

The meaning of *ghar* in *shabad* headings of Guru Granth Sahib¹
Copyright December 6, 2008
Inderjit N Kaur, PhD
Research Associate, Music Department
University of California, Santa Cruz

Dedication

This research is a humble offering on the joyous occasion of the tercentenary celebration of *gurgaddi* of Guru Granth Sāhib.

Introduction

Shabads in Guru Granth Sahib are arranged by *rāg*, composition type, authorship and *ghar* numbers. As an example, the first *rāg* section contains *shabads* in Srirāg. The first subsection of Srirāg contains *shabads* that are *padey* compositions. Within this subsection Guru Nānak's *padey* are presented first and are arranged in *ghars* 1 through 5. This principle of organization is carried through for the *shabads* in all the *rāg* sections, and these form the main body of Guru Granth Sāhib.

What did Guru Arjan mean by the *ghar* numbers? This has been a major puzzle facing both the academe and community. Some interpretations have been offered, but do not stand up to scrutiny and do not have practical applicability. Sikh musicians consider the meaning of *ghar* to be forgotten². Bhāi Baldeep Singh (2001 lecture at UC Berkeley) states, "This is one significant area still open for research."

The research

The research consisted of studying the pattern of *ghar* in the *shabad* headings and analyzing the findings in the context of Indian music during the Guru Period.

The meaning of *ghar* discovered by this research is contextually sound, fitting naturally in Guru Granth Sāhib and the context of Indian music at the time of Guru Sāhibān. It can be

¹ More detailed articles with references will be available in journals and magazines.

² Late Bhāi Avtār Singh Rāgi (1926-2006), in (videotaped) interview with the author in 2005, expressed regret that it never occurred to him to ask his father, the illustrious 10th generation Sikh musician, Bhāi Jwālā Singh Rāgi (1879-1952). Bhāi Kāhn Singh Nābha's lament of the loss in Gur Shabad Ratnākar Mahān Kosh (1930) indicates that the meaning of *ghar* had been forgotten by then.

The meaning of *ghar* in *shabad* headings of Guru Granth Sahib

Copyright December 6, 2008, Inderjit N Kaur, PhD

Research Associate, Music Department, University of California, Santa Cruz

Please do spread the word that this article can be read on www.sikhmusicheritage.org

This version is not for publication or reproduction in any form

Page 2 of 6

practically applied and also opens doors to a rich melodic repertoire for *rāg*-based *keertan*, as the Guru Sahibān must have employed for the many *shabads* they sang.

Rāg Gaudi stands out

In looking at the pattern of *ghar*, Rāg Gaudi immediately stands out. The *shabads* in Rāg Gaudi do not have any *ghar* specification. Instead they are presented in several named versions of Gaudi. This indicates that in Gaudi, *rāg* versions occupy the place of *ghar* numbers. In other words, *ghar* refers to *rāg* versions. For Gaudi the names of the *rāg* versions have been spelled out. Thus, Gaudi serves as a prototype.

Ghar numbers as *rāg* versions – supporting observations

The word *ghar* is used here to mean system³ - a system of melodies, regional such as Dakhani or performance styles like Kāfī. Melodic details were important to Guru Sāhibān – they even specify particular *dhunis* (melodies) in several *shabad* headings. The use of many melodic varieties would be natural for Guru Sāhibān, singing so many *shabads* and addressing diverse communities. During Guru Sāhibān's times, melodic systems such as the Persian *dastgāh* and Arabic *maquām* were influencing the *rāg* system.

Ghar is also used, with a different spelling and without numbers, in some *shabad* headings in the manner that *dhuni* (melody) is used. For example, ਸਿਰੀਰਾਗੁ ਕਬੀਰ ਜੀਉ ਕਾ ॥ ਏਕੁ ਸੁਆਨੁ ਕੈ ਘਰਿ ਗਾਵਣਾ ॥ [Srirāg, of Kabir. Sing to the Ghar(i) of Ek Suān]. In such cases *ghar* has been widely translated as melody, in keeping with the meaning of *dhuni*.

For *ghar* numbers to be *rāg* versions, it must be that each *rāg* section starts with *ghar* 1, i.e., version 1, and that *ghar* numbers are presented sequentially, since it would not make sense to have version 2 without there being a version 1, and so on. A detailed study of the *shabad* headings confirms that this is in fact the case.⁴

³ as in the *shabad*, ਛਿਅ ਘਰ ਛਿਅ ਗੁਰ ਛਿਅ ਉਪਦੇਸ ॥ ਗੁਰੁ ਗੁਰੁ ਏਕੋ ਵੇਸ ਅਨੇਕ॥੧॥ ਬਾਬਾ ਜੈ ਘਰਿ ਕਰਤੇ ਕੀਰਤਿ ਹੋਇ ॥ ਸੋ ਘਰੁ ਰਾਖੁ ਵਡਾਈ ਤੋਇ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥

⁴ Nat Nārāyan, Māligauda, Tukhāri, Jaijavanti are only in one version, so there is no need for *ghar* numbers for them. Bihāgra does not have *padey* in its first version, so it does not begin with *ghar* 1. Two other exceptions are likely scribal errors – for Kalyān the specification of *ghar* 1 at the beginning seems to have been missed, and for Bairāri *ghar* 1 is specified even though it is only in one version. In the sequencing of *ghar* numbers there are some exceptions, which are explainable and will be explained in detail in journal papers.

The meaning of *ghar* in *shabad* headings of Guru Granth Sahib

Copyright December 6, 2008, Inderjit N Kaur, PhD

Research Associate, Music Department, University of California, Santa Cruz

Please do spread the word that this article can be read on www.sikhmusicheritage.org

This version is not for publication or reproduction in any form

Page 3 of 6

For each *rāg*, composition type and author, *ghar* numbers occur sequentially. So, for example, the *Srirāg* section begins with Guru Nānak's *padey* in *ghars* 1 to 5, followed by Guru Amardās' *padey* in *ghar* 1, Guru Ramdās' *padey* in *ghar* 1, and finally Guru Arjan's *padey* in *ghars* 1,2,6 and 7. The next section of *asthpadeeā* begins with Guru Nānak's *shabads* in *ghars* 1 and 2, Guru Amardās' in *ghar* 1 and finally Guru Arjan's in *ghar* 5. In this manner, each sub-section is presented in the order of the *ghar* number of the *shabads*.

Further, the order in which the Gaudi versions are presented for Guru Nānak's *padey* is preserved in the rest of the section, with Guāreri always occurring first. In other words, Gaudi versions are presented in order just like *ghar* numbers.

The use of numerical ordering, as well as names, to refer to *rāg* versions is also found in medieval texts of Indian music - for example, the second Gaudi or the fourth Gurjari, and version names like Maharāshtrā Gurjari, Saurāshtrā Gurjari, Dakshinā Gurjari and Dravidā Gurjari. But there is no instance of any other musical concept being represented numerically.

Analysis of other interpretations

Other interpretations offered in the past have been that *ghar* numbers refer to versions of *tāl* or of the *shruti* (microtone) to be emphasized. However, there would be no reason why the *tāl* or *shruti* would not be specified for *shabads* for only a handful of *rāgs*, namely Gaudi, Nat Nārāyan, Māligauda, Tukhāri and Jaijavanti.

Further, the *shruti* interpretation also does not fit with sequential *ghar* numbers. *Rāgs* often do not use consecutive *swars*, and therefore, consecutive *shrutis*. For example, (the contemporary) *Rāg Āsā* does not use any *vikrit swar* (altered notes, i.e. flat or sharp). So it could not be that *ghar* numbers 2, 3, 6, 7, 12, 13, 15 and 16, which would correspond to *shrutis* of *komal* (flat) *Re*, *Ga*, and *Dha* and *teevra* (sharp) *Ma*,⁵ could be used in *Āsā*. Similarly, the note *komal Re* is not used at all in any (current) version of *Rāg Sārāng*. Then it could not be that *ghars* 2 and 3, which would correspond to *shrutis* of *komal Re* could be used in *Sārāng*. Many other examples can be cited.

Finally, in medieval Indian music texts, *tāls* and *shrutis* are not referred to by numbers.

⁵ Table below shows *shruti* numbers corresponding to *swars*, where small case refers to altered notes.

<i>Swar</i>	S	r1	r2	R1	R2	g1	g2	G1	G2	M1	M2	m1	m2	P	d1	d2	D1	D2	n1	n2	N1	N2
<i>Shruti</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22

The meaning of *ghar* in *shabad* headings of Guru Granth Sahib

Copyright December 6, 2008, Inderjit N Kaur, PhD

Research Associate, Music Department, University of California, Santa Cruz

Please do spread the word that this article can be read on www.sikhmusicheritage.org

This version is not for publication or reproduction in any form

Page 4 of 6

Gaudi as prototype

This research shows that *ghar* numbers are *rāg* versions and Gaudi serves as a prototype. What clues do the Gaudi versions give us? Most are regional variants - Guāneri from Bengal, Dakhani for the South, Poorbi from Eastern Uttar Pradesh, Mālvā from Madhya Pradesh, Mājh from Punjāb, and Sorath from Saurāshtra. Cheti is a folk style of spring songs and Bairagan of *birah* (separation) songs from Uttar Pradesh. Deepaki is sung in the manner of Rāg Deepak – with peace, heroism and wonder, and Mālā in the manner of rāgmālā – a garland of *rāgs*.

Considering Guru Nanak's *udāsis* (travels), the use of regional versions of *rāgs* is very natural. In fact, Indian music at that time saw a rapid expansion of *desi sangeet* with a proliferation of regional melodies and *rāgs*. The use of regional *rāg* varieties by the Guru Sāhibān is both a natural participation in that process and a celebration of diversity.

The Gurjari versions (shown above) from medieval Indian music texts are regional too.

Other named *rāg* versions in Guru Granth Sahib

In addition to the Gaudi versions, certain other *rāg* versions have been named. Kāfi (Sindhi song style) versions have been used for Āsā, Tilang, Soohi and Māru. Dakhani versions have been used for Vadhans, Bilāval, Rāmkali, Māru and Prabhāti. The other versions are Āsāvāri, Āsāvāri Sudhang (using natural *Re*), Bilāval Mangal (auspicious songs), Bilāval Gond (from Bengal), Basant Hindol (spring songs) and Kalyān Bhopāli (from Madhya Pradesh).

Why is Gaudi used as prototype, rather than Āsā?

Guru Sāhib specified the names of the *rāg* version names of Gaudi since it was a well known, and widely known regional *rāg*. It is also the longest section of Guru Granth Sāhib with *shabads* by all 5 Guru Sāhibān (whose Bani is in Guru Granth Sahib) and 3 *bhagats*.

Third position for Gaudi section

Even though Guru Sāhib used Gaudi as prototype, Srirāg was presented first in Guru Granth Sāhib. It was an ancient and auspicious *rāg* with a large presence. Mājh, from the local tradition, was presented second.

The meaning of *ghar* in *shabad* headings of Guru Granth Sahib

Copyright December 6, 2008, Inderjit N Kaur, PhD

Research Associate, Music Department, University of California, Santa Cruz

Please do spread the word that this article can be read on www.sikhmusicheritage.org

This version is not for publication or reproduction in any form

Page 5 of 6

No *ghar* numbers in Guru Teg Bahadur's *shabads*

The *rāg* system was undergoing a great deal of change during the first five Guru Sāhibān's time. Evidence in medieval Indian music texts indicates that the Kāfī scale emerged as the natural scale in the 17th century⁶, i.e. after the Adi Granth was compiled. Many *rāgs* would have changed their form by Guru Teg Bahadur's time. Hence, he does not use *ghar* numbers. And he uses more than one *rāg* version in only two *rāgs*, Tilang and Basant.

Practical applicability of *ghar* numbers

What would be the musical characteristics of each *rāg* version? Medieval Indian music texts offer significant clues. To continue with the Gurjari example from above, while all versions of Gurjari are stated to have *Re* as an important note, the distinguishing characteristics are stated to lie in the note embellishments, such as vibrato rendering of different notes. In some cases different notes are omitted.

The various *rāg* versions available with different *kirtankārs* and from Hindustani music are ready sources for use.

To establish the prevalent versions that would likely have been used by the Guru Sāhibān, careful detailed research will be needed. During the lives of the first five Guru Sāhibān, Indian music was undergoing rapid change, with new regional melodies being constantly discovered, and with influences from Persian and Arabic music. New *rāgs* and *rāg* versions were being sung. For example, Kāfī was a Sindhi song style, and not yet a *rāg*.

The practical application of *ghar* numbers as *rāg* versions opens new doors for Sikh musicians and musicologists. It vastly expands the range of melodic variety for use for singing *shabads*. It diminishes the need to turn to non-*rāg* based melodies for variety.

Conclusion

Several factors support the thesis that *ghar* numbers in *shabad* headings of Guru Granth Sāhib refer to *rāg* versions.

1. *Shabads* in Gaudi are not presented in *ghar* numbers but in several named *rāg* versions such as Guāreri and Bairāgan, indicating that *rāg* versions occupy the place of *ghar* numbers.

⁶ The emergence of Bilāval as the natural scale is dated by Indian musicologists to be in the 19th century.

The meaning of *ghar* in *shabad* headings of Guru Granth Sahib

Copyright December 6, 2008, Inderjit N Kaur, PhD

Research Associate, Music Department, University of California, Santa Cruz

Please do spread the word that this article can be read on www.sikhmusicheritage.org

This version is not for publication or reproduction in any form

Page 6 of 6

2. *Ghar* numbers occur sequentially, just as Gaudi versions do.
3. *Shabad* sections of all *rāgs* that have more than 1 version begin with *ghar* 1, i.e. version 1, which in the case of Gaudi is Guāreṛi.
4. *Shabads* in Nat Nārāyan, Māligauda, Tukhāri and Jaijavanti do not have *rāg* versions and therefore no *ghar* numbers.
5. *Ghar* refers to a system - of melodies, regional such as Dakhani and in various performance styles such as Kāfī.
6. Melodic details were important to Guru Sāhibān – they even mention particular *dhunis* (melodies) in several instances.
7. The use of many melodic varieties would be natural for Guru Sāhibān, singing so many *shabads* and addressing diverse communities.
8. There are also some *shabad* headings that use *ghar* with a different spelling and without numbers, as in ਸਿਰੀਰਾਗੁ ਕਬੀਰ ਜੀਉ ਕਾ ॥ ਏਕੁ ਸੁਆਨੁ ਕੈ ਘਰਿ ਗਾਵਣਾ ॥ [Srirāg, of Kabir. Sing to the Ghar(i) of Ek Suān], and in such cases *ghar* has been widely translated as melody, in keeping with a similar use of *dhuni* in *shabad* headings.
9. *Ghar* cannot be *tāl* (rhythmic cycle) or *shruti* (microtone) since there would be no reason to omit the *tāl* or *shruti* specification for certain *rāgs* such as Gaudi, Nat Nārāyan, Māligauda, Tukhāri and Jaijavanti).
10. The *shruti* interpretation also does not fit with sequential *ghar* numbers.
11. Medieval Indian music texts use numerical ordering for *rāg* versions, but not for *tāl* or *shruti*.

These factors and the practical applicability of the *rāg*-version interpretation are strong support for its reasonableness. This interpretation opens the doors to developing a rich repertoire of *rāg*-based melodic varieties and reduces the need to use non-*rāg* melodies. The Guru Sahibān were not interested in musical complications but rather the use of regional melodic varieties and vernaculars to bring the Divine Word to diverse people.
