

INTERNATIONAL MOTHER EARTH DAY* A Dedication to Guru Nanak on his 550th Birthday

ARTICLE

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

INTRODUCTION

The concept of **Earth Day** was first proposed by John McConnell in 1969 at a UNESCO Conference in San Francisco. His proposal of March 21, 1970, the first day of spring in the Northern Hemisphere, was proclaimed by Secretary General U Thant at the United Nations for its celebration. [1] 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. [2]

However, the importance of air as Guru, water as father and the **Earth as mother** 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's vision about the importance of environment (air, water and the Earth) during the 15th century:

ਪਉਣੁ¹ ਗੁਰੂ² ਪਾਣੀ³ ਪਿਤਾ⁴ ਜਾਤਾ⁵ ॥

Pa-uṅ gurū pāṇī piṭ jāṭā.

ਉਦਰ⁶ ਸੰਜੋਗੀ⁶ ਧਰਤੀ⁷ ਮਾਤਾ⁸ ॥

Uḍar sanjogī ḍhartī māṭā.

Guru Nanak is advising 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 ਹੇ ॥੧੦॥

Rainḍ dīnas dū-e ḍāiḍ dāiḍā jag kḥelai kḥelāi he. ||10||

ਅਗਗਸ, ਮ: 1, ਪੰਨਾ 1021.

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

AGGS, M 1, p 1021. [3]

Guru Nanak added this above philosophy as the concluding

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses that 'Earth Day' was proposed by John McConnell in 1969 to save the Earth and environment after exactly 500 years of Guru Nanak. Since 2009, Earth Day has been celebrated as 'International Mother Earth Day' on April 22. It also discusses Guru Nanak's (1469-1539) contributions about the importance of air, water and Mother Earth for sustaining life on this Earth.



Figure 1. The Earth (Credit: Freeiconspng.com)

sloka of JAP – *The Essence of Nanakian Philosophy* on page 8 of the Aad Guru Granth Sahib (AGGS) and it is repeated again on page 146 but under M 2 instead of M 1. Controversy about the authorship of this sloka has been settled by Chahal since it is based upon the above stanza of Guru Nanak [4]:

ਪਵਣੁ¹ ਗੁਰੂ² ਪਾਣੀ³ ਪਿਤਾ⁴ ਮਾਤਾ⁵ ਧਰਤਿ⁶ ਮਹਤੁ⁷ ॥

ਦਿਵਸੁ⁸ ਰਾਤਿ⁹ ਦੁਇ¹⁰ ਦਾਈ¹¹ ਦਾਇਆ¹² ਖੇਲੈ¹³ ਸਗਲ¹⁴ ਜਗਤੁ¹⁵ ॥

Pavan gurū pāṇī piṭā māṭā ḍharaṭ mahat.

Divas rāṭ dū-e ḍāiḍ dāiḍā kḥelai 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 of 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 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 this Earth: The Great Mother.

(ਮਾਤਾ ਧਰਤਿ ਮਹਤੁ – Mata Dharat

Mahat):

ਚੰਗਿਆਈਆ¹⁶ ਬੁਰਿਆਈਆ¹⁷ ਵਾਰੈ¹⁸ ਧਰਮੁ¹⁹

ਰਦੂਰਿ²⁰ ॥

ਕਰਮੀ²¹ ਆਪੋ ਆਪਣੀ²² ਕੇ ਨੇੜੈ²³ ਕੇ ਦੂਰਿ²⁴ ॥

Chang¹⁶ buri¹⁷ vāchhai dḥaram 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.

ਜਿਨੀ ਨਾਮੁ²⁵ ਧਿਆਇਆ²⁶

ਗਏ²⁷ ਮਸਕਤਿ²⁸ ਘਾਲਿ²⁹ ॥

ਨਾਨਕ ਤੇ ਮੁਖ³⁰ ਉਜਲੇ³¹ ਕ

ੇਤੀ³² ਛੁਟੀ³³ ਨਾਲਿ ॥੧॥

Jinī nām dḥi²⁵ āiā

ga²⁶ e maskat ghāl.

Nānak te mukh ujle

ketī chḥutī nāl. ||1||

ਅਗਗਸ, ਮ: 1, ਪੰਨਾ 8; ਅਗਗਸ, ਮ: 2,

ਪੰਨਾ 146.

Nanak says:

The faces³⁰ of those, who have comprehended²⁶ the 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: ਧਰਮੁ*: Many theologians interpret

ਧਰਮੁ* as the Dharam Raj who keeps an account of the good and bad deeds of every person according to ancient mythology. But here ਧਰਮੁ has been

interpreted as the laws of righteousness – strictly observing the laws of morality'

** ਨਾਮੁ : It has been interpreted as

'Laws of Nature/Universe' since ਨਾਮੁ

(Naam) has also been shown as ਹੁਕਮੁ

(Hukm – meanings Laws of Nature/ Universe) by Guru Nanak as follows:

ਏਕੈ¹ ਨਾਮੁ² ਹੁਕਮੁ³ ਹੈ ਨਾਨਕ ਸਤਿ

ਗੁਰਿ⁴ ਦੀਆ ਬੁਝਾਇ⁵ ਜੀਉ ॥੫॥

Ēko nām hukam hai Nānak satgur dī⁴ ā bujhā⁵ e jī⁵ o. ||5||

ਅਗਗਸ, ਮ: 1, ਪੰਨਾ 72.

That the One¹, Naam², has been deciphered⁵ as is the Laws of Nature/ Universe³ by the true Guru⁴.

AGGS, M 1, p 72.

And

Guru Arjun explains the meanings of ਨਾਮੁ (Naam) as 'Laws of Nature/ Universe':

ਨਾਮ¹ ਕੇ ਧਾਰੇ² ਸਗਲੇ³ ਜੰਤ⁴ ॥

Nām ke dḥāre sagle janṭ.

All³ living beings⁴ are under² the Laws of Nature¹.

ਨਾਮ¹ ਕੇ ਧਾਰੇ² ਖੰਡ³ ਬ੍ਰਹਮੰਡ⁴ ॥

Nām ke dḥāre khḥand barahmand.

ਅਗਗਸ, ਮ: 1, ਪੰਨਾ 284.

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

AGGS, M 5, p 284.

Guru Nanak continues to write about the importance of air, water, and the Earth, including the Sun and the Moon, for providing energy:

ਪਾਣੀ¹ ਪ੍ਰਾਣ² ਪਵਣਿ³ ਬੰਧਿ⁴ ਰਾਖੇ ਚੰਦੁ⁵ ਸੂਰਜੁ⁶

ਮੁਖਿ⁷ ਦੀਏ⁸ ॥

Pānī parāṇ pavan bandh rākhe chand sūraj mukh dī⁷ e.

ਮਰਣ⁹ ਜੀਵਣ¹⁰ ਕਉ ਧਰਤੀ¹¹ ਦੀਨੀ¹² ਏਤੇ

ਗੁਣ¹³ ਵਿਸਰੇ¹⁴ ॥੨॥

Maraṇ jīvaṇ ka⁹ o dḥartī dīnī eṭe gun visre. ||2||

ਅਗਗਸ, ਮ 1, ਪੰਨਾ 877.

One's life² is dependent⁴ upon water¹ and air³; and the Sun⁶ and Moon⁵ are the major⁷ sources of energy (light)⁸ also provided.

One should not forget¹⁴ the bestowing¹³ of provision¹² of (Mother) Earth¹¹ for sustaining life^{9,10} (for living and dying).

AGGS, M 1, p 877.

And

ਘਰਿ¹ ਘਰਿ¹ ਲਸਕਰੁ² ਪਾਵਰੁ³ ਤੇਰਾ ਧਰਮੁ⁴ ਕਰੇ

ਸਿਕਦਾਰੀ⁵ ॥

Gḥar gḥar laskar pāvak ṭerā dḥaram kare sikdārī.

Every living being^{1, 2} has energy³, and Your³ (Eternal Entity - God) Laws of Nature/Universe⁴ control⁵ every action in these living beings

ਧਰਤੀ⁶ ਦੇਗ⁷ ਮਿਲੈ⁸ ਇਕ⁹ ਵੇਰਾ ਭਾਗੁ¹⁰ ਤੇਰਾ¹¹

ਭੰਡਾਰੀ¹² ॥੨॥

Dḥartī deg milai ik verā bhāg ṭerā bḥandārī. ||2||

ਅਗਗਸ, ਮ: 1, ਪੰਨਾ 1190.

(The Eternal Entity – God) has provided⁸ everything⁷ (needed by the living beings) on the Earth⁶ (Mother) but once⁹ and forever this¹¹ provision¹² is for their utilization¹⁰.

Main Theme: For nourishment of every being, the Earth is bestowed as the great cooking pot where everything is put in but once and forever for their utilization.

AGGS, M 1, p 1190.

Finally, 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 a suitable environment for sustaining life are found. Guru Nanak advises to practice righteousness for a peaceful life and to save this Earth (Mata Dharat Mahat) and its environment for future generations of 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 ॥

ਅਗਗਸ, ਜਪੁ 34, ਪੰਨਾ 7.

Rātī rutī thiṭī vār.

Pavan pānī agnī pātāl.

Fis vich dḥartī thāp rakhī dḥaram sāl.

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

AGGS, JAP 34, p 7.

Sikhs might have recited the above Sabds millions of times during the performance of *Akhd Paths* (continuous reciting without any break) of the Aad Guru Granth Sahib (AGGS) and also while reciting JAP bani all over the world, but they never realized the importance of air, water, and the Earth to celebrate MOTHER EARTH DAY. However, it was recognized by John McConnell in 1969 after exactly 500 years of Guru Nanak. John McConnell (1915-2012) was a Peace Activist with passion for peace, religion, and science. [1, 5] Ironically, Sikhs 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 create long-term plans to improve their relationship with the environment.

Under that program, Sikhs started their own **EcoSikh** project to celebrate **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 (Fig. 2). [6] But the Encyclopedia of Sikhism [7] and Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar says it is March 3, 1644. [8] 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. Guru Nanak made 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 humanity. Evidently, it becomes the duty of humanity to practice righteousness and protect them (air, water and Mother Earth) from pollution.

The Sikhs are requested to celebrate the **INTERNATION MOTHER EARTH DAY** as a

great event with the rest of humanity on April 22 as well.

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

The birthday of Guru Nanak falls on April 15.

Sikhs celebrate Vaisakhi on April 13/14.

Vaisakh is almost the peak of the spring season – the cheerful season according to Guru Nanak:

SUMMARY

- John McConnell suggested celebrating Earth Day in 1969, exactly 500 years after Guru Nanak.
- 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.
- Guru Nanak has discussed the importance of air as the Guru, water as the Father, and the Earth as the Mother for sustaining life in details in his bani.



Fig.2. Symbol of EcoSikh.

ਨਾਨਕ ਵੈਸਾਖੀ¹ ਪ੍ਰਭੁ² ਪਾਣੀ³ ਸੁਰਤਿ⁴ ਸਬਦਿ⁵
ਮਨੁ⁶ ਮਾਨ⁷ ॥੬॥

Nānak vaisākhiṅ parabḥ pāvai surat
sabad man mānā. ||6||

ਅਗਸਤ, ਮ: 1, ਪੰਨਾ 1108.

Guru Nanak says use⁷ your mind⁶ to study Sabd⁵ (enlightening philosophy) attentively⁴ to understand³ the Eternal Entity (God)² during the month of Vaisakh - the peak of Spring Season when everything is cheerful.

AGGS, M 1, p 1108.

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

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am thankful to Miss Komal Sidhu, M.A., Speech-Language Pathologist, CA, USA, for editing the manuscript.

*Revised and modified from the previously published versions: Chahal, DS. 2013. 'Earth', *The Great Mother*. The Sikh Review, Calcutta 61:25-8

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Printed on: 15-06-2018.