Anand Karaj: (Sikh Matrimonial Ceremony and Conventions)

Sikh marriages are usually arranged. However, the word 'arranged' is not always properly interpreted by people in Western societies. An arranged marriage does not mean forcing a boy or a girl into a wedlock of parents' choice only. It is agreeing to marriage proposed by mutual discussion between the boy or the girl on one side and his or her parents and relatives on the other. This is in fact selecting the right partner from a number of choices or proposals. Several criteria are usually adopted before making a marriage proposal. Most important are the boy and girl themselves who show their willingness only after taking into account, personality, family background, educational standing and physical appearance of the proposed partner. Generally, relatives or close family friends suggest a suitable match to the family. The boy and girl then get to know each other to convey their consent to their parents. The Sikh marriage is monogamous. In the case of broken marriage, divorce is not possible according to the Sikh religious tradition. The couple can, however, obtain a divorce under the Civil law of the land. Marriage, in Sikhism, is regarded as a sacred bond in attaining worldly
and spiritual joy. About the ideal marriage, the Guru says: “They are not husband and wife who only have physical contact; rather they are wife and husband who have one spirit in two bodies.”

The Sikh marriage ceremony is called Anand Karaj meaning ‘ceremony of bliss’. The fourth Guru, Guru Ramdas, originally composed Lavan, the wedding song, to celebrate a holy union between the human soul (Atma) and God (Parmatma). The Guru wishes that our married life should also be moulded on the ideal laid down for our union with the Parmatma. The 4 verses of Lavan explain the four stages of love and married life. The first verse emphasizes the performance of duty to the family and the community. The second verse refers to the stage of yearning and love for each other. The third verse refers to the stage of detachment or Virag. The fourth verse refers to the final stage of harmony and union in married life during which human love blends into the love for God.

Lavan is a Sanskrit word literally meaning 'break away', i.e. the bride breaking away from her parents' home. Based on a concept depicted in Lavan, the Sikh marriage is not merely a physical and legal contract but is a sacrament, a holy union between two souls, where physically they appear as two individual bodies but in fact are united as one. The bride's past and present becomes the bridegroom's past and present. Her present becomes his and his hers. They feel and think alike and both are completely identified with each other, i.e., they become 'Ek Jot Doe Murti' meaning one spirit in two bodies.

Sometimes before the wedding day another important ceremony called Kurmayaee or Shagan takes place usually at the bridegroom's house or the Gurdwara. It is a formal engagement ceremony involving a promise to marry and an exchange of rings and other presents. But the word Kurmayaee literally means the coming or the meeting of the parents of both the boy and the girl, and this shows the importance attached to the union of the two families. As soon as the bridegroom, and the two families are assembled the Milnee is performed, a meeting of parents and close relatives of the bride and groom and exchange of presents. The bride herself does not normally participate.
The marriage ceremony is conducted in a Gurdwara or at the bride's home or any other suitable place where Guru Granth Sahib is duly installed. A priest or any Sikh (man or woman) may conduct the ceremony, and usually, a respected and learned person is chosen. First Asa di Var (morning hymns) and then hymns appropriate for the occasion are sung while, family, friends, guests and groom arrives. The groom is first seated before Guru Granth Sahib and when the bride comes she take her place on his left. The couple and their parents are asked to stand while the rest of congregation remains seated. A prayer is then said, invoking His blessings for the proposed marriage and asking His Grace on the union of the couple. This connotes the consent of the bride and the bridegroom and their parents. The parties then resume their seats and a short hymn is sung.

This is followed by a brief speech addressed particularly to the couple, explaining the significance and obligation of the marriage. The couple is then asked to honour their vows by bowing together before Guru Granth Sahib. Then the bride's father places one end of pink or saffron-coloured scarf in the groom's hand, passing it over the shoulder and placing the other end in the bride's hand. Thus joined, the two will take the vows.

This is followed by a short hymn. Guru Granth Sahib is now opened and the first verse of Lavan is read from it. The musicians then sing the same verse while the couple slowly encircles Guru Granth Sahib. The groom leads in a clock-wise direction and the bride, holding the scarf, follows as nearly as possible in step. When the couple reaches the front of Guru Granth Sahib, they both bow together and take their respective seats. The same protocol is repeated for the remainder three verses. The ceremony is concluded with the customary singing of the six stanzas of the Anand Sahib, Song of Bliss, followed by Ardas, prayer, and Vak, a random reading of a verse from Guru Granth Sahib. The ceremony, which takes about an hour, ends with the serving of Karah Parshad to the congregation. Relatives and friends then exchange greetings and congratulations. A few hours after the marriage the bridal party or Doli leaves and the bride depart from her parental home with her husband.
1. A Sikh man and woman should enter wedlock without giving thought to the prospective spouse's caste and descent.

2. A Sikh's daughter must be married to a Sikh.

3. A Sikh's marriage should be solemnized by Anand marriage rites.

4. Child marriage is taboo for Sikhs.

5. 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.

6. 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 Karah and some sweets may be tendered to the boy.

7. 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.

8. Putting on floral or gilded face ornamentation, decorative headgear or red thread band round the wrist, worshipping of ancestors, dipping feet in rffiik mixed with water, cutting a berry or jandi (Prosopis spieigera) bushes, filling pitcher, ceremony of retirement in feigned displeasure, reciting couplets, performing havans (Sacrificial fire), installing vedi (a wooden canopy or pavilion under which Hindu marriages are performed), prostitutes' dances, drinking liquor, are all sacrileges.

9. The marriage party should have as small a number of people as the girl's people desire. The two sides should greet each other singing sacred hymns and finally by the Sikh greetings of Waheguru ji ka Khalsa, Waheguru ji ki Fateh.

10. For marriage, there should be a congregational gathering in the holy presence of Guru Granth Sahib. There should be hymn-singing by ragis or by the whole congregation. Then the girl and the boy should be made to sit facing the Guru Granth Sahib. The girl should sit on the left side of the boy. After soliciting the congregation's permission, the master of the marriage ceremony (who may be a man or a woman) should bid the
boy and girl and their parents or guardians to stand and should offer the Ardas for the commencement of the Anand marriage ceremony.

The officiant should then apprise the boy and the girl of the duties and obligations of conjugal life according to the Guru's tenets. He should initially give to the two an exposition of their common mutual obligations. He should tell them how to model the husband-wife relationship on the love between the individual soul and the Supreme Soul in the light of the contents of circumambulation (Lavan) Sabads in the Suhi measure (Rag) section of the Guru Granth Sahib.

He should explain to them the notion of the state of "a single soul in two bodies" to be achieved through love and make them see how they may attain union with the Immortal Being discharging duties and obligations of the householders' life. Both of them, they should be told, have to make their conjugal union a means to the fulfilment of the purpose of the journey of human existence; both have to lead clean and Guru-oriented lives through the instrumentality of their union. He should then explain to the boy and girl individually their respective conjugal duties as husband and wife.

The bridegroom should be told that the girl's people having chosen him as the fittest match from among a lot, he should regard his wife as his better half, accord to unflinching love and share with her all that he has. In situations, he should protect her person and honour, should be completely loyal to her and he should show much respect and consideration for her parents and as for his own.

The girl should be told that she has been joined matrimony to her man in the hallowed presence of the Guru Granth Sahib and the congregation. She should ever harbor for him deferential solicitude, regard him the lord master of her love and trust; she should remain firm in loyalty to him and serve him in joy and sorrow and in every clime (native or foreign).
and should show the same and consideration to his parents and relatives as she to her own parents and relatives.

The boy and girl 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 wearing over his shoulders and the person in attendance the Guru Granth Sahib should recite the matrimonial circumambulation stanzas (Lavan of the Fourth Nanak, Guru Ram Das Sahib in the Suhi Rag of the Guru Granth Sahib) (Pp. 773-4). After the conclusion of the recitation of each of the stanzas, the boy, followed by the girl holding the end of the sash, should go round the Guru Granth Sahib while the ragis or the congregation sing out the recited stanza.

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. There being four matrimonial circumambulation stanzas in the concerned hymn, the proceeding will comprise four circumambulation with the incidental singing of the stanza. After the four circumabulation, the boy and girl should, after bowing before the Guru Granth Sahib, sit down at the appointed place and the Ragis or the person who has conducted the ceremony should recite the first five and the last stanza of the Anand Sahib. Thereafter, the Ardas should be offered to mark the conclusion of the Anand marriage ceremony and the Karhah Parshad, distributed.'

11. k. Persons professing faiths other than the Sikh faith cannot be joined in wedlock by the Anand Karaj ceremony.

12. No Sikh should accept a match for his/her son or daughter for monetary consideration.

13. If the girl's parents at any time or on any occasion visit their daughter's home and a meal is ready there, they should not hesitate to eat there. Abstaining from eating at the girl's home is a superstition. The Khalsa has been blessed with the boon of victuals and making others eat by the Guru and the Immortal Being. The girl's and
boy's people should keep accepting each other's hospitality, because the Guru has joined them in relationship of equality (Prem Sumarag).

14. 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.

15. The remarriage may be solemnized in the same manner as the Anand marriage.

16. Generally, no Sikh should marry a second wife if the first wife is alive.

17. Amritdhari Sikh ought to get his wife also Amritdhari