

Self-empowerment through spirituality

DR. AMRIT KAUR RAINA*

* M.A., M.Ed., Ph.D. Research Scholar, Major Research Project U.G.C.

Address: 154, Tribune Colony, Baltana (Zeerakpur). Punjab

SPIRITUALITY IS A WIDE term which encompasses the entire vista of man's life, i.e. physical, mental, spiritual, emotional, and social. Self-empowerment through spiritualism means that man is endowed with great inborn potentialities and capacities and if they are developed and blossomed fully, he can scale the heights higher and higher. Swami Vivekanand¹ believes that all the souls are potentially divine and education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man.

Such is the divine play of the creator,
That he has reflected the whole cosmos
In the human body (SGGS: 117)

The body is the temple of God in which are revealed precious pearls of knowledge (SGGS:1346) and if these precious pearls of knowledge are explored and developed with the help of a true Guru, the harmonious development of personality takes place. Man is carved in the image of God. *The drop is contained in the ocean, the ocean in the drop.* (SGGS: 1318). The human body is not a mere body. In the body, there is divine light which has been placed there by great God. "Oh! *My body the lord imbued thee with light and then thou comest into this world.* (SGGS: 921) That is why Guru Amar Das asks man to recognise his essence i.e. know thyself in the modern words.

"You are the embodiment of light oh! Man

Recognise thy essence. (SGGS: 441)

Within the mind are the jewels and the rubies, whose worth is infinite (SGGS: 754). Man has got a storehouse of energy. He has great potentialities to solve his own problems. He can carve out his destiny through his own efforts. If guided and inspired properly he can work wonders that is why lord Buddha asks man to become his own lamp of knowledge to guide his own path.

On the basis of his actions and qualities, the Gurus have divided man into two categories, 'Gurmukh' and 'Manmukh'. The *Gurmukh* or *Brahmagyani* (A man having divine knowledge and experience) or Khalsa (the pure) is the ideal man of the Gurus whom they tried to carve in their own image through moral, spiritual training. If a man controls his evil impulses, his haumai (ego) and attunes himself to God he becomes a 'Gurmukh', a God-dedicated soul. But if he forgets God and does not control his evil impulses he degenerates and becomes a 'Manmukh', self-willed egoist away from God. The *Manmukh* is attached to worldly wealth, worldly allurements and sensual enjoyments. He is bound by the whirlpool of desires. Getting and spending he lays waste his powers. He is enveloped by the darkeners of ignorance. He is tossed in bondage from birth to birth.

*He writhes in pain day and night
And the noose of death is round his neck.
He gets no peace even in his dreams,
And anxiety tears at his heart.*

In Gurbani the example of Ravana is quoted to distinguish between 'Gurmukh' and 'Manmukh'. He was a great scholar and had mastered all the Shastras and Vedas and yet he could not control his lust for revenge and sex. Far away from real spiritualism, the animal in him took the better of him and led to his destruction and degeneration. In Sukhmani Sahib, Guru Arjun Dev has described the character, personality and spiritual powers of Brahmgyani or Gurmukh in detail. His spiritual powers are developed. He is the purest of the pure rays, serene. His mind is illumined and nourished by divine knowledge. Meditating over the name of God he enjoys supreme bliss. He is compassionate and works for the welfare of humanity at large. He lives like a lotus flower, fully blossomed, who scatters his fragrance around to beautify the world. There is peace and contentment in his life.

In Gita too Krishna depicts in detail two types of men, the one possessing divine nature, sattvic disposition and the other possessing a demonic disposition. The sattvic qualities are all divine attributes of God. They constitute man's spiritual wealth. They are fearlessness, purity of heart, steadfastness, charity, right study of scriptures, self-discipline, truth, peace, compassion towards all beings, forgiveness, cleanliness of body and purity of heart and mind. The development of these *sattvic* qualities lead a man to self-realization and self-manifestation. This is what Christ says in Bible, "Be ye, therefore perfect, as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." Hypocrisy, arrogance, pride, conceit, anger, ignorance of mind are the marks of a man with demonic disposition (XVI/IV) He is given to greed, lust and anger. He strives hard to amass wealth by unfair means and use it for sensuous pleasures. Lust, anger and greed constitute the threefold gate of hell leading him to destruction. Due to his demonical nature he is cast again and again into demonical wombs by the Lord.

Now the question arises how the powers of body, mind and soul can be developed through spiritualism to strengthen and empower oneself. In the beginning of Japji one important spiritual question is asked "*How can one become sachara (true)*" in the court of God and how the veil of ego can be torn asunder? Prompt comes the reply, "*Follow the Hukam, the ordinance and discipline of God and thou can achieve your goal.*"

The Gurus ask their disciples to discipline their physical, mental, moral and spiritual faculties. It is the training of the body, mind and soul to act according to rules and regulations. It means moderation, control, sublimation and balance in our thoughts, words, deeds and desires. Body is the gift of God and taking care of the body and keeping it in a healthy and sound condition by regular habits and good diet taken in moderation is the first Dharma of man. Live for hundred years performing your duties well and taking good diet, say the Vedas. The constitution of a man's mind is determined by the kind of food he takes. Purity of mind follows from purity of diet earned by rightful means. In Gita lord Krishna insists on taking *sattvic* diet to develop a *sattvic* mind. Physical chastity is emphasized. Smoking and use of intoxicants are prohibited in Gurbani.

"Avoid such foods which cause pain to the body and arouse passion in the mind.
Avoid such dresses which cause pain in body
And arouse passion in the mind.

(SGGS: 16)

For physical fitness - life of action, hard labour and service to humanity is emphasized. Perfection in action is the real yoga, says lord Krishna in Gita, which depends on a strong and stout body. That is why Vivekanand prefers to build a strong body by playing football than to study Gita passively. His towering physical personality cast a spell on the western people. He conquered west through his spiritual power.

“Sport and play are the mind’s amusement” (SGGS: 465) says Guru Nanak. In Siddhagosht he admonishes the Sidhas not to torture and starve their bodies in the hope of finding salvation. Body is the vehicle of the soul and must be kept in a fit, strong and healthy condition by hard physical labour, earning one’s livelihood through the sweat of one’s brows, says the fifth Guru.

*“You live your life making earnest efforts,
And make your life happy through rightful earnings.
Meet the lord through contemplation.
And your anxieties will be dispelled.”*

(SGGS: 522)

For the physical fitness of their disciples, the Gurus emphasized games, sports and training in arms. There was blend of *Bhagti* and *Shakti* in their educational curriculum. Guru Har Gobind was a saint soldier, whom Guru Arjun, the first martyr of the Sikh religion admonished to sit fully armed on the throne. Guru Gobind Singh turned the Sikhs into a martial community through games, sports and training in arms. He raised the dormant energies of the vanquished people and filled them with rare spirit of valour and confidence. “Men who had never touched a sword or shouldered a gun were empowered by him to become heroes and soldiers in the battle of life. Confectioners and washermen, sweepers and barbers became leaders of armies before whom the Rajas quailed and the Nawabs cowered down with terror.”

“The Sikhs whom you see around³ are men of sturdy built, handsome countenance, of tough strength and unflinching courage. They are Sishyas, disciples of Guru Nanak. It is through his teachings that their temper is fearless. They keep their heads erect. Their character and countenance are brightened with magnanimity” These physical qualities of the Sikhs based on spiritualism have empowered them to carve a niche for themselves in the whole world.

*“He alone is learned and educated
who gains self knowledge through self enlightenment.”* (SGGS: 25)

Ignorance is a spiritual bondage. Gurus emphasize acquisition of knowledge for mental enlightenment. *“Of all elements, the most significant is the element of knowledge.”* (SGGS: 152) *“Of all the Yajnas, the most divine is the Gyan Yajna”* says lord Krishna (4/38). It is *Avidya* (Ignorance) which forges fetters to bind the mind. It is divine wisdom which enlightens the mind. Goutama, became Buddha (the enlightened one) by the acquisition of knowledge. Just as darkness disappears when the lamp is lighted, similarly through the study of books of wisdom, ignorance of mind is removed. It becomes clean and does not get dirty again.

“One can clean the mind with the jewel of wisdom

And there after it is soiled not again.

(SGGS: 992)

Knowledge not only illumines the mind, it gives its seeker divine happiness. Guru Nanak has described in Japji, the domain of Knowledge (Gyan Khand) which is illumined by the waves of knowledge. In this realm, there is abundance of knowledge, '*Gyan Prachand*' where a seeker can enjoy millions of wonderful sights and sounds. It is full of divine music (*Nada*), joyous spirit (*Vinod*) and abounds with vibrations of happiness.

In the domain of knowledge, knowledge abounds,

Myriad kinds of joys, sights and sounds. (SGGS: Japji, P.7)

According to some thinkers the battle field of Kurukshetra in Mahabharata is an allegory. The body is the chariot. The senses are the horses. The mind, the reins. The intellect is the charioteer, the controlling power which holds the reins of the horse in hand and checks it to run ruthlessly. The same allegory is given in Kathopanishad. By controlling the mind, we conquer the world, says Guru Nanak. This magic transformation of Arjuna takes place through this lengthy spiritual discourse between him and Lord Krishna which empowers him to shed off his weakness of mind and strengthens him to fight valiantly in the battle field of life. The vibrations of fear are reversed by this intellectual discourse. And when the fear of death is removed, it becomes easier to fight in war. That is why Guru Gobind Singh asks his disciples to remove the dirt of cowardice with the broom of knowledge. (Dasam Granth P-570) He declares emphatically, "Blest is his life in this world who repeats God's name on his lips and contemplates war in his heart (Dasam Granth, P.570) He selected the five beloveds on the day of Baisakhi, removing cowardice with the broom of knowledge, waving sword in the air, he said.

"If thou desires to play the game of love with me.

Come my way with thy head in the palm of thy hand

Put thy feet on the road,

Give thy head and care not others opinion (SGGS: 1412)

"I need such soldiers" said Guru Gobind Singh,

"who fight to protect the helpless.

Though cut limb by limb, flee not the field." (SGGS: 1412)

The musical narration of heroic stories filled the Sikhs' hearts with urge for social freedom and national ascendancy. These divine songs and singing of heroic ballads in his court created such mighty soldiers like Baba Deep Singh, Taru Singh, Hari Singh Nalwa, Banda Bahadur who were cut to pieces limb by limb and his own sons who were bricked alive and died fighting but never surrendered and compromised with the unjust, cruel rulers and oppressors of their times. This spiritual power empowered Guru Arjun Dev, Guru Teg Bahadur, Mati Dass, Sati Dass, Bhai Dyala to sacrifice their lives calmly for the sake of justice with divine glow on their faces singing the divine name with their lips "Oh! God thine sweet will be done." These heroic sacrifices of the Gurus have inspired many Bhagat Singhs to die valiantly on the altar of motherland singing the songs of bravery "Oh! Mother dye my garments with the divine colours of spring."

Mere intellectual development without the development of character, learning without piety, proficiency in the sacred lore, with a deficiency in practice may pervert the very goal of spiritualism. Ethical conduct is the basis of spiritual life. Truth is high but higher still is truthful living. There can be no worship without good actions. The mark of an educated person is that he contemplates upon the higher values of life.

*“He alone is a wise man, Who gains spiritual knowledge,
Through meditation upon the divine virtues.”* (SGGS: 931)

Divine knowledge can be obtained through the practical evolution of higher values alone. And these virtues like our friends help us to overcome vices.

*“Nanak as many are the vices,
So many are the chains round our neck
Ye, one removes the vices with the cultivation of virtues in life.
As virtues are our only friends.”*

(SGGS: 62)

A person may read a large number of books and acquire degrees but he will not be considered an educated person if he suffers from selfishness, greed and ego.

*“An educated person is a fool
If he indulges in ego, greed and lust.”*

(SGGS: 140)

Man is bound by the law of Karma. The body is a field (Gita-13/1). As we sow so shall we reap. A man sattvic in character possesses divine disposition. The fruit of sattvic actions is harmony and purity. The fruit of rajasic actions is pain. The fruit of tamasic actions is ignorance. Lust, wrath and avarice are the threefold ways to hell. Evil impulses are to be controlled and sublimated otherwise delusion and destruction will be the result. The more we run after sensory pleasures, the less bright becomes the flame in our hearts. Control your senses and the flame will go stronger and stronger. When godly virtues dominate, heart becomes pure and man hears the gentle voice of his conscience, the inner self and treads on the right path:

*My mind is the Guru who has instructed me in wisdom.
So that desire, its mother has turned Away from me.
(Guru Gobind Singh: Dasam Granth, P-73)*

Man cannot live by bread alone. He needs spiritual food for his sustenance. From times immemorial India has been a land of spiritual consciousness. Spiritual books like ‘Vedas’, ‘Upanishads’, ‘Ramayana’, ‘Guru Granth Sahib’, the revealed books of God have been giving spiritual food to millions of people. Indian sages, saints and educationists consider self-realization and self-manifestation as the ultimate goal of life. In the light of Ish Upanishad “Education helps in Salvation ‘*Sa vidya ya vimuktaya*’ is a well-known Indian saying. “*An educated man, a scholar or a seer is one who puts the garland of Ram Nam round his neck.*” (SGGS: 1288)

In Japji Guru Nanak has described five stages of mental and spiritual journey of the individual. These stages mark the development of scientific outlook, artistic vision, creative attitude, moral and spiritual strength which help to realize the divine truth. These five grades of spiritual journey are *Dharam Khand* (The realm of perceptual truth) *Gyan Khand* (The realm of knowledge) *Saram Khand* and *Karam Khand* (The realms of action or divine grace), *Sach Khand* (The Realm of Divine

Truth). The disciple has to pass through these realms to become fully accomplished. It is the path of knowledge, action and devotion, all the three combined together. This blend of Gyan (knowledge) Karam (action) and Bhakti (devotion) lead to balanced spiritual development. Then the disciple reaches the ultimate, the abode of the Formless lord and is united with him. It is condition of peace, of consummate joy and perfect tranquility, a condition transcending all human telling. The ray is united with the sun. Water blends with water. Light blends with light. Perfection is achieved. There is complete identification of the self with the higher self.

For spiritual development, self-purification by the development of virtues, love, devotion, concentration and meditation on God's name, singing of God's praises in *sadh sangat*, service of mankind have been emphasized by our sages, saints and scriptures. The Sikh Gurus attach great importance to the role of the Guru in the spiritual development of a person. One cannot think of any spiritual, moral, mental or social development without the kindly help of the Guru. The ennobling touch of the enlightened divine personality transforms the life of the disciple. He is a light kindling other lights, an awakened soul awakening other souls. It is with the help of the true Guru that the mind of the disciple is cleansed and emancipated. The veil of ego is torn asunder and he sees God everywhere.

*The egg of superstition hath burst, The mind is illumined.
The Guru hath cut the fetters of the feet, And freed the captive*

(SGGS: 1002)

Besides the human Guru, the enlightened and the perfect teacher, the Sikh Gurus consider God, Self, Word, Guru Granth Sahib, Nature and Sangat as 'Guru'.

In Siddhagosht, the yogis ask Guru Nanak, "who is your Guru, Whose disciple you are?" the Guru replies.

"The word (shabad) is the Guru,
And the mind attuned to the shabad is the disciple
The Shabad is the Guru, teacher, fathomless and calm,
Without the shabad the people wander astray
Attune your mind to the word, Guru."

(SGGS: 942)

The idea of shabad as Guru is found in Vedas, Upanishadas and Gita. Word (the living voice of God) imparts knowledge and truth to man. God is identified with the word. In Gita lord Krishna describes in detail the repetition of the word 'Om' for name meditation.

"Thou art the word and thou art its expression." (SGGS: 795)

It is 'Trai Lok Dipak' shabad chanan. Incorporated word in the form of holy books is the Gyan Guru in which are enshrined all the nectars of life.

*"The Bani is the Guru and Guru is the Bani
For all the nectars are enshrined in it."* (SGGS: 982)

That is why the Gurus emphasize the reading and reciting of Gurbani and name meditation in the ambrosial hours of the morning. Name meditation is the panacea for all ills.

Musical singing of Gurbani is a precious jewel,

*It produces unfathomable joy,
And all the sorrows depart.*

(SGGS: 213)

Music is the food for soul. It sweetens life. Singing of Gurbani gives spiritual joy and transcendental bliss. It becomes a means of communication with God.

*“The generous lord has given us this gift,
Through it light merges into light.”*

(SGGS: 366)

Musical singing of Gurbani gives emotional food. With emotionally balanced and stable mind one marches ahead on the path of life. Singing of God’s name elevates his character and brings strength and solace to his mind in the sorrows and struggles of day to day life. Why to worry? Guru is there to protect and help us.

*“Who so ever hears the kirtan of Hari.
Who so ever hears the kirtan of Hari.
Near that person, no misery can ever come.”*

(SGGS: 190)

This sense of indwelling presence of the Guru in Guru Granth Sahib has shaped the course of Sikh history and led to many noblest endeavours in the annals of mankind in the cause of humanity, dignity and freedom. The teachings of Guru Granth Sahib and other holy books have been a source of life and light to millions of people. To make Guru Granth Sahib as a vehicle of mass-education, the Gurus made Sangat and Pangat an integral part of the lives of their disciples. *God dwells in the company of saints.* (SGGS: 72) *The society of the saints is the School where one is instructed in the merits of God* (SGGS: 1316). One is purged of one’s evil impulses in saintly company. Sajjan Thug, Koda Raksash and Noorshah came into the company of Guru Nanak and were transformed. How sangat trains one in social and civic efficiency and in social behaviour is very beautifully described by the fifth Guru.

*“I have forgotten to speak ill or think ill of any one,
Ever since I learnt to live in the company of good and holy saints,
No one is my enemy nor is any one stranger to me,
I get on well with one and all.”*

(SGGS: 1299)

By holy association, lamp of divine light is lit. One is blessed with wisdom. There is kirtan, katha, discussions and discourses, where problems are solved and doubts removed. All the seekers after truth are united both in word, deed and thought for noble purposes of life. It was on the historical Baisakhi day when a large number of sangat had assembled when Guru Gobind Singh created the Khalsa, an army of saint soldiers to fight against cruelty, oppression and injustice and the freedom of the motherland. *Sadh Sangat* not only helps in spiritual progress but social development also. In *Sadh Sangat* and *Pangat* (community dining), there is no difference between man and man. The barriers of caste, creed, high and low are removed. God is one and we all are his children. Recognise all mankind as one, says the Guru. Service of *Sangat* becomes service of God. The Gurus taught this service of man by their personal examples by sacrificing their all for the welfare of society. They emphasize the sharing of one’s earnings with the needy for the upliftment of society and reconstruction of a new social order.

*He alone, O Nanak, knows the right path of life
Who earns his livelihood with the sweat of his brow,
And shares it with his fellow human beings.* (SGGS: 1245)

This is what Lord Krishna says in Gita: *Those who are devoted to the welfare of all attain me and endear themselves to me.*(12/4) Strengthened by these spiritual virtues of body mind and soul, man attains such spiritual heights that his own inner self, his conscience, Atma awakens, he recognizes himself and his own inner self becomes the Guru, the guiding star of his life. When man recognizes his higher self, the divinity in himself, he undergoes a wonderful change. This divine consciousness helps him to distinguish between right and wrong, good and bad, virtue and vice. His will power and character are developed. He develops strength to resist temptations. This divine consciousness gives him mental balance and keeps him on the right track. It prevents him from becoming acquisitive, over ambitious or greedy. It inspires him to be kind and helpful to the less fortunate ones. "When this God-consciousness becomes a part of conscience, a monitor, a deep and all pervasive sentiment in man's every day life, influencing and guiding his behaviour as a second nature, man undergoes a wonderful change," says Guru Nanak. Empowered by this spiritual awakening his daily prayer becomes to die fighting valiantly and heroically in the battlefield of life to save his own honour and the honour of his countrymen.

*"Give me this power O Almighty,
From righteous deeds I may never refrain
Fearlessly may I fight all the battles of life.
With confident courage claiming the victory
May my highest ambition be to sing thy praises.
And may thy glory be ingrained in my heart,
When this mortal life reaches its end,
May I die fighting with limitless courage,
In the battle of life." (Guru Gobind Singh, Dasam Granth, P-99)*

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