No cover image available

The Oxford Handbook of the Phenomenology of Music Cultures

Harris M. Berger (ed.) et al.

https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190693879.001.0001

Published: 2021 **Online ISBN:** 9780190693886 **Print ISBN:** 9780190693879

CHAPTER

Toward a Phenomenology of *Rasa*: Theorizing from *Ras* in Sikh Sabad Kīrtan Practice

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https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190693879.013.19 Pages C19.P1–C19.N26

Published: 20 October 2022

Abstract

Rasa (flavor, essence), as a concept in the Indian aesthetics of performance, is as widely known as the notions of *raga* and *tala*. Yet, the lived experience of rasa in the everyday remains seriously underexplored. This essay pursues a phenomenology of rasa by presenting an ethnographic investigation of the phenomenon of *ras* (rasa's vernacular counterpart) in the practice of Sikh *sabad kīrtan* (sung scriptural verse). It proposes that ras can be understood as an interrelational experience that emerges in a phenomenal field co-constituted by people, objects, sound, food, ideas, memory, and aspirations. Focusing on what I call the "ethical flavors" of non-Othering in *har-ras* (divine-ras) and resilience in *vīr-ras* (heroic-ras), the essay explicates ras as the body's mode of inhabiting the lived world. It illuminates the epistemic value of ras in gaining knowledge of self, community, and the divine, and explores the temporal dimension of ras as it accretes in the body to continue to be productive in the overlapping phenomenal fields of everyday social and political life.

Keywords: rasa, phenomenology, phenomenal field, interrelationality, co-constitution, inhabitation, politics, ethics, Sikh sabad kīrtan, ethical flavor

Subject: Ethnomusicology, Music

Series: Oxford Handbooks

Collection: Oxford Handbooks Online

In Indian theories of the aesthetics of performance, the notion of *ras(a)* (lit. juice; flavor, essence) holds a prominent place. Not only is a good performance one in which the audience savors some flavor, the very comprehension of the performance is considered to be truly possible only through the experience of ras(a). Notions of rasa (a Sanskrit term from the first millennium BCE) and ras (its vernacular counterpart) permeate the expressive culture of South Asia,[1] and, unsurprisingly, there is a vast literature on the subject. Most of this work pertains to rasa in classical Indian aesthetics, and much of it uses an exclusively conceptual approach. In this chapter, I take a methodological turn to ethnography and a focus on the process of ras generation and its workings in everyday life to elucidate ras as a phenomenon of experience in Sikh musical worship. Drawing from Sikh philosophy and practice, and engaging ideas from Western

phenomenology on perception, consciousness, and subjectivity, I investigate the musical generation of ras among participants in worship sessions to reveal the embodied nature of this phenomenon and the intersensorial, intercorporeal, and situated processes at play here.

A phenomenological approach to understanding ras is particularly productive. Arguing for the significance of phenomenology for ethnomusicology, Harris Berger has observed that "a concern for lived experience is at the heart of much of ... [the phenomenological] tradition" (2015, 1). It is precisely the lived experience of ras for my interlocutors that stood out for me and piqued my interest in exploring this subject. In my ethnographic work,[2] I learned that rather than having a discursive engagement with the concept of ras, my interlocutors were concerned with the embodied experience of ras and of the world lived through a ras-full body. ("Rasa-full" is a term that Sarah Weiss [2003] uses to describe Javanese musical performances that have rasa. Sikh communities do not use the term "rasa," and in this article I have adapted her usage to translate my interlocutors' references to bodies that have ras as "ras-full.")

In engaging the phenomenological tradition to explore ras, I am drawn particularly to the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. If ras is *essence*, phenomenology, according to Merleau-Ponty, "is the study of essences" ([1945] 2002, vii)—the essence of a phenomenon being the directly accessed somatic experience of it, unlaced by cognitive processes such as reflection and judgment (xvi-xix). If ras as a generalized feeling in the body points to a unity of experience, perceptual activity, according to Merleau-Ponty, is at once a unified, embodied experience of a whole phenomenon, not a process of synthesizing its constituent elements. If ras is an awareness fundamentally of the body, consciousness, according to Merleau-Ponty, is fundamentally embodied and not "in the universe of things said" (xvii).

In addition to an elaboration of the embodied and embedded nature of ras and the interrelationalities at play in its experience, my research reveals the relevance that Sikhs find it has for engaging with the lived world. In this chapter, I highlight in particular the critical ethical dimensions of this phenomenon, which are central to Sikh philosophy and practice in the quotidian. These pertain to the lived social and political aspects of existence, to how one inhabits this world.

In Sikh scriptural songs,[3] a number of ras flavors are specified. Most salient is divine-ras, which is termed *har-ras* and also *rām-ras*, both of which refer to the experience of a presence of the divine. The expressions of divine-ras include *prém-ras*, the experience of feelings of love for the divine; *amrit-ras*, the sweet experience of the eternal divine; and *ānand-ras*, the bliss of divine experience. In contrast to these valorized ras, scriptural songs caution against *an-ras* (lit. non-ras)—the taste for materialistic excess. Additionally, in the context of musical worship, Sikhs refer to *vīr-ras*,[4] that of courage and valor, and with a negative connotation, to *kan-ras* (lit. pleasure of the ear), which refers to the taste for mere musical sound devoid of the flavors of the divine. Ras is also used to describe the grocery offerings from the congregation that will become ingredients in the preparation of the sweet sacrament and the communal meal served in conjunction with worship. In this chapter, I focus on har-ras in terms particularly of its most salient attribute—the absence of *dooja-bhāv* (lit. Other-feeling) which, based on its elaborations in the scriptural songs, I term non-Othering (rejecting socially created differences, such as class, caste, race, or religion)—and on vīr-ras as it pertains to overcoming discriminatory social treatment.

Ras(a)

It has often been my experience that, over the course of a session of Sikh *sabad kīrtan* (sung scriptural verse), the participatory space feels increasingly intensified and saturated with affect. I remember in particular a regular Sunday session at the Sikh *gurdwāra* (public place of worship) in San Jose, California, in November 2014, when congregants all around me seemed deeply but quietly moved and feelingful. The "stage secretary" (emcee) thanked the musicians for their "*ras-bhinna*" (ras-drenched) kīrtan. Like many congregants, I proceeded backstage after the singing to personally thank the performers for the beautiful experience. There, I could hear others comment, "Bhai Sahib, aj té bahut hī ras āya" (Respected Brother, today there was so much ras) or "Bhai Sahib, bahut hī anand āya" (Respected Brother, there was so much bliss). Meanwhile the stage secretary had moved on to other matters. I could hear his voice over the microphone, thanking the congregants for the ras (grocery) offerings they had brought for the *langar* (free community kitchen and communal meal). As is the custom, I joined other congregants to enjoy the langar in the adjacent langar hall. There, the PA system was relaying the next kīrtan session. The lyrics of the sabad (scriptural song) caught my attention:

> ਰਾਮ ਰਸੁ ਪੀਆ ਰੇ ॥ ਜਿਹ ਰਸ ਬਿਸਰਿ ਗਏ ਰਸ ਅਉਰ ॥ (Guru Granth Sahib, 337)[5]
>
> *Rām ras pīā ré. Jeh ras bisar gaé ras aor.*
>
> I drank rām-ras. With which other ras are forgotten.

These words seeped into my consciousness, as it seemed to do for other congregants around me, with varying degrees of attention. At this point, the kīrtan was more in the background, as I ate the delicious spicy vegetarian meal and sweet rice pudding, sipped the hot milky tea, and chatted with friends and acquaintances seated around me.

Driving home, other sabad on ras that I had heard in the past welled up in my consciousness. One emphasized the critical importance of ras and the embodied nature of knowledge:

> ਰਸਿ ਰਸਿ ਗੁਣ ਗਾਵਉ ਠਾਕੁਰ ਕੇ ਮੋਰੈ ਹਿਰਦੈ ਬਸਹੁ ਗੋਪਾਲ ॥ (Guru Granth Sahib, 680)
>
> *Ras ras gūṇ gāvao ṭẖākur ké morai hirdai basao gopāl.*
>
> Ras-fully (savoring) singing the virtues of the divine, the divine dwells in my heart.

Another underscored the crucial role of the congregation in the generation of ras and knowledge:

> ਸਭਿ ਸੁਖ ਹਰਿ ਰਸ ਭੋਗਣੇ ਸੰਤ ਸਭਾ ਮਿਲਿ ਗਿਆਨੁ ॥ (Guru Granth Sahib, 21)
>
> *Sabh sūkh har ras bhogṇé sant sabhā mil giān.*
>
> Peace, har-ras, knowledge, all are experienced in pious congregation.

On another occasion in the langar hall, I became aware of a young woman (in her late twenties, I would guess) who was seated diagonally across from me and enjoying the kīrtan that was relayed on the PA system as she ate langar. The kīrtan was in the participatory-chant style known as AKJ (described further below), in which the singing proceeds through cycles of intensity that culminate in the chanting of the divine name, *wāheguru*. As the wāheguru chanting would begin, her eyelids would gently drop and her body slightly sway as she slowly finished chewing her food. It was as though the food she was tasting, ingesting, and savoring was part of the same experience as that of feeling the divine. Her connection to the sounding of wāheguru chants appeared to be automatic, of great ease. Her countenance was serene, deep in experience. Even the

sounds of the hustle-bustle of the langar hall, where around two hundred people socialized as they ate, seemed to be literally transduced into an energy that was peaceful.[6] The ras in the sacred words, their musical sounding and audition, and the sacralized meal and communal dining, with its attendant sounds of sociality, seemed to come together seamlessly. It is such a phenomenon of ras that caught my interest, a lived experience, an experience that is embodied, embedded, and inter-relational—in and between people, things, and words, all intertwined in a participatory social field.

In the scholarship on both popular and elite Indian musics, the dominant understanding of Indian notions of aesthetics comes via the classical Sanskrit theory of rasa, particularly as expounded in two ancient treatises, the *Nātyashāsthra* and the *Abhinavabhāratī*.[7] It is curious that despite the widespread circulation of the term *rasa* in the ethnomusicological literature on Indian music, scholars have largely focused on explicating this theory, particularly in the context of art music,[8] rather than on presenting detailed ethnographic investigations of the phenomenon as a lived experience of participants. Even in the few ethnographic studies of rasa (e.g., Slawek 1996; Nuttall 2013; Krishnamurthy 2019), the starting point and much of the discussion is abstract rasa theory. Here, there is either an implicit assumption—or a goal of the scholarship—to show that this ancient theory of dramaturgy works in contemporary musical practice. Eminent Indian musicologist Prem Lata Sharma (1927–1998) has argued against such an approach. In an essay published in a collection of her works (Sharma 2000), she writes with reference to "*rāga*-music of the modern times" (98): "*Rasa* in its essential form of aesthetic delight is undoubtedly present in music, but its direct analysis in terms of traditional exposition is neither fully possible nor is it warranted" (108).[9]

Following ancient rasa theory, a common thread in ethnomusicological scholarship is that rasa is produced by the performer and evoked in the encultured audience, the *rasikā* (aesthete, lit. one who tastes). Here, the relationality of the rasa experience is predominantly described as one-sided—from an agentive performer to a recipient audience. As Slawek explains it, rasa is "something to be evoked from the culturally conditioned unconscious of the aesthete" (1996, 33).[10] In such accounts, then, rasa is conceptualized as a response in the spectator's body to an external stimulus emanating from an aesthetic object that is separate from their body, even if rasa is conceptualized as something that is evoked during moments of an experiential internalization of the aesthetic object. This notion of internalization has important implications, as it suggests the containment of rasa in *discrete* and *independent* entities, namely musical sound, performers, and audiences. Another feature of this scholarship is that there is little or no contribution mentioned of the context in which rasa is experienced. Here, it must be kept in mind that the ancient theory of rasa was written in the context of drama, and the contribution of musical sound to rasa was understood in terms of its role in plot development. In this context, music was considered as one of the many constituents for an effective theatrical performance. Needless to say, the context of contemporary concert-stage art music is vastly different.

Sikh practice and the philosophy that is expressed in scriptural songs point away from a decontextualized stimulus-response model toward a co-constitution of the human subject, objects, and ras, as well as toward a participatory-immersion model of ras co-generation. Here, agency is distributed across musicians and congregants, sacred texts and their musical rendition, sacred food and other sacred articles, as well as memories and aspirations. In an example that reflects this view, one of my interlocutors, who is a committed and accomplished musician, congregant, and organizer of AKJ kīrtan sessions, remarked to me, "Ras cannot be produced, it just happens." While musicians are appreciated for their virtuosity, congregants do not consider them the sole agents for evoking the experience of ras. Nor do musicians typically claim or accept agency, deflecting compliments to the scripture or congregation. This could be ascribed to culturally learned humility, but the requirement of humility itself can be said to speak to a recognition of distributed agency.

The notion of distributed agency that I will pursue here is intended to capture the social interrelationality of all participatory entities in a context, human and non-human. It builds on Alfred Gell's (1998)

conceptualization of the agency of non-living objects and of "distributed personhood." Gell critiqued the "classificatory and context free" (23) approach to defining "human beings" (who are sentient and capable of intentional intelligence) and "things" (which are non-sentient and incapable of intentional intelligence) as missing the social nature of their relationship. In contrast, he emphasized that human beings are embedded in social relationships not just with other human beings but also with things. A soldier, for example, is not just a person, but a person with a gun, each constituting and affecting the other. Both the ontology and the agency of the person is relational, and the same can be said of the thing as well. If the gun fails, it renders the soldier ineffective. It is in this sense that Gell argued that there exist social relationships between persons and things, rather than just among persons, and that he ascribed agency to things, in addition to living entities. Agency for him does not manifest as "permanent dispositional characteristics of particular entities" (21), but as "relationships in the fleeting contexts and predicaments of social life" (22). In this context, he conceptualized the intertwining of objects, people, cognition, and social action, as "enchainment" (141) and agency as distributed across this chain. He thus developed an expanded understanding of personhood as not "internal" (contained within the individual body) but as distributed across people and things. Thus, he wrote:

> a person and a person's mind are not confined to particular spatio-temporal coordinates, but consist of a spread of biographical events and memories of events, and a dispersed category of material objects, traces, and leavings, which can be attributed to a person and which, in aggregate, testify to agency and patienthood during a biographical career which may, indeed, prolong itself long after biological death. (222)

Gell's ideas resonate strongly with Sikh philosophy and experience. In Sikh musical worship, the *rasiyā* (lit. one who savors ras) is not the rasikā, discussed above in the context of Hindustani music—a connoisseur of musical sound, a "knowledgeable listener" of its grammatical content responding just to aural stimuli. To the contrary, the Sikh rasiyā of har-ras is by definition one who savors ethical affects, not simply musical flavors,[11] and the subject here is one part of an enchainment, a domain of interactions that I will describe below as a phenomenal field in which ras "happens." The rasiyā in the Sikh kīrtan session partakes of the "[f]oundational reciprocity between the world and ourselves" (Berger 1999, 21) in the particular context of a congregation embedded in the sacred and ethical milieu of sabad kīrtan.

My explication of the Sikh context of musical worship, and its sociality, explores in detail how all constituent elements of sabad kīrtan events are intertwined in the co-generation and co-habitation of ras, and how the constituent elements of the Sikh sacred ecosystem gain potentialities in their interdependent agency. Furthermore, a consideration of Sikh worship practice and philosophy moves me away from the analysis of ras as a form of aesthetics detached from the wider lived social and political life, to one in which ras is a mode of inhabiting this world. Ras thus reveals the very ontology of the self, community, and ethics,[12] and an epistemology of the divine.

These perspectives lead me to pursue a "local phenomenology" (Halliburton 2002) of ras based on philosophy and practice in the Sikh tradition and engaging Western phenomenological ideas. As ethnomusicologists have long recognized, a culture's own views about its practices are of prime importance to the way they are carried out and therefore are centrally relevant to any discussion of that culture. Sikh kīrtan practice is based on the philosophy in the sabad, even if it sometimes falls short of its own ideals. With respect to ras, Sikh scriptural verses contain rich ideas about sensation, embodiment, intersubjectivity, and ethical comportment. I see the consonance of many of these ideas with elaborations in the Western phenomenological tradition, particularly Merleau-Ponty's thoughts on perception, consciousness, and embodiment, and Edmund Husserl's views on the subject and subjectivity (discussed later). Drawing on all of this and my ethnographic findings, I theorize ras as a feeling that emerges in an experiential field co-constituted by people, objects, words, sounds, actions (including musicking),

memories, and aspirations. I argue that ras's ontology can be found in the flow in and across inter-dependent, co-existent entities; that ras is in the very motility of the body, in its fundamental motor intentionality; and that ras is the flavor of the body's very inhabitation of the world.

Bodily Inhabitation of the Lived World

In *Phenomenology of Perception* ([1945] 2002), Merleau-Ponty rejects both empiricist and intellectualist approaches to perception and knowledge, as well as the implication of these things for the nature of the person and their relation to the world. Empiricist approaches privilege the empirical sciences to explain perception as a response of the sense organs to external stimuli, enlisting perception in a cause-and-effect process. Intellectualist approaches privilege conceptual and discursive processes in the construction of sensory knowledge. Seen from such an approach, the world is made up of independently existing, discrete sensations, which are synthesized via mental attention and judgment. Eschewing causal and interpretive analyses, Merleau-Ponty pursues a methodology of description, which he considers the essential phenomenological method, with a focus on process rather than internal representations of external objects.

For Merleau-Ponty, our perception of something is never the result of an isolated stimulus acting upon us. Rather, he advances the idea that there is no "pure sensation": every sensation is "already bound up with a larger whole" ([1945] 2002, 10). "The perceptual something is always in the middle of something else," he argues, "it always forms part of a 'field'" (4). Any perceptual experience comes into formation in relation to other sensations in the field and is experienced as part of that meaningful whole. Emphasizing the interdependence of sensations in the lived world, Merleau-Ponty shifts the focus away from the causal and mechanical relationships that are dominant in what he calls "objective thought" and that require the assumption of independently experienced sensory data.

To explain the interdependence of sensation, Merleau-Ponty uses the example of color perception.[13] Here he argues that rather than an objective, constant, and standard attribute of a visual phenomenon, the perception of the color of a thing is innately connected to other properties of that thing, and these connections are the conditions under which that perception takes place. These conditions make up a "phenomenal field," which can take many forms, such as a setting, a landscape, an atmosphere, or a horizon. So, for example, the perception of the red in a red carpet is sensed in relation to the many features of that carpet, such as other colors in it, the size and shapes in its pattern, and its texture and thickness. Relevant also are surrounding factors, such as, in this example, the color and reflective properties of the surface on which the carpet is placed and of the furniture surrounding it, as well as its lighting conditions. It is important to note here that the properties in this example are not only visual but also tactile and even sonic. In Merleau-Ponty's words:

> it is impossible completely to describe the colour of the carpet without saying that it *is* a carpet, made of wool, and without implying in this colour a certain tactile value, a certain weight and a certain resistance to sound. (376; emphasis in the original)

Describing the carpet's color simply as red, or as a shade of red, will be an incomplete description of the sensation of the redness of the carpet. It will not capture the woolly quality of the redness and a certain softness that would be different from the redness, say, of a piece of hard, red plastic. Thus, a description of color that does not account for its embeddedness in a field of sensations will be an abstraction from the lived experience of that color and will mislead us from the actual nature of the perception of color, in which our senses work together to create an intersensorial gestalt of color perception. Further, we perceive texture in color—a roughness or smoothness—because what our eyes see, the varied reflection of light on the

carpet's un-uniform surface, always emerges in conjunction with what our hands and fingers know as the tactile experience of that texture.

In another passage on color, Merleau-Ponty develops these ideas by discussing landscape painting:

> Cézanne declared that a picture contains within itself even the smell of the landscape. He meant that the arrangement of colour on the thing (and in the work of art, if it catches the thing in its entirety) signifies by itself all the responses which would be elicited through an examination by the remaining senses; that a thing would not have this colour had it not also this shape, these tactile properties, this resonance, this odour, and that the thing is the absolute fullness which my undivided existence projects before itself. (371)[14]

It is this "undivided existence" of the body, with its unified sensory and motor organs, that engages with the things of the world, such as the picture of the landscape or the carpet, as perceptually united phenomena. In the examples above, the visual sensations of the landscape are bound up with its olfactory sensations, while the redness of the carpet is bound up with its tactile sensations. Rather than a cognitive mechanism that receives compartmentalized stimuli and processes information into mental representations that translate into bodily responses, perception is an inseparable part of the very motility of the body, the pre-reflexive circuits of perception and action in everyday conduct that Merleau-Ponty refers to as our "motor intentionality." This sensory-motor unification of the body is anterior to any contents of experience. The body knows itself as a coherent functional unit, not as a collection of coordinated parts. As Merleau-Ponty writes, "my whole body is not for me an assemblage of organs juxtaposed in space. I am in undivided possession of it" (112). It is this unified body that is our access to the world. In Merleau-Ponty's words:

> what I call experience of the thing or of reality … is my full *co-existence* with the phenomenon, at the moment when it is in every way at its maximum articulation, and the "data of different senses" are directed towards this one pole (371; italics added)

The pre-reflexive union of the body-subject and the sensed world stems from this bodily inhabitation of the world. That is, the body does not merely exist within the space and time of the world, but rather is enmeshed with them, defined by its relations with them, and can only be understood in terms of them. Space, time, world, and body, therefore, do not exist separately from one another but in conjunction with each other, and space and time come into being along with the lived body. When I perceive space and time, I have already been part of their constitution, and they have been part of mine. They are not given, objective entities, cognized or represented. The body, in its motor intentionality, has its own situated spatiality, which enacts its perceptual field. Within this bodily motility at any instance are enfolded previous and anticipated experiences. That is, the body's pre-reflexive grasp of the world at any moment includes already incorporated, undifferentiated elements from the past, what we refer to in everyday talk as "habits." For Merleau-Ponty, these are specifically "*motor* habits" ([1945] 2002, 177; italics added), and they form the bodily means by which we bring the past into the present. Further, our moving body is always geared toward and anticipates future states of affairs. Taken together, motor habits and the future orientation of our motility create the temporality of our embodied relation to the world. The past, present, and future are thereby integrated in the body's perceptual field. In this way, the body, space, and time are part of a totality; they are sensed together in relation to each other; they construct each other. As Merleau-Ponty says, "I am not in space and time, nor do I conceive space and time; I belong to them, my body combines with them and includes them" (162). In this sense, the world and the body-subject are co-constituted.

In the context of all of this, the body's motility—its meaningful, pre-reflexive engagement with the things of the world—forms the basis of Merleau-Ponty's notion of the embodied nature of consciousness. Building on Edmund Husserl's notion of intentionality, that—in Husserl's famous phrase, "[a]ll consciousness is

consciousness of something" (Husserl quoted in Merleau-Ponty [1945] 2002, xix), Merleau-Ponty argues for a kind of intentionality that is operative in pre-reflexive bodily processes and conduct, rather than in deliberated judgment. "Consciousness is in the first place not a matter of 'I think that,'" Merleau-Ponty writes, "but of 'I can'" (159). In other words, consciousness emerges primarily not in the realm of words but in the realm of one's existence, one's bodily conduct in the world, and is directed toward the world as lived. Rather than an "intellectual" phenomenon (250) that observes a world from afar and cognizes about it, consciousness is "sensible" (250), sensing itself and the lived world together and in relation to each other. Body, consciousness, and world thus come into being and develop together. This "operative intentionality" of the body "establishes the natural and pre-predicative unity of the world and of our life" (xx). Merleau-Ponty's critique of empiricist and intellectualist approaches to philosophy is thus based on their neglect of the work of an embodied consciousness, "through which from the outset a world forms itself around me and begins to exist for me" (ix).

Just as perception and consciousness are "an intention of our whole being" (92) and a way of inhabiting the world, intersubjectivity too, for Merleau-Ponty, is primarily embodied and pre-reflexive. He gives an illuminating example:

> A baby of fifteen months opens its mouth if I playfully take one of its fingers between my teeth and pretend to bite it. And yet it has scarcely looked at its face in the glass, and its teeth are not in any case like mine. The fact is that its own mouth and teeth, as it feels them from the inside, are immediately, for it, an apparatus to bite with, and my jaw, as the baby sees it from the outside, is immediately, for it, capable of the same intentions. "Biting" has immediately, for it, an intersubjective significance. It perceives its intentions in its body, and my body with its own, and thereby my intentions in its own body. (410)

Thus, as bodies, we are linked together in the lived world by our fundamental corporeality and pre-conscious intentionalities. Our common corporeality enables a pre-personal communication; one that is "anonymous." In other words, we constitute the perceptions and relations of each other's worlds by reference to a generalized person, and this generalized person is prior to the particularity of myself as myself and the other as an other, and is in this sense anonymous. Husserl ([1931] 1977) too, in advancing his idea of the subject, understood it to be fundamentally constituted by intersubjectivity, which he saw, at its core, as a process of empathy, of pre-reflexively apprehending sameness in others.

Merleau-Ponty's notion of "intercorporeality" is intensified by the phenomenon of language, since words have a motor presence. In a spoken word, there is a link between perceptual experience and the motor sensations of phonation. As Merleau-Ponty explains:

> The word "sleet," when it is known to me, is not an object which I recognize through my identificatory synthesis, but a certain use made of my phonatory equipment, a certain modulation of my body as being in the world .... One day I caught on to the word "sleet," much as one imitates a gesture, not, that is, by analysing it and performing an articulatory or phonetic action corresponding to each part of the word as heard, but by hearing it as a single modulation of the world of sound, and because this acoustic entity presents itself as "something to pronounce" in virtue of the all-embracing correspondence existing between my perceptual potentialities and my motor ones .... (469)

Understood in this way, shared words, as for example in shared song, entail shared articulatory gestures of phonation involved in sounding them. These motor sensations reinforce the bodily experience of the shared meanings of the words. The word *ras*, for instance, is connected to the bodily sensations of ras as a feeling and the bodily sensation of sounding the word's phonemes. A common language thus deepens

communication through embodied identification and reciprocity. It establishes a commonly inhabited world. We become "collaborators for each other in a consummate reciprocity" (413).

With this backdrop of Merleau-Ponty's description of our phenomenal inhabitation of the world as fundamentally embodied, and with the idea established that perception, intentionality, consciousness, and intersubjectivity are all first pre-conscious affairs of the body, I proceed now to describe the phenomenon of ras in Sikh musical worship. I start by providing a thick description of the Sikh phenomenal field, and then move on to the analyses of a ras-drenched (*ras-bhinna*) kīrtan session. Finally, introducing the concept of "overlapping phenomenal fields," I reflect on the durational aspects of ras and its ontological and epistemological workings outside of worship sessions in everyday life. Here, I suggest that just as the body-subject is constituted by ras-full experiences, the ras-full body projects back into the lived world with pre-conscious intentionality.

The Phenomenal Field of Sabad Kīrtan

Along with sacred song and musicians, the main co-constituents of the phenomenal field of sabad kīrtan are the *Guru* (spiritual preceptor), *sādh sangat* (pious congregation), and *langar* (communal food). They co-constitute a sensorially rich phenomenal field that is much more than just oral and aural. It is one in which auditory, visual, haptic, olfactory, gustatory, and kinesthetic sensations are all enjoined, as are memories and aspirations. Importantly too, the host of kinesthetic ritual gestures that participants partake of are imbued with ethical meanings, such as non-Othering, humility, and service. Throughout this discussion, I foreground the ethical aspects of the phenomenal field, since har-ras is the term given to the somatic experience of the divine in all its ethical attributes. I show how the ethical flavor of har-ras is experienced through nondeliberative embodied practices rather than mentalist rationalizations.

Sacred Presence

Central to the phenomenal field of sabad kīrtan is the experience of the Guru (lit. spiritual preceptor). In the Sikh context, the Guru is a multidimensional entity with intertwined perceptual, textual, human, and affective dimensions. The Sikh faith was founded by Guru Nanak (1459–1539) and shaped by nine subsequent Gurus, who lived from 1504 to 1708. During their lifetime, they canonized about five thousand of their songs into the Sikh scripture, and as an act of non-Othering, they also included a few hundred songs known to be from saint-singers of other faith traditions, duly ascribed. The first complete compilation was scribed in 1604 and known as the Adi Granth (First Book). The finalized version was completed in 1704 by the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh, who in 1708 designated it the Guru Granth Sahib (lit. respected spiritual-preceptor book) and proclaimed that after his passing, the Guru Granth Sahib, and not a person, was to be accepted as the (eternal) Guru of the Sikhs. The Sikh idea of the divine is also that of a preceptor—the preeminent one, wāheguru (lit. awesome guru). For devout Sikhs, the unblemished divine spirit dwells in all forms of the Guru—the formless divine, the ten late human Gurus, and the sacred songtexts (sabad) that form the primary scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib. Sikhs experience all these dimensions of the Guru in closely connected ways, and often as a single entity. For many, the Guru Granth Sahib is the manifest body (*pragat déh*) of the human Gurus, and they refer to the scripture as a living Guru and to its pages as *ang*, that is, body part or limb. Significantly, following scriptural songtexts, as in the example below, Sikhs themselves aspire to embody divine attributes.

> ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਕੀ ਬਾਣੀ ਸਤਿ ਸਰੂਪੁ ਹੈ ਗੁਰਬਾਣੀ ਬਣੀਐ ॥ (Guru Granth Sahib, 304)
>
> *Satgur kī baṇī sat sarūp hai gurbāṇī baṇīai.*

> The true Guru's word is the embodiment of truth, become this embodiment.

In kīrtan sessions, the presence (*hazoori*) of the Guru Granth Sahib is deemed essential for the appropriate and best kīrtan experience, whether at a gurdwāra (public place of worship; lit. doorway to the Guru) or in private homes. Several interlocutors have expressed to me that they feel transformed in the presence of the Guru. This point was especially driven home to me in 2005 when I was curating an outreach program of historical compositions of Sikh sacred songs to be sung by the highly regarded tenth generation kīrtan singer, the late Bhai Avtar Singh Ragi.[15] Responding to my plan to host the program in a concert hall without the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib, he said in his gentle way, "Guru di hazoori vich hi behtar rehega" (It will be best in the presence of the Guru). What he indicated was that lacking the interrelational power of the Guru's presence in its affective, ethical, epistemological, and ontological dimensions, his singing would just not be the same. He knew from embodied experience that the musician and music are themselves co-constituted with other elements in a phenomenal field.

Figure 1:

Guru's darbār at Gurdwara San Jose, San Jose, California.

(Used with permission.)

The Guru's presence is experienced by devotees through a variety of interactive and embodied engagements, and thus manifests as a phenomenal field. The Guru Granth Sahib is the presiding entity in the worship hall, which is referred to as the Guru's darbār (lit. court); there, it is majestically enthroned, center stage, on a dais, endowing it with the same respect and authority due to royalty. (See Figure 1.) The enrobing and staging of the scripture is an elaborate process, including processional singing and ritual actions.[16] Entering a Guru's darbār to participate in a worship session entails a number of attendant gestural engagements, too. Before entering the sanctuary, devotees take their shoes off, wash their hands, and cover their heads as a sign of respect to the Guru. At the threshold, they bend over to touch the floor with their hands and then swipe their fingers on their heads. The belief is that this acceptance of the *charan dhoor* (foot-dust of a pious congregation) will help embody their ethical values. In the sanctuary, devotees walk up a central aisle and approach the dais on which the Guru Granth Sahib is staged with an attendant. They place any ras (groceries) they may have brought, or a small amount of cash, at the foot of the Guru and then gesticulate on all fours, touching their foreheads to the ground as a gesture of respect, humility, and willingness to imbibe the Guru's teachings. At this point, they may stand in silent prayer for several seconds, expressing supplication or gratitude. They then circumambulate around the Guru Granth Sahib, pausing behind the dais to bow and touch their forehead to it. On the way, they may stop to place a tip by the

musicians. Finally, they proceed to the attendant with the *kaṛāh parshād* (blessed pudding) and, receiving a handful in their cupped hands, sit down to enjoy the sweet sacrament and the melodious kīrtan. (See Figure 2.) All these ritual actions come together as an embodied, experiential engagement with the Guru.

Figure 2:

Receiving kaṛāh parshād at Gurdwara San Jose, San Jose, California.

Photo by Inderjit N. Kaur.

Added to the various sensorial interactions with the Guru is the singing, which consists of the very songtexts that make up the scripture, linking sound and vision intimately. In fact, in the Sikh language for the scriptural songtext, no difference is made between oral utterance and written text (i.e., between their sonic and print forms). The sabad were first sung, later compiled into songbooks, and ultimately into scripture. In all these forms, these songtexts are referred to as *sabad* (lit. word) or as *gurbāni* (lit. the Guru's word-utterance). This captures the fact that the experience of sabad does not admit a sensory/textual, or word/affect, divide.

The engagement with the sacred text is visual, auditory, haptic, kinesthetic, psychological, cognitive, and affective all at once. The profound connection of devout Sikhs with the Guru Granth Sahib and all forms of the Guru, including the sabad, cannot be underestimated. A Sikh is definitionally a Sikh (lit. student) of the Guru. The Sikh and the Guru are thus ontologically co-constituted. The connection with the Guru is established young in life, through not only musical worship, festivals, and celebrations but also the everyday singing of sabad as lullabies and hagiographic stories of the late human Gurus. These hagiographies were traditionally oral and now are also transmitted through books, comics, and multimedia productions such as video, film, and theater.

Sabad quotes find their way in everyday speech too, in the form of phrases of inspiration, solace, gratitude, and joy. Key excerpts of the Guru Granth Sahib are also printed in smaller books—*gutkay* (which contain verse compositions), *pōthiāṅ* (which contain a section of the scripture), and *sainchiāṅ* (which contain sabad with exegesis)—and are used by Sikhs in worship sessions at the gurdwāra or at home to sing, chant, read (silently or aloud), and understand the meaning of sabad. All these book versions are kept in ornate cloth wraps and treated with great respect, the devotee often touching the book to the forehead before commencing engagement with it. Sikhs serving in the Second World War were known to have miniature versions of the Guru Granth Sahib tucked in their turbans for courage and resilience. The embodiment of courage has historically been a prominent ethic in Sikh culture, and below I will discuss how musical worship is a site for the inculcation of vīr-ras and how this ethically flavored, embodied ras might be retained for the phenomenal fields in everyday situations to affect lived conduct.

Congregation

The second significant co-constituent part of the phenomenal field of sabad kīrtan is the sādh sangat (pious congregation, lit. of similar pious ways). Members of the sādh sangat can be said to have shared constitutive experiences. In my framework, within the phenomenal field of musical worship various members co-constitute each other, and each does so in a way that is similar to, but not identical with, that of others. Congregants experience the intercorporeal field with a whole range of intensities and affects. For example, while sabad kīrtan is sung in a diverse array of musical styles and most gurdwāray (pl. of gurdwāra) have kīrtan sessions in these different styles, congregation members often have aesthetic preferences for certain kinds of sabad kīrtan rendition, and some even find certain styles unfavorable to a ras experience.[17] Many tend to go to those kīrtan sessions based on its musical style. In terms of the framework I am developing here, one could say that they find their ras-full co-constitution in their choice of a musical phenomenal field.

Congregating in formal and informal spaces for singing and chanting has long been a tradition among Sikhs, both at home and when on the move. In addition to assembling at gurdwāray, Sikhs have sought sangat for musical worship in a variety of settings—from circles of family and friends in homes, to gatherings under trees when on army duty, and at train depots when sent abroad as indentured laborers by a colonial government.

The scripture's ethic of the one-ness of humanity becomes embodied in the congregation through several practices. Gurdwāray and all their programs are held open house, free to people from all backgrounds. When possible, gurdwāra sanctuaries are constructed with doors on all four sides to symbolize this openness.[18] There is no required membership and no hierarchical seating arrangements or other preferential treatment for congregation members. All attendees (except those with special needs) sit on the floor together with people of all social backgrounds.[19] The inclusiveness in the congregation creates the conditions of possibility for transmission of a ras that has the flavor of non-Othering. The flow of this har-ras is a shared experience of that divine potential.

In Sikh musical worship, the practice of congregating takes on special form and significance for a community of Sikhs known as the AKJ (Akhand Kirtani Jattha, lit. uninterrupted kīrtan group). Their name derives from the fact that they congregate regularly for long kīrtan sessions that last from a few hours to all night (*raensabāē*, lit. night gathering). Importantly, the musical sounding of the sacred word is continuous and without interjection of any exegesis or announcement, not even the musicians' names. AKJ weekend gatherings, *samāgam* (lit. coming together similarly), consist of a series of kīrtan sessions at gurdwāray or homes of highly committed Sikhs. These events are open house, non-commercial, and 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, serving, and cleaning.

This emphasis on congregation is also reflected in their kīrtan ensemble structure. While the core ensemble is formed typically by only two members, the ensemble gets extended to the congregation, who sit next to and behind the lead performers (see Figure 3). This ensemble arrangement is known as *sangat roop* (lit. congregational form) and is explicitly recognized for dissolving the binarized roles of performer and audience. Below, I will further elaborate on the musical teamwork between what I call the "core ensemble" and the "extended ensemble." Here, it is important to note that it is the musicians from the seated congregation who take turns at sitting in front to assume the lead role in the ensemble and, after their turn is over, go back to their original role in the congregation. All participants thus bear the responsibility for the generation of a phenomenal field.

Figure 3:

AKJ ensemble in congregational form at Gurdwara San Jose, San Jose, California.

(Used with permission.)

Communal Dining

The third major constituent of the phenomenal field of musical worship is communal dining. The pairing of worship and food has been a Sikh tradition since its founding years in the early sixteenth century. Early gurdwāray functioned as rest houses for weary travelers, who stopped for free board and lodging, along with audiencing with the Guru.[20] In contemporary practice too, as mentioned above, it is typical for gurdwāray to have langar service that is open to all. Langar, the sharing of a simple vegetarian meal with all, irrespective of social, religious, and economic differences, is a cherished and proud component of Sikh worship activities. (See Figure 4.) It is an embodied practice of equality and non-Othering.[21] In the sacred setting, the ras in the langar, and in the parshād served in the sanctuary, becomes linked to the ras in the sacred word. Both need to be ingested and savored to gain knowledge of the divine, and both require an ethic of overcoming socially constructed differences.

Figure 4:

Langar at Gurdwara San Jose, San Jose, California. (Used with permission.)

In fact, the tongue, as both the sense organ of taste and as an organ for speech, is referred to as *rasna*. It is emphasized in the sabad that by chanting the sacred word, one develops a taste for it. This speaks to Merleau-Ponty's understanding of language, discussed above, which recognizes words as gestures of the body's organs of phonation. I have often heard in casual conversations among congregants, especially in the context of raising Sikh children, that it is most important to simply chant the sabad; this chanting, they feel, will lead to both a love for and an understanding of the sacred words, and this will teach one how to be a Sikh. I have also heard from San Francisco Bay Area Sikh parents how their children in general do not like to eat Indian food very much but love the langar in worship settings. In other words, participating in the phenomenal field of sacred word, pious congregation, and sacred food, their rasna becomes co-constituted differently.

Langar also combines with the ethic of *seva* (service) outside of the gurdwāra premises and worship context. A common Sikh practice is to offer free water and food from stands at events such as festivals and marathons, from food trucks on the street, and at places such as soup kitchens run by various communities. Some Sikh non-profit organizations provide this service during disasters and other emergencies, such as serving food to the federal workers in the United States who were not paid their salaries due to the month-long government shutdown in 2019 and, as I write this chapter, to those in need, worldwide, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.[22]

Through these various activities (congregational musical worship, ras grocery offerings, and communal dining), the gurdwāra becomes a site of enactment of the Sikh tripartite motto for a good lived life—*Nām japō, kīrt karō, vand chhakō* (constantly remember the divine, earn an honest living, share your earnings). The phenomenal field of sabad kīrtan, and the ras experienced in it, draws, builds upon, participates in, and contributes to all of this. Through these embodied ethical connections, we begin to see the intertwining of the aesthetic, the social, the political, and the everyday. Here and below, I will continue to build upon the idea that ras is not just anchored in the aesthetic performance event and not just a response to aural-visual stimuli but is emergent and dynamic in and across the various realms, the overlapping phenomenal fields, of the Sikh lived world.

Bringing together these insights from Sikh philosophy and practice, and Merleau-Ponty's gestalt view of perception, I think of a phenomenal field as a dynamic, social realm of interrelational co-constitution of all participant elements. That the field is dynamic is highly significant, for there is always motion and change. Interrelationality is a critical aspect as well, as there is no independent construction of self and other, or of subject and object, and this co-constitution includes both musical sound and the experiential body. Significantly, also, historical memory and future aspirations are integrally at play here. As many ethnomusicologists have argued, the experience of musical sound is typically embedded in the social world, in historical memory, and future aspirations. In my framework of the phenomenal field, musical sound (and indeed each participatory element, including memory) is not an isolatable external stimulus but is itself constituted by the living body, just as the living body is constituted by the musical sound and all other constituent elements. It is with the co-constitution of, and immersion in, such a phenomenal field that congregants listen to and sing the sabad in a kīrtan session.

A “Ras-Drenching” Kīrtan Session

I turn now to the description of a particular kīrtan session to highlight some of the ways that the ras experience takes shape musically. This session is in the AKJ style; it is sung by the accomplished musician Bhai Jagpal Singh and accompanied on the *joṛi* (tabla drum pair) by the very talented Bhai Paramjit Singh. About an hour-and-a-half long (see Video 1), it was part of an all-night AKJ kīrtan program that began on the evening of February 25, 2018, at the Gurdwāra San Jose, in San Jose, California. The program itself was part of an all-weekend gathering.[23]

Video 1

[Video/Audio] available online

Complete kirtan session led by Bhai Jagpal Singh. Annual Akhand Keertan Samaagam, February 25, 2018, Gurdwara San Jose, San Jose, California. (Used with permission.)

As I mentioned above, the AKJ style is highly participatory. While all styles of kīrtan operate within the phenomenal field that I have been discussing, a number of features of the AKJ kīrtan intensify the field and the emergence of ras within it. Among my various interlocutors, references to ras were usually emphasized in relation to AKJ kīrtan sessions. For example, a devout Sikh and fan of the AKJ style said to me, “Akhand kirtan vich bhij jaaidae” (In akhand kīrtan one gets drenched [in ras]).” The notion of becoming drenched in divine rain, or dyed in divine color, is also found in various sabad.

The AKJ style uses a number of musical techniques to enhance the generation and circulation of ras. These include call and response, several repetitions of each line, and cycles of intensifications in rhythmic density, volume, and tempo. The singing begins at a slow tempo and gradually accelerates, passing through a number of cycles of ebbing and flowing intensification within each song. Cycles typically follow a pattern of phrase diminution, starting with complete lines of songtext and moving on to a repetition of key phrases. When the time seems ripe, cycles climax with the chanting of the divine name, wāheguru. (See Video 2 for an example of this.) With successive cycles, the tempo increases steadily (i.e., each successive cycle begins at a slightly faster tempo than the previous one started at and ends at an even faster tempo). Typically, these cycles are also successively shorter. The overall effect is one of a whirling spiral that takes participants into ever deeper experiential states. Other intensification techniques that the lead singer(s) employ throughout include increases in the density of the songtexts and dynamics, changes in register, octave leaps, belting out melody lines and phrases, an emphasis on key words, and elongation of the duration of vowels that occur at the end of phrases or lines.

Video 2

[Video/Audio] available online

Intensity Cycle 1 with phrase diminution in a kirtan session led by Bhai Jagpal Singh (with subtitles). Annual Akhand Keertan Samaagam, February 25, 2018, Gurdwara San Jose, San Jose, California. (Used with permission.)

The instruments play their part in intensification, too. The drummer shifts to playing in double-time as intensity cycles progress, uses more syncopated phrases and dynamics for emphasis, and employs strong, open-hand, resonant strokes on the joṛi bass drum for key moments of intensification. The *khartālāṅ* (shakers) player(s) typically follow the speed and dynamics of the joṛi. The *vājā* (harmonium) is used to play complementary melodic material with varying amounts of density, dynamics, and speed. During significant intensification moments, the playing becomes percussive, with the bellows pumped forcefully on the strong beats.

The AKJ session that I am describing here caught my attention in particular because it is centered on the theme of ras. In this session, not only do the congregants seem deeply immersed in ras-full experience but throughout the performance the lead singer can be seen leaning toward those around him (sometimes toward the joṛi player, at other times toward the congregants), thus seeking active inputs into the phenomenal field. The lead singer visibly wants a field of strong social interaction, and he gets it wholeheartedly. The "extended ensemble" (formed by congregation members seated around the "core ensemble," which includes only the lead singer and the drummer) participates actively and enthusiastically. In addition to the standard responsorial singing in repetition, congregants can be heard executing a variety of impromptu vocal enhancements—using tonal and dynamic emphasis on key words, melodic variations on key textual phrases, extended singing on line-ending vowels, and interjections of phrases from the sabad being sung. Emerging from the congregation's pre-reflexive engagement with the kīrtan and responding to the embodied presence of the singer, drummer, and other congregants, the inclusive and collaborative intercorporeality of their singing is an important contributor to the amplification of the phenomenal field and har-ras.

The first sabad of this session in fact states that the sabad-texts are themselves replete with flavors of the divine (*ras rasāl*), and singing them imbues the heart with divine color. The sabad emphasizes that har-ras must be drunk if one is to comprehend the divine.

> ਹਰਿ ਕੈ ਰੰਗਿ ਰਤਾ ਮਨੁ ਗਾਵੈ ਰਸਿ ਰਸਾਲ ਰਸਿ ਸਬਦੁ ਰਵਈਆ ॥
>
> ਨਿਜ ਘਰਿ ਧਾਰ ਚੁਐ ਅਤਿ ਨਿਰਮਲ ਜਿਨਿ ਪੀਆ ਤਿਨ ਹੀ ਸੁਖੁ ਲਹੀਆ ॥ (Guru Granth Sahib, 835)
>
> *Har kai rang ratā man gāvai, ras rasāl ras sabad ravaīā.*

> *Nij ghar dhār chūai att nirmal jin pīā tin hī sukh lahīā.*
>
> The heart is imbued with divine color, singing the sabad, by nature replete with ras.
>
> Within the body the stream flows, so pure; it is they who drank [har-ras] who have obtained peace.

Couplets from other sabad are interpolated time and again to intertextually intensify affect. The successive sabad that are sung have themes that form a cyclical affective pattern (as is often the case in such sessions). They build up from tender sentiments of love and comfort to a noble theme of truthfulness, then ramp up to more vigorous feelings of courage and valor, circle back to sentiments of love and comfort, and finally center on peace and calm. These are all flavors of har-ras, the culminating feeling being one of serenity and ease with the embodiment of the ethical attributes. This overall cyclical pattern of intensification in the session envelops the smaller cycles of intensification in each sabad. The collaboratively engendered intensifications strengthen the transmission and circulation of ras among the participants, drawing them out of their everyday, isolated individuality into the deeper co-participation and co-presence of the event. The repeated and nested ras-full cycles aid somatic enculturation, so that har-ras may become a mode of inhabiting this world.

Here, the generation of ras is clearly intersubjective and generated not just by musicians but by all participants and components of this rich phenomenal field. Ras comes from the scripture, sacred words, music, food, and all congregants. Importantly, these elements are mutually constituted as a meaningful totality and experienced as a unified whole. The congregant does not engage in an intellectualist process of projecting meaning on to each component as an individual, external phenomenon. The aural, visual, tactile, and gustatory sensations are meaningful as a co-constituted gestalt, and this unified whole is sensed as a unified experience through the motility of the unified lived body, not separately by the ears, eyes, hands, and so forth. It is this unified, interrelational experience that is ras.

The singing begins with a gentle, unmetered introductory couplet (see Video 2) before moving on to the first sabad, which is accompanied by joṛi drums and shakers.

> ਜਿਨ੍ਹ ਦਿਸੰਦੜਿਆ ਦੁਰਮਤਿ ਵੰਞੈ ਮਿਤ੍ਰ ਅਸਾਡੜੇ ਸੇਈ ॥
>
> ਹਉ ਢੂਢੇਦੀ ਜਗੁ ਸਬਾਇਆ ਜਨ ਨਾਨਕ ਵਿਰਲੇ ਕੇਈ ॥ (Guru Granth Sahib, 520)
>
> *Jinā disandaṛiā durmat vañai mitar asāḍaṛé séī.*
>
> *Hao ḍhūḍhédī jag sabāiā jan Nānak virlé kéī.*
>
> Seeing whom ill judgment leaves, true friends are they.
>
> I search the whole world over, says devotee Nanak, rare are they.

As is standard in AKJ kīrtan, the lead singer, Bhai Jagpal Singh, accompanies himself on the vājā. An accomplished musician of this style, he engages the congregants in call-and-response on each line of the refrain multiple times, taking a good eight minutes to slowly move through a gradual warm-up and culminating in the chanting of the divine name wāheguru. (See Video 2.)[24] His pacing of the energy build-up and relaxation within each cycle and across successive cycles, as well as the increase in the overall tempo of the performance, is smooth and achieved collaboratively with the extended ensemble. This virtuosically shaped intensity of musical experience is a key factor in the intensification of ras in the AKJ style.

The call-and-response that is a constant feature throughout the kīrtan is also a significant means of the co-generation of ras and the co-constitution of the phenomenal field. Particularly notable here is that the call-and-response form does not only take place in a unidirectional manner from the ensemble to the audience,

though that is its primary mode. These events also involve what I term here "call-and-response reversals" and "call-and-response shifts," which further distribute agency in the constitution of the phenomenal field. One way that call-and-response reversal often happens is in the initiation of the ecstatic wāheguru chant by someone in the extended ensemble who has reached a particularly ras-full stage, which the lead singer then follows. This can be seen in Video 3, which begins with a line initiated by the lead singer; immediately after, the congregation joins in and repeats the line responsorially. Towards the end of the responsorial singing, which occurs around thirteen seconds into the video, the congregant who is wearing the orange scarf and seated right behind the lead singer initiates the wāheguru chant. The lead singer responds by joining in, and the congregation follows suit. This reciprocity in leading and following is a powerful element in the intercorporeal co-constitution of ras-full bodies in congregation.

Video 3

[Video/Audio] available online

Call-and-response reversal in a kirtan session led by Bhai Jagpal Singh (with subtitles). Annual Akhand Keertan Samaagam, February 25, 2018, Gurdwara San Jose, San Jose, California. (Used with permission.)

The February 2018 kīrtan session was also rich in instances of call-and-response shifts, which I define as the transfer of the calling role from the lead singer to the drummer. In sabad kīrtan, the drummer is a key partner in the intensification process, offering up rhythmic patterns, dynamics, rhythmic densities, and tempi that complement the singer and shape the intensity of the event. This is especially so in the AKJ style, and in this context, it is natural that the drummer becomes moved to initiate calls sometimes. An instance of this occurs about half an hour into the February 2018 session, when the energy had built up quite a bit and the joṛi player had reached a stage of ras-fullness that yearns for the wāheguru chant. His intense affective state is expressed in his continuous playing of open-hand strokes on the bass drum, which occurs around 20 seconds into the video, and his interjection of "Pīā! Pīā!" (Drank! Drank [ras]!), which occurs at around forty-five seconds into the video, and these lead the congregation to launch into an ecstatic wāheguru chant (see Video 4). The lead singer is moved by this increased energy and the diffusion of har-ras to introduce a couplet from another sabad that speaks more explicitly to har-ras's ethical realm, infusing the congregation with sensations of divine ethical attributes.

Video 4

[Video/Audio] available online

Call-and-response shift in a kirtan session led by Bhai Jagpal Singh (with subtitles). Annual Akhand Keertan Samaagam, February 25, 2018, Gurdwara San Jose, San Jose, California. (Used with permission.)

> ਸੇ ਜਨ ਸਾਚੇ ਸਦਾ ਸਦਾ ਜਿਨੀ ਹਰਿ ਰਸੁ ਪੀਤਾ ॥
>
> ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਸਚਾ ਮਨਿ ਵਸੈ ਸਚੁ ਸਉਦਾ ਕੀਤਾ ॥ (Guru Granth Sahib, 955)
>
> *Se jan sāché sadā sadā jinī har ras pītā.*
>
> *Gurmukh sachā man vasai sach saudā kītā.*
>
> They are forever truthful, who have drunk har-ras.
>
> The Divine/Truth dwells in the heart of the Guru-oriented; they have struck the true bargain.

The kīrtan session proceeds in ebbs and flows of intensity, and the congregation seems to be, in the words of one of my interlocutors, drenched in ras. This ras, however, does not just come from the musical sound or from human musicking. All constituent elements in the event, human and non-human, are agentive. The sung sacred texts, for example, bring the Guru's revered message, along with a shared phonetic, corporeal force, especially during the wāheguru chant, deepening the intercorporeal reciprocity in the ras experience. The presiding Guru Granth Sahib brings into the event the phenomenal presence of the late human Gurus and the scriptural Guru, along with historical memory and aspirations, infusing sacred ethical flavors into the ras. The warm parshād, made with ras offerings from the congregants, gently releases its sweet aroma, reinforcing the har-ras experience with an olfactory presence of the sacred. At the end of the kīrtan, congregants will eat this parshad, savoring its taste, and through this gustatory action physically ingesting har-ras. After the worship session, congregants will share a langar also prepared with ras offerings and voluntary labor from the congregation—another act of corporeal ingestion of divine ethical flavors. What we see here is what Berger has called the "traffic and transformation" of meaning across different elements of an experiential field (2009, 43). Here, the presence of noema (entities in experience) with particular affective valences shapes the affective quality of the participant's noesis (the process of constituting experience). The various noema in the sabad kīrtan setting are rich in the affective valences of har-ras and reinforce each other in the constituted experience. Affective qualities, which are included in the category of meaning contents, can further expand into "disposition[s] … a tendency to think, act, or feel in a certain way" (Berger 2009, 45). In the kīrtan context, the semantic meanings of the sacred text provide critical "affirmations" (45) of the ethical aptitude that Sikhs hope will become part of their everyday inhabitation

of the lived social and political world outside of the worship setting. These differing but interrelated realms of life are what I am calling overlapping phenomenal fields.

Ras in Overlapping Phenomenal Fields

> "If my son has vīr-ras, school bullying will not crush him."
>
> Pritipal Singh (personal communication, San Jose, California, 2006)
>
> "The body is the vehicle of being in the world, and having a body is, for a living creature, to be intervolved in a definite environment, to identify oneself with certain projects and be continually committed to them."
>
> Merleau-Ponty ([1945] 2002, 94)

> ਨਉ ਨਿਧਿ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤੁ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਕਾ ਨਾਮੁ ॥ ਦੇਹੀ ਮਹਿ ਇਸ ਕਾ ਬਿਸ੍ਰਾਮੁ ॥
>
> Guru Granth Sahib ([1604] 1708, 293)

> *Nao nidh amrit prabh kā nām. Déhī meh is kā bisrām.*
>
> Full of [ethical] treasures is the ambrosial nectar of the divine name.
>
> In the body is its place of dwelling.

More than just a concept for explaining the aesthetics of musical performance or the experience of worship services, ras has a direct role in daily life. I would suggest that, for the parent quoted above, if one's body, which is the vehicle of being in the world, is a ras-full one, one imbued with vīr-ras, its "intervolvement" with a challenging environment (i.e., its involvement in and co-existence with a particular social situation) becomes automatically committed to a project of resilience. Vīr-ras becomes an integral part of the unified body, through which the world is experienced and lived. In a body imbued with vir-ras, ras is not engaged as a deliberated act but rather as automatic, operative intentionality—that is, the process by which one's pre-reflexive embodied consciousness engages directly with others and the world.

For Sikhs, vīr-ras is linked particularly to the memory of Guru Gobind Singh, who is remembered for his bravery in upholding freedom of faith at great cost to his family members' lives and his own at the hands of an oppressive political regime.[25] For most Sikhs, and particularly the AKJ members, embodying the articles of faith instituted by Guru Gobind Singh, and the ethic of being a saint-soldier (*sant-sipāhi*) modelled by him, are significant aspects of the phenomenal field in which a Sikh ras-full sensorium is nurtured. The embodiment of this ethic is enabled by the initiation ceremony known as *amrit sanchār* (lit. transmission of the nectar of immortality), which was begun by Guru Gobind Singh in 1699 in the month of *Vaisakh* (April/May) and subsequently celebrated as *Vaisakhi*. In the ceremony, *amrit* (sacralized sweetened water) is prepared by five deeply spiritual Sikhs, known as the "five beloved" (*panj pyāré*) and sprinkled on the initiate, as well as given to them to drink. The experience of imbibing amrit is also an experience of ras, as indicated by one of my interlocutors, a millennial raised in a devout Sikh family in California. During our conversation on the experience of ras in kīrtan participation, she related the following to me:

> The most powerful experience of simran [wāheguru chants] 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 pyāré. 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.

Adherence to the articles of faith has not been easy for Sikhs, either in India or the diaspora. In post-9/11 America, the turban and beard have become for some outside the Sikh faith the image of terrorism in the name of religion. Sikh males with turbans and beards have continued to face acts of hate, from school bullying, hate speech, vandalism, and physical assaults, to fatal gun violence.[26] The quote above from my interlocutor on the importance of instilling his child with vir-ras indicates how historical memory of courage against injustice links with future aspirations for a just lived world; how this link is maintained via ritual practices, including musical worship; and how the ras experienced in a rousing kīrtan session is not merely a detached aesthetic response but a way of developing a ras-full sensorium that carries over productively to another phenomenal field, that of the lived everyday social and political world. In Berger's theory of stance, the affective, aesthetic, or valual quality with which a person engages expressive practices are not only contained within the performance event itself; rather, "the meanings of [such] practice[s] often flow across the boundaries between domains" (2009, 99). The "stance-on-power" (111) that emerges in experiences of expressive culture, its ideology with respect to social power differentials, can therefore become embodied in one's bearing in the everyday, especially when that stance is the very spirit of one's culture.

In the kīrtan session I have been describing, vīr-ras is strongly foregrounded during the third quarter of the performance. By this point, the energy level among the participants has built up considerably. Using a series of excerpts from Guru Gobind Singh's sabad, along with historical references to valor and resilience, the musicking becomes more vigorous, loud, and emphatic. The drummer employs open-hand bass-drum strokes repeatedly. The participants reach a stage of peaked vīr-ras (see Video 5) when the singer evokes a deeply poignant memory of the injustice of the killing of all of Guru Gobind Singh's four children and follows it with a roaring rendition of the call of the Sikh call-and-response battle cry—*Jo Bole So Nihal* (The one who speaks up is exalted). The congregation offers, with equal enthusiasm, the response part—*Sat Sri Akal* (Truth is Eternal). This leads to an energetic and ecstatic wāheguru chant in a high vocal register matching that of the battle cry.

Video 5

[Video/Audio] available online

Vir-ras in a kirtan session led by Bhai Jagpal Singh (with subtitles). Annual Akhand Keertan Samaagam, February 25, 2018, Gurdwara San Jose, San Jose, California. (Used with permission.)

Participation and immersion in such an affectively rich, intersubjective phenomenal field transforms the participants' sensoria. As Husserl argued, the body is "a localization field for sensations and for stirrings of feelings, [a] complex of sense organs, and [a] phenomenal partner and counterpart of all perceptions of things" ([1952] 1989, 165). The immersive phenomenal field changes the participants' way of inhabiting the

world, of perceiving and experiencing the world. In the case of vir-ras, it creates conditions of possibilities for the body to experience emotionally and physically traumatic events with less emotional and psychological harm. It provides greater agency in shaping what Husserl ([1954] 1970) would call their "lifeworlds" (*Lebenswelten*); it opens up avenues of enaction.

The ras that is experienced in a phenomenal field is not merely a sum of individual responses to discrete stimuli from their constituent elements. Individual sensations are simultaneously in conversation with the whole. The interactive mutualities have an amplified affect that is presented as a comprehensive feeling in a unified body. One's experience of ras thus makes explicit one's awareness of the body as an integrated whole, not an aggregate of parts. The perception of ras is also the perception of the body in the world. Integrated in the body's motor intentionalities, ras is co-constitutive of the subject and of a particular kind of intersubjectivity, both in everyday life and musical worship. In this way, ras reveals ontological and ethical entanglements, which are involved in the making of the subject and its pre-reflexive ethical engagement in the lived world. Through these operative somatic intentionalities, ras reveals an ontology of the self and of ethics, and it reveals self-knowledge. In Merleau-Ponty's words, "remaking contact with the body and with the world, we shall also rediscover ourself, since, perceiving as we do with our body, the body is a natural self, and, as it were, the subject of perception" ([1945] 2002, 239). A lived life of constant rediscovery is what the sabad encourage. As one of the sabad states:

> ਏ ਸਰੀਰਾ ਮੇਰਿਆ ਇਸੁ ਜਗ ਮਹਿ ਆਇ ਕੈ ਕਿਆ ਤੁਧੁ ਕਰਮ ਕਮਾਇਆ ॥
>
> . . .
>
> ਜਿਨਿ ਹਰਿ ਤੇਰਾ ਰਚਨੁ ਰਚਿਆ ਸੋ ਹਰਿ ਮਨਿ ਨ ਵਸਾਇਆ ॥ (Guru Granth Sahib, 922)
>
> *É sarīrā mériā is jag meh āé kai kiā tudh karam kamāiā.*
>
> . . .
>
> *Jin har térā rachan rachiā so har man na vasāiā.*
>
> O body mine, having come into this world, what [ethical] actions have you enacted?
>
> . . .
>
> The divine that constituted you, you have not enshrined in your heart.

If Sikh congregants believe that kīrtan is a means of experiencing the divine, perhaps it can be said that ras, as a coming together in a phenomenal field, is experienced as a union with something larger than all constituent elements—something that feels like divine essence (har-ras). Seen in this way, ras is central to both Sikh ontologies and epistemologies.

Concluding Remarks

Based on an investigation of ras in the Sikh musical worship context, I have theorized it in reference to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception as an interrelational experience that becomes emergent in a phenomenal field co-constituted by people, objects, sound, food, ideas, memory, and aspirations. Ras has epistemic value for gaining knowledge of self, community, and the divine. Ras also has a temporal dimension that accretes in the body and becomes productive in the overlapping phenomenal fields of everyday social and political life. Ras is thus ontologically informative, revealing our being in the world.

In their overview of phenomenological approaches in anthropology, Robert Desjarlais and Jason Throop ask, "What is the relation between the phenomenal and the discursive—between, that is, experience, being, and sensate perception, on the one hand, and language, aesthetic and rhetorical forms, and communicative practices more generally on the other hand?" (2011, 97). My ethnographic research on ras in Sikh philosophy and practice suggests deep connections between such categories.

Ras is in text and language, as much as in musical sound, food, and the experiencing human body, and it moves synergistically between such domains. As a flow in a phenomenal field, ras cuts through binaries such as mind/body, imaginary/material, word/affect, text/orality, ocular/aural, music/context, and theory/practice. The continuities of ras draw attention to the futility of hard analytical boundaries and caution us against those forms of analytical over-correction that would, for example, privilege body over mind, sound over other sense modalities, or orality over text.

Ras also seeps from aesthetic and communicative practices into the concerns and contingencies that make up people's everyday lifeworlds—concerns and contingencies that have intertwined within them not only issues of aesthetics and emotions but also questions of ethics and morality, spirituality, and politics. This seepage is consciously supported in the Sikh context by the valorization of the ethic of *mīrī-pīrī* (lit. temporal-spiritual engagement), which urges us to attend to both the spiritual and the political in everyday life. Thus, the spiritual ras of har-ras and amrit-ras are experienced in relation to the ethical-political ras of vīr-ras. The spiritual ras of amrit-ras itself crosses these realms seamlessly, with its connotations of ethical purity and temporal longevity. Amrit literally means "that which does not die" (the prefix *a-* indicates negation and *mrit* means "dead") and indexes truth as eternal. Ras therefore links the sacred and the secular, and the past and the future, through the body's motor intentionalities and habits. In explicating the nature of ras in Sikh musical worship, I hope to have contributed fruitfully not only to ongoing conversations on rasa more broadly but also to work in phenomenological ethnomusicology and anthropology that seeks to understand how being-in-the-world is conditioned by musically engendered structures of experience, how knowledge is produced through this being-in-the-world as a lived reality, and how this knowledge is put back into world-making.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the Akhand Kirtani Jatha organization for the use of their video recording on the *Oxford Handbooks* website. These recordings, which I have edited and subtitled, help considerably to drive home the points I have sought to make here. I am thankful to AKJ member Nirmaljot Singh, who kindly helped in a number of ways that were extremely valuable. I would also like to express my gratitude to the editors of this volume, especially Harris Berger and an anonymous reader, for their very helpful comments on this essay.

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Notes

1 In Southeast Asia too, rasa is an important aesthetic principle, with its own specificities, of course. See, for example, Becker (1993), Weiss (2003), and Benamou (2010).

2 My fieldwork was undertaken in India, the United States, and the United Kingdom and spanned the period from 2004 to 2018. In its most concentrated form, the fieldwork was undertaken in 2014 and 2015 in the greater San Francisco Bay Area.

3 Sikh scriptures are compilations of thousands of canonized songs and do not contain prose.

4 This is the dominant flavor of the non-scriptural heroic narrative songs (*ḍhāḍī vār*), which are most often sung on celebratory occasions to remember a history of oppression, resistance, and resilience, and infuse feelings of *jōsh* (zeal)

and *chardi kalā* (optimism and high spiritedness) in the community. For a brief description of ḍhāḍī vār, see Kaur (2019a). Vīr rasa, along with *karūṇa* ("sad") rasa, is also an aesthetic in Hindu nationalistic kīrtan (Schultz 2013, 127–130).

5 All song quotes in this chapter are from the Sikh scripture, Guru Granth Sahib. All translations are my own interpretations. The English transliterations are adapted from the website "Sri Granth: A Sri Guru Granth Sahib Search Engine and Resource" (SriGranth.org).

6 On the transduction of sound into embodied energy, see Silverstein (2003), Henriques (2003), Helmreich (2015), Eidsheim (2015), Kapchan (2017), Eisenlohr (2018), and Kaur (2021). Here, I emphasize that serene experiences may also be highly intense ones. For a discussion of the coexistence of serenity and intensity in lived experience, see Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's work on flow states (1990).

7 The *Nātyashāsthra* is a treatise on dramaturgy that was written roughly at the turn of the Common Era. Its author, Bharata, presented a classificatory scheme of eight rasa and the *bhāva* (emotions) that undergird it. The eight types of rasa are *shringāra* (erotic), *hāsya* (comic), *karūna* (pathetic), *raudra* (furious), *vīra* (heroic), *bhayanaka* (terrible), *bibhatsa* (disgusting), and *adbhūta* (wondrous). Around the tenth century CE, the aesthetician Abhinavagupta elaborated on this work in the *Abhinavabhāratī*, providing a detailed theoretical explanation and adding the ninth form of rasa, that of *shānta* (peaceful). For an English translation of the *Nātyashāsthra*, see Bharata Muni (1950). For an English translation of the *Nātyashāsthra*, along with the commentary in the *Abhinavabhāratī*, see Ghosh (2006).

8 Some detailed theoretical discussions include those by van der Meer (1980), Rowell (1992), and Rao (2000).

9 In the context of Javanese musical performance, Judith Becker (1993) explicates that the Javanese aesthetics of rasa is related to the ancient Indian Tantric notions of rasa; Weiss (2003) argues that Javanese ideas of embodiment can explain how musicians make their performance rasa-full; and Mark Benamou (2010) offers a detailed ethnographic study, investigating the complex terminology and meanings related to rasa, their musical contexts, and what musicians feel about the relationship of rasa to performance.

10 Discussing Southeast Asian music, Weiss similarly explains, "In the course of this article, I will suggest that for a Javanese performance to be assessed as convincing, effective, or full of rasa, something from inside the performer(s)—some mixture of uninhibited emotion and deep knowledge (both terms associated with the word rasa)—must be felt by the performers and, *subsequently*, by the audience" (2003, 23; italics added).

11 An issue related to ethics should be mentioned here, though a detailed discussion of it is beyond the scope of this chapter. In Bharata's *Nātyashāsthra*, the ability to savor rasa is reserved for those of "high birth" (Higgins 2007, 46). Combined with the conceptualization of rasa as the experience of the universal spirit through the loss of ego due to unity with the aesthetic object, a view which is found in the *Abhinavabhāratī*, this stipulation of high birth reinforces the Brahminical caste system, which ontologically and epistemologically denies the experience of the divine to a large part of society. Like other vernacular faith traditions in India, Sikhī (Sikhism) arose as a protest against Brahminical systems of social hierarchy. Sikh philosophy explicitly accords to all the potential of ras and divine experience, and emphasizes that feelings of social supremacy and hierarchy eliminate the possibility of experiencing har-ras and the divine.

12 The *Nātyashāsthra* does not comment on the relationship of ras to ethics. The *Abhinavabhāratī* adds the notion of the universalization of the spirit during the rasa experience, but this is seen as transcendence and is not related to everyday life. See also the ethical issues mentioned in footnote 12.

13 From his various examples, I chose to use the one relating to color, since the notion of imbuing the body with the color (*rang*) of the divine is significant in Sikh sacred songs, and Merleau-Ponty's arguments apply well to the experience of rang, as well as ras. In fact, rang is another widely used aesthetic principle in Indian expressive culture.

14 Merleau-Ponty's remarks assumes, of course, that the subject has had previous experiences of landscapes in their visual, olfactory, and tactile dimensions. The same assumption goes for the perception of the woolly redness of the carpet (i.e., that one has had a tactile experience of its wooliness and the muted sound of, say, one's footsteps upon it).

15 For a DVD of this program, see Kaur (2005).

16 For a discussion of the multiple sensory modalities that come into play in experiences at Sikh gurdwāray, and their affordances, see Kaur (2019b).

17 For a discussion of the different musical styles of Sikh kīrtan and the congregants' stance toward them, see Kaur (2016).

18 The most revered Sikh gurdwāra, Harmandir Sahib in Amritsar, Punjab, which is commonly known as the "Golden Temple," is the model of this ethic. It has a daily estimated attendance of about 50,000 people from all social backgrounds.

19 Some gurdwāray divide the area where the congregants sit by gender, so that on crowded occasions women and men can avoid sitting knee-to-knee.

20 For a discussion of "audiencing" as aural-visual engagement, see Kaur (2019b).

21 Each weekday at the Golden Temple, for example, 40,000 to 80,000 people eat at the langar hall, which serves langar around the clock. The number doubles on weekends, and even more are present on holidays. For a video of the langar at the Golden Temple, see "Best Ever" (2018).

22 See, for example, *Tacoma Daily Index* (2019) and Roy (2020).

23 A nearly ten-hour recording of the all-night kīrtan can be viewed on YouTube (see AKG.Org 2018). The hour-and-a-half long session I am describing here begins four hours, thirty-three minutes, and thirty-eight seconds into the video. Video 1 on the *Oxford Handbooks* website presents the entire hour-and-a-half session from that video and is used by permission. Videos 2–5 on the *Oxford Handbooks* website present short excerpts from this session. I have subtitled these clips with translations of the sabad, since the sacred texts are a critical part of the phenomenal field.

24 Video 2 splices segments from the first eight-minute cycle into a two-and-a-half-minute clip.

25 In the Sikh tradition, the ḍhāḍī vār (non-scriptural songs of heroism and resistance) are a key musical mode of transmission of these historical narratives.

26 See, for example, SALDEF and Stanford University Peace and Innovation Lab (2013).