

Natural Symbolism in Sri Guru Granth Sahib

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ABSTRACT

Symbolism, as a literary device, is widely employed in scriptures of almost all religions. Understanding the use of symbolism in a scripture enables us to comprehend and appreciate the intended message of the scripture's author in a better way. The poetic compositions of Sri Guru Granth Sahib (SGGS) are notable for their richness, and various images and symbols used to tell its authors' mystical and spiritual experiences. These compositions aptly use natural symbolism to describe humanity's diverse physical and spiritual needs and suggest innovative ways to tackle these issues. As SGGS's message is addressed to the ordinary person, the symbolism used to depict various facets and aspirations of human life has been taken from nature and Indian culture. This article reports on the usage of natural symbolism in SGGS.

Keywords: Symbolism, Scripture, Religion, Spiritual, Mystical, Guru Granth, Nature, Soul.

INTRODUCTION

Majestic peaks, white clouds across intense blue skies, gushing torrents of crystal-clear water, golden daffodils quivering and dancing, the refreshing shades of new leaves, newborn babies - all these images bring back to us the beauty and joy of nature ("Symbols in nature," n.d.). Images of mountains inspire the feelings of the might and majesty of nature and its creator. Likewise, the streams tumbling down the mountainsides symbolize the dynamic nature of things.

Symbolism is widely employed in scriptures of almost all religions. Understanding the use of symbolism ("Symbolism," 2021; "Lesson 13: Scriptural use of symbolism," n.d.) in a scripture enables us to comprehend and appreciate the intended message of the scripture's author in a better way. The poetic compositions of Sri Guru Granth Sahib (SGGS) ("Sri Granth," n.d.; Gujral, 1999) are notable for their wealth and variety of images and symbols used to describe the mystical and spiritual experience of its authors ("Symbols," n.d.). Many similes, metaphors, and other forms of figurative expressions

enrich the text (Singh, 2020; Chahal, 2021). Most of the imagery comes from the nature and Indian culture storehouse.

NATURE, MAN, AND GOD

SGGS proclaims that nature is a manifestation of God (Singh, 2019). In his hymns, Guru Nanak articulates:

ਖੰਡ ਬ੍ਰਹਮੰਡ ਪਾਤਾਲ ਅਰੰਭੇ ਗੁਪਤਹੁ ਪਰਗਟੀ ਆਇਦਾ ॥

He formed the planets, solar systems, and nether regions, and brought what was hidden to manifestation. (Guru Nanak, SGGS, p. 1036)

A complete oneness or union between the two is often mentioned in several hymns of SGGS. For example, using the analogy that foam, bubbles, and water waves are alike water, Bhagat Namdev, a saint-poet of SGGS, describes that God is inherent in nature. This analogy has the potential to always convey precisely the same meaning to all people, without reference to a particular language, time, or people.

ਜਲ ਤਰੰਗ ਅਰੁ ਫੋਨ ਬੁਦਬੁਦਾ ਜਲ ਤੇ ਭਿੰਨ ਨ ਹੋਈ ॥ ਇਹੁ ਪਰਪੰਚੁ ਪਾਰਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਕੀ ਲੀਲਾ ਬਿਚਰਤ ਆਨ ਨ ਹੋਈ ॥
The waves of the water, the foam, and bubbles are not distinct from the water. This manifested world is the playful game of God; reflecting upon it, we find that the creation is not different from God. (Bhagat Namdev, SGGS, p 485)

Since humans are an inseparable part of nature (Chahal, 2022), an implicit union between humans and God is expressed. At the spiritual level, the relationship between a human being and God is like that of a part to the whole. But being engrossed in worldly passions, humans generally suffer a sense of separation from the Lord. Guru Nanak expresses the inter-relationship between a human being and God as:

ਸਾਗਰ ਮਹਿ ਬੂੰਦ ਬੂੰਦ ਮਹਿ ਸਾਗਰੁ ਕਵਣੁ ਬੁਝੈ ਬਿਧਿ ਜਾਣੈ ॥
The drop is in the ocean, and the ocean is in the drop. Who understands and knows this? (Guru Nanak, SGGS, p 878)

Here drop is not only a drop of water, but it is also the symbolic representation of a human being, and the ocean represents the Lord.

HUMAN MIND AND MAYA

The entire poetic diction of the Guru Granth Sahib is surcharged with symbolic meanings ("Symbols," n.d.). The metaphysical or mystical experiences have been made comprehensible in images taken from nature and everyday life (Singh, 2021). Guru Nanak describes the intoxication of the human mind with worldly passions, the ephemerality of material phenomena and the need to imbibe God's love in one's life in his hymns as:

ਤੂੰ ਸੁਣਿ ਹਰਣਾ ਕਾਲਿਆ ਕੀ ਵਾੜੀਐ ਰਾਤਾ ਰਾਮ ॥ ਬਿਖੁ ਫਲੁ ਮੀਠਾ ਚਾਰਿ ਦਿਨ ਫਿਰਿ ਹੋਵੈ ਤਾਤਾ ਰਾਮ ॥ ਫਿਰਿ ਹੋਇ ਤਾਤਾ ਖਰਾ ਮਾਤਾ ਨਾਮ ਬਿਨੁ ਪਰਤਾਪਏ ॥ ਓਹੁ ਜੋਵ ਸਾਇਰ ਦੋਇ ਲਹਰੀ ਬਿਜੁਲ ਜਿਵੈ ਚਮਕਏ ॥ ਹਰਿ ਬਾਝੁ ਰਾਖਾ ਕੋਇ ਨਾਹੀ ਸੋਇ ਤੁਝਹਿ ਬਿਸਾਰਿਆ ॥ ਸਚੁ ਕਹੈ ਨਾਨਕੁ ਚੋਤਿ ਰੇ ਮਨ ਮਰਹਿ ਹਰਣਾ ਕਾਲਿਆ ॥
Listen, O black deer: why are you so attached to the orchard of passion? The fruit of sin is sweet for only a few days, then it grows sour and bitter. That fruit which intoxicated you has now become acrid and painful without the Naam. It is temporary, like the waves on the sea and the flash of lightning. Without the Lord, no other protector exists, but you have forgotten Him. Nanak speaks the Truth. Reflect upon it, O mind; you shall die, O black deer. (Guru Nanak, SGGS, p 438).

Here black deer is symbolic of the human mind, and the orchard is a metaphor for the vast world of earthly

pleasures. *Rata* is also symbolic as it connotes imbued with or engrossed in (worldly affairs). Finally, fruits are symbolic of material gains.

Shaikh Farid, a Muslim Sufi poet of SGGS, uses the symbolism of bird, tank, and captor to describe the state of the human mind in the grip of worldly temptations as:

ਸਰਵਰ ਪੰਖੀ ਹੋਕੜੋ ਫਾਹੀਵਾਲ ਪਚਾਸ ॥ ਇਹੁ ਤਨੁ ਲਹਰੀ ਗਠੁ ਬਿਆ ਸਚੇ ਤੋਰੀ ਆਸ ॥
There is only one bird in the lake, but there are fifty trappers. This body is caught in the waves of desire. O, my True Lord, you are my only hope! (Shaikh Farid, SGGS, p 1384)

Here the tank (*sarvar*) is symbolic of the world, the bird (*pankhi*) is symbolic of the human mind, and the captor (*pahival*) is the temptations of worldly pleasures.

Using an analogy of a swan eating a carcass, Guru Nanak Dev describes the state of a person engrossed in worldly passions as:

ਸਿਫਤਿ ਸਲਾਹਣੁ ਛਡਿ ਕੈ ਕਰੰਗੀ ਲਗਾ ਹੰਸੁ ॥
The swan-soul has abandoned the contemplation on Lord and is chasing a rotting carcass. (Guru Nanak, SGGS, p 790).

Here swan is the symbolic representation of the human soul, and the carcass stands for evil tendencies.

YEARNING FOR THE LOVE OF GOD

The longing for God is the breath of our souls! Yearning for God with our hearts opens our souls to breathe in the Spirit of God and live for IT alone. The lack of yearning has brought us to our current state of suffering at the hands of worldly passions. The rigidness of our religious lives results from our lack of earnest desire for God's love. Complacency is a fatal enemy to our spiritual growth (Slimm, 2021). An acute passion for God's love is crucial for God's manifestation to IT's people. Using symbolism from nature, such as deer, cuckoo, fish and snake for the human soul, Guru Nanak expresses their yearning for the love of the Lord as:

ਹਰਣੀ ਹੋਵਾ ਬਨਿ ਬਸਾ ਕੰਦ ਮੂਲੁ ਚੁਣਿ ਖਾਉ ॥ ਗੁਰ ਪਰਸਾਦੀ ਮੇਰਾ ਸਚੁ ਮਿਲੈ ਵਾਰਿਵਾਰਿ ਹਉ ਜਾਉ ਜੀਉ ॥੧॥ ਮੈ ਬਨਜਾਰਨਿ ਰਾਮ ਕੀ ॥ ਤੇਰਾ ਨਾਮੁ ਵਖਰੁ ਵਾਪਾਰੁ ਜੀ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥ ਕੋਕਿਲ ਹੋਵਾ ਅੰਬਿ ਬਸਾ ਸਹਜਿ ਸਬਦ ਬੀਚਾਰੁ ॥ ਸਹਜਿ ਸੁਭਾਇ ਮੇਰਾ ਸਚੁ ਮਿਲੈ ਦਰਸਨਿ ਰੂਪਿ ਅਪਾਰੁ ॥੨॥ ਮਛਲੀ ਹੋਵਾ ਜਲਿ ਬਸਾ ਜੀਅ ਜੰਤ ਸਭਿ ਸਾਰਿ ॥ ਉਰਵਾਰਿ ਪਾਰਿ ਮੇਰਾ ਸਚੁ ਵਸੈ ਹਉ ਮਿਲਉਗੀ ਬਾਹ ਪਸਾਰਿ ॥੩॥ ਨਾ ਗਨਿ ਹੋਵਾ ਧਰ ਵਸਾ ਸਬਦੁ

ਵਸੈ ਭਉ ਜਾਇ ॥ ਨਾਨਕ ਸਦਾ ਸੋਹਾਗਣੀ ਜਿਨ ਜੋਤੀ ਜੋਤਿ ਸਮਾਇ ॥੪॥

What if I were to become a deer and live in the forest, picking and eating fruits and roots, yet by Guru's Grace, I meet my Master? Again and again, I am a sacrifice, a sacrifice. ||1|| I am a vendee of God's love. Your Name is my merchandise and trade. ||1||Pause||If I were to become a cuckoo living in a mango tree, I would still contemplate the Shabad (Word). I would still meet my Lord and Master intuitively; the Blessed Vision of IT's Form is incomparably beautiful. ||2|| If I were to become a fish living in water, I would still remember God, who watches over all beings and creatures. My Husband Lord (God) dwells on this shore and the shore beyond; I would still meet IT and hug IT close in my embrace. ||3|| If I were to become a snake living in the ground, the Shabad would still dwell in my mind, and my fears would be dispelled. O Nanak, they are forever the happy soul-brides, whose light merges into IT's Light. ||4|| (Guru Nanak, SGGS, p 157)

Due to a symbol's visual nature, it is generally remembered for a longer time than a description of a concept without a symbol. So, for example, Guru Nanak uses the analogies of love of lotus and marine life for water to imply that our yearning for the love of God should be as intense as that of the love of lotus or marine life for water, without which they die.

ਰੇ ਮਨ ਐਸੀ ਹਰਿ ਸਿਉ ਪ੍ਰੀਤਿ ਕਰਿ ਜੈਸੀ ਜਲ ਕਮਲੇਹਿ ॥ਲਹਰੀ ਨਾਲਿ ਪਛਾੜੀਐ ਭੀ ਵਿਗਸੈ ਅਸਨੋਹਿ॥ ਜਲ ਮਹਿਜੀਅ ਉਪਾਇ ਕੈ ਬਿਨੁ ਜਲ ਮਰਣੁ ਤਿਨੋਹਿ ॥

O mind, love God like the lotus loves water. Tossed about by the waves, it still blossoms with love. In the water, the creatures are created; outside of the water, they die. (Guru Nanak, SGGS, p 59)

THE WAY TO LOVE

People who try to fill their hunger for love, acceptance, security in relationships, material possessions, or success often don't find real or lasting satisfaction (Belzer et al., 2018). Their hunger is not a mere physical or emotional hunger. Instead, it is a hunger for everlasting love and acceptance - a holy hunger, a hunger for the love of God. Some may not know they long for God because they don't know IT. Some don't seek God because they don't know where or how to look for IT. Others look for God but aren't sure what IT "looks like." What helps you to cultivate a longing for God? What stokes the fires of your love for God? Contemplation on God is probably an essential thing to do. There are many ways to do this. Using several analogies from nature, such as the yearning of fish for water, the yearning of songbird for rain, the

love of water and milk, and the yearning of the chakvee (Ruddy shelDuck) bird for the sun, Guru Nanak describes the way to imbibe the love of the Lord in our life as:

ਰੇ ਮਨ ਐਸੀ ਹਰਿ ਸਿਉ ਪ੍ਰੀਤਿ ਕਰਿ ਜੈਸੀ ਮਛਲੀ ਨੀਰ॥ ਜਿਉ ਅਧਿਕਉ ਤਿਉ ਸੁਖ ਘਣੈ ਮਨਿ ਤਨਿ ਸਾਂਤਿ ਸਰੀਰ ॥ ਬਿਨੁ ਜਲ ਘੜੀ ਨ ਜੀਵਈ ਪ੍ਰਭੁ ਜਾਣੈ ਅਭ ਪੀਰ ॥੨॥ ਰੇ ਮਨ ਐਸੀ ਹਰਿ ਸਿਉ ਪ੍ਰੀਤਿ ਕਰਿ ਜੈਸੀ ਚਾਤ੍ਰਕ ਮੋਹ॥ ਸਰ ਭਰਿ ਥਲ ਹਰੀਆਵਲੇ ਇਕ ਬੁੰਦੁ ਨ ਪਵਈ ਕੋਹ ॥ ਕਰਮਿ ਮਿਲੈ ਸੋ ਪਾਈਐ ਕਿਰਤੁ ਪਇਆ ਸਿਰਿ ਦੋਹ ॥੩॥ ਰੇ ਮਨ ਐਸੀ ਹਰਿ ਸਿਉ ਪ੍ਰੀਤਿ ਕਰਿ ਜੈਸੀ ਜਲ ਦੁਧ ਹੋਇ ॥ ਆਵਟਣੁ ਆਪੇ ਖਵੈ ਦੁਧ ਕਉ ਖਪਣਿ ਨ ਦੋਇ ॥ ਆਪੇ ਮੇਲਿ ਵਿਛੁੰਨਿਆ ਸਚਿ ਵਡਿਆਈ ਦੋਇ ॥੪॥ ਰੇ ਮਨ ਐਸੀ ਹਰਿ ਸਿਉ ਪ੍ਰੀਤਿ ਕਰਿ ਜੈਸੀ ਚਕਵੀ ਸੂਰ ॥ ਖਿਨੁ ਪਲੁ ਨੀਦ ਨ ਸੋਵਈ ਜਾਣੈ ਦੂਰਿ ਹਜੂਰਿ ॥ ਮਨਮੁਖਿ ਸੋਝੀ ਨਾ ਪਵੈ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਸਦਾ ਹਜੂਰਿ ॥੫॥

O mind, love God like a fish loves water. The more the water, the more the happiness, and the greater the peace of mind and body. Without water, she cannot live, even for an instant. God knows the suffering of her mind. ||2|| O mind, love the Lord, as the songbird loves the rain. The pools are overflowing with water, and the land is luxuriantly green, but they mean nothing to her if that single drop of rain does not fall into her mouth. By God's Grace, she receives it; otherwise, she reaps the rewards of her previous deeds because of her past actions. ||3|| O mind, love God, as water loves milk. The water added to the milk itself bears the heat and prevents the milk from burning. God unites the separated ones with Itself again and blesses them with true greatness. ||4|| O mind, love God, as the chakvee duck loves the sun. She does not sleep for an instant or a moment; the sun is so far away, but she thinks it is near. Understanding does not come to the self-willed Manmukh. But to the Gurmukh, the Lord is always close. ||5|| (Guru Nanak, SGGS, p 59-60)

LOVE OF GOD

The symbolism adopted in SGGS is more akin to the hymn's theme than mere embellishment. Most of the imagery in the text has been derived from the ordinary householder's life. For instance, bliss from the human soul's union with the Supreme Soul is expressed in terms of sweetness. Shaikh Farid, a Muslim Sufi poet of SGGS, describes it as:

ਫਰੀਦਾ ਸਕਰ ਖੰਡੁ ਨਿਵਾਤ ਗੁੜੁ ਮਾਖਿਉ ਮਾਂਝਾ ਦੁਧੁ ॥ ਸਭੇ ਵਸਤੁ ਮਿਠੀਆਂ ਰਬ ਨ ਪੁਜਨਿ ਤੁਧੁ ॥

Fareed: sugar cane, candy, sugar, molasses, honey, and buffalo's milk - all these things are sweet, but they are not equal to You (Oh, Allah!). (Shaikh Farid, SGGS, p 1379)

Using the symbolism of love of fish for water and love of rainbird (chatrik) for rain, Guru Arjan Dev points out that a devotee has such a loving relationship with God.

ਜਿਉ ਮੀਨਾ ਜਲ ਸਿਉ ਉਰਝਾਨੇ ਰਾਮ ਨਾਮ ਸੰਗਿ ਲੀਵਨਿ ॥
ਨਾਨਕ ਸੰਤ ਚਾਤ੍ਰਿਕ ਕੀ ਨਿਆਈ ਹਰਿ ਬੁੰਦ ਪਾਨ ਸੁਖ ਥੀਵਨਿ ॥
*As fish are immersed in water, the holy men are absorbed
in the love of God. Nanak says, thus, the Saints are like the
rainbirds; they are comforted, drinking the drops of God's
love. (Guru Arjan, SGGS, p 1222)*

GOD-CONSCIOUS BEING

The hymn writers used familiar, everyday objects to symbolize spiritual Truth. For example, Guru Arjan Dev uses the lotus symbol to describe the attributes of a God-conscious being, which grows and blooms in muddy water but remains unsullied. This symbolism has often been used to bring home the idea that to realize God, a person need not renounce the world. Instead, he should lead a life of detachment, living amid worldly temptations.

ਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਗਿਆਨੀ ਸਦਾ ਨਿਰਲੇਪ ॥ ਜੈਸੇ ਜਲ ਮਹਿ ਕਮਲ ਅਲੇਪ ॥
*The God-conscious being is always unattached, as the
lotus in the water remains detached. (Guru Arjan, SGGS,
p 272)*

Water's spiritual symbolism (Shazi, 2021) can be best understood by knowing what can refresh and cleanse our inner spiritual world. And the simple answer is 'love of God' because when we become 'God-conscious' beings, our minds get imbued with His attributes of compassion and love for all. When we apply these ideas in our daily life, our inner self gets cleansed and rejuvenated. For example, while describing the attributes of a God-conscious being, Guru Arjan Dev uses the symbolism of water since the inherent nature of water is to remain unsullied, even when the dirt is washed with it. Similarly, despite the all-around dirt of worldly desires and passions, we should remain unsullied.

ਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਗਿਆਨੀ ਨਿਰਮਲ ਤੇ ਨਿਰਮਲਾ ॥ ਜੈਸੇ ਮੈਲ੍ਹ ਨ ਲਾਗੈ
ਜਲਾ ॥
*The God-conscious being is the purest of the pure; filth
does not stick to water. (Guru Arjan, SGGS, p 272)*

Guru Arjan Dev uses extensive symbolism from nature to express the characteristics of a God-conscious being. Using the analogies such as: the sun providing comfort and warmth to all, without any distinction of caste, colour, or creed; air providing the breath of life to rich and poor without any difference; the earth being indifferent to the actions of people, be it good or bad; and fire providing benefit to all, Guru Arjan Dev emphasizes that a God-conscious being treats all beings with equality, love and compassion.

ਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਗਿਆਨੀ ਸਦਾ ਨਿਰਦੋਖ ॥ ਜੈਸੇ ਸੂਰ੍ਹ ਸਰਬ ਕਉ ਸੋਖ ॥
ਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਗਿਆਨੀ ਕੈ ਦਿਸਟਿ ਸਮਾਨਿ ॥ ਜੈਸੇ ਰਾਜ ਰੰਕ ਕਉ ਲਾਗੈ
ਤੁਲਿ ਪਵਾਨ ॥ ਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਗਿਆਨੀ ਕੈ ਧੀਰਜੁ ਏਕ ॥ ਜਿਉ ਬਸੁਧਾ
ਕੇਉ ਖੇਦੈ ਕੇਉ ਚੰਦਨ ਲੇਪ ॥ ਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਗਿਆਨੀ ਕਾ ਇਹੈ ਗੁਨਾਉ ॥
ਨਾਨਕ ਜਿਉ ਪਾਵਕ ਕਾ ਸਹਜ ਸੁਭਾਉ ॥੧॥

*The God-conscious being is always unstained, like the
sun, which provides comfort and warmth to all. The God-
conscious being looks upon all alike, like the wind, which
blows equally upon the king and the poor beggar. The
God-conscious being has steady patience, like the earth,
which remains unaffected even if a person digs it up or
another anoints it with sandal paste. Such is the quality
of the God-conscious being: O Nanak, his inherent nature
is like an all-embracing warming fire. ||1|| (Guru Arjan,
SGGS, p 272)*

GOOD COMPANY (SAT SANGAT)

In the natural world, trees ("Symbols in sacred scriptures," n.d.) are a beautiful part of a landscape, sometimes in new leaves (during spring), sometimes in the beautiful colours (in autumn), or sometimes in the silhouettes (amid winter). Despite its shape, size or spread, a tree always grows upwards towards the light, away from the earth. Almost all trees bring forth some form of flowers and fruit. Some trees, such as sandalwood, also make their surroundings fragrant. Trees provide a wonderful symbol of how our perception and understanding of what is excellent and authentic can grow, from being very down to earth to reaching lofty heights of spiritual insight. Using the symbolism of the sandalwood tree, which can affect its surroundings, Bhagat Kabir asserts that even an ordinary soul can get evolved in the company of the enlightened ones.

ਚੰਦਨ ਕੈ ਸੰਗਿ ਤਰਵਰੁ ਬਿਗਰਿਓ ॥ ਸੇ ਤਰਵਰੁ ਚੰਦਨੁ ਹੋਇ
ਨਿਬਰਿਓ ॥

*The nearby tree gets changed by being associated with the
sandalwood tree. Even that tree begins to smell just like
sandalwood. (Bhagat Kabir, SGGS, p 1158)*

Using the analogy of sandalwood tree and castor-oil plant, Guru Ram Das proclaims that even a sinner can attain spiritual enlightenment in the company of holy persons.

ਜਿਉ ਚੰਦਨ ਨਿਕਟਿ ਵਸੈ ਹਿਰੜੁ ਬਪੁੜਾ ਤਿਉ ਸਤਸੰਗਤਿ ਮਿਲਿ
ਪਤਿਤ ਪਰਵਾਣੁ ॥

*The poor castor oil plant, growing near the sandalwood
tree, becomes fragrant; in the same way, the sinner,
associating with the Saints, becomes acceptable and
approved. (Guru Ram Das, SGGS, p 861).*

LIBERATION (NIRVANA)

Many abstract concepts are hard to grasp without some symbolic association as a learning aid. Therefore, such ideas can best be taught symbolically. For instance, the principle of faith is difficult to understand based on a definition only. If, however, the doctrine of faith is associated with something in the realm of our experience, it can be better understood. For example, when Guru Nanak Dev articulated how to attain Nirvana (liberation), he compared the human body to a field, doing good deeds to the planting of a seed, watering the fields as the contemplation on God, and the flourishing of the Lord's love in one's mind as sprouting of a seed. He proclaims that this is the way to attain liberation.

ਇਹੁ ਤਨੁ ਧਰਤੀ ਬੀਜੁ ਕਰਮਾ ਕਰੋ ਸਲਿਲ ਆਪਾਉ
ਸਾਰਿੰਗਪਾਣੀ ॥ ਮਨੁ ਕਿਰਸਾਣੁ ਹਰਿ ਰਿਦੈ ਜੰਮਾਇ ਲੈ ਇਉ
ਪਾਵਸਿ ਪਦੁ ਨਿਰਬਾਣੀ ॥

Make this body the field and plant the seed of good actions. Water it with the Name of the Lord, who holds all the world in His Hands. Let your mind be the farmer; the Lord shall sprout in your heart, and you shall attain the state of Nirvana (liberation). (Guru Nanak, SGGGS, p 23)

Similarly, when Guru Nanak taught us to cultivate faith in the Lord, he compared the acts: of doing good deeds to preparing the soil for plantation, contemplation on *Shabad* to the planting of a seed, imbibing the love of the Lord in one's mind as watering of the soil, and the flourishing of faith as the sprouting of a seed.

ਅਮਲੁ ਕਰਿ ਧਰਤੀ ਬੀਜੁ ਸਬਦੋ ਕਰਿ ਸਚ ਕੀ ਆਬ ਨਿਤ ਦੋਰਿ
ਪਾਣੀ॥ ਹੋਇ ਕਿਰਸਾਣੁ ਈਮਾਨੁ ਜੰਮਾਇ ਲੈ.....॥

Make good deeds the soil and let the Word (Shabad) be the seed; irrigate it continually with the water of Truth. Become such a farmer, and faith will sprout. (Guru Nanak, SGGGS, p 24)

IMPERMANENCE OF NATURE

Symbols can be timeless, culture-free, and language-free. When such things as plants, animals, or natural manifestations are used to teach doctrines, these can be used without reference to a particular time, people, or language. They can bridge the barriers of communication that often exist between ages or cultures. When the analogy of the appearance and disappearance of a bubble in water represents the impermanence of worldly phenomena (nature), it can always communicate the same message to all people.

ਜੈਸੇ ਜਲ ਤੇ ਬੁਦਬੁਦਾ ਉਪਜੈ ਬਿਨਸੈ ਨੀਤ ॥ ਜਗ ਰਚਨਾ ਤੈਸੇ
ਰਚੀ ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਸੁਨਿ ਮੀਤ ॥

As the bubbles in the water well up and disappear again, so is the universe created, says Nanak; listen, O my friend! (Guru Teg Bahdur, SGGGS, p 1427)

CONCLUSION

Nature is a tremendous and diverse source of symbolic meanings. It is because it reflects so many of the emotions and activities of our minds. Emanuel Swedenborg ("Symbols in nature," n.d.) has rightly pointed out that there is a correspondence between everything in the spiritual world and the natural world. Swedenborg writes, *'There is nothing in the natural world which does not represent something in the spiritual world, or which has not something there to which it corresponds.'* Therefore, natural symbolism is a helpful tool to depict spiritual issues, which holds deeper meaning about our existence and direction on our path of life in a simple and easily understandable way.

Symbolism, as a literary device, gives a writer freedom to add double meanings to his work: (i) a literal one that is self-evident and (ii) the symbolic one whose sense is much more profound than the literal one. Thus, the symbolism provides universality to the characters and the themes of a piece of literature. Also, the usage of symbolism contributes to an attitude of searching in learners of the scripture. A seeker who understands that there is more than just the obvious in scriptural passages is likely to be more inclined to explore, ponder and probe these, and fully comprehend and appreciate their spiritual or divine message.

As Sri Guru Granth Sahib (SGGS)'s message is addressed to the ordinary person, the symbolism used to depict various facets and aspirations of human life has been taken from nature and Indian culture. The enlightened authors of SGGGS made apt use of natural symbolism to describe humankind's various physical and spiritual needs. They also suggested innovative ways to tackle these issues, making them easily understandable to everyone, without reference to place, time, and culture. Thereby the message of SGGGS has been highly relevant to the development, progress, and enrichment of humanistic culture. It is pertinent to add that SGGGS, with its universal ethos, has the potential to play a major role in finding apt solutions to the significant issues facing the contemporary world.

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