

Gurmat Maryada of Anand Karaj

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The *Sikh Rehat Mayrada* (SRM), as sanctioned by the *Akaal Takhat* for the *Sikh Panth*, lists out the following four *Sanskars* as being an integral part of the Sikh Way of Life:

- (i) *Janam & Nam Sanskar*
- (ii) *Amrit Sanskar*
- (iii) *Anand Karaj*
- (iv) *Mirtak Sanskar*.

This article deals with *Anand Karaj*. The objectives are to lay out the stipulations of the SRM with regards to *Anand Karaj*, provide a commentary on selected stipulations and conduct a discussion on some social issues relating to the Sikh marriage.

STIPULATIONS OF THE SRM

The following are the stipulations from the SRM (Original in Punjabi, translated by author).

- (i) A Sikh marriage should be arranged *without* regard to *Jaat Paat, Goatt* etc.
- (ii) There is to be *no* exchange of dowries etc.
- (iii) Child marriages are prohibited in the Sikh way of life.
- (iv) The daughter of a Sikh should marry only a Sikh. [Commentary provided in the following section]
- (v) The marriage of a Sikh should be conducted in the *Anand Reeti*.
- (vi) Prior to *Anand Karaj*, the *Kurmaee* (engagement) is not necessary. If desired, however, the prospective bride's family can gather the *sangat*, conduct an ardas before the Guru Granth Sahib, and offer to the prospective groom a *Kirpan, Kra* and some sweets.

- (vii) In setting the date of the *Anand Karaj*, paying attention to “opportune” times and days is *Manmat* (meaning against *Gurmat*). Mutual consent of both sides is all that is required.
- (viii) The tying of the *Sehra*, *Mukat*, *Ganna*; praying to one’s *pittars*, dipping the feet in *kachee lasee*, the chopping of *beri* or *jandee*, the filling of *Gharolee*, leaving the home in despair (*rus ke jana*), reading of *chands*, performing of *havans*, *vedi gadnee*, *vesva* dance, and serving of liquor is *manmat*.
- (ix) In the *Baraat*, the fewer the members, the better. *Janjis* should sing *gurbanee shabads* and recite the *fateh* upon arrival.
- (x) During the *Anand Karaj*, a *diwan* should be conducted before the *Guru Granth Sahib*. *Kirten* should be done. Then the bride and groom should be asked to sit in the presence of the GGS. The bride should be seated on the left of the groom. The permission of the *sangat* should be obtained, and the bride, groom and parental representatives from both sides should stand with the *ardasia* to do an *arambhak ardas*.

[Point to note: The practice of singing the Shabad “*Hum Ghar Sajan Aiye*” when the *Janj* arrives in the *Darbar* is not in accordance with the teachings of *Gurmat*. Similarly the singing of the Shabad “*Keeta Loreay Kum So Har Peh Aikhey*” **specifically** for the purpose of beginning of this ceremony is also against the philosophy of *Gurmat*. The SRM does not in any place mention that these *shabads* are to be sung as tied to the occasion. A detailed explanation is provided in the section on commentary.]

- (xi) The bride and groom should then be advised on the issue of *ghrisst* in Sikh way of life. They should be given this common advice based on the four *laavan*. Then they should be given advice with regards to their respective roles within a *ghristee jeevan*.

[Point to note: The SRM provides the detailed wordings of the advice. *Parbhandaks* are advised to make the SRM available to their *Granthis* and *Ragis* and instruct them to *read out* this concise and meaningful advice instead of rambling on with their own].

- (xii) As a sign of acceptance of the advice, the bride and groom should bow in obeisance.

- (xiii) Then the father of the bride (or any other head relative) should hand one end of the *palla* into the hands of the groom and the other to the bride.

[Point to Note: The singing of the Shabad “*Palley Tendey Lagee*” during the *palla* handing ceremony is against the teachings of *Gurmat*. The SRM does not in any place mention that this *shabad* is to be sung as tied to the occasion. A detailed explanation is provided in the section on commentary.]

[Second Point to Note: From the *arambhak ardas* till this point of *palla* – the ceremony runs **without** any *kirten*. The only *kirten* for the ceremony is the singing of the *laavan*]

- (xiv) The couple should then be asked to stand. The *tabia gursikh* should read out one *laav* at a time. The *kirtenias* should sing the *laav*, during which time the groom should lead the *parkirma* while holding on the *palla* followed by the bride, also holding on the *palla*.
- (xv) After each *parkirma*, both bride and groom should *matha thek*, and **stand up** to listen to the next *laav*. After the fourth *laav*, the *Anand Sahib* is recited. The husband and wife should proceed to sit within the *sangat*.

[Point to Note: The singing of the Shabad “*Viah Hoa Mere Babula*” at this point of time is against the teachings of *Gurmat*. The SRM does not in any place mention that this *Shabad* is to be sung as tied to the occasion. A detailed explanation is provided in the section on commentary.]

- (xvi) An *anand karaj semaptee ardas* should then be done and *karah parashad* served thereafter.
- (xvii) If the husband should happen to die, and if she so desires, the wife may re-marry. Same provision applies to the husband if his wife were to pass on.
- (xviii) The *maryada* for the second *anand karaj* is the same as the first.
- (xix) In normal circumstances, a Sikh should not be polygamous.
- (xx) An *amritdhari* Sikh should have his life partner partake the *amrit* as well.
- (xxi) Persons professing faiths other than the Sikh faith cannot be joined in wedlock by the *Anand Karaj* ceremony

COMMENTARY ON ISSUES ARISING OUT OF THE SRM.

Most of the stipulations of the SRM as listed above are straight forward. This section provides a discussion relating to three issues: (i) The mention of “daughter” in Stipulation (iv), (ii) The singing of specific *Gurbani shabads* during the conduct of the *Anand Karaj* Ceremony and (iii) The need of *sikhia* as stipulated in (xi) above.

Stipulation (iv): The daughter of a Sikh should only marry a Sikh. This stipulation has been singled out by some SRM commentators as being gender biased. Some Sikhs have suggested that there ought to have been another stipulation to the effect that “the son of a Sikh should marry a Sikh.” Others have suggested that the wording could simply have been “a Sikh should marry a Sikh.” Yet others have asked, does it then mean that the “son of a Sikh *can* marry a non-Sikh?

To put Stipulation (iv) into perspective, there is a need to understand its context, its intent, and if possible, the mindset of the framers of the SRM. There is perhaps no other area in which the human race has accepted gender bias in favor of the male than in marriage. The situation which generally exists today is by and large the same as it existed when the SRM was constructed. The only difference is perhaps the degree of it. Briefly, this bias can be stated as follows: The female married into the male family and took the male family name. More importantly, however, (in cases of mixed marriages which have been the norm in Punjab given the proximity of Hindu and Sikh families) the female always and automatically took the *religion* of the male.

The SRM Stipulation (iv) thus is a courageous attempt to correct this gender bias and allow the female Sikh to maintain her Sikh belief in all circumstances – particularly if she intends to marry a non-Sikh. The intent of the stipulation is that it is her *male* partner who will have to take up the Sikh faith within the marriage. The stipulation forces the male to convert, and not the other way around. Put in other words, the *Anand Karaj* of his female Sikh partner *cannot* take place unless *he* embraces the Sikh faith first.

Stipulation (iv) therefore is visionary in that (i) it allows the female Sikh to keep her Sikh faith in all circumstances (ii) allows for the non-Sikh male to be brought into Sikh faith – if he so desires and (iii) allows the female Sikh and her Sikh-adopting / converting partner to have an *Anand Karaj*.

Why did the framers of the SRM not add another stipulation to the effect “a son of a Sikh should marry a Sikh? The answer is fairly straightforward. Given the male-oriented society whenever a Sikh male married, and to whoever he married – she HAD to become a Sikh, she was CONSIDERED a Sikh, whether she liked it or not, whether she wanted to or not. So there really was *no need* to provide a special clause for the

“son” of a Sikh. There was no need to protect the “son” because the male dominated society already protected him by determining the religion of his spouse. Coming up with a stipulation in this respect was tantamount to fixing something that was not broken in the first place.

The gender that needed a special clause, and hence the protection to enable her to carry on being a Sikh, irrespective of who she married, was the “daughter.” This is the reason for a specific clause for the “daughter of the Sikh.”

It is important to note that the SRM has its basis in the Guru Granth Sahib (GGS). It follows the underlying themes of the GGS. So now the question is – which gender does the GGS strive to protect and defend? Again, the answer is fairly straightforward: there is NOTHING in the 1430 pages of the GGS to protect the “son” or the “male” status. Why – because there was no need to. But there is ample *Gurbani* that defends, protects and enhances the status of the “female.” The reason: because this was the problem that needed a solution.

So why did the framers not word it as “a Sikh should marry a Sikh” without specifying son or daughter? Actually this “gender neutral” stipulation is already provided in Stipulation (xxi) that reads: Persons professing faiths other than the Sikh faith cannot be joined in wedlock by the *Anand Karaj* ceremony. This means that a Sikh must undergo a *Anand Karaj* with a Sikh. Despite this very concise stipulation, it is clear that the framers of the SRM wanted *extra* protection for the female Sikh and decided to achieve that through Stipulation (iv).

An analogy is provided help put the above commentary into perspective. Let us assume that the *Akaal Takhat* is called upon to issue a *hukumnana* relating to female infanticide amongst Sikhs of today. I would assume that the following flow of logic would apply for the framers of this religious order. First: what is the *problem* that needs *fixing*? Answer: Increasing number of Sikhs are conducting gender tests and aborting female fetuses. The most appropriate *hukumnana* would then be: Sikhs should not abort or otherwise kill or cause to kill female fetuses or babies. Assuming that this is indeed the *hukumnana*, then four critiques can be raised here. **One**, does this mean that Sikhs can kill male fetuses? Answer: definitely not. Nowhere does it state that male fetuses can be killed. Why the need to stretch the *hukumnana* to ridiculous lengths? The *hukumnana* should be interpreted by what it *says*, not what it omits. **Two**, the *hukumnana* is gender biased. Answer: It is gender biased only to the extent that it aims to protect the female fetus. It is further gender-biased in the sense that it deals with the real problem – gender selected murder. In other words, it is gender biased because the problem was gender biased. But its overall objective is to *correct* the bias. **Three**: Why not another *hukumnana* that says “Sikhs should not abort male fetuses? Answer: Why waste a *hukumnana* on a non-existent problem? Sikhs are not aborting male fetuses or

killing male babies. Why fix something that is not broken in the first place. *Hukumnamas* should not be created merely to please all sides. **Four**, why not an all encompassing *hukumnama* to the effect: Sikhs should not abort / kill babies. No need to mention gender. Answer: such language sounds fine on the surface, but misses the point, *hides the real problem*, is evasive and skirts the issue. The framers of such a stipulation would be guilty of dancing around the bush. Worse, they may be accused of condoning or supporting female infanticide by refusing to mention specifically the word “female” in their stipulation.

ABUSE OF GURBANI by tying specific *Shabads* to specific portions of the *Anand Karaj* Ceremony. Three things relating to *Gurbani* are worth noting. First, *Gurbani* is non-occasion specific. We sing the same *Anand Sahib bane* whether it is birth, death or other occasion. Second, the words within *bane* are meant for our relationships with the Guru and God. Applying them for human to human references is therefore wrong. Third, *bane* is gender-neutral in the sense that it considers the *entire* human race coming before God in one form, albeit the female form. Consider the verse ਸਖੀ ਆਉ ਸਖੀ ਵਸਿ ਆਉ ਸਖੀ ਅਸੀ ਪਿਰ ਕਾ ਮੰਗਲੁ ਗਾਵਹ ॥ “*S’khee Aao S’khee, Vas Aao S’khee, Asee Pir Ka Mangal Gavey*” GGS page 847. Translation: Come friends, let us get together and sing the praises of God. The term for friends is (*S’khee*) which is used by females for other female friends. So not only are the friends female, but the reader and writer also takes the female form. Everyone, except God is female in the GGS. So when we start applying *Gurbani* (wrongly) to human relationships, we get a variety of problems – as explained below.

The *Shabad* ਹਮ ਘਰਿ ਸਾਜਨ ਆਏ ॥ ਸਾਚੈ ਮੇਲਿ ਮਿਲਾਏ ॥ “*Hum Ghar Saajan Aiye SACHE Mel Milaye*” (GGS page 764) is a reflection of the joy the human soul experiences when it feels the presence of the Guru and Waheguru. This *shabad* has nothing to do with an *Anand Karaj*. The word “*Saajan*” is masculine and therefore refers to God. To translate “*Saajan*” as “*bratees*” is not only wrong, but provides a gender related problem. If the *shabad* was meant to welcome *Bratees* then why is there no *shabad* to welcome the female party? Either our *ragis* are inept at finding such a *shabad*, or it does not exist. The truth is there is nothing in *Gurbani* that welcomes *bratees* or the female party.

Similarly the tying of the *shabads* “*Palley Tendey Lagee*” (GGS 963) and “*Viah Hoa Mere Babula*” specifically during *Anand Karajs* is reflective of our poor or totally absent understanding of these verses.

The full verse for the former is ਉਸਤਤਿ ਨਿੰਦਾ ਨਾਨਕ ਜੀ ਮੈ ਹਭ ਵਵਾਈ ਛੋੜਿਆ ਹਭੁ ਕਿਝੁ ਤਿਆਗੀ ॥ ਹਭੇ ਸਾਕ ਕੂੜਾਵੇ ਡਿਠੇ ਤਉ ਪਲੈ ਤੈਡੈ ਲਾਗੀ ॥ “*Ustat Ninda Nanak Ji, Mein Hab Vanjaiey Choria, Haon Sabh Kich Tyagee. Habhey Saak Kuravey Dithey Tao Palley Tendey Lagee*” Guru Arjun is saying I have henceforth totally discarded praise and slander, O Nanak; I have forsaken and abandoned everything. I have seen that all relationships are false, and so I

have come at your side / into your *sharan*. The *shabad* is indicative of the process (*lagee*) of the human soul coming within the protective sphere (*palley*) of God. *Palley* here refers to *sharan*.

To apply the above to a human relationship is ridiculous, to say the least. The bride is supposedly saying “I have forsaken and abandoned everything (meaning my birth parents, family friends etc). All relationships (that of me being a daughter and a sister amongst others) are false, and I have now come to be tied to you – my husband with this piece of cloth! Is this what *Gurbani* teaches us – that we declare our birth parents, family, brothers and sisters as false and abandon them to get married? Is one’s parents are false, why is one’s husband not so? Remember, one’s father is somebody’s husband too. Does *Gurbani* tell one to get “tied” to her husband? And what happened to that part about discarding praise and slander (*Ustat Ninda* in the first line). This does not fit “neatly” into our distortion, so we omit it altogether? Fitting *Gurbani* verses meant for Godly relationships into human relationships is like pushing square pegs into round holes. We end up with broken pegs and distorted holes.

As for the second *shabad* (sung at the conclusion of the *Anand Karaj* but before *Anand Sahib*), the verse ਵੀਆਹੁ ਹੋਆ ਮੇਰੇ ਬਾਬੁਲਾ ਗੁਰਮੁਖੇ ਹਰਿ ਪਾਇਆ ॥ “*Viah Hoa Mere Babula*” is indicative of the highest realms of spirituality and union (*viah*) of the human soul with God (*Babul* refers to God). The second line is ਅਗਿਆਨੁ ਅੰਧੇਰਾ ਕਟਿਆ ਗੁਰ ਗਿਆਨੁ ਪ੍ਰਚੰਡੁ ਬਲਾਇਆ Again *Andhera Katiya, Gur Gyan Parchand Bulaya*. Meaning: as a result, the darkness of my ignorance is shattered, as the Guru shines like the sun of knowledge.

To use the term *Babul* to refer to the bride’s father and the term “*palley tendey*” to the piece of cloth (*palla*) is to make a mockery of the *shabads*, at the very least. It is also creates a gender biased problem: why is *only* the bride announcing “I am now married, dad my *babul*!” Or why is just the bride saying “I am now tied to you, my groom!” Is the groom exempted from saying or declaring his situation? To equate marriage to “being tied to someone” is to denigrate the *Anand Karaj*. One ties cows and goats so that they don’t wander off. If *babul* refers to the bride’s father, then it should *not* be sung in instances where the bride does not have her father present. This would then mean the *shabad* was not meant for brides which, for some reason, did not have their fathers present at the ceremony! The truth is this *shabad* is not meant for brides and or their fathers.

These then, are the problems which arise when we wrongly equate God-human relationship descriptions contained in *Gurbani* to male-female relationships. Not only does the language not fit, the meanings, intent, objectives and messages of *Gurbani* get warped. The Guru says” *Hum Ghar Saajan Aiyee*. Meaning: my Lord friend has come into my heart and home – I have attained God. What can be more warped than to use this

line to welcome a bunch of fumbling, over eaten, under slept and overly late arriving mortal- brats that we euphemistically call “bratees”?

Omission of Sikhiya from the Anand Karaj Ceremony. Some *Gurdwaras* have eliminated the *Sikhiya* part of the ceremony with the intention of saving time. They say that that the ceremony is too long. Some *Ragis* are heard announcing that the couple is “educated” and hence not in need of any *Sikhiya*. In some cases, the couple is given the *sikhiya* in private prior to the *anand karaj*. These situations contravene the SRM. If done according to the dictates of the SRM, the *anand karaj* is a short and sweet ceremony. It appears ever shorter and sweeter if everybody – the bride, groom, their parties, the *sangat* and *kirtenias* are punctual. Hours are wasted on what goes on before and after the ceremony on unnecessary rituals and receptions; thus to complain about a 20 – 30 minute ceremony is not right. Being “educated” does not negate the need for *Sikhiya*. Too many “educated” couples have been seen walking the wrong way during the *lavan*, sitting when asked to stand, standing when asked to sit, not bowing their head even when told to repeatedly etc – indicating that they are relatively “uneducated” when it comes to the *actions* of a ceremony, what more matters of spiritual obligations within *ghrist*. Furthermore, the SRM mandates giving the *sikhiya* in the presence of the *sangat*. Having heard or even delivered the *sikhiya* before is not a reason for its elimination during one’s *anand karaj*. The *sikhiya* is not meant for the couple alone. It is meant to reinforce the beliefs of the rest of the *sangat* who are married, and to prepare those not married regarding the dictates of *Gurmat*. Even for the couple, *sikhiya* given in the presence of the *sangat* and their public commitment to it helps enforce its validity much more than doing it in private.

SOME ISSUES RELATING TO SIKH MARRIAGE

Within the context of *Anand Karajs*, it is pertinent to discuss some other *manmat* influences that have crept into this spiritual ceremony. The result is the serious downgrading or defiling of this pure and simple ceremony. The following are some of the more common deviationist practices.

Dropping of “Singh” and “Kaur” on wedding cards. While such a practice may make fashion sense and turn spiritual names into *filmi* sounding ones, it is an act that suggests embarrassment with names given to the Sikh *panth* by Guru Gobind Singh.

Un-necessary rituals. The list is long. *Jai mala*, *shagun-aphshagun*, *mehendi rasam*, *ghoree charna*, *sehre bann-ney*, *maiyan* – are no more than *bipran kee reet*. They suggest a lack of appreciation and belief in the *Anand Karaj* as being the full, complete, final and only Guru-sanctioned “ritual” for a Sikh. These other rituals take the mind away from the realm of the Guru and God and into the sphere of influence of the superstitious.

Most of these rituals are the result of un-thinking copying from Indian films. These rituals are passed on as Indian culture. Yet the truth is that a great deal of these rituals has no basis *even* in Indian culture. They are simply what they are: *filmi* culture plain and simple entertainment.

Gurbani says: ਜਾਲਉ ਐਸੀ ਰੀਤਿ ਜਿਤੁ ਮੈ ਖਿਆਰਾ ਵੀਸਰੈ ॥ *Jalo Aisee Reet Jit Mei Pyara Veerai*. GGS page 590. (I have discarded those rituals that separate me from my beloved God).

Special Vishaes, Fhul Varkha, Garlands, Reading of Sehras, Sikhias, etc go against the grain of *Gurmat*. They are written to overly glorify ordinary mortals and such practice in the presence of the Guru is to be discouraged. The only reason the couple sit in front of the *sangat* is because they have to undertake the *parkirma*. There is no reason for them to be treated with special *vishayees*. We come before the Guru humbly, no matter what the occasion. No one goes before a King self garlanded, and then demands a special seat. The GGS is the *Sacha Patchah* – True King of Kings!

Disregard for Sanctity of the Guru. Video recorders, lighting technicians, ushers, event managers, and other self proclaimed directors often turn a solemn, joyous and spiritual ceremony into a chaotic filming of a movie. These distracters are given priority over *kirtanias, ardasias* etc who have to make way for the distractions and their equipment. The result is confusion, non concentration on the *Gurbanee* messages, and tensions. It is a clear sign that we have got our priorities in reverse order. The most important aspect of the ceremony – the Guru and his *Gurbanee* are sacrificed wantonly at the altar of those whose only business is to distract, interrupt and make a mockery of the sanctity of the *sangat*.

The *Anand Karaj* is the point of conception of *Ghrist*. Both *Anand* and *Karaj* translate, in combination, as perpetual bliss. The SRM principles are meant to ensure that the parties actually enjoy such bliss. But it is common practice that the *Anand Karaj* ceremony is anything but blissful. We have turned this wonderful ceremony into a chaotic, unruly, tension-filled, show off, and hence totally unsatisfying one. Instead of removing the distractions, we play the blame game and pass the buck. We blame our parents, friends, society etc and feel that the reform of the ceremony should take place only *after* we have had our individual turn.

The most pathetic excuse is that a marriage is a joyous and happy once- in a lifetime occasion. Therefore all inhibitions should be discarded – so that the event can be as memorable as ever. Yet the result is that for an ever increasing number of Sikhs, married life is no longer joyous, *Ghristi jivan* is no more than a sham and marriage is becoming more than “once” in a life time affair.

Obviously, there are a myriad of reasons why the institution of marriage is crumbling. But from the spiritual point of view, the main reason may simply be that our marriage was never given the chance to obtain the blessings of the Guru. Our *Anand Karajs* were conducted so much against the guidelines set by the Guru that the ceremony amounted to the Guru being dismissed from it.

After all, the Sikh *Anand Karaj* is a union of three – A *Gursikh* couple and the Guru. That is precisely why the couple circumambulates the Guru. The *laavan* are a solemn undertaking between the couple and the Guru. *Ghrist jeewan* means a life led with the Guru very much within the midst of our family life.

Ghrist is a critical and vital part of Sikhi. It is a progressive step for a soul that is traveling the journey of spirituality. The journey begins as a child, where the Sikh parents, as part of their own *Ghrist Jeewan* have the responsibility of inculcating Sikh values in their children. In youth, the young Sikh takes on personal responsibilities such as undertaking a study of *gurbanee*, learning the scripture, *sewa*, *kirten*, taking the *khande da pahul* etc. The practice of Sikhi is to be done within a marriage that comprises of two Sikhs, who, while traveling the journey of Sikh spirituality, are both desirous of moving on to the next station. This is where *Ghrist* comes in. A Sikh couple, deciding to set up home and family with the Guru integral in their lives, and then passing on the wonder of the Guru to their next generation. The practice of *Sikhi* from this point on is within the confines of *Ghrist*. In this sense, the *Anand Karaj* is critical and crucial to those who are walking the journey, and intend to get to the ultimate destination.

Without the Guru, our *Anand Karaj* is reduced to just another *karaj* (job), our *Ghrist Jeewan* to just another chapter of our life and Sikh philosophy to just a set of rules meant to be thrown out of the window.

Anand Karaj with a Non-Sikh party. Applying the logic of the journey of Sikh spirituality, the concept of *Ghrist* and *Anand Karaj* being a union of three, it makes absolutely no sense for a non Sikh to want to undertake an *Anand Karaj* ceremony. The non-Sikh has never started the journey of Sikhi and will (with *few* exceptions) probably not embark on it even after marriage. Even if this logic is put aside, the *Rehat Maryada* is absolutely clear on this – the *Anand Karaj* is meant for believing Sikhs. Finally, when taking the meanings of the four *laavas*, the commitment demanded therein, and the philosophical essence of the *hukumnama* that is taken after the *ardas* on the *anand karaj* day, it leaves no doubt whatsoever that the entire process is part and parcel of *Sikhi*, and meant for believing and practicing Sikhs.

But some Sikhs, Sikh institutions and Sikh religious leaders, because of what they sometimes are – ignorant, self serving and pseudo – have attempted to twist the logic of *Sikhi*, cast aspirations on the *Sikh Rehat Maryada*, and paint *Gurmat* following and

Gurbani abiding Sikhs as backward and not keeping with modern times. It is thus proper to examine some of the hollow arguments presented by these parties, and to put things within the correct perspective.

Argument: Sikhs marrying non-Sikhs is part of the phenomenon of modernity and Sikhs who oppose this trend are straight jacketed. Whether such marriages are acts of modernity and their opponents narrow minded is subject to debate. But the fact remains that this phenomenon is real and part and parcel of the times we live in. No Sikh should judge other Sikhs, certainly not on the basis of who one chooses to marry. Even without applying any principle of *Sikhi*, basic humanity, family cohesion and societal obligations require a Sikh to open heartedly accept, support and unconditionally love members of our family or community who make the choice of their life partners that are different from our preferences.

It should be clear therefore that a Sikh has a right to marry a non-Sikh and that choice should be respected. Every modern society has secular/civil marriage ceremonies and institutions that perform them, Sikh families should share in the joy for the choices made by their loved ones and acceptance should be accorded.

But whether Sikhs who make such a choice and their families have a right to demand an *Anand Karaj* (with all its accompanying *Gurmat* practices – such as *laavan*, *parkirma* etc) is the real issue of concern for Sikhs, its institutions and leaders. Every choice comes with consequences and the repercussions for a Sikh who chooses to step out of the sphere of *Sikhi* (and he/she does so in the **choice** of wanting to spend the rest of one's life with a non-Sikh), is simply that the *Anand Karaj* becomes meaningless. This spiritual ceremony steeped in *Gurmat* is meaningless if one does not intend it to be part of the journey of Sikh spirituality. It is also meaningless if the succeeding *Ghrist* way of life is not to be practiced. Short of making a mockery of the *Anand Karaj* in the selfish pursuit of one's choice and desire, one finds it difficult to rationalize why an *Anand Karaj* is pursued under such meaningless circumstances.

A more pointed question is whether such Sikhs and their families have a right to make a mockery of the *Anand Karaj*, denigrate this spiritual ceremony to one that is purely social, cultural and entertainment based, and hurt the sentiments of *Gurmat* following and *Gurbani* abiding Sikhs. Does anybody have a right to make a mockery of a ceremony that is listed as one of the four most important ones in the *Sikh Rehat Maryada*? This is the perspective within which this issue is to be discussed.

To overcome such criticisms, some Sikhs and institutions have resorted to twisting the *Rehat Maryada* and or designing ingenious methods of circumventing it and *Gurmat* all together.

Instant conversions of the non-Sikh partner. Some institutions arrange for *panj pyaras* to administer the *khande da pahul* to the non-Sikh party sometimes a day or two prior to the ceremony. There exist *panj pyara* managers who specialize in arranging for such ceremonies in short notice. In most cases, this non-Sikh individual has absolutely no idea of what the ceremony entails and the spiritual obligations that come along with it. In most cases too, this party has none of the 5 *kakars*, or adorns those can be adorned temporarily for the ceremony. Having no knowledge of *Gurbani* and *Gurmukhi*, expecting such individuals to perform their *nitnem* (as required by the *pahul* ceremony) would be akin to asking a cow to play the violin five times daily. All that matters is that he/she walks out of the ceremony with a Sikh sounding name (for temporary use during the *Anand Karaj*).

Some Sikh institutions simplify matters. The *Khande da pahul* is administered by just one *pyara*. And he/she only reads 5 *paures* of the *Japji* to make this super instant *pahul*. Others have simplified them even further – just come with a piece of paper pledging that from now on you are a Sikh.

The only way to put these ingenious methods into perspective is to call them what they truly are – insulting, denigrating and mocking a crucially important ceremony in *Sikhi*, namely *khande da pahul*, - so that yet another critically important ceremony – the *Anand Karaj* may be mocked.

Argument: Sikh Gurdwara Parbhandaks, parcharaks, kirtenias, panj pyaras and leaders of Sikh institutions are subject to the demands of the sangat. Many a *pardhan* and *jathedar* will tell you that if he/she refused the ceremony that made a mockery of the *Anand Karaj*, the Guru and *Gurmat*, then the *sangat* will be split. What he/she truly means is that he/she may lose his *pardhanship* or *jathedari*. Some Sikhs have so fine tuned the art of being spineless that they care not for the responsibility that is entrusted upon their shoulders. Some *Gurdwaras* specialize in performing such marriages. Their yellow pages listing would read such. People come from the northern and southern borders to have their “non-sikh *Anand Karaj*” performed in such *Gurdwaras*. Money that is charged to the family is the only motivation here.

Most common Sikh institutions have no stand worth talking about. Or they have one which no one knows about. Others have their ingenious methods too. Instead of taking a clear and solid stand on the basis of *Gurmat* (which is what they were set up for in the first place), they hide behind elaborate and confusing positions that are based on inventive interpretations of the *Rehat Maryada*. In the simplest of terms what these institutions are doing are washing their hands off the issue.

Argument: But even when both parties are Sikhs (born to Sikh families, carrying Sikh names), they are really not practicing Sikhs either. These Sikhs have

also not traveled on the journey of *Sikhi*, will not be practicing *Ghrist* etc. So if we can do the *Anand Karaj* for such *naam dhareek* Sikhs (Sikhs by name only), what is wrong with performing the ceremony for non Sikhs. This argument is usually presented by our *ragees, kirtenias and granthis*. There is a disingenuous truth in their argument. The *Anand Karaj* is indeed meaningless for those who look like Sikhs, sound like Sikhs but are not Sikhs (Sikhs by name only). And it is indeed wrong to conduct this spiritual ceremony for such Sikhs, just as it is wrong to conduct the *Khande da pahul* to a Sikh who has no intention of practicing the *Rehat*, and just as it is wrong to conduct a *Mirtak Sanskar* for someone who never lived his life as a Sikh. Yet one wrong does not justify another wrong, even if one wrong is lesser than the other. The Sikh leaders, *parbhandaks, ragees, granthis* etc of today do not have the courage to say no to the bigger wrong (*Anand Karaj* for non-Sikhs). How are they expected to say no to the lesser wrong (*Anand Karaj* for Sikhs by name only)? Instead they sell their soul to the devil by using the first wrong to justify the second.

So what is the solution to this rather elaborate problem? It may be surprising to some, but it is absolutely simple. *Gurmat, Gurbanee* and the *Sikh Rehat Maryada* are absolutely clear on this issue. And the solution is to go back to the basics as prescribed therein. Individual Sikhs need to appreciate the meaning of the *Anand Karaj* ceremony, Sikh families need to respect the sanctity of the ceremony, our *ragees* and *paracharakas* need to educate themselves and their audiences, and our Institutions and *Gurdwaras* need to defend it. The issue becomes complicated only when we try to justify the unjustifiable.

The *Anand Karaj* is to be done when both parties are Sikhs and intend to live the Sikh way of Life. Any non-Sikh who genuinely desires to become a Sikh, does indeed become a Sikh and practices *Sikhi* – even if inspired only by a Sikh partner in marriage ought to be welcome to partake in an *Anand Karaj*. The onus of establishing this genuineness is upon the couple.

On the other hand, for those who have no intention of genuinely wanting to be Sikhs, and for those who know deep in their hearts that their non-Sikh partners have no desire to be genuine Sikhs, a civil marriage is an act of honesty. Should they subsequently desire the blessings of a *Gurdwara sangat*, their civil marriage can be followed by a *Jor Mela* and *kirtan katha diwan* (minus the *laavan*) in the local *Gurdwara*. This way the sanctity and dignity of the *Anand Karaj* is allowed to remain intact. End.

Note to Parbhandaks, Gurdwaras and Institutions: Please make copies and distribute to your *Sangats*. Education is the way to get back to the correct *maryada*.

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