

# Concept of “Seva” in Sikhism

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# Definition

- Seva versus Service
  - Service smacks of
    - Job done for wages
    - Ceremonial functions
    - Philanthropic assistance or offering
  - Seva Reflects
    - Labor of love
    - Being available
- Twin meaning of Seva from Sanskrit root “sev”
  - To serve, wait or attend upon
  - To honor, revere or worship
- As per Traditional Hindu Society
  - Homoheirarchicus
  - Worship reserved for Brahmins. Revered.
  - Service (described as menial) reserved for shudras (despised)

## “Seva” as per Gurmat

- Both functions (serve and worship) combined
  - Worship that does not become work is fake
  - Work that does not become worship is in vain
- No worship is conceivable without seva

ਗੁਰੁ ਸੇਵਾ ਬਿਨੁ ਭਗਤਿ ਨ ਹੋਈ ॥

Without serving the Guru, there is no devotional worship,

- Prabhati Bibhas m.1 p.1342

- All forms of worship are covered by seva

ਪੂਜਾ ਅਰਚਾ ਸੇਵਾ ਬੰਦਨ ਇਹੈ ਟਹਲ ਮੋਹਿ ਕਰਨਾ ॥

ਬਿਗਸੈ ਮਨੁ ਹੋਵੈ ਪਰਗਾਸਾ ਬਹੁਰਿ ਨ ਗਰਭੈ ਪਰਨਾ ॥੧॥

This is the service which I perform: worship, flower-offerings, labour of love and devotion.

My mind blossoms forth and is enlightened, and I am not cast into the womb again.

- Devgandhari m.5 p.531

## Characteristics of Seva

- Seva is work out of dedication, for no reward apart from itself –

ਸੇਵਾ ਕਰਤ ਹੋਇ ਨਿਹਕਾਮੀ ॥

One who performs selfless service, without thought of reward,

- Sukhmami Gauri m.5 p.286

- It is a Divine gift.

He performs His own service and inspires us to do so.

ਆਪਣੀ ਆਪਿ ਕਰੇ ਪਰਤੀਤਿ ਆਪੇ ਸੇਵ ਘਾਲੀਅਨੁ ॥

He inspires us to place our faith in Him, thus performs His Own Service.

- Siri rag m.4 p.90

ਤੁਮ ਲਾਵਹੁ ਤਉ ਲਾਗਹ ਸੇਵ । ਹਮ ਤੇ ਕਛੁ ਨ ਹੋਵੈ ਦੇਵ ।

If You assign me, I render you service,

By myself, Lord, I cannot do anything. – Gauri Guareri m.5 p.18

## Characteristics of Seva (contd)

- It is the highest austerity (Tap)

ਗੁਰੁ ਸੇਵਾ ਤਪਾਂ ਸਿਰਿ ਤਪੁ ਸਾਰੁ ॥

Service of the Guru\_ is the most sublime. - Asa m.3 p.423

It is the only aproved austerity

ਸਤਿਗੁਰੁ ਕੀ ਸੇਵਾ ਇਹੁ ਤਪੁ ਪਰਵਾਣੁ ॥

Serving the True Guru is the only acceptable austerity. - Var Ramkali m.3 p.948

- It is not thrust upon you, it has to be begged.

ਸੇਵਾ ਮੰਗੈ ਸੇਵਕੋ ਲਾਈਆਂ ਅਪੁਨੀ ਸੇਵ ॥

Your servant begs to serve those who are enjoined to Your service.

- Siri rag m.5 p.43

It has to be faithfully carried out, not grudgingly tolerated.

## Characteristics of Seva (contd)

- It is one of the *three pillars* of spiritual practice (others being Nam and Simran)

ਹਿਕੁ ਸੇਵੀ ਹਿਕੁ ਸੰਮਲਾ ਹਰਿ ਇਕਸੁ ਪਹਿ ਅਰਦਾਸਿ ॥

I *serve* the One Lord, I contemplate the One Lord, and to the One Lord, I offer my prayer.

-Var Jaitsari m.5 p.710

Also:

Nam, *Dan*, Ishnan and

Kirt karna, Nam japna, *Vand ke chhakna*

## Characteristics of Seva (contd)

- It is egalitarian in spirit

Everyone is welcome to volunteer; none is barred. Anyone and everyone may be served, because God is in everyone.

ਹਰਿ ਹਰਿ ਸੇਵਕੁ ਸੇਵਾ ਲਾਗੈ ਸਭੁ ਦੇਖੈ ਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਪਸਾਰੇ ॥

The servant of the Lord, is committed to His service;  
He sees God pervading the entire universe.

- Nat m.4 p.982

However,

ਜਿਸ ਕੈ ਮਸਤਕਿ ਕਰਮੁ ਹੋਇ ਸੋ ਸੇਵਾ ਲਾਗਾ ॥

One who has good karma inscribed upon his forehead,  
He only commits himself to the Lord's service.

-Var Ramkali m.5 p.964

Yet, millions are there to serve Him:

ਕੋਟਿ ਜਨਾ ਕਰਿ ਸੇਵ ਲਗਾਇਆ ਜੀਉ .

You have engaged millions of people in Your Service.

- Gauri Majh m.5 p.216

But who serves and who is served?

ਆਪੇ ਠਾਕੁਰੁ ਆਪੇ ਸੇਵਕੁ ਆਪਿ ਬਨਾਵੈ ਭਾਤੀ ॥

He Himself is the Master, and He Himself is the servant;  
He Himself creates the variety (of Creation).

– Dhanasri m.4 p.668

## Characteristics of Seva (contd)

- It establishes dignity of labour.

Unlike the Hindu system, one who serves is considered honourable

ਆਦਰੁ ਦਿਤਾ ਪਾਰਬ੍ਰਹਮਿ ਗੁਰੁ ਸੇਵਿਆ ਸਤ ਭਾਇ ਜੀਉ ॥੪॥

The Supreme Lord confers honor and respect on those who serve the Guru with true love.

– Suhi m.5 p.760

Not just serving the Guru, serving even the 'lowest' of men:

ਜਨ ਨਾਨਕੁ ਤਿਸ ਕੇ ਚਰਨ ਪਖਾਲੈ ਜੋ ਹਰਿ ਜਨੁ ਨੀਚੁ ਜਾਤਿ ਸੇਵਕਾਣੁ ॥੪॥੪॥

Servant Nanak washes the feet of that humble servant of God; who serves even the low caste people.  
-Gond m.4 p.861.

In fact, the Lord confers robe of honour on one who serves, blends him with Himself, and dignifies him in the world.

ਪਹਿਰਿ ਸਿਰਪਾਉ ਸੇਵਕ ਜਨ ਮੇਲੇ ਨਾਨਕ ਪ੍ਰਗਟ ਪਹਾਰੇ ॥੨॥੨੯॥੯੩॥

He dressed me in robes of honor, and blended His servant with Himself;

Nanak is revealed in glory throughout the world

–Sorath m.5 p.631.

Those who serve not only are great themselves, they redeem others as well.

ਸਤਿਗੁਰੁ ਸੇਵਹਿ ਸੇ ਮਹਾ ਪੁਰਖ ਸੰਸਾਰੇ ॥ ਆਪਿ ਉਧਰੇ ਕੁਲ ਸਗਲ ਨਿਸਤਾਰੇ .

Those who serve the True Guru are the greatest people of the world.

They save themselves, and they redeem all their generations as well

-Gauri Guareri m.3 p.161

## Characteristics of Seva (contd)

- Eradication of Haumai is essential for Seva\_

ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਕੀ ਸੇਵਾ ਸੋ ਕਰੇ ਜਿਸੁ ਬਿਨਸੈ ਹਉਮੈ ਤਾਪੁ ॥

One can serve the True Guru only when the fever of egotism has been eradicated.

- Sri rag m.5 p.45

So too is required eradiction of pride and arrogance

ਮਾਨ ਅਭਿਮਾਨ ਮੰਧੇ ਸੋ ਸੇਵਕੁ ਨਾਹੀ ॥

One who is influenced by pride and conceit is not God's servant.

- Sri rag m.5p.51

## Characteristics of Seva (contd)

- It has a collective more than an individual profile

Organization of *san\_gat* and *pan\_gat*.

ਸਾਧਸੰਗਤਿ ਕੈ ਘਰਿ ਵਸੈ ਏਕੋ ਸਚਾ ਸੋਇ ॥੧॥

In the Company of the Holy, the One True Lord abides

- Srirag m.5 p.44.

- Seva versus Dan

Seva is the ideal, dan is the means

Seva becomes collective, dan by and large remains individual

Dan is centered on the need of others, seva irrespective of it.

ਲੰਗਰੁ ਚਲੈ ਗੁਰ ਸਬਦਿ ਹਰਿ ਤੋਟਿ ਨ ਆਵੀ ਖਟੀਐ ॥

The Langar runs on the Guru's word and its supplies never run short.

-Var Ramkali Balvand & Satta p.967

# Numinous Relations of Seva

## Relation with Naam

- Through Seva Naam comes to dwell in the miind

ਏਹਾ ਸੇਵਾ ਚਾਕਰੀ ਨਾਮੁ ਵਸੈ ਮਨਿ ਆਇ .

By this work and service, the Naam shall come to dwell within the mind.

-Sri rag m.3 p.34

ਗੁਰੁ ਸੇਵਾ ਤੇ ਹਰਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਪਾਇਆ ਬਿਨੁ ਸਤਿਗੁਰੁ ਕੋਇ ਨ ਪਾਵਣਿਆ ॥੧॥

Serving the Guru, the Lord's Name is obtained. Without the True Guru, no one can receive it.

-Majh m.3 p.116

- Nam aids seva by eradicating haumai

ਮੁਕਤੇ ਸੇਵੇ ਮੁਕਤਾ ਹੋਵੈ ॥ ਹਉਮੈ ਮਮਤਾ ਸਬਦੇ ਖੋਵੈ ॥

ਅਨਦਿਨੁ ਹਰਿ ਜੀਉ ਸਚਾ ਸੇਵੀ ਪੂਰੈ ਭਾਗਿ ਗੁਰੁ ਪਾਵਣਿਆ ।

Serving the Master of Liberation, liberation is achieved.

The Shabd eradicates egotism and possessiveness. So serve the True Lord, night and day. By perfect good luck, the Guru is found.

-Majh m.3 p.116

## Numinous Relations of Seva (contd)

### Relation with Shabd

- Through seva one gets shaped by Shabd

ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਸੇਵਾ ਘਾਲਿ ਜਿਨਿ ਘਾਲੀ ॥

ਤਿਸੁ ਘੜੀਐ ਸਬਦੁ ਸਚੀ ਟਕਸਾਲੀ ॥

Whoever, as Gurmukh, serves and works hard,  
is shaped in the true mint of the Shabd.

- Bhairo m.4 p.1134

- Seva comes by reflecting on Shabd

ਸੇਵਾ ਸੁਰਤਿ ਸਬਦਿ ਵੀਚਾਰਿ ॥ ਜਪੁ ਤਪੁ ਸੰਜਮੁ ਹਉਮੈ ਮਾਰਿ ॥

ਜੀਵਨ ਮੁਕਤੁ ਜਾ ਸਬਦੁ ਸੁਣਾਏ ॥ ਸਚੀ ਰਹਤ ਸਚਾ ਸੁਖੁ ਪਾਏ ॥੭॥

Selfless service and intuitive awareness come by reflecting upon the Shabd.  
Chanting the Nam, intensive meditation and austere self-discipline come by subduing  
the ego.

One becomes *Jivan-mukta* by listening to the Shabd.

Living a truthful way of life, one finds true peace. || 7 ||

- Prabhati m.1 p.1343

## Numinous Relations of Seva (contd)

### Relation with Hukam

ਕਾਟਿ ਸਿਲਕ ਪ੍ਰਭਿ ਸੇਵਾ ਲਾਇਆ ॥ ਹੁਕਮੁ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਕਾ ਸੇਵਕ ਮਨਿ ਭਾਇਆ ॥

ਸੋਈ ਕਮਾਵੈ ਜੋ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਭਾਵੈ ਸੇਵਕੁ ਅੰਤਰਿ ਬਾਹਰਿ ਮਾਹਰੁ ਜੀਉ ॥੨॥

God has cut the noose from around my neck and placed me in His Service. The Master's Command is pleasing to His servant's mind. He does that which pleases his Master. Inwardly and outwardly, the servant knows his Lord.

- Majh m.5 p.101

## Whom To Serve

- Only the Lord God

ਹਰਿ ਤੁਧੁ ਬਾਝੁ ਮੈ ਕੋਈ ਨਾਹੀ ॥ ਹਰਿ ਤੁਧੈ ਸੇਵੀ ਤੈ ਤੁਧੁ ਸਾਲਾਹੀ ॥

Other than You, Lord, nothing is mine. I serve You, Lord, and I praise You.

-Majh m.3 p.112

ਸਚਾ ਸੇਵਹਿ ਸਚੁ ਕਮਾਵਹਿ ਸਚੇ ਸਚੁ ਕਮਾਵਣਿਆ ।

They serve the True One, practice Truth; and earn only Truth.

- Majh m.3 p.116

- The Guru\_

ਕਿਸੁ ਹਉ ਸੇਵੀ ਕਿਆ ਜਪੁ ਕਰੀ ਸਤਗੁਰ ਪੁਛਉ ਜਾਇ ॥

ਸਤਗੁਰ ਕਾ ਭਾਣਾ ਮੰਨਿ ਲਈ ਵਿਚਹੁ ਆਪੁ ਗਵਾਇ ॥

Whom shall I serve? What shall I chant? I will go and ask the Guru.

I will accept the Will of the True Guru, and eradicate my 'self' from within.

- Sri rag m.3 p.34

ਗੁਰ ਤੇ ਸਾਚੀ ਸੇਵਾ ਹੋਇ ॥

Through the Guru, true service is performed.

- Gauri m.3 p.158

## Whom To Serve (contd)

ਤਿਸੁ ਗੁਰ ਕਉ ਸਦ ਬਲਿਹਾਰਣੈ ਜਿਨਿ ਹਰਿ ਸੇਵਾ ਬਣਤ ਬਣਾਈ ॥

I am forever a sacrifice to that Guru, who has led me to serve the Lord.

-Var Vadhan\_s m.4 p.588

ਹਉ ਸਤਿਗੁਰੁ ਸੇਵੀ ਆਪਣਾ ਇਕ ਮਨਿ ਇਕ ਚਿਤਿ ਭਾਇ ॥

I serve my True Guru with single-minded devotion,  
and lovingly focus my consciousness on Him.

-Sri rag m.3 p.26

ਸਤਗੁਰ ਕੀ ਸੇਵਾ ਗਾਖੜੀ ਸਿਰੁ ਦੀਜੈ ਆਪੁ ਗਵਾਇ ॥

It is very difficult to serve the True Guru.

for you have to render your head; give up your 'self'.

- Sri rag m.3 p.27

ਸਤਗੁਰ ਕੀ ਸੇਵਾ ਅਤਿ ਸੁਖਾਲੀ ਜੋ ਇਛੇ ਸੋ ਫਲੁ ਪਾਏ ॥

Serving the True Guru brings great comfort,  
and whatever one desires is fulfilled.

- Sri rag m.3 p.31

- *Harjan* – God's servant

ਹਰਿ ਜਨ ਕੀ ਸੇਵਾ ਜੋ ਕਰੇ ਇਤ ਉਤਹਿ ਛੂਟੈ ॥

Whoever serves the humble servants of the Lord,  
is emancipated here and hereafter.

- Bilaval m.5 p.811

## Types of Seva

ਅਨਿਕ ਭਾਂਤਿ ਕਰਿ ਸੇਵਾ ਕਰੀਐ ॥ਜੀਉ ਪ੍ਰਾਨ ਧਨੁ ਆਗੈ ਧਰੀਐ ॥

ਪਾਨੀ ਪਖਾ ਕਰਉ ਤਜਿ ਅਭਿਮਾਨੁ ॥ਅਨਿਕ ਬਾਰ ਜਾਈਐ ਕੁਰਬਾਨੁ ॥

Serve Him in many different ways;

Dedicate your soul, your breath of life and your wealth to Him.

Carry water for Him, and wave the fan over Him - renounce your ego.

Time and again, be a sacrifice unto Him.

– Asa m.5 p.391

ਮਨੁ ਤਨੁ ਅਰਪੀ ਸੇਵ ਕਰੀਜੈ ॥

Dedicates your mind and body to servethe Lord. -Gauri guareri m.5 p.181

ਨੇਤ੍ਰੁ ਪੁਨੀਤ ਭਏ ਦਰਸੁ ਪੇਖੇ ਹਸਤ ਪੁਨੀਤ ਟਹਲਾਵਾ ।

ਰਿਦਾ ਪੁਨੀਤ ਰਿਦੈ ਹਰਿ ਬਸਿਓ ਮਸਤ ਪੁਨੀਤ ਸੰਤ ਧੂਰਾਵਾ ॥੧॥

The eyes are sanctified, gazing upon the Lord,

Serving Him, the hands are sanctified.

The heart is sanctified, when the Lord abides within it;

The forehead Saints is sanctified which touches the dust of the feet of the.

-Sarang m.5 p.1212

## Types of Seva-2

### ***Tan di seva\_* - serving with one's body**

ਸਾ ਕਾਇਆ ਜੋ ਸਤਿਗੁਰੁ ਸੇਵੈ ਸਚੈ ਆਪਿ ਸਵਾਰੀ ॥

That body, which serves the Guru, the True Lord has decorated Himself.

– Suhi m.4 p.754

ਪਾਣੀ ਪਖਾ ਪੀਸਉ ਸੇਵਕ ਕੈ ਠਾਕੁਰ ਹੀ ਕਾ ਆਹਰੁ ਜੀਉ ॥੧॥

I carry the water, wave the fan, and grind the grain for the servant of my Lord.

-Majh n.5 p.101

Looking after the sick, cripples, handicapped with love and sympathy.

Serving the guests.

ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਕੀ ਟਹਲ ਸਫਲ ਇਹ ਕਾਇਆ ॥

Working for the Lord, the body becomes fruitful. – Gauri m.5 p.201

## Types of Seva (contd)

### ***Man di seva – serving through the mind***

ਪ੍ਰਭ ਕੇ ਸੇਵਕ ਬਹੁਤੁ ਅਤਿ ਨੀਕੇ ਮਨਿ ਸਰਧਾ ਕਰਿ ਹਰਿ ਧਾਰੇ ॥

God's servants are most exalted; they enshrine faith for Him in their minds.

- Nat m.4 p.982

ਗੁਰ ਕੀ ਸੇਵਾ ਵਿਸਰੀ ਕਿਉ ਮਨੁ ਰਹੈ ਹਜੂਰਿ ॥

One who forgets to serve the Guru; how can his mind remain in the Lord's Presence?

- Var Bilaval m.3 p.854

Contributing through one's learning, art, managerial skills.

Bringing about reforms – economic, political, social, religious.  
without involving the ego

## Types of Seva (contd)

***Dhan di seva*** - philanthropic service  
needs of the needy.

Fulfilling

ਗਰੀਬ ਦਾ ਮੂੰਹ ਗੁਰੂ ਦੀ ਗਲਕ - ਰਹਤ ਨਾਮਾ ਭਾਈ ਚਉਪਾ ਸਿੰਘ

Mouth of the poor is the Guru's charity-box

Tithe, offerings before Guru Granth Sahib, Shabd Bhet

ਮੇਰੇ ਰਾਮ ਕੋ ਭੰਡਾਰੁ ॥ ਖਾਤ ਖਰਚਿ ਕਛੁ ਤੋਟਿ ਨ ਆਵੈ ਅੰਤੁ ਨਹੀ ਹਰਿ ਪਾਰਾਵਾਰੁ .

This is the treasure of my Lord.

Consuming and expending it, it is never used up.

O Lord, it has no end or limitation. Ramkali m.5. p.893

## Types of Seva (contd)

### ***Surt di seva* - serving through inner awareness**

ਸੇਵਾ ਸੁਰਤਿ ਸਬਦਿ ਵੀਚਾਰਿ ॥ਜਪੁ ਤਪੁ ਸੰਜਮੁ ਹਉਮੈ ਮਾਰਿ ॥

ਜੀਵਨ ਮੁਕਤੁ ਜਾ ਸਬਦੁ ਸੁਣਾਏ ॥ਸਚੀ ਰਹਤ ਸਚਾ ਸੁਖੁ ਪਾਏ ॥੭॥

Labor of love through intuitive awareness comes by reflecting upon the Shabd.

Chanting, intensive meditation and austere self-discipline come by subduing the ego.

One becomes liberated while yet alive, by listening to the Shabd.

Living in a truthful way, one finds true peace.

– Prabhati m.1 p.1343

ਸੇਵਾ ਸੁਰਤਿ ਏਕ ਲਿਵ ਲਾਇ ॥

Serve the One Lord, with loving awareness.

-Gauri Guareri m.1 p.222

**This is the highest type of seva.**

ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਰੋਮਿ ਰੋਮਿ ਹਰਿ ਧਿਆਵੈ .

The Gurmukh meditates on the Lord with every hair of his body.

- Sidh GostRamkali m.1 p.941

His virtues would echo from every atom of the world and dissipate ecstasy.

Q & A