Concept of “Seva” in Sikhism

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Vichar
Chardikalaa Foundation Monthly Meeting
July 18, 2009
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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 Brahmans. 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

without serving the Guru, there is no devotional worship,
- Prabhati Bibhas m.1 p.1342

• All forms of worship are covered by seva

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 –

   मेहा वनस्पति तेज फिरबन्धी

   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.

   आपत्ति आपि वहे परमीति अपे मेह शक्तिः
   He inspires us to place our faith in Him, thus performs His Own Service.
   - Siri rag m.4 p.90

   ज्ञ भक्ति उद्रे लघा मेह । ज्ञ उ वहु है देने देने ।
   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)

गुरु मेंदे उर्मि निन्द उर्मि मन्नु
Service of the Guru_ is the most sublime. - Asa m.3 p.423

It is the only approved austerity

महिषासुर वी मेंदे दिया उर्मि भवहास्त
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.

मेंदे भेले मेंदे लण्णीशि अपूर्वी मेंद
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)

> 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.

> जीत जीत मेंद्र मेंद्र लागै मँड़े ठेंचे यूरभ धमाने ॥

The servant of the Lord, is committed to His service;
He sees God pervading the entire universe. - Nat m.4 p.982

However,

> निम वै भमउवि वत्भ वैदित में मेंद्र लागा ॥

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:

> वैट नरम वैट मेंद्र लमागित्या नीि ॥

You have engaged millions of people in Your Service. - Gauri Majh m.5 p.216

But who serves and who is served?

> अथे ठावूँ अथे मेंद्र अधि घराहै डाँडी ॥

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


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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:

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.

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.

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

माउमै की मेरा मे बरे निम खिलमे उठिभे उथु ॥

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 eradication of pride and arrogance

अठ अझबा भई मे मेरवु ठणी ॥

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.

  संगति के पात्र हैं जन्म जन्मे जन्मन निश्चयः
  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.

  लंगार चले गुरु मूर्ति गति वेंटि त अप्पी धर्मने
  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 mind

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

-Sri rag m.3 p.34

• Nam aids seva by eradicating haumai

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

-Majh m.3 p.116

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

\[ \text{Bhairo m.4 p.1134} \]

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• Seva comes by reflecting on Shabd

\[ \text{Prabhati m.1 p.1343} \]

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

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 ||

\[ \text{Prabhati m.1 p.1343} \]
Numinous Relations of Seva (contd)

Relation with Hukam

गट मिलवू पृथि में में सर्खिश || उम्मत मणिप्र वा मेंव भंति उगिधा || |
मेंटी वहाँै मे मणिप्र उहाँै मेंव संदित घटि भगवन नीै ||२||

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

‘गीत उप चण्डू मै बेटी रवजी ‘गीत उपे मेंडी है उग मलणी ॥
Other than You, Lord, nothing is mine. I serve You, Lord, and I praise You.
- Majh m.3 p.112

‘स昆仑 मेंदी मधू वननति मधू मधू वननिता ॥
They serve the True One, practice Truth; and earn only Truth.
- Majh m.3 p.116

• The Guru

‘तिझ तरी मेंडी विश्व नख बली मउलते पूणे नरपि ॥
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

‘गुरु हे माजी मेंडा गेिद ॥
Through the Guru, true service is performed.
- Gauri m.3 p.158
Whom To Serve (contd)

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

-Var Vadhan_s m.4 p.588

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

–Sri rag m.3 p.26

It is very difficult to serve the True Guru. for you have tourrender your head; give up your 'self'.

– Sri rag m.3 p.27

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

– Sri rag m.3 p.31

• Harjan – God's servant

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

– Bilaval m.5 p.811
Types of Seva

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

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

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

_मा वरिष्ठा ने मटित्तु मेहे मसै अधि प्रणजी ॥_
That body, which serves the Guru, the True Lord has decorated Himself.

– Suhi m.4 p.754

_पाटी धर थोपहरि मेहब वै ठवृत्त जी ह आउँ नीहि ॥९॥_
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.

_वेडिंच वी टाज़ महर टिंग वरिष्ठा ॥_
Working for the Lord, the body becomes fruitful.

– Gauri m.5 p.201
Types of Seva (contd)

*Man di seva* – serving through the mind

God's servants are most exalted; they enshrine faith for Him in their minds.
- Nat m.4 p.982

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, manarerial skills.

Bringing about reforms – economic, political, social, religious.
without involving the ego
Types of Seva (contd)

_Dhan di seva_ - philanthropic service

Fulfilling needs of the needy.

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

Tithe, offerings before Guru Granth Sahib, Shabd Bhet

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

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

Serve the One Lord, with loving awareness.  

― Gauri Guareri m.1 p.222

This is the highest type of seva.

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