

ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS & GURU GRANTH SAHIB

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Every organism lives in its particular environment and ecology being a branch of biology deals with the mutual relationship of living organisms and their environment. Man's actual environment consists of a thin layer of soil, water and air near the surface of earth and this environment composed of biotic communities is generally known by the name of biosphere. These biotic communities consist of organized plant and animal relationships and they all persist on the exchanging of life-sustaining raw materials with the others. These communities further form the eco-systems or the living segments of larger units which in fact encompass all earthly and atmospheric substances. Perpetuation of the cycle and the interaction of all these substances is based on exchange basis in which the plants convert substance such as carbon dioxide and energy from the sun into food, animals consume the plants as food and the bacteria decompose the waste products of plants and animals. In this process, nothing is superfluous or useless and every element, whether that is of nature or living being, is as essential part of the whole as any other.

These life systems are very intricate and delicate and by polluting the environment by increasing or decreasing, introducing or eliminating some essential component such as species of animal or plant life, a gas or a mineral, the man has severely threatened the balance and the integrity of the entire system. The results may be catastrophic. Dr. S. Jayarama Reddy, Coordinator, Natural Coordinating Committee for monitoring environment in India and working in the Department of Chemistry of Shri Venkateswara University, Tirupati, with his team

conducted extensive survey of Cuddapah, a backward district of Andhra Pradesh with a view to study the impact of pollution created there by cement factories, pulp and paper mills and the molasses of a sugar factory. Their report points out that there is a slow but considerable build-up of sulphur trioxide in the atmosphere caused by factories located in the area and the whole of district Cuddapah may soon have to face a major problem in the form of acid rain. According to the report, the first symptoms of sulphur trioxide pollution have started surfacing with people in the area falling victims of diseases like asthma, cough, cardio-vascular problems and respiratory problems like bronchitis. Labourers working in these places are complaining that their hair is prematurely turning grey. Farming in the areas around Cuddapah would soon become a thing of past as the agricultural land is being enveloped by layers of cement dust spewed from a local factory. "Already, the nearby farm lands are becoming useless for agricultural purposes due to the settlement of cement dust."

The report further points out that in Kodur which is surrounded by barytes mines, the prime ore of barium, the people are being exposed to a higher dose of barium salts. "Occurrence of salivation, vomiting, abdominal pain and diarrhoea, slow and often irregular pulse, hypertension, heart-disturbances, muscle-twisting and tinnitus in the mining workers indicate the increase in these levels in the people occupied with this activity."¹ When through gaps, the over-burdening of the atmosphere takes place, the nature in order to restore balance, immediately becomes active often overcompensating and causing even further imbalances. Since all eco-systems are interrelated, no one part of nature can be altered without influencing the other systems. In fact, man has become almost blind and deaf to the delicate callings of the nature and is ruthlessly busy in creating the gaps in the entire atmosphere to destroy himself along with the environment around. It may be said that saving the eco-systems of nature is not merely for the sake of aesthetic

values but mainly they are required to be protected through conservation of soil, water and air for the survival of human beings themselves.

All these eco-systems, independent of each other, are, however, internally bound with one-another and the binding force working among them, has been denoted in the Guru Granth Sahib as *qudarat*. Word *mula prakrit* for inherent nature was being used long before Guru Nanak but considering a basic difference between *prakriti* and *qudarat*, the Guru selected this Indo-Islamic word from the common lingual pool of the period in which he lived and gave it a precise meaning and philosophical exactitude.² In fact, in all the philosophies of the East and the West, the concepts of 'subject' and 'object', 'mind' and 'matter', 'life' and 'nature' have been discussed as the basic concern of the philosophers. Here in India, the *Sankhya* system while postulating the two absolute concepts of *prakrti* and *purusha*, provides the most ancient speculations on these topics. As we know in the *Sankhya*, *prakrti* absolutely exists in its own right and though it dances before *purusha* to put him in her dragnet, she is totally free of his powers and in fact *Sankhyan purusha* has no power whatsoever. We find in the hymns of Guru Nanak that he retained the term *purusha* as fundamental to his system of religion, but abandoned altogether the term *prakrti* to this purpose, though he was quite familiar not only with the dualism of these terms, but also with their philosophical import. Guru Nanak purposely collected the hymns of Jaideva, later on incorporated in the Guru Granth Sahib, in which both these terms *purusha* and *prakrti* have been used: "*Paramadi purakh manopimam sati adi bhav ratam. paramadabhutam prakriti param jadi chinti sarab gatam*"³ i.e. in the beginning was incomparable primal Purusha immersed in truth. Supremely wonderful and the transcendent Being, when remembered He grants liberation to all.

In Sikhism, God (*Purusha*) is considered as the Supreme Being and in view of keeping His status of being first and the last, Guru Nanak considers this *qudarat* as activating in the cyclic order initiated by Him,

in space and time under some set rules which originate widely different, though internally harmonized, biotic communities.⁴

Guru Nanak sees the whole of the natural phenomena as the body of the supreme Lord wherein His own light permeates and sustains the whole nature or *qudarat*. The universal self has created the individual self and He Himself has created the differentiating names. Thus nature (*qudarat*) has He created as the other and, depositing Himself therein, He is in a relation of aesthetic contemplation to *qudarat*.⁵ Guru Nanak considers this earth as the seat of *dharma*, and man being at the apex of development, is urged to be most responsive towards his co-terminus cultures, creative activities and other species. Man's sense of religion of course takes him higher from the less developed world of animals but that also is the reason why man is supposed to be more ethical, benign and responsible towards others. Nobody is a favourite child in the lap of mother earth. All are equal for her but as we have been doing for the last few centuries, and, presently also have been making the precious lives of many species extinct by creating unlivable conditions for them by clearing the jungles and poaching wantonly, it is not improper and impossible that one day this planet Earth will become totally annoyed with its inhabitants and will go on without man itself.⁶ Such a greedy and opportunistic attitude of man suggests that man considers earth as a lifeless 'made-for-man' object which cannot react at any sort of excess perpetrated upon her. But looking back at the history of mankind, one may find that such a rude attitude of man towards earth was not a phenomenon in the earlier times.

Using the principle of analogy, since the times immemorial the activity of natural productivity had been viewed in terms of human productivity and the mother Earth was visualized in terms of human mother who begets mankind as her progeny. The womb of mother and that of the Earth are taken in the same esteem even up to this day when it is said that one comes naked out of mother's womb and goes back naked

to the same after death. Earth is fertility incarnate like woman and their identification with each other is profoundly available in the folklore of India as well as other nations. However, as the plight of women has attracted the attention of people very late even in the most civilized countries, the conservation of earth (soil) also could not be considered a fit idea to ponder upon even up to the last decades of the 20th century. In rural parts of the countries, still the earth is somehow considered as mother in the true sense of the word but the greed of urban life has taken its toll over it and the mother is being stripped off shamelessly by man by cutting of the trees, plants and grasses over it which mutually sustain and conserve each other.

In Guru Granth Sahib, where air has been designated as the Guru, water the father, the expansive earth has been accepted as the mother in whose lap the whole of the world is entertained by day and night: "*pavanu guru pani pita mata dharati mahati, divasu rati dui dai daia khelai sagal jagatu.*"⁷ The earth, in the Guru Granth Sahib is the symbol of the bearing of the sufferings. She for the sake of her children, absorbs all sorts of heats in it - *asaru bhala suraju gagani tapai. dharati dukh sahai sokhai agani bhakhai.*⁸ The earth never losses its equanimity whether some body digs it or paints it with sandal. That is why earth has been compared with *brahmgiani*, the ideal man conceived by Guru Arjan Dev in his magnum opus, *Sukhmani-brahmgiani kai dhiraju ek. Jiu basudha kou khodai kou chandan lep.*⁹

In Sikh parlance the terms *deg* (kettle) and *tegh* (sword) are held in a very high esteem. *Deg* denotes charity, liberality, equality, neutrality, secularity and the spirit of distribution among the needy ones. *Deg* in Sikhism forbids the people to be repudiators of the world and teaches them to be of the world but of course not to become worldly. *Tegh* is used for those who try to push the Sikhs to the wall while they are genuinely on the way to achieve the aims and the objects of the *deg*. Sikh *deg* is open to all irrespective of caste, colour and creed, similarly, as the

mother earth is for one and all. Says Guru Nanak in the Guru Granth Sahib: "*Ghari ghari laskaru pavaku tera dharamu kare sikdari. Dharati deg milai ik vera bhagu tera bhandari*" i.e. O God, in every home Thy fire works and righteousness reigns supreme. The earth is the *deg* (big kettle) which yields at once what is sought by Thy creatures; and each one of them receives in accordance with the holy writ.¹⁰ By considering the earth as a *deg*, the holistic attitude of the Sikh Gurus towards earth is amply delineated. In the *Japu*, the opening longer hymn of the Guru Granth Sahib, the earth has been likened to a *dharamsal*, i.e. the abode of righteousness from where one has to take inspiration of self-analysis and consequent self-denial and the responsibility towards others. At another place also, Guru Nanak says : *Dharati upai dhari dharamsala. utpati parlau api nirala. Pavanai khela kia sabh thai kala khinch dhahaida*, i.e. He creates the earth, the abode of righteousness, and keeps Himself detached, even after or before its creation or destruction. In the air He puts the life current, but when He withdraws His power, the whole show crumbles of its own.¹¹

The capacity of putting forth a point logically and fertility of a religious system decide its quality, general purport and the direction in which it has to move, survive and make its meaning. World-view alone is not the only aspect but the space-time references are also deciding factors in this regard. Most of the Semitic religions believe in historical particularism which has evolved the idea of linear space time metaphysics among the adherents who consequently give more impetus to the faster pace of growth and development which sometime may prove even catastrophic. One thing more: the concept of Doom's Day presupposes that the world is bound to get worse and worst day by day. The mounting environmental crises may provide a sort of sadistic delight for the people believing in linear space-time concept because this reinforces their belief that world has to be destroyed completely one day, the sooner, the better. This may provide a good excuse for not bothering

about the nature and the environment around. On the other hand, in India and in most eastern religions, the cyclic time scheme has been accepted by the people. This cyclic flow of time and nature postulates the necessary ongoing creative process which "acknowledges the continuous realization and actualization of the divine dynamics in the creative as well as the disintegrating cosmic process."

Sikhism being a totally spiritual experience and actively engaged in uplifting the secular is quite open to the dynamics of nature. In the Guru Granth Sahib, though the natural cyclic flow of nature has been accepted as divided in *yugas*, years, months and weeks yet even these divisions of time-space inspire a Sikh to be more intensive in love and devotion, and conscious to the realities of life. Yearning of the heart for meeting the Lord through getting attuned to nature has been graphically depicted in the *Barahmaha* (calender hymn) in Raga Tukhari (GGS, 1108-1111) by Guru Nanak. Here it has been said how the cyclic flow, beauty and ferocity of nature make the heart of the Guru more vibrant and alive to the supreme reality permeating all around. Here in this longer hymn the natural fauna and flora sometimes provides the contrast of the love-lorn soul with that of the delightful scenic beauty of the nature made more lively by the creatures like black bee, cuckoo, frogs, the blossoming flowers and green boughs.

All the stanzas of this hymn provide the touches reminiscent of the early home of Guru Nanak in the forest land of Bar (now in Pakistan) and one may see how deeply the Guru's thinking is embedded in the natural phenomena around him. Sometimes, the bitterness of soul's separation is depicted on the canvas of lovely nature and sometimes, as it is delineated in the month of Asad, in the internal dryness of a *manmukh*, the self-centred person, who is described with the help of image of smouldering torments arising out of the scorching heat of Sun. Other such hymns are *Var Sat*, *Thitin*, *Pahare* etc. wherein the cyclic flow of time-space is realized. However, they all help in reinforcing our belief in

the creative un-ending process of nature which helps in realization of the divine all around. Such an understanding fills us with contentment and humility which are the essentials of Sikh way of life. To quote Rev. Anand Veeraraj: "In these days of ecological crises and the pressure of modern culture on the human psyche, the cyclical view of life of the primitive man seems a saner way to live by, not only for the sake of health and happiness of human beings, but for the continued survival of nature as well. Those who live by a linear space-time consciousness seem to live under a perpetual historical psychosis. While it is true that such people have a sense of destiny, achievement, and self-fulfilment, they cause immense damage to the environment and their neighbours."¹² However, our sense of individuality has become so keen and dominating that we do not think it worth pondering that if by becoming blind in the mad race of so-called development, the urbanisation and self-fulfilment the other biotic communities in the biosphere of the earth are forced by us to be no more, then who is going to transform our stale breath into fresh air and how without the help of certain organisms our faeces and urines are going to be changed into the plants without whom life on earth is unthinkable.

In the light of the above, it is impossible for a Sikh not to love, take care of and conserve the mother earth, but, as is in the other cases, the worship of a Sikh is only due to God, the sustainer of earth and other planets. At many places in the Guru Granth Sahib, the body of man is compared to earth in which the seed of good acts is urged to be sowed,¹³ but side by side, true to the spirit of Sikhism, a warning against the indulgence in the ritualistic worship of earth and other elements of nature is also given."¹⁴ Guru Arjan Dev further affirms the supremacy of the Lord by saying that O God, you are the one who destroys the world's bonds of sorrow, and angles, men and ascetics all serve you alone. The earth and sky are upheld by your power - *bhav khandan dukhnas dev. surinar muni jan taki sev. dharani akasu ja ki kala mahi. tera dia sabhi*

jant khahi.¹⁵ *Gurbani* in religious terminology exhorts mankind to be more alive to the fact that let us not be mere hypocrites when we go on repeating that all are one and all are brothers. So long we do not accept fatherhood of one God whose light is permeating all and utility of every thing created by Him, we cannot think of being equals and mutually useful to each other.

Such a thinking, as alluded to above, brings a global perspective before man in which every person, country, economy, religion and form of life looks to be precious and as important as the other one. "We take care of our own" attitude is automatically expanded to include in "our own" those others also who seemingly do not belong to our ethnic or racial group, or nation or our species. As has been considered by Guru Arjan Dev, the most dignified way of uniting with the Supreme source is non-injury to any other species: *dukhu na dei kisai jia pati siu ghari javau*, i.e. do not put harm to any living being and go to your home eternal as full of self-respect.¹⁶

Seen in the epistemological perspective, the *Gurbani* considers the sense of wonder and love towards all as the very valid source of knowledge. Man is required to fill his heart with innocence of a child who when exposed to the world around is wonderstruck to see different kinds of people and objects. A sense of awe fills him, and by remaining continuously in the same stage he erases his ego which in Sikhism has been supposed to be chronic ailment. His existential sense becomes wide and he happily accepts the presence of all other fellow-beings who are in no way less important than his ownself. The 35th stanza of *Japu* underlines this idea of variety of creation and its openhearted acceptance by Guru Nanak for all purposes.¹⁷

The information about and the interest in the variety of *qudarat* tells explicitly how much Sikhism is tolerant to other traditions and communities. The sense of pride and I'ness falls of its own when somebody accepts the existential position of others. And then the

question of putting somebody else to harm cannot arise. Rather in Guru Granth Sahib, he is a true learned being (*Jnani*) who neither is afraid of anybody nor he makes others afraid of him - *bhai kahu kau det nahi nahi bhai manat ani. kahu Nanak suni re mana giani tahi bakhani*.¹⁸

Love, the real oxygen for the creatures on earth is the valid source of knowledge in Sikhism. When this elan vital is lessened in any society, that society becomes rough, waspish and hollow. Most of the pre-Socrates and post-Socrates Greek philosophes consider love as the early combining force working through different elements which are the cause of this creation of the cosmos. Antagonism distracts them away from each other and in common parlance dissolution of the creation is said to take place though in fact they do not get extinct at all and are just separated from each other. In Guru Granth Sahib also, this activity of the elements is named as *sanjog* and *vijog*. Guru Gobind Singh calls this action as *akarakhan* and *udkarakhan*. They combine due to love and affection and separate from each other because of hatred. So this is a basic fact that love joins different biotic communities whereas hatred, jealousy and exploitation as are prevalent in the so-called modern society, separate the living beings.

Indeed when dry and rigorous discipline replaces love, the family and society is infested with a sort of mawkishness and arrogance. Too many laws for the smooth conducting of life in fact generate revolt from inside and the integrated life stands fragmented. Sikhism accepts the concept of *halemi raj*, a state in which the mutual relationship is based on love and freedom and not on authority and the authoritarian laws. When the life is flooded with negative orders and laws then obviously it should be understood that the breaking element in life has entered and the person leading such a life of aloofness on the one hand instead of coming closer to others goes astray and on the other, he has started sowing the seeds of revolt in the society and the family. One can count thousands of laws for the improvement of life, but the hard reality is that

this life span is so short that all the regulations cannot be implemented in this life. Therefore the *summum bonum* of all the laws is love which subsumes in it all the temporal and spiritual imperatives. The loving person cannot steal; he cannot hate and cannot be consumed by anger. Greed cannot come near him and in fact greed and love cannot exist together because a greedy person is always engrossed with accumulation of wealth, self and pride, whereas a true lover is busy in giving away to others whatever he has. Says Shaikh Farid in Guru Granth Sahib - *Farida ja labu ta nehu kia labu ta kura nehu. Kicharu jhatu laghaiai chhapari tutai mehu.* i.e. Farid, love and greed do not go together. With greed love is rendered impure. Such a love is frail as leaking straw roof against rain.¹⁹

God is the greatest lover because He goes on giving and never gets tired though the recipients get exhausted. While counting many names of God and considering Him beyond forms, symbols, castes and creeds, Guru Gobind Singh accepts God as liberal, primeaval, unincarnated and diffused in all the directions in the formless form of love:

Nam tham na jat jakari rup rang na rekh.

Adi Purakh udar murati ajoni adi asekh.

Des aur na bhes jakar rup rekh na rag.

*Jatra tatra disa visa hui failio anurag.*²⁰

Such a loving understanding in which temple, mosque, the Puranas and the holy *Quran*, all are seen alike and everyone is allowed to see, pursue and follow according to one's own inclination is considered in Sikhism as the basis of the divine effulgence of the same flame of the Supreme Reality.

Science also affirms this religious postulate that this cosmos is the manifestation of one Supreme Reality. The basics of biology are told to even the elementary students that the embryo constitution of diversely different creatures is the same in the initial stage. If a few week-old embryos of hen, fish, goat or man are seen, one may find it difficult to

identify who is what. Indeed the apparent difference among the creatures is not of quality and origin but is of degree of development which has been attained by the individual creatures after millions of years of evolution. Almost all the scriptures of the world have taken notice of this evolution. Rigvedic *Nasdiyasukta* deals with cosmology and picking a cue therefrom the authors of Sutras and the Puranas have told the story of the evolution of man through the incarnations of Vishnu in the form of Kachhap (tortoise), Fish (*matsya*) and Boar (*varah*) and onward. In the Guru Granth Sahib, the Supreme Reality is supposed to be the root cause of whole natural creation which came out of Him in the form of gases (*pavan*) thus further creating water and hence, the creatures on earth. Of course, it was 19th century biologist, Darwin who put up his evolution theory in a systematic and scientific way and told the world that from water came amoeba, a unicellular creature and from it onward the pisceas, amphibians, avians reptiles and mammals evolved and developed. This very theory of evolution holds and proves that the father of all creatures is one God and the creatures have their natural claims of fraternity over each other. Have we ever thought why our heart feels a sort of harmony with the waters of sea, lake or a big pond and becomes a bit more peaceful after having seen the waves and ripples therein. Obviously, man has reached this stage of civilisation after his evolution from the creatures of water and up to day his soul has not altogether lost its subtle ear for listening to the accoustics of the waves of water. On the river bank or sea shore, he revives his attunement with waters. Scientific facts also hold that the salty water of ocean still is the cause of the sustenance of man, for an embryo in the body of mother, is surrounded by a membrane full of saltish water, which helps in the normal delivery of a child. Even otherwise we know the importance of salt content in our body which, if it is not in a balanced proportion, can easily create in us high or low blood pressures. Similar types of relationship we have with the greenery of woods and open air which are the most positive elements

of congenial and healthy environment for the creatures. Our bones, blood and flesh all are the gifts of nature around us, which is the glimpse of the Almighty in its physical form. Nature is His body which in no way should be put to harm and in fact being part and parcel of the nature if we try to do so, we will be just jeopardizing our own interests and welfare.

In fact, the man has misplaced apprehensions about his being the master of and superior to all the creatures. Man should never forget that if he is at the apex of the evolution, it should never mean that he has no relationship with the other biotic communities who are still struggling to evolve and come up. Undoubtedly, long long ago man was but an animal and he still retains some of the animal instincts in him, which are urged, day in and day out to be elevated, sublimated and refined. The fact that the mental skill attained by man is the result of his constant struggle of millions of years notwithstanding, he in no way can snap his ties with other living beings, who as discussed in the very beginning are variously useful for him by offering their various services to mankind. But most regretfully one has to see that let alone the understanding of equality of all the creatures, man is not ready even to accept his fellow man as equal to him. True love is the only lasting bond which being the necessary ingredient of human personality ought to be revived and raised to the heights of mutual welfare and respects on the one hand, and on the other, as the valid source of real knowledge on philosophical levels. Man has endless cravings due to which he is always full of discontentment, the root cause of exploitation, tension and cruelty towards others. We know 'love' as a mere word and as the knowing of words 'water' and 'fire' cannot quench our thirst and burn us respectively, likewise 'love' as a mere word is of no use. In fact love is that illuminating fire which finishes off the dross collected around our soul and the latter then shines, glitters and takes us to the path of righteousness. Love is creative and positive energy which when obstructed and not allowed to flow freely

through one's heart, mind and body, becomes anger, pride and consequent destruction. A person bereft of love is acquired by many psychosomatic diseases which in turn compel the concerned fellow to generate such vibrations which spoil the whole environment around. Such a person has been called *manmukh* by Guru Nanak in his longer hymn, the *Sidh Gosti*. The society of such persons may be held to be responsible for acceleration of the race for more and more material gains. They become blind and deaf to the necessities of others and go on looting and exploiting the natural resources which otherwise could have benefitted one and all living on this planet Earth. *Manmukh* has been defined in the 26th stanza of *Sidh Gosti* in the Guru Granth Sahib²¹ by saying that the *manmukh* deviates from the right path of loveful and truthful living. He harnesses all his resources to make himself the focal point of all social, religious and political activities. He intensely craves for the channelization of all worldly pleasures towards him. In order to do so he interprets and distorts all the cherished values and codes of conduct according to his own convenience, without caring for the troubles of others and the voice of the soul. He is not only in need of wealth, rather he dies for it and does not hesitate in devastating the creation of God which is in the form of men, animals and other living organisms.

Guru Granth Sahib is very clear on the point that internal balance in the personality of an individual is a must before seeking and searching that harmony outside. These subject and object, mind and matter, life and nature, *purusha* and *prakrti* concepts were put forth as dichotomous to each other before the advent of Sikhism. Sikh Gurus, in view of hitherto unexplored possibilities of blending these widely opposed qualities in one man, took cognizance of these concepts in totally practical sense and conceived the idea of *bhakti* and *shakti* in one individual. *Bhakti* covered the balance of innerworld and *shakti* represented the outer world of nature (*qudarat*). They are held

supplementary to each other and in fact according to the scientifically proved fact that, the macrocosm is inherent in the microcosm, both these aspects of the same supreme truth are the two sides of the same coin. Thus Sikhism though being basically a spiritual experience, lays full emphasis on the natural biological growth of the personality in which the communion with nature, its systems and the creation of congenial environment is taken as an important task before man.

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