

Guru Nanak Dev Ji - On Education

*Dr. (Mrs.) Amrit Kaur Raina**

** Retd. Principal, 154, Tribune Colony, Baltana (Zeerakpur). Punjab.*

According to Dr. G.W. Leitner (History of Indigenous Education in Punjab. P1) Dr. R.L. Ahuja (Indigenous Education in Punjab) (p. 185, 194) Principal Teja Singh (Growth of Responsibility in Sikhism). Guru Nanak was the pioneer of a new educational movement. He enjoined upon his followers to open elementary schools attached to the Gurdwaras for boys and girls. This practice continued upto the beginning of the twentieth century. According to Dr. Ahuja, Guru Nanak's contribution to this educational movement was threefold: Education, both religious and ethical in character was provided in the schools. Secondly, the mother tongue of the people, i.e. Punjabi, was used as the medium of instruction. Thirdly, the chief aim of enlightening the minds of the people was to be achieved in two ways by instructing the adults through sermons and discussions and by giving education to the children from infancy.

“He alone is a really educated teacher, who is God centered or Gurmukh,
Who awakens divine intelligence in his disciples,
who meditates on the divine name with concentration
who cherishes the name in his mind

Who gains the gain of God realization

Which is the main purpose of human life. (M.1. A.G. p. 938)

In this process of self-realization and self manifestation, the acquisition of divine knowledge, the Gyan Guru helps. Of all the elements, the most significant is the element of knowledge. It is avidya (ignorance) which forges fetters to bind the mind. Education enlightens the mind with the light of knowledge. “As with the appearance of the sun, the moon disappears, so with attainment of knowledge, ignorance is dispelled” (M.1. p. 791). “The lamp of wisdom burns steadily when it is fed by the oil of the essence of knowledge.” (M.1. p. 1109). Just as the darkness disappears when the lamp is lighted, similarly through the study of books of wisdom, ignorance of our mind is removed and it gets enlightened. 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.” (M.1. p. 992)

For Guru Nanak knowledge helps in the harmonious development of body, mind and soul, Cultivation of intellect is the most important factor in developing a fully integrated personality.

“When we acquire treasure of divine knowledge,

We get insight into all the three realms of body, mind and soul.” (M.1. p .60)

With the help of knowledge man is able to discriminate between good and bad, right and wrong. He shuns evil and follows the virtuous path. He is able to fight evil impulses of his mind with the sword of knowledge.

“Man's desires subside in his mind,

When he fights against them, With the sword of wisdom.” (M.1. p.1022)

In his Japji, Guru Nanak has described Gyan Khand which is illumined with Knowledge. The flames of thought keep it bright. A million brooks of joy are there. It is only after passing through Gyan Khand that man passes into Sach Khand, meaning thereby that acquisition of divine knowledge helps in self-realization. For Guru Nanak, education is not synonymous with book learning. He differentiates education from mere information and passing of examinations in the modern times. One may read and read innumerable books and still may not be rightly educated person. Reading heaps of books without realization and

understanding of the knowledge so gained is useless. It is just burden on the mind.

*“Talking of one’s knowledge and mere reading of scriptures is load on the mind”
(P.412)*

A mere store of information or knowledge does not constitute real education. The ability to use what we learn is a fundamental aim of intellectual education. This is what he explained to Pandit Dharam Dass, a profound scholar of Sanskrit literature who carried cart loads of books to display his learning.

*“We may read and read books
And fill carts with their load
We may read and read books
And Store caravans upon caravans
with their loads,
We may read and read books
Through out the life and for all the breathes allotted to us.” (M1 p. 467)*

And still may not be a rightly educated person if the knowledge gained does not make us a better person.

*“There is no dearth of educated men in the world but rare is the wise man,
Who makes use of the knowledge gained.
There is no dearth of learned scholars in the world
But rare is the man of wisdom who reflects on the wisdom gained and acts
accordingly.” (M.1. p. 413)*

Long before the modern educationists, Gururji proclaimed that the right education must enkindle the spark for quest and enquiry in man, improving his thinking, sharpening his imagination and making him a socially useful person.

According to Guru Nanak true wisdom can be realized only through a life of action.

*“Wisdom cannot be sought through prattle,
To describe its essence is also hard,
Those alone can gain wisdom
Who through God’s grace
Lead, the very practical life of Karam yoga. (M.1. p. 464)*

How strikingly modern he appears in his approach! Acquisition of divine knowledge leads to eternal bliss. But this divine knowledge can be obtained through the practical evolution of higher virtues alone. “Truth is high but higher still is truthful living. There can be no devotion without cultivating noble qualities.” (M.1. p. 4)

The mark of an educated person is that he tries to inculcate higher values of life in himself.

*“He alone is a wise man
Who gains practical enlightenment of life
Through meditation over the divine virtues”.* (M.1. p. 940)

A person may read 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.”*

(M.1. p.140)

As a moral teacher, Guru Ji emphasizes the inculcation of higher values in life again and again and these virtues as our friends help us to overcome vices.

*“Nanak, as many are the vices
So many are the chains round our neck.
Yea one removes vice with virtue.*

For virtue is our only friend” (p .595).

The educated person of Guruji’s conception is a fully blossomed personality who like a fragrant flower scatters the fragrance of his virtues around. “I have not come on this earth bringing the message of heaven, I have come to make this world a veritable heaven” says Rama in Saket written by Hindi poet Mathilisan Gupta. The educated person of Guruji’s conception does not only work for his own emancipation. He does good to others.

“He is really an educated person who does good to others” (M.1. p. 356). Service of man is service of God. Religion and education should inspire man to dedicate his life and genius to the service of humanity. Wisdom, virtues, spirituality are futile if they help only in personal salvation; that is why the teacher of Guru’s conception regards teaching the students as his mission and does not hanker after tuition work for wealth. The teacher who works only for amassing wealth is not a true teacher.

The egocentric selleth his knowledge and poison he earneth and eateth(M.1. p. 938).

Guruji’s concept of the teacher is elevating and inspiring even for the instructors of today. Like the modern educationists he believes that every child is endowed with infinite potentialities which can be made to blossom under the personal care of the teacher through dedicated efforts, “In the mine of the human soul there are so many gems and jewels of faculties waiting for development only if one cares to listen to the voice of teacher”.

Guru Nanak advocates the harmonious development of personality through education. He has not neglected the physical, social, emotional, aesthetic development of personality. The physical fitness of the body is the most important factor in the education of a pupil. Sport and play are the mind’s amusement. He. upholds the dignity of labour and a life of action for physical fitness. The human body is the temple of God and should be kept in a healthy condition by regular habits. The use of intoxicants is prohibited. “Avoid such foods which cause pain to the body and passion in the mind”. (M.1.p. 16)

Guru Nanak has not only expressed his views on education but he took practical steps to educate the masses. In his days, illiteracy was wide spread. Instead of Sanskrit and Persian, he preferred to impart education in Punjabi. It helped him to take education to the doors of the masses. He seems to understand the psychology of the child and wants the child to get education in his mother tongue. He feels that the learning of one’s language is very important to keep intact one’s culture. His own contribution to the development of Punjabi language and literature is unrivalled. He is a true nationalist. He is critical of the study of Persian, the foreign language of Indians of his times. At several places he condemns the adoption of foreign culture and language by the people.

The Kshatriyas have given up their real Dharma. They have adopted the language (culture) of the ill-intentioned foreign rulers. (M.I. p. 663)

An educated man is an improved man. Guru Nanak designed the daily routine of his disciples in such a way as to provide them practical training in social service, moral, spiritual, cultural and aesthetic development. To remove the barriers of caste and creed, high and low, rich and poor he started the institutions of *Sangat* and *Pangat*. The Guru and his Sikhs began their daily routine with meditation, musical recitation of shabads, katha, discussion and prayer which provided them spiritual, emotional and aesthetic food. Then they dispersed for the day’s labour. They were advised to earn their livelihood through honest, hard labour. In the evening the same morning routine was repeated. Through this daily routine of disciplined life, the disciples learnt a life of action, service, exchange of ideas and corporate living. It also provided them with intellectual and spiritual food. Higher moral values were inculcated.

During the times of Guru Nanak there was great political, religious, cultural turmoil and

chaos in India. Kings were butchers, cruelty was their knife. The moon of truth was not visible anywhere. Babar invaded India disguised as Yama. His soul cried in anguish to see the terrible slaughter.

He tried to awaken the people politically by his clarion call of nationalism, "What is the use of living if we cannot protect our honour and freedom". (M.1. p.142)

He travelled extensively throughout the whole of India and the neighbouring countries to bring about better understanding, goodwill and ties of friendship among the people belonging to different regions and countries. Wherever he went Gurdwaras were established which became the centres of educating the masses. He was a walking, talking philosopher like Socrates and Buddha. These were some of the practical steps he took to bring about national solidarity, social, emotional, cultural, national integration and international goodwill.

Thus reading and writing became common among the followers of the Guru. The new literacy movement spread among the Sikhs and a network of simple informal type of elementary schools sprung up to make education accessible to all. The movement grew and developed during the times of the later Gurus. While the first Guru gave education its new basis substance and content, the second guru started the new literacy movement. He made '*pothis*' of the Guru's and his own Shabads and sent them to various centres of education. This tradition was carried on by the third and fourth Guru.

The fifth Guru compiled the Sri Guru Granth Sahib, which has become a source of light and life to millions of people. The tenth Guru realizing the needs of his times greatly elaborated the training in defensive and offensive weapons, games and sports which was originally initiated by the sixth Guru. By the time of tenth Guru seats of learning came to be established at Amritsar, Anandpur Sahib, Paunta Sahib and Damdama Sahib. The knowledge of three R's as well as skill in warfare henceforth became the essential equipment of a Sikh. The Sikh literacy drive of the masses went hand in hand with religious education. Every new Dharamshala came to be centre of education. The study of Sri Guru Granth Sahib remains an indispensable part of the education of the Sikhs.

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