

# THE IMPORTANCE OF SADH SANGAT IN SIKH RELIGION

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The word SANGAT is derived from the Sanskrit term sangti, meaning company or fellowship. In Sikhism the word Sadh Sangat stands for people who meet religiously to listen or discuss the holy Word –Nam or to discuss the life stories of the Sikh Gurus.

In Sikhism, the word Sadh sangat has been in use since the time of Guru Nanak (1469-1539). During his period and those of his nine successor Gurus, the word Sangat has been predominant in the their hymns. The term is also used in the Janam Sakhis, i.e. traditional life-stories of Guru Nanak, and in the Hukam-Namas, i.e. edicts issued by the Sikh Gurus, to their followers in different parts of the country.

The assembly of the gathering may be in a gurdwara, in a College, a University, a School, a private residence or in any other place, but, preferably, in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib. The main purpose of the gathering is to explore the meaning of Nam and to inscribe it in the hearts of the listeners. In Guru Granth Sahib it is said (page 72): "Sadhsangat is where the Divine Name alone is cherished and where virtues are learnt."

In Gurdwaras, the sangat normally listens to the kirtan or katha. In Nam Simran sessions, they may collectively recite a sacred word e.g., Waheguru, Satnam, Sat Kartar and so on. At other places e.g., places of learning, they may all participate in the discussion to understand the meaning of hymns. In Guru Granth Sahib (page 1316) it is stated: "*Sadhsangat is the Guru's own school where one practises Godlike qualities.*"

It is believed that Waheguru is present in Sadh Sangat, and those who have belief in the teachings of the Sikh Gurus, can feel His presence next to them while sitting amongst Sadh sangat. Guru Granth Sahib states (page 94:) "*Amid sangat abides the Almighty*". Again on page 266, it states: "*Highest among all works is joining the sangat and thereby conquering the evil propensities of the mind*" (SGGS, 266).

The tradition of sitting together and having collective meditation had started in the times of Guru Nanak, when the first Gurdwara (then called Dharmshala) was

established in Kartarpur. The tradition, later, was developed by other Gurus. Guru Hargobind also introduced 'morning choirs' (prabhat pheris) to induce Sikhs to rise early in the morning for prayers.

The mode of prayers, in Sikhism, is both individual and collective. In individual prayers, the nitnem banis are recited at home and in the collective prayers, people meet in Gurdwaras to listen first to the Asa-di-var and then other shabads.

In most of the Gurdwaras, though the Sadh-sangat has freedom to discuss secular matters affecting the community, it is its spiritual core which imparts to it the status and authority it commands in the Sikh system. Guru Granth Sahib states (page 1098): "*Without sangat ego will not be dispelled*". Again (page 282), "*As one lost in a thick jungle rediscovers one's path, so will one be enlightened in the company of Sadh-sangat*".

However, in Golden Temple Amritsar, it is only the spiritual aspect which is allowed. At 4 o'clock in the morning the kirtan starts, first with Asa-di -Var, followed by other appropriate shabads in allowed ragas. The last hymn is sung and completed at 10 p.m. sharp. Sadh-sangat, fellowship of the holy also inculcates Sikh values viz., Unity of God, Brotherhood of mankind, respect for each other and selfless seva. Historically, Sikh sangats played a very important role in the evolution of the Sikh community. A male member of the community was respectfully called 'Bhai' (brother), and a female member was called 'Mai' (lady). The names of Bhai Dharam Singh and others, and Mai Bhago and others are reminiscent of these titles. During Guru Amardas' times the word Sangat acquired another meaning. It was referred to a group of local sangats and was called 'manjis', each comprising a number of sangats. Guru Arjan appointed masands, which Guru Gobind Singh later disbanded, as community leaders, to look after sangats in different regions.

Sadh-Sangat was the forerunner to the creation of the Khalsa, at Keshgarh Sahib, in 1699 by Guru Gobind Singh. That miracle of the emergence of Saint-soldiers was the highest point in the evolution of the Sikh commonwealth originating in the institution of Sadh-sangat.

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Like the dream  
of night  
You treat false  
wealth as real  
Like the shadow  
of a cloud  
Whatever you  
see must  
disappear.

Guru Tegh Bahadur,  
S.G.G.S., Gauri

"He who eats  
what he earns  
through his  
earnest labour  
and from his  
hand gives  
something in  
charity; he alone,  
knows the true  
way of life"

Guru Nanak Dev, Rag Sarang  
S.G.G.S p.1245