



## The Sikh Marriage: The Anand Sanskar

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### Abstract

*In fact, the Sikhs are governed by the Hindu Law as per the Constitution of India, but they have their own laws and customs governing their personal life. The Rehat Maryada is the chief book of compiled codes for the Sikhs. There was Anand Marriage Act before the inception of the Constitution of India. But along with Jainism and Buddhism, the Sikhs also became a part of the Hindu Law. Although there are more sects that are governed by the Hindu Law, these three religions have their own precepts and a large number of followers. During the marriage the Sikhs take only four circumambulations of the Guru Granth Sahib, whereas the Hindus take seven around the fire. The minute differences demand for a separate code, and the differences are observed by the community not as comparison with other religions but as part and parcel of their own customs and ceremonies. This paper studies the religious books with a view to highlighting the main ceremonies as they are observed by the Sikhs.*

According to *The Sikh Law Book: Japji*, the Sikhs enjoyed their own marriage law, in accordance with their holy scriptures. But with the passage of time and political conditions, it ceased to be in force; rather the Sikhs, Buddhists and the Jains began to be governed by the Hindu Law. The author of the book Kapoor states it as the following: Until the enforcement of Indian Constitution, the Sikhs had their separate Anand Marriage Act, but after the enforcement of the constitution, the Sikhs are being governed by the Hindu Marriage Act and the Anand Marriage Act has become redundant. The Anand Marriage Act was passed on 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1909 by the Imperial Legislative Council to establish legal validity of the marriage ceremony common among Sikhs called Anand. (75)

Marriage or Anand Sanskar:

Sikhism considers marriage as a part and parcel of human life and advocates marriages, known as Anand Sanskar, among Sikhs in presence of Guru Granth Sahib. A systematic vent to sexual instinct is given in the form of marriage in Sikhism. Avtar Singh in his *Ethics of the Sikhs* comments as: "It is thus the lasciviousness which is disapproved of and not the consummation of relationships within the

marital bonds. This seems to be a special connotation of *kām*. The sex response, when it is transformed and fortified through loyalty, purity of mind and marriage, is held to be desirable in Sikhism" (55).

Sikh marriages follow many rites or customs but they may not essentially be the part of the marriage ceremony and might bear the local fragrance.

It is remarkable that the Sikhs have extracted relevant rules from the holy books and scriptures providing it the form of *Universal Sikh Personal Law (Proposal)*. This is proposed by Gurcharan Singh Surie and is still struggling for identification by the government to become an Act. This proposal contains almost all the matters of Sikh personal law that is actually practiced among the Sikh fraternity. Shedding light on the nature of a Sikh marriage, the proposal ordains as the following :

The Sikh marriage is a God ordained monogamous sacred union of two heterosexual human beings on the basis of mutual trust, love, faithfulness, equality, and free will for the prosperity of the humankind. It is permanent and not at all a matter of any sort of contract, convenience or consideration in any shape or form. It is sacrosanct and life-long companionship as soul-mates. The



Sikh scriptures pronounce it as sacred and so binding a relationship as that between God and His Saints. From this fundamental relationship only, all other relationships of humanity, spring up. In Sikh parlance, marriage ceremony is termed as '*Anand Karaj*', meaning, the God blessed event for attainment of abiding bliss in human life. Barring certain situations . Sikh marriage is irrevocable. (7-8)

The *Rehat Maryada* or the Sikh Code of Conduct is an agglomeration of rules through which the Sikhs are governed. This is a document published by Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee, Amritsar. The Sikh Marriage, according to Article XVIII of the *Rehat Maryada* is 'Joyful Ceremony' which takes place having the constituents, of which some are, as the following :

- a. A Sikh man and woman should enter wedlock without giving thought to the prospective spouse's caste and descent.
- b. A Sikh's daughter must be married to a Sikh.
- c. A Sikh's marriage should be solemnized by Anand marriage rites.
- d. Child marriage is taboo for Sikhs.
- e. When a girl becomes marriageable, physically, emotionally and by virtue of maturity of character, a suitable Sikh match should be found and she be married to him by Anand marriage rites.
- f. Marriage may not be preceded by engagement ceremony. But if an engagement ceremony is sought to be held, a congregational gathering should be held and, after offering the Ardas before the Guru Granth Sahib, a kirpan, a steel bangle and some sweets may be tendered to the boy.
- g. Consulting horoscopes for determining which day or date is auspicious or otherwise for fixing the day of the marriage is a sacrilege. Any day that the parties find suitable by mutual consultation should be fixed. (26)

The commonly observed rituals with sacrificial or occult features are strictly prohibited in the Sikh marriage as

sacrileges. Similarly, child marriage, bigamy, polyandry, dowry etc., are neither observed nor allowed in any condition. There is no concept of divorce in the Sikhism, as per the religious dictates.

### Procedure of Marriage

The parties to marriages should observe the Sikh greeting with 'Waheguru ji ka Khalsa, Waheguru ji ki Fateh.' The girl on the left side of the boy, both should sit before the Guru Granth Sahib. The officiating person, a man or a woman, should introduce the duties and obligations of the conjugal life as per the Guru's tenets after offering the Ardas (prayer). According to Joginder Singh, in *Sikh Ceremonies*, the officiating person "may be a relative or anyone of whom the parties approve. There is no ordained priesthood among the community" (11).

The holy hymns are recited and the couple takes should bow before the Guru Granth Sahib to betoken their acceptance of these instructions. Thereafter, the girl's father or the principal relation should make the girl grasp one end of the sash which the boy is wearing over his shoulders and the person in attendance of the Guru Granth Sahib should recite the matrimonial circumambulation stanzas (lavan section of the Guru Granth). The boy and girl, after every circumambulation, should bow before the Guru Granth Sahib in genuflexion, lowering their forehead to touch the ground and then stand up to listen to the recitation of the next stanza. After the fourth circumambulation, the boy and girl should, after bowing before the Guru Granth Sahib, sit down at the appointed place and the ragis (singers of the classical ragas) or the person who has administered the ceremony should recite the first five and the last stanza of the Anand Sahib. Thereafter, the Ardas should be offered and the *hukum* (order of the Gurus) is taken to mark the conclusion of the Anand marriage ceremony and the sacred *Kadah Parsad* (pudding) distributed. One of the striking features of the Anand marriage, according to the *Sikh Ceremonies*, worth mentioning, is that "A similar marriage



ceremony is performed for the marriage of a widow or of a previously married man. No fault in the procedure in a marriage ceremony can invalidate a marriage. Even going round the Granth Sahib is not essential if the Lavan is read while the couple stand in front of the Holy Book” (19).

### Gifts of Marriage

As per Surie’s proposal of the *Universal Sikh Personal Law*, the gifts received by the bride or the bridegroom shall remain exclusively the property of the person receiving them. This property, at the death of either of the two, shall be transferred, as inheritance, to their children or the next legal heir. For the woman the following is the prescription:

All gifts and presents of any kind including cash, ornaments, clothing, house- hold articles, given to the bride by her parents, her husband, her in-laws and any other person in connection with the marriage, shall become inalienable and exclusive property of the bride. (13)

### The Status of Widow or Widower

A widow is not prohibited for remarriage as the sub-clause ‘n’ of Article XVIII of the *Rehat Maryada* ordains, “If a woman’s husband has died, she may, if she so wishes, finding a match suitable for her, remarry. For a Sikh man whose wife has died, similar ordinance obtains.” The process of such remarriage is further prescribed in the sub-clause ‘o’, as “The remarriage may be solemnized in the same manner as the Anand marriage” (29).

### Bigamy or Polyandry

Marriage in Sikhism is not the means of sensual pleasure but the union of the two souls and two family for the service of the One (Name or God) and it has a spiritual connotation. Therefore no bigamy or polyandry is even imagined. Thus, as referred to the aforementioned Article, the sub-clause ‘p’ ordains as, “Generally, no Sikh should marry a second wife if the first wife is alive.” Thus no man having a living wife or no woman having a living husband is allowed to have another partner as a rule.

### Death of Brides Amounting to be Unnatural

The Sikh religion, being the most modern one, has very many canons belonging to the modern conditions and provisions of law. The *Universal Sikh Personal Law* of Surie in its Section 19 provides, as under :

Any death of a married woman within seven years of her marriage by burns, poisoning, injury of any kind, induced malnutrition, induced or untreated disease when hidden from her parents or other concerned, and the like causes, shall be construed as unnatural death. The criminal aspect of such deaths shall be dealt with as per prescribed law of the land wherever these may occur. (15)

The Sikhs, being a global community, their legal tenets bear a remarkable feature of universality, i.e., adaptability of the laws of the land where the incident occurs. These laws do not adhere to the situation of any particular place.

### References

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