

Creation of the Universe and the Purpose of Life in Sikh Theology

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There has never been any extensive system of scriptural study among Sikhs. The average Sikh knows very little about the Guru Granth Sahib. But most Sikhs treat it with reverence, almost to the point of idolatry.¹

Sikhism is the most modern religion, yet the least understood of world religions..... The Sikhs have for historical and other reasons, never seriously attempted a scientific and cogent exposition of the doctrines of their faith, based on the word of the Guru-Granth, or related to the historical lives of the Gurus who uttered it.²

In most of the world religions creation of Universe and human Life is described differently than that in *Gurbaani* of Guru Granth Sahib. The problems of human life are adequately dealt with in Sikh philosophy, besides, question of life after death, too, is concisely answered. In most religions birth of a human being is attributed to deeds already performed in earlier lives while fruits, or rewards, of good deeds in the present human life are assured in life after death. An approach of Sikhism to this aspect, including some other religions, has been attempted before³. Let us examine this issue in the light of *gurbaani* given in Aad Guru Granth Sahib:

I- Creation of Universe

Gurbaani

guides us to understand the phenomenon of creation of the universe, Guru Nanak, in Pauri 16 of Japuji, speaks of creation of the universe:

klqw pswau eyko kvwau] iqs qy hoey IK drlAwau]16]

jpu A:g:g:s: pMnw

Meaning: *A single command [Big bang theory of modern Physics] of God, resulted in creation of this universe along with numerous different strains and species of life, including human beings [16].*

In Raag Maru there are a couple of *slokas* pertaining to the creation of this universe by divine being and the situation before its creation. Selected *slokas* are given below with meaning:

Arbd nrbd DuMDU kwrw] Drix n ggnw hukmu Apwrw]

n idnu rYin n cMdu n sUrju suMn smwiD lgwiedw]1]

Kwxi n bwxi pwaux n pwxl] Epiq Kpiq n Awvx jwxi]

KMf pqwl spq nhl swgr ndl n nlru vhwiedw]2]

[SGGS: 1035]

Meanings: For countless years there was darkness all around and neither day or night existed nor earth or heaven. But **Hukam**, the limitless divine Order, was every where. Then, neither day or night nor sun or moon existed. However, God, the Creator, ever absorbed in an everlasting trance. Then neither form of Creation nor of sound existed. Wind and water, too, were not there. Neither birth or death nor calamitous disappearance ever happened. There were not continents, nether regions,

nor the seven seas, rivers with flowing water [2].

There was neither heaven nor hell, neither Time that destroys; nor earth or the nether world. Not birth or death. None arrived into the world and none departed from it [3].

When it pleased God, He created the universe; without any support from anywhere, He sustains it. By His command the creation became operative and he watches over it with pleasure. God manifested Himself through the Creation of continents, spheres and nether worlds [15]. This perfect realization comes from the Divine Satguru. None can gain knowledge about the full extent of God.

Nanak says: Those who are in pursuit of truth, are wonder-struck. In wonder, they chant the laudations of divine God. [16..3.15].

Creation of Human Species:

In Raag Gauri, Guru Arjun 91563-1606] has succinctly discussed the creation of human beings in a sequence which reminds one of the logic of Darwin (Origin of Species), developed much later.

kel jnm Bey klt pqMgw] kel jnm gj mln kurMgw]
kel jnm pMKI srp hoieE] kel jnm hYvr ibRK joieE]1]
imlu jgdls imln kl brlAw] icrMkwI ieh dyh sMjrIAw]1]rhwau]
kel jnm sYI igir kirAw] kel jnm grB ihir KirAw]
kel jnm swK kir aupwieAw] IK caurwslh join BRmwieAw]2]
swDsMig BieE jnm prwpiq] kir syvw Bju hir hir gurniq]
iqAwig mwnu JUTu AiBmwnu] jlvq mrih drgh prwvnu]3]
jo ikCu hoAw su quJ qy hogu] Avru n dUjw krXy jogu]
qw imlIAY jw IYih imlwie] khu nwnk hir hir guX gwie]]4]3]72] 3
gauVI m: 5 A:g:g:s: pMnw 176

Meanings: During numerous life cycles, prior to human form, a person is incarnated as a worm, elephant, fishes, dears, birds, snakes, horses, and oxen to be yoked [1]. After a long journey the human frame has been acquired to realize the existence of Creator. [1.rhao]. For numerous life cycles the person performed as rocks, mountains. For numerous times the person passed through the womb of the mother as a creature. The person became a tree and its branches, flowers and seeds. Countless birth cycles were completed before reaching this stage of human form [2]. This human incarnation is to accept and realize the existence of God and to follow the advice of **Saadh Sangat** for serving *Its* creation. Discard arrogance, falsehood and **haume**. Those who have suppressed their **haume**, are accepted in the court of **IkOh**[3]. None else has any power and every thing happens in accordance with the **Hukam** of **IkOh**. Earn the grace of **IkOh** by contemplating on *Its* attributes [4.3.72].

The human birth and exalted status of human being among all the species is only for once. It involves rights and responsibilities. Be careful not to miss this opportunity to do good deeds otherwise the human being itself will be responsible for the consequences.

Guru Nanak in Japu and Guru Arjan in Raag Maru utter the following slokas;

What you sow so shall you reap.

puMnl pwpl AwKxu nwih] kir kir krwx iliK IY jwhu]
Awpy blij Awpy hl Kwhu] nwnk hukml Awvhu jwhu]20] 4
jpu A:g:g:s: pMnw 4

Meaning: A person does not become a virtuous or vicious person by only uttering these words. It matters what the person practices in its daily life in order to earn such a title. In fact, what one sows, one shall reap. Says Nanak, everything is governed by the **Hukam** of **IkOh**, the **Akaalpurkh** [20].

Exalted status for human being.

IK caurwslh join sbwel] mwxs kau pRiB dlel vifAwel]
iesu pauVI qy jo nru cUkY so Awie jwie duKu pwiedw]2]1]5] 5
mwrU m: 5 A:g:g:s pMnw 1075

Meaning: God has conferred exalted status on human beings, out of all the numerous species created in the universe; whosoever lapses at this step remains rankling in the cycle of rancorous life [2.1.5].

Birth in human form is only once.

Awgwhw kU qRwiG ipCw Pyir n muhfVw]
nwnk isiJ ievyhw vwr bhuiV n hovl jnmVw]1]7] 6
mwrU fKxy m: 5 pMnw 1096
[SGGS:1096]

Meaning: Think about the future, look not on the past. Make the present life a great success because there is no birth again [1].

kblr mwns jnmU duIMBu hY hoie n bwrY bwr]
ijau bn Pl pwky Buie igrih bhuir n lwgih fwr]30] 7
slok kblr A:g:g:s: pMnw 1366

Meaning: Kabir says, it is hard to attain human birth. It does not come again and again. Ripe fruits of forest trees fall on the ground. It cannot be attached with the branch again [30]

This universe in God's Command:

In *gurbaani* it is made clear that a person is ordained to follow God's Order:

jyhw clrl iliKAw qyhw hukmu kmwih]
Gly Awivh nwnkw sdy auTI jwih]1]5] 8
swrMg m: 2 A:g:g:s:
[SGGS: 1239]

Purpose of Life on Earth:

jau qau pRym Kylx kw cwau] isru Dir qll gll myrl Awau]
iequ mwrig pYru DrljY] isru dljY kwix n kljY]20] 15
slok m: 1 A:g:g:s: pMnw 1412

Meaning: In case a person chooses the path of love of **IkOh**, only then it should step on the path to God's court with one's head on his palm. Such a person should be ready to offer his head as a sacrifice, as and when required to defend principles of its faith [20].

pihlw mrxu kbUil jlvx kl Cif Aws]
hohu sBnw kl ryxukw qau Awau hmwrY pwis]1]23] 16

mwrU m: 5 A:g:g:s: pMnw 1102

Meaning: Get rid of *haume*, self-centeredness and discard attachment to worldly temptations and attachments in life. After acquiring enough of humility, join the *Sangat*, company, of saintly persons[1.23]

Gwil Kwie ikCu hQhu dyie]

nwnk rwhu pCwxih syie]1]22] 17

swrMg m: 1 A:g:g:s: pMnw 1245

Meaning: Those who earn their livelihood by the sweat of their brow and give away something to the needy and poor; says Nanak, truly recognize the way to the door of *IkOh* [1.22].

mn hT buDI kyqIAw kyqy byd blcwr]

kyqy bMDn jIA ky gurimuK moK duAwru]

schu ErY sBu ko aupir scu Awcwru]5]14] 18

isrl m: 1 A:g:g:s: pMnw 62

Meaning: There are many stubborn but intelligent persons and many who contemplate on the *Vedas*.

Despite many entanglements for a person [soul], only a *Gurmukh* finds the clue to get rid of these attachments. Truth is higher than everything else but highest is truthful living [5.14].

Concept of Heaven and Hell

Undoubtedly the topic of life after death has been dealt with in *gurbaani* of AGGS. The following slokas are given in support of absence of heaven or hell after death in Sikhism.

gur kl swKI AMimRq bwxl plvq hl prvwXu BieAw]

dr drsn kw pRIqmu hovY mukiq bYkuMTY krY ikAw]3]4]38] 19

AwsW m: 1 A:g:g:s: pMnw 360

Meaning: *IkOh* approves at once whosoever meditates on the universal *gurbaani* of *Satguru*. Any one who is devoted to *IkOh* and determined to follow *Its hukam*, attaches very little value to liberation and paradise [3.38].

Amlu kir Drql blju sbdo kir sc kl Awb inq dyih pwxl]

hoie ikrsWxu elmwnu jMmwie IY iBsqu dojku mUVy eyv jwxl]1]27] 20

isrl m: 3 A:g:g:s: pMnw 24

Meaning: Make good actions the soil and put into it *Sabd* as seed. Now irrigate it with water of truth. Be such a famous farmer whose faith is firmly established. Thoughtless man ! This is the way for you to know about heaven and hell [1.27].

Mystery of Death:

After describing birth of human being and earlier life, attention is focused on death and what happens to the human body after death. Guru Arjun, in *Ramkali*, describes the philosophy death:

pvny mih pvnu smwieAw] joql mih joiq ril jwieAw]

mwtl mwtl hoel eyk] rovnhwry kl kvn tyk]1]

kaunu mUAW ry kaunu mUAW] bRhm igAwnl imil krhu blcwrw

iehu qau clqu BieAw]1]rhWau]

Agll ikCu Kbir n pweI] rovnhwru iB aUiT isDwel]

Brm moh ky bWDY bMD] supnu BieAw BKlwey AMD]2]
iehu qau rcnu ricAw krqwir] Awvq jwvq hukim Apwir]
nh ko mUAw n mrxY jogu] nh ibnsY AibnwsI hogu]3]
jo iehu jwxhu so iehu nwih] jwnxhwry kau bil jwau]
khu nwnk guir Brmu cukwieAw] n koel mrY n AwvY jwieAw]4]10] 26
rwmkll m: 5 A:g:g:s: pMnw 885

Meaning: The elements constituting the body have gone back to the source. The self in the being has mingled with its origin. Then what is the use of crying over the death of a loved one? [1].

Who died? None! The wise men ponder over the issue and conclude it to be the cycle of life and death for the entire creation [1.rhao].

The person who cries does not know that it, too, will pass through the same cycle of birth and death. All these attachments and illusions, on the canvas of mirage, are result of human bonds with the worldly temptations [2].

The Creator, has determined the system that governs the universe. In reality none dies since the Self [soul] does not die [3].

The Self [soul] is not what people conceive it to be. Says Nanak, whosoever knows it shall be my Master. *Akaalpurkh* has lifted all my illusions. None ever dies nor is caught in the phenomena of transmigration [4.10].

Conclusion:

Contrary to the prevalent belief, discussed in most of the religions preceding Sikhism, there is no hell or heaven after death in human life. Of course, if there is anything akin to it in human affairs, it is in this very life as a consequence of human behaviour practiced in daily life. This span of human life is the most auspicious, most important and most precious opportunity for human beings to perform acceptable and noble deeds which lead to peace and prosperity of all humanity rather than follow a path of individual salvation at the cost of comfort of other people that tantamounts to selfish behavior, comparable to that of an animal. The principle of *what you sow so shall you reap* is applicable in this very life and useful for peace and prosperity of entire humanity. Sikhs, as human beings, are advised not to be misled by those who believe in obtaining fruits of labour of this life in any life in the future about which no one is certain nor any thing like it is suggested in Sikh scriptures.



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Reincarnation: A Sikh Viewpoint

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Sikhism believes in the immortality of the human soul. The soul (*Jiva*) is in essence Godlike and is deathless like Him. Death means the destruction of the physical self. The ashes and bone-dust mix with the elements. But the soul, along with its subtle body, leaves the material body to dwell in another material body. The Sikh belief in the transmigration of the soul follows the popular Vedic belief as enunciated in the *Bhagavad Gita* "Just as a person casts off worn-out garments and puts on others that are new, even so does the embodied soul cast off worn-out bodies and take on others that are new" (*The Bhagavagita*, II, 22).¹

For Sikhism, human life is a stage in the development of the soul. Human birth is a boon granted by God after the soul has gone through lower forms of life. It is an opportunity to seek union with God. Guru Arjan Dev says it pointedly:

Now that you have attained the human body

This is your opportunity to meet with the Lord.²

Similarly, Kabir says:

After wandering through eighty four lakh species,
you have arrived into the human birth;

Should you now miss the chance of liberation, no shelter will you find.³

The existence of eighty four lakh species of creatures is a popular Indian belief based probably on old mythological scriptures. Although there are references to this figure in Sikh scriptures, it is not meant to be a precise figure as Guru Nanak refers to innumerable universes and creatures created by God.⁴

Among the innumerable forms of life, the supreme position is assigned to the human being. As Guru Arjan Dev says:

Out of all the eighty four lakh species, God has conferred greatness on man; Whoever misses out at this step, continues to suffer transmigration.⁵

There is considerable difference of opinion among theologians on what happens to the human soul if it misses the opportunity of achieving liberation. According to the commonly held Hindu belief, the human soul can go into the body of any creature after a person dies. As Maharaj puts it, "some sects and eminent persons state that after coming into the human body, the soul does not go into other forms of bodies. This statement is virtually against Indian philosophy, scriptures and Vedic literature. In order to bear the consequences of Karma, the soul can go into the body of any creature after human life... There are thousands of such examples in religious literature."⁶

Surinder Singh Kohli follows the popular Hindu belief in saying: 'When the soul appears before the god of justice, after death, a decision is taken about its future according to its actions in the material world. *It may be sent to be reborn as an animal, a bird or an insect. It may even be sent to higher planes of gods according to its actions. It may be sent, to be born as a human being again for its further development.*'⁷

Daljeet Singh is of the view that "the Gurus envisage a clear process of evolution in this world. Man, according to the Gurus, is the highest evolved being ... He has a clear capacity for discernment, reflection and deliberation. This is an attribute higher than that of other animals. Life affords man an opportunity to become a God-centred being."⁸

A similar view has been expressed by Swami Abhedananda, a Vedantic scholar, who asserts that the doctrine of reincarnation is a scientific theory like the theory of evolution and is, in fact, a logical supplement to the theory of evolution. Without reincarnation, evolution cannot reach perfection. Abhedananda argues that the moral and spiritual nature of the human beings cannot be explained satisfactorily through the theory of evolution. "Evolution explains the process of life, while reincarnation explains the purpose of life."⁹

A view of the human being consistent with the process of evolution does not sit comfortably with the idea of regressive transmigration. In my view, the possibility of a human soul being reborn as a lower form of life is envisaged by the Sikh Gurus only to emphasize the Sovereign Will of God who may, if He so chooses, send an extremely degenerate human soul into a lower form of life. The real emphasis in their hymns is on spiritual endeavour for further development of the human soul. The progress from being a self-centred person to becoming a God-centred person may be seen as an evolutionary step which prepares the human person for the next step of liberation from the cycle of births and deaths.

In support of my view I would like to point out that the possibility of being reborn in a lower form of life is often mentioned by the holy Gurus in a metaphoric sense. As Guru Nanak says, "like hogs, dogs, asses and cats, beasts, the foul ones and the lowly outcasts are those who turn away from the Master; they continue to whirl in transmigration. Tied in (worldly) bonds, they continue to come and go."¹⁰ Guru Amardas affirms that "those who have not served the True Master, nor have contemplated the Holy Word, cannot be considered as having been born in human incarnation; they remain as ignorant, stupid animals" even though they appear to be human beings.¹¹ Similarly, Guru Arjan Dev says: "Cursed is the creature devoid of the Master's teaching, foul his birth. He is stupid like a dog, hog, ass, crow, snake."¹²

Thus the references to lower forms of life are often meant to refer to human beings who behave like animals. The main thrust of the Sikh Gurus' view of transmigration appears to be progressive: a human soul may be reborn again and again as a human being with God's grant of further opportunities for spiritual development. If one chooses to behave like an animal even when blessed with human birth, one will be missing another opportunity to be liberated from the bondage of transmigration.

The progressive view of transmigration is also consistent with the concept of God as the All-Merciful, All-Forgiving Father who forgives His children even when they commit mistakes. "Our way is to ever make mistakes," says Guru Arjan, "Your nature (O Lord) is to save the fallen."¹³

So long as the soul remains caught in the cycle of births and deaths, it remains away from God. It is only when the individual soul has purified itself of all forms of sin by constant meditation on '*Naam*' (the Word of God)¹⁴ that it is approved by God as worthy of being united with Him. Liberation from the cycle of births and deaths is achieved through spiritual effort, with the guidance of the Guru, and ultimately through the Grace of God. As Guru Nanak says: