

The Sikh Poiesis of Nature and Environment

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What is Nature?

ਕੁਸਰਤਿ ਕਵਣ ਕਹਾ ਵੀਚਾਰੁ ॥

How can I describe (the Lord's) Creative Potency? (SGGS: 3)

Nature is the art of God. – Dante.

The term *Nature* is generally applied to the 'content, structure and development of the spacio-temporal world'. It is the entirety of phenomenal existence. Man with his ever-increasing mastery of the laws of Nature and ever expanding reach of technology, has increasingly transformed Nature into what has been called *noosphere*. The noosphere is tending continually to spread out its borders as man penetrates outer space on the one hand and probes the depths of the planet and the realm of genes on the other.

Discovering the objective laws of nature and making use of them by means of specially created tools and implements of labour, man has utilized the substances and energies of nature for creating material wealth. As a consequence of this process, he has supplemented his natural habitat by an artificial one – the so-called *Second Nature*. It is the creation of man's social production, and man has increasingly become attached to it. Several consequences have ensued from our production of and attachment with the Second Nature.

One important consequence has been the resurgence of materialism with its emphasis that the material is primary and the ideal as well as the so-called spiritual has merely secondary significance. Modern materialism has evolved hand in hand with the development of natural science and technology. The great success of these has provided unprecedented prestige to materialism. It is not surprising then, that the two contemporary world ideologies, namely, capitalism and communism are both materialistic.

Another consequence has been exploitation of Nature by man for material affluence. Reinforced by human greed, and buttressed by selfishness, this trend has caused grabbing and holding of as much material wealth as possible. This has taken place at the individual as well as societal level. A widening chasm has thus been produced between the haves and have-nots both at the individual level and also at the level of nation states. This is the gift of materialism to our world.

Man's attachment with the *Second Nature* has led, in a variety of ways, to devastation of the First Nature. As a consequence, the very existence of man appears to be threatened. He lives under the threat of total devastation. Spiritual faith and hope had hitherto sustained man in distress. But man's faith has now been corroded by the unarguable success of science and technology. This has happened particularly in the Western culture because even the theist there considers Nature to

be work of God but never a part of Him. Also because, Nature has been considered the objective reality existing outside consciousness and independently of it.

God and Nature

According to Sikh thought, Nature is not merely the handicraft of God, or even the signature of His Power, it is His very countenance – sacred, immaculate and splendid. The laws of Nature are but agencies of His wisdom. He Himself takes on multiple shapes to create what we call Nature:

ਅਨਿਕ ਰੂਪ ਖਿਨ ਮਾਹਿ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਧਾਰਦਾ॥

In a moment does He transform Himself into the innumerable forms of Nature. – SGGS p.519

Just as the sea-waves, foam and bubbles are not separate from the sea, so too nothing of Nature is separate from God who pervades and fills everything.

ਸੂਤੁ ਏਕੁ ਮਣਿ ਸਤ ਸਹਸ ਜੈਸੇ ਓਤਿ ਪੋਤਿ ਪ੍ਰਭੁ ਸੋਈ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥ ਜਲ ਤਰੰਗ ਅਰੁ ਫੋਨ ਬੁਦਬੁਦਾ ਜਲ ਤੇ ਭਿੰਨ ਨ ਹੋਈ ॥ ਇਹੁ ਪਰਪੰਚੁ ਪਾਰਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਕੀ ਲੀਲਾ ਬਿਚਰਤ ਆਨ ਨ ਹੋਈ ॥

Just as one thread holds hundreds and thousands of beads,
The Lord is woven into the creation.

The water-waves, the foam and bubbles are not distinct from water,
The phenomenal world is the play game of the Supreme Lord,
Reflecting on it we find it no different from Him. – SGGS p.485

Nature mirrors God's glory. His glory is reflected by not just the splendid sun, but even by the glimmering glowworm. Nature is beautiful, always beautiful, splendidly beautiful, for it is God manifesting Himself for us to see and contemplate.

ਨਾਨਕ ਸਚ ਦਾਤਾਰੁ ਸਿਨਾਖਤੁ ਕੁਦਰਤੀ ॥

Says Nanak, the True Creator can be recognized in Nature. – SGGS p.141
God pervades Nature, abides in it as its very life.

ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਕਰਿ ਕੈ ਵਸਿਆ ਸੋਇ ॥

He created Nature, and within it He dwells. – SGGS p.83

Through the contemplation of Nature, by steps, man can ascend to God. One who is in love with Nature cannot stay without loving its Creator, His splendour, His power and His wisdom are manifest in Nature. Guru Arjan Dev exclaims:

ਤੂ ਅਚਰਜੁ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਤੇਰੀ ਬਿਸਮਾ ॥

Astonishing are you and your created Nature is agapeic wonderment. – SGGS p. 563

He is known through the Nature that He created and which He pervades:

ਸਚੁ ਸਚਾ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਜਾਣੀਐ ਦਿਨੁ ਰਾਤੀ ਜਿਨਿ ਬਣਾਈਆ ॥

The Lord who created day and night, can be known through His created Nature.
– SGGS p. 313

ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਵਰਤੇ ਰੂਪੁ ਅਰੁ ਰੰਗਾ ॥

He pervades every being; His creativity is manifest in every form and every hue.
– SGGS p. 376

ਆਪਿ ਅਲੇਖੁ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਹੈ ਦੇਖਾ ॥

Himself unseen, He reveals Himself in His Nature. – SGGS p. 1042

The Sikh poeisis of Nature

Modern Science has provided us with a powerful mathematization of Nature. However, let me ask, “Do we, can we, dwell in Nature as a mathematical construction?” I wish to emphasize that ‘even though we might have a *mathesis* of Nature, we must be aware of the *poeisis* of being’³.

That is precisely the position that the Sikh faith takes. Guru Nanak, the founder of this faith never claimed to be a scholar or a thinker. All he claimed was that he was a singer and a poet. To him, therefore, Nature was an aesthetic appearance – where ‘aesthetic’ refers to sensible BEING and ‘appearing’, connotes BECOMING in the widest sense. This is what he sang about Nature:

**ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਦਿਸੈ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਸੁਣੀਐ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਭਉ ਸੁਖ ਸਾਰੁ ॥ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਪਾਤਾਲੀ ਆਕਾਸੀ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਸਰਬ ਆਕਾਰੁ
॥ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਵੇਦ ਪੁਰਾਣ ਕਤੇਬਾ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਸਰਬ ਵੀਚਾਰੁ ॥ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਖਾਣਾ ਪੀਣਾ ਪੇਨੁਣੁ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਸਰਬ ਪਿਆਰੁ
॥ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਜਾਤੀ ਜਿਨਸੀ ਰੰਗੀ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਜੀਅ ਜਹਾਨ ॥ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਨੇਕੀਆ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਬਦੀਆ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਮਾਨੁ
ਅਭਿਮਾਨੁ ॥ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਪਉਣੁ ਪਾਣੀ ਬੈਸੰਤਰੁ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਧਰਤੀ ਖਾਕੁ ॥ ਸਭ ਤੇਰੀ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਤੂੰ ਕਾਦਿਰੁ ਕਰਤਾ
ਪਾਕੀ ਨਾਈ ਪਾਕੁ ॥ ਨਾਨਕ ਹੁਕਮੇ ਅੰਦਰਿ ਵੇਖੈ ਵਰਤੇ ਤਾਕੋ ਤਾਕੁ ॥**

Nature we see, Nature we hear,
Nature is our awe and wonder and joy.
Nature is the nether-regions, Nature, the skies,
Nature is the scriptures, thoughts and creeds.
Nature is food and drink and raiment,
Nature is love for all.
Nature is species, genera and races,
Nature is the whole of the world alive.
Nature is indeed both good and evil,
Nature is in self-esteem as in conceit.
Air and water and fire and Nature,
Nature is the soil of earth.
'Tis your manifest Power as well, O
Creator,
Nature is hallowed by Your holy Name!

SGGS p. 464

This sublime song of Guru Nanak brings into relief four complementary conceptualizations of nature:

First, Nature is *prima facie* an aesthetic experience – generating in us ‘awe, wonder and joy’.

Secondly, man is not in confrontation with Nature, he is part of it. Man’s inner nature, his thoughts, inclinations and even love, are as much a part of nature as the nether-worlds and the skies.

Thirdly, Nature is fully alive, not inert material but living vigorously.

Finally, Nature is not apart from God, but an integral part of God. It is His wonderful craft⁶. In the Gurus’ works there is a great variety of poetic metaphors that describe the relationship between God and Nature. It is described as His abode⁷, His face⁸, His art⁹, His knowledge¹⁰, His consciousness, power and will¹¹. That is why the Guru exclaims:

ਬਿਸਮੁ ਭਏ ਬਿਸਮਾਦ ਦੇਖਿ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਤੇਰੀਆ ॥

I am wonderstruck beholding Your
created Nature. (SGGS: 521)

Nature as *Becoming*

Nature is not static. It has unrelenting dynamism. It is Almighty Power manifest. It is not merely *being*, it is continually *becoming*. In *Gurbani* (Gurus’ Works), Nature is termed *Kudrat*, a term that simultaneously means the created Nature¹² and the Divine Power of Creativity¹³. It is unity as well as diversity. This is clearly in contrast with the univocal mathematizing approach. It is the equivocal aesthetic approach. In its diversity, there is little uniformity – none resembles another existent¹⁴. It evokes a sense of agapeic wonder, pleasant astonishment and a sense of deepest mystery¹⁵. We are bound to be overwhelmed with an aesthetic experience when we behold Nature as *becoming*.

It would be instructive to note that the term ‘nature’ is derived from *natus* meaning ‘a being born out of a source outside itself. Whatever is born is a ‘being’ that sets upon the process of ‘becoming’ – and ‘becoming’ consists of the loosening of obdurate determinacies, the giving in of apparent stabilities to form ever new and different patterns of being. Thus, nothing is ever absolutely the same. It reminds me of an apt Urdu couplet:

*Sukoon muhal hai qudrat ke karkhaney mein,
Sabaat ek taghayyur ko hai zamaney mein.*
Hard it is to spot constancy in the workshop of Nature,
The one thing that changes not is change.
Guru Nanak affirms:

ਜੋ ਕਿਛੁ ਹੋਆ ਸੁ ਸਭੁ ਚਲਣਾ ॥

Whatever exists is all mutable.

(SGGS:433)

The creative power of the Indeterminate is all the time at work. Nothing stays, nothing can stay; nothing can be stayed¹⁶. The aesthetic show of ‘being’ is met with the diversification of Nature in whose matrix ‘fact’ and ‘value’ comingle. This great aesthetic show is inexhaustible. The poiesis of becoming knows no limits. Galileo is

known to have said, “(The story of nature) is written in the language of mathematics... outside of calculation, there is no singing.” It seems, Galileo never realized that mathematical and musical are analogous, both embodying a harmony of being. The mathematician experiences this harmony through his head, the musician through his heart. While the cold scientific-mathematical approach makes God dispensable, the poiesis of Nature makes a benevolent Creator indispensable. The scientific-mathematical approach is devoid of any emotions except ‘eureka’. The poetical-musical approach brims with emotions – of love, of surrender, of ecstasy, of awe, of wonder, and what not. To Guru Nanak, the aesthete par excellence, the entire existence collectively, as also all its existents individually, appeared to be singing the praise of their Creator. He affirmed this in his famous hymn titled *Sodar* (That Divine Portal) where as he said:

ਵਾਜੇ ਤੇਰੇ ਨਾਦ ਅਨੇਕ ਅਸੰਖਾ ਕੇਤੇ ਤੇਰੇ ਵਾਵਣਹਾਰੇ ॥ ਕੇਤੇ ਤੇਰੇ ਰਾਗ ਪਰੀ ਸਿਉ ਕਹੀਅਹਿ ਕੇਤੇ ਤੇਰੇ
ਗਾਵਣਹਾਰੇ ॥

Countless are Thy minstrels, numberless Thy instruments,
Fathomless Your harmonies, tunes and measures,
Sing to You winds and water and fire,
The angel of reckoning does You admire.
Sing to You spheres lauds universe,
Sings to You all Creation diverse.

(SGGS: 8)

He goes further to recount the animate and inanimate existents that he could recollect and affirmed that they too were singing laudations of the Lord. And then he says:

ਹੋਰਿ ਕੇਤੇ ਤੁਧਨੋ ਗਾਵਨਿ ਸੇ ਮੈ ਚਿਤਿ ਨ ਆਵਨਿ ਨਾਨਕੁ ਕਿਆ ਬੀਚਾਰੇ ॥

Many another Your name exalt,
But Nanak recollects them not.

(SGGS: 8)

Even science marvels at universe’s design but cannot understand the source of this design. It is only the subtle aesthetic sensibility that is able to appreciate the uninterrupted poiesis of becoming that provides it the richness of design.

Nature is communicative

Nature is not silent. We are referring here not to the great elemental sounds of Nature such as the sound of the rain, the sound of wind in a primal wood, or the sound of outer ocean on a beach. We are not wishing only to say with Kahlil Gibran that “the earth delights to feel your bare feet and the winds long to play with your hair. What we are wanting to affirm is that nature is really communicative in a thousand tongues. It was Pascal who said, “Those honour Nature well who teach that she can speak on everything, even on theology.” It requires keen poetic sensibility to understand what nature is saying. Guru Nanak really found that every thing in Nature was in communication with its Creator, talking to him, Praying before Him in its own peculiar tongue.

ਬਾਬੀਹਾ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਵੇਲੇ ਬੋਲਿਆ ਤਾਂ ਦਰਿ ਸੁਣੀ ਪੁਕਾਰ ॥ ਮੇਘੇ ਨੇ ਫੁਰਮਾਨੁ ਹੋਆ ਵਰਸਹੁ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਧਾਰਿ ॥

The rain-bird prayed in the early morn
And the Lord its prayer heard.
The cloud was then ordained by the Lord
To rain in great benediction.

(SGGS: 1285)

There is intimate relationship, on the one hand, between every living being and Nature from which it draws its sustenance, and on the other, between these beings and their Creator to whom they pray and on whom they rely. Guru Nanak testifies this twin relationship in the following verses:

ਅਧੁ ਗੁਲਾ ਚਿੜੀ ਕਾ ਚੁਗਣੁ ਗੋਣਿ ਚੜੀ ਬਿਲਲਾਇ ॥ ਖਸਮੇ ਭਾਵੈ ਓਹਾ ਚੰਗੀ ਜਿ ਕਰੇ ਖੁਦਾਇ ਖੁਦਾਇ ॥

Half a grain the sparrow pecks
Skyward flies and makes its calls –
Thus she wins the favour of the Lord,
For, she utters His holy Name!

(SGGS: 1286)

And again:

ਅਕ ਸਿਉ ਪ੍ਰੀਤਿ ਕਰੇ ਅਕ ਤਿਭਾ ਅਕ ਭਾਲੀ ਬਹਿ ਖਾਇ ॥ ਖਸਮੇ ਭਾਵੈ ਓਹੇ ਚੰਗਾ ਜਿ ਕਰੇ ਖੁਦਾਇ ਖੁਦਾਇ
॥

The grasshopper fond of the *akk* plant,
Feeds itself on its leaves.
The lord's favour he does win,
For, he utters His holy Name!

SGGS p. 1286

The Nobel laureate, Rabindra Nath Tagore, in the same vein, exclaims:

Trees are the earth's endless effort
to speak to the listening heaven. – Fireflies.

Aren't these exquisite examples of poesis of nature?

God seems to pervade Nature as a mega-consciousness. The laws of Nature amply testify this. The puny human consciousness is able to understand only its small fragments. Even though never understood in its totality, yet it is able to impress its grandeur on the human mind. Sensitive minds have often exclaimed it to be the Beauty that gives beauty to every season. Such an aesthetic experience has been captured by Guru Nanak in his *Baramaha* (acrostic song). His portrayal of the month of *Asarh* (June-July) is especially worth appreciating:

ਆਸਾੜੁ ਭਲਾ ਸੂਰਜੁ ਗਗਨਿ ਤਪੇ ॥ ਧਰਤੀ ਦੁਖ ਸਹੇ ਸੋਖੇ ਅਗਨਿ ਭਖੇ ॥ ਅਗਨਿ ਰਸੁ ਸੋਖੇ ਮਰੀਐ ਧੋਖੇ ਭੀ
ਸੋ ਕਿਰਤੁ ਨ ਹਾਰੇ ॥ ਰਬੁ ਫਿਰੇ ਛਾਇਆ ਧਨ ਤਾਕੈ ਟੀੜੁ ਲਵੈ ਮੰਝਿ ਬਾਰੇ ॥

Auspicious indeed is *Asarh* despite the sun scorching the skies.
The earth is travailed. Dried up by the blazing fire
Dessicating its juices.

The sun itself smoulders, yet continues to perform,
Its chariot moves on; life everywhere looks for shade;
And the gnat in the forest, wails.....

(SGGS: 1108)

The experience of the variety of the beauty of Nature is always so overwhelming that whoever is familiar with it may find in the following lines of Guru Nanak, an echo of his feeling:

ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਕਵਣ ਕਹਾ ਵੀਚਾਰੁ ॥ ਵਾਰਿਆ ਨ ਜਾਵਾ ਏਕ ਵਾਰ ॥
How may I fathom Your Nature O Lord?
I fail even once to sacrifice myself unto You!

SGGS p. 4

Man as part of Nature

Like everything else, man too is part of Nature. Kabir, the renowned medieval saint says:

ਅਵਲਿ ਅਲਹ ਨੂਰੁ ਉਪਾਇਆ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਕੇ ਸਭ ਬੰਦੇ ॥ ਏਕ ਨੂਰ ਤੇ ਸਭੁ ਜਗੁ ਉਪਜਿਆ ਕਉਨ ਭਲੇ ਕੇ ਮੰਦੇ
॥

First God created Light; then the mortals, slaves of His Nature.
Since the entire world arose from the same Light,
Whom can we call good and whom bad?

(SGGS: 1349)

Man, therefore is not opposed to nature. Even his power and his strength are part of Nature.

ਮਨ ਤੁਆਨਾ ਤੂ ਕੁਦਰਤੀ ਆਇਆ ॥

I am powerful because I am part of Your Nature.

(SGGS: 1291)

God pervades every being, hence even every man. Thus it is that His Nature is revealed unto man.

ਤੂ ਸਭ ਮਹਿ ਵਰਤਹਿ ਆਪਿ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਦੇਖਾਵਹੀ॥

You pervade all, and thus reveal Your Nature.

(SGGS: 1095)

Even the subjectivity and spirituality of man are part of Nature. Nature not only surrounds him, it is also within him, functioning there. All the elements of Nature support and sustain man. There is a verse in *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* that occurs twice in that holy book and every holy service of the Sikh congregation is supposed to be concluded with a recitation of it. It is considered that important. It underlines the function that nature plays in the physical sustenance and spiritual advancement of man. It begins as follows:

ਪਵਣੁ ਗੁਰੂ ਪਾਣੀ ਪਿਤਾ ਮਾਤਾ ਧਰਤਿ ਮਹਤੁ ॥ ਦਿਵਸੁ ਰਾਤਿ ਦੁਇ ਦਾਈ ਦਾਇਆ ਖੇਲੈ ਸਗਲ ਜਗਤੁ ॥

Air is our Guru, Water our Sire,
And Earth the Master Great.
Day and night are the nurses twain,
In whose lap the whole world plays.

(SGGS: 8)

In this verse, three elements, namely, air, water and earth, and two elements of time, namely day and night, have been employed to represent the spacio-temporality of Nature. It then studies the relation of these with man.

Air has been called the Guru. That, because all verbal communication is transmitted through the medium of air. Even the revelatory Word of God, the Guru's *bani*, is transmitted through it. It is unattached to the world; so too is Guru. It moves everywhere without let or hindrance. That is also the prerogative of the Guru.

Water has been called Father or Sire, firstly, because 'it is prime life by virtue of which all else is alive'¹⁷. Its fluidity is suggestive of semen, which represents generativity. It is immaculate itself and cleanses others. It moves down the slope, and thereby provides instruction in humility.

Earth is the Great Mother because, like a mother, it nurtures. The *earth* is material, and *materia* and *mater* are *cognate* terms. Mother Earth gives birth to beings on which she lavishes the intimacy of Nature. Like a mother, it provides food and nourishment to one and all. Guru Nanak has said:

ਧਰਤੀ ਦੇਗ ਮਿਲੈ ਇਕ ਵੇਰਾ ਭਾਗੁ ਤੇਰਾ ਭੰਡਾਰੀ ॥

The Earth is Your cooking vessel
Yielding at once what is sought.
Each one receives his portion
According to his writ. (SGGS: 1190)

The Earth is also the symbol of forbearance and patience. It tolerates even being dug up with the same equanimity as being plastered with sandalwood paste¹⁸.

Day and *Night*, express 'Time' and provide the ground for growth and development. They enable one to participate continually in the play of the world.

It is clear, then, that man is part of Nature in more ways than one. He is born of it, mothered by it, and attains his full potential through its benevolence. When in tune with its rhythms and harmonies, he finds it communicating both with himself and with God. That is how, through it, he recognizes his Creator. This cognition is an experience of great wonderment. It is not surprising then that Guru Nanak chose to sang:

ਬਲਿਹਾਰੀ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਵਸਿਆ ॥ ਤੇਰਾ ਅੰਤੁ ਨ ਜਾਈ ਲਖਿਆ ॥

I am a sacrifice unto Your Nature,
Who can its limit know? (SGGS: 469)

Respect Nature

Rousseau said, "Everything is perfect coming from the hands of the Creator; everything degenerates in the hands of man¹⁹. Man has abused the elements of nature because he regarded them as a commodity belonging to him. He has not seen them as a community to which he belongs. He thinks of himself as a creator instead of a user. However, his delusion is depriving him not only of his natural heritage, but also robbing him of even his future. Man seems to be dishonoring Nature by polluting it.

Guru Arjan Dev, in his *bani* tersely expressed his opinion about those who do not accord due respect to Nature. He said:

ਸੋਈ ਕੁਚੀਲੁ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਨਹੀ ਜਾਨੈ ॥ ਲੀਪਿਐ ਥਾਇ ਨ ਸੁਚਿ ਹਰਿ ਮਾਨੈ ॥

One who respects not Nature is polluted.

Plastering one's kitchen does not make it pure in the Lord's eyes.(SGGS: 1151)

One of the names with which the religion that Guru Nanak founded was remembered as *Nirmal Panth* or 'the Way of Cleanness'. He advised his followers to keep their bodies clean, they being the abode of God.

Do not let filth despoil it,

Do not let your own bodies be unclean²⁰

Kabir enjoins us to live in accord with Nature, when he says:

ਅਪੁ ਤੇਜੁ ਵਾਇ ਪ੍ਰਿਥਮੀ ਆਕਾਸਾ ॥ ਤਿਨ ਮਹਿ ਪੰਚ ਤਤੁ ਘਰਿ ਵਾਸਾ ॥

Water, fire, air, earth, and sky –

Live like them and be near God.

(SGGS: 1031)

If you consider that Kabir's advice is sound and one must live in accord with the forces of Nature, then one cannot dare pollute Nature but would strive hard to preserve its balance and maintain its beauty. We must understand that with the respect of Nature is tied our destiny. We need to reaffirm our love and respect for Nature and say with Guru Arjan Dev:

ਕਰਤੇ ਕੁਦਰਤੀ ਮੁਸਤਾਕੁ ॥

Lord Creator! With Thy created Nature I am in love.

(SGGS: 724)

Pollution of Nature

Nature is God's creation, His poesis, His music, and so deserves the reverence and veneration that is due to God. However, man has neglected his obligations towards Nature rather ruthlessly. He has denuded hills and mountains of their forests by merciless lumbering. As a consequence, landslides and floods have started playing havoc. His industrial waste is polluting rivers unrelentingly. As a result, his water supply is being rendered impotable. His containers and carry-bags have made his living places cluttered with garbage. If continued like this, he shall find himself buried in his own waste. His oil spills pollute oceans endangering sea life most cruelly. His pesticides are polluting his food and drinks. The exhaust from his vehicles is polluting air and causing disabling respiratory diseases. He seems to have ruptured the ozone layer consequent upon which global warming has begun. He may soon be roasted to death. Tons of discarded electronic products being ripped apart and smelted daily emit poisonous fumes and harmful e-waste. Poisonous elements like cadmium, mercury, barium and lead pollute the environment, thus causing slow burn. On account of careless handling of radioactivity, congenital deformities are on the increase. Man is playing with chromosomes and clones but does not know whether he would produce through their agency angels or misanthropes. He has even polluted space. Space junk that he has littered has already posed a danger to space-flights. Man's own selfishness

has depleted this world of so many beautiful species and drastically disturbed the symbiotic balance of the biosphere. He stands threatened by his own doings.

Man and his environment

Man's environment is three fold: physical, biological and social. His cruelty on his physical environment we have already considered. He has abused the earth, air, water and energy without consideration for consequence. The Gurus considered the earth the School of Dharma, where the practice of righteousness is to be learnt. It is also the cauldron of charity from which the entire living world is liberally catered. The produce of the earth should not be selfishly appropriated, but shared equitably (*vand chhakna*) with others. The Gurus' *langar* (free kitchen) is a model for this.

The Gurus wanted the earth to be kept perfectly clean. They forbade smoking strictly, declaring it an unexceptionable taboo.

Water too was required to be kept clean. The Sikhs were advised to be 'friends of the rivers'²¹ and accord them their care. The *sarovars* (pools) attached to their Gurdwaras were to be kept meticulously clean. For this purpose certain fish were specially reared in them and they acted as scavengers. Regular desilting (*kar seva*) of these pools is arranged periodically.

The Sikhs were literally required to observe personal cleanliness as a preparation for Godliness – a bath being a compulsory requirement before sitting for meditation.

The Sikh respect for bio-environment

In the *Janam Sakhis* (biographies) Guru Nanak is very often mentioned either sitting under a tree or in a garden or forest. In fact, he avoided going into towns or villages. Thus, there are many trees and gardens, etc. that have come to be associated with him during his many travels. Some of these are as follows:

1. The tree under which Nanak was asleep and a cobra spread his hood to protect the Guru from hot sun. A gurdwara called Sarap Chhaya has been built around that tree and that gurdwara as well as the tree still stands.
2. The tree under which the Guru arranged to feed the hungry faqirs with the money that his father had given him for a good bargain or *sacha sauda*. The aged tree under which he sat is still preserved. The tree is now called *Thumb Sahib* or the holy trunk.
3. After his crucial mystical experience in Sultanpur, when he had disappeared for three days the Guru emerged from a forest.
4. The withered *Pipal* tree under which the Guru had dialogue with the Siddhas in Gorakhmata, which became green as the Guru sat under it.
5. The soap-nut tree whose fruit the Guru asked his companion, Bhai Mardana, to eat and whose fruit became sweet on the side from which Mardana started plucking the fruit. The other side of the same tree yields the usual bitter fruit. The tree still stands in its pristine glory and a Gurdwara has come up around it, which is called *Mitha Ritha*.
6. When the Guru went to Sri Lanka, he sat in a withered and desolate garden outside the town. This garden became green when the Guru sat in it. The tidings

of this supernatural occurrence brought the King of Sri Lanka to come to pay a visit to the Guru.

It is not Guru Nanak alone with whom trees are associated. There are other Gurus with whom trees are associated in a variety of ways.

The peg in front of the weaver's home against which Sri Amar Das stumbled and fell, also became green and grew up into a tree. A Gurdwara came to be built around it. It is called *Killi Sahib*. Guru Arjan Dev caused to be preserved the three *beri* (jujube) trees in the *parikrama* of Sri Harmandir Sahib. They stand well-preserved even today.

Guru Har Rai was having a stroll in his Garden when his cloak got entangled in a flowering plant and broke a flower. The Guru never forgave himself and ever afterwards, he wrapped his cloak very carefully around himself when he entered the garden.

Several trees, in Shergarh, Bhangani, Machiwara, Jatpura, and Tibbi Sahib are associated with the sports and battles of Guru Gobind Singh.

Apart from the Sikh Gurus, reverence for the biological environment has been shown by many of the *bhaktas* whose works are found in *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*.

Bhakta Kabir, one day, saw a gardener woman plucking flowers to offer the stone image of her deity. He was distressed at the desecration of nature being done in this manner, and exclaimed:

ਪਾਤੀ ਤੋਰੈ ਮਾਲਿਨੀ ਪਾਤੀ ਪਾਤੀ ਜੀਉ ॥ ਜਿਸੁ ਪਾਹਨ ਕਉ ਪਾਤੀ ਤੋਰੈ ਸੋ ਪਾਹਨ ਨਿਰਜੀਉ ॥੧॥ ਭੂਲੀ ਮਾਲਨੀ ਹੈ ਏਉ ॥
ਸਤਿਗੁਰੁ ਜਗਤਾ ਹੈ ਏਉ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥ ਬ੍ਰਹਮੁ ਪਾਤੀ ਬਿਸਨੁ ਡਾਰੀ ਫੂਲ ਸੰਕਰਦੇਉ ॥ ਤੀਨਿ ਦੇਵ ਪ੍ਰਤਿਪਿ ਤੋਰਹਿ ਕਰਹਿ ਕਿਸ
ਕੀ ਸੇਉ ॥੨॥ ਪਾਖਾਨ ਗਵਿ ਕੈ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਕੀਨੀ ਦੇ ਕੈ ਛਾਤੀ ਪਾਉ ॥ ਜੇ ਏਹ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਸਾਚੀ ਹੈ ਤਉ ਗੜਣਹਾਰੇ ਖਾਉ ॥

O gardener woman! Why are you plucking the floral leaflets?

The leaflets too have life.

The stone idol for which you pluck the flowers is un-alive.

O deluded gardener woman, know you not that the True Master is ever awake and alive and

The leaf is Brahma, the branches are Vishnu, and the flowers are Shiva.

You have broken these three gods, who else are you hoping to serve?

While your god was carved from raw stone, the sculptor placed his feet on its chest.

Were the stone-image a genuine god, it should have devoured the sculptor (for the sacrilege). (SGGS: 479)

It would be relevant to recall here that during the tercentenary celebrations of the birth of the Khalsa, the Jathedar of Takht Sri Kesgarh Sahib distributed saplings as *prasad* to the hundreds of thousands of devotees who came to participate in the celebrations. These saplings were to be planted by the devotees in their respective living places as an activity to combat atmospheric pollution.

Man and his social environment

The Gurus have commanded the Sikhs to keep the social environment clean by avoiding company with power mongers²², evil doers and slanderers²³. The Sikhs were counseled to lead a life of contentment, and to respect the person, property and dignity of others.

However, it is a matter of tremendous concern that even in the Sikh community crime seems to be spreading its tentacles though, perhaps, not as rapidly as in the rest of the country. What a tremendous pollution has taken place in the social environment of our great country. Open the newspaper on any day and you read crime writ large – murder, rape (especially rape on minors, rape by minors and gang rapes), armed robberies, drug trafficking, mass killing, and what not. Moral values seem to have sunk to a very low level. Such indices of social pathology as divorce, juvenile delinquency, suicide, drug addiction, besides crime, are soaring up. So too is beggary. It may be some consolation for the Sikh community that there are still hardly any beggars among them.

The worst crimes are crimes in the name of religion. Desecration of holy books or holy places of religions other than one's own are now rampant. Communal riots have been endemic in India, but mass killings of members of religious minorities organized through state abetment is a recent phenomenon that casts a slur on our national image. Indelible blots on the image of a people are left by such heinous acts as demolition of a mosque or invasion of the sanctum sanctorum of a community by armed forces. Bhai Vir Singh, the spokesman of modern Sikh learning in two of his poems lamented the demolition of the Martand temple by Muslim invaders. He wrote:

mwr pel jd mwrqMf f, p~Qr ro krlwxy [
 p~Qr qoVy ? idl pey tutdy ! idl kwbw r~bwxy -
 lwey hQoVw swf ? pr qk ! s~t pey 'r~b-Gr' f
 Gt Gt dy ivc vsdw ijhVw, qMU ikf r~b islwxyN

mwrqMf f mwr ipAW hoel mudq kihMdl loel [
 pr, kMbxl p~Qrw ivc swf hux qk sl shl hoel [
 hwey hunr qy hwey ividAw, hwey dyS dl qwkq,
 hwey ihMd PI PwiVAW vwly hr isl kiMhdl roel [
]

Both these poems lament the ruin of art and culture when these exquisite works of art and symbols of faith and culture were demolished. In every faithful mind would have arisen the same type of feelings when the images of the Buddha were demolished by the Taliban in Afghanistan or an attempt at the demolition of Babri mosque in Ayodhya was made by volunteers of the Hindu Parishad.

Today man seems to be polluting not only the nature out there, but also his own inner nature. He may be redeemed only God's Grace! □

References

- 1 Flew, A: Dictionary of Philosophy. Pan Books, 1984
- 2 It is a term introduced by the nature philosopher Tielhard de Chardin whose contention was that in the ordinary course of evolution of living things the biosphere is being supplanted by the *noosphere*.
- 3 J Dharma xx: 4 p.321
- 4 ਹਉ ਢਾਢੀ ਵੇਕਾਰੁ ਕਾਰੈ ਲਾਇਆ ॥ I was an unemployed singer, God engaged me in His work – SGGS p. 150
- 5 ਨਾਨਕੁ ਸਾਇਰੁ ਏਵ ਕਹਤੁ ਹੈ Nanak, the poet, sayeth thus – SGGS p. 660
- 6 ਤੂ ਅਚਰਜੁ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਤੇਰੀ ਬਿਸਮਾ ॥ Wonderful are You, and Your Nature brimming with marvels. – SGGS p. 563

- 7 ਇਹੁ ਜਗੁ ਸਚੈ ਕੀ ਹੈ ਕੋਠੜੀ ਸਚੇ ਕਾ ਵਿਚਿ ਵਾਸੁ ॥ This world is the abode of the True One, He lives in it. – SGGS p. 463
- 8 ਨਾਨਕ ਸਚ ਦਾਤਾਰੁ ਸਿਨਾਖਤੁ ਕੁਦਰਤੀ ॥ From Nature may the True Creator be recognized – SGGS p. 141
- 9 ਕਲਾ ਉਪਾਇ ਧਰੀ ਜਿਨਿ ਧਰਣਾ ॥ He created His art and infused it into the earth. – SGGS p. 1071
10 qMU jwxoel sBsY You know everything. – SGGS p. 463
- 11 ਸਿਵ ਸਕਤਿ ਆਪਿ ਉਪਾਇ ਕੈ ਕਰਤਾ ਆਪੇ ਹੁਕਮੁ ਵਰਤਾਏ ॥ Having created consciousness and power, the Creator Himself manifested His Will. – SGGS p. 920
- 12 ਦੁਜੀ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਸਾਜੀਐ ਕਰਿ ਆਸਣੁ ਡਿਠੋ ਚਾਉ ॥ In the second place, he fashioned Nature, took His seat in it, and beheld it with delight. – SGGS p. 463
- 13 ਆਪਣੀ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਆਪੇ ਜਾਣੈ ਆਪੇ ਕਰਣੁ ਕਰੇਇ ॥ੳ He alone knows His creative Power, and Himself brings about creative action. – SGGS p. 53
- 14 hir krqy iek Kylu rcwieAw [koie n iks hl ijhw bxwieAw [What a play my Lord has created that none like unto another has He made. – SGGS p. 1056
- 15 ਵੇਖਿ ਵਿਡਾਣੁ ਰਹਿਆ ਵਿਸਮਾਦੁ ॥ ਨਾਨਕ ਬੁਝਣੁ ਪੂਰੈ ਭਾਗਿ ॥ Seeing such marvels, I am wonderstruck. With supreme good luck may this mystery be resolved. – SGGS p. 464
- 16 ਚਲੇ ਚਲਣਗਰ ਵਾਟ ਵਟਾਇਆ ॥ The ephemeral is ever on the move, its course continually shifts. – SGGS p. 419
- 17 ਪਹਿਲਾ ਪਾਣੀ ਜੀਉ ਹੈ ਜਿਤੁ ਹਰਿਆ ਸਭੁ ਕੋਇ ॥ – SGGS p. 472
- 18 ਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਗਿਆਨੀ ਕੈ ਧੀਰਜੁ ਏਕ ॥ ਜਿਉ ਬਸਧਾ ਕੋਊ ਖੋਦੈ ਕੋਊ ਚੰਦਨ ਲੇਪ ॥
- 19 Emile (1974) 1.
- 20 Bhai Santokh Singh: Gur Pratap Suraj.
- 21 ਤਿਨਾ ਦਰੀਆਵਾ ਸਿਉ ਦੋਸਤੀ ਮਨਿ ਮੁਖਿ ਸਚਾ ਨਾਉ ॥ - SGGS p. 146
- 22 ਸਾਕਤ ਸੰਗੁ ਨ ਕੀਜੀਐ ਜਾ ਤੇ ਹੋਇ ਬਿਨਾਹੁ ॥ - SGGS p. 1369
- 23 ਨਿੰਦਕੁ ਡੁਬਾ ਹਮ ਉਤਰੇ ਪਾਰਿ ॥ - SGGS p. 339