

Key concepts

- This concept is as old as Sikhism – institutionalised by Guru Hargobind. The miri/piri concept encompasses spiritual activities and temporal activities. The spiritual part is the relationship with God Waheguru. The temporal part is the relationship and interaction with the creation.
- The concept of miri signifies worldly, materialist, and political power. The concept is linked to the traditional power enjoyed by kings and rulers where the might of the military results in the power and ability to rule or influence the people.
- The concept of piri is linked to the power enjoyed by religious leaders, to have power or influence over the devotees by the way of ‘spiritual power’ or religious power.
- Sikhs must have regards to both the material needs of the community and the people and also the spiritual needs of the people. Langar is an important aspect of the miri concept; it provides for the materialist needs of the community.
- Sikhs now refer less to miri and piri and more to deg and teg. Deg means ‘large cooking pot’ and teg means ‘sword or kirpan’ – fulfilling the material needs of the community and defending the rights of the people.
- Wealth in itself is not wrong – it is a reward for the previous life (Law of Karma). Sikhs do not see poverty as being essential to goodness. This is a practical view in today’s world. The wealthy have a duty to help those less fortunate and give what they can – dasvandh. This is related to the idea of sewa – selfless service to God by helping others.
- A Sikh is, by definition, charitable, kind, patient, understanding, fearless and tolerant of all people. He or she is prepared to come to the aid of any other human being in need. He is a defender of the weak, provider to the poor, and an inspiration to the downtrodden. This is signified by the wearing of the kirpan.
- ‘God’s bounty belongs to all, but in this world it is not shared justly.’ –Guru Granth Sahib. This can be argued to be an honourable view, but in a secular, impersonal world it can also be argued to be an impractical ideal.



Key quotes

‘It is through thine intercession I obtained birth; and it is in fulfilment of thy blessing I wear two swords as emblems of spiritual and temporal authority. In the Guru’s house religion and worldly enjoyment shall be combined – the caldron to supply the poor and needy and scimitar to smite oppressors.’ – (Guru Hargobind)

‘The kirpan constantly reminds the Sikhs of three things. First, of his responsibilities to confront injustice and oppression in the political field, both as an individual and as member of the Sikh society. Second, the use of force, to the extent necessary, is permitted. The third reminder is equally significant, namely, that the Sikh society should never shirk its socio-political responsibilities, nor decline into monasticism, withdrawal or asceticism.’ – (The Abstracts of Sikh Studies Editorial)

‘The earth is the cooking-pot that the person receives only once; destiny dictates access to your great store.’ – (Guru Granth Sahib p. 1190)

‘They who dwelt on His Name, ate only after sharing their food and provisions with others, maintained the deg and wielded the teg and sacrificed their lives for the sake of dharma, remember them, Khalsa Ji and proclaim Vahiguru ...’ – (Ardas)

Key words

Miri	Piri	Waheguru	Materialist	Spiritual
Langar	Deg	Teg	Kirpan	Karma
Sewa	Dasvandh	Secular	Impractical	Defender
Guru Hargobind	Provider	Guru Granth Sahib		

Issues for analysis and evaluation

Key arguments/debates

Some would argue that in today’s world, miri is more important than piri. Others that it is the spiritual (piri) that gives birth to the material. Some would argue that they are both as important as each other.

Key questions

Are Sikh attitudes to defending the poor and oppressed relevant and practical in today’s world?

What is the relationship between the spiritual and material in religious life?

How important are the concepts of miri and piri to the Sikh community?