

GURBANI PATH³

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Reading Gurbani has been greatly emphasized in Sikhism. Most of us perform it only as an act of pious, ritualistic or charitable nature. Perhaps, that is why various methods and rituals of Gurbani recitation like Akhand Paath; series of Sukhmani Sahib, Nitname and Nam Simran sessions are in vogue.

Many preachers, priests, especially the so-called sants, cult heads, and *dehradar babas* exhort their followers: Do *Paath, Nam Jap and Simran*. All this seems to have developed a business mentality among greedy priests, sadhs and even some institutions to mint money in the guise of religious practice. So much so, Brahmanical rituals also accompany Gurbani recitation.

No doubt, reading Gurbani and meditating on *Naam* are very important. But should this practice remain limited to mere reciting or getting read Gurbani *Path* by hired readers? It is most painful to see that most of our religious and political institutions have become subservient to those who hold and promote Bramanical and mercantile mentality. *Path*, its exposition, *Kirtan*, and even *Naam Simran* is being commercialized.

We have drifted away from the Gurus' teaching that a Sikh must recite or hear Gurbani to seek and practice the way which leads his/her awareness to Gurmukh level or Guru-oriented thinking and living. We are expected to dwell on Gurbani and learn to shatter the veil of ego and ignorance so as to lead helpful, happy and peaceful life in society. We ignore this advice and do not advance from mere recitation part.

On the other hand, we have started worshipping our Gurus like *avtars* and reading/selling their Bani like *Jantar-Mantars!* In the absence of understanding what the Gurbani says and means our self remains enveloped in ignorance and superstitions. Aad Guru Granth Sahib is being worshiped like an idol.

Let us try to answer these common questions, which arise about Gurbani Path:

Why, how and for what purpose should the Gurbani be recited?

Sikhs must read/recite Gurbani to understand how to dispel ignorance and enlighten themselves with *Gurmat Gyan* and thereby reach the Gurus' realm of awareness. Gurbani teaches us how to break the shackles of *Haumai* (ego) and realize our real self.

ਮਨ ਤੂੰ ਜੋਤਿ ਸਰੂਪ ਹੈਂ ਆਪਣਾ ਮੂਲੁ ਪਛਾਣੁ॥
ਮਨ ਹਰਿ ਜੀ ਤੇਰੈ ਨਾਲਿ ਹੈ ਗੁਰਮਤੀ ਰੰਗੁ ਮਾਣੁ॥

AGGS, M 3, p. 441. [1]

My soul thou art thee embodiment (image) of divine light, so know thy self. [2]

As we are driven by egocentric 'me-mine' attitude, there is no hope of peace and happiness in families and society. We are always under undue anxiety, stress and strain. Its solution, according to *Gurmat*, is to attain *Jiwan-Mukti* (liberation) while performing social duties of day-to-day life. We can learn and practice this way of life by reading and understanding the Gurus' message conveyed in Gurbani:

ਸੋ ਮੁਕਤਾ ਸੰਸਾਰਿ ਜਿ ਗੁਰਿ ਉਪਦੇਸਿਆ॥
ਤਿਸ ਕੀ ਗਈ ਬਲਾਇ ਮਿਟੇ ਅੰਦੇਸਿਆ॥

AGGS, M 5, p. 519.

He whom the Guru has instructed is emancipated in this world. [2]

Reading and listening to Gurbani is a means to the goal of understanding, imbibing and practicing Gurus' teaching and wisdom. Reading/reciting without grasping the essence does not help in our spiritual development:

ਪੜਿਐ ਨਾਹੀ ਭੇਦੁ ਬੁਝਿਐ ਪਾਵਣਾ॥

AGGS, M 1, p. 148.

Not through studying, but through understanding, the Lord's secret is found. [3]

ਜੋ ਸੁਣੈ ਕਮਾਵੈ ਸੁ ਉਤਰੈ ਪਾਰਿ॥

AGGS, M 5, p 370.

He, who hears and practices it, is saved. [3]

Gurmat does not prescribe or recognize any specific method of reciting Gurbani. It does not require any particular dress, place, time or ritual. Unfortunately, various *dehras, taksals*, so-called *sadh-sants* and sects use and propagate their own ways of doing *Path*, chanting selected Sabds as mantras, telling rosaries, sitting in Samadhi etc. All such practices are rejected by Gurbani as the crest of *Gurmat*-oriented life is Truthful Living or becoming *Sachiara*.

ਸਚਹੁ ਓਰੈ ਸਭੁ ਕੋ ਉਪਰਿ ਸਚੁ ਆਚਾਰੁ॥

AGGS M 1, p 62.

Truth is higher than all else, higher still is truthful living. [3]

Gurbani defines *Manmukh* conduct as neither meditating on *Naam* nor contemplating *Sabd*:

ਨਾਮੁ ਨ ਚੇਤਹਿ, ਸਬਦੁ ਨ ਵੀਚਾਰਹਿ, ਇਹੁ ਮਨਮੁਖ ਕਾ ਆਚਾਰੁ॥

AGGS, M 3, p. 508.

Those asleep in duality, never wake up from the love and affection of the mammon. They think not of the Name and do not ponder on Guru's hymns. This is the conduct of the self-willed, perverse persons. [3]

Are not we on the *Manmukhi* path if mere ritual reading or hiring someone to recite Gurbani has been substituted for comprehension (*Vichar*) and practice (*Kamai*) of Gurus' teaching? Is this sad situation not the outcome of Brahmanical influence, which is subtly engulfing our thinking and controlling our congregational activities?

The need of the hour is a serious self-analysis at the individual as well Panthic level to understand how and why are we going astray from the Gurus' will? The solution lies in the following phrase of Guru Amardas:

ਸੋ ਸਿਖੁ ਸਖਾ ਬੰਧਪੁ ਹੈ ਭਾਈ ਜਿ ਗੁਰ ਕੇ ਭਾਣੈ ਵਿਚਿ ਆਵੈ॥

ਆਪਣੇ ਭਾਣੈ ਜੋ ਚਲੈ ਭਾਈ ਵਿਛੜਿ ਚੋਟਾਂ ਖਾਵੈ॥

AGGS, M 3, p 601.

He alone is the true disciple, friend, Kinsman and brother who follows the Guru's will. He, who follows his own will, O brother, is separated from the Lord and bears blows. [3]

For this purpose, we need a global Sikh *Vichar Manch* where free and fearless discussions on *Gurmat* guidance

Notes

1. **Gurbani*: *Sabd Bani* of the AGGS.
2. *Gurmat*: The way of life as defined in the AGGS.
3. English Summary of the original article presented in Punjabi by Mr Gurdev Singh Sangha)

***Editorial Note:** '*Gurbani*' according to Bhai Kahn Singh in *Gurmat Martand* eis as follows: *The Bani, uttered by the mouth of Satguru Nanak and his successor Gurus through the inspiration of the Almighty, is called Gurbani.* Although Bhai Gurdas used this term, *Gurbani*, for the *Bani* of others also, but according to Bhai Kahn Singh this term is specially reserved for the *Bani* of the Sikh Gurus.

INHERITED TREASURE

ਪੀਉ ਦਾਦੇ ਕਾ ਖੋਲਿ ਡਿਠਾ ਖਜਾਨਾ ॥
 ਤਾ ਮੈਰੈ ਮਨਿ ਭਇਆ ਨਿਧਾਨਾ ॥੧॥
 ਰਤਨ ਲਾਲ ਜਾ ਕਾ ਕਛੂ ਨ ਮੋਲੁ ॥
 ਭਰੇ ਭੰਡਾਰ ਅਖਟ ਅਤੋਲ ॥੨॥
 ਖਾਵਹਿ ਖਰਚਹਿ ਰਲਿ ਮਿਲਿ ਭਾਈ ॥
 ਤੋਟਿ ਨ ਆਵੇ ਵਧਦੇ ਜਾਈ ॥੩॥
 ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਜਿਸੁ ਮਸਤਕਿ ਲੇਖੁ ਲਿਖਾਇ ॥
 ਸੁ ਏਤੁ ਖਜਾਨੇ ਲਇਆ ਰਲਾਇ ॥੪॥
 AGGS, M 5, p 186.

"As the inherited treasure (Gurbani) of ancestors (Gurus) was opened and viewed, then my mind was illumined with Treasure (Gurbani). Compared with this treasure the jewels and rubies have no value. The chest is full of inexhaustible and immeasurable treasure (Gurbani). Let us utilize it together, and dispense (disseminate) it among others, O'Brothers. The Treasure (Gurbani) will not be exhausted instead it would multiply manifold. Nanak says: Whosoever has the desire in his mind to have it, can be a shareholder of this Treasure (Gurbani)."

Interpretation from: Chahal, DS (2004) "Sabd Guru to Granth Guru" IUS Publication.

for Sikh issues can be held. No doubt, our Gurdwaras are the best venues for this but it is common knowledge that their managements try to control the proceedings according to their own thinking.

Let us remember that reading/reciting and listening to Gurbani, doing *Nitname*, *Nam Jap*, *Simran* etc are means to reach the goal of becoming *Sachiara* Sikhs who attain *Jiwan-Mukti* while selflessly performing their social and family duties:

ਨਾਨਕ ਸਤਿਗੁਰਿ ਭੋਟਿਐ ਪੂਰੀ ਹੋਵੇ ਜੁਗਤਿ॥

ਹਸੰਦਿਆਂ ਖੋਲੰਦਿਆਂ ਪੈਨੰਦਿਆਂ ਖਾਵੰਦਿਆਂ ਵਿਚੇ ਹੋਵੈ ਮੁਕਤਿ॥

AGGS, M 5, p 522.

Fifth Guru Nanak says, by meeting the true Guru, man comes to know the perfect device of living, while laughing, playing, enjoying dresses and eating, he gets emancipated. [3]

REFERENCES

1. AGGS = Aad Guru Granth Sahib. 1983 (reprint). Publishers: Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar. (M = Mahla, i.e., succession number of the Sikh Gurus to the House of Nanak, M is replaced with the name of Bhagat/ Bhatt for their Bani, p = Page of the AGGS).
2. Chahal, Pritam Singh. No Year. Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Chattar Singh Jiwan Singh, Amritsar.
3. Singh, Manmohan. 1981 (Second Edition). Sri Guru Granth Sahib. (Translation in Punjabi and English). Shiromani Parbandhank Committee, Amritsar. Second addition.