

A Talent for Gurbani

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Priya Tiwari, 12, Annie Roy, 15, and Mithu Roy Choudhury, 35, are all practicing for a talent hunt show. They sit demurely, their heads covered with a dupatta. This is no ordinary contest. It's the Gurmat Sangeet Competition and the contenders sing the Gurbani, the holy verses of *Guru Granth Sahib*. What's more interesting is that all the above competitors are non-Sikh.

The competition, whose final will be in December, is organized by The Sikh Heritage International (TSHI), which held the preliminary round on September 24. The idea behind the competition is to create awareness about *Shri Guru Granth Sahibji*. "To draw the young crowd, you have to think of innovative ways. At the initial stage, we thought of music, which attracts all," says Satnam S. Ahluwalia, chairman, TSHI. Along with Sikh participants, there was huge response from non-Sikh communities too.

The Guru Granth Sahib includes 5,894 *shabads* (hymns and holy verses) arranged in 31 *ragas*. All participants were asked to sing one *raga*.

"My passion for singing Gurbani made me participate," says Annie, a student of class nine, Khalsa Senior Secondary School, Dunlop. "After school, I requested my music teacher to teach me different *shabads*," she adds. Mithu, who teaches commerce at Khalsa English High School, Bhawanipur says, "I simply love singing *shabads* in the evenings. Though I have no professional training in music, I frequently visit Gurdwaras. I can even read Gurmukhi." Hindustani Classical teacher Ratna Roy, 60 is slightly nervous about the contest, "I cut a Gurbani album in 1991. I never got huge support from my family but continued singing and plan to do in future too," says Roy.

Out of 200 candidates, 35 were selected for the second round, which begins in December. Those associated with the projects include music composer Uttam Singh, ghazal singer Ashok Khosla and Dr. Gurnam Singh, head of Gurmat Sangeet Chair, Punjabi University, Patiala.

The finalists will perform in Five Thakts, along with a live show at Calcutta Maidan during Guru Gobind Singh's birth anniversary on January 5, 2007.

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