

# ***Creation and Sikh Philosophy<sup>1</sup>***

## ***Introduction***

Some of the most fundamental questions from time immemorial regarding existence and our purpose in life relate to the mystery of creation. How did the universe come into being? What was there before the universe? Why did it come into being? How large is it? What is our place and role in it?

Almost all major theological and philosophical traditions of the world have their views and perspectives regarding answers to some of these questions. Modern science too has made many discoveries that try to provide some of the answers.

This article summarizes the Sikh philosophical perspective — in particular as stated by Satguru Nanak Dev Ji and SatGuru Arjan Dev Ji in Gurbani. The first section deals with the pre-creation phase, and the process of creation; the second summarizes the extent, magnitude, and functioning of the universe; and third, Waheguru Ji's presence in the universe, our place in it and the implications for our conduct. A last section provides concluding remarks.

## **I. The Pre-Creation Phase and Creation**

### ***A. Before the Universe***

SatGuru Nanak Dev Ji's Gurbani concerning the mystery of what existed before our universe came into being – the **pre-creation phase** - offers a remarkable perspective. Written well over five centuries ago, His Shabads provide a detailed view of that phase which preceded physical reality, space and time itself—the “Void” that existed before the universe came into being. He describes a state where *nothing physical* existed—no time, no galaxies, no stars, no earth, no sky, no sun or moon. So what existed? Only Waheguru Ji, Ik Onkar, and His Hukam, the Divine Command<sup>2</sup>:

---

<sup>1</sup> Manmohan Singh Kumar; I am very grateful to Prabhjote Singh Kumar, Kiran Kaur Kumar, Nihal Singh and Prabhkirat Singh Walha for their invaluable comments and suggestions..

<sup>2</sup> In the very first line of Japuji Sahib ji, the first composition of SatGuru Nanak Dev Ji in Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji, the characteristics of Waheguru Ji are summarized beginning with Ik Onkar, Satnam, KartaPurakh: There is one eternal, universal Divine Reality, with Naam (existence) that is always true (permanent) and one who is the Creator.

"*Arbad Narbad Dhundukara, Dharan Na Gagana Hukam Aparā.*" (Guru Nanak Dev Ji in Raag Maaroo, 1035)<sup>3</sup>.

For countless periods, there was utter "darkness"; neither earth nor sky existed—only the infinite Divine Hukam prevailed." "*Arbad narbad*" – refers to an immeasurable period before time existed and before creation; eons that preceded time itself; "*dhundukara*" – describes a state of complete and utter "darkness", or formlessness. "*Dharan na gagana*" – No earth, sky, or any structures. "Hukam Aparā" – Only Hukam (Divine Order) existed. Only Waheguru Ji Himself—*Ad Sach*—existed before the beginning of time and the infinite command of His Hukam.

The Shabad then goes on to elaborate on this absence of any material object, time, activity or anyone before the universe began. There was no creation or destruction; no sun, moon, earth, day or night: an unimaginable state that had continued for eons.

The concept of *Hukam* is central to Sikh philosophy—it is manifestation of Waheguru Ji; it is beyond human comprehension, but can be interpreted as the eternal force that existed before creation and time itself, exists now and will exist after time itself ceases to exist. It encompasses Divine command (literal meaning) but also the universal force that governs everything. It is manifested at both macro and micro levels—from the vast cosmos to the tiniest subatomic particles; from the farthest galaxies to all aspects of life here on earth.

### *B. Creation of Universe*

From this "*Dhundukara*" Waheguru Ji created the universe by Hukam that led to the creation of universal physical laws, and the evolution and operation of this newly created universe:

"*Kita Pasao, Ecko Kawao  
Tis To Hoi Lakh Dreao*" (Guru Nanak Dev Ji in Japji Sahib, 3)

---

<sup>3</sup> The number in parentheses indicates the Ang (page number) in Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji.

He created the vast expanse of the universe with One Word” (ie. His Hukam); and from Him hundreds of thousands of rivers (ie creation) flowed.

*"Ja Tis Bhana Ta Jagat Upaya."* (Guru Nanak Dev Ji in Raag Maaroo, 1036)

When He so willed ---He created the universe.

The above underlines the notion that creation was not accidental but unfolded according to Divine will. As discussed in Section III below, this has important implications for our place in the universe and for our conduct.

*"Hukmi Hovan Aakar Hukam Na Kahya Jai"* (Guru Nanak Dev Ji, Japji Sahib, 3)

By Hukam, all forms (all creation) came into being, but Hukam itself cannot be stated—it is beyond description.

SatGuru Ji also states the specific processes by which the universe and all elements within it—galaxies, stars, planets, earth itself, and forms, shapes and color came into being:

*"Sache Te Pavna Bhya Pavne Te Jal Hoi*

*Jal Te Tirbhavan Sajya Jal Thal Maheal Soi"* (Guru Nanak Dev Ji Raag Marroo, 1036)

From Waheguru Ji came the material elements of the universe—starting with the creation of gaseous material, then liquids, and then solids—the universe itself. And He Himself permeated the universe—His “Jyot” manifested in “ghat ghat” each and every aspect of the creation.

A key aspect relates to the core concept in Sikh philosophy of the twin aspects of Waheguru Ji --“*Nirguna*”—without any form, attributes or characteristics, and “*Sarguna*”—with all characteristics. The process of creation entailed Waheguru Ji’s decision to come from the Nirguna state to the Sarguna state.

*"Khand Brahmand Patal Aranbhe Guptuh Pargaty Aeda".* (Op. Cit.)

The galaxies, stars, planets came into being, as He manifested Himself.

The above summary indicates how SatGuru Nanak’s unique perspectives on creation differ from existing philosophical and theological traditions, including in terms of the description of the pre-creation phase, the role of Hukam, the specific

process of creation and the permeation and presence of the ‘Jyot’ throughout the entire universe.

How do these perspectives compare with science? Science cannot be the criterion by which to judge philosophy, since if no other reason than that its conclusions deal with observable or measurable phenomenon. Moreover despite huge progress, there remain vast amounts of knowledge still to be discovered. Philosophy deals with material and non-material and reflects fundamental premises. Nonetheless, it is striking how Guru Nanak’s revelatory perspectives, written over five centuries ago, are congruent with science, or often augment it.

The creation process as described by Guru Ji is consistent with the current Big Bang theory: according to the latter, around thirteen billion years ago, there was “singularity” – a point of infinite density and energy where the known laws of physics break down. Darkness and unmanifest potential – similar to “*Dhundukara*”. There was no time, no space – the universe did not yet exist. In addition to the scientific view, however, SatGuru Nanak describes more specifically what did exist in that pre-creation state: Waheguru Ji. And then in the very first infinitesimally small moment of time gaseous materials appeared, which became liquified and then solidified. He also indicates *why* that happened. Even more fundamentally science of course does not talk about the notion of “Jyot”, permeating in all that was created.

## **Section 2: Timing, Extent and Evolution**

### *A. Mystery of Creation’s Timing*

SatGuru Nanak raises a profound question—can the moment of creation truly be known?

*"Kawan so wela wakht kawan kawan thit kawan var.;Kavan se rutī mahao kavan jit hoaa aakaar." Vale Na paya Pundti Jo hove lekh Puran; Wakht Na payo Kadya je likhan lekh puran;Thit var na jogi jane rut maho na koi; Ja Karta sirthi ko saje aape jane soi". (Guru Nanak Dev Ji in Japji Sahib, 3)*

What was that moment, the time, the date, the day? What was that season, and what the month, when the universe was created?" Even the learned—whether

Hindu pandits or Muslim qazis—have not truly known the exact moment of creation. Despite their scriptures and intellectual efforts, the precise origin of the universe lies beyond the reach of human knowledge and religious texts. The timing of creation is known only to Waheguru Ji. These verses also align with modern physics: time and creation cannot be measured in human terms since time itself began with the creation.

## B. Extent of Creation

In Sikh philosophy, the universe is unimaginably vast, beyond human comprehension, containing billions of galaxies, stars, planets.

*"Asankh Nav Asankh Thav, Agam Agam Asankh Lo.  
Asankh kahe sir bhar hoe "* (Guru Nanak Dev Ji in Japji Sahib, 3)

Countless names, countless places; countless beyond countless worlds. Even to say that there are countless structures does not capture the absolute vastness of the creation<sup>4</sup>. *And*

*"Patalaa patal lakh agasa agas.Orak orak bhaal thake veda kehni ik vaat.Sahas  
athaarah kehan katheba asuloo ik dhaat.Lekha hoe ta likhiye lekha hoe  
vinaas.Nanak vadaa aakhiye aape jaanai aap."* (Japji Sahib, op.cit)

There are countless worlds and countless skies. The scriptures say they searched and searched, but could not find the limits. Even the Puranas and sacred texts say there is only one fundamental reality. If there were an account of this, it could be written; but no such account exists. O Nanak, the Creator is great—only He knows His own vastness.

## C. Development and Evolution of Universe

The universe had an origin, is expanding but at some time, over eons, it will contract and will cease to be.

*"Nis Basur Nakheatar binasi rav sasiar benadha*

---

<sup>4</sup> Similarly Kai Kot Khani ar Khand; Kai Kot Akas Brahmand" (Guru Arjan Dev Ji in Raag Gauree (Sukhmani Sahib)276)

Uncountable galaxies, stars and planets.

*“Gir Basudha jal pavan Jaibo Ik Sadh Bachan Atladha” (Guru Arjan Dev Ji in Raag Saarang 1204)*

(Over eons) Night and day (time itself) and stars in the sky will vanish; sun and the moon will be no more; the earth itself, mountains, water and air will all pass away—what will remain is the Word of Waheguru Ji’s own<sup>5</sup>.

But the passing of the universe is not the ultimate end, as nor was its beginning the ultimate beginning. Indeed,

*“Kai Bar Pasreo Pasar; Sada Sada Ik EkAnkar” (Guru Arjan Dev Ji in Raag Gauree (Sukhmani Sahib)276)*

(This is not the only time universe created); He has manifested Himself many times; but always He is absolutely the One, the One universal creator”.

This is again a unique concept of Sikh philosophy and consistent with the notion of multiverse in one set of the latest scientific theories.

### **Section 3: Waheguru Ji’s Presence and Our Lives**

The essence of the above discussion is that creation occurred with Waheguru Ji’s Hukam, is sustained by the Hukam reflected in the laws created by it, and that Waheguru Ji permeates every aspect of it. This whole process is very difficult to understand:

*“Vekhai vigsai kar veechaar, Naanak kathnaa kararaa saar.” (Guru Nanak Dev Ji in Japji Sahib, 8)*

The Creator watches over the creation and rejoices. Nanak says describing this is very hard.<sup>6</sup>

*That is, His “Jyot” is within all:*

---

<sup>5</sup> “Dristman hei sagal benasi ik Sad Bachan Agadha”, all that is or can be seen (material) will pass away; only the word of His own is beyond destruction.

<sup>6</sup> Similarly “Abnasi Prabh Khel Rachya Gurmukh Soghi Ho”; *It is a play instituted by Wahuguru Ji and (only) Gurmukh understands it*

*“Sabh Meh Jyot Jot hei Soi*

*“Tis De Chanan Sabh Meh Chanan Hoi” (Guru Nanak Dev Ji in Sohila 13)*

*Amongst all is the light—Jyot—that is you. His light gives light to all (permeates all).*

It is important to note that this notion has strong implications for the unity of humanity, the complete equality of women and men, and for our interaction with other human beings. Indeed, this provides a fundamental basis for ethical conduct towards others at all times. At the same time, that the Jyot is in each of us underlines the notion that we have to be cognizant of who we are and how we view ourselves (see below), and that we not alone. Waheguru Ji is with each of us everywhere and always.

*“So Prabh Nere Hu to Nere”, ” (Guru Arjan Dev Ji in Raag Dayv Gandhaaree 530)*

Waheguru Ji is the nearest of the near.

That He is always with us is also very uplifting—indeed directly related to the Sikh concept of *“Chardi kala”*—a state of optimism, and positive attitude towards life even in the face of adversity. This is particularly so when taken in conjunction with Waheguru Ji being *“Nirvair”*- without enmity, hostility or enemy.

So with the Hukam came the creation and universal laws that He instituted which led over vast periods to the creation of our own earth<sup>7</sup>. Over time we human beings came on the scene-- He created us, gave us everything; body, mind, consciousness, life itself-- priceless gifts.

This gives rise to two further interrelated implications—the gratitude we owe for our existence, and what behoves us in terms of our responsibility for having been granted this gift.

---

<sup>7</sup> *Jal Thal Maheal rav rahya soi*

*Jeh jeh pekho the hajoor door katho na jai*

## A. Gratitude

The aspects warranting gratitude are so beautifully expressed in the following verses:

*“Pani Pran Pavan Baandh Rakhe Chand Suraj Mukh Deye”*

*“Maran Jeevan Kao Dharti Dini Ete Gun Visre” (Guru Nanak Dev Ji in Raag Raamkalee 877)*

Bringing together air and water (the elements) He infused breath of life into the body, and gave sun and the moon as lamps; to die and to live He gave us the earth itself, but we have forgotten these blessings.

And

*“Jin tun saaj, swar segaaria’*

*“garbh agan meh jineh ubaria” (Guru Arjan Dev Ji in Siree Raag Gauree (Sukhmani Sahib) 266)*

The one who created, designed, and adorned you;  
and then in the mother’s womb preserved and developed you

The above verse, from Sukhmani Sahib Ji—a canonical composition by Guru Arjan Dev Ji then goes onto enumerate all the other amazing gifts that are bestowed on human beings.<sup>8</sup>

So it is incumbent on us to realize, acknowledge and express our deepest gratitude for all that we have been bestowed with; and to feel, appreciate, wonder and admire the creation.

## B. Goal and responsibility

A related implication, deemed a responsibility, is to make an effort—indeed make life’s key objective to seek Him, to develop connection with Him—the one who

---

<sup>8</sup> “Bar Bavesta Tujhe Piayre Dudh, Bhar Joban Bhojan Sukh Sudh”

*“Biradh Bhya Uper Sak Sen; much upeao beth kao den” (Guru Arjan Dev Ji in Siree Raag Gauree (Sukhmani Sahib) 266)*

And “Jeh Prasad Dhar Uper Sukh Base”

“Sut Bhrat meet Baneta sang haseh”;

“Dene hasat pav karan netre rasna; tise tyag avar sang Rachna” (op. cit)



created the universe, earth itself and our bodies and consciousness. And the one who is closest to us.

*“So Prabh nere hun te nere”*

*“Simar Dhiaye Gai Gun Gobind din ren sajh swere” (Guru Arjan Dev Ji in Raag DayvGandhaaree 530)*

He is nearest of the near; remember Him, meditate on Him, and praise Him—the creator of the universe, day, night evening and morning.

This is emphasized further in the following verses by Guru Arjan Dev Ji:

*“Bhai Prapat Manukh Dehria”*

*Gobind milan ki eh teri baria”*

*“Avar Kaaj tere kite Na Kaam”*

*“Mil sadh Sangat bhaj keval naam” (Guru Arjan Dev Ji in So Purakh 12)*

You have been bestowed this body, this life; and this is your opportunity for His “Darshan” to “meet” Him. Nothing else really matters—join the Sadh Sangat and recite and meditate on Him and His Naam. This is also echoed in the following verse:

*“Eko Naam Hukam hein Nanak Satgur Dia Bhujai Jeo” (Guru Nanak Dev Ji in Siree Raag 72)*

The One Naam is Waheguru Ji’s Hukam; Nanak says that understanding comes from SatGuru Ji’s blessings

There is an extraordinarily symmetry encapsulated in the above verses: the Hukam which created the universe, the earth, and life itself, that same Hukam “enjoins” us to remember and contemplate Waheguru Ji, to meditate on Him—the understanding of which is which is attained by the blessings of the Satguru.

#### **Section 4: Concluding remarks**

This article has tried to provide an overview in Satguru Nanak’s Philosophy of the creation of the universe, as well as our place in it. The process of creation and all that the creation entails happened according to Waheguru Ji’s His Hukam which is beyond human comprehension and unknowable. Waheguru Ji was there before the universe was created and continues to be in every part of it and will be there when the universe ceases to be. He is the essence of all and permeates all.

Recognizing that enjoins us to express our deepest gratitude to Waheguru Ji and appreciate the implications for our conduct. At the same time, the ultimate objective of human life is set as to be able to recognize Waheguru Ji's presence, indeed to have His "Darshan". This is possible only with the blessings of Satguru Ji who provides understanding of Gurbani and Naam. We are enjoined to meditate on and recite the Naam which will pave the way for recognizing Waheguru Ji's presence and attain the worthiest and loftiest of all goals.