioned and encouraged diverse ways of singing sabad kīrtan. The spread of kīrtan under the influence of Guru Nānak is noted in Bhāi Gurdās’s vār 1:27 (*ghar ghar hōvé dharamsāl, hōvé kīrtan sadā visōā* – every house was a place of worship with constant kīrtan as on Vaisākhi¹).

¹ At that time, a Punjabi spring harvest festival.

Figure B.1

Guru Nanak's major journeys (udasi)

[Map of his travels over 24 years (1500-24), eastward to Assam, southward till Sri Lanka, northward up to Tashkent, and westward to the Arabian Peninsula]



ਗੁਰੂ ਨਾਨਕ ਦੇਵ ਜੀ ਦੀਆਂ ਯਾਤਰਾਵਾਂ

Travels of Guru Nanak Dev Ji

Image from http://www.sikhiwiki.org/images/b/b0/Guru_Nanak_Udasis.jpg

As Sikhism spread under the leadership of the ten Gurus (1469-1708), and after, it is very likely that a wide range of musical genres and styles for singing kīrtan were in practice in the various places that the Gurus and Sikhs lived -- across Punjab (in northwest India), in Patna, Bihar (in northeast India, where the tenth Guru was born and raised), and in Nanded, Maharashtra (towards southcentral India, where the tenth Guru spent his last days). It is quite likely that changes in musical styles occurred over the period of the ten Gurus' lives (1469-1708) itself, and continued after that. It is difficult to imagine the growth and spread of sabad kīrtan in musically frozen terms, and in terms exclusively and narrowly of what was practiced in the Gurus' darbārs (courts), and even that to be severely musically restricted. In fact, a story well established in Sikh memory points to a reading that would suggest the opposite. This story is that when the rabābis of Guru Arjan's darbār became arrogant, the Guru did not want them to perform and instead asked the Sikh congregation to take charge of singing sabad kīrtan. This indicates that particular musical modes were less important to the Guru than the communication of ethical values.

In fact there is textual evidence that the musical practices of the Gurus were changing. The addition of new musical forms is documented in sabad headings of the Guru Granth Sahib, and in the Dasam Granth texts. Dr. Nivedita Singh of Punjabi University Patiala, in her research paper written in September 1998,² argued that references in Guru Gobind Singh's poetry indicates his interest in various musical forms and that the musical idiom khyāl occurs in one song heading of his verses, providing the following quote. The idiom khyāl is not referenced in the Guru Granth Sahib (which does not include his poetry), nor for that matter is the older idiom, dhrupad.

ਖਿਆਲ ਖਾਤਸ਼ਾਹੀ ੧੦॥
 ਮਿਤ੍ਰ ਪਿਯਾਰੇ ਨੂੰ ਹਾਲੁ ਮੁਰੀਦਾਂ ਦਾ ਕਹਿਣਾ ।
 ਤੁਧੁ ਬਿਨੁ ਰੇਗੁ ਰਜਾਈਆਂ ਦਾ ਓਢਣੁ; ਨਾਗ ਨਿਵਾਸਾਂ ਦੇ ਰਹਣਾ ।
 ਸੂਲ ਸੁਰਾਹੀ ਖੰਜਰੁ ਪਿਆਲਾ; ਬਿੰਗੁ ਕਸਾਈਆਂ ਦਾ ਸਹਿਣਾ ।
 ਯਾਰੜੇ ਦਾ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਸੱਥਰੁ ਚੰਗਾ; ਭੱਠ ਖੇੜਿਆਂ ਦਾ ਰਹਿਣਾ ।

In Sikh memory, starting from the fifth Guru, Guru Arjan (1563-1606), new instruments were introduced to Sikh kīrtan practice by the Sikh Gurus themselves -- the lutes, saranda and taus, and the drums, jori and mridang (see Figures 1.9 and 4.4).

In terms of textual sources, the Sikh scriptures – the Guru Granth Sahib, the Dasam Granth, and the verses of Bhai Gurdas and Bhai Nand Lal remain the crucial available historical documents from the period of the lives of the Gurus from which to glean information about kīrtan practices at that time.³ This information is embedded in the sabads as well as in the sabad headings which contain musicological terminology. In Chapter 4 I have provided a detailed discussion of this information from the Guru Granth Sahib (as have other scholars such as Gurnam Singh and Janice Protopapas). As an example from a tertiary scripture, I can cite here that Bhāi Gurdās mentions the use of rabāb in vār 14:15.

For the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there are no known literary productions directly on sabad kīrtan. Again, information would need to be gleaned from the more general Sikh literature and writings about Sikhs in this period.⁴ After the death of the last Guru in 1708, the eighteenth century was a particularly unsettled period for the Sikhs, which would explain the lack of literary or artistic productions on kīrtan practices from this period. There are some brief mentions in writings of British officers and observers in India, which provide valuable information, however little. Even for the first half of the nineteenth century when there was a flourishing Sikh empire under the leadership of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, and after that a period of princely states, very little direct information is available on the range of kīrtan practices. There are some paintings, coins and architectural reliefs, mostly from the nineteenth century. The most common depiction is of Guru Nanak with his rabāb accompanist, Bhai Mardana. Some

² Available at www.gurmatsangeetlibrary.com.

³ The usefulness of related manuscripts and also the literary productions of breakaway groups such as the Minas is open to research.

⁴ For discussions of different types of Sikh literature see the section, Literary Expressions, in The Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies (Singh and Fenech 2014).

artistic productions show other instruments, often in different contexts such as wedding processions and administrative darbār settings. These sources need to be used carefully.

The earliest literature available on sabad kīrtan seems to be from the turn of the twentieth century, written in Punjab. This was a period when British colonial rule was using a divide-and-rule strategy. When the country achieved independence in 1947 it was under conditions of highly tense inter-religious relations, resulting in a violent and bloody partition into the countries, Hindustan (land of Hindus) and Pakistan (land of the pure/Muslims), which drew the line in the middle of Punjab, the homeland of Sikhs. Like much of the literature of that period, the literature on sabad kīrtan indicates an anxiety about maintenance of the Sikh tradition and identity in Hindustan, especially as a minute percentage of the population constantly under the threat of assimilation due to Hindu proselytization and nationalism. Added to this was the concern that over the 18th century, a chaotic period for Sikh institutions after the death of the last Guru in 1708, there had been largescale instalment of Hindu practices in Sikh gurdwāras, such as idol worship which is against the teachings of the Gurus. The Sikh literati turned to the Sikh scriptures to formulate their ideas that they published in books, pamphlets and newsletters.⁵

Thus, there was a focus on the concern of identifying and promoting musical styles that were consonant with the teachings in the primary Sikh scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib, and emphasis on the need for educational institutions for this purpose. The publications of that time indicate unease about the dilution of Sikh ideology in the musical styles of sabad kīrtan. My research so far indicates that it was in this context that the term gurmat sangīt seems to have emerged,⁶ and set the stage for an exclusive focus in publications on rāg-based performance of sabad kīrtan.

The publications from this period include books about gurmat sangīt, and anthologies of notations of rāg-based compositions of kīrtan which had in their titles the term gurbāni sangīt. It is worth mentioning that two earlier books are known that include Western staff notation of the rāg scales of rāgs from the Guru Granth Sahib and rāg-based sabad compositions respectively.⁷

The first major work in English specifically on sabad kīrtan appears to be a little book put together in 1967 by the Sikh Sacred Music Society in New Delhi. Titled *Sikh Sacred Music*, it expressed the Society's views on the aesthetic aspects of sabad kīrtan, and is informative of the Sikh literati's approach at that time which was a denouncement of florid singing to separate spiritual from entertainment music. The next major work was a book published in 1982 by Gobind Singh Mansukhani, *Indian Classical Music and Sikh Kīrtan*, which for the first time provided a detailed overview of sabad kīrtan. Both these works pay attention to Sikh ideology and to the experience of kīrtan, and are focused on the classical genre of sabad kīrtan. In 1978, a book chapter was published by Ajit Singh Paintal, a Hindustani music faculty member in the

⁵ A detailed study of these sources in Punjabi could reveal information on musical practices in sabad kīrtan.

⁶ The first significant published mention of the term gurmat sangīt appears to be in Dr. Charan Singh's booklet, *Sri Guru Granth Bani Beora*, published in 1902. The term is mentioned in reference to his essay *Gurmat Sangīt Nirnhe*. This essay was published in Bhāi Vir Singh's important booklet: *Gūrmat Sangīt par hūn tak mili khōj* (translated as: Research up till now on Gūrmat Sangīt), published in 1958. See Kaur 2011.

⁷ Max Arthur Macauliffe's *The Sikh Religion* (1909), Volume 5, and Prem Singh's *Gurmat Sangeet Ratan Bhandar* (1922).

Department of Music at the University of Delhi, based on his 1971 PhD dissertation from the same institution, titled “The Nature and Place of Music in Sikh Devotional Music and its Affinity with Indian Classical Music.” In the article Paintal provides his summary views on the different styles of *sabad kīrtan* and their historicity. The detailed methodology and sources cited in his dissertation would provide further information on historiographical issues.

During the last two-three decades there has been a rapid growth of publications on *gurmat sangīt* in Punjab, particularly those published by the Patiala University Press,⁸ under the leadership of Dr. Gurnam Singh who heads the Department of *Gurmat Sangeet* at that university. There are several doctoral dissertations and faculty research papers. The majority are in Punjabi. Dr. Gurnam Singh has himself authored many publications over the last decade and half, and is a significant figure in the institutionalization of the *gurmat sangīt* genre. His works are primarily concerned with the musicological terminology in the *Guru Granth Sahib*, the grammar of *rāgs* and musical notations of compositions. The Sikh educational center, *Javaddi Kala Taksal* in Ludhiana, Punjab, is another site of publications relating to their annual *gurmat sangīt* festival that has been organized since 1991.

While these publications from Punjab do not use the ethnographic method, the views expressed by the authors likely have some basis in informal ethnography as these authors are immersed in the culture. This research does not in general operate within the analytical methods and theories of the Western academy. But it is rooted in native knowledge. Hence I see the scope of fruitful collaborative research between scholars in Punjab and in Western academic institutions.

Scholarship in the Western academy

In the scholarship in the Western academy, the main approaches can be categorized as (i) descriptive overview, (ii) diaspora studies, (iii) postcolonial analysis, (iv) historical analysis and (v) individual themes. Within each of these categories some studies have used the ethnographic method, though only two studies are based on reception, those of religious studies scholars Joy Barrow (1991) and Charles Townsend (2011). Other ethnographic accounts are those of select musicians, many of whom are not *rāgis* (professionals who sing for congregations). Musical analysis has also not been part of the scholarship on *sabad kīrtan*. A large proportion of the articles are published in the journal, *Sikh Formations*, and some scholars have published only there. Of the rest, many are articles in edited volumes on topics related to Sikhs and Sikhism.

(i) Descriptive overview

Overview essays have initially been written by religious studies scholar Pashaura Singh, offered as chapters in two edited volumes. In “Sikhism and Music” (2006) he provides a historical view of the importance of *sabad kīrtan* in liturgy, and also its aesthetics as explained in the scriptures. His definition and treatment of *kīrtan* however is limited to the *gurmat sangīt* genre, except for a mention of innovative styles in the diaspora in a brief section on current and

⁸ For a listings and previews see gurmatangeetlibrary.com.

future trends. A similar approach is seen in his (2011) essay, “Kīrtan *Chaunkis* at the Darbar Sahib,” on liturgical musical sittings at the holiest gurdwāra, Harmandir Sahib.

In her doctoral dissertation (2011) and following manuscript (2013), *Sikh Śabad Kīrtan: The Musicology of Sacred Memory*, ethnomusicologist Janice Protopapas, has offered the most detailed musicological information in English so far. Basing her work extensively on that of Dr. Gurnam Singh of Patiala University, she presents explanations of the musical terminology in the Guru Granth Sahib and transnotations of Singh’s native notations of rāg scales and sabad melodies. She provides a detailed performance map of the morning liturgical Asa ki Vār composition as sung by a rāgi at the Harmandir Sahib Gurdwara in Amritsar. Protopapas also points out the language of affect and embodiment in Asa ki Vār. She avers that sabad kīrtan is a powerful vehicle of memory and identity.

My article, “Sikh *Shabad Kīrtan* and *Gurmat Sangīt*: What’s in the Name?” (2011) combines an overview with a critical analysis of the term, gurmat sangīt. It offers a summary historical view of shabad kīrtan, its genres, and performance context, with some detail on the evidence available in the writings of Bhai Gurdas (ca.1558-1633) on kīrtan practice during the earlier part of the Sikh Guru period.

(ii) Diaspora studies

In her article, “The Akhand Kirtani Jatha: a local study of the beliefs and practices of its members” (2001), religious studies scholar Joy Barrow provides an ethnographic account of the devotional practices of the AKJ members in Southall near London. She notes the importance of the chanting and experience of the divine name, wāheguru, and of kīrtan, especially all night programs. Barrow provides descriptions from her interlocutors of their deep devotional experiences during kīrtan, and the connection of these experiences with the Khalsa initiation ceremony and the tenth Guru. My fieldwork in the Bay Area shows similar findings to Barrow’s. She also notes that at the programs she attended, over 75% of attendees seemed to be under thirty years of age. My fieldwork has also shown a high attendance and involvement of millennials, and I see this as a significant research topic.

In his article, “Gurbani Kīrtan and the Performance of Sikh Identity in California” (2011) religious studies scholar Charles Townsend explores the connection between Sikh kīrtan and identity in the diaspora. Based on ethnographic information from his fieldwork in gurdwāras in Southern California, he argues for kīrtan as an important part of the Sikh construction of identity relating to history and homeland, faith and transmission, as well as a sense of uniqueness and pride. Townsend also reports meeting many young interlocutors, and significantly that even those who did not understand Punjabi did not want to listen to English translations of sabad, attesting to the affective power of sabad for Sikhs. Townsend quotes extensively from his interviews stating that his hope is that his approach will alleviate the concern of Sikhs that “scholars writing about Sikhism are ‘disconnected’ from the Sikh communities (or from the ‘effects’ that these writings may have on the communities) or that everyday Sikhs ‘have not been consulted’ by scholars of Sikhism” (225). Townsend picks up an important point since many scholars of Sikhism in the Western academy are not proficient or literate in Punjabi, do not undertake ethnographic work with common Sikhs, or do not mingle in the community.

In their article, “Sikh Kīrtan in the Diaspora: Identity, Innovation and Revivalism” (2013) sociologist Navtej Purewal and musician Harjinder Singh Lallie discuss kīrtan in the diaspora as a performance and negotiation of identity. They note the simple non-professional styles of early immigrants, the development of new world music styles of Bhai Dya Singh of Australia and the 3HO community (Happy, Healthy, Holy Organization) of European American Sikhs, as well the revived interest in older forms such as the classical and the AKJ. Comparing to Townsend, this study is not ethnographic but briefly traces the movement of people and their practices, relating them to some key events in India such as the 1984 pogroms against Sikhs that led to a surge in migration and identity assertion.

As will become clear by the end of this review, it is only in these three articles that we find a break from the trend in scholarship to focus on the classical genre of sabad kīrtan, and only in two of these (Barrow and Townsend) ethnography with listeners/congregants.

(iii) Postcolonial analysis

In his article, “Sikh Sacred Music: Identity, Aesthetics and Historical Change” (2013), South Asian historian Bob van der Linden, focusing on the classical genre of kīrtan, and drawing from postcolonial studies on Indian classical music, argues that Sikh kīrtan in the colonial period went through transformations similar to Hindustani music, that is the formation of a “classical” and national music. Citing examples of “Orientalist and musicological texts, canonization of music, [and] professionalization of musicians,” (154) he concludes that there was a “modernization of Sikh kīrtan” and an invention of an “authentic” tradition in the colonial period under Sikh revival movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This paralleled the institution of the Sikh “orthodox” identity (with uncut hair and beard, and turban).

In my view, Linden’s conclusions are an overreach and need to be nuanced. The changes he talks about impacted a small proportion of practice -- only that in the rāg-based genre, and that too among a limited group of musicians. The reach of the classical genre and the musicological texts was not and still is not far reaching. It is important to note that the AKJ genre was born as part of the same revival movements. This is not a classical genre (see Introduction and Chapter 3) and it did not partake of the “modernization” processes Linden outlines. Linden does not have enough evidence of the kinds of musical genres of kīrtan in practice prior to the nineteenth century to show how kīrtan changed musically in the imperial encounter. The entire practice of sabad kīrtan cannot be spoken of in terms only of the classical genre. With respect to the “invention” thesis, it must be kept in mind that the changes in the colonial period had threads with the past that gave them purchase for Sikhs. As I show in Chapters 3 and 4, canonization of musicological detail and the formalization of the Sikh visible identity was undertaken by the Sikh Gurus themselves. Regarding professionalization of musician too, this was a practice under the Sikh Gurus right from the beginning. Initially the professionals were Muslim rabābis, who sang rāg-based kīrtan with the rabāb. The first rabābi was Bhai Mardana who was the founding Guru’s travelling companion for twenty-four years. The profession of rabābi singers of sabad kīrtan continued till the partition of Punjab into India and Pakistan. Their social history has been analyzed by Purewal (2011) who I discuss below. The history of rāgis, Sikh singers of sabad kīrtan, who are the sole professionals now, has not been

investigated in depth. It is simply assumed that it happened under Sikh revival movements of the early twentieth century.

In her article, “Sikh/Muslim bhai-bhai? Towards a social history of the *rabābī* tradition of *shabad Kīrtan*” (2011), sociologist Navtej Purewal, investigates the reasons for the demise of the once significant *rabābī* tradition of Muslim musicians who sang *rāg*-based *kīrtan*. She charts a long term process with three main “watershed moments” in its history: (i) the democratization of *sabad kīrtan* in the early sixteenth century under the fifth Guru, Guru Arjan, following the arrogant behavior of the *rabābī* musicians of his *darbār* (court), which broke their monopoly of *kīrtan* performance for congregations (ii) the “disciplining” effects in terms of “prescriptive conventions of style, text, creative display and religious identity” of the Sikh reform movement, that forbade the *rabābis* from singing in the holiest *gurdwāras*, and (iii) the partition of India in 1947 leading to migration of the Muslim *rabābis* to Pakistan where there was little scope for Sikh *kīrtan*. Purewal’s locates the Sikh revival movement as the major reason for the exclusion of *rabābis* from *kīrtan* performance at *gurdwāras*, due to the hardening of religious boundaries as well as the *gurdwāras*’ “modernist” practices.

A similar account of the exclusion of *rabābis* is given in terms of their “vilification” by Sikh institutional leaders, in sociologist Virinder Kalra’s article, “Crafting *Kīrtan*” (2015). He discounts as “Sikh-centric” Jagir Singh’s (1992) analysis of the changing attitudes of *rabābis*. I will argue below that a number of issues demand a nuanced analysis of what is a set of complex factors.

The role of the Muslim *rabābī* in *sabad kīrtan* is a significant line of enquiry. Purewal’s and Kalra’s analyses is based on ethnographic fieldwork, though with only one *rabābī*, Bhai Chand. Purewal’s identification of “watershed moments” is well thought out, though some details need modification in my view. For example, *sabad kīrtan* as a “prescriptive text of performance, *rāgs* and procedure” (Purewal 2011:373) does not begin with but predates Guru Arjan and begins with Guru Nanak himself, as evidenced in *sabad* lyrics of the first four Gurus that speak to an ideology regarding music, which I have discussed in the Introduction and Chapter 4 and also in Kaur (2011). Similarly, in stating that “Guru Nanak’s *darbār* was mobile” (374), it is important to consider that after his extensive travels he settled in Kartarpur and initiated liturgical practices, as evidenced in Bhai Gurdas’s *vār* 1:38.⁹ Likewise Guru Hargobind was mobile too, travelling around Punjab and the Himalayan foothills. Furthermore, the notion of a single Guru’s *Darbar* needs to be balanced by reckoning that as Sikhism grew, there were many local centers of learning and devotional practice.

To come to my larger arguments, there are a number of important factors that if included would have enabled a more balanced account of the exclusion of *rabābis* from performing at *gurdwāras*. One significant factor in the social place of *rabābī* in Sikh history is that it derived not merely from his “sense of professional identity” (Purewal 2011:367) but a deeply affective one that entailed a close and affectionate relationship with the Gurus. The term “affective labor” (Hardt 1999) is apt here. It recognizes that labor includes an engagement

⁹ “*Sōdar ārtī gāvīai amrit vaylē jap ūchārā* -- *Sōdar* and *Ārti* were sung, and in the early morning *Jap* was recited. These are poetic compositions consisting of many *sabads*. They were canonized in the *Guru Granth Sahib*, and now form part of daily liturgy.

both of reasoning and feeling.¹⁰ The colonial observation (Candler 1910) that Purewal quotes in support of the presence of rabābis in sites of kīrtan performance explicitly mentions Muslim Mardana as one “who loved Nanak” and “yet kept his own faith” (Purewal 2011:370-71). Sikh memory recounts the affective relationship between not only Bhai Mardana and Guru Nanak, but also between the following generations of rabābis and successive Gurus. For example, rabābi Bhai Babak is remembered as very close to Guru Hargobind and always accompanying him, even in the battlefield. It is possible to see these practices, as Purewal does, as “areas of ambiguity” (369) or ‘fuzziness between what is Muslim and what is Sikh” (370), but they can also be understood, in the way that it resides in Sikh memory, as inter-faith friendships across “religious categorization” (371).

The more important point is that if positive affective relations engendered boundary transformations or crossings, then their absence will likely have the opposite effect. It is significant that in contrast to the above accounts, the quotes from Bhai Chand in Purewal do not talk about such feelings, but only about “passion for their music”¹¹ (377). Additionally, Kalra (2015:71) mentions, but does not explore, that during the colonial period, “At the Hamandir there were no formally mixed groups of performers; rabābis performed with their own kinsman and Gursikhs did the same.” In my ethnographic research with 97-year old, 11th generation rāgi Bhai Gurcharan Singh,¹² when I asked what he thought about the exclusion of rabābis from performing sabad kīrtan at gurdwāras, he recounted an incident from a kīrtan event. He said that upon sensing arrogance from a rabābi over his musical knowledge, the rabābi was asked how much regard he had for the Guru Granth Sahib, and the reply was: as much as you have for the Holy Quran. These accounts indicate that by the mid-twentieth century a complex set of factors had affected feelings negatively on both sides.

There is need then to explore the processes of the demise of positive affect on both sides. An account of one such long-term process is given by South Asian history scholar specializing in the social and political history of colonial Punjab, Tai Yong Tan (1995). It describes the change, after the death of the tenth Guru, in the management of gurdwāras:

In the early eighteenth century, with the large-scale Muslim persecution of Sikhs, first by the Mughals and then by the Afghan invaders, taking charge of Sikh places of worship became a hazardous enterprise. As large numbers of keshdharis [those with long hair and beards] were forced to flee into exile, the management of Sikh shrines was entrusted to the *Udasis*, a sect of ascetic Sikhs founded by Guru Nanak's eldest son, Sri Chand. Udasi Sikhs subsequently filled the positions of *granthi* (scripture reader) and *mahant* (manager) in most of the important Sikh gurdwaras in the Punjab. The arrangement worked well. The Udasi Sikhs were greatly renowned and revered for their asceticism and devotion to the religious tenets of Guru Nanak, yet as sahajdhari Sikhs, they did not

¹⁰ In fact, embodying love and faith in the Guru, and transmitting conviction is one of the key performative competencies in sabad kīrtan for all performers. Most Sikh rāgis I have talked to expressed deep passion for the Gurus and sabad. This is not a detached musical practice, but an intensely devotional one, and that to sabad and Guru. This devotion serves an important social function, and creates the valuable intersubjectivities between rāgis and congregation, and among rāgis. It is the foundation of the ecosystem that I have discussed in the Introduction.

¹¹ It would also be informative to know what word Bhai Chand used that Purewal translates to “music.”

¹² July-August, 2012, New Delhi.

maintain the outward appearances of the Khalsa, and thus were able to avoid Muslim persecution aimed at the followers of Guru Gobind Singh.” (662)

However, over time, the mahant system became entrenched and corrupt:

“Gradually, the mahants gained complete control over the temples, converting gurdwara lands and revenue into their personal possessions, and leaving the congregation virtually powerless to exercise any influence on the ways they conducted the affairs of the temple. Without having to account for their conduct to the congregation, mahants turned the Sikh temples into their private properties, and in some cases, Hindu practices and idol worship soon found their way into the gurdwara.” (ibid)¹³

Purewal’s interlocutor Bhai Chand remembers and commends these “patronage systems” of mahants and their any-thing-goes stance toward the rabābis, and she assumes in her analyses that these were ideal systems that were damaged by the “disciplining” of Sikh reforms. It would be useful to see an analysis that investigates in detail the stance of rabābis toward these corrupt practices of mahants in gurdwāras, as well as towards the Sikh movement of the AKJ groups of participatory kīrtan singers.

A related concern about Purewal’s approach is that her analysis assumes that changes in the musical practices of the rabābis over 400 years were all valuable “innovations” but that those initiated by the Sikhs of the revival movement were “a modernist form, bereft of the depth of [its] historical musicality” (376) despite their connection to the musicology in the Guru Granth Sahib.¹⁴ It is significant also that at some point the rabābis stopped using the rabāb. Purewal justifies this in the context of the sarod taking over the rabāb in the wider Indian musical context, diminishing the availability of musical training. But rabābis as hereditary musicians would not have needed training from elsewhere. Their changing practices need to be critically assessed along with those of Sikh revival movements.

Another major process in the demise of affective relations that I see is the 1947 partition of Punjab, the homeland of Sikhs, into Pakistan and Hindustan. This is mentioned but underplayed in Purewal’s analysis. In this partition an estimated one million people were killed, with Hindus and Sikhs pitted against Muslims in acts of violence on each other, including rape of women. This could not have left feelings among musicians untouched, and likely seriously impacted the viability of a Muslim musician, and that too one with merely a “professional identity,” as a performer of faith and conviction in the Sikh Gurus.

There are other questions too. The Pakistan side of Punjab has some of the holiest and historical Sikh gurdwāras including the site of Guru Nanak’s birth. It would be useful to know about the rabābis’ connections to and wishes to perform at gurdwāras in Pakistan, especially since Purewal and Kalra both conducted their ethnographic research with rabābi Bhai Chand in Pakistan. Does Bhai Chand visit those gurdwāras? If so, what reaction has he received from the struggling few Sikh families there similarly estranged by the Muslim population? Another question relates to the limitation of Purewal’s analysis only to the Harmandir Sahib. Gurdwāras all over India have different practices from Harmandir Sahib. Did rabābis perform at other gurdwāras, and how did that process change?

¹³ It is important to note here that in Sikh memory some mahants are also remembered as not being corrupt.

¹⁴ This is a similar problem to that in Linden (2013).

(iv) Historical analysis

In his article, “Pre-Twentieth-Century Sikh Sacred Music: The Mughals, Courtly Patronage and Canonisation,” (2015), Linden writes, “Essentially, the article argues that pre-twentieth-century Sikh sacred music was Hindustani (classical) music because of its performance practice, instruments used, music theory and the interactions between Sikh court musicians and those of the Mughal and other North Indian courts, as well as of different Hindustani music lineages (gharānas)” (141). This is a sweeping and strong thesis that cannot be supported with evidence, and the article has several conceptual and methodological flaws. I mention here some of the larger issues. Linden analyses kīrtan, which he translates as Sikh sacred music, only in terms of detached musical sound without its ritual context. I have discussed this problem in Chapter 5. Additionally, in this article Linden equates sabad kīrtan to its classical genre. As I argued above, there is no basis to argue that kīrtan was limited to its classical genre for the period he discusses, and the likely scenario is quite the opposite of this. Further, the argument that there was circulation of some (selected) elements of musical sound between Sikh kīrtan and another tradition is not a basis for equating the two. Regarding performance practice, rāg-based sabad kīrtan is a performance of sabad not of a rāg. The performance does not aim to present a rāg. Its “episode organization” (Clayton 2000:108) is distinct. This practice is connected to the ideation in sabads in the Guru Granth Sahib that explicitly describe the purpose and aesthetics of rāgs in terms distinct from the same available in Hindustani music treatises (Kaur 2011). Linden does not consider these important facts, but bases his argument of the equation of performance practice in the two traditions just on broad features such as common rāg names in them.

Linden also argues for a disconnected reading of Sikh history in his statement: “I argue that the canonisation and institutionalisation of early-modern and nineteenth-century kīrtan needs to be read independently of the [canonization that occurred in the] imperial encounter because modern Sikh sacred music remains the legacy of the Singh Sabha reformation” (2015:144). I would argue that such independent reading would lead to misplaced conclusions about the revival processes in the early twentieth century, as is the case in his 2013 article discussed earlier above.

The politics of Linden’s scholarship is also one of concern. Given that for Sikhs their identity and sabad kīrtan are deeply interconnected,¹⁵ equating Sikh kīrtan to Hindustani music disaffirms their very identity, especially in the context of a historically continuing threat of assimilation due to Hindutva (Hindu nationalism) activities.

I have other causes for concern as well. Linden’s language in several instances reveals a disregard for Sikh sentiments. For example: the Sikh scriptures were “carried around during processions” (141), and the hymns of the Sikh Gurus “were bundled together in the Sikh sacred scripture” (144). Linden also seems to state his inability to “read the primary sources” and his need to rely on works in English (142).

In her article “Gurbani Sangīt: Authenticity and Influences,” ethnomusicologist Francesca Casio asserts that “the mosaic of the past tradition can be reconstructed and revived,

¹⁵ As noted by numerous scholars. See references in the Introduction fn. 20, and in particular, Townsend (2011).

intertwining the available data (the unique musical corpus of compositions, rāgas and tālas, and the peculiar instruments) with the metamusical discourses (written and oral sources). The objective of this research is to reestablish the original Gurbānī music idiom and the dhrupad-based kīrtan form” (51). The claim to having the ability to define and reconstruct the entire past Sikh kīrtan tradition is problematic, especially given the paucity of information available on practice. Further, the written sources Cassio refers to are medieval treatises on Hindustani music and she does not cite any information on sabad kīrtan from them. Additionally, her predominant source of information and authentication of the “unique corpus of compositions,” etc., and “oral sources” she refers to is one musician, Bhai Baldeep Singh. If Bhai Baldeep Singh, due to his family lineage (see Chapter 4 fn. 12) and training with other elder master musicians, has information on “original” and “authentic” corpus of compositions, etc., then there should be no need for reconstruction. However, to represent the information available with one musician, or even a few, as the entire and only “authentic” Sikh kīrtan tradition is problematic.

Another problematic argument in Cassio is that the “original” sabad kīrtan was in the dhrupad idiom because most of the pre-Partition repertoire is structured in the four-fold medieval dhrupad form. Cassio does not provide any data to back this claim. Even if she could provide some data on the repertoire in the early twentieth century, her claims about practices in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (the period of the Sikh Gurus) would need further support. If we look at the structure of sabads in the Guru Granth Sahib, it is only a small percentage that are in the four-verse form, and even those are not written in the dhrupad four-verse form of *sthāyi-antarā-sanchāri-abhog*. They are written in verse-chorus-verse form (see on p. 91 for example, the first sabad in the first rāg section from the Guru Granth Sahib). And the four-verse sabads are sung in chorus-verse-chorus form. Regarding repertoire, my impression of contemporary practice is that four-verse sabads are a popular choice because they make for a rendition that is not too short or too long. I remember growing up that my parents told me to sing sabads with four verses, and also people generally voiced preference for those. In her Master’s thesis based on ethnographic research in New Delhi, Sarah Van Doel (2008:62) notes an informant saying that four-verse sabads are “harmonious” and “even.”

My main point here is that claims about historical practices of Sikh sabad kīrtan need to be cautious, grounded in careful methodology, and alert to issues of representation.

(v) Individual themes

In her doctoral dissertation, “The Renaissance of Sikh Devotional Music: Memory, Identity, Orthopraxy” (2014), South Asian studies scholar Nirinjan Khalsa examines the contemporary revival of the rāg-based “traditional modes of Sikh devotional music” available with “a few remaining memory-bearers” (1). Based on ethnographic research with several prominent Sikh musicians participating in the revival movement and vested in “authenticity” debates, she concludes that it is only the musical sounds as remembered and transmitted now by select memory bearers that that can maintain the soteriological nature of the Gurus’ sacred poetry. The predominant memory bearer and authority in her analysis is the musician Bhai Baldeep Singh. As my ethnographic research in this dissertation shows, the views of listeners and the rāgis who serve congregations at large offers a different understanding of the experiential aspects of sabad kīrtan in different musical styles, compared to Khalsa’s thesis.

In her article, “Female Voices in Gurbānī Sangīt and the Role of the Media in Promoting Female Kīrtanīe (2014),” Cassio argues that traditional societal constraints have kept the rāgi profession gendered and that since the 1980s media has played a role in promoting female participation.

In her doctoral dissertation, “The Sikh *Gurmat Sangīt* Revival in Post-Partition India” (2015), ethnomusicologist Wai Chung Li examines the post-1990 revival of rāg-based kīrtan at the Javaddi Kala Taksal, Ludhaiana, Punjab. Li provides detailed information on this revival movement and its key figures and events. Focusing on details of musical sound such as rāg and notation system she assesses the post-1990 *gurmat sangīt* revival as “combined authentic, invented, and westernized” (2015:3), and also concludes that “neither does Sikh devotional music performance become political, nor do initiators and musicians become nationalistic actors to propandize political agendas” (188).

Concluding remarks

In reviewing the literature on Sikh sabad kīrtan, I see the following significant methodological problems: (i) conflation of the distinct terms sabad kīrtan and music, (iii) drawing conclusions about the entire diverse practice of sabad kīrtan based only on the classical styles of performance, which are a very small part of the total practice (iv) sweeping generalizations about kīrtan practice based on analysis, often one-sided, of only a small part of events and processes in the pre-colonial and post-colonial periods (19th and 20th centuries), and without engagement with the Punjabi literature of the revival movements discussed, (v) non-representation of the views of the congregations (except in Barrow and Townsend), and (vi) non-representation of rāgis who serve most of the congregation in India and abroad. I am also concerned about the level of literacy/proficiency in the Punjabi language, and its Gurmukhi script, among scholars of sabad kīrtan.

In my dissertation I add to the literature on sabad kīrtan in several distinct ways. First, I bring in the lived experience of congregants through ethnographic research. Second, I bring to light an important function of sabad kīrtan occasions, as sites where ethical knowledge is gained as embodied experience. Third, I enlarge the conversation from the classical genre and select musicians to include the three main genres and the rāgis who serve the congregations. Fourth, I bring music analysis into the picture, presenting analyses of how musical sounds come together with Sikh ideation for heightened experiences for kīrtan participants. Further, I combine this with insights from a number of disciplinary approaches – sound studies, anthropology of the senses, affect studies, phenomenology, cognitive studies, and socio-cultural anthropology. Lastly, and importantly, having studied the sabad texts themselves (not just their English translations) as a source for understanding values, instructions, and ideals for ethicality, I engage with the meaning and metaphor in them, and also with congregants’ deep engagement with them, to analyze how sabad and musical sound come together in the lived experience of congregants.