

THE CONCEPT OF EDUCATION (VIDIAA)
IN
SRI GURU GRANTH SAHIB

The concept of education (vidiaa) in Sri Guru Granth Sahib is a very important subject because the Sikh educational tradition is deep-rooted in Sikh beliefs and shapes the Sikh way of life. After all, the very word 'sikh' means a learner, a disciple, a follower and a student, who discovers the truth from the hymns of Sri Guru Granth Sahib (gurbani), the Living Guru and a treasure of divine knowledge. Sri Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru, declared Sri Guru Granth Sahib as the "shabad guru" of the Sikhs. In the 'Siddh Goshti' Sri Guru Nanak Dev, the founder of Sikhism affirms: *The shabad is the guru and the surati attuned to it is the disciple.* (Sri Guru Granth Sahib p. 943) In gurbani it is proclaimed:

The guru in the form of shabad modifies human consciousness and elevates it to higher stages of development... Meeting with the satguru one's darkness is dispelled..." (SGGS 939)

Sri Guru Nanak Dev instructs his disciples: *Contemplating the guru, I have been taught these teachings.* (SGGS 465) *Do those deeds which the guru has ordained.* (SGGS 933) The word 'guru' represents the meanings of the syllables 'gu' as darkness and 'ru' as dispeller of darkness.¹ Guru is very important to bring mind under control. Sri Guru Angad Dev illustrates:

Water remains confined within the pitcher, but without water, the pitcher could not have been formed; just so, the mind is restrained by spiritual wisdom, but without the Guru, there is no spiritual wisdom. (SGGS 469)

Without a doubt, Sri Guru Granth Sahib is full of teachings, which any person can follow for a meaningful life. Detailed study of Sri Guru Granth Sahib has revealed that the concept of teacher (guru), disciple (sikh) and the relation between teacher and his disciple has been greatly emphasized. Guru is Divine teacher, who teaches his uneducated students and makes them wise. Gurbani elucidates:

O my Lord, we are just the ignorant children of our Lord God. Hail, hail, to the Guru, the Guru, the True Guru, the Divine Teacher who has made me wise through the Lord's Teachings? (SGGS 168)

In the light of gurbani we will try to discuss the concept of education (vidiaa). At this point it is proper to state that in the title of this article, the word 'vidia' is bracketed for education but a scholar differentiates these two words as such: "As gurbani guides vidaya is the most challenging accomplishment and becomes manifested with gurprasad only as appreciated, desired and understood by others. One acquires vidaya by grace. Education on the other hand seems something that can be learnt and acquired through training, practicing, etc. from the person, source, institution, through a defined path, with recognition and appreciation there after by others."² Prior to discussing 'The concept of education (vidiaa) in Sri Guru Granth Sahib', it is appropriate to be acquainted with the etymological meaning, definition, synonyms words, purpose and importance of education specified by the educationists, in broad-spectrum.

Etymologically, the word education is derived from *educare* (Latin) "bring up", which is related to *educere* "bring out", "bring forth what is within", "bring out potential" and "to lead".³ There are numerous definitions of education specified by the educationists from different viewpoint. But, in its technical sense, education is the process by which society deliberately transmits its accumulated knowledge, skills and values from one generation to another. "Education, if simply stated, means the process of gaining knowledge, inculcating forms of proper conduct and acquiring technical competency. It involves the cultivation of an innocent mind,

the instilling of values and principles in the minds of children. It includes the development of skills along with the achievement of one's physical, mental and social development. ⁴ It is believed that the process of education starts in the womb and continues throughout life. The synonyms words of the word education are: knowledge, teaching, understanding, realization, know-how, experience, way of life, expertise, skill, awareness, sense, insight, perception, erudition, scholarship, wisdom, intelligence, ability, comprehension, discernment, conception, scholarship, culture, book learning, teaching, schooling, tutoring, instruction, edification, grasp, earning, etc. ⁵ "The sole purpose of education is to educate all students and give everyone equal opportunity as a means to succeed in life. Through knowledge and skill, all individuals can achieve greatness. ⁶ In the words of Eric Hoffer, "The central task of education is to implant a will and facility for learning; it should produce not learned but learning people. The truly human society is a learning society, where grandparents, parents, and children are students together." Emma Goldman writes, "The effort of every true education should be to unlock that treasure." According to Ayn Rand, "The only purpose of education is to teach a student how to live his life by developing his mind and equipping him to deal with reality."⁷ Education is very important for an individual's success in life. An American proverb is: 'Genius without education is like silver in the mine.' In these times, being an educated person is really important because if people don't educate themselves no one can succeed in life. Education provides pupils teaching skills that prepare them physically, mentally and socially for the world of work in later life. Education is major aspect of development of any modern society since if there is a deficit of educated people then society will stop its further progress. ⁸

In Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the importance of education (vidiaa) is recognized. Vidiaa is light and avidiaa is darkness. Uneducated person always stumble in darkness because he is unable to differentiate between good and evil, truth and untruth, right and wrong, virtue and vice, etc. Therefore, Sri Guru Granth Sahib inspires a person to enlighten himself and help others in acquiring knowledge with the purpose of propagating education (vidiaa). Lack of knowledge is a spiritual bondage. Without wisdom a person is unable to carry out all his duties (individual and social) successfully. In gurbani, it is affirmed:

*Wisdom leads us to serve our Lord and Master; through wisdom, honor is obtained.
Wisdom does not come by reading text books; wisdom inspires us to give in charity. (SGGS 1245)*

There is immense emphasis on learning in Sri Guru Granth Sahib:

*Without learning, how can one be a pandit- a religious scholar? (SGGS 1140)
To instruct their minds, people ought to study some sort of spiritual wisdom. (SGGS 340)*

Guru Nanak Dev approving the importance of 'word' (akhar) says:

*From the Word, comes the Naam; from the Word, comes Your Praise.
From the Word, comes spiritual wisdom, singing the Songs of Your Glory.
From the Word, come the written and spoken words and hymns.
From the Word, comes destiny, written on one's forehead. (SGGS 4)
-In the Word, God established the three worlds Created from the Word, the Vedas are contemplated.
From the Word, came the Shaastras, Simritees and Puraanas.
From the Word, came the sound current of the Naad, speeches and explanations.
From the Word, comes the way of liberation from fear and doubt.
From the Word, come religious rituals, karma, sacredness and dharma. (SGGS 261)*

Gurbani emphasizes the acquisition of knowledge:

Of all elements, the most significant is the element of knowledge. (SGGS 152)

According to Sri Guru Granth Sahib the aims of education are of two types:

1. Individual aim: The principal aim of education is to lead an individual to self-realization so that his full potentials are realized. Strong moral character, physical well-being and strength, emotional and aesthetic abundance are the aspects which should be the result of a meaningful education.⁹ True education is to assure the all-round development of an individual, in other words, the flowering of all aspects of personality and the development and integration of human personality. In the words of G.S. Mansukhani, "Guru Nanak based the uplift of man on the cultivation of character. It is character which helps us to make the right choice or to take the right step in a moral crisis. Temptations come so suddenly that man has to take quick decisions. Unless one has sufficient virtue and guts, acquired by steady practice over a number of years, one is likely to fall a prey to evil. The function of education is to prepare the intellectual, aesthetic and emotional background in such a way, that the individual's development is assured."¹⁰ According to Gurbani only individual development is of no worth if it is not put to the good use of the society.

2. Social aim: According to Guru Nanak Dev ji- "*Vidiaa veechaaree tan parupkaaree*". That education is good, which is used for the welfare of people. (356) We can explore this phrase as such: The word vidiaa means- education, 'parhaae', 'sikhiaa', 'ilam', 'bodh', 'vichaar', 'jaankaaree', 'likhae-parhaae', 'giaan', learning, understanding, study, being acquainted with, cognizance, reading, gaining knowledge, reflections, understanding, exploring, researching, etc.

'veecharee' means- vichar karna, contemplate, reflect, think, etc.

'parupkaaree' means- altruistic, selfless, kind, philanthropic, generous, humanitarian, beneficent, benevolent, etc. It means, altruism (*parupkaar*) is the essence of knowledge. Unless one practices education it cannot turn out to be vidiaa. "In Sikhism, the purpose of education is declared to be to initiate the person to altruism."¹¹

It is believed that an ideal scholar understands the true essence of the teachings of Sri Guru Granth Sahib and shares his/her knowledge with others.

-Blessed is that mortal being, who shares the teachings for the good of others. (SGGS 311)

A natural outcome of true education is service of the humanity through honest means. Where possessions are shared, inequalities are bridged and discrimination is eliminated. All the Sikh Scholars agree to this statement that Sri Guru Nanak Dev summed up the Sikh tenets whereas he went, in the following triple precept: *Kirt karo, wand chhako* and *naam japo*. "It means, thou shalt earn thy livelihood by honest creative labour, thou shalt share the fruits of thy labour with thy fellow beings, and, thou shalt practise the discipline of the Name.... The first two precepts are to constitute the foundation of the Sikh society, while the remaining third is to vitalize and regenerate it."¹² Guru Nanak Dev had associated education with kindness and an instrument of moral and spiritual development. He recommended the model for a worldwide society where every individual must engage in honest reproductive labour, followed by sharing fruits of his labour with his neighbours. "The incorporated message of Sri Guru Granth Sahib, combining devotion with performance of worldly duties with earnest endeavor for the welfare of all has its parallel in the aim of modern education, which aims at training individuals to become worthy citizens. The importance attached to livelihood through honest means finds its echo in the aims of education which wants to root out corruption from society."¹³

In this context, Jodh Singh states, "Acquisition of virtues alone can make one a truly wise individual".¹⁴ "The teachings of Sri Guru Granth Sahib aim at inculcating values that bring out the broad universal outlook of man, which has assumed more importance in the present context of education, where the world has become a global village. As more and more importance is attached to the social implications of education, the various social values taught in Sri Guru Granth Sahib may be considered as the factors that can help integrating education to society. The instrumental values like, truth, love, forgiveness, justice, humility, compassion are universal appeal and various subsequent schools of education thought have also given importance to these values. The aim of education is to inculcate in man the scientific temper based on reasoning and understanding. The teachings of Sri Guru Granth Sahib similarly show the path where the mind is freed from social dogmas, superstitions and other psychological barriers ..."¹⁵ A scholar writes, "Guru Nanak taught us the three 'Hs' in place of the three 'Rs', namely the knowledge of the *Hand*, knowledge of the *Head* and the knowledge of the *Heart*. The education of the Hand implies the dignity of labour, self-reliance and the need of service of humanity. The education of the Head implies the appreciation of the wonders of Nature, the understanding of the mysteries of the universe and the search for truth. The education of the Heart includes the awakening of the higher self and finding true inspiration within."¹⁶

Unquestionably, just as a student needs a teacher, so a disciple needs the guidance of a 'guru'. Man may find it difficult to resist evil and do good, if left on his own, but if he is assisted by a great personality possessing dynamic powers, his progress will be steady and significant.¹⁷ It is established truth that Guru Nanak was a born teacher, who "started opening the flood gates of Divine Wisdom by uttering wonderful hymns from his very tender age. The Teacher of the Teachers, this Child World Teacher illumined the hearts of the Pandit and the Maulvi with true spirituality when taken to the school for education.... Divine wisdom, the true education then imparted by Sri Guru Nanak Sahib at that tender age delights the soul, illumines the heart, is the basis of all morality, is the foundation of all truthful living, and is the source of true character building.... This pure stream of Divine Wisdom flowing from the Child God had made the world holy and blessed. It had started dispelling the clouds of ignorance and darkness and had started filling the world with pure light of luminosity."¹⁸ Gurbani affirms that the guru is the spiritual guide who provides guidance to the disciple through the journey of life. Guru is considered as the divine spirit, which transforms an ordinary individual to a new lease of life. According to Sri Guru Granth Sahib, duties of a teacher (guru) are manifold. Starting from spiritual and religious responsibilities, he has moral and social responsibility in leading the disciple through the right path and prepares him to play the greater social role.

While the multi-dimensional qualities of a true guru make him adorable and respectable, a false teacher may pretend to be a man of great virtue and knowledge but lack of depth exposes him sooner or later. In Sri Guru Granth Sahib there are repeated warnings against such false teacher. Gurbani put in plain words- 'the educated persons, who advise others without following themselves, are condemnable because they use education only for amassing money. Such scholars cannot guide others to lead truthful life because they are full of greed, pride and egoism and love to gather wealth only. In gurbani they are named as fools (moorkh) and 'manmukh':

- *That scholar who is full of greed, arrogant pride and egotism, is known to be a fool. (SGGS 140)*

- *The fools call themselves spiritual scholars, and by their clever tricks, they love to gather wealth. (SGGS 469)*

- *The fool does not think of the Word of the Shabad.*

He has no understanding, no comprehension. (SGGS 938)

-The Pandits (the religious scholars), read their books, but they do not understand the real meaning. They give instructions to others, and then walk away, but they deal in Maya themselves. (SGGS 56)
-The Pandits (the religious scholars), read the scriptures, but they are trapped in the bondage of emotional attachment. In love with evil, they do not understand. (SGGS 33)

Reading and studying are just worldly pursuits, if there is longing and dishonesty within. Reading in egotism, all have grown weary; through the love of duality, they are ruined. "One does not turn gnostic simply through the reading of books and communicating to others the contents thereof."¹⁹ Only book learning is not acceptable in gurbani. Gurbani guides all scholars and religious leaders that only reading the loads of books repetitively are of no use without understanding:

-You may read and read loads of books; you may read and study vast multitudes of books.
You may read and read boat-loads of books; you may read and read and fill pits with them.
You may read them year after year; you may read them as many months there are.
You may read them all your life; you may read them with every breath.
O Nanak, only one thing is of any account: everything else is useless babbling and idle talk in ego. ...
The more one write and reads, the more one burns. (SGGS 467)
-The religious scholars achieve nothing only by reading and studying scriptures:
The Pandits read them, study them and contemplate them.
Without understanding, all are ruined. (SGGS 791)
- What use is it to read, and what use is it to study?
What use is it to listen to the Vedas and the Puraanas?
What use is reading and listening, if celestial peace is not attained? (SGGS 655)
-I have read all the Vedas, and yet the sense of separation in my mind still has not been removed;
the five thieves of my house are not quieted, even for an instant. (SGGS 687)
-This filth is not removed by studying.
Go ahead, and ask the wise ones. (SGGS 39)
-But you gain nothing by reading and studying, O mad-man, if you do not gain the understanding in your heart. (SGGS 483)
-The fools read them, but do not understand the Word of the Shabad.
How rare are those who, as gurmukh, understand. (SGGS 1053)
--One who reads and understands is acceptable. (SGGS 662)

Sri Guru Granth Sahib declares: that teacher (guru) alone is educated, who enlightens his mind with divine knowledge through right reflection in a spontaneous way.' Without the attainment of self-realization and enlightenment, education is incomplete:

-He alone is educated, and he alone is a wise Pandit, who contemplates the Word of the Guru's Shabad.
He searches within himself, and finds the true essence; he finds the Door of Salvation...
- That Pandit (religious scholar), is said to be well-educated, if he contemplates knowledge with intuitive ease.
Considering his knowledge, he finds the essence of reality. (SGGS 937-38)

According to gurbani such blessed scholars are named as 'gurmukh', 'pandit', 'giaani' and 'brahmgiyani.' In the educational philosophy of Sri Guru Granth Sahib, 'guru' occupies the foremost position. He is the beacon light. Although the mind of a pupil has great powers, it blossoms with the help of a real teacher. "The gems, the jewels, the rubies are in the mind. If one were to find them should hearken to the Guru's call, 'tis who giveth to each and all (on Him, on Him, O let me call)/Yea in the guru's words are the jewel's (of wisdom)/and whosoever seeketh findeth these' "... In brief, physical development, moral uplift and spiritual regeneration are possible through the institution of a worthy teacher or guru. About the challenging role of a teacher or guru the first Guru says, "When the true guru is merciful/ faith is perfected/ when the true guru is merciful/there is no grief/ when the true guru is merciful/ nine treasures of naam are obtained. The true guru helps the disciple to overcome his weakness. The guru is an ocean, a mine of jewels," from whom are obtained the five blessings of truth, contentment, compassion, dharma and patience. He calls the teacher "Guru Gopal".¹⁹

In Sri Guru Granth Sahib the references to disciple are complementary to that of the guru keeping in line with the great educational tradition of teacher-taught relationship. According to Sri Guru Granth Sahib, a disciple is not one who has read a lot books or has only bookish knowledge but as one who has full grown personality under the guidance of the Guru and one who is integrated to the society to play his active role. Physical, mental and spiritual discipline should be the hallmark of a disciple as these qualities enable an individual to face the challenges of life in the righteous way.²⁰ Sri Guru Granth Sahib's conception of education is not one-sided as it includes the complete view of man's life on the earth. Therefore all Gurus stressed mental as well as physical development through education, Sports and discipline as the important characteristics of a Sikh....The 10 fundamental principles of the Guru's educational system are (i) knowledge is strength; (ii) knowledge leads to wisdom and insight; (iii) knowledge elevates mind, body and soul; (iv) knowledge of virtue; (v) wisdom leads to spiritual consciousness; (vi) education as unfolding of potentialities; (vii) formation of character and infusion of piety; (viii) cultural, emotional and aesthetic development; (ix) physical development; and, (x) education for harmonious development.²¹ I agree with Amrit Kaur Raina's thought- "any learner first time introduced to Sri Guru Granth Sahib will instantaneously realize it as an educational institution where a teacher interacting with a group of students constitute an integral educational unit. The Granth being the teacher and the congregation being a school for learners will immediately become the center of attention making every Sikh as the object of its emphasis. Thus, the institution of education becomes a central doctrine in the Sikh society."²²

While discussing the Concept of Education (vidyaa) in Sri Guru Granth Sahib, it is necessary to be familiar with the medium of Sri Guru Granth Sahib. The hymns of Sri Guru Granth Sahib convey a powerful effect on the mind of the reader because of a suitable medium 'gurmukhi' dialect used by the Gurus. Historians are of the view point that Guru Angad Dev invented the present form of the gurmukhi script. It became the medium of writing the Punjabi language in which the hymns of the Gurus are expressed. This step had a far-reaching purpose and impact. Firstly, it gave the common people a language that is simple to learn and write. Secondly, it helped the community to dissociate itself from the very reserved and complex nature of the Sanskrit religious tradition so that the growth and development of the Sikhs could take place unhampered and unprejudiced by the backlog of the earlier religious and social philosophies and practices. It is noteworthy that Guru Angad Dev started the school and also developed the gurmukhi language in order to make education available to the downtrodden and the underprivileged of the society at that time. Guru Angad was a great teacher who personally taught punjabi in gurmukhi script to children.²³

In the end we can conclude that Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the living Guru, is a source of true education. Gurbani commands us:

"There is none to compare with the guru; I have searched and looked throughout the entire universe... Meeting with the guru, be a sincere student of proper conduct, and suffering shall never touch you. (SGGS 50)
He Himself is the teacher, and He Himself brings the students to be taught...
He Himself makes the children wise. (SGGS 552)
The sat-sangat, the true congregation of the true guru, is the school of his soul, where the glorious virtues of the Lord are studied. (SGGS 1316)

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