

# Emotional Intelligence Through the Lens of Gurbani: A Spiritual and Psychological Perspective

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## ABSTRACT

Gurbani, the sacred scripture of Sikhism, offers timeless wisdom on cultivating emotional intelligence in enhancing both personal growth and social harmony. The present review explores the conceptual and practical alignment between Gurbani and Emotional Intelligence (EI), as recognized in modern psychology, and the spiritual insights embedded in Gurbani. Drawing from Daniel Goleman's EI model and the teachings from Guru Granth Sahib, the paper synthesizes how Sikh spirituality fosters emotional awareness, regulation, empathy, and resilience. It also identifies Gurbani's unique contributions to EI, emphasizing the holistic development of the self-rooted in divine consciousness. The spiritual scripture of the Sikhs, primarily found in the Guru Granth Sahib, offers profound guidance on inner growth, self-realization, and compassionate living-aligning closely with these EI components. Although Sikh philosophy and Gurbani have long emphasized introspection, emotional regulation, and compassion, systematic empirical research connecting these teachings with modern Emotional Intelligence (EI) constructs remains in its infancy and needs further exploration and validation. This is a humble effort by authors to synthesize existing literature, presents case illustrations and propose avenues for future empirical validation and implications.

**Keywords:** *Gurbani, Emotional Intelligence, Emotional Awareness, Self-Realization, Regulation, Empathy, Compassion and Resilience*

## Context

Gurbani refers to the sacred hymns and spiritual teachings enshrined in the Sikh scriptures, primarily the Guru Granth Sahib, which is the central religious text of Sikhism. The word "Gurbani" is derived from "Gur" meaning *Guru* or *spiritual teacher*, and "Bani" meaning *word* or *speech*. So, Gurbani means "the word of the Guru." Gurbani is considered the revealed Word of God as spoken by the Sikh Gurus and other enlightened saints (Bhagats) included in the Guru Granth Sahib. It teaches values like truth, humility, compassion, contentment, self-awareness, inner peace, and oneness with the Divine. The language is primarily Gurmukhi script, containing a mix of Punjabi, Sanskrit, Persian, Braj, and other regional dialects. Gurbani is organized according to ragas (musical measures) to facilitate its recitation in kirtan (devotional singing). In Sikhism, the Guru Granth Sahib, which contains Gurbani, is considered the eternal living Guru after the ten human Gurus.

Emotional Intelligence has emerged as a pivotal construct in psychology, education, and organizational behaviour. Coined and popularized by Daniel Goleman (1995) EI encapsulates the ability to perceive, manage, and utilize emotions effectively. EI has been described as "the capacity to effectively perceive, express, understand and manage emotions in a professional and effective manner at work. Several schools of thought exist which aim to accurately describe and measure Emotional Intelligence (E.I). Salovey and Mayer (1990) initially conceived the concept and coined the term Emotional Intelligence, which was derived from Gardner's (1983) theory of multiple intelligences. This included interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence which were used by Salovey and Mayer (1990) to form the basis of the theory of emotional intelligence, which they define as the "ability to monitor and regulate one's own and other's feelings and to use feelings to guide ones thinking and action". This definition identifies five main domains: knowing one's emotions, managing emotions, motivating oneself, recognizing emotions in others and handling relationships. Goleman (1998b) adapted Salovey and Mayer's (1990) model as a basis and explained the theory of emotional intelligence and its implications for everyday life. He divided EI competencies into five parts: Self-awareness, Self-regulation, Motivation, Empathy and Social skills.

Parallel to this psychological model, Sikh philosophy — particularly through Gurbani — offers rich insights into

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managing the mind, developing compassion, and attaining inner equilibrium. This review paper aims to find out how the teachings in Gurbani not only align with but enrich the understanding of Emotional Intelligence. Emotional Intelligence (EI), often defined as the ability to recognize, understand, manage, and utilize emotions effectively, is widely acknowledged as a key component of personal and professional success. Daniel Goleman a pioneer in EI, outlines five core components:

1. Self-awareness
2. Self-regulation
3. Motivation
4. Empathy
5. Social skills

### **Mapping Emotional Intelligence onto Gurbani Teachings**

1. Self-Awareness (Aatma-Gyaan): Gurbani, the Sikh scriptures, emphasizes self-awareness as a crucial path to spiritual growth and liberation. It guides individuals to understand their true selves, move beyond ego (haumai), and connect with the divine light within. By practicing Gurbani's teachings through meditation, contemplation, and selfless service, one can achieve a state of inner peace and unity with the divine. Gurbani promotes self-awareness through understanding the mind's fluctuations and how it can both lead to spiritual growth and entanglement in worldly illusions (Maya). The concept of "Haumai," or ego, is a major obstacle in Gurbani, and the scriptures guide individuals to recognize and transcend it. Gurbani emphasizes that the divine light (Jot Saroop) is within everyone, and self-awareness involves recognizing and connecting with this inner source. It encourages introspection and self-reflection to identify areas for personal growth and to understand one's own strengths and weaknesses. Gurbani frequently emphasizes the importance of introspection and understanding one's inner self.

**"Man tu jot saroop hai, apna mool pachhaan."**

*O mind, you are the embodiment of Divine Light – recognize your origin.*

**“ Jetti Surat teha tin rah”**

*As is (beings') awareness, so is (their) way-* This verse highlights that self-awareness shapes one's path in life.

These reflect a core EI skill — being aware of one's emotions, triggers, and inner values.

2 Self-Regulation (Sanjam or Sehaj): Gurbani highlights the mind as the source of both good and bad actions and urges individuals to train their minds through meditation and contemplation. By understanding the mind's nature and its connection to the divine, one can learn to regulate its fluctuations and cultivate inner peace. Gurbani identifies five thieves (lust, anger, greed, attachment, and ego) that can hinder spiritual progress. It emphasizes the need to recognize and control these negative tendencies to live a more virtuous life. Gurbani encourages the development of virtues like truthfulness, compassion, love, and humility. These virtues act as a guide for making ethical choices and living a life aligned with spiritual principles. Gurbani emphasizes the importance of self-reflection and understanding one's true self. By examining one's thoughts, actions, and motivations, individuals can identify areas for improvement and strive for self-improvement. Gurbani promotes a balanced approach to life, emphasizing the importance of both spiritual and worldly responsibilities. It encourages individuals to find harmony between their spiritual pursuits and their daily lives.

Gurbani guides self-regulation urging individuals to practice self-control, mindfulness, and ethical conduct. Gurbani's verses offer practical advice and wisdom on how to navigate life's challenges, manage emotions, and cultivate positive habits. By inspiring individuals to strive for self-improvement, Gurbani encourages them to overcome negative tendencies and live a more fulfilling and meaningful life. Self-control and inner balance are key themes in Gurbani. Sikh teachings promote overcoming anger, ego, greed, attachment, and lust (the five thieves).

**"Kaam krodh nagar bahu lutiya, sabh kuchh le gaye chor."**

*Lust and anger have plundered the city of the body – the thieves have taken everything.*

Practicing Naam Simran (meditative remembrance of God) and living in *Sehaj* (equilibrium) helps regulate emotional responses.

**“Antar ko jo jaanai soee sachiyaar”**

*One who understands their inner self is truly wise.*

In essence, Gurbani offers a path of self-regulation through self-awareness, self-control, and the cultivation of virtues, ultimately leading to inner peace and spiritual growth. By following the guidance of Gurbani, individuals can embark on a transformative journey of self-discovery, leading to inner peace, spiritual awakening, and liberation.

**3 Motivation (Chardi Kala – Ever-ascending spirit):** Gurbani offers profound guidance on self-motivation by emphasizing self-effort, mindfulness, and detachment from worldly attachments. It encourages individuals to take charge of their lives, cultivate positive self-talk, and live in the present moment to achieve personal growth and spiritual enlightenment. Gurbani stresses the importance of self-reliance and taking initiative to improve oneself and achieve life's goals. It encourages focusing on the present moment and being aware of one's thoughts and actions, rather than dwelling on the past or worrying about the future. Gurbani emphasizes the power of the mind and the importance of cultivating positive self-talk to overcome negativity, doubt, and fear. Gurbani's Teachings Apply to Self-Motivation as they empower individuals to take ownership of their lives and actions, encouraging them to be the architects of their own destiny. By fostering resilience and a positive mental attitude, Gurbani equips individuals with the tools to overcome challenges and setbacks on their path to self-motivation and personal growth.

**“Apna hath aapai hi aap”**

*You yourself are your own helper.*

**"Nanak naam chardi kala, tere bhaane sarbat da bhala."**

Chardi Kala embodies positive motivation and resilient optimism, even in adversity.

*Through the Name, Nanak remains in high spirits; may all be blessed in Your Will.*

(Ardas)

Intrinsic motivation, fuelled by spiritual devotion and purpose, is encouraged in Sikh thought. It encourages self-reliance while also surrendering to divine wisdom

(Hukam). Gurbani teaches positive inner dialogue, resilience, and taking proactive steps toward spiritual and worldly goals.

**4. Empathy (Daya – Compassion):** Gurbani emphasizes empathy as a core principle, highlighting the interconnectedness of all beings and encouraging compassion and selfless service. It teaches that true devotion to God is inseparable from kindness and service to humanity. Gurbani acknowledges that suffering is a part of life and can be a catalyst for empathy and compassion. By understanding the pain of others, individuals can develop a deeper sense of connection and offer support. Gurbani advocates for recognizing the divine spark in everyone and treating all with respect and love, regardless of differences. Gurbani emphasizes that compassion should be expressed through actions, not just thoughts or words. It encourages Sikhs to actively help those in need, engage in selfless service (Sewa), and treat others with kindness and respect. The Sikh tradition of Sewa (selfless service) is a direct manifestation of empathy in action. It involves engaging in acts of kindness and service without expecting anything in return, further fostering a sense of interconnectedness and compassion. The Guru Granth Sahib repeatedly emphasizes compassion, reminding Sikhs that spiritual growth is incomplete without it. Verses highlight the importance of kindness, generosity, and recognizing the divine presence in all. Gurbani repeatedly calls for compassion and understanding others' pain.

**“Dookh paaye taji bairaayi”**

*When one sees others in pain, one abandons enmity.*

**"Deyh Daan Dayaa Bhagat Karmee."**

*Bless me with charity, compassion, and devotion.*

Seeing the divine in all beings promotes compassion and empathy. The Sikh practice of Langar (community kitchen) and volunteerism reflect this lived empathy.

**5. Social Skills (Seva, Sangat):** Gurbani, the Sikh scriptures, emphasizes the importance of social skills. Gurbani promotes virtues like honesty, compassion, humility, and generosity. These ethical principles are fundamental to building positive and respectful relationships with others. Sikhism, as reflected in Gurbani, rejects the caste system and promotes equality among all individuals, regardless of background. This fosters a sense of inclusivity and respect for all, which are crucial for healthy social interactions. Gurbani emphasizes sharing one's resources and talents with others, promoting a spirit of cooperation and mutual support. This fosters a sense of community and strengthens social bonds. Gurbani encourages selfless service to humanity. This involves helping others without expecting anything in return, which builds trust, strengthens relationships, and promotes social harmony. Gurbani lays down a framework for developing positive interpersonal relationships. It promotes humility, honesty, generosity, and mutual respect, while denouncing hierarchy and discrimination.

**“Sabh meh jot, jot hai soye”**

*The same Divine Light shines in all.*

**"Man neevaa (n), mat uchi."**

*Keep your mind humble and intellect high. (Bhai Gurdas Ji)*

Sangat encourages positive peer influence, accountability, and emotional support. By embracing inclusivity and equality, Gurbani enhances the capacity for constructive social engagement, conflict resolution, and community building.

### **Empirical Evidence and Case Integration**

While direct empirical studies linking Gurbani and EI are limited, relevant studies and examples from spiritual psychology, Sikh education, and value-based leadership can be included.

#### **1. Gurbani in Sikh Educational Institutions**

Sikh schools integrating Gurbani teachings into moral education curricula to inculcate self-awareness, compassion, service and inclusivity.

#### **2. Transformation through Gurbani**

Many spiritual leaders and life coaches use examples from Gurbani to cope up with anxiety and stress in life and enhancing wellbeing in life.

#### **3. Guru Nanak's Emotional Wisdom**

Even historical or religious figures can be viewed through the lens of Emotional Intelligence.

Example: Guru Nanak's encounter with Sajjan Thug — he responded not with anger but with empathy, social skills, self-regulation transforming him through dialogue and spiritual awakening. This episode can be interpreted as a model of emotionally intelligent leadership rooted in Gurbani's values.

### **Research Gap and Proposal**

Despite the philosophical alignment between Gurbani and Emotional Intelligence, empirical studies quantifying this relationship in Sikh populations remain limited.

Future research using EI inventories, mindfulness measures, and qualitative interviews with practicing Sikhs can bridge this gap.

### **CONCLUSION**

Gurbani serves as a spiritual-psychological guide for developing emotional intelligence. Its teachings integrate self-awareness, regulation, motivation, empathy, and social harmony into a holistic path of personal and collective transformation. By aligning with Gurbani, individuals are not only spiritually uplifted but also

equipped with emotional competencies essential for modern life. Gurbani is not only a spiritual guide but also a blueprint for Emotional Intelligence. It teaches how to:

- Understand oneself profoundly
- Respond consciously to emotions
- Stay motivated through the hymns of Gurbani
- Empathize with others / show compassion
- Believing in community building through social skills

By integrating these Gurbani principles into their lives, individuals can cultivate better social skills and contribute to a more harmonious and compassionate society. According to Sikhism teachings, living by these values can help individuals build stronger relationships and navigate social situations with greater ease and effectiveness. A spiritually grounded emotional intelligence, as inspired by Gurbani, cultivates not just personal success and excellence but collective harmony and spiritual fulfilment. Gurbani serves as a spiritual-psychological guide for developing emotional intelligence. Its teachings integrate self-awareness, regulation, motivation, empathy, and social harmony into a holistic path of personal and collective transformation. By aligning with Gurbani, individuals are not only spiritually uplifted but also equipped with emotional competencies essential for modern life.

### **Unique Contributions of Gurbani to EI**

While modern EI emphasizes self-mastery and interpersonal dynamics, Gurbani introduces spiritual dimensions such as:

- Naam Simran as emotional cleansing and mental focus
- Hukam (Divine Will) as acceptance and resilience
- Ego eradication (**Haumai naav naal virodh hai**) as a path to authentic living

### **Implications for Practice**

- Education: Integrating Gurbani-based EI modules in value education can nurture emotionally balanced youth.
- Leadership: Sikh ethical leadership supported by EI can transform institutions.
- Counselling: Gurbani provides therapeutic narratives and metaphors beneficial for mental health support.

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