

COSMOLOGY IN GURU NANAK'S HOLISTIC VISION

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In these days of advanced science and technology religion is still the greatest single factor which influences people. For the Western people religion has still the original Latin meaning - to bind or a relationship. But for the people of the East, religion is *Dharma*, a support and a way of life. The study of religious concepts is essential for it guides and enriches the social and individual life of the people. The doctrine of every religion consists of some basic concepts which are the result of the experiences of its prophets, holy persons or thinkers. In Sikhism, these concepts have been expounded by Guru Nanak and elaborated by his successors in the Guru Granth Sahib². In the present article, the concept of 'Nature' is gleaned out of the Holy Scriptures.

COSMOLOGY : For a scientist, the word Cosmology, or wider term 'Nature', stands for the baffling mysteries of the Universe³. The universe consists of this planet earth with its land, underlying lava - full of boundless energy, minerals, rivers, mountains, seas, atmosphere, vegetation, life, other planets, millions of stars and solar systems, meteors and galaxies, Novas, super Novas, Nebulas, Black hole, White dwarfs, Quasars and pulsars, etc. Thus, 'Nature' is the entire composite material universe and its phenomenon - the world. It is the sum total of all the things in perpetual motion in space and time.

From the stand point of religion, Nature is the wonderful conglomeration and ever-present consciousness. It is controller of the five distinct but subtle elements: Space (time rhythm, sound, ether), Air, Fire, Water and Earth. It gives birth to the chain of beings, or Four Kingdoms, namely, the mineral, the plant, the animal and the human beings.

Guru Nanak's interest in Nature has been expressed in his hymns at many places. He has used the word *Qudrat* for the creation, or nature. *Qudrat* is the same as *Prakriti* or *Maya*. Whatever we see or hear is *Qudrat*⁵.

*Qudrat dissai Qudrat Suniai
Qudrat bhau Sukh Saru.....*

(Var Asa M. I. SGGS : 464)

Guru Nanak explains 'Nature' thus;

*Nature is seeing, nature is hearing,
Nature is fear, nature is essence of happiness,
Nature is the underworlds, nature the heavens,
Nature is manifestations of all forms,
Nature is the Vedas, Puranas and Semitic Scriptures,
Nature is eating, drinking and dressing.
And nature is love within us,
Nature is all kinds, colours and species,
Nature is the world of life.
Nature is goodness and evil for sure,
Nature is honour and dishonour,*

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Nature is winds, water and fire.'

[Var Asa M. I. SGGS : 464]

Thus, 'Nature' is the word generally used by Guru Nanak for the physical universe, composed of or represented by the Heavens, the Sun, the Moon, the Stars, the light or radiation, the air, the water and the Earth and everything on it, or from it, for example, the trees, the beautiful flowers, the birds, the animals, the beasts and last, but not the least, the human beings.

VASTNESS : There have been speculations⁵⁻⁶ about the extent of the universe. Ptolemy believed in one thing and Copernicus in another. Christianity and Islam talk of fourteen regions (*Chaudah Tabak*). They hold that there are seven skies and seven planets in the nether world.

The Hindus believe in fourteen *Lokas* or planes (*Chaudah Bhuvan*). According to Hindus, *Bhur, Bhurvar, Swar, Mahat, Janas, Tapar* and *Satyas* are the seven skies, or upper worlds. *Atala, Vitala, Nitala, Gobhastimat, Mahatala, Sutala* and *Patala* are the seven nether worlds. Sometimes, Hindus talk of three regions, known as *Triloki* viz. Heaven, Earth and the Nether World. The earth has been further divided into nine regions as *Nav-Khand*.

Guru Nanak did not accept their stand. Therefore, he said,

patala patal lakh agasa agasa agas.

There are lakhs of nether and upper regions.

[*Japuji - stanza 22*]

According to Guru Nanak it is wrong to delimit the creation of the infinite Lord - The Creator. He talks of an immeasurable expanse in the sense of *Neti, Neti*:

*ant na japai kita akar,
ant na japai paravar.
ant karin ketai bil-lah'e
Ta ke ant na pai jahe'
eh ant na janai koe,
bahuta kehai bahuta hoai.*

There is no limit of the created material world.

There is no limit and no end.

Many people wander for the knowledge of His limits,

None can know this limit.

The more we think of it,

The more it goes farther.

[*Japuji - Stanza 24*]

It is a known fact that scientific observations have yet not revealed any limits to the Universe. The scientists have been successful to probe only a fraction of the universe so far. Yet, to travel to the frontiers of this observed fraction, even at the speed of light (i.e. 3×10^8 km/s) would take about 20,000 times the period that human life is estimated to have existed on earth.

When Guru Nanak talks of the region of piety (*Dharam Khand*) in *Japuji*, he talks only of our earth.

*Rati ruti thitti var, pavan pani agni patal
Tis vich dharti thap rakhi dharamsal
Tis vich jia jugat ke rang,*

tin kai nam anek anant.

[Japuji - Stanza 34]

But on entering the region of knowledge (*Gian Khand*), the Guru says;

kete pavan pani vesantar kete kan mahesh

kete barmeh gharhat gharhia roop rang ke vais,

ketia karam bhumi mer kete kete dhu updesh

kete ind chand soor kete kete mandal des.

kete sidh budh nath kete kete devi ves.

kete dev danav mun kete kete ratan samund.

ketia khani ketia bani kete pat narind.

ketia surti sevak kete Nanak ant na ant.

[Japuji - Stanza 35]

Thus Guru Nanak tells us that 'There are innumerable air, waters, fires, krishnas, shivas, brahmas, karma-bhumis, mountains, dhruvas, indras, moons, suns, spheres, countries, siddhas, buddhas, nathas, goddesses, gods, demons, munis, gems, oceans, divisions of creation and sound, kings and believers in Scriptures in this region (*Gian Khand*). There is no end of them.

In the region of truth (*sach khand*), we find him telling the existence of countless universes.

tithai khand mandal varbhand

je ko kathai ta ant na ant

There are regions, spheres and universes,
If one edescribes, there is no end of them.

[Japuji - Stanza 37]

Thus Guru Nanak dilates on this diversity and the treasures of the 'Nature'. He also describes the existence of innumerable flora and fauna, diversity of mineral resources and linguistic variations.

Scientists tell us that even in our own universe, we can find countless species of diverse forms and colours. As per latest scientific estimates, about 10 to 30 million species of flora and fauna may exist on our earth itself. Though till date, scientists have been able to identify and classify only about 14 lakh of such species. The puranic idea of eighty-four lakhs of species is found in the Sikh scripture. Namdev, one of the saint-poets of Guru Granth Sahib believes that half of these species live in water and the other half on Earth.

In the Sikh Scripture, there is mention of *Nav-Khand*, *Triloki*, *Chaudeh Bhavan* and four *Khanis* (i.e. divisions of creation, viz. *Andaja*, *Jeraju*, *Svetaja*, and *Udibhuj*). These above mentioned terms are only illustrative terms and not those of belief⁶.

TIME OF CREATION : In 1930, the Belgian astronomer Georges Lemaitre expounded the 'Big Bang' theory of the Universe. He suggested that about 10,000 million years ago, a super dense 'cosmic egg' exploded and its many fragments gave birth to planets, stars and galaxies. Another popular belief about creation of the Universe is the 'Steady State Theory'. It was advanced in 1948 by British Cosmologists, Hermann Bondi, Thomas Gold and Fred Hoyle. They suggested that the universe is eternal and that it has always existed. In 1965, the American astronomer, Allan

Sandage developed the 'Pulsating Universe' theory. He suggested that the Universe is created, destroyed and then re-created in 80,000 million year cycles. At the moment, he said the universe is only 10,000 million years along the expansion stage. Thus the various theories proposed by scientists to account for the birth of the Universe have not been able to accurately do so.

Hinduism talks of several ages and periods in the process of creation of this world of time and space. In different countries and different schools of thought, different times of the origin and the periods of the evolution of the world have been imagined. Some scriptures have even given the number of years that they have passed since the creation of world. But Guru Nanak, over 525 years ago, has emphatically rejected all such thinking. He holds that only the Creator (The ultimate Reality) knows the time of the origin of the creation.

What moment, what time,
What date and what day of a week,
What season and what month,
When Thou first made the universe?
The Pundits did not know of the dawn
of the creation to record it in the Purans;
Nor did the Qazis know that time to put it
down in the Koran;
Nor did the Yogis know of that season, hour,
date or the day;
The creator who made the universe,
He himself alone doth know.

[Japuji - Stanza 21]

WORKING OF NATURE : In the vast areas of nature, which science has investi-

gated, law and order, method and system, regularity and consistency are found to prevail. Natural phenomena follow definite laws and system which are the same everywhere, at all times and for everyone. Natural laws have existed since the origin of the universe and are inexorable. In no country can they be disobeyed without penalty. Nor do they ever warn the transgressor; the punishment is as silent as the command. Like the numerous phenomenon of nature, the natural laws are innumerable. Scientists agree that no matter how much man enlarges his powers, he cannot acquire absolute control over nature⁸.

Guru Nanak expounds that the Creator (The ultimate Reality) is pure consciousness. He acts as a conscious power. Nature and all its phenomena follow the Universal Law (command or *Hukam*) constituted by the creator:

'Hukme andar Sabhu-ko, bahar hukam na koai'

[Japuji - Stanza 2]

All creatures of the Universe, planets of the Cosmos and elements of nature act within the bounds of eternal law. All cosmic forces obey His universal commands (*Hukam* or *Bhai*).

Through fear of Him, the wind blows,
Through fear of Him lakhs of rivers flow,
Through fear of Him labours the fire,
Through fear of Him the earth remains overburdened,
Through fear of Him, move the sun and the Moon,
They traverse millions of miles, with no end.

Under His fear the skies have spread.
[Asa Di Var, Pauri 4 Shloka 1]

Guru Nanak expresses his inability to describe the universal law in totality, though he tells that it is the basic cause of creation:

*Hukami hovan akar
Hukam na kehaia jaie*
[Japuji - Stanza - 2]

For scientists, nature and all its phenomena occur in and out of energy according to eternal but universal natural laws. But for Guru Nanak all this occurs as per the eternal and universal command of the creator (The Ultimate Reality)":

*Hukami hukam chalaai rah
Nanak Vigsai Veparvah.*
[Japuji - Stanza 3]

WONDERS OF NATURE : Sometimes, we awake on warm and clear nights and gaze at the star-lit heavens in a passive and imaginative mood. Let the glory of Infinity sink deep into your soul. Just gaze and gaze, and do nothing more until you cry out in rapture, with Shelly⁹:

Spirit of Nature, here;
In this interminable wilderness,
of Worlds, at whose immensity,
Even soaring fancy staggers,
Here is thy fitting temple;
Spirit of Nature; Thou;
Imperishable as this scene,
Here is thy fitting temple,

Wonder is defined as something that sur-

prises and attracts, something that causes admiration and delight, and something that leaves one astonished with a sense of questioning. The sense of wonder is common to mankind and does not distinguish between the sage and the scientist¹⁰.

As scientist is a man enchanted by the mysterious universe which possesses a powerful motivating force. The famous scientist Albert Einstein has emphasised that 'The most beautiful and most profound experience that man can have is the sense of the mysterious. This constitutes the foundation of religion and of all other profound striving in art and science. He who has not experienced it seems to me - if not dead - at least blind'. It must be stressed that the motivation does not so much arise from trying to solve the mystery as simply form the act of apprehending it.

Talking about the religious spirit of science, Albert Einstein tells us of 'Cosmic Religious feeling', which knows no dogma and no god conceived in man's image. He says that, 'For a scientist religious feeling takes the form of a rapturous amazement at the harmony of natural law which reveals an intelligence of such superiority that, compared with it, all the systematic thinking and acting of human beings is an utterly insignificant reflection.'

Guru Narak is not only a sage or conventional mystic but an explorer with a scientific mind. To describe the beauties of nature, he lays a great emphasis on the wonder-element¹² - '*wismad*'. The cosmic religious feeling as described by Albert Einstein can

be seen in Guru Nanak's composition *Asa Di Var*, where-in he acclaims the beauties of Nature, thus;

*Wismad nad wismad ved
Wismad Jia, Wismad Bhed.
Wismad rup Wismad Rang,
Wismad nange phirahi jant,
Wismad paun Wismad pani,
Wismad agni khedahi wedani,*

Wonderful is the sound;
Wonderful is Wisdom,
Wonderful is life, wonderful its distinctions
Wonderful is form, Wonderful is color,
Wonderful is creatures,
 who wander drest naked,
Wonderful is air, Wonderful the water,
Wonderful is the fire
 that worketh many wonders.

[*Asa Di Var* M.I. P-464]

Guru Nanak in the *Arati* mentions that the sky, the sun, the moon, the stars, the wind and the flowers sing the praises of the Creator. Nature is His temple¹³.

*Gagan meh thal rav chand deepak bane
tarika mandal janak moti
Dhoop malianlo pavan charvo kare
Sagal ban jai phulant joti
Kaisi arti hoe bhavkhandana teri arti.
[Rag Dhanasari M. I. - P 663]*

Rabindra Nath Tagore's translation of the above lines of the *Arati* is given below :

In the disc of the sky,
The sun and the moon shine as lamps,
The galaxy of stars twinkle like pearls,

All Zephyr is incense,
 the winds are fanning.
All the woods are bright with flowers.
Oh Saviour of the world :
Thine *Arati* (adoration) is wonderful indeed.

Thus Guru Nanak wonders how the entire creation is ecstatic, inspiring and kept in perfect order. He loves the hills, water, trees, flowers, clouds, the sun, the moon, the stars, and whatsoever appears to be wonderful.

Professor Julian Huxley, the Zoologist, once wrote, 'There are certain experiences which transcend ordinary experience, make the individual feel enlarged and have a quality of absoluteness and perfection which is absent in the human affairs of everyday. Wonder and joy are a right relation towards nature, whether we feel them in relation to a hypothetical Power behind nature or to be stars and sea and living creatures directly. This feeling of wonder and joy is *wismad* and it is indescribable:

Kahn na jai achraj bismad
 [Sukhmani, SGGS : 293]

According to one theologian¹³, *Wahguru* is an expression of the feeling of wonder, when we contemplate His Creation (Nature). It is a term for ecstasy - *wismad*. *Wah* signifies wonder, awe and mystery, whereas *Guru* is a charismatic guide, a prophet and a dispeller of darkness. Here the Creator (The ultimate Reality) Himself is *Wah* as well as the *Guru*. *Wahguru* - the Wonderful Enlightener.

It is inferred from above that Guru Nanak

was a great preceptor and a mystic prophet of extraordinary foresight. His gift of intuition brought forth revelations and contributed meaningful genetic thought to our understanding of Nature. He has

revealed the cosmological and physical evolutionary explanation of 'Nature', in subtle and sensitive manner, which is in general, consonance with the findings of the modern scientific research.

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