

Pañjābī Poetic Aesthetic forms

Each word, phrase, line, verse are a witness of the aesthetic beauty contained within the Gurū Granth Sāhib. The aesthetics can certainly be found throughout, however, it seems one of the reasons these forms were used was to convey a thought, a message. The Gurūs were not necessarily writing for themselves to fulfill some poetic impulse but rather directly for their audience. They understood very well the psyche of those to whom they were speaking. They understood the experiences, the emotional states, and social, political and religious environment of their audience. Therefore, they explained their message in ways and methods with which their listeners already had a close emotional rapport. They used the same type of tunes, the same type of rhythms so that what they wanted to share was not something foreign or something their audience could not relate to. The images they created, the pictures they painted, the analogies, the similes, the metaphors, and the examples they used were a part of the common man's experience. When the common person read the Gurū's Word he could identify with it as to how it related to the different aspects of his life and it was therefore easier for them to comprehend the true message. The Gurūs used examples from all spheres of life: nature, culture, human relationships etc. The Gurūs did what no other can claim. They brought about revolutionary change through these innovative methods and thus infused a new spirit into the common man. Below are some examples of the different types of aesthetic forms that can be found within the Gurū Granth Sāhib.

a) Alliteration (ਸ਼ਬਦ ਅਲੰਕਾਰ) – this is the most popular form where there is an occurrence of the same sound at the start of words. The words are close and are repeated to form a melodious expression, which is easy to remember, for example:

ਸੂਰ ਸਰੁ ਸੋਸਿ ਲੈ ਸੋਮ ਸਰੁਪੋਖਿ ਲੈ ਜੁਗਤਿ ਕਰਿ ਮਰਤੁ ਸੁ ਸਨਬੰਧੁ ਕੀਜੈ ॥ (ਮ: ੧, ਪ. ੯੯੧)

[Burn off the mainsprings of Passion, and strengthen the attributes of Truth: this verily, is the inhalation and exhalation of breath; and let poise be the holding of the breadth.]

b) Expressions of Praise (ਉਪਮਾ ਅਲੰਕਾਰ) – in the form of simile, where one thing is compared to another. For example:

ਧਨੁ ਜੋਬਨੁ ਅਰੁ ਫੁਲਤਾ ਨਾਠੀਅਤੇ ਦਿਨ ਚਾਰਿ ॥

ਪਬਣਿ ਕੇਰੇ ਪਤ ਜਿਉ ਫਲਿ ਫੁਲਿ ਜੁੰਮਣਹਾਰ ॥

(ਮ: ੧, ਪ. ੨੩)

[Wealth, the beauty of youth and flowers are guests for only a few days.
Like the leaves of the water lily, they wither and fade and finally die.]

c) Metaphorical expression (ਰੂਪਕ ਅਲੰਕਾਰ) – which is the application of a word or phrase to something that it does not apply to literally. This form is beautifully used throughout Gurbāṇī i.e.: He uses the items used in a prayer called Ārtī with a plate and with an oil lamp

ਗਗਨ ਮੈ ਥਾਲੁ ਰਵਿ ਚੰਦੁ ਦੀਪਕ ਬਨੇ ਤਾਰਿਕਾ ਮੰਡਲ ਜਨਕ ਮੋਤੀ ॥ (ਮ: ੧, ਪ. ੬੬੩)

[The sky is a plate, the sun and moon the oil lamps and the stars the pearls.]

d) Expressions of Analogy (ਦ੍ਰਿਸ਼ਟਾਂਤ ਅਲੰਕਾਰ) – in this form one thing is compared to another to make its meaning more lucid. For example Gurū Sāhib tells of the suddenness of death in the following manner:

ਭਾਈ ਰੇ ਇਉਂ ਸਿਰਿ ਜਾਣਹੁ ਕਾਲੁ ॥

ਜਿਉ ਮਛੀ ਤਿਉ ਮਾਣਸਾ ਪਵੈ ਅਚਿੰਤਾ ਜਾਲੁ ॥

(ਮ: ੧, ਪ. ੫੫)

[O my brothers, just like this, see death hovering over your own heads! Just like this fish; unaware, the noose of death descends upon them.]

e) Expressions of logic (ਕਾਵਯਲਿੰਗ ਅਲੰਕਾਰ) – this form is used when through a given method the meaning is confirmed or substantiated.

ਅਸੰਖ ਜੋਗ ਮਨਿ ਰਹਹਿ ਉਦਾਸ ॥ ਅਸੰਖ ਭਗਤ ਗੁਣ ਗਿਆਨ ਵੀਚਾਰ ॥ ਅਸੰਖ ਸਤੀ ਅਸੰਖ ਦਾਤਾਰ ॥

ਅਸੰਖ ਸੂਰ ਮੁਹ ਭਖ ਸਾਰ ॥ ਅਸੰਖ ਮੋਨਿ ਲਿਵ ਲਾਇ ਤਾਰ ॥

(ਮ: ੧, ਪ. ੩-੪)

[There are countless Yogis, whose minds remain detached from the world. There are countless devotees contemplate the Wisdom and Virtues of the Divine. There are countless the holy, countless the givers. There are countless heroic spiritual warriors, who bear the brunt of the attack in battle. There are countless who silently meditate on Divine Love.]

f) Critical or Sarcastic expressions (ਵਕ੍ਰੋਕਤੀ ਅਲੰਕਾਰ) – Here the form appears to be one of sarcasm or criticism. However, the underlying meaning or message behind the surface is quite deep. For example:

ਤੂੰ ਸੁਣਿ ਹਰਣਾ ਕਾਲਿਆ ਕੀ ਵਾੜੀਐ ਰਾਤਾ ਰਾਮ ॥

ਬਿਖੁ ਫਲੁ ਮੀਠਾ ਚਾਰਿ ਦਿਨ ਫਿਰਿ ਹੋਵੈ ਤਾਤਾ ਰਾਮ ॥

(ਮ: ੧, ਪ. ੪੩੮)

[O black deer, listen: why are you so attached to the orchard of passion?

The fruit of sin is sweet for only a few days, and then it grows hot and bitter.]

g) Active expressions (ਸ਼ਿੱਖਲਾਮੂਲਕ ਅਲੰਕਾਰ) -

ਸੁਣਿਆ ਮੰਨਿਆ ਮਨਿ ਕੀਤਾ ਭਾਉ ॥ ਅੰਤਰਗਤਿ ਤੀਰਥਿ ਮਲਿ ਨਾਉ ॥

(ਮ: ੧, ਪ. ੪)

[Listening and obeying with love and humility in your mind,

Cleanse yourself with the Name, at the sacred shrine deep within.]

h) Confrontational or Contradictory Expressions (ਵਿਰੋਧਮੂਲਕ ਅਲੰਕਾਰ) – these appear as such on the surface; however at a deeper level the contradiction doesn't actually exist.

ਸਾਗਰ ਮਹਿ ਬੂੰਦ ਬੂੰਦ ਮਹਿ ਸਾਗਰੁ, ਕਵਣੁ ਬੂਝੈ ਬਿਧਿ ਜਾਣੈ ॥”

(ਮ: ੧, ਪ. ੮੭੮)

[The drop is in the ocean, and the ocean is in the drop. Who understands, and knows this.]