

## **Prime Environmental Teachings of Sikhism**

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### **Abstract**

*Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the holy scripture of the Sikhs, contains numerous references to the worship of the divine in Nature. The Sikh scripture declares that human beings' purpose is to achieve a blissful state and be in harmony with the Earth and all creation. Millions of Sikhs recite Gurbani daily wherein the divine is remembered using the symbolism from Nature, esp. air, water, sun, moon, trees, animals, and the Earth. The human mind loses communion with Nature and ultimately with God by being self-conceited. It causes misery all around, is a repeated assertion of Sikhism. The contemporary environmental crisis is an outcome of the actions of such a self-conceited human mind. By affirming God's immanence and His presence in the creation, the Sikh religion imparts the spirit of self-righteousness to the entire subject of Nature. Sikhism is a remarkable religious and cultural phenomenon; several important themes emerge within its universe of beliefs. On the ecological front, the theology of Sikhism suggests that humans must live in harmony with Nature. The Sikh Gurus exemplified many of these teachings, and their examples continue to inspire contemporary social, religious, and environmental leaders in their efforts to protect the planet. In this presentation, the prime environmental teachings of Sikhism are shared with the community.*

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Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the holy scripture [1-2] of the Sikhs, contains numerous references to the worship of the divine in Nature. The Sikh scripture declares that human beings' purpose is to achieve a blissful state and be in harmony with the Earth and all creation. Millions of Sikhs recite *Gurbani* daily wherein the divine is remembered using the symbolism from Nature, esp. air, water, sun, moon, trees, animals, and the Earth.

Guru Nanak, the first Sikh Guru, in his composition 'aartee' elucidates that the sky, the sun, the moon, the stars, the wind and the flowers sing the praises of the creator. Nature is His temple.

ਗਗਨ ਮੈ ਥਾਲੁ ਰਵਿ ਚੰਦੁ ਦੀਪਕ ਬਨੇ ਤਾਰਿਕਾ ਮੰਡਲ ਜਨਕ ਮੇਤੀ ॥ ਯੂਪੁ ਮਲਆਨਲੇ ਪਵਣੁ ਚਵਰੇ ਕਰੇ ਸਗ  
ਲ ਬਨਰਾਇ ਫੂਲੰਤ ਜੇਤੀ ॥੧॥ ਕੈਸੀ ਆਰਤੀ ਹੋਇ ਭਵ ਖੰਡਨਾ ਤੇਰੀ ਆਰਤੀ ॥ ਅਨਹਤਾ ਸਬਦ ਵਾਜੰਤ ਭੇਰੀ  
॥ (ਧਨਾਸਰੀ ਮਹਲਾ 1, ਆਰਤੀ, ਸਗਗਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 663)

In the sky's bowl, the sun and moon are the lamps; the stars in the constellations are the pearls. The fragrance of Sandalwood is the incense, the wind is the fan, and all the vegetation are flowers in offering to You, O Luminous Lord. ||1|| What a beautiful lamp-lit worship service this is! O Destroyer of fear, this is Your Aartee, Your worship service. The sound current of the Shabad is the sounding of the temple drums. (Dhanasari, First Mehl, Aartee, SGGS, p 663)

The human mind loses communion with Nature, and ultimately with God, by being self-conceited. It causes misery all around. It is a repeated assertion of Sikhism:

ਬਿਨੁ ਬੂਝੇ ਸਭੁ ਦੁਖਦੁਖੁ ਕਮਾਵਣਾ ॥ ਹਉਮੈ ਆਵੈ ਜਾਇ ਭਰਮਿ ਭੁਲਾਵਣਾ ॥ (ਸੂਹੀ ਮਹਲਾ ੧, ਸਗਗਸ, ਪੰਨਾ  
752)

Having no understanding (of the situation, a self-conceited person) suffers, which leads to a state of greater distress. Lead by his ego; all his actions are done in confusion and deluded by doubt. (Soohee, First Mehl, SGGS, p 752)

The current environmental crisis is an outcome of the actions of such a self-conceited human mind. By affirming God's immanence and His presence in the creation, the Sikh religion imparts the spirit of self-righteousness to the entire subject of Nature. Sikhism is a remarkable religious and cultural phenomenon; several important themes emerge within its universe of beliefs. On the ecological front, the theology of Sikhism suggests that:

- Nature is sacred. Revere it.
- *Panch Tattva* - Foundation of the web of life.
- Earth - a great mother. Treat it with respect.
- Recognize interdependence. Nurture it.
- Nature - a great teacher. Learn from it.
- Earth as *dharamsal* - A place for righteous action
- Nature is beautiful. Rejoice it.
- Harmony with Nature - A basis for peaceful co-existence

- *Kirat karo, Naam japo, and Wand chhako* - A model for a sustainable economy
- Simple living - A key to sustainability
- *Seva* - Selfless voluntary service for the benefit of all
- Pollution and Its Control - Be aware and take action
- *Sarbat da Bhala* - A prayer for universal wellbeing

The Sikh Gurus exemplified many of these teachings, and their examples continue to inspire contemporary social, religious, and environmental leaders in their efforts to protect the planet. The following are thirteen essential Sikh teachings on the environment:

### **1. Nature is sacred. Revere it.**

Sri Guru Granth Sahib contains many references to the Supreme divinity's omnipresence – including its presence throughout and within nature [3]. Sikhs accept the presence of God in Nature.

ਨਾਨਕ ਸਚ ਦਾਤਾਰੁ ਸਿਨਾਖਤੁ ਕੁਦਰਤੀ ॥ (ਸਲੋਕੁ ਮ. 1, ਸਗਗਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 141)

O Nanak, the True One is the provider to all; He is revealed through His All-powerful Creative Nature. (Shalok, First Mehl, SGGS, p141)

ਜਲਿ ਥਲਿ ਮਹੀਅਲਿ ਰਵਿ ਰਹਿਆ ਸਾਚੜਾ ਸਿਰਜਣਹਾਰੇ॥ (ਰਾਗੁ ਵਡਹੰਸੁ ਮਹਲਾ 1, ਸਗਗਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 579)

The True Creator Lord is pervading and permeating the water, the land and the air. (Raag Wadahans, First Mehl, SGGS, p 579)

Sri Guru Granth Sahib emphasizes that Nature is a manifestation of God. Every creature in this world, every plant, every form is a manifestation of the creator.

ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਕਰਿ ਕੈ ਵਸਿਆ ਸੇਇ ॥ (ਮਃ 1, ਸਗਗਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 83)

He created the Creative Power of the Universe, within which He dwells. (First Mehl, SGGS, p 83)

ਤੂੰ ਦਰੀਆਉ ਸਭ ਤੁਝ ਹੀ ਮਾਹਿ ॥ ਤੁਝ ਬਿਨੁ ਦੂਜਾ ਕੋਈ ਨਾਹਿ ॥ (ਮਃ 4, ਸਗਗਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 11)

You are the River of Life; all are within You. There is no one except You. (Fourth Mehl, SGGS, p11)

Gurbani proclaims that God, Himself is the bumblebee, flower, fruit and tree. He is the water, desert, ocean and pond. He is the big fish, tortoise and the Cause of causes. Each is part of

God, and God is within each element of creation. God is the Cause of all, and He is the primary connection in all existence.

ਆਪੇ ਭਵਰੁ ਫੁਲੁ ਫਲੁ ਤਰਵਰੁ ॥ ਆਪੇ ਜਲੁ ਥਲੁ ਸਾਗਰੁ ਸਰਵਰੁ ॥ ਆਪੇ ਮਛੁ ਕਛੁ ਕਰਣੀਕਰੁ ਤੇਰਾ ਰੂਪੁ ਨ  
ਲਖਣਾ ਜਾਈ ਹੇ ॥ (ਮਹਲਾ 1, ਸਗਗਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 1020)

You are the bumble bee, the flower, the fruit and the tree. You are the water, the desert, the ocean and the pool. You are the great fish, the tortoise, the Cause of causes; Your form cannot be known. (First Mehl, SGGS, p 1020)

Sikh Scriptures describe Nature as an emanation of God's will. Sikhism proclaims that the world reflects God's qualities and attributes and should therefore be greatly respected and cherished.

## 2. *Panch Tattvas* (Five Classical elements) - Foundation of the web of life

Sikhism sees the physical world as a natural matrix of five classical elements (*panch tattva* [4-5] - air, water, earth, fire and sky or space) in which life and growth are interdependent. It endorses the caring of these five basic elements as part of a symbiotic relationship. Sikhs are urged to maintain a harmonious relationship with these. In Sikhism, *panch tattva* (five classical or basic elements) are ap (water), tej (fire), vaaye (air), pirthmi (Earth) and akash (space). Gurbani describes that the creator created all these elements from the primal void. It elaborates that all of creation, including the human body, is made up of these five basic elements. Upon death, the human body dissolves into these five elements, thereby balancing the cycle of Nature.

ਅਪੁ ਤੇਜੁ ਵਾਇ ਪ੍ਰਿਥਮੀ ਆਕਾਸਾ ॥ ਤਿਨ ਮਹਿ ਪੰਚ ਤਤੁ ਘਰਿ ਵਾਸਾ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਸਗਗਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 1031)

Water, fire, air, earth and sky (space), in that house of the five elements, they dwell. (First Mehl, SGGS, p 1031)

These five basic elements create the entire universe. The composition and mix of these elements in each form - animate or inanimate - varies in degrees depending upon the structure, Nature and function of the created object. The variance of the mix is also what makes diversity in Nature. Gurbani enunciates that the creator created the whole creation from these five elements.

ਪੰਚ ਤਤੁ ਕਾ ਰਚਨੁ ਰਚਾਨਾ ॥ (ਮ. 5, ਸਗਗਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 1073)

The creation was created of the five elements. (Fifth Mehl, SGGS, p 1073)

*Panch Tattva* creates a web of life shown in the structure and interconnectedness of the cosmos and the human body. Sikhism teaches that the five significant elements (air, water, fire, earth and space) that constitute the environment are all derived from *sunm*, the primal energy. Each of these elements has its own life and form; together, the elements are interconnected and interdependent.

Sikhism recognizes that the human body is composed of and related to these five elements and connects each element to one of the five senses.

ਹਰਿ ਆਪੇ ਪੰਚ ਤਤੁ ਬਿਸਥਾਰਾ ਵਿਚਿ ਧਾਤੂ ਪੰਚ ਆਪਿ ਪਾਵੈ ॥ (ਮ. 4, ਸਗਗਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 720 )

The Lord Himself directs the evolution of the five elements' world; He infuses the five senses into it. (Fourth Mehl, SGGS, p 720)

The cycle of life perpetuates when all these five elements are present in a state of harmony. Each element is individually rich with its own core embryonic energy. We, as human beings, are also born with the combination of these five elements. Describing the evolution of the world Guru Ram Das, the fourth Sikh Guru, proclaimed;

ਪੰਚ ਤਤੁ ਮਿਲਿ ਦੇਹੀ ਕਾ ਆਕਾਰਾ ॥ (ਮ. 3, ਸਗਗਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 1128)

The five elements join together to make up the form of the human body. (Third Mehl, SGGS, p 1128)

This bond between our senses and the elements is the foundation of our human relationship with the natural world. For Sikhism, Nature and the environment are not outside us, not alien or hostile to us. They are an inseparable part of our existence, and they constitute our very bodies. Sikhism encourages us to revere these elements of life and do our best to maintain their pristine glory.

### **3. Earth - A Great mother, deserves our devotion and protection.**

All life depends on the Earth; all life originates from Earth [6]. Earth is our *janani*, our mother. She is the basis for everything; our happiness and sadness are all directly linked to mother Earth. Guru Nanak proclaims the fact that we are all children of great mother earth as;

ਪਉਣੁ ਗੁਰੂ ਪਾਣੀ ਪਿਤ ਜਾਤਾ ॥ ਉਦਰ ਸੰਜੋਗੀ ਧਰਤੀ ਮਾਤਾ ॥ ਰੈਣਿ ਦਿਨਸੁ ਦੁਇ ਦਾਈ ਦਾਇਆ ਜਗੁ ਖੇਲੈ ਖੇ  
ਲਾਈ ਹੇ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਸਗਗਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 1021)

Air is a vital force; water is like the progenitor. The womb of the mother earth gives birth to all. Night and day are the two nurses; in whose lap, all the world is at play. (First Mehl, SGGS, p 1021)

Earth is our great provider, whether we are alive or dead. When we are alive, we get everything from Earth. Even after death, mother earth holds our remains - we merge back into the Earth. If we are buried, our graves are formed here; if we are cremated, we are burnt into ashes to become a part of the Earth. The importance of five vital factors, i.e. air, water, earth, day and night, for the existence and growth of life is emphasized in *Gurbani* as;

ਪਵਣੁ ਗੁਰੂ ਪਾਈ ਪਿਤਾ ਮਾਤਾ ਧਰਤਿ ਮਹਤੁ ॥ ਦਿਵਸੁ ਰਾਤਿ ਦੁਇ ਦਾਈ ਦਾਇਆ ਖੇਲੈ ਸਗਲ ਜਗਤੁ ॥(ਮ. 1,  
ਸਗਗਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 8)

Air is a vital force, water the progenitor, the vast Earth is the mother of all, Days and Nights are nurses, fondling all creation in their lap. (First Mehl, SGGS, p 8)

Earth, our great mother, is magnificent and highly creative. We share its richness and fecundity with all life on it. However, humankind has repeatedly abused this beautiful gift by exploiting it recklessly. Sikhism proclaims a notion of balance and harmony with it and its creation.

#### **4. Appreciate Interdependence, Nurture it**

All things are interconnected [7] and flourish according to the principle of interdependent origination. This principle underlies Sikhism's understanding of the way the universe works and the responsibilities of humanity. This principle proclaims the doctrine of one is all and all is one. It tells us that things do not exist outside of each other. Things exist within each other and with each other. Guru Angad Dev proclaims the principle of interdependent origination in his hymns as:

ਪਉਣੁ ਗੁਰੂ ਪਾਈ ਪਿਤਾ ਮਾਤਾ ਧਰਤਿ ਮਹਤੁ ॥ ਦਿਨਸੁ ਰਾਤਿ ਦੁਇ ਦਾਈ ਦਾਇਆ ਖੇਲੈ ਸਗਲ ਜਗਤੁ ॥  
(ਮਃ ੨, ਸਗਗਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 146)

Air is the vital force, water the progenitor, the vast Earth is the mother of all, Days and Nights are nurses, fondling all creation in their lap. (Second Mehl, SGGS, p 146)

In Sri Guru Granth Sahib, all the material world elements are seen no more as external to each other, but being involved in an inter-dependent relationship, reciprocally conditioning each other's life. Guru Nanak emphasizes this kind of inter-dependent relationship in his hymn;

ਜੇ ਅੰਤਰਿ ਸੇ ਬਾਹਰਿ ਦੇਖਹੁ ਅਵਰੁ ਨ ਦੂਜਾ ਕੋਈ ਜੀਉ ॥ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਏਕ ਦ੍ਰਿਸਟਿ ਕਰਿ ਦੇਖਹੁ ਘਟਿ  
ਘਟਿ ਜੋਤਿ ਸਮੇਈ ਜੀਉ ॥ (ਸੋਰਠਿ ਮਹਲਾ 1, ਸਗਗਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 599)

Whatever is within, the same is outside. See that there is nothing else. By divine prompting, look upon all existence as one and undifferentiated; the same light penetrates all existence. (Sorat'h, First Mehl, SGGS, p 599)

Guru Arjan Dev has summed up the worldly play very beautifully in the following hymns. The role of five basic elements (*panch tattva*), air, water, earth, fire, and akasha, in this play is very aptly enunciated. The transient nature of different forms of creation rising from the Earth and, in the end, merging back into it, as waves in a sea, is pointed out.

ਆਖਾਰ ਮੰਡਲੀ ਧਰਣਿ ਸਬਾਈ ਉਪਰਿ ਗਗਨੁ ਚੰਦੇਆ ॥ ਪਵਨੁ ਵਿਚੇਲਾ ਕਰਤ ਇਕੇਲਾ ਜਲ ਤੇ ਓਪਤਿ ਹੋਆ ॥  
ਪੰਚ ਤਤੁ ਕਰਿ ਪੁਤਰਾ ਕੀਨਾ ਕਿਰਤ ਮਿਲਾਵਾ ਹੋਆ ॥੨॥ ਚੰਦੁ ਸੂਰਜੁ ਦੁਇ ਜਰੇ ਚਰਾਗਾ ਚਹੁ ਕੁੰਟ ਭੀਤਰਿ ਰਾਖੇ  
॥ਦਸ ਪਾਤਉ ਪੰਚ ਸੰਗੀਤਾ ਏਕੈ ਭੀਤਰਿ ਸਾਥੇ ॥ਭਿੰਨਭਿੰਨ ਹੋਇ ਭਾਵ ਦਿਖਾਵਹਿ ਸਭਹੁ ਨਿਰਾਰੀ ਭਾਖੇ ॥੩॥  
ਘਰਿਘਰਿ ਨਿਰਤਿ ਹੋਵੈ ਦਿਨੁ ਰਾਤੀ ਘਟਿਘਟਿ ਵਾਜੈ ਤੂਰਾ ॥ਏਕਿ ਨਚਾਵਹਿ ਏਕਿ ਭਵਾਵਹਿ ਇਕਿ ਆਇ ਜਾਇ  
ਹੋਇ ਧੂਰਾ ॥.....( ਮ. 5, ਸਗਗਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 884)

The whole Earth is the stage, with the canopy of the sky overhead. The wind is the director; people are born of water. From the five elements, the puppet was created with its actions. ||2|| The sun and the moon are the two lamps that shine, with the four corners of the world placed between them. The ten senses are the dancing girls, and the five passions are the chorus; they sit together within one body. They all put on their own shows and speak in different languages. ||3|| In every home, there is dancing, day and night; in every home, the bugles blow. Some are made for dancing, and some are whirled around; some come, and some go, and some are reduced to dust..... (Fifth Mehl, SGGS, p 884)

In Sri Guru Granth Sahib, Bhagat Peepa articulates about this interrelationship as;

ਜੇ ਬ੍ਰਹਮੰਡੇ ਸੇਈ ਪਿੰਡੇ ਜੇ ਖੋਜੈ ਸੇ ਪਾਵੈ ॥ (ਭਗਤ ਪੀਪਾ, ਸਗਗਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 695)

Whatever pervades the Universe also dwells in the body; whoever seeks it finds it there. (Bhagat Pipa, SGGS, p 695)

Thus one sees that one's life is not just present in one's own body but is also interrelated to all that is in the universe.

As is evident, we are the Earth, through the plants and animals that nourish us. We are the rains and the oceans that flow through our veins. We are the breath of the forests of the land and

the plants of the sea. We are human animals, related to all other life as descendants of the firstborn cell. We share with these kins a common history written in our genes. We share a common present, filled with uncertainty. And we share a common future, as yet untold. Humans are only one of eighty-four million species weaving the thin layer of life enveloping the world. The stability of communities of living things depends upon this diversity. Linked in that web, we are interconnected -- using, cleansing, sharing and replenishing the fundamental elements of life.

Since environmental degradation erodes many natural resources forever, the entire ecological and social cost must enter all development equations. We must be aware that we are one brief generation in the long march of time; the future is not ours to erase. So, where knowledge is limited, we must remember all those who will walk after us and err on the side of caution. All this must now become the foundation of the way we live. At this turning point in our relationship with Earth, we must work for an evolution: from dominance to partnership, from fragmentation to connection, from insecurity to interdependence. Thus, we must be aware of our precise role in Nature's plan of things and play it responsibly to sustain and nurture things' interdependence.

### **5. Nature- a great teacher of ethics and spirituality, Learn from it.**

Sikhism places a great deal of spiritual significance on the lessons we can learn directly from Nature. One can learn true selflessness, real renunciation, and sacrifice from it. According to Gurbani [8-12] - Earth teaches us patience and love; sky teaches us equality and broadmindedness; fire teaches us warmth and courage; air teaches us mobility; water teaches us purity and cleanliness. This emphasis is evident in the following hymns;

ਚੰਦਨ ਅਗਰ ਕਪੂਰ ਲੇਪਨ ਤਿਸੁ ਸੰਗੇ ਨਹੀ ਪ੍ਰੀਤਿ ॥ ਬਿਸਟਾ ਮੂਤ੍ਰੁ ਖੇਦਿ ਤਿਲੁ ਤਿਲੁ ਮਨਿ ਨ ਮਨੀ ਬਿਪਰੀਤਿ ॥

Earth neither loves Sandalwood, aloe, or camphor-paste. Nor does it mind if someone digs it up bit by bit or applies manure and urine to it.

ਊਚ ਨੀਚ ਬਿਕਾਰ ਸੁਕ੍ਰਿਤ ਸੰਲਗਨ ਸਭ ਸੁਖ ਛਤ੍ਰੁ ॥ ਮਿਤ੍ਰੁ ਸਤ੍ਰੁ ਨ ਕਛੁ ਜਾਨੈ ਸਰਬ ਜੀਅ ਸਮਤ ॥

The comforting canopy of the sky stretches evenly overall, without considering their being High or low, good or bad. It does not distinguish between friends and enemies. For it, all beings are alike.

ਕਰਿ ਪ੍ਰਗਾਸੁ ਪ੍ਰਚੰਡ ਪ੍ਰਗਟਿਓ ਅੰਧਕਾਰ ਬਿਨਾਸ ॥ ਪਵਿਤ੍ਰੁ ਅਪਵਿਤ੍ਰੁਹ ਕਿਰਣ ਲਾਗੇ ਮਨਿ ਨ ਭਇਓ ਬਿਖਾਦੁ ॥

Blazing with its dazzling light, the sun rises and dispels the darkness. Touching both the pure and the impure, it harbours no hatred to any.

ਸੀਤ ਮੰਦ ਸੁਗੰਧ ਚਲਿਓ ਸਰਬ ਥਾਨ ਸਮਾਨ ॥ ਜਹਾ ਸਾ ਕਿਛੁ ਤਹਾ ਲਾਗਿਓ ਤਿਲੁ ਨ ਸੰਕਾ ਮਾਨ ॥



The cool and fragrant wind gently blows upon all places alike. It touches all the things wherever these are, without even a bit of hesitation.

ਸੁਭਾਇ ਅਭਾਇ ਜੁ ਨਿਕਟਿ ਆਵੈ ਸੀਤੁ ਤਾ ਕਾ ਜਾਇ ॥ ਆਪ ਪਰ ਕਾ ਕਛੁ ਨ ਜਾਣੈ ਸਦਾ ਸਹਜਿ ਸੁਭਾਇ ॥

(ਮਾਰੂ ਮਹਲਾ 5, ਸਗਰਾਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 1018)

Whoever comes close to the fire, his cold is taken away without considering his being Good or Bad. It does not know to differentiate between its own or others. It always has the same Nature. (Maru, Fifth Mehl, SGGS, p 1018)

ਭਰੀਐ ਹਥੁ ਪੈਰੁ ਤਨੁ ਦੇਹ ॥ ਪਾਣੀ ਧੋਤੈ ਉਤਰਸੁ ਖੇਹ ॥ (ਮਹਲਾ 1, ਸਗਰਾਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 4)

When the hands and the feet, and the body are dirty, water can wash away the dirt. (First Mehl, SGGS, p 4)

Guru Angad Dev pointed out that a rich person can overcome his intense selfish desire to acquire great wealth or power by following Earth's example.

ਧਰਤੀ ਚੀਜੀ ਕਿ ਕਰੇ ਜਿਸੁ ਵਿਚਿ ਸਭੁ ਕਿਛੁ ਹੋਇ ॥ (ਮ. 2, ਸਗਰਾਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 150)

What are personal possessions to the Earth, from which all things are produced? (Second Mehl, SGGS, p 150)

Quoting the examples of lotus flower and duck (which remain unaffected by mud and water, though living in these), Guru Nanak emphasized that one should live one's life unattached to material or worldly gains.

ਜੈਸੇ ਜਲ ਮਹਿ ਕਮਲੁ ਨਿਰਾਲਮੁ ਮੁਰਗਾਈ ਨੈ ਸਾਣੇ ॥ ਸੁਰਤਿ ਸਬਦਿ ਭਵ ਸਾਗਰੁ ਤਰੀਐ ਨਾਨਕ ਨਾਮੁ ਵਖਾਣੇ ॥ (ਰਾਮਕਲੀ ਮਹਲਾ ੧ ਸਿਧ ਗੋਸਟਿ, ਸਗਰਾਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 938)

As the lotus flower floats untouched upon the surface of the water, and the duck swims through the stream, so with one's consciousness focused on the Word (Shabad), one crosses over the terrifying world-ocean. O Nanak, chant the Naam, the Name of the Lord. (Ramkali, First Mehl, Sidh Gosht, SGGS, p 938)

Sikh scriptures express that we can learn precious lessons from flowers - a marvellous creation of Nature, about living a happy and well-balanced life. Observing the characteristics of flowers helps us develop a stronger sense of compassion, inner balance and altruism. Guru Arjan Dev proclaimed that by imbibing flowers' qualities, a state of profound satisfaction, happiness and joy is obtained. He asserted that we should renounce egotism and remain appreciative and conscious of this beautiful world's Creator (God).

ਦੇਖੁ ਫੁਲ ਫੁਲ ਫੁਲੇ ॥ ਅਹੰ ਤਿਆਗਿ ਤਿਆਗੇ ॥.....ਹਰਿ ਚੇਤਿ ਮਨ ਮੇਰੇ ॥ (ਬਸੰਤੁ ਮਹਲਾ 5, ਸਗਗਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 1185)

Behold the flowers flowering, and the blossoms are blossoming forth! Renounce and abandon your egotism. ....O my mind, remain conscious of the Lord. (Basant, Fifth Mehl, SGGS, p 1185)

Through its marvellous happening, Nature represents that nothing is static or fixed. Everything is fleeting and impermanent. Everything is in process. Everything—every tree, every blade of grass, all the animals, insects, human beings, buildings, the animate and the inanimate—is constantly changing, moment-to-moment. The dynamic nature of things has been articulated in *Gurbani* as;

ਫਰੀਦਾ ਰੁਤਿ ਫਿਰੀ ਵਣੁ ਕੰਬਿਆ ਪਤ ਝੜੇ ਝੜਿ ਪਾਹਿ॥ਚਾਰੇ ਕੁੰਡਾ ਢੂੰਢੀਆਂ ਰਹਣੁ ਕਿਥਾਉ ਨਾਹਿ॥ (ਸੇਖ ਫਰੀਦ, ਸਗਗਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 1383)

Fareed says; the seasons change, the woods shake, and the leaves drop from the trees. I have searched in the four directions, but I have not found any resting place anywhere. (Shaikh Farid, SGGS, p 1383)

Impermanence and change are thus the undeniable truths of our existence. Guru Arjun Dev, the fifth Sikh Guru, enunciates the impermanence of the world as;

ਪੇਖੁ ਹਰਿਚੰਦਉਰਤੀ ਅਸਥਿਰੁ ਕਿਛੁ ਨਾਹੀ ॥ ਮਾਇਆ ਰੰਗ ਜੇਤੇ ਸੇ ਸੰਗਿ ਨ ਜਾਹੀ ॥(ਆਸਾ ਮਹਲਾ 5,ਸਗਗਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 461)

Behold - the world is a mirage; nothing here is permanent. The pleasures of Maya (world), as are here, shall not go with you. (Aasa, Fifth Mehl, SGGS, p 461)

The awareness of the impermanent nature of life helps us see how precious life is, to help us know that we do not waste our lives. When we see the impermanence of things, we appreciate their true value. Thus, Nature, a great teacher of ethics and spirituality, provides practical examples of the valuable lessons to be learnt. Following these lessons, human beings can make marvellous achievements at the worldly and spiritual level. Thus Sikhism encourages its adherents to follow the practical examples of the valuable lessons of ethics and spirituality as provided by Nature for a harmonious relationship with all beings and things.

## 6 . Earth as *dharamsal* - a place for righteous action

Emphasizing Nature's sacredness, Sikhism proclaims the Earth as a place for righteous action (*dharamsaal*) [13].

ਰਾਤੀ ਰੁਤੀ ਥਿਤੀ ਵਾਰ ॥ ਪਵਣ ਪਾਣੀ ਅਗਨੀ ਪਾਤਾਲ ॥ ਤਿਸੁ ਵਿਚਿ ਧਰਤੀ ਥਾਪਿ ਰਖੀ ਧਰਮ ਸਾਲਾ॥(ਮ. 1, ਸਗਗਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 7)

Nights and days, weeks and seasons; wind, water, fire and the nether regions – in the midst of these, He established the Earth as a home for *dharma*. (First Mehl, SGGS, p 7)

According to the Sikh belief, the world is Holy, and one's relation to it must also be holy.

ਧਰਤਿ ਉਪਾਇ ਧਰੀ ਧਰਮ ਸਾਲਾ ॥ (ਮਾਰੂ ਮਹਲਾ 1, ਦਖਣੀ, ਸਗਗਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 1033)

Creating the Earth, He established it as the home (place) of *dharma* (righteous actions). (Maru, First Mehl, Dakhani, SGGS, p 1033)

By this portrayal of the world (Earth) as a place for righteousness and purity, Sikhism insists that we relate with others with equality and justice. Gurbani reveals that real peace can only be found when desire and greed are subdued and diminished. It will only happen when the individual realizes that God abides in all the elements (including water, Earth and the woods) and stops damaging these elements purely to satisfy his material greed.

ਸਾਂਤਿ ਪਾਵਹਿ ਹੋਵਹਿ ਮਨ ਸੀਤਲ ਅਗਨਿ ਨ ਅੰਤਰਿ ਧੁਖੀ ॥ ਗੁਰ ਨਾਨਕ ਕਉ ਪ੍ਰਭੂ ਦਿਖਾਇਆ ਜਲਿ ਥਲਿ ਤ੍ਰਿ  
ਭਵਣਿ ਰੁਖੀ ॥ (ਸੋਰਠਿ ਮਹਲਾ 5, ਸਗਗਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 617)

You shall find peace, and your mind shall be soothed and cooled; the fire of desire shall not burn within you. The Guru has revealed God to Nanak, in the three worlds, in the water, the Earth and the woods. (Sorat'h, Fifth Mehl, SGGS, p 617)

## 7. Nature is beautiful, Rejoice it

Nature represents the most common source of awe, wonder and joy, readily available to people everywhere. Sikhism encourages rejoice at the incredible display of Nature, leading to a state of *wismad* (wondrous bliss). The grandeur of a moonlit night and the sparkling beauty of a star-studded night sky can leave us wonderstruck. The sight of the towering mountain range, the glory of sunrise, the lapping of enormous waves on a seashore, the lush green forests and fertile plains, all these can throw the mind into a mood of wonder. Guru Nanak Dev, the first Sikh Guru, in his hymns articulates that looking at the wondrous play of Nature leaves one wonderstruck [6].

ਉਤਭੁਜੁ ਚਲਤੁ ਕੀਆ ਸਿਰਿ ਕਰਤੈ ਬਿਸਮਾਦੁ ਸਬਦਿ ਦੇਖਾਇਦਾ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਸਗਗਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 1037)

The Supreme Creator created the play of Nature; through His Sabd (command), He stages His Wondrous Show. (First Mehl, SGGS, p 1037)

Appreciating the marvellous innate characteristics of flowers, Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth Sikh Guru, expressed that the whole world is like a beautiful garden, full of scent, colour and beauty.

ਨਾਨਕ ਫੁਲਾ ਸੰਦੀ ਵਾੜਿ ਖਿੜਿਆ ਹਭੁ ਸੰਸਾਰੁ ਜਿਉ ॥ (ਮ. 5, ਸਗਗਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 1095)

Nanak, the entire world is blooming, like a garden of flowers. (Fifth Mehl, SGGS, p 1095)

The natural environment is a constant source of physical *wismad*. The sight of an enormous mountain can elicit wonder, as can a rainbow. The star-studded night sky, vast oceans, sunsets, flowers, the aurora borealis and living systems' intricacies all provide windows through which an observer can feel wonder and joy. In Sri Guru Granth Sahib, Guru Amar Das, the third Sikh Guru, explains such a situation as;

ਪਰਪੰਚ ਵੇਖਿ ਰਹਿਆ ਵਿਸਮਾਦੁ ॥ (ਮ. 3, ਸਗਗਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 1174)

Gazing upon the wonder of God's Creation, I am wonderstruck and amazed. (Third Mehl, SGGS, p 1174)

Sikhs are encouraged to enjoy and appreciate the joys and mysteries of this life. The wonders of Nature are all around us. In the words of John Muir, "The grand show is eternal. It is always sunrise somewhere; the dew is never dried all at once; a shower is forever falling; vapour is ever rising. Eternal sunrise, eternal dawn and gloaming, on sea, continents and islands, each in its turn, as the round earth rolls." Guru Nanak Dev, a great nature lover, expresses his wonder, on seeing the marvels of Nature, as;

ਬਿਸਮੁ ਭਏ ਬਿਸਮਾਦ ਦੇਖਿ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਤੇਰੀਆ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਸਗਗਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 521)

I am wonderstruck beholding the wonder of Your Almighty Creative Power. (First Mehl, SGGS, p 521)

Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth Sikh Guru, describes in his hymns that even the taste of delicious food is lovely and has the potential to take one to the state of *wismad* (wonder and joy).

ਜਿਨਿ ਚਾਖਿਆ ਤਿਸੁ ਆਇਆ ਸਾਦੁ ॥ ਜਿਉ ਗੁੰਗਾ ਮਨ ਮਹਿ ਬਿਸਮਾਦੁ ॥ (ਮ. 5, ਸਗਗਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 801)

One who has tasted it comes to know its flavour; he is like the mute, whose mind is filled with wonder. (Fifth Mehl, SGGS, p 801)

Wonder is a sense of how great and marvellous life is, both in terms of our own small lives and the vast and intricate web of beings in which we exist. Expressing his wonder at the world at play, Guru Arjan Dev said;

ਕੋਟਿ ਅਖਾਰੇ ਚਲਿਤ ਬਿਸਮਾਦ ॥ (ਮ. 5, ਸਗਗਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 1156)

Wondrous Plays are enacted on millions of stages. (Fifth Mehl, SGGS, p 1156)

*Gurbani* considers the sense of wonder and love towards all as an excellent source of knowledge in the epistemological perspective. A human being is required to fill his heart with the 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 a 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 himself. The 35th stanza of *Jap(u)* underlines this idea of the variety of creation [3] and its openhearted acceptance by Guru Nanak for all purposes.

ਕੇਤੇ ਪਵਣ ਪਾਣੀ ਵੈਸੰਤਰ ਕੇਤੇ ਕਾਨ ਮਹੇਸ ॥ ਕੇਤੇ ਬਰਮੇ ਘਾੜਤਿ ਘੜੀਅਹਿ ਰੂਪ ਰੰਗ ਕੇ ਵੇਸ ॥ ਕੇਤੀਆ  
ਕਰਮ ਭੂਮੀ ਮੇਰ ਕੇਤੇ ਕੇਤੇ ਧੂ ਉਪਦੇਸ ॥ ਕੇਤੇ ਇੰਦ ਚੰਦ ਸੂਰ ਕੇਤੇ ਕੇਤੇ ਮੰਡਲ ਦੇਸ ॥ ਕੇਤੇ ਸਿਧ ਬੁਧ ਨਾਥ ਕੇਤੇ  
ਕੇਤੇ ਦੇਵੀ ਵੇਸ ॥ ਕੇਤੇ ਦੇਵ ਦਾਨਵ ਮੁਨਿ ਕੇਤੇਕੇਤੇ ਰਤਨ ਸਮੁੰਦ ॥ ਕੇਤੀਆ ਖਾਣੀ ਕੇਤੀਆ ਬਾਣੀ ਕੇਤੇ ਪਾਤ  
ਨਰਿੰਦ ॥ ਕੇਤੀਆ ਸੁਰਤੀ ਸੇਵਕ ਕੇਤੇ ਨਾਨਕ ਅੰਤੁ ਨ ਅੰਤੁ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਸਗਗਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 7)

There are numerous winds, waters and fires; so many Krishnas and Shivas. Numerous Brahmas, fashioning forms of great beauty, adorned and dressed in many colours. Countless worlds and lands for working out karma. Countless lessons to be learned! Numerous Indras, countless moons and suns, so many galaxies and worlds. Numerous Siddhas and Buddhas, so many Yogic masters. Numerous goddesses of various kinds. Countless demi-gods and demons, so many silent sages. Multiple oceans of jewels. Myriad ways of life, so many languages. Numerous dynasties of rulers. Countless intuitive people, so many selfless servants. O Nanak, it is all limitless! (First Mehl, SGGS, p 7)

The sense of awe and reverence to the universe is prompted by our aspiration to respond to the ultimate reality. It makes our lives purposeful and meaningful. Whether we come from a creationist or an evolutionist perspective, we are indebted to "nature, earth and the myriad

things" for our existence. To repay this debt, we cultivate ourselves to attain our full humaneness amidst the wonder of existence.

## 8. Harmony with Nature

Gurbani expresses that Nature and every object in it have been created as an abode of God. It articulates that human beings' purpose is to be in harmony with all creation and that human domination is to be rejected. The Sikh Gurus recognized human responsibility towards the material world. So, air, water and Earth's importance to life are emphasized repeatedly in the SGGS. The Earth is referred to as the mother and, as such, requires our respect. Great care needs to be taken to ensure that no damage occurs to it while a Sikh is going about his or her daily life. The pollution of these classical elements of life is against the principles laid down by the Gurus. The Sikh Scriptures enunciate the importance of environment as:

ਪਉਣ ਪਾਣੀ ਧਰਤੀ ਆਕਾਸ਼ ਘਰ ਮੰਦਰ ਹਰਿ ਬਨੀ ॥ (ਮ. 4, ਸਗਗਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 723)

Air, water, earth and sky - the Lord has made these His home and temple. (Fourth Mehl, SGGS, p 723)

The Sikh scripture declares [14-16] that human beings' purpose is to achieve a blissful state and be in harmony with the Earth and all of God's creation. Air, water, earth and sky are God's home and temple - sacred places, which need to be protected and looked after. The history of the Sikh Gurus is full of stories of their love for animals, birds, trees, vegetation, rivers, mountains and sky. The Sikh Gurus built many Gurudwaras surrounded by large pools which supported marine life, especially fish. Guru Har Rai, the seventh Sikh Guru, developed Kiratpur Sahib as a town of parks and gardens. Located on the banks of a tributary of the Sutlej, he planted flowers and fruit-bearing trees all over the area. It created a salubrious environment, attracting beautiful birds to the town and turning it into an idyllic place to live in.

Emphasizing the importance of trees in our life, Guru Nanak describes God as an infinite tree of life and all beings as birds perched on its branches. *Gurbani* refers to various species of trees, eulogizing species, which are useful to the world.

ਤੂੰ ਵਡ ਪੁਰਖੁ ਅਗੰਮ ਤਰੇਵਰੁ ਹਮ ਪੰਖੀ ਤੁਝ ਮਾਹੀ ॥ (ਮਃ 1, ਸਗਗਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 505)

You are the Great Primal Lord, the infinite tree of life; I am a bird perched on Your branches. (First Mehl, SGGS, p 505)

Several trees [17] such as *bohrh* (*ficus bengalensis*), *pipli* (*ficus religiosa*), *jand* (*prosopis spicigera*), *garna* (*capparis horrida*), *karir* (*capparis aaphylla*), *phalahi* (*acacia modeta*), *reru* (*mimasa leucophloea*), *luhura* (*Cordia latifolia*), *tahli* (*shisham*), *imli* (*tamarind*), *amb* (*Mangifera indica*), *Harian velan*, *neem* (*margassa*), *ritha* (*Sapindus mukorosa*), *kalp* (*mitragina parvifolia*) and *ber* (*Zizyphus jujube*) have been provided sanctity in Sikh scriptures. Four of the most sacred trees associated with the Sikh shrines, namely *Dukh Bhanjani Beri* of Sri Harmandir Sahib, *Beri* of Baba Budha Ji, *Beri* of Gurudwara Ber Sahib of Sultanpur Lodhi and *Beri of Lachi Ber* of Sri Harmandir Sahib. It highlights the role that trees have played in Sikh history. It clearly describes that the Sikh way of life encourages all to live in harmony with Nature rather than in conflict with it.

This Sikh understanding of the universe as a holistic unity emphasizes every person's responsibility to behave respectfully and with care to contribute to creation's general wellbeing. In this way, the interests of humanity are served by looking after all of Nature's goods.

### **9. Kirat Karo, Naam Japo, Wand Chhako - A model for Sustainable Economy**

The concept of social responsibility is fundamental to the message of Sri Guru Granth Sahib. The socio-spiritual welfare of humanity is one of its central concerns. Gurbani describes this world as '*dharamsal*' (an abode of righteous actions). Its objective is the creation of a new egalitarian social order with emphasis on work ethics.

The core of the teaching of SGGS is *kirt karo* (honest endeavour), *naam japo* (contemplation on God), and *wand Chhako* (sharing of earnings with others). It proclaims:

ਘਾਲਿ ਖਾਇ ਕਿਛੁ ਹਥਹੁ ਦੇਇ ॥ ਨਾਨਕ ਰਾਹੁ ਪਛਾਣਹਿ ਮੇਇ ॥ (ਸਲੋਕ ਮ. 1, ਸਗਗਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 1245)

He, who earns his livelihood by the sweat of his brow and shares his earnings with others, has discovered the path of righteousness, says Nanak. (Shalok, First Mehl, SGGS, p 1245)

Thus Gurbani encourages its adherents to earn their livelihood by honest means and share their earnings with others. It emphasizes that this is the path of righteousness, and in this way, one can make a significant contribution to encouraging an environment of peaceful co-existence among community members.

Since the time of the Gurus, Sikh gurudwaras have included institutionalized practices that emphasize sharing of resources [14]. Besides being places for congregational prayer and meditation, Gurudwaras are:

1. A place to stay for travellers and others.
2. A community kitchen - *langar*.
3. A place for dispensing medication and medical care.
4. A place to impart education to the young.

Also, Sikh Gurudwaras stock extra mattresses, pots and pans etc. At weddings and other family events, the Gurudwaras are sources for borrowing sheets, mattresses, pots and pans. The kitchens have always been stocked by ordinary people - farmers, traders, others in the community - voluntarily.

Thus Sikhism lays a great emphasis on human endeavour and honest labour. It commands the Sikhs to keep the social environment clean by avoiding the company of power mongers, evildoers and slanderers. It lays significant stress on good conduct in worldly affairs as it enunciates:

ਸਚਹੁ ਓਰੈ ਸਭੁ ਕੇ ਉਪਰਿ ਸਚੁ ਆਚਾਰੁ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਸਗਗਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 62)

Truth is higher than everything, but higher still is truthful living. (First Mehl, SGGS, p 62)

It condemns living by exploitation, bribery and corruption. It asserts:

ਹਰੁ ਪਰਾਇਆ ਨਾਨਕਾ ਉਸੁ ਸੁਅਰ ਉਸੁ ਗਾਇ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਸਗਗਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 141)

To deprive others of their rights should be avoided carefully as the Muslims avoid pork and the Hindus consider beef a taboo. (First Mehl, SGGS, p 141)

Gurbani emphasizes that for a Sikh, others' exploitation is like eating a dead man's flesh. The Sikhs are counselled to lead a life of contentment and respect others' person, property, and dignity. As proclaimed in *Gurbani*, these social ideals have the potential to provide a solid basis to develop a model for a sustainable economy and eradicate the menace of corruption and other malpractices from our contemporary society.

## 10. Simple Living - A key to Sustainability



The virtue of a simple life has always been prized in Sikh society. Sikh Gurus taught people to live simply and appreciate the natural cycle of life.

ਨਾਨਕ ਸਤਿਗੁਰਿ ਭੇਟਿਐ ਪੂਰੀ ਹੋਵੈ ਜੁਗਤਿ ॥ ਹਸੰਦਿਆ ਖੇਲੰਦਿਆ ਪੈਨੰਦਿਆ ਖਾਵੰਦਿਆ ਵਿਚੇ ਹੋਵੈ ਮੁਕਤਿ  
॥ (ਮਃ 5, ਸਗਗਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 522)

O Nanak, meeting the True Guru, one comes to know a Perfect Way. While laughing, playing, dressing and eating, he is liberated. (Fifth Mehl, SGGS, p 522)

Sikhism emphasizes that true happiness comes from within, not from outer possessions. It means that the search for material possessions, and the consumption of materials and energy it brings, should not be allowed to dominate life. Life's primary purpose is to discover the spiritual nature and the peace and fulfilment it brings. Sikh Gurus consider the efforts to exploit this world's things to be a distraction from this central purpose of life.

Craving and greed only bring unhappiness since demands for material possessions can never be satisfied, and people will always demand more, so threatening the environment. It is why the real solution to the environmental crisis begins with the individual.

Gurbani urges us to earn our livelihood by honest labour (work) and enjoying the bounties of life with our consciousness fixed on love for God. Guru Arjan Dev proclaims that all kinds of stress and anxiety disappear from one's life with such a labour of love.

ਉਦਮੁ ਕਰੇਦਿਆ ਜੀਉ ਤੂੰ ਕਮਾਵਦਿਆ ਸੁਖ ਭੁੰਦੁ ॥ ਧਿਆਇਦਿਆ ਤੂੰ ਪ੍ਰਭੂ ਮਿਲੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਉਤਰੀ ਚਿੰਤ ॥  
(ਸਲੋਕੁ ਮ. 5, ਸਗਗਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 522)

Make an effort, and you shall live; practicing it, you shall enjoy peace. Meditating, you shall meet God, O Nanak, and your anxiety shall vanish. (Shalok, Fifth Mehl, SGGS, p 522)

Sikhism proclaims that humans, practicing a highly disciplined life while remaining active in the world, are capable of spiritual progression.

ਅਲਪ ਅਹਾਰ ਸੁਲਾਪ ਸੀ ਨਿੰਦ੍ਰਾ ਦਯਾ ਛਿਮਾ ਤਨ ਪ੍ਰੀਤਿ॥ ਸੀਲ ਸੰਤੋਖ ਸਦਾ ਨਿਰਬਾਹਿਬੋ ਹੈਬੋ ਤ੍ਰਿਗੁਣ  
ਅਤੀਤਿ॥ ਕਾਮ ਕ੍ਰੋਧ ਹੰਕਾਰ ਲੋਭ ਹਠ ਮੋਹ ਨ ਮਨ ਸੇ ਲਯਾਵੈ॥ ਤਬ ਹੀ ਆਤਮ ਤਤ ਕੇ ਦਰਸੇ ਪਰਮ ਪੁਰਖ  
ਕਹ ਪਾਵੈ ॥ (ਰਾਮਕਲੀ ਪਾਤਿਸ਼ਾਹੀ ੧੦, ਸਦਗਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 1345)

Eat less and sleep less, cherish mercy and forgiveness; Practice gentleness and contentment and remain free from three modes (Rajo-guna, Tamo-guna and sattva-guna). Keep your mind unattached from lust, anger, greed, insistence and infatuation, Then one achieves self-realization and realizes the supreme Lord. (Ramkali, Patsahi 10, SDGS, p 1345)

Based on this ahimsa doctrine, many observant Sikhs oppose the institutionalized breeding and killing of animals, birds, and fish for human consumption. Many Sikhs, though not all, also have a strong tradition of being vegetarian.

ਕਬੀਰ ਭਾਂਗ ਮਾਛਲੀ ਸੁਰਾ ਪਾਨਿ ਜੋਜੇ ਪ੍ਰਾਨੀ ਖਾਂਹਿ ॥ ਤੀਰਥ ਬਰਤ ਨੇਮ ਕੀਏ ਤੇ ਸਭੈ ਰਸਾਤਲਿ ਜਾਂਹਿ ॥  
(ਸਲੋਕ ਭਗਤ ਕਬੀਰ, ਸਗਗਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 1377)

Kabir states that those mortals who consume marijuana, fish, and wine will all go to hell no matter what pilgrimages, fasts, and rituals they follow. (Shalok, Bhagat Kabir, SGGS, p 1377)

Sikhs must retain the primacy of spirit over matter, while they shouldn't deny the matter or material existence. It is not required that humans renounce the world. Sikh religion preaches strong family involvement. Sikhism stresses that human must maintain their life in the world and uphold all responsibilities in the world. Humans should be renouncers of plenty and maintain a simple life. The emphasis is on mastery over the self and discovering the self, not mastery over Nature, external forms and beings. Sikhism teaches against a life of conspicuous, wasteful consumption. The Guru recommends a judicious utilization of material and cultural resources available to humans. A simple life free from apparent waste is the Sikh ideal – a life that stresses mastery over the self rather than mastery over Nature.

## 11. Seva (Selfless Voluntary Service)

Sikhism places a strong emphasis on equality and service. Sikhs are encouraged to take up philanthropic activities for the welfare of all.

ਜਨ ਕੀ ਸੇਵਾ ਉਤਮ ਕਾਮਾ ॥ (ਮ. 4, ਸਗਗਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 164)

Serving others is the ultimate good deed. (Fourth Mehl, SGGS, p 164)

It encourages a spirit of cooperation and an equal sharing of resources. For example, the *langar*, or community kitchen, is maintained by the community's voluntary services and

foodstuffs' donation by the adherents. The follower of Sikhism aspires to become a *Gurmukh* - a morally noble person who understands what is right and behaves accordingly. Directing this morality is the principle of selfless voluntary service to fellow beings.

ਸੇਵਾ ਸੁਰਤਿ ਭਗਤਿ ਇਹ ਸਾਚੀ ਵਿਚਰੁ ਆਪੁ ਗਵਾਈਐ ॥ (ਮਃ 3, ਸਗਗਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 246)

Selfless service is true meditation and devotion if one does it without selfishness and conceit. (Third Mehl, SGGS, p 246)

This principle forms the basis for the relationship between people and Nature, extending our filial love for parents and family to all living things. Therefore, a follower of Sikhism is expected to show love and care for Nature. The rewards for this moral behaviour are great, as *Gurbani* proclaims :

ਸੇਵਾ ਕਰਤ ਹੋਇ ਨਿਹਕਾਮੀ ॥ ਤਿਸ ਕਉ ਹੋਤ ਪਰਾਪਤਿ ਸੁਆਮੀ ॥ (ਮ. 5, ਸਗਗਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 286)

One who performs selfless service, without thought of reward, shall attain his Lord and Master. (Fifth Mehl, SGGS, p 286)

*Gurbani* proclaims that only by doing selfless service to others is one able to attain inner peace.

ਸੁਖੁ ਹੋਵੈ ਸੇਵ ਕਮਾਈਆ ॥ (ਸਿਰੀਰਾਗੁ ਮਹਲਾ ੧, ਸਗਗਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 25)

You shall find peace, doing seva (selfless service). (Sri Raag, First Mehl, SGGS, p 25)

SGGS makes love for God the *sine qua non* for love for humankind and seeks the expression of this love through *seva* (selfless voluntary service to others) and other philanthropic activities, striving for and even suffering martyrdom for a righteous cause.

ਆਪੁ ਗਵਾਇ ਸੇਵਾ ਕਰੇ ਤਾ ਕਿਛੁ ਪਾਏ ਮਾਨੁ ॥ (ਮ. 2, ਸਗਗਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 474)

But if he eliminates his self-conceit and then performs service, he shall be honoured. (Second Mehl, SGGS, p 474)

## 12. Pollution and its control - Be Aware and Take action

Of all living beings, humans have the most impact on Nature. Many human activities that relate to agriculture, transportation, and industry create different kinds of contaminants [18-20]. Whether they are released into the water, the air, or the ground, these pollutants waste no time spreading throughout an ecosystem, throwing the natural environment off balance. Nature's

health and future depend on our willingness to fight the causes of pollution and to work hand in hand to prevent it.

Our water reserves are being constantly polluted by waste from agriculture, industries, and sewers. Every year, millions of tons of industrial waste, household garbage, fertilizer, and pesticides are dumped into Nature. Automobile engines and power plants burn combustible fuels like gasoline and coal and allow toxic gases and smoke to escape into the air. Some pollutants help destroy the ozone layer, others contribute to global warming, and still, others create acid rain. All these phenomena have disastrous effects on Nature and its constituting elements. Guru Nanak elaborated on such a state of Nature in his hymns as;

ਸੂਤਕੁ ਅਗਨਿ ਭਖੈ ਜਗੁ ਖਾਇ ॥ ਸੂਤਕੁ ਜਲਿ ਥਲਿ ਸਭ ਹੀ ਥਾਇ ॥ ਨਾਨਕ ਸੂਤਕਿ ਜਨਮਿ ਮਰੀਜੈ ॥ (ਆਸਾ ਮਹਲਾ ੧, ਸਗਗਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 413)

Pollution is the burning fire, which is consuming the world. Pollution is in the water, upon the land, and everywhere. O Nanak, people, are born and die in pollution. (Aasaa, First Mehl, SGGS, p 413)

ਪਉਣੁ ਪਾਣੀ ਬੈਸੰਤਰੁ ਰੋਗੀ ਰੋਗੀ ਧਰਤਿ ਸਭੋਗੀ ॥ (ਭੈਰਉ ਅਸਟਪਦੀਆ ਮਹਲਾ ੧, ਸਗਗਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 1153)

Air, water and fire are diseased; the world with its enjoyments is diseased. (Bhairao, Ashtapadees, First Mehl, SGGS, p 1153)

Sikhism emphasizes that we should shun such actions which lead us to suffer. It is so true about our relationship with our environment. Humans have to shun those activities which impact our environment negatively. Instead, we should take such measures to make our environment suitable for everyone. This message is explicitly described in *Gurbani* as;

ਜਿਤੁ ਕੀਤਾ ਪਾਈਐ ਆਪਣਾ ਸਾ ਘਾਲ ਬੁਰੀ ਕਿਉ ਘਾਲੀਐ ॥ ਮੰਦਾ ਮੂਲਿ ਨ ਕੀਚਈ ਦੇ ਲੰਮੀ ਨਦਰਿ ਨਿਹਾਲੀਐ ॥ ਜਿਉ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਨਾਲਿ ਨ ਹਾਰੀਐ ਤੇਵੇਹਾ ਪਾਸਾ ਢਾਲੀਐ ॥ ਕਿਛੁ ਲਾਹੇ ਉਪਰਿ ਘਾਲੀਐ ॥ (ਮਹਲਾ ੨, ਸਗਗਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 474)

Why do you do such evil deeds that you shall have to suffer so? Do not do any evil at all; look ahead to the future with foresight. So throw the dice in such a way that you shall not lose with your Lord and Master. Do those deeds which shall bring you profit. (Second Mehl, SGGS, p 474)

Sikhism also warns us that if we don't listen to the above-said advice, there will be no time left to regret our actions once the time passes away.

ਜੇਹਾ ਬੀਜੈ ਸੇ ਲੁਣੈ ਮਥੈ ਜੇ ਲਿਖਿਆਸੁ ॥ ਰੈਣਿ ਵਿਹਾਣੀ ਪਛੁਤਾਣੀ ਉਠਿ ਚਲੀ ਗਈ ਨਿਰਾਸ ॥

(ਬਾਰਹ ਮਾਹਾ ਮਾਂਡ ਮਹਲਾ ੫, ਸਗਗਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 134)

As you plant, so shall you harvest; your destiny is recorded on your forehead. The life-night passes away, and in the end, one comes to regret and repent and then depart with no hope at all. (Baarah Maahaa, Maajh, Fifth Mehl, SGGS, p 134)

Guru Nanak has asserted that we can control Nature's pollution provided we have the knowledge and wisdom to do so. Thereby he emphasized that the relevant knowledge be acquired, and it is applied wisely to overcome the problematic situation.

ਨਾਨਕ ਸੂਤਰੁ ਏਵ ਨ ਉਤਰੈ ਗਿਆਨੁ ਉਤਾਰੇ ਧੋਇ ॥(ਮ. 1, ਸਗਗਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 472)

O Nanak, the impurity cannot be removed in this way; it is washed away only by knowledge and wisdom. (First Mehl, SGGS, p 472)

Sikhism doesn't proclaim ecology and ethics as separate arenas of life [21-23]. Instead, these are understood to be a part of dharma to treat creation with respect. Sikhism teaches that the entire universe is the manifestation of divine energy. It affirms that all phenomena, objects, and individuals are expressions of the divine. Also, It envisions the Earth as a great mother. Contemporary eminent Sikhs (Bhagat Puran Singh and Sant Seechewal) have used these teachings to ameliorate the environment, women, and indigenous peoples' wrongness.

### 13. Sarbat da Bhala - A Prayer for Universal Well-being

'Sarbat da bhala' is a Punjabi term that means "may everyone be blessed" or "may good come to all." This term forms an integral part of the Sikh prayer (ardas). This concept is central to Sikhism and forms an essential part of Sikh philosophy. It establishes new precedence set by Sikh Gurus, encouraging Sikhs to ask for the "wellbeing of everyone in the world." All Sikhs narrate this prayer at least twice a day. As a culminating couplet of their daily Ardas, the Sikhs recite the following;

ਨਾਨਕ ਨਾਮ ਚੜ੍ਹਦੀ ਕਲਾ, ਤੇਰੇ ਭਾਣੇ ਸਰਬਤ ਦਾ ਭਲਾ

Says Nanak: May with Lord's blessing all be in good spirit! May all prosper and remain in peace!

In our efforts to pursue the well-cherished ideals of equality, justice, liberty, and fraternity, Sikhism prompts us not to be afraid of anyone and never frighten anybody.

ਭੈ ਕਾਹੂ ਕਉ ਦੇਤ ਨਹਿਨਹਿ ਭੈ ਮਾਨਤ ਆਨ ॥ ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਸੁਨਿ ਰੇ ਮਨਾ ਗਿਆਨੀ ਤਾਹਿ ਬਖਾਨਿ ॥

(ਸਲੋਕ ਮ. 9, ਸਗਗਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 1427)

One who does not frighten anyone, and who is not afraid of anyone else - says Nanak, listen, mind: call him spiritually wise. (Salok, Ninth Mehl, SGGS, p 1427)

Sikhism encourages us to follow the concept of fraternity, assuring the dignity of the individuals and the unity of the nations.

ਸਭੇ ਸਾਝੀਵਾਲ ਸਦਾਇਨਿ ਤੂੰ ਕਿਸੈ ਨ ਦਿਸਹਿ ਬਾਹਰਾ ਜੀਉ ॥ (ਮ. 5, ਸਗਗਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 97)

Let all share in Lord's Grace; Let none be without it. (Fifth Mehl, SGGS, p 97)

Gurbani proclaims the idea of a just and peaceful world. As we know, the concept of 'Just world' is rooted in the principles of democracy: equality, freedom, and fraternity. A just world is a corruption-free world where human rights are fully respected. Cooperation and not competition will be the basis for the just world dynamics that will also have the legal framework to enable social entrepreneurs to strive to bring the above directive principles into reality [24].

ਹੁਣਿ ਹੁਕਮੁ ਹੋਆ ਮਿਹਰਵਾਣ ਦਾ ॥ ਪੈ ਕੇਇ ਨ ਕਿਸੈ ਰਵਾਣਦਾ ॥ ਸਭ ਸੁਖਾਲੀ ਵੁਠੀਆ ਇਹੁ ਹੋਆ ਹਲੇਮੀ ਰਾਜੁ  
ਜੀਉ ॥ (ਮ. 5, ਸਗਗਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 74)

Now, the Merciful Lord has issued His Command. Let no one chase after and attack anyone else. Let all abide in peace, under this Benevolent Rule. (Fifth Mehl, SGGS, p 74)

Thus Sikhs desire and pray for the (i) Well being of all of humanity, (ii) Prosperity for everyone and (iii) Global Peace for the entire planet.

### **Sikhs in Action**

Sikhs, as an international and responsible community, have undertaken several initiatives to be environment friendly collectively, as families and as individuals.

Bhagat Puran Singh, an ardent environmental activist of Punjab, was instrumental in spreading awareness about various environmental issues and their causes in Punjab and its surrounding areas. Many pamphlets, printed on recycled paper containing useful environmental info, were freely distributed by him. He encouraged numerous tree plantation drives and organized several awareness programs on diverse social and ecological issues. He authored and published several books on the environment for free distribution through his Pingalwara Society.

Sant Balbir Singh Seechewal is another renowned eco-activist of Punjab, is spearheading an anti-water pollution campaign. With his consistent efforts, he has been instrumental in resurrecting a 110-miles long Kali Bein rivulet. With the inspiration of *Gurbani* and a self-help philosophy, he lays stress on service to humanity through water conservation.

Baba Sewa Singh, a Sikh environmentalist, based in Khadoor Sahib, has been instrumental in the plantation and nurturing of over 100,000 trees in the last ten years.

Although love and respect for Nature and the environment are common to almost all religions, the naming of sacred shrines after trees is unique to the Sikh religion. There are at least 58 holy Sikh shrines are named after 19 species of trees, e.g. Gurudwara Nim Sahib, Patiala; Gurudwara Ber Sahib, Sialkot; Gurudwara Amb Sahib, Mohali; Gurudwara Ritha Sahib; Gurudwara Tahli Sahib, Gurudwara Garna Sahib, Gurudwara Ber Sahib, Sultanpur Lodhi; Gurudwara Imli Sahib, Gurudwara Lahura Sahib, Ghavindi, Lahore. To scientifically preserve and propagate sacred trees and herbs which have social, religious and cultural significance, the 'Chandigarh Nature and Health Society,' a non-profit-organization, has established the 'Museum of Trees,' in Chandigarh. The museum is established with support from the Indian Ministry of Culture and India's Botanical Survey. The 'Museum of Trees' is inspired by the pioneering work of D. S. Jaspal in his book 'Tryst with Trees - Punjab's Sacred Heritage'. The 'Museum of Trees' is a storytelling Museum that tells the story - the myths, customs, traditions, and historical events - behind every tree planted outdoors or exhibited indoors.

Sikh Council on Religion and Education (SCORE), Washington D.C., founded in 1998, SCORE is dedicated to upholding religious freedom, civil rights, human dignity, justice, and nature preservation. Inspired by the Sikh values, SCORE pursues harmony and mutual respect among different religious communities and people through interfaith dialogue and joint work in an increasingly diverse society.

Another international Sikh organization providing a notable contribution to environmental conservation activities is EcoSikh. It was launched in 2009 in response to a call by the United Nations to world religions to save Earth's environment. Since then, EcoSikh has facilitated many Punjab projects and the world over. It also launched Sikh Environment Day (March 14). Over 2,000 Sikh gurdwaras, educational institutions, schools and colleges have joined this movement till now. EcoSikh has also started initiatives for the city of Amritsar and Nanded in India.

S.G.P.C., Amritsar and D.G.P.C., Delhi, through their numerous educational institutions, are also playing a laudable role in tree plantation and encouraging public awareness of environmental issues and their control measures.

## **Conclusion**

We as human beings need to derive sustenance from the Earth, not to deplete, exhaust, pollute, burn or destroy it. Sikhism proclaims that awareness of that sacred relationship between humans and the environment is necessary for our planet's health and survival. In Sikh beliefs, a concern for the environment is part of an integrated approach to life and Nature. As all creation has the same origin and end, humans must have consciousness of their place in creation and their relationship with the rest of creation. Humans should conduct themselves through life with love, compassion and justice. Becoming one and being in harmony with God implies that humans endeavour to live in harmony with all of God's creations. Life, for its very existence and nurturing, depends upon a bounteous nature.

Sikhism urges a holistic approach towards the care of Nature combined with a genuine sense of universal responsibility based on love and compassion. The following recommendations of Sikhism have the potential to act as a beacon for conserving the pristine environment of our planet.

- Reverence for Earth, Nature and the universe.
- Active respect and care for the rights of all humans and other living beings.
- Celebration of our lives on this beautiful Earth as a joy and a privilege.
- Respect for reason, evidence and the scientific method as our best ways of understanding Earth, Nature and the universe.
- Taking appropriate measures to tackle current environmental situations, locally and globally, on a cooperative basis compassionately and judiciously.

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