

EARTH DAY

ਮਾਤਾ ਧਰਤਿ ਮਹਤੁ EARTH, THE GREAT MOTHER



Prof Devinder Singh Chahal, PhD
Institute for Understanding Sikhism
Laval, Quebec, Canada H7W 5L9
Email: Sikhism@iuscanada.com

Concept of **Earth Day** was first proposed by John McConnell in 1969 at a UNESCO Conference in San Francisco. He proposed March 21, 1970, the first day of spring in the Northern Hemisphere, which was proclaimed by Secretary General U Thant at the United Nations for its celebration.[8] However, US Senator, Gaylord Nelson proposed April 22, 1970. Later on it was designated as **International Mother Earth Day** in 2009 by a consensus resolution adopted by the United Nations [7].

However, the importance of air, water and the Earth was realized by Guru Nanak (1469-1539) exactly 500 years before John McConnell could think of it during 1969. Let us have a look into Guru Nanak vision about the importance of environment (air, water and the Earth) during 15th century:

ਪਉਣੁ¹ ਗੁਰੂ² ਪਾਣੀ³ ਪਿਤਾ⁴ ਜਾਤਾ⁵ ॥

Pa=un gurū pānī piṭā jāṭā.

ਉਦਰ⁶ ਸੰਜੋਗੀ⁶ ਧਰਤੀ⁷ ਮਾਤਾ⁸ ॥

Uḍar sanjogī ḍhartī māṭā.

Guru Nanak is advising the humanity:

Please consider⁵ the importance of air¹ as the Guru²; water³ as the father⁴;

And the Earth⁷ as the womb⁶ of mother⁸, where everything needed by the humanity is produced with collective⁶ actions of air, water and Earth.

ਰੈਣਿ⁹ ਦਿਨਸੁ¹⁰ ਦੁਇ¹¹ ਦਾਈ¹² ਦਾਇਆ¹³

ਜਗੁ¹⁴ ਖੇਲੈ¹⁵ ਖੇਲਾਈ¹⁶ ਚੇ ॥੧੦॥

Rain dīnas ḍu=e ḍū=ī ḍū=ī=ā jag khelai khelā=ī he. ||10||

ਅਗਰਾਸ, ਮ: 1, ਪੰਨਾ 1021.

Night⁹ and day¹⁰ both¹¹ are as female¹² and male¹³ nurses and the whole humanity¹⁴ plays^{15,16} in their laps. 10

AGGS, M 1, p 1021. [1]

Guru Nanak has further expanded the above philosophy about the importance of environment as a Sloka at the end of *JAP – The Essence of Nanakian Philosophy* at page 8 of the Aad Guru Granth Sahib and it is repeated again at page 146 but under M 2 instead of M 1 [2]:

ਪਵਣੁ¹ ਗੁਰੂ² ਪਾਣੀ³ ਪਿਤਾ⁴ ਮਾਤਾ⁵ ਧਰਤਿ⁶ ਮਹਤੁ⁷ ॥

ਦਿਵਸੁ⁸ ਰਾਤਿ⁹ ਦੁਇ¹⁰ ਦਾਈ¹¹ ਦਾਇਆ¹² ਖੇਲੈ¹³ ਸਗਲ¹⁴

ਜਗਤੁ¹⁵ ॥

Pavan gurū pānī piṭā māṭā ḍharat mahat.

Divas rāṭ ḍu=e ḍū=ī ḍū=ī=ā khelai sagal jagat.

Air¹ is like a Guru², water³ like a father⁴ and the Earth⁶ like the great⁷ mother⁵ (which provides all types of resources and food).

Both¹⁰ day⁸ and night⁹ are like female-nurse¹¹ and male nurse¹² and the whole¹⁴ humanity¹⁵ plays¹³ in their laps.

During Guru Nanak's time people were not polluting the air, water and the Earth as we are doing now, however, he was cautious to warn the humanity that they have to pay according to their activities (Good or bad deeds) so it is their duty to practice righteousness while living on the Great Mother Earth –
ਮਾਤਾ ਧਰਤਿ ਮਹਤੁ.

ਚੰਗਿਆਈਆ¹⁶ ਬੁਰਿਆਈਆ¹⁷ ਵਾਚੇ¹⁸ ਧਰਮੁ*¹⁹

ਹਦੂਰਿ²⁰ ॥ ਕਰਮੀ²¹ ਆਪੇ ਆਪਣੀ²² ਕੇ ਨੇੜੇ²³ ਕੇ ਦੂਰਿ²⁴ ॥

Chang¹⁶ buri¹⁷ vāchāi dharam hadūr.

Karmī āpo āpnī ke neṛai ke dūr.

Virtues¹⁶ (good deeds) and vices¹⁷ (bad deeds) of everybody are evaluated¹⁸ naturally under²⁰ the laws of righteousness¹⁹.

Therefore, everybody will be affected by their²² deeds²¹ whether they consider themselves close to God (religious mentors)²³ or away from God (atheists)²⁴.

ਧਰਮੁ*: Many theologians interpret ਧਰਮੁ* as the Dharam Raj who keeps an account of good and bad deeds of every person according to ancient mythology. But here ਧਰਮੁ has been interpreted as laws of righteousness – strictly observing the laws of morality’.

ਜਿਨੀ ਨਾਮੁ**²⁵ ਧਿਆਇਆ²⁶ ਗਏ²⁷ ਮਸਕਤਿ²⁸ ਘਾਲਿ²⁹ ॥

ਨਾਨਕ ਤੇ ਮੁਖ³⁰ ਉਜਲੇ³¹ ਕੇਤੀ³² ਛੁਟੀ³³ ਨਾਲਿ ॥੧॥

Jinī nām dhī²⁵ ga²⁶e maskat ghāl.

Nānak te mukh ujle ketī chhutī nāl. ||1||

ਅਗਸਤ, ਮ: 1, ਪੰਨਾ 8; ਅਗਸਤ, ਮ: 2, ਪੰਨਾ 146.

Nanak says:

The faces³⁰ of those, who have comprehended²⁶ Laws of Nature/Universe²⁵ and had²⁷ worked²⁹ hard²⁸ accordingly, will glow³¹ with happiness and attain liberation from their troubles. And many others³² can also be liberated³³ with the association of such persons.

AGGS, M 1, p 8; AGGS, M 2, p 146.

Note: ** ਨਾਮੁ : It has been interpreted as ‘Laws of Nature/Universe’ since ਨਾਮੁ (*Naam*) has been shown as ਹੁਕਮੁ (*Hukm* – meanings Laws of Nature/ Universe) by Guru Nanak:

ਏਕੇ¹ ਨਾਮੁ² ਹੁਕਮੁ³ ਹੈ ਨਾਨਕ ਸਤਿ ਗੁਰਿ⁴ ਦੀਆ ਬੁਝਾਇ⁵ ਜੀਉ ॥੫॥

Éko nām hukam hai Nānak satgur gū⁴ā bujhā⁵e jīo.

||5||

That only¹ Naam² has been deciphered⁵ as is the Laws of Nature/Universe³ by the true Guru⁴.

AGGS, M 1, p 72.

And

According to Guru Arjan ਨਾਮੁ (*Naam*) also means ‘Laws of Nature/Universe’:

ਨਾਮ¹ ਕੇ ਧਾਰੇ² ਸਗਲੇ³ ਜੰਤ⁴ ॥

Nām ke dhāre sagle jant.

All¹ living beings⁴ are under² the Laws of Nature¹.

ਨਾਮ¹ ਕੇ ਧਾਰੇ² ਖੰਡ³ ਬ੍ਰਹਮੰਡ⁴ ॥

Nām ke dhāre khand barahmand.

All the galaxies⁴ and stars³ and planets³ are under² the Laws of Nature¹.

AGGS, M 5, p 284.

Here Guru Nanak explains that the Earth is the only Planet in our Solar System where all the natural resources, i.e. air, water and the necessary phenomena - day, night, and seasons; and the suitable environment for all the living beings are found. Guru Nanak advises to practice righteousness for peaceful life and to save this Earth (*Mata Dharat Mahat*) for coming generation of the humanity. The Earth (*Mata Dharat Mahat*) as a place to practice righteousness has also been explained by Guru Nanak in the Stanza 34 of JAP as follows:

ਰਾਤੀ ਰੁਤੀ ਥਿਤੀ ਵਾਰ ॥

ਪਵਣ ਪਾਣੀ ਅਗਨੀ ਪਾਤਾਲ ॥

ਤਿਸੁ ਵਿਚਿ ਧਰਤੀ ਥਾਪਿ ਰਖੀ ਧਰਮ ਸਾਲ ॥

ਅਗਸਤ, ਜਪੁ 34, ਪੰਨਾ 7.

Rāṭī ruṭī thitī vār.

Pavan pānī agnī pātāl.

Fis vich dhartī thāpī rakhī dharam sāl.

The Earth having energy in its center is a place, among air and water around it with day, night and different season, for the humanity to practice righteousness.

AGGS, JAP 34, p 7.

The Sikhs might have recited the above Sabds for hundreds of millions of times during performance of *Akhaḍ Paaths* of the Aad Guru Granth Sahib and also while reciting JAP Bani all over the world but never realized the importance of air, water and the Earth to celebrate EARTH DAY. However, it was recognized by John McConnell in 1969 exactly after 500 years of Guru Nanak. John McConnell (1915-2012) is Peace Activist with passion for peace, religion and science.[3] Ironically the Sikh still could not recognize this realization of Guru Nanak until 2009 for another 40 years when the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC) initiated a program to help the world’s religious traditions to create long-term plans to improve their relationship with the environment.[6]

Under that program the Sikh started their own **EcoSikh** project for celebration of **Sikh Environment Day** not on March 21 or April 22 but on March 14 the date when Guru Har Rai, the seventh Guru, succeeded to the House of Nanak.[6] But Encyclopaedia of Sikhism [4] and Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar say it is March 3, 1644.[5] This credit was given to Guru Har Rai for his passion of preserving flowers since a few flowers were broken from a bush with his long robe which made him very sad. I wonder why the Sikh, responsible for creating Sikh Environment Day, ignored to give this credit to Guru Nanak for his

passion for peace, religion and science, the founder of Sikhi, who made the humanity aware of the fact that air is the Guru, water is the father and the Earth is their Great Mother who provides everything needed by the humanity. And it is the duty of the humanity to practice righteousness and protect them from pollution.

Now the question is:

Should the Sikh celebrate EARTH DAY as a great event with humanity of the world on April 22nd or as Sikh Environment Day on March 14th?

I may add here that April 22 is the most suitable date for the Sikhs because during the month of Vaisakh (April):

- Birthday of Guru Nanak falls on April 15.
- The Sikhs celebrate Vaisakhi on April 13/14.
- Moreover, Vaisakh is almost peak of the Spring Season – The cheerful season according to Guru Nanak:

ਨਾਨਕ ਵੈਸਾਖੀ¹ ਪ੍ਰਭੂ² ਪਾਵੈ³ ਸੁਰਤਿ⁴ ਸਬਦਿ⁵ ਮਨੁ⁶ ਮਾਨਾ⁷ ॥੬॥

Nānak vaisākhīṅ parabhṅ pāvai suratṅ sabaḍ man mānā. ||6||

AGGS, M 1, p 1108.

Guru Nanak says use⁷ your mind⁶ to study Sabaḍ⁵ attentively⁴ to understand³ God² during the month of Vaisakh - The peak of Spring Season when everything is cheerful.

(Note: The time of blooming of shrubs and trees is variable at different places. For example, in Quebec, Canada the plants are still in dormant stage while in Punjab the farmers have harvested their crops, and flowers of shrubs and trees are gone and now bearing fruits.)

References

1. AGGS (ਅਗਗਸ) = Aad Guru Granth Sahib. 1983 (reprint). Publishers: Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar. M (ਮ) = Mahla, i.e., succession number of the Sikh Gurus to the House of Nanak, M is replaced with the name of Bhagat/ Bhatt for their Bani, p (ਪੰਨਾ) = Page of the AGGS).
2. Chahal, D. S. 2003. Jap: The Essence of Nanakian Philosophy. Institute for Understanding Sikhism, 4418 Martin-Plouffe, Laval, Quebec, H7W 5L9, and Singh Brothers, S.C.O. 223-24 City Centre, Amritsar – 143 006.
3. McConnell (Peace Activist) [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_McConnell_\(peace_activist\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_McConnell_(peace_activist))
4. Singh, Harbans, 1996. Entry: Har Rai, Guru. In: Encyclopaedia of Sikhism. Punjabi University, Patiala.
5. <http://www.sgpc.net/gurus/guruharrai.asp>
6. <http://www.ecosikh.org/about/>
7. "General Assembly Proclaims 22 April 'International Mother Earth Day' Adopting By Consensus Bolivia-Led Resolution". United Nations. 2009-04-22. Retrieved 2011-04-22.
8. https://wipfandstock.com/store/Earth_Day_Vision_for_Peace_Justice_and_Earth_Care_My_Life_and_Thought_at_Age_96