



# PURATAN JANAM SAKHI- THE GURMAT SANGEET CONTEXT

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## Abstract

*In Sikhism, Gurmat Sangeet tradition is a distinctly unique tradition which has made a niche for itself at a global level. We get to know about its theoretical place, practical value and historicity from various sources of Sikhism. Among these sources, the Janam Sakhis occupy an important place. 'Janam Sakhi' - the very word is a composite form of two words Janam+ Sakhi. The word 'janam' does not imply its being restricted only to the rituals pertaining to birth. It encapsulates the entire gamut of life. From among the janam sakhis popular in Sikhism, Puratan Janam Sakhi has its own distinct position in the context of Gurmat Sangeet. While each sakhi in the Puratan Janam Sakhi has a specific objective, we find also the seeds of the historical evolution of Gurmat Sangeet in them. The phenomenon of sprouting and blossoming of these seeds can be finely observed in these parables. The musical allusions appearing in the sakhis play a significant role to understand the theoretical and practical nature of Gurmat Sangeet. Multi-faceted historical knowledge on the inspiration of gurbani, Bhai Mardana's joining the great Master Guru Nanak Dev, their moving together, the raga tradition of Gurmat Sangeet, the nature of ragas, their rendition, importance of rabab as stringed musical instrument, Bhai Mardana's obtaining rabab from Bhai Firanda etc. becomes available to us from Puratan Janam Sakhi. It is in this very context that from Gurmat Sangeet perspective, the whole of janam sakhi tradition exists with us as a valuably original, authentic and historical source.*

**Keywords:** Puratan Janam Sakhi, Gurmat Sangeet, Gurmat, Music, Janam Sakhi, Raga, Guru Nanak, Janam Sakhi tradition

## INTROUCTION

Music occupies a very significant place in Sikhism. The Gurmat Sangeet (music) has made a niche for itself in the world due to its distinct identity in Sikhism. The credit of founding Sikhism and initiating the Gurmat Sangeet tradition goes to Guru Nanak Dev who employed music as a potent medium to disseminate his celestial message among the people. References to this effect are available to us first of all from the Janam Sakhis.<sup>1</sup>

Gurmat Sangeet gains its theoretical basis from Guru Granth Sahib. Besides, we get its theoretical, practical and historical knowledge from different sources of Sikhism. From among the initial sources, the janam sakhis have a special importance of their own. It is impossible to know about the historical and theoretical importance of Gurmat Sangeet without making a study of these parables.

The tradition of janam sakhis pre-eminently exists in Sikhism. From the guru period up to the modern era, a number of janam sakhis have been written but the following four occupy a place of prominence among them:

- Puratan Janam Sakhi or Vilayat Wali Janam Sakhi
- Meharbaan Wali Janam Sakhi
- Bhai Baala Wali Janam Sakhi
- Bhai Mani Singh Wali Janam Sakhi.

Out of these, we shall focus on Puratan Janam Sakhi in the context of Gurmat Sangeet. Before going ahead in this direction, it would be worthwhile to understand the definitional meaning of *Janam Sakhi*.

## JANAM SAKHI

This is a composite form of two words. As described by the scholars, the word 'sakhi' owes its origin to the Sanskrit word 'sakshi' which means eye witness. In other words, it is a happening witnessed by someone.<sup>2</sup> In

<sup>1</sup> Kirpal Singh, Janam Sakhi Parampara Itihasak Drishtikon Ton, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, 2009, P. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Prem parkash singh (Dr.) (Chief Editor) Punjabi University Sanskrit Punjabi Kosh, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, 2002, P. 1013.





Punjabi prose literature, the janam sakhis enjoy their status as the original source. Janam sakhi has been defined variously as under:

- Bhai Vir Singh views the biographical details of Guru Nanak Dev as janam sakhi.<sup>1</sup>
- As per Encyclopedia of Sikhism defines janam sakhis as the words used to describe the life of Guru Nanak Dev.<sup>2</sup>
- Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha, the author of Mahan Kosh treats janam sakhi as biographical narrative and accepts it as the tale of Guru Nanak's life.<sup>3</sup>
- According to Punjabi Vishwa Kosh, a writing that depicts the spiritual character of a great Master is called janam sakhi.<sup>4</sup>
- According to Dr. Kirpal Singh, Janam Sakhi is a writing that carries the details of Guru Nanak Dev's life.<sup>5</sup>

It becomes clear from the above description that Janam Sakhi is made from the combination of two words Janam and Sakhi. Here janam does not mean literally birth or the rituals pertaining to the birth of a child. It stands for life as a whole. In Gurmat Sangeet context it reveals the multifaceted history of this genre. Therefore, as we talk about the sources of Gurmat Sangeet it is only the janam sakhis which exist with us its original source. Of these, Puratan Janam Sakhi is the first and foremost written source.

### PURATAN JANAM SAKHI

Puratan Janam Sakhi occupies the most important place in the Janam Sakhi tradition of Sikhism. This is the major historical source which is known as Vilayat Wali Janam Sakhi also. There is divergence of opinion about the origin of this janam sakhi as follows:

- According to Bhai Vir Singh, "Since this Sakhi has hymns of Guru Arjan Dev, it means it was written during or after the period of the fifth guru."<sup>6</sup>
- As per Sikh Panth Vishwakosh, "Janam Sakhi was written 16 years before Guru Granth Sahib was edited and 7 years after the ascension of Guru Arjan Dev to the spiritual seat in 1588 AD (1645 Bikrami)."<sup>7</sup>
- The Encyclopedia of Sikhism says, "A recent publication gives 1588 as the year of its completion. Its language and grammatical constructions show that this janam sakhi must have been written around the time of the compilation of the Adi Granth Sahib."<sup>8</sup>
- According to Dr. Surinder Singh Kohli, "This is that janam sakhi of Guru Nanak Dev which Bhai Vir Singh edited in 1926 (Source: A copy of the manuscript lying preserved in India Office Library London. It was obtained through zincography and a copy of lithographic script secured from Hafizabad and the janam sakhi published by Singh Sabha Lahore. It was also based on the London Janam Sakhi. When this sakhi was edited, Meharban-written sakhi was not available as yet. Therefore, treating it as the oldest

1 Bhai Vir Singh (ed.), Puratan Janam Sakhi Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji, Bhai Vir Singh Sahit Sadan, New Delhi, 21st. time, 2016, P.4.

2 The term used to designate traditional narratives of the life of Guru Nanak. (Harbans Singh (Editor -in-Chief), The Encyclopedia of Sikhism, volume 3, Punjabi University Patiala 2011, p. 337).

3 Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha, Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh, Bhasha Vibhag, Punjab, Seventh time, 2006, P. 504.

4 Jaggi Rattan Singh (Dr.)(ed.), Punjabi Vishwakosh, Basha Vibhaag Punjab, volume 10th page 225.

5 Kirpal Singh, Janam Sakhi Parampara Itihasak Drishtikon Ton, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, 2009, P. XV

6 Bhai Vir Singh (ed.), Puratan Janam Sakhi Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji, Bhai Vir Singh Sahit Sadan, New Delhi, 21st. time, 2016, P. 7.

7 Dr. Rattan Singh Jaggi, Sikh Panth Vishwakosh, Vol.3, Gracious Books, 2014, Pp. 1304.

8 Harbans Singh, (Editor-in-Chief), The Encyclopaedia of Sikhism, Volume-3, Punjabi University Patiala 2011, Page-411.





one, it came to be known as the Puratan Janam Sakhi. This janam sakhi is deemed to have been written 1692 B. i.e. 1635 AD.”<sup>1</sup>

Bhai Vir Singh edited the sakhi gained from India Office London and Hafizabad. Its first publication took place in August 1926.

Puratan Janam Sakhi covers the entire period from Guru Nanak Dev’s birth up to his leaving his temporal frame. It comes out with 57 sakhis in 5 odysseys. The first odyssey is longer than the other four ones. Besides, having some religious preaching in every sakhi we find several references to Gurmat Sangeet. These references contain also the seeds of the early historical evolution period of Gurmat Sangeet in Sikhism.

**Puratan janam sakhi: the Gurmat Sangeet context:** When we study janam sakhi in the context of Gurmat Sangeet, we find a number of musical elements in the process. These elements or symbols are instrumental in understanding the practice and historically of Gurmat Sangeet. The following musical references are available on Gurmat Sangeet in Puratan Janam Sakhi:

**References on Raga and Context:** Raga has great significance in Gurmat Sangeet. Raga has been used here as vehicle of conveying shabad i.e. hymn. Gurbani extols ragas as under:

Sabhna raga vich so bhala bhai jit vasya mann aai.

Raag naad sabh sach hai qeemat kahi na jai.

(Sri Guru Granth Sahib, 1421)

Raageinaade baahra ini jukamna boojhya jai.

(Sri Guru Granth Sahib, 1421)

Raag naad sabd shone ja laage sehaj dhyan.

(Sri Guru Granth Sahib, 849)

Puratan Janam Sakhi contains references of several ragas of Gurmat Sangeet. The sakhi titled “Vanjaryan De Taande” makes reference to Siri Raga as following:

“.....Tab baabeakhya:Mardanya! Rabab vajai, taan Mardane rabab vajaya, raag sri raag keeta, guru babe sabd uthaya: Pehle pehre rain ke vanjarya mitra hukam paya garbhaas (Siri Raag Phre Mahla 1 ||1|| (74)”<sup>2</sup>

Similarly Qazi Charcha, Nimaaj, Modikhane da tyag are the titles in which there is a mention of Maajh raga as below:

“.....Tad qazi keha, ‘Nanak jo tu kehnda hain, ‘Na ko Hindu hai na Mussalman hai’ so tain kya paya hai’ Tab babe Nanak kahya slok, raag maajh vich: Mussalman kahaavan muskal ja hoi taa mussalman kahave. (Maajh ki var Mahla 1 ||8||(141)mehar maseet musla haq halal quraan”<sup>3</sup>

Thus Puratan Janam Sakhi has as many as 20 references which have been as below:

1 Kohli, Surinder Singh (ed.), Janam Sakhi Bhai Bala, Punjab University Publication Bureau, Chandigarh, Vol.3, 2010. P. 12-13

2 Kirpal Singh, Janam Sakhi Parampara Itihasak Drishtikon Ton, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, 2009, P. 21

3 Ibid, p.13





Raag name	Sakhi's Name	Page
Asa	Kheti, Vanaj, Saudagri, chakri,	9
Asa	Kafi Saidpur Di Band	39
Siri,	Pati, Paandha	6
Suhi Lalit	Asa Desh, Sheikh Farid Nal Gosht	6
Suhi Sajjan	Thug Da Nistara	16
Sorath	Saidpur Di Band	19
Gauri	Vaid,	9,10
Gauri Guareri	Mardane Di Pooja Karai	5
Gauru Deepaki	Joti Jot Samauna	63
Gauri Poorbi	Kohri Faqir Nistara	37
Tilang	Modikhane Da Tyag	14
Tukhari Raag	Asa Desh, Sheikh Farid Nal Gosht	29
Dev Gandhari	Gosht Sheikh Sharf	17
Dhanasari	Kohri Faqir Nistara	37
Basant	Brahman Di Such Rasoi	43
Malhar	Vaid	9
Maajh	Modikhane Da Tyag	13
Ramkali	Siddhan Nal Gosht	51
Ramkali Dakhni	Banaras Vich Chatur Das	20
Wadhans	Noor Shah Nistar	24

While the above list manifests the ragaite musical importance of Puratan Janam Sakhi, the importance of the placement and utility of raga is also underlined in the context of Gurmat Sangeet.

**References and Context regarding Singing Styles in Gurmat Sangeet:** Different singing styles are in vogue in the Gurmat Sangeet tradition. They have their own original music mechanism. The janam sakhis have a mention of the singing styles in the Gurmat Sangeet tradition e.g. Var, Chhant, Alauhnis etc. Both kinds of singing styles-Classical (*Chaupadas, Ashtpadis*) and folk ang (*Var, Chhant, Alauhnis* etc.)- are available in Puratan Janam Sakhi. The reference of Var folk style of singing is available in the janam sakhi as under:

- Taan phir peer kahia: Nanak! Hik khudai ki var sunai, asanu eh makhsud hai: Jo var duhu baajh hondi nahi, ate tu hikohik aakhda hain, ekhan khudai da sareek tu kavan karsi?' Tab babe aakhya: 'Mardanya rabab vajai', taan Mardane rabab vajaya, raag asa keeta, babe slok ditta, slok satiguru parsad balihari gur apne deohari sad var (Var Asa, Mahla 2 || 1|| (462)1

1 Ibid, p.13





- Tab sangat lagi sabd gaavan alahnian tab baba bismaad de ghar aya tit mahl hukam hoya raag tukhari keeta, baba bolya barahmaha, raat, amrit vela hoaa, chalaane ke bakht: Tu sun kirt karamma purb kamaya (Tukhari chant, Mahla 1, Barahmaha (1107)<sup>1</sup>
- Thus Puratan Janam Sakhi has references of various Bani Roop (singing styles or forms) of bani forms under different sakhis:

Bani Roop	Sakhi's Name	Page
Ashtpadian	Saidpur Di Band	38
Alaunhian	Joti Jot Samauna	63
Chaupade	Ujar Jaave	28
Chhant	Mata Pita ji Nal Mel	33
Pauri	Teeji Udasi, Kashmir Brahm Das Pundit	55
Barahmaha	Joti Jot Samauna	63
Malhar	Var Sheikh Brahm Nal Gosht	36
Maajh Ki Var	Keer Nagar	27
Maru, Var	Sheikh Brahm Nal Gosht	35
Ramkali Ki Var	Sheikh Brahm Nal Gosht	36
Var Asa	Sheikh Brahm Nal Gosht	36

The above description ratifies the importance of janam sakhi with reference to the singing styles in Gurmat Sangeet. Like the ragas and singing styles, we find references to keertan also in Puratan Janam Sakhi

**References and Context of Keertan:** Keertan tradition enjoys utmost importance in Gurmat Sangeet. Guru Granth Sahib has a number of references to this effect in the Holy text:

-Kaljug Meh Keertan Pardhana Gurmukh Japiye Laai Dhyana.

(Sri Guru Granth Sahib, 1075)

-Keertan Nirmolak Heera Anand Guni Gahira.

(Sri Guru Granth Sahib, 893)

Puratan Janam Sakhi has references to keertan in different contexts. When Guru Nanak Dev had to deliver some message to the people in general he would do so through keertan of gurbani. Puratan Janam Sakhi has a numerous references to keertan in it:

- Tab ek din guru ki agya hoyee, jo pichhle pahar raat kau keertan jovei taan ikk ladka barsan satan ka ghar te uth aave, aai guru ji kei pichhe khara hovei, taan uth jaavei tab babe ik din kahya: 'Aj ehu ladka pakad rakhna' tab babe di khushi hoyee, ladka pairin paya taan guru babe tit mahil sabd bolya: Ghadi pahar ka pahuna kaaj svaaranhaar (Siri Raag, Mahla 5 ||74|| (43)<sup>2</sup>

1 Ibid, p. 63-64

2 Ibid, p. 43





- Tit mahal jo sabd hoaa, so pothi jubaan guru angad jog mili tab babe sangat nu hukam keeta, keertan parahu tab sangat lagi keertan parhan: Je ghar keerati aakhiye karte ka hoye bichaaro (Sohla Raag Gauri Deepki Mahla 1 (12))<sup>1</sup>
- Dhanasari Raag hoya, aarti gaavi tit mahal keertan hoya sabd , tab slok padhya: Pavan guru pani pita mata dhart mahat, divas raat dui daai daya khele sagal jagat, changyaaian buriaayian vaache dharm hadoor karmi aapo apni ke nere ke door, jinni naam dhaaya gaye mushakkat ghaal, Nanak te mukh ujle keti chhutti nal 1<sup>2</sup>
- Ar jo kichhu aloofa Guru Nanak jog mile, khaave so khaave, hor pamesar k earth deve and Nitapraati raat kau keertan hove pichhon Mardana doom aaya Talwandion aai babe nal tikya<sup>3</sup>

The importance of Puratan Janam Sakhi comes to light through the above references to the practical tradition of shabd keertan. Like shabd keertan, Puratan Janam Sakhi has reference to the musical instruments as well.

**References and Context of Musical Instruments:** The instrument tradition of Gurmat Sangeet includes rabab, saranda, taus, israaj, taanpura, Jodi, harmonium etc. The first instrument in Gurmat Sangeet is rabab. Puratan Janam has reference to rabab at many a place:

- Aakheosu: ‘Mardanya! Rabab vajaan’, raag tilang keeta, babe sabd uthaaya kahar vichon: Jaisi meh aave khasam ki vani taisra kari gyan ve Lalo (Tilang Mahla 1 ||5|| (722))<sup>4</sup>
- Tab babe aakhya: ‘Mardanya! Rabab vajaan’, raag Siri Raag keeta, guru babe sabd uthaaya: Pehle pehre rain ke vanjaarya mitra, hukam paya garbhaas (Siri Raag pahre Mahla 1 (74))<sup>5</sup>

Apart from ragas and instruments, we have in the Puratan Janam Sakhi tradition references to the singing styles, *Vars*, *Alauhnian*, *Ghorian*, *Keertan* and other musical terminology. Thus Puratan Janam Sakhi is a valuable source of information in the context of Gurmat Sangeet.

**References of Musical Terminology:** There are musical terms galore in the janam sakhis in general. But the list of terms available in the Puratan Janam Sakhi alias Vilayat Wali Sakhi has been given below with the terms and number of pages they appear on:

Music Terms	Sakhi’s Heading	Page No.
Anhad	Vein Parvesh	12
Alauhnian	Joti Jot Samauna	63
Sabd gave	Bhageerath, Mansukh te Shivnabh	46
Sabd	Joti Jot Samauna	63
Keertan	Ikk Vairagi Balak	43
Gaavan	Joti Jot Samauna	63
Dholkian	Noor Shah Nistara	25

1 Ibid, p. 64

2 Ibid, p. 63

3 Ibid, p. XI

4 Ibid, p. 34

5 Ibid, p. 21





Tilang	Kaji Charcha, Nimaj Modikhane da Tyag	14
Tukhari	Joti Jot Samauna	63
Dhanasari	Noor Shah Nistara	25
Dhuni	Vein Parvesh	12
Nachni	Noor Shah Nistara	25
Paudi	Teeji Udasi Kashmir Brahm Das Pundit	55
Basant	Banaras vich Chatur Das	19
Malhar	Teeji Udasi Kashmir Brahm Das Pundit	55
Maajh	Kaji Charcha, Nimaj, Modikhane da Tyag	13
Maru Kaji	Charcha, Nimaj, Modikhane da Tyag	13
Rababi	Pehli Udasi da Pehrawa ate Sheikh Bajeed	19
Rabab	Banaras vich Chatur Das	19
Raag	Joti Jot Samauna	64
Vajai	Kaji Charcha, Nimaj Midikhane da Tyag	13
Vajai	Banaras vich Chatur Das	19
Wad-hans	Joti Jot Samauna	63
Var	Joti Jot Samauna	55

Thus, Puratan Janam Sakhi is a very important reference source with regard to Gurmat Sangeet.

The above analysis of Janam Sakhi Tradition makes it amply clear that these sakhis are the biographical details about Guru Nanak Dev in a chronological order. As regards Gurmat Sangeet, the references available in the Puratan Janam Sakhi elucidate the fact that its sakhis are replete with the early history of the rich heritage of Gurmat Sangeet. The phenomenon of the origin and development of Gurmat Sangeet can be seen in the sakhis in a very relevant manner. The musical references found in these sakhis help us understand the theoretical and practical aspect of Gurmat Sangeet. Various references to rabab, the early musical instrument of Gurmat Sangeet tradition vouchsafe its historical importance. We also get important references to the raga tradition of Gurmat Sangeet in Puratan Janam Sakhi. We get valuable references about the nativity of the ragas viz. *Asa*, *Asa Kafi*, *Siri*, *Suhi Lalit*, *Suhi*, *Sorath*, *Gaudi*, *Gaudi Guareri*, *Gauri Deepaki*, *Gaudi Poorbi*, *Tilang*, *Tukhari*, *Dev Gandhari*, *Dhanasari*, *Basant*, *Malhar*, *Maajh*, *Ramkal Dakhni*, *Wad-hans* etc. because of their belonging to different areas. A thorough but relevant study into the janam sakhis provides us with the historical perspective on compositions like *Asa di Var*, *So Dar*, *keertan chaukis* of *Aarti*, *Kartarpur Sahib* as the hub of *keertan*, *Bhai Mardana* and *Shahzada*. Hundreds of musical terms reach us from these janam sakhis in prose.

The predominance of *keertan* which is also the nucleus of the practical tradition of Gurmat Sangeet, can be observed clearly in the sakhis. Besides, Puratan Janam Sakhis provides us plentiful historical references to the intuitiveness of *bani*, *Bhai Mardana's* meeting *Baba Nanak* and their togetherness thereupon, importance of the instrument *rabab*, *Mardana's* receiving *rabab* from *Bhai Firanda* et al. To sum up, janam sakhis are a valuable, authentic and historical treasure source of Gurmat Sangeet with us.





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- Ibid, p.13
- Ibid, p.13
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- Ibid, p. 43
- Ibid, p. 64
- Ibid, p. 63
- Ibid, p. XI
- Ibid, p. 34
- Ibid, p. 21

