

## "Ghar-1 to 17"

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Raga and Ghar are stipulated at the headings of most of the shabads in Guru Granth Sahib. Mahallas and Ghars are numbered, and these are traditionally pronounced as: pehlaa, doojaa, teejaa, chautha (first, second, third, fourth) and so on. Ghar stands for the starting note (swar) of a shabad as explained below. Let us examine in detail the connotation of the word Ghar as the starting note of a shabad. The ancient Sanskrit word 'graha', literally means a home, modified to 'ghar' in Punjabi language. The word graha, began to be used for the first note of a song during the Vedic period. Similar developments in musical parlance took place in the West, and English-speaking musicians call it the 'home-note' even today. They sometime call it the 'tonic', because the starting note determines the totality of a piece of music.

A musical composition starts from the home-note, and after meandering through several notes it generally returns to its 'home', hence called home-note, which gives the listeners a feeling of satisfaction, through a sense of completion of finality. This pull to the tonic is ingrained in our minds, through usage of this musical practice over the centuries. For instance, if we sing or play the notes Saa-Ri, we are left with a feeling as if we have not arrived at a satisfying end. Thus a degree of tension is generated in our minds, which is resolved when we sing or play the note Saa again (which is the tonic or the home-note), that is

Saa-Ri-Saa. So this small fragment returns before its end, to the key in which it started, which is the home-note.

Since fundamental principles of music are the same in all regions of the world, music is considered to be a universal language. Much of ancient knowledge was exchanged between East and West through the middle-country of the Greeks. We may state as an analogy that in the West also the starting note is special. For instance musical compositions are stated to be in 'C (Saa) Major' or 'C Minor', and as 'D (Ri) Major' or 'D Minor', and so on, as the case may be. It is understood that the first note to be sounded is C or D (respectively), and that the work isn't Major mode or in a Minor mode, as the case may be.

Note names for a Saptak are :

Indian: S,R,G,M,P,D,N.,  
English: C,D,E,F,G,A,B.  
, , - Universal: 1,11,111,1V, V.VI.VII.

Since 12-Tone harmonium was not invented during the earlier period Bhai Mardana, and the Rababis used Arabian Scale of 17 micro-tones or (Sarutis). These were divided in the Saptak as follows :

3\_, 3, 1\_, \_3, \_3, 1\_, \_3  
S R G M P D N

Hence we find that most of the shabads are in Ghars 1,11 and III which are covered by the note "Saa". Generally, shabads are fewer in other Ghars, as we go on, in ascending order of pitch.

The scale of 17 musical notes is still being used by singers of classical music. However, the harmonium in general use has only 12 notes. The selection of ghar is usually made by the composers according as it suits their throat. Sometimes ghar is not prescribed with the shabad, and it is left to the singer to choose one that suits him.

Another view is that the ghar numbers, 1,2,3,4, etc., represent the number of beats (matraas) in a Tala' cycle (*Avartaa*). If this were so, ghar -1 is out of question, because there can be no tala of only one beat, repeat over and over without forming cycles or Avartaas. A rhythm to be called a Tala, must have atleast 2 beats. The first beat is accented, hence called 'Bhaaree', while the second beat is played with normal force. In

the West also there is no one-beat musical rhythm. They start with Duple-time.

Secondly, there is no text which names Talas on the basis of number of beats in a cycle. Talas bear names as for total beats in a cycle given below :

Roopak Tala : 3 + 2 + 2 = 7  
Jhap Taia : 2 + 3 + 2 + 3 = 10  
JhumarTala : 3 + 4 + 3 + 4 = 14

There are, however, two Talas which are pronounced as numerical syllables, but these have nothing to do with the number of beats in a cycle, for examples :

EkTala : 4 + 4 + 2 + 2 = 12  
Teen Tala : 4 + 4 + 4 + 4 = 16

We may mention that there are in some cases, two different Tala names having the same number of beats in each Bar (Khandwaa), and the totals for their cycles also tally. For, instance, '*Tilwaara*' Tala has also same 4 + 4 + 4 + 4 = 16 beats in a cycle, but it varies from Teen Tala' in the placement of *Khaali* or unstruck beat, in the cycle. A rhythm, that is Tala, having the same number of beats in its bars (Khandwaas) to make a cycle is known as a simple Tala. On the other hand a Tala comprising varying number of beats in the Khandwaas of a cycle is designated as Complex Tala. Perhaps the most Complex Tala is Dharuva Tala totalling as many as 29 beats in each cycle: 7 + 3 + 1 + 9 + 6 + 3 = 29.

Besides, there are some Talas, East or West, in which an occasional half-beat is employed.

Hence we arrive at the conclusion that the word 'Ghar' applies to the starting note of a *shabad*. And these are numbered from No. 1 to No. 17, and no more.

#### WHO IS BLIND

Not such are blind as bear not eyes on forehead:

Those are the truly blind as from the Master are strayed.

- Guru Angad Dev (GGS p. 954)

