

What is Sikhism?  
Series 5

ੴ ਸੇਤਿਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ  
**What is Sikhism?**  
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**Institutions of Sikhism**

**Sikh Awareness Society of USA**  
**Tampa--Florida**

## Gurdwara - The Sikh Place of Worship

Gurdwara is the Sikh place of worship, prayer and piety. It is the center of Sikh life. It is indestructible symbol of Sikh faith. Gurdwara emerged as the new edifice on the Indian subcontinent's religious landscape in the seventeenth century, when in 1604 AD, Guru Arjan, the fifth Guru of the Sikhs, in Amritsar, placed with reverence the first volume of Aad Granth in the building, which had been completed by him three years earlier. Till then Sikh place of worship was popularly called Dharamsal. First Dharamsal was established by Guru Nanak at Kartarpur (now in Pakistan).

The term Gurdwara is a combination of two Punjabi words; Guru and Dwara, literally meaning, Guru's door, but in Sikh theology it means, the Guru's house i.e, the house of the divine. It is the Sikh center of spiritual, social and educational activities. The term Gurdwara is purely Sikh in origin and it was coined by Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith and is found written in the holy Sikh Scripture, Guru Granth Sahib on pages 351, 554, 730, 922, 933, 937, 1015, 1075 and 1234. Usually there are four parts of the complex: The main hall for worship, *Langar* (The Community kitchen), *Serai* also called *Saran* (inn i.e, residential area) and the school. All major Gurdwaras have all these facilities, but, in small Gurdwaras, one or more of these facilities may not be available. Every Gurdwara, besides religious worship, is expected to provide food and lodging to visitors/ travelers, free of cost. Hence, a Serai /-Saran (Inn i.e, Hostel), is usually attached to most of the Gurdwaras. A school to teach Punjabi language, Gurmukhi script, Sikh history, philosophy along with modern science and other languages is part of major / big Gurdwaras. Every Gurdwara has a *Jora Ghar*-ਜੋੜਾ ਘਰ (shoe house) outside the main complex for depositing the shoes, as shoes are not allowed inside the main Gurdwara complex and the visitor has to go bare foot after washing his / her hands and feet.

The main structure in the Gurdwara is a big hall, where Guru Granth Sahib wrapped in fine Rumalas is seated over a small bed (*Manji Sahib/also called Peerah Sahib*) with nice bedding on a raised platform in a *Palki* (palanquin) with *Chandoa/ Chanani*, hanging from the ceiling of the hall. The place where Guru Granth Sahib rests is the most decorated part of the Gurdwara. Except when it is being read, it is kept covered. The Granthi waves *Chaur* (made of yalk hair) over Guru Granth Sahib. *Chanani and Chaur* are symbols of royalty and their presence is not functional Guru is *Sachcha Padshah* (True king/ King of Spiritual Realm).

In a Gurdwara there are no images, altar or pulpit, the object of Sikh reverence is the scripture (Guru Granth Sahib) itself, and the Sikhs bow before it, walk around it and if they wish, find a space in the hall, sit cross legged on the floor in a position facing Guru Granth Sahib to listen the Ragis (religious musicians) proclaim verses from its sacred pages. A Sikh is supposed to join Sangat (congregation) in the Gurdwara as frequently as possible.

### *How to attend Gurdwara*

Any one, Sikh or non- Sikh, may visit Gurdwara, attend congregation and dine in *Guru Ka Langar* (the community kitchen) but proper protocol has to be maintained. Carrying of tobacco, alcohol or any other intoxicant is strictly prohibited inside a Gurdwara. A head covering is mandatory inside a Gurdwara. Those men who are not wearing turban (*Dastar*)

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they should cover the head with a piece of clothe. Women should cover the head with the *Dupatta* or any scarf. This is a mark of respect to the Guru Granth Sahib. No shoes are worn in a Gurdwara, as Sikhs treat shoes ceremoniously unclean. Before entering the inner premises of a Gurdwara every one has to take off one's shoes. Every Gurdwara has a *Jora Ghar* (room for depositing shoes) outside the inner premises also there is provision of clean water for-washing hands and feet. Visitors / devotees go inside the Gurdwara bare foot after washing their feet and hands at the entrance. After washing one's hands and feet one goes directly to the main hall and bows before Guru Granth Sahib, makes obeisance (offering) and offers prayer. The devotee's offering is invariably monetary, the amount determined by the individual. At times particularly in rural areas, the offering is in kind for example, grain, fruit, vegetables or confectionery etc. Offering is not obligatory, one can make obeisance even without offering any cash or kind. After paying obeisance and offering prayer, one can join the Sangat(congregation), find a place in the hall, sit cross legged on the floor in a position facing the Guru Granth Sahib to listen the Ragis (religious musicians) proclaim verses from the sacred pages of Guru Granth Sahib. Complete silence is observed while in Guru's service.

#### ***Religious services at Gurdwara:***

Generally, a Gurdwara remains open to every visitor through out the day, so that worshippers can offer prayers at any time convenient to them. However, in Punjab and India two services are held daily in every Gurdwara, one in the morning and one in the evening.

Each day early in the morning before sunrise Guru Granth Sahib is brought in the Gurdwara hall from its resting place. All present stand up with bowed heads and folded hands, as a mark of respect. In the Gurdwara hall, Guru Granth Sahib is placed on the *Manji Sahib* with nice bedding resting on a raised platform. Guru Granth sahib is covered with fine Rumalas. Then Ardas is offered.

The morning services begin with the opening (Parkash-exposition) of Guru Granth Sahib. After this *Hukum* (The order i.e, command) from Guru Granth Sahib is read. It is followed by, *Asa Dee Var*. For the rest of the day the *Ragis* perform *Kirtan* or a Sikh scholar may perform *Katha* i.e, religious discourse. In a Gurdwara, only hymns from Guru Granth Sahib, Dasam Granth or verses written by Bhai Gurdas and Bhai Nand Lal can be sung.

In the evening Guru Granth Sahib is closed (unless continuous uninterrupted recitation of Guru Granth Sahib ---Akhand Path is going on), after *Rehras*, *Keertan Sohila* and *Ardas*, *Karah Parshad* is distributed and then Guru Granth Sahib is ceremoniously wrapped in *Rumalas* and taken to its special place for the night.

#### ***Days of service or worship in a Gurdwara:***

In Punjab and in India, Sikhs do not have a special day of worship; they can do this on any day and all days of the week. Outside Punjab and outside India, most Sikhs visit the Gurdwara on the rest day of the particular country they live, for example in Muslim countries it takes place on Fridays, while in other countries such as Britain, Canada and United States of America, the main service is held on Sunday.

### ***Difference between Gurdwara and Mandir (Temple)***

#### ***Gurdwara***

The Sikh place of worship is known as Gurdwara. In a Gurdwara there are no Images, Statues, Idols, Altar or Pulpit, the object of Sikh reverence is The Sikh Scripture---Guru Granth Sahib, and it is universal.

The Sikh worship in the Gurdwara is congregational, therefore the main structure in the Gurdwara is a big hall where Guru Granth Sahib wrapped in fine Rumalas is seated over a small bed (*Peerah Sahib*) with nice bedding on a raised platform under a chandoa hanging from the ceiling of the hall. The Sikhs bow before Guru Granth Sahib and if they wish find a space in the hall, sit cross legged on the floor in a position facing Guru Granth Sahib to listen the *Ragis* proclaim verses from its sacred pages.

The Gurdwara building is built on a level ground and there is no prohibition on the number and direction of doors and windows in any direction.

#### ***Mandir (Temple)***

The Hindu place of worship is known as *Mandir* (Temple), *Devi- dwara* or *Shiv- dwara*. The objects of worship are Idols or Statues of different Hindu deities. Different Mandirs have statues of different deities and there is no universality.

The Hindu worship is not congregational like the Sikhs / the Christians / the Muslims and is mainly personal. The main structure of the temple where the image of the deity is installed is therefore based on the principle of having a *small garbha griha*. There is a passage for circumambulation of the *garbha griha*. This is the heart of the temple and the dome or the spire is normally above the *garbha griha*. Passage around the idol is an essential part of the structure of the temple as circumambulation after prayers is very necessary. There is a small passage called *antrala* (Vestibule), which connects the *Garbha Griha* to *Mandapa* or the pillard hall where devotees gather for worship. The entrance porch is called *Ardh-mandapa*.

The Hindu temple is built on a raised platform with stairs and has only one door, which is used both for entrance and exist purposes.

### **Dera**

In Punjabi 'Dera' literally means a residential place of a particular person, who can manage it according his own will and no one can interfere. It is his personal property and he can mortgage it, sell it and appropriate the income incurred from it according to his wishes, no outsider or Public can interfere in its management / daily affairs / income etc.

### **Sant Dera**

The British were in league with the Brahmans / Hindus of India, therefore after taking the Sikh rulers in the Malwa region of the Punjab under their protection and signing the treaty of friendship with 'Sarkare Khalsa' headed by Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1805 CE, they encouraged the Brahmans from Banaras to come to the Punjab and settle down in the princely states of the Punjab, between rivers Satluj and Jamna, under their protection. The literate Brahmans from Banaras in Sikh garbs / Nirmala sadhus came here and set up their establishments, with Guru Granth Sahib as the presiding deity

and themselves as priests. Each settlement was named after the priest as his 'Dera'. In order to wean the Sikhs away from the Khalsa practices, these Brahmans in Sikh garb started the Brahmanical practices in their establishments called Sant Deras, with Guru Granth Sahib as the deity. They not only introduced un-Sikh, but even anti-Sikh practices there. They made exposition of the holy Sikh Scriptures according to Vedanta / Sanatan philosophy and not according to Gurmat. They started producing Sikh literature and training disciples as per Vedantic philosophy. These Brahmanical establishments with Guru Granth Sahib as the presiding deity became Sikh places of worship in the 'Princely Sikh States' of the Punjab in the Malwa region and came to be popularly known as 'Sant Deras' created and controlled by the Sant Babas, which are now mushrooming everywhere.

The 'Princely Sikh States' of the Punjab in the Malwa region of the Punjab remained out of the purview of the Sikh Gurdwara Act and thereby out of the control of Sharomani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee. Therefore, the Sikhs of the Malwa region remained cut off from the main stream Sikhism till the merger of Pepsu with the Punjab. The Sikhs in the Malwa region of the Punjab therefore became largely Hinduised in their religious practices introduced by the Brahmanical Sants. Each Sant Dera devised its own religious code of conduct distinct from the Sikh religious code of conduct published by Sharomani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee in 1945, under the Sikh Gurdwara Act 1925. These Sant Deras believe in ritualistic practices of Hinduism and make the exposition of Guru Granth Sahib according to Vedanta Philosophy instead of Gurmat.

The Sikhs of the Malwa region joined the main stream Sikhism only after the creation of the 'Punjabi speaking State of Punjab' in 1966. Because of their numerical strength in the democratic set up they have now taken over the control of SGPC and other Sikh institutions / organizations and are now trying to replace the practices of main stream Sikhism introduced by Singh Sabha movement with those of the Sanatan Dharma.

### **Difference between Gurdwara and Sant Dera**

Gurdwara belongs to the *Sangat* (congregation / gathering) and it is not property of any single individual whereas a '*Sant Dera*' is the property of particular person and the Sikh community cannot assert any interference or legal control in its management or income etc.

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## ***The Sikh Takhats***

### **Seats of Temporal Authority in Sikhism**

Takhat, literally meaning: throne or the seat of authority or the ceremonial chair for the king, but in Sikh theology, it means the seat of temporal authority. There are five Sikh Takhats:

- Akal Takhat
- Takhat Patna Sahib
- Takhat Kesgarh Sahib
- Takhat Hazoor Sahib
- Takhat Damdama Sahib

#### **Akal Takhat**

##### **The Supreme seat of Temporal Authority of Sikhism**

Akal Takhat literal meaning: throne of the immortal--Almighty-God- (Eternal Throne). It is the seat of supreme temporal (Worldly /secular) authority in Sikhism. It was established in Amritsar by Guru Hargobind, as counter part to the imperial throne in Delhi, when the Sikh religion made a formal bid to proclaim its basic commitment to politics and social problems. It is situated in the Gurdwara Darbar Sahib (Golden temple) complex. The Guru established it, because he thought that secular (Temporal) matters should not be considered in the Gurdwara Darbar Sahib (Golden Temple), which is meant purely for worship of God (spirituality). Before Guru Hargobind's accession to Gur Gaddi, Gurdwara Darbar Sahib at Amritsar was the place where Guru Arjan Dev used to sit and give spiritual guidance to the Sikhs. With Guru Arjan Dev's martyrdom and changed circumstances the dire need of such a place was felt where Sikhs should assemble in the presence of the Guru and discuss their secular affairs. Since they were faced with an intolerant and oppressive government they required a place where they should be able to hold deliberations for their self-preservation. So, the Guru ordered in 1609 A.D, the construction of Akal Takhat at a distance of about one hundred yards from Gurdwara Darbar Sahib opposite the *Darshani Deori* (gate way). The building of Akal Takhat comprises of a high throne of an altitude three times as high as was permitted to any authority by the Mughal sovereigns of Hindustan and it is higher than the Mughal Throne balcony in the Red fort at Delhi. Thus, Guru Har Gobind, by establishing the Akal Takhat and building this high throne openly repudiated the Mughal sovereignty over Hindustan and proclaimed the Sikh claim to a co-equal sovereign status. Here the Guru held his court, received envoys settled disputes, administered justice and decided matters of military strategy and policy. The congregation (Sangat) heard extolling feats of heroism instead of listening to religious discourses.

The building of Akal Takhat opposite to the Gurdwara Darbar Sahib (Golden temple) has a great significance. The Gurdwara Darbar Sahib stands for spiritual guidance and the Akal Takhat for dispensing justice and temporal activity (Sikh politics). The two are complementary to each other. During the day Guru Granth Sahib is kept in the Gurdwara Darbar Sahib and the same is kept for the night in a room called '*Kotha Sahib*' in Akal Takhat.

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The new entrants to Sikh faith were baptized or initiated here, a practice still in vogue. During the 18<sup>th</sup> century A.D; when Sikhs had to take shelter in the forests, they used to have their special gatherings at Akal Takhat, which became a rallying point. On the occasions of Vaisakhi and Diwali, the Sikhs used to have their general gatherings at Akal Takhat and the Sarbat Khalsa (the whole Sikh nation) used to discuss their plans in the presence of Guru Granth Sahib, before these were adopted as Gurmatas (the decree of the Guru). It was from here that Guru Hargobind issued Hukamnamas to Sikhs during his stay here. Traditionally all Sikh warriors seek blessings here before going to battle or launching a '*Morcha*' (political agitation) for a Sikh cause. Presently, the Sikh *Sewadars* (care takers-Sikh high priests) issue Hukamnamas on the matters concerning the Sikh nation from here, which are binding on all Sikhs. The Sikhs (Dal Khalsa-The Sikh national army) with Ranjit Singh as their leader under the supremacy of Akal Takhat founded the mighty Sikh kingdom and put the Sikh nation and the Sikh Democratic Republic of Punjab, on the map of the world. In spite of his being ruler of the Sikh state Ranjit Singh was awarded punishment twice by the Sewadar (priest) of Akal Takhat Akali Phoola Singh, for violating the principles of Sikhism, once for marrying a Muslim woman who refused to embrace Sikhism and then for dyeing his beard. Both times the Sikh Monarch presented himself at the Akal Takhat and accepted the punishment like a humble Sikh.

Akal Takhat Sahib is the only *takhat* established by the sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind Sahib. Neither he nor any one of the succeeding Gurus established any other *takhat* during his life time. Akal Takhat was established to look after the temporal affairs of the Panth. After the loss of Sikh rule in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, all Sikh political movements by the Akalis (the Sikh political party) have been launched and directed from here. Ever since its founding Akal Takhat has remained, the supreme seat of temporal authority of the Sikhs. When ever, any important issue arises the Sikh nation holds a meeting of the Sikh nation (Sarbat Khalsa), takes decisions here on matters of war and peace and settles disputes between the various Sikh groups. The decision taken by the Sarbat Khalsa (Sikh nation) at Akal Takhat in the presence of Guru Granth Sahib is called Gurmat (the decree of the Guru) and is issued as Hukamnama to the Sikh nation by the Sewadar (the high priest-care taker) of the Akal Takhat under the seal of Akal Takhat, the decision is binding on all the Sikhs.

In order to cater to the political and religious matters relating to the Sikhs in different regions of the Indian subcontinent, the Panth has added four more *Takhats*. But none of these Takhats despite their being connected with the life of the Guru Gobind Singh, was established as *Takhat* by the Guru himself.. These *Takhats* are: Takhat Patna Sahib in the east, Takhat Damdama Sahib in the west, Takhat Hazoor Sahib in the south and Takhat Kesgarh Sahib in the north. They are regional high courts of the Sikh religion, which deal with the temporal affairs of the Sikhs. The Supreme Authority (Supreme Court) in the temporal affairs of the Sikhs is Akal Takhat Amritsar, where an appeal can be filed and vital decisions concerning 'the Sikh religion' and 'The Sikh Nation' are taken. The ruling of Akal Takhat is binding on all the Sikhs. Only renowned, neutral and catholic Sikhs with a track record of selfless community service are selected and appointed, as Sewadars (Care takers- Jathedars) of these five Takhats by the Sharomani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) Amritsar. NB: Akal Takhat is not a Gurdwara, therefore it neither falls under the purview of the Sikh Gurdwara Act 1925 nor is meant to be governed by the Sikh clergy created by the

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SGPC. It is the sovereign seat of Temporal Authority of the Sikh nation under the supremacy of Guru Granth Sahib to be served by a sewadar selected by consensus by the Sikh Nation.

### **Takhat Patna Sahib**

The second seat of authority in Sikhism is called "Takhat Patna Sahib". Guru Teg Bahadur Sahib lived with his family here. Here was born Guru Gobind Singh. Here are preserved the relics of Guru Gobind Singh including his cradle, weapons and proclamations.

### **Takhat Kesgarh Sahib**

The third seat of authority is called, "Takhat Kesgarh Sahib". It is situated at Anandpur Sahib, in the state of Punjab. The town of Anandpur Sahib was founded by Guru Gobind Singh on the Vaisakhi day of 1684 AD, but the Takhat there owes its importance to the creation of 'The Khalsa' by Guru Gobind Singh in 1699 AD. The shrine contains the historic double-edged sword 'Khanda' with which the Guru stirred the Amrit. It has number of weapons of Guru Gobind Singh. During the annual Hola Mohalla festival, mock battles between groups of Sikhs are held here.

### **Takhat Hazoor Sahib**

The fourth seat of authority in Sikhism is 'Takhat Hazoor Sahib'. It is the place where Guru Gobind Singh passed away in 1708 AD, and is situated at Nander in Maharashtra state of India. Maharaja Ranjit Singh built the shrine and provided a gold dome and costly decorations. The Takhat puts on display the weapons of Guru Gobind Singh and other relics on Sikh festivals.

### **Takhat Damdama Sahib**

The fifth seat of authority in Sikhism is called 'Takhat Damdama Sahib'. It is situated in village Talwandi Sabo in district Bathinda (Punjab). This place owes its importance to the literary work of Guru Gobind Singh done during his stay here in 1706 AD. Here he re-edited Aad Granth and entered the Bani of his father, ninth Guru Teg Bahadur. He appointed Baba Deep Singh to make copies of Aad Granth (Guru Granth Sahib) and teach meanings of Gurbani to Sikhs, and called it *Guru Kee Kanshi*, the Sikh seat of learning as counter part of Hindu seat of learning, Kanshi (Benaras). Guru Gobind Singh stayed here for over nine months, before leaving for Deccan (south).

## Basic Institutions of Sikhism

When Guru Nanak founded Sikhism in the fifteenth century, the whole Indian society was divided into caste and class and was full of hatred towards each other and there was great cultural decadence and religious confusion all round. The Hindu and Muslim elite had formed a separate group and both committed social, political and economic tyrannies against the common man. The priestly class Qazis and Brahmins justified the oppressive rule. The Hindu had divided the society into four groups and the lowest in the hierarchy were called the Shudras or the untouchables who were treated worst than animals. The plight of women was no better. According to the Hindu ideology, “*Dhor-ganwar, Shudar, Pashu, Nari, Yeh Sab Tarin Ke Adhikari*—ਢੋਰ ਗੰਵਾਰ ਸ਼ੁਦਰ ਪਸ਼ੂ ਨਾਰੀ। ਯਹ ਸਭ ਤਾੜਨ ਕੇ ਅਧਿਕਾਰੀ[”, i.e, the stupid people, the Shudras (the untouchable), the animals and the women deserve reprimand. The Hindu addressed the non-Hindus as Malechhas—the ‘unclean’. The Muslims called non-Muslims as ‘*Kafirs*—ਕਾਫਰ ’ (non-believers) and observed that the Muslim society was to be enlarged and strengthened progressively through the policy of “enforcement of Islamic laws through the sword”— “*as-shara tahat-us-saif*” \*—ਅਸ ਸ਼ਰਾ ਤਾਹਤ ਅਸ ਸੈਫ.

Guru Nanak founded Sikhism as revealed to him by God, to fill this vacuum of cultural decadence and religious confusion. Since he viewed the caste system as the greatest obstacle in the way of developing an egalitarian society, he established the community of the Sikhs outside the boundry of the caste society. He laid the foundation stone of the first Sikh village on the western bank of River Ravi and named it Kartarpur, literally meaning the abode of God. He laid down the fundamentals of Sikhism and founded its basic institutions based on equality, social justice and tolerance. To break off the caste barriers between the high low and untouchables and the stigma of fraternizing with the Muslims, he founded here the basic institutions of *Sangat*, *Pangat* and *Langar* in Sikhism.

### Sangat-ਸੰਗਤ

Sangat, literally meaning congregation, is the first and foremost basic institution of Sikhism founded by Guru Nanak in order to abolish caste, establish equality and propagate love and affection among people. Literally: Sangat means association / company. Theologically, the gathering of the Sikhs for the practice of Naam Bani is called Sangat:

- “ਸਤਿਸੰਗਤਿ ਕੈਸੀ ਜਾਣੀਐ ਜਿਥੇ ਏਕੋ ਨਾਮ ਵਖਾਣੀਐ—*Satsangat kaisi janien jithay eko Naam vakhani-ay* i.e;How do you come to know the society of saints? It is where the Name of One Lord is mentioned” (*GGS, Sri Rag Ml, p.72*).
- ”ਸਤਸੰਗਤਿ ਸਾਈ ਹਰ ਤੇਰੀ ਜਿਤੁ ਹਰਿ ਕੀਰਤਿ ਹਰਿ ਸੁਨਣੈ—”*Satsangat sai har teri jit har keerat har sun-nay* i.e; God, that alone is true holy congregation wherein is listened Thy praise” (*Ibid, p.1135*).
- ”ਸਾਧ ਸੰਗਿ ਹਰਿ ਕੀਰਤਨੁ ਗਾਈਐ। ਇਹੁ ਅਸਥਾਨੁ ਗੁਰੂ ਤੇ ਪਾਈਐ—*Sadh sang har keertan gai-ay,*

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*ih asthan Guru to pai-ay* i.e; In the holy company sing the praise of God. This state is found from the Guru” (Ibid, p.385).

- ਇਕ ਸਿਖ ਦੋਇ ਸਾਧ ਸੰਗ ਪੰਜੀ ਪ੍ਰਮੋਸ਼ਰ “*Ikk Sikh do-ay sadh sang panjin Parmeshar-* When alone one is a Sikh. When they are two, it amounts to congregation of holy. And when there is a congregation of five Sikhs God dwells there” (Bhai Gurdas Var XIII:19).

Satsangat is the spiritual school of the Sikhs, ਸਤਸੰਗਤਿ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਚਟਸਾਲ ਹੈ ਜਿਤੁ ਹਰਿ ਗੁਣ ਸਿਖਾ-“*Satsangat Satgur chatsal hai jit har gun sikha* i.e; The holy congregation is the True Guru’s school where the mortal learns the Lord’s merits” (Ibid, p.1316). By attending Satsangat one swims across the worldly-ocean, “ਮੇਰੇ ਮਾਧਉ ਜੀ ਸਤਸੰਗਤਿ ਮਿਲੇ ਸਿ ਤਰਿਆ।।-“*MerayMadho jee satsangat milay so taria*-i.e; O my venerable Lord, whoever has joined holy company, is saved” (Ibid, p.495). In Sangat one dispels enmity and inculcates mutual love and affection:

ਬਿਸਰਿ ਗਈ ਸਬ ਤਾਤਿ ਪਰਾਈ।।ਜਬ ਤੇ ਸਾਧ ਸੰਗਤਿ ਮੇਰੇ ਪਾਈ।।ਨਾ ਕੋ ਬੈਰੀ ਨਹੀ ਬਿਗਾਨਾ ਸਗਲ ਸੰਗ ਹੰਮ ਕੋ ਬਨ ਆਈ।।---“*Bisar Gai Sab Taat Prai Jab Te Sadh Sangat Mohe Paaee Na Koi Beri Nahi Begana Sagal Sang Ham Ko Ban Aaee*” i.e; Since the time , I have attained holy company, I have altogether forgotten to be envious of others”. There is no enemy, no stranger, I live in harmony with all”(Ibid, p.1299).

In this way under the influence of sangat the sleeping mind wakes up. One comes to realize one's weaknesses and with the grace of sangat comes to overpower them, ਸਾਧਸੰਗਿ ਮਨ ਸੇਵਤ ਜਾਗੇ। ਤਬ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਨਾਨਕ ਮੀਠੇ ਲਾਗੇ[-“*Sadh sang man sovatjagay, tab Prabh Nanak meethay lagay* i.e; In the holy company, the sleeping self is awakened then the Lord becomes sweet” (Ibid, p.386).The praise of sangat recorded in Gurbani is as under:

- ਵਿਚਿ ਸੰਗਤਿ ਹਰਿਪ੍ਰਭੁ ਵਰਤਦਾ ਬੁਝਹੁ ਸਬਦ ਵੀਚਾਰਿ--“*Vich sangat her prabh vartda bujhauh sabad vichar* i.e; The Lord God abides in the holy congregation. By contemplating the Guru’s word, you shall realize Him (Ibid, p.1314).
- ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਬਾਝਹੁ ਸੰਗਤਿ ਨ ਹੋਈ। ਬਿਨੁ ਸਬਦੇ ਪਾਰੁ ਨ ਪਾਏ ਕੋਈ।।-“*Satgur bajhau sangat n hoi bin sabadey par n paey koe* i.e; Without the True Guru, there is no Divine congregation and without the Word noe has ever ferried across (ibid, p.1068).
- ਜਿਨ ਹਰਿਜਨ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਸੰਗਤਿ ਪਾਈ ਤਿਨ ਧੁਰ ਮਸਤਕਿ ਲਿਖਿਆ ਲਿਖਾਸਿ।।ਪੰਨੁ ਪੰਨੁ ਸਤਸੰਗਤਿ ਜਿਤੁ ਹਰਰਸੁ ਪਾਇਆ ਮਿਲਿ ਜਨ ਨਾਨਕ ਨਾਮੁ ਪ੍ਰਗਾਸਿ।।-“*Jin her jan sat gur sangat pai, Tin dhur mastak likhia likhas. Dhan dhan satsangat jit her ras paia Mil jan Nanak naam pragas* i.e; The men of God, who are in company of the True Guru, have that destiny already written on their foreheads (Ibid, p.10).

According to Sikh tradition, Guru Nanak would invite all people, irrespective of caste, creed and gender, for religious singing and collective worship at his residence. They all

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had to sit in the same room rubbing shoulders with members of high and low caste groups. Perhaps, it was first time in their life when they really felt that they were members of one human family. The institution of Sangat has emerged as one of the most powerful and democratic institutions within Sikh society. The sangat is empowered to take decisions concerning the general welfare of the Sikh community. A resolution approved by the sangat is called gurmatta literally guru's 'mat' (intention), which is un-reservedly followed by members of the congregation. The institution of 'Sangat' established by Guru Nanak was given the status of the '*Guru Khalsa Panth*' by Guru Gobind Singh. In the theology of Sikhism the words: *Sangat*, *Satsangat* and *Sadhsangat* are synonymous.

### **Pangat-ਪੰਗਤ**

The second basic institution of Sikhism established by Guru Nanak is Pangat lit: row, which in Sikh theology means sitting together in a row as equals. It was also meant to abolish caste, remove untouchability, establish equality, inculcate love and teach humility before each other. After meditation he asked people to sit in a row and eat together, irrespective of their social background or economic status.

### **Langar-ਲੰਗਰ**

The third basic institution established by Guru Nanak to remove caste, establish equality, teach sharing with the needy and inculcate love among people is *Langar*, the sacred food, cooked in community kitchen, (*Langar Khana*) and served free of cost in the Langar Hall attached to the Sikh place of worship (Gurdwara). It enjoins all to work and provide for the whole human family. All who visit Gurdwara sit down together in a row (Pangat) and partake of the simple food offered with loving care as equals, regardless of distinction of caste, creed, colour, country or status in life. Only vegetarian food is served in *Guru Ka Langar* so that it could cater to the people of all faiths.

The institutions established by Guru Nanak brought Hindus, Muslims, Brahmins and Shudras (untouchables) to a common social level.

### **References**

\* Some in sights into Sikhism (GNLU) p. 40