



**CEREMONIES OF THE SIKH  
WEDDING by MINA SINGH**

# CEREMONIES OF THE SIKH WEDDING

*Ceremonies of the Sikh Wedding* (published in New Delhi in 2005) is the first comprehensive book on the religious ceremonies of the Sikh marriage, known as the *Anand Karaj*. Two major developments -- the existence of a large number of expatriate Sikh communities in distant lands and the increasing number of marriages between Sikhs and adherents of other religions -- prompted the writing of this book. With pictures by well-known photographer Raghu Rai, *Ceremonies of the Sikh Wedding* aimed at providing useful information not only to those planning a Sikh wedding, but also to those interested in learning more about the social customs and religious practices of India's most colourful community.

The Sikh marriage is a unique sacrament because it does not require any services to be performed by a priest -- it requires only the presence of the Sikh holy book, Guru Granth Sahib, and a reader, either man or woman, to read specified verses from it while the bride and bridegroom walk four times around the holy book. The Sikh marriage ceremony does not have to be performed in a gurdwara or Sikh place of worship. It can legally take place in the home or in an appropriate public place, at any time. *Ceremonies of the Sikh Wedding* celebrates the uniqueness and simplicity of the *Anand Karaj*, behind which lies the sublime meaning the Sikh Gurus gave to the different stages of a human being's life, from birth to death and, importantly, to wedded life.

According to Sikhism, marriage is a necessary fulfilment because through marriage the highest form of love, the love for the Divine, may be experienced. Few Sikhs remain single because of their faith that God has ordained marriage as a necessary sacrament and holy union, which is enacted in accordance with Divine Will. Marriage remains even today the most popular social institution of the Sikhs -- of those settled in the homeland, the Punjab, as well as of those settled abroad. It is celebrated as the most momentous event in a Sikh's life. This book outlines in detail the numerous social customs, joyous ceremonies and solemn rites that are performed during a Sikh wedding, which may extend over a week.

*Ceremonies of the Sikh Wedding* includes detailed information about pre-nuptial celebrations and ceremonies, such as the *sangeet* and *mehndi*, concluding with the *doli* and reception that follow the *Anand Karaj*. With intra-community marriages on the increase, this book aims to provide the younger generation all the information they need to organize a wedding according to Sikh traditions. *Ceremonies of the Sikh Wedding* provides ample information for the bride and groom and their families, who bear maximum responsibility for the proper performance of the sacred ceremonies of the *Anand Karaj*, to be able to do so with confidence.

Sikhism is a young faith compared to Christianity, Islam and Hinduism. *Ceremonies of the Sikh Wedding* is written in the hope that the general reader will enjoy its insights into Sikhism. As multiculturalism firmly establishes itself in many countries around the world, more and more people are beginning to value and explore cultural diversity in a globalised world. For hundreds of years, India has deeply appreciated cultural richness, making its society the most multicultural in the world. This book is written in the anticipation that India's love of cultural diversity will be further strengthened in the 21st century.

‘Mina Singh’s book is a thoughtful account of the religious ceremonies of the *Anand Karaj*. I did not think my practice of daily worship, such as *Prakash*, *Ardas* or *Vaak*, required detailed explanation, but I’m glad Mina has finally done it for the benefit of Sikhs and non-Sikhs and especially the younger generation. For those planning a Sikh wedding, this book is a must.’

**Dr Bhai Mohan Singh**

‘One of the most beautiful aspects of Sikhism is its wedding ceremony. It is simple and solemn and holds so much meaning that a book such as this one, which explains the ceremony in detail, is to be welcomed by everyone. I appreciate Mina Singh’s earnest endeavour to spread the beauty of Sikhism...Don’t delay, add *Ceremonies of the Sikh Wedding* to your collection of books today!’

**Mandira Bedi**

‘Mina Singh's book will make NRIs nostalgic for the colour and majesty of the Indian wedding. Sikhs, from New York to New Zealand, who miss the exuberant celebrations that are so much a part of the Punjabi way of life, will find here a guide that is authentic, informative and committed. Mina Singh has rightly placed principles alongside the reality. She has recorded a moment in Sikh cultural history, as it is being played out today in India. Tomorrow new practices may be initiated abroad based on this record.’

**Sant Singh Chatwal**

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## PREFACE

The Sikh wedding is a unique sacrament because it does not require any services to be performed by a priest -- it requires only the presence of the Sikh holy book, Sri Guru Granth Sahib, and a reader, either man or woman, to read specified verses from it while the bride and bridegroom walk four times around the holy book. The Sikh marriage ceremony does not have to be performed in a gurdwara or Sikh place of worship. Thus, it is the ultimate self-help wedding that can legally take place in the home, or in an appropriate public place, such as a community hall.

Therefore, the aim of this book is to provide information to those family members who bear the maximum responsibility for the successful completion of the sacred rituals of the *Anand Karaj*, enjoined upon them in their role as lay-priests. This book is also an up-to-date guide to the rules of etiquette, the correct forms and practices, of the Sikh wedding. It includes detailed information about the joyful celebrations before the *Anand Karaj* ceremony, such as *sangeet* and *mehndi*; the rituals of giving and receiving gifts; and the tradition-bound *doli*, the bride's tearful departure from her parent's home.

Two major developments -- the existence of a large number of expatriate Indian communities and the increasing number of, hitherto forbidden but now accepted, marriages between adherents of different religions -- have prompted this first comprehensive book on the social etiquette and religious ceremonies of the *Anand Karaj*. Today, all of us can benefit from knowing something about how other communities in India organize, solemnize and celebrate weddings.

## INTRODUCTION

### A NECESSARY FULFILMENT

Few Sikhs remain single because of their faith that God has ordained marriage as a necessary sacrament and sacred duty. They believe marriage represents a holy union, consecrated in accordance with Divine Will or *Hukam*. In order to find true bliss, ascetics give up the world altogether rather than aspire to transcend the world's daily turmoil. That is not the way of a Sikh -- to shirk personal and social obligations or to avoid a problem by attempting to remove the possibility of that problem ever arising.

The word 'Sikh' means a follower or *shishya*, from the Sanskrit *sikhya*, and was used for the followers of Guru Nanak (1469-1539) from the very outset. The Ten Gurus of Sikhism lived among the people, guiding them, worshipping in congregations, and sharing the joys and sorrows of the community. Those few Sikhs who feel they have a higher calling are free to follow it outside marriage, but their place is still with the people.

The Sikhs view marriage as *lodiye kam*, a necessary fulfilment, by means of which the highest form of love, the love for the Divine, may be experienced. Married life or *grihasta* is celebrated, granting to women equality in society and an important role as mothers. Sikhism teaches that men and women are equal in all respects. The founder of the religion Guru Nanak, in the following *shlok* from the early-morning prayer, *Asa di Var*, accords to women absolute equality with men:

*Bhand jami-ai bhand nimi-ai bhande mangan viah  
Bhundoh hovai dostee bhundoh challe rah  
Bhand muah bhand bhali-eh bhand hovai bandhaan  
So kyon mandah aakhi-ai jit jameh rajaan*

From women born, conceived in the womb, to young women betrothed and wed,  
With women we are friends, from women come future generations.  
If one's wife dies man seeks another; a woman binds his life and passions.  
Why then speak ill of women, of whom kings are born?  
SGGS, p 473

Sikhism repudiates celibacy, extreme asceticism, and the view that women are impediments in the path of spirituality. In times of celebration or mourning, recitation of *bani*, first called *Gurbani* by Guru Ram Das (1534-81) to make explicit the identification of *bani* with the Guru, has been the cherished mode of acknowledging the presence of the Divine:

*Bani Guru Guru hai bani wich bani amrit saarey*

The Word is the Guru and the Guru is the Word, which is permeated with nectar.  
SGGS, p 982

Women could always read and recite *Gurbani* and take equal part in the religious ceremonies of the Sikh community. Moreover, throughout the Granth Sahib the bride is used as a symbol of mankind. The symbol of the human bride pining for her Divine Groom is central to the poetry of the Granth Sahib:

*Mera man loche gur darshan tai  
My mind pines for a glimpse of the Guru  
SGGS, p 96*

By seeking to wed the sublime, Transcendent Groom, the bride symbolises the human desire to merge with the Divine in life's experiences. The worthy bride is deemed *gunvantee*, full of virtues, because she yearns to follow a true Sikh:

*Jo deesay Gur sikhraa tis niv niv laagao pie jio.*

*Aakhaa birthaa jee ki Gur sajjan de milai jio.*

*Soee dus updesraa mera mun anat na kahoo ja-ai jio.*

When I see a *sikh* of the Guru, I humbly bow and touch his feet.

I tell him my state of mind so that he may help me meet my beloved Guru.

I seek such instruction from him that my mind may never go astray again.

SGGS, p 763

The picture of the young bride in Guru Nanak's *bani* is that of an alive and passionate young woman engaged in a spiritual quest. She does everything to make herself attractive as a bride, darkens her eyes with *anjanu* and adorns her neck with jewels. Surrounded by her sisters and female friends, she oversees the arrangements for her wedding. She confides in them her joy at her good fortune:

*Meri sakhi saheli sunhu bhai*

*Mera pir risaalu sung sai*

Listen, my friends and sisters,

My groom is handsome! He is always by my side.

SGGS, p 1169

The bride says to her family and friends:

*Sambat saha likhia mil kar paavo tel*

*Deho sajjan asisaria jio hovai Sahib sio mel*

The day of my wedding is fixed, come pour the ritual oil at my threshold

Give me your blessings, O friends, that I may be united with my Lord

SGGS, p 12

Guru Nanak's composition titled *Barah Mah* or Twelve Months presents month by month, using the Indian calendar as a backdrop, the suffering of the human Bride who is separated from her Divine Beloved. Thus, humankind's relationship with the *Akal Purakh* or Eternal Creator is better understood and appreciated, and human life in the cosmos imbued with meaning.

All the nine Gurus, who preached the Sikh faith after Guru Nanak, supported the stand taken by him on social issues. They opposed dowry, *purdah*, female infanticide, child marriage and *sati*, which were all practised in the Punjab of their time. They offered women equal opportunity to find spiritual liberation through the tenets of Sikhism. Both men and women read and recited *bani* and took part in the religious ceremonies initiated by Guru Nanak in Kartarpur. Here he established a distinctive community of his disciples, who revered, collected and finally compiled his hymns as scripture in order to establish an independent religion.

However, one must set against the ideal view of gender equality in Sikh scriptures, the firm establishment of patriarchy in Sikh society, then and now. The hard reality is that the power to grant fair treatment to women rests with men only. In the Sikh wedding ceremony, the bride's father places the groom's *palla* in the bride's hand and she *follows* the groom around the Sikh holy book four times. This aspect of the ceremony illustrates symbolically the patriarchal social system under which Sikh women live to this day.

Marriage is still the most popular social institution of the Sikhs -- of those settled in their homeland, the Punjab, as well as of those settled abroad. It is celebrated over several days and is the most momentous event in a Sikh's life. Arranged marriages are still the norm in rural communities, more so than in urban communities and the metro cities of India, where the educated young are eager to choose their own mates. But whether their marriages are arranged or not, young Sikhs value parental consent to their marriage and approval of their choice of partner. Communities of the Sikh diaspora can be even more conservative in the matter of exclusively arranging marriages within the community. Even in a 'love marriage' with a non-Sikh, a Sikh is expected to solemnize his or her marriage by Sikh rites.

Today, Sikh couples look forward to a nuclear family and a whole new life-style, but for all their new ways, if their relationship with their in-laws is not established from the start on the right footing, their marriage is more likely to be a marriage at risk than one where the etiquette, at least, of one big, happy, joint family is kept up.

## ORIGINS

The origins of marriage by *Anand Karaj* go back to early Sikhism, but the form and simplicity of the present-day practice of the marriage rites owes much to the reformatory zeal of the nineteenth century Nirankari and Namdhari or Kuka movements. In 1909, the Anand Marriage Act was passed in the Imperial Legislative Council, recognising the Sikh marriage ceremony, the *Anand Karaj* or Ceremony of Bliss, and ensuring its validity. The Anand Marriage Bill was introduced by Tikka Ripudaman Singh of Nabha State, where there was already in force a wise order stipulating that no more than eleven guests should accompany the wedding party to the bride's house! In 1945, the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee published the Sikh *Rehat Maryada* or Code of Conduct, which contains rules of the Sikh way of life and includes the correct procedures for the *Anand Karaj*. These have now been followed for almost a hundred years, firmly establishing the *Anand Karaj* as a Sikh practice.

The social aspects of marriage are also important in the Sikh community: Co-sanguine marriage, child marriage and *sati* have always been repudiated by the Sikhs. Divorce is allowed according to the civil laws of the land. Both the *Rehat Maryada* and Granth Sahib are silent on this issue, as before 1947 a man could take more than one wife without divorcing the previous one.

The families of the girl and boy still largely arrange marriages. In all cases, the two families assist in the wedding even if they disapprove of their progeny's choice. Marriage is not thought of as a private matter between two individuals. A large number of guests from both sides are expected to attend the wedding. Parents also consider it their duty to pay for the wedding and provide the *vari* (the bridegroom's parents' gifts of clothes and jewellery for the bride) or the *daaj* (dowry provided by the girl's parents).

However, there is no sanction in the Granth Sahib for demanding dowry from the bride's parents. Guru Nanak teaches that the bride who takes the Divine Name with her as dowry to her in-laws' home is truly happy:

*Harprabh mere babula Har devaih daan mai daajo*

*Har kapro Har sobhaa devaih jit savarai mera kaajo*

O Father, give me only the Divine Name as a marriage gift

The Divine Name will be my raiment, my pride and adornment, all my tasks it will fulfil.

Monetary or so-called caste considerations or show of wealth at a wedding are contrary to Sikh tenets, as Guru Ram Das says:

*Hor munmukh daaj je raakh dikhaalah so koor ahankar kach paajo*

*Har prabh mere Babula har devaih daan mai daajo*

Any other dowry, the self-willed puts out on show, is pride and falsity

O, my Father, give me only the Divine Name.

SGGS, p 79

According to custom, it is more important that a Sikh marries a Sikh than any other criteria of education, social status or wealth. The reason for this is the

Sikh belief that the householder's life (*grihastha*) must be transformed into a fit state for the true discipleship of *Wahe Guru* or the Eternal Guru.

## THE ENGAGEMENT

### *KURMAI*

The engagement or *kurmai* may precede the wedding by a few days or by several months. Hymns in the Granth Sahib establish the fact that the ceremony of betrothal or *kurmai* is at least as old as the Sikh religion:

*Sat santokh kar bhao kuram kurmaee aiya Balram jio*

She who is embellished with truth and contentment is favoured by her father-in-law (by the Guru's visit) to betroth her to the Lord.

SGGS, p 773

The gift of an engagement ring to the girl or the exchange of rings is always followed or preceded by *Ardas*, a formal petitioning of the Almighty through words said to be laid down in the *Rehat Maryada* from the time of Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708). The groom slips the engagement ring on the third finger of her left hand and, if the girl is gifting him a ring, she does likewise. Since generally men wear only one ring, whereas women wear two (their engagement ring and wedding band), the boy may be gifted a ring either at the engagement ceremony or at the conclusion of the Anand Karaj.

For the engagement the girl's parents invite the boy and his family to their home. In the presence of Guru Granth Sahib and the assembled members of both families and guests, Guru Amar Das' *Anand Sahib* or Hymn of Bliss is sung. The first five verses and the last verse of this Hymn are always recited before *Ardas*. After *Ardas* follows *vaak* or *hukam* and distribution of *prashad*. The *vaak* is the term used for the verse, read in its entirety from the top of a randomly opened page of the Granth Sahib, which is deemed to be the divine command or *hukam* for the day.

If the engagement ceremony cannot be held in the presence of Guru Granth Sahib, the *Ardas* alone may be recited, maintaining Sikh etiquette, such as taking off of one's shoes, covering one's head and remaining standing during the course of *Ardas*.

The girl's parents present a *gutka* or small prayer-book, a symbolic *kirpan* or dagger and a *kara* or steel bangle, among other gifts, such as traditional Indian sweets or *mithai*, dry fruits, especially *chuhare* or dried dates, and token money to the boy. Should the girl's family wish to avoid the expense of an engagement, their financial constraint should be a matter worthy of consideration by the bride as well as the groom and his family. Sikh tradition enjoins upon the married man to show the same love and respect for his wife's parents as he shows his own parents. In any case, an engagement is a social custom not a religious requirement. It is a genuine occasion for celebration if both families are comfortable with the scale and cost of the celebration.

Breaking an engagement is considered a more serious breach of custom than changing one's mind after a *thaka* or *roka*. The *thaka* is a formal ceremony prior to the engagement, signifying the intention of the couple to be married in the near future. Often there is no exchange of rings at this point. Usually the girl's family visits the boy's home with gifts of sweets and fruits to mutually

consent to the marriage of the couple, at a convenient time in the future. Often this is the first formal meeting between the two families, and its aim is to establish a cordial relationship.

The boy's family gifts the girl jewellery and clothes, according to their budget, and likewise the girl's family gifts token money, *mithai* and gifts to their prospective son-in-law. The girl's father may apply a *tilak*, a mark with *kesar* or saffron paste, on the forehead of his future son-in-law as a sign of betrothal. The *thaka* or engagement, like other important events, such as an important birthday or anniversary, may be commemorated with *paath* (reading of appropriate verses from the Granth Sahib) or *kirtan* (singing verses from the Granth Sahib) followed by *Ardas*.

## PRE-NUPTIAL CEREMONIES

### *AKHAND PAATH*

*Akhand Paath* is the unbroken reading of the entire Granth Sahib (1430 pages) completed in forty-eight hours. The Sikhs attach special merit to *Akhand Paath*. To enable maximum participation in this special ceremony, *Akhand Paath* is held over a weekend. The *Anand Karaj* is usually fixed for the following Sunday.

A relay of *paathis* or readers begins reading on Friday morning and ends the reading on Sunday morning. The family joins in the reading or otherwise serves meals and provides every convenience for the undisturbed completion of the *paath* by the *granthis* or readers, usually four in number, each of whom reads for about two hours at a stretch. Both families hold *Akhand Paath* so advance planning is required to avoid a clash. Both sides are expected to attend the *bhog* or ceremonies relating to the joyful completion of *Akhand Paath*, at each other's residence.

The *Akhand Paath* may be held in the local gurdwara if it is more practicable, but family members should always be present, especially during the night, to ensure that the *Paath* is not interrupted by sleep. The enthusiastic spirit in which this arduous *Paath* is begun should be maintained throughout the two days, till its completion. Reading silently, for lack of an audience, or solely by hired *granthis* is contrary to the spirit of the *Akhand Paath*, which celebrates recitation of the Lord's Name, *Naam Jaap*, as the highest good and Guru Granth Sahib as a living Guru.

If a room in the house is specifically used for prayers (also called gurdwara because Guru Granth Sahib is installed there) and if it has enough space to house all the relatives who are likely to be invited, then that room is the logical choice for holding the *Akhand Paath*. Otherwise, any other room may be used, after it has been emptied of all furniture and all paintings or wall decorations that are not conducive to prayer. The floor is covered with a clean carpet or any floor covering, and clean white sheets are spread on top.

Bouquets of fresh flowers are placed before the Guru Granth Sahib and strings of fresh flowers (*gaindas* or orange marigolds are the most economical) are used to decorate the gurdwara. Flowers for decorating the *palki* or palanquin-like structure in which the Granth Sahib is installed can be as simple or elaborate as the family wishes, but the trend is towards elaborate arrangements. Incense and *divas* or oil lamps are best avoided as their fumes may irritate the throats of the *paathis* and *raagis*. Fresh fruits, a coconut or other ingredients of ritual

offerings to deities are also not placed before Guru Granth Sahib. They are thought unnecessary, in the words of Guru Nanak, to the simple experiencing and tasting of the Name of the True Lord:

*Thal vich tin vastu paeyo sat, santokh, vichaaro*  
*Amrit Naam Thakur ka paiyo jis ka sabs adhaaro*  
*Je ko khavai je ko bhunchai tis ka hoi udhaaro*

Served on the platter are three things: truth, contentment and contemplation,  
The Ambrosial Name of the Lord, the support of all,  
Whoever consumes and savours the Name is saved  
SGGS, p 1429

The *Akhand Paath* invokes God's blessings through prayer before commencing with the wedding celebrations. The day-and-night reading of the holy book is meant to prepare the prospective bride and groom and their families to undertake the important rites of marriage in the right spirit, and to be mindful of God's benevolence in bringing about such great good fortune in their lives.

Sikhism teaches that ritualism can be counter productive and since a majority of human beings may never progress beyond the customs and rites of devotion, it is better to avoid ritualism altogether. Whatever the feelings behind ritualistic worship, it is better to express love of God directly through prayer. Says Guru Nanak:

*Jalo aisi reet jit main piyara visrai*  
Set fire to such rituals which alienate my Beloved Lord  
SGGS, p 590

However, although Sikh religious observances are meant to be simple, in practice they have become complicated under the influence of the social customs of the Punjab taken as a whole. Parents, at least, should be able to differentiate wisely between Sikh social practices and true Sikhism as embodied in the writings of the Gurus in the Granth Sahib.

Writings of Hindu and Muslim saints (notably Kabir, Namdev, Ravidas and Shaikh Farid) are uniquely incorporated in the Granth Sahib. However, only those writings were chosen that were doctrinally consistent with the basic beliefs of the Sikh Gurus and the tradition initiated by the founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak. All 1430 pages underline the ideals of the new religion: Inner devotion to, and meditation on, the Divine Name, universality of faith in the One God or *Ikk Oankar*, egalitarianism, truthful conduct, service of the needy, earning a living by honest means, and erasing of the egotistical self.

Since the time of Guru Nanak, congregations have met and sung *shabads* or sacred songs written by Sikh Gurus and *bhagats*, the latter denoting the saints other than the first, second, third, fourth, fifth and ninth Gurus whose compositions are incorporated in the Granth Sahib. This shared experience of hearing and reciting *bani* or the Divine Word received by Guru Nanak, constitutes the Sikh community. It is through *Bani*, says Guru Nanak that he received his revelation, recorded it and transmitted it to his followers. Guru Arjun portrays *dhur ki bani* as the divine source of Guru Nanak's spiritual utterances:

*Dhur ki bani aa-ee*  
*Tin sagali chint mitaa-ee*  
From beyond arrived the Word  
And put an end to all suffering.  
SGGS, p 628

Guru Arjun gave *Bani* the physical form of a holy book, the *Adi Granth*, and Guru Gobind Singh, the Tenth and last of the Sikh Gurus, institutionalized it as *Guru Granth Sahib*, proclaiming the holy book as his successor and Eternal Guru of the Sikhs. From the poetic text of *Guru Granth Sahib* emanate the Sikh community's ideals and institutions. All Sikh ceremonies relating to birth, initiation, marriage or death are performed within the ambit of the presence or sound of this scripture.

Since then *Bani*, as recorded and exclusively embodied in the *Granth Sahib*, has exerted a profound influence upon Sikh life. Icons form no part of Sikh sacred space, only *Gurbani* makes the space and time sacred, wherever and whenever *bani* is seen, spoken or heard.

### ***KIRTAN***

Sikhism is perhaps the only religion in the world in which *kirtan* is the chief mode of worship. Where there is *kirtan*, the singing of *Bani* to the accompaniment of musical instruments, there is paradise: *Taha baikunth jaha kirtan tera*, says Guru Arjun. As even the *raags* have been indicated in which different verses of the *Granth Sahib* are to be sung, Sikh *kirtan* in *satsang* (a gathering to pay religious homage) is a powerful means by which the mind and the senses, the body and spirit, can be attuned to the presence of the Divine.

During the marriage ceremony *kirtan* is usually performed by a group consisting of three *raagis*: One plays the *tabla* and the other two the *harmonium*. Some *raagis* now use an electronic keyboard instead of the *harmonium*. Traditional stringed instruments, such as the *pakhawaj*, may also be used. The lead singer sits in the middle and the group is known by his name as *Raagi Harjit Singh* and Party or *Bhai Satnam Singh* and Party. *Raagis* must at all times be treated with the utmost respect as they are the channels through which *bani* reaches and touches the hearts of countless people who may never have read the *Granth Sahib*. Guru Nanak describes himself as a *dhadhi* or itinerant singer of hymns:

*Hau dhadhi wekaar kaarey laa-i-aa*

I was a minstrel, out of work, when the Lord took me into His service.

*Raat dihai kai vaar dhuro furmaa-i-aa*

Night and day to sing His verses, the command came from Beyond.

SGGS, p 150

*Raagi* groups are employed by the *Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee* and may be booked to perform *kirtan* through the local *gurdwara* or the main historical *gurdwaras* in the city, such as *Gurdwara Bangla Sahib* or *Gurdwara Sis Ganj Sahib* in New Delhi. At an *Anand Karaj* the groom's father pays the fee of the *raagis*.

In large assemblies, the *raagis* generally sit on the right, facing the men in the congregation, and with their backs to the women in the congregation. They sit on a raised platform or dais so that they may be in full view of the congregation, but the dais on which they sit must never be higher than the one on which the *Granth Sahib* is placed.

For the *Anand Karaj*, however, the *raagis* sit to the left of the congregation (see diagram). The groom and bride do not walk behind the seated *raagis* when taking a *phera* (round) of *Guru Granth Sahib*, but move in front of

them, so enough space must be left between the *raagis* and Guru Granth Sahib for them to walk as they circumambulate Guru Granth Sahib.

### ***ARDAS***

The *Ardas* is a supplicatory prayer that is recited daily by Sikhs, individually and in congregations in gurdwaras. The *Anand Sahib* or Hymn of Bliss generally precedes *Ardas*. For a devout Sikh the *Ardas* is a must before the beginning and at the conclusion of any significant undertaking. Any man or woman, of any social caste or status, who is appointed or chooses to lead the congregation's petition, may recite *Ardas*. At the time of *Ardas*, the whole congregation stands facing the Guru Granth Sahib, with head covered and palms held together in supplication.

The *Ardas* concludes with the *jaikara* or triumphal cry of *Bole so nihal!* This is answered by the congregation's response *Sat Sri Akal!* *Sat Sri Akal* is also the most commonly used Sikh salutation.

#### *Boley So Nihal*

Let him who utters be filled with joy:

*Sat Sri Akal!*

True is the Immortal One!

The first eight and the last two lines of the *Ardas* are unalterable. The full text, currently in use, is published in all *gutkas* or prayer books which contain the *Nit-nem* or daily prayers. A personal manner of petitioning, illustrative lines from the text of Granth Sahib, intercessions that add to the exaltation of the moment, may be introduced during *Ardas*, but they must always be addressed to *Wahe Guru* or the Almighty Guru. At the end of *Ardas*, everybody assembled in the congregation must bend down on their knees and touch their forehead to the ground, rising again on their feet to recite the concluding *shlok* of Guru Nanak's *Japji Sahib*:

*Pavan Guru paani pita mata dharat mahat*

*Divas raat do daayee daya khele sagal jagat*

Air is the Guru, Water the father, Earth great mother of all

Day and Night the two nurses fondly watch all creation at play

*Changiyaayan buriyayeeyan vaache dharam hadoor*

*Karmi aapo aapni, ke nere ke door*

Our virtues and bad deeds God's judgement shall weigh

As we have acted so some will be near to God, some driven away.

*Jini naam dhiyayiya gaye musakat kaal*

*Nanak te mukh ujale, ke ti chutti naal*

They who meditated on the Holy Name have also departed, after much endeavour

Nanak says, radiant are their visages, many have they freed in their wake.

SGGS, p 4

Finally, the following verse by Guru Gobind Singh is sung, extolling the Guru Granth Sahib as the Guru of the *Panth* or Sikh community and the ascendancy of the *Khalsa* or Congregation of the Pure:

*Aagiya bha-ee Akal ki, tabhi chalayo panth*

*Sab Sikhan ko hukam hai, Guru maniyo Granth*

The Timeless One gave command then was created the Panth  
All Sikhs are commanded to acknowledge as their Guru the Granth.

*Guru Granth ji maniyo, pargat guran ki deh*  
*Jo Prabh ko milbo ch-hai, khoj shabad main leh*  
Have faith in Guru Granth ji as the manifest body of the Gurus  
One who seeks union with God let him search the Word

*Raj karega Khalsa, aki rahe na koi*  
*Khuar huai sab milange, bacche sharan jo hoi*  
The *Khalsa* shall rule, none will remain outside it  
Released we will all meet, those saved by God's protection

The rousing cry of *Bole so nihai* is then answered by the whole congregation  
with *Sat Sri Akal*, followed by:  
*Waheguru ji ka Khalsa!*  
*Waheguru ji ki fateh!*  
The Pure Congregation of Waheguru!  
Victory to Waheguru!

### **VAAK**

Then the congregation is again seated, and the *vaak* or counsel is read from the Granth Sahib. Every day, after the morning prayers and *Ardas*, the Granth Sahib is ritually opened and a verse is read from the randomly opened page. This is deemed the divine command or *hukam* for the day and is called a *vaak*. The reader or a member of the congregation should stand behind the reader and wave a *chaur* or flywhisk at the time of the *vaak*. This is done during the reading as a sign of respect to the enthroned Guru Granth Sahib.

A *vaak* may also be read at any time of the day or on an important occasion, to obtain guidance for the benefit and comfort of all present. Reading of the *vaak* or *hukam* from the Granth Sahib always concludes a prayer meeting. It is read from the top of the left hand page opened at random. Not from mid-sentence but from the beginning of the topmost stanza on the page. The name of the *raag*, in which the ensuing verses are to be sung, followed by the codeword *mahala*, is found at the beginning of every hymn in the Granth Sahib. The word *mahala* (meaning chieftain of a feudal principality, or guru in a spiritual context) is followed by a number that indicates which Guru is the author (for example, the heading *Raag Suhi, Mahala 4*, indicates that the composition which follows is in *raag* Suhi and is authored by the Fourth Guru, Guru Ram Das). This is the point at which the reading is begun and the entire stanza is read and deemed the *vaak*. After the *vaak*, everybody remains seated till the distribution of *karah prashad* is over.

### **KARAH PRASHAD**

*Karah prashad* is sanctified food prepared by a prescribed method and offered to all after *Ardas*. Distribution of *prashad* to the entire congregation and the partaking of it commemorate Guru Gobind Singh's removal of all caste restrictions at the time of instituting the *Khalsa* or Brotherhood of the Pure. Food that is served afterwards is always referred to as *langar* or food from the Guru's kitchen. It is always vegetarian.

Sikhs always cover their heads, as a mark of respect, in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib. Not covering one's head when sitting or standing before Guru Granth Sahib is tantamount to insult, according to the Sikh point of view.

*Karah prashad*, the sacramental food, is distributed at the conclusion of the *vaak* and is received with both hands. It is prepared by the bride's family or at the request of the bride's family by *sevadars* from the local gurdwara. It is prepared in large quantity, as it is to be distributed to everybody present at the *Anand Karaj*, including staff. In experience, it has rarely been known to run short so generous is the spirit in which it is cooked. *Prashad* made with one kilo of *atta* (whole wheat flour) or semolina will make about 25-30 servings.

*Karah prashad* is carried to the place of prayer in a clean container, covered with a clean cloth, and placed on a *chowki* or low table, next to the podium on which the Granth Sahib is opened and read, and never on the ground. It is at all times covered with a clean, fresh cloth, even during distribution, when the cloth covering it is only partially lifted to enable its distribution. It is served by hand to members of the congregation who must receive it, with both hands cupped together, with due respect and in a spirit of thanksgiving. It is the consecrated food or *prashad* with which the first five chosen ones, *punj piyaras*, were initiated into the *Khalsa* or Brotherhood of the Pure by Guru Gobind Singh. From that time on, the Sikh *Khalsa* maintains the five Ks, five emblems of this brotherhood, each beginning with the letter 'k': *kes* (with turban), *kanga* (comb), *kaccha* (underpants), *kirpan* (sword) and *kara* (steel bangle).

*Karah prashad* is prepared with equal portions by volume of semolina (*sooji*) or flour (*atta*), ghee and sugar (see Appendix). After the *Ardas* and after the *vaak* has been read, the *karah prashad* is sanctified by passing a *kirpan* through it and reciting the *Mul Mantra* or Essential Mantra contained in the opening lines of the Granth Sahib: *Ik Onkaar, Satnam, Karta Purakh, Nirbhau, Nirvair, Akal Moorat, Ajuni, Saibhang, Gur Parsad*. The first five portions of the *prashad* are put in a serving vessel, to be given to *Khalsa* members of the congregation in memory of the initiation of the *punj piyaras*. More often, the five portions are put back into the container after the *Mul Mantra*, the opening lines which occur before the first verse (*pauri*) of the *Japji Sahib*, have been recited in commemoration of the sacrament of the *Khalsa*. Then the *prashad* is distributed. The *bhai ji* (gurdwara functionary, reader-reciter of the Granth Sahib) sitting in attendance behind the Guru Granth Sahib is served his portion first, which is put in a bowl and placed beneath the *manji* to be consumed later. After this, more *karah prashad* is put into the serving vessel and distributed to everybody in the congregation. A *sewadar* or gurdwara attendant may be called from the local gurdwara to help distribute *karah prashad* to a large congregation.

Between the day of the Bhog of Shri *Akhand Path*, usually Sunday, and the day of the *Anand Karaj*, the following Sunday, the pre-nuptial ceremonies of *shagan, chunni, sangeet* and *mehndi* are performed.

The Sikh wedding can take place on any day suitable to both families: Sikhs repudiate the belief that certain days, hours or seasons are inauspicious or more auspicious than others. Credence is not given to *lagna, tithi* or *mahurat*. The *Anand Karaj* is normally fixed for Sunday morning, as it is a weekly holiday.

The matter of wedding invitations follows western practice. The conventional wedding invitation conforms to all the rules universally followed regarding paper and the style and wording (see Appendix). Normally, both sides send out invitations independently, however, the groom's family invites close

members of the bride's family for the Reception, after obtaining a list from the other side. For the two *sangeets*, a fixed number of invitation cards are usually handed to the parents for sending out to close family members, depending upon each family's budget for entertaining. The wording of the invitation card is traditional, the only notable difference being that the main card is often sent out in the name of the grandparents rather than the parents of the bride or groom, as a mark of respect to the elders of the family.

The wedding invitation card should reach guests about a week before the start of these ceremonies. Separate invitation cards inviting guests to the *Akhand Paath*, *sangeet* or *mehndi* are enclosed with the wedding invitation. The hosts are usually shown as the parents of the bride and groom but often the invitation to the *Anand Karaj* ceremony, at least, is from the grandparents, even if they are not paying for the event.

### **SHAGAN**

For the *shagan* ceremony, the girl's close relatives arrive at the prospective groom's residence with the *shagan ka thal*, that is, with auspicious gifts on a tray or salver, the whole covered with a decorative cloth. The offerings include *kesar* or saffron paste (for the *tikka* or auspicious marking of the forehead of the groom-to-be), a coconut broken into two halves, some almonds, *misri* or sugar crystals and *chuare* (dried dates), which are presented to the boy after he has been formally welcomed with a *tikka*, applied to his forehead by his future father-in-law. A *gutka* or small prayer book of *Nit Nem* or daily prayers and an iron *kara* is also gifted to the groom-to-be. Token money and gifts of fresh fruits, dry fruit and *mithai* are also given to the boy and his family. His parents and brothers and sisters may also receive gifts of clothing, budget permitting.

This ceremony is often combined with, or called, *chunni chadana*. A few days before the *Anand Karaj*, the female members of the boy's family, led by the *bhabhi* (boy's sister-in-law) and his mother and sisters, take the *chunni* (of auspicious red colour) and gifts of jewellery, a *salwar-kameez* or a sari, a red *paranda* (braid which is plaited with the hair), along with perfume and make-up for the bride-to-be. Thus, gifts are given and received to establish goodwill between the two families and to mark the first stage in a contract that is finalized by marriage.

The significance of the *chunni* lies in that it is a beautiful and rich garment meant not only to adorn the bride but also to secure and protect her with power derived from the love of the man to whom she is now betrothed. A fine shawl may also be gifted to the bride if the wedding takes place in winter. Fashion dictates the shade and cut of the garments gifted to the bride-to-be but red is the traditional colour worn by the Sikh bride at the *Anand Karaj*, symbolising her departure from the life of a maiden into womanhood and conjugal life.

In the Granth Sahib, the festive red *manjithara* of the bride's garments is symbolic of the new colour her life has assumed. The bride's binding love for the Lord's Name is as brilliant and unfading now as the dye with which her garments have been imbued:

*Tera eko naam manjithara rata mera chola saad rang dhola*

With your Name alone have I everlastingly dyed red my raiments, O Beloved.

SGGS, p 729

The future bride has discarded the faded garments of lust and anger: *Kaam krodh ki kachi choli* and assumed the vestments of unfading love and devotion. When she appears in the clothes gifted to her by her future in-laws, she signifies her entrance into the preparatory stage for the religious sacrament she is about to receive at the *Anand Karaj*. It is a very emotional moment for the girl's family, which the boy's family should appreciate as they go about glorying in the contributions they have made to the young bride-to-be's appearance. The future mother-in-law then covers the girl's head with the *chunni* she has brought, formally presents her gifts of ornaments and other items of adornment, and finally offers her *mithai* to eat. Other women from the boy's family also greet the girl by offering her sweets and token money. Money after *warna* (warding off the evil eye) is given to the poor or those who serve in her father's household.

Guru Nanak's phrase *haun wari jio wari sabad suhawania* (I devote myself to the wonderful Word of the Lord) and the oft-heard exclamation *main wari jaanva* (I am utterly devoted to you!) point to a long history of offering token money in devotion to a loved one, but since etiquette demanded that the recipient of such devotion should modestly refuse to accept even token money, the correct response was to give the money to a needier person. Thus, the practice of *warna*, giving token money out of love, was seen as spiritually efficacious and successful in warding off the negative consequences of the evil eye or envy, rivalry, malice and other harmful emotions.

*Warna*, or the warding off of the evil eye, is common during wedding festivities. It is also an acceptable way of rewarding household staff for their extra labour on this happy occasion. A rupee note, not a coin, of any denomination, is waved clockwise over the heads of the bridegroom and bride by elders in the family to seek protection for them from the evil eye, and the note handed to the nearest helper or accompanist, such as the drummer, or a family member, usually the mother of the groom, for distributing to the poor.

### ***SANGEET***

The importance of *sangeet* cannot be exaggerated in Sikh wedding celebrations. For hundreds of years, Punjabi folk songs have been handed down orally through generations and retained as a result of the practice of celebrating a wedding in the family with singing and dancing. The songs are loosely classified as *sehra*, when the subject is the groom and *mehndi*, when the subject is the bride. Other songs fall into groups, known generically as *tappe*, *jugni* and *boliyan* for their fast tempo and strong rhythm. Most are simple love songs with a strong rural flavour.

Originally, the *sangeet* was known as 'ladies' *sangeet*' because the women of the family sat down to sing and play the *dholak* or drum and have a good time, while the men welcomed guests and attended to the practical arrangements. Dancers and musicians, called *mirasis*, entertained wedding guests in feudal times. Now audio-cassettes and CDs of wedding songs are played if there is a dearth of singing talent in the family.

The groom's family invites the immediate family as well as close relatives of the prospective bride to attend their *sangeet*. In previous times, the girl herself was not expected to attend. The groom, however, was expected to attend and join in the merry-making at the girl's *sangeet*. Nowadays the couple, their relatives and friends, both men and women, assemble to sing and dance.

Some all-time favourites include:

1. *Kaley rang da paranda merai sajannan ney aanda*

2. *Bajre da sitta, ni main tallee te maroriya, rusiya jaanda mahiya*
3. *Amritsarai de variyaan veh main khaandi na*
4. *Chann veh ke shaunkan melai di, oye hoye ki shaunkan melai di*
5. *Latthe di chaddar, utte salaitee rang mahiyaa*
6. *Kaala doriya kundey naal ar gayee oye*
7. *Ni mein kattaan pareetaan naal charkha chanan da*
8. *Phullan di bahar raateen aayo na, shavah raateen aayo na*
9. *Saari raat tera takniaan raah, taareyan to puchh chann ve*
10. *Chann kithaan guzariyaee raat ve mainda jee daleela de vaas ve*
11. *Luk luk vekhna tu kanu meri chaal ve, vekhda ainveh mera laung gawacha*
12. *Mehndi ni mehndi, aj ralke lavan aayeeyan ni bhaina te bharjayeeyan*
13. *Kaala shah kaala, mera kaala hai sardar goriyan nu dafaa karo*
14. *Nachh lain dey nee mainoo dyor de viyah vich*
15. *Dacchi valya mor muhaal, ve soni valya lai chal naal ve*
16. *Mathhe te chamkan waal merai banre de*
17. *Ho mehndi ta sajdi je nachhey mundey di maan*

Traditionally, in the Punjab, men dance the *bhangra* and women the *gidda*. Now other popular forms of dancing and film music are also fashionable. A large *dholak*, which is played with sticks by professional drummers, is a must if the men in the family are keen on the *bhangra*. As he plays, the drummer expects tips from enthusiastic guests and family members. This is in addition to the fee he charges for the night.

Singing and dancing is followed by dinner. Caterers are hired to provide for the large number of guests. A dance floor is sometimes set up and music from a live band is the most important entertainment. *Sangeet* is sometimes organised in a marriage hall or in a hotel, which relieves the hosts of problems caused by bad weather, extreme heat or cold, security and other dampers to revelry.

Guests from the other side must be warmly and effusively looked after during dinner. The hosts should be relaxed and informal and make every effort to make the occasion memorable for a loved son or daughter. At the same time, they should not forget that the more important the ceremony, the more scope there is for misunderstanding, especially as social norms deem the two sides intrinsically unequal. The younger generation, especially the prospective bride, rebels against this lopsided view but is unable to do very much about it. They know weddings cost the most, receive the greatest preparation, enforce the most ritualized behavior and are almost entirely paid for by the parents.

### ***MEHNDI***

On the morning before the *Anand Karaj*, the female relatives of the prospective bridegroom take gifts of fruit and sweets to the bride's family, who will be commencing ceremonies leading up to the *Anand Karaj* with the application of the auspicious henna or *mehndi*. The dry *mehndi* powder is a gift from the groom's family. Along with it are sent gifts of clothing, jewellery and other items used by brides for their adornment usually at the time of *chunni chadana*.

The *mehndi* is moistened with water and left overnight, then stirred till it becomes a fine paste. A professional *mehndi* applier may be hired to prepare the *mehndi*, and to apply it on the hands of the bride and all her female relatives and friends. Beautiful patterns are also traced with *mehndi* on the bride's feet and ankles. Normally, only the bride-to-be has *mehndi* applied to her feet.

Food and drink are offered to all. Often glass bangles are gifted by the bride's mother to all the girls and women in the family, with the request that they will be worn during the wedding ceremonies. After a few hours the dry, flaking *mehndi* is washed off, by which time it has left a deep orange colour on the skin that lasts for a few weeks.

To initiate the bride's rites of cleansing and beauty in preparation for the wedding day, a ritual application-massage of *vatna* (paste of turmeric, gram flour and mustard oil) is applied on the bride's body by her sisters and close female relatives. The massage-cleansing and her bath afterwards, signify ritual blossoming. The rite of *vatna* anoints the young bride-to-be and the ritual bath purifies her for the religious ceremonies ahead.

Some sort of water ceremony is common to all marriage rites in India, its aim being the purification of mind and body before assuming the dharma of wedded life:

*Satgur sev dhhann baal-aree-ai Har var paa-vai soo-ee Ram*

*Sadaa ho-vai sohagane phir mael-aa ves na ho-ee Ram*

*Phir mael-aa ves na ho-ee gurmukh boojh-ai ko-ee haum-ai maar pachhaan-i-aa*

Serve the True Guru, O young and innocent bride, and thus attain the Lord as your spouse.

Forever will you be the wife of the True Lord, and never again wear soiled raiments.

Your garments shall never be soiled: Rare are the *gurmukh* (followers of God's wisdom) who recognize this having conquered their ego.

SGGS, p 770

The Granth Sahib is replete with comparisons between the potential *gurmukh* and the real *munmukh*. Poles apart from the *gurmukh* is the *munmukh* or arrogant self-willed person, who is forever unhappy and deluded:

*Kaايا andar appe wasai alakh na lakhia jaaee*

*Munmukh mugadh boojhai naahee baahar bhaalan jaaee*

*Satgur sewai sadaa sukh paye Satgur alakh ditaa lakhaaee*

The Lord abides within the body, invisible and unknowable.

The foolish self-willed *munmukh* goes out searching for the Lord

One who serves the True Guru is always at peace: To him is revealed the unseen.

SGGS, p 754

In the Punjab, the groom's family also celebrates *mehndi* but with somewhat less excitement and preparation than in the home of the prospective bride, simply because the application of henna or *mehndi* is not for him the beauty ritual it is for the bride and her friends. The application of a turmeric *vatna* to his face and arms and other exposed parts of his body is enjoyed as a custom rather than as an indulgence in beautification. Although the groom's sisters and female cousins and aunts may revel in applying *mehndi* to their hands and in selecting *chooris* (provided by the groom's mother), the groom-to-be may simply dip his hand into henna paste and, with his back to a wall in the house, print his hands on the wall behind him, auspiciously marking with henna (as a defense against ill-fortune) the walls of the family home, where he will return only after he has married and become a householder. *Mehndi* is not applied to any other part of the groom's body.

## **CHOORA**

After a bath, the bride takes part in the *choora* ceremony. The maternal uncle gifts the bride *chooras* (traditional red and white bangles by which the newly wed girl will be identified for as long as she wears them), and with it a *nathh* or nose-ring, a small *gutka* or prayer book, token money and *mithai*. The *chooras* are washed in milk to cleanse them before their ritual wearing. The usual number is eleven on each wrist. The *mama* or maternal uncle slips them on the bride's wrists and blesses her with token money. Sweets are offered to the bride, her family and all present. Her sisters, her brothers' wives, other female relatives and women friends, tie *kaleeras* (beaten gold and silver hangings) with pieces of red string on the *chooras* for good luck, thus beginning the process of decking out the bride in ritual finery. Tying *kaleeras* with thread dipped in turmeric or saffron around the wrists of the bride is a traditional custom by which female members of the family and friends begin to take leave of the bride by giving her talismans of good fortune. Token money is also gifted to the bride by all her relatives.

The *choora* ceremony is usually performed on the day before the *Anand Karaj*. Her *chooras* are not taken off, once worn, till after the marriage ceremony is over, but the thin bangles on which the *kaleeras* have been tied are taken off at night so that the bride can sleep comfortably on the night before her wedding day, and reworn once she is ready and dressed for the *Anand Karaj*.

## THE WEDDING PROCESSION

### *SEHRA BANDI*

The ceremony of *sehra bandi* is performed prior to the groom's departure for the bride's house or place where the *Anand Karaj* is going to be performed. The bridegroom is in full wedding attire before the richly decorated *sehra* or wreath-like veil is tied around his forehead. By tradition he dresses in an *achkan* and *churidar pajama* and usually wears male, ceremonial jewellery, such as a necklace of pearls or woven golden threads, and a *sarpech* or jeweled turban ornament with a *kalgi* or plume fixed in it. Gold-worked Punjabi *juttees* are worn on the feet. In his hands he holds a sword, signifying his readiness to uphold the dharma of the householder. He may choose a sword belonging to the family or borrow one for the occasion. From the time that Guru Gobind Singh introduced the *Khalsa* rite of baptism by the sword Sikhs display the sword on their person on important ceremonial occasions.

The *Ardas* opens with the words *Prathamī bhagautī simar kai* or 'recall first the sword', *bhagautī* meaning Durga in Hindu mythology and the Almighty in Guru Gobind Singh's hymns, where God is also invoked through names such as *sarab loh* and *kharag*, also meaning the sword. The sword has both a real and a symbolic value in Sikhism.

The ceremony of *sehra bandi* involves the ritual tying of the *sehra*, usually a decorative fringe made of strings of pearls or flowers (like jasmine) or gold threads, around the bridegroom's forehead and turban so that his face is hidden from ordinary gaze. The bride's face is also veiled but no ritual is involved in her first donning of her wedding clothes and the veil or *chunni*.

This North Indian custom is recorded as early as 1633 in the *Padshahnama*, a history of Shah Jahan's reign: 'In accordance with the custom of Hindustan, for good luck His Majesty fastened around the Prince's head the

*sehra*, which consists of strands of lustrous pearls with brilliant rubies and emeralds, and which His Majesty Jannat Makani [Jahangir] had fastened with his own blessed hand around His Majesty's head on the eve of his marriage... The *sehra* is lifted and tied at the back of the turban or removed altogether before the First *Lavan* is read.

Nowadays, the sisters and female cousins of the bridegroom tie the *sehra*, the crown-like symbol of the groom's exalted status, and their good wishes are returned with token gifts of money from the bridegroom or his mother. *Mithai* and snacks are offered to the assembled relatives. A *granthi* or family elder recites the *Ardas* before the groom mounts on horseback, with his sword in hand. The sisters and female cousins feed the *ghodi* with gur and grains, and tie decorative tassels, dipped in turmeric or saffron, or braids of golden threads, on the mare's bridle.

Traditional songs are sung praising the handsome appearance of the groom on his horse, and seeking blessings for him as well as protection from the evil eye. These folk songs are collectively known as *ghodiyaan* or *sehra*.

These folk songs have found a reference in the Granth Sahib, in the verses titled *Ghodiyaan*, where the ritual associated with the auspicious mounting on horseback is given a spiritual meaning: The subduing of the body by the awakened mind.

Guru Ram Das's verses in Raag Wadhans, titled *Ghodiyaan*, exalt the human body as a fleet mare, which a human being may ride to meet his Lord: *Deh ghodi ji jit Har paa-i-aa Ram*. Guru Ram Das says, meditation is the saddle, the bridle is spiritual knowledge, and God's love is the whip that spurs on the body-mare. Thus, the saints proceed in a *junj*, a wedding procession, to meet with their beloved Lord:

*Har Har kaaj rachaa-i-aa poorai mil sant jannaa junj aa-i-ee*

*Jan Nanak Har war paa-i-aa mangal mil sant jannaa wadh-i-aaee.*

The Lord himself has ordained this work: the saints ride together in a marriage procession

Servant Nanak has been granted the Lord as his spouse! In joyful unison the saints glorify Him.

SGGS, p 575

The name Nanak, in the last line of this stanza by Guru Ram Das, symbolises the authority and the supreme position of the founder of the Sikh faith, Guru Nanak. It occurs in the compositions of all the Sikh Gurus, assembled in the Granth Sahib, as a signature of Guru Nanak's lineage. It evokes the continuity of his mission in the lives and compositions of the nine Gurus, who comprised his spiritual lineage.

Riding on horseback to the bride's house is a rite of prestige for the bridegroom. The bridegroom may ride only on a horse, the noblest of beasts, or on an elephant, because of his exalted status. This practice seems to have had its basis in royal ceremonies and martial traditions. However, since he rides to wed and not to war, it is customary for the bridegroom to ride a white mare or *ghodi*. The symbolism of white includes the quality of submissiveness to the mastering groom who restrains conjugal ties with the higher bonds of dharma.

Nowadays, the bridegroom proceeds only a short distance or till the gates of his house, where he dismounts and gets into the back of a flower-bedecked car, which is driven by a close relative to the bride's house. His parents are seated in the same car. Other close relatives follow in decorated cars behind the

groom's car. At a short distance from the bride's house, the bridegroom gets out of the car and mounts another mare and thus completes the ceremony of his proud, secure arrival.

The number of relatives and friends who will make up the *baraat* or groom's wedding procession is decided in advance by mutual agreement between the two families. The groom's male relatives in the *baraat* usually wear turbans of the same colour so that they can be easily identified as privileged guests of the bride's family. Since it is obligatory for everybody to cover their heads, as a sign of respect for Guru Granth Sahib, even non-Sikh men may wear a turban on this formal occasion, thereby also indicating their status as *baraatis* or *jamaatis*.

The boy's family has to ensure that cars are provided for all out-of-town guests to reach the bride's house or the venue of the *Anand Karaj*, punctually. The wedding party enters the bride's house as a joyful procession with the mounted bridegroom at its head. A *shehnai* player, with accompanists, may lead the way with a *sumangal dhun* or a band may play popular tunes as it leads the groom's party through welcome arches decorated with fresh flowers. A dholak, beaten with sticks, is another important accompaniment to the *baraat* if the young men or close relatives in the *baraat* wish to dance the *bhangra* to express their joy.

### RECEPTION OF THE *BARAAT*

When the *junj* or groom's wedding procession arrives at the home of the bride, the parents, relatives and friends of the bride should be ready and waiting to receive the bridegroom. If the *junj* is late or the bridegroom's friends are keen to take a little more time to dance the *bhangra*, the delay should be borne with good cheer. The *sarbala*, by tradition the youngest boy in the family, one who is as yet a mere child, rides with the bridegroom as his mascot or auspicious portent of fertility. He too is dressed like a bridegroom.

A hymn of gratitude composed by Guru Nanak is sung by the bride's family before the formal meeting (*milni*) between the male members of the two families takes place. This is done after the bridegroom and *sarbala* have dismounted:

*Hum ghar saajjan aa-ai pyaria, hum ghar saajjan aa-ai*  
*Saachai mel milaa-ai*  
*Sahaj milaa-ai Har mun bha-ai panch milae sukh pa-i-aa*  
Our home is graced by the arrival of good folk  
The Lord has brought about this true union  
It pleased Him, to bring the chosen one to me, I have found peace.

*Sa-ee vast parapat hoee jis setee munn la-i-aa*  
*Andin mel bha-i-aa munn maan-i-aa ghar mandir sohaa-ai*  
*Punch shabad dhun anhad waje hum ghar saajjan aa-ai*  
All the goods of the world I have obtained in Him to whom I am attached  
Day and night my heart is with him who is the adornment of my temple-home  
The unstruck melody of the Word resounds when my Lord enters my home.

*Aavoh meet pyare mangal gaavoh niyare*  
*Sach mangal gavoh taa Prabh bhavoh sohilaraa jug chare*  
Come, dear friends, sing auspicious songs  
Sing with true joy to delight the Lord in the four ages

*Apnai ghar aa-i-aa thaan suhaa-i-aa kaaraj shabad savare*

*Gyan maharas netri anjan tribhavan roop dikha-i-aa*

*Sakhi miloh ras mangal gavoh hum ghar saajjan aa-ai*

The Lord has come and blessed this place and all our tasks the Word has accomplished

With the salve of great knowledge in my eyes, I behold the Lord's beauty in the three worlds.

Come together, my friends! Let us sing the auspicious songs of joy: my Lord has come to my home.

SGGS, p 764

Family members of both the bride and the bridegroom should cover their heads during the *Ardas*, invoking the presence of God on this happy occasion, which follows this hymn.

### **MILNI**

After *Ardas*, the father of the bride steps forward and welcomes with a warm embrace and symbolic gift of money (in an envelope) the father of the bridegroom. After *warna* he places the envelope in the bridegroom's father's hands as a token of the new bond between the two families. The bride's brother will likewise greet the bridegroom's brother, the bride's uncle the bridegroom's uncle, and so on. High spirits and warm hugs are displayed on this occasion, which marks the honouring of the bridegroom and his party as they arrive at the bride's residence. Only close male relatives participate in this formal yet boisterous welcoming ceremony. The number of relatives who will participate in the *milni* is previously decided upon according to the wishes of the groom's family.

After the *milni* is over, the bridegroom alights from his *ghodi* and he and all the members of his *baraat* are led into the house or the colourful cloth canopy raised on poles called a *shamiana* -- where the bride waits on a specially decorated dais with her friends and female relatives to welcome the bridegroom. Garlands may be exchanged but no *tilak* is applied on the groom's forehead and no *aarti* is performed. The bride first garlands the groom, who garlands the bride in return. This beautiful ceremony (*jaimala*) of welcome by exchanging garlands is practised throughout India, so it is often, but not always, followed by Sikhs. The freshest flowers, rose, jasmine or gairda, are used in the garlands and also in the decoration of the *pandal* or pavillion in which the Granth Sahib is already installed and into which the wedding party now proceeds for the *Anand Karaj*.

If the *baraat* arrives at the bride's house in the morning, the bride's family and relatives lead the bridegroom straight after the *milni* into the presence of Guru Granth Sahib, where friends and relatives are already assembled and *shabads* of rejoicing are being sung -- thus invoking the Lord's presence in the *Saadh Sangat*, or True Congregation of the Holy, with Guru Granth Sahib in the midst as witness. As Guru Arjun says:

*Saadh sangat Prabh kio nivaas*

God resides in the congregation of saints

SGGS, p 1184

If the *baraat* reaches the bride's home at night, after *milni* it is treated to a feast. The bride and groom may be asked to sit on two flower-bedecked chairs, on a dais sumptuously decorated for the occasion. Guests know where to find the

soon-to-be-marrieds to greet them and wish them happiness in their life together. The groom is surrounded by the bride's sisters and female cousins and wives of her brothers, who may tease him, demand token money from him, or rings as mementoes (*kaleecherees*), but also bring him food and drink and introduce him to members of their families and to their friends. For the principal members of the groom's family, as well as for the bridal couple, a sit-down dinner is organized even when a buffet is being served to all the wedding guests. The bride's parents seat themselves at the same table when they are not circulating talking to their guests.

In principle, the marriage ceremony may be conducted at anytime, anywhere, in the presence of Guru Granth Sahib. In practice, it takes place in a gurdwara or in the bride's home or in any other suitable place where the Granth Sahib may be respectfully installed. Hotels and other commercial places are deemed inappropriate nowadays for the observances of such a sacred ceremony. Usually a *granthi* or a respected Sikh (rarely a woman) conducts the ceremony.

## THE MARRIAGE CEREMONY

### *Anand Karaj*

When the marriage hall or *pandal* is ready, the Granth Sahib is brought in covered with a beautiful *rumala*. The officiating *bhai ji* or *granthi* carries the holy book on his head and places it on a decorated dais beneath a decorated canopy or *chandni*. The hall now assumes significance as sanctified space. The *raagis* seat themselves on the right of Guru Granth Sahib, that is, to the left of the congregation, and begin *kirtan* while family members show the groom's wedding party where to take off their shoes and comfortably seat elderly relatives. This is a signal for both families and the wedding guests to enter into an appropriately solemn frame of mind and assemble before Guru Granth Sahib.

The same protocol must be observed in the presence of Guru Granth Sahib as in a gurdwara. Tobacco and liquor are strictly forbidden in the wedding *pandal* as on gurdwara premises. Before entering the marriage hall or *pandal* everybody must take off their shoes and cover their heads. No one is exempt from showing these marks of respect to the Guru Granth Sahib. As in a gurdwara, if any individual is found lacking in these observances, he may be politely, yet firmly, asked to comply with the protocol. Non-Sikhs must cover their heads with a clean handkerchief, wearing a hat or cap does not amount to the same thing and is deemed impolite.

Upon entering the presence of Guru Granth Sahib, everyone must walk slowly up to Guru Granth Sahib, bow humbly, touch their forehead to the ground, place token money before Guru Granth Sahib, and quietly sit down in the congregation without disturbing others. In a congregation it is usual for women to sit on the left side of the gurdwara and for the men to sit on the right side. Men sit facing the *raagis* and the women sit on the side the *raagis* are seated. Talking or looking around is deemed inappropriate behaviour.

The girl's family invites the *lara* or bridegroom, still wearing the *sehra* tied by his sisters, to first sit before Guru Granth Sahib, along with his parents, brothers and sisters, uncles and aunts, and close friends. Usually a longish floor cushion or mattress is provided for the couple to sit on. The bride enters after the groom, in the company of her female relatives, who lead her to her place on the

left of the groom. Both must touch their foreheads to the ground before sitting down cross-legged in front of the holy Granth Sahib.

When the *shabad* the *raagis* are singing is completed, the bridal couple and their parents stand up for *Ardas*. The rest of the congregation remains seated. *Ardas* is then recited, invoking God's blessings and seeking His permission to perform the marriage rites. This *Ardas* signifies the consent of the bride and the groom and their parents to the marriage. No individual consent is obtained from the parties concerned or marriage contract drawn between them as in a Muslim wedding.

After every one is seated again, the groom's sisters or closest female relatives lift the *sehra* and tuck it in his turban so that his face is visible or remove the *sehra* altogether before the commencement of the *Lavans*. The groom may also not wear a *kalgi* in the presence of Guru Granth Sahib. According to ancient custom, however, the bride's face remains covered with her veil, which is lifted only after the *Lavan Pheras* are over. The superstitious believe this protects the bride from the gaze of the envious. In any case, the veil allows her to experience the overwhelming emotions that are bound to arise on this momentous occasion in privacy. The bride's sisters and friends help her to stand up and sit down during the *phas*, adjust her veil, remove the garlands of flowers around her neck and place in safekeeping the gifts of money and jewelry she receives immediately after the *Lavan Pheras*, in short assist her in every way possible, during the marriage ceremony and up to the time of *doli*. For this they are thanked by the bridegroom at a convenient time, after the religious ceremonies are over, with a keepsake *kaleechari* or ring, the bride's sisters receiving special mentions.

The person appointed to read the marriage hymns from the Granth Sahib usually takes his place, behind the dais on which the Granth Sahib has been duly installed, before the bridegroom is seated. When the Granth Sahib is transported from the house into the marriage pandal, it must be carried on the head of a Sikh and should be covered with a *rumala*, a brocade or silk wrapping about a metre square, and likewise when it is returned. All who are present must reverentially stand with their heads covered while the Granth Sahib is being transported.

The waving of a whisk, or *chaur*, usually made of yak's hair, over Guru Granth Sahib is another sign of royal veneration for *Sache Patishah*, the True King, of the Sikh community.

The Granth Sahib is placed on a lectern or bed-like platform (*manji*), on which a mattress covered with a clean white cloth is laid and three small cushions are placed -- at the top and to the right and left, to support the holy book when its pages are opened. The holy book is never opened and read without a canopy above it. The opening and reading of it every morning, *prakash karna*, is followed every night by the closing of it and putting it to rest, *sukh asan*. Modern *palkis*, constructed out of wood, have a domed structure above the platform or *manji* (literally meaning bed) on which rests the Granth Sahib. This serves as a small canopy if a bigger canopy cannot be suspended just below the ceiling.

For weddings a large, richly decorated canopy or *chandni* is constructed filled with fresh flowers. It should be large enough to cover the *palki* of Guru Granth Sahib, as well as the path along which the groom and bride will circumambulate it. The Granth Sahib is also always covered with a *rumala* or mantle, tailored specially for the purpose. When it is to be read, the *rumala* is

gathered at the top of the volume to reveal the pages under it. After the reading, the *rumala* is again lowered over the pages to cover the Granth Sahib.

The dimensions of the *rumala* are usually one square metre. Another *rumala* of similar dimensions is draped in front of the *manji* or *palki* so as to hide its legs. Two more *rumalas* of half the size (half a square metre) are draped over each side of the *manji* so that its legs are completely covered with the beautiful *rumalas*. In all, four *rumalas* are used, the one that is used to cover the Granth Sahib generally has the most trimmings, although all are sewn out of the same material and are similar in design and decorative trimming.

In the congregation, as in a gurdwara, every one must be seated at a level lower than that of Guru Granth Sahib, no matter what their position in politics, government or society. If chairs are provided for the elderly to sit on, then these must not be placed in view of Guru Granth Sahib, but just outside the entrance or in a designated area, so that no insult is intended to Guru Granth Sahib or the *sangat* which is seated on the ground in holy congregation all around the Granth Sahib.

### **LAVAN PHERAS**

After the *granthi* or officiating family member, who has been requested to do so, seeks God's permission through *Ardas* (for which a separate microphone should be provided) to commence with the *Lavan Pheras*, both sets of parents and the bridal couple bow before the Granth Sahib in public assent to the marriage rite and then sit down. Guru Nanak's short hymn of general counsel is then sung by the *raagis*:

*Keeta lodriye kam so Har pe aakhiye*

*Karaj dai savaar Satgur sach saakhiye*

*Sangataan sang nidhan amrit pe chaakhiye*

*Bheh bhanjan meharvan dass ki raakhiye*

*Nanak Har gun gaaye alakh Prabh laakhiye*

Seek the grace of God for the necessary fulfilment of your task

He will accomplish your success, the true Satguru hath said.

With the congregation, in bliss, taste the ambrosial nectar

Destroyer of fear, the Merciful Lord, preserves the honor of his supplicator.

Says Nanak, by singing the praises of the unseen Lord you may lay eyes on him.

SGGS, p 91

The tying of garments, in a knot symbolic of their union, is common in Indian marriage ceremonies. In the *Anand Karaj*, however, the father of the bride takes one end of the bridegroom's *palla* and gives it to his daughter who receives the *palla* with both hands. The *raagis* then sing a *shlok* composed by Guru Arjun:

*Ustat nindaa Nanak ji mai habh wanjaa-ee chhoria habh kij tyagee*

*Habhe saak kooraave dithhe tao pallai taindai laagee*

Praise or criticism, Nanak ji, I have given up and all worldly affairs.

Finding all relationships false I have tied my *palla* to thee.

SGGS, p 963

The *palla* is provided by the bridegroom's family. It normally consists of a length of fine fabric, measuring about two and a half metres, in bright colours, such as red, pink and orange. The bridegroom holds one end of it with both hands (along with his sword). The rest of the *palla* is then draped over his

right shoulder and across his back. Its other end is given to the bride to hold. Joined in this way the couple show their acceptance of each other as bride and groom, ready to circumambulate Guru Granth Sahib.

A brief speech follows addressed particularly to the couple, explaining the significance and obligations of marriage. This may be delivered by any respected elder but is usually delivered by the person appointed to read the *Lavans*. The ideal of marriage as the union of two souls is expressed in various hymns of the Granth Sahib, in which the bride, symbol of humankind, yearns to be united with her Divine Lord.

*Dhan pir eh na aakhiyan bahan ikathe hoee*

*Ek jot duee murti dhan pir kahiye soee*

Praise not those as man and wife who merely cohabit

Praised be those who are as one flame in two bodies

SGGS, p 788

The officiating *granthi* or senior person reading the *Lavans* may cite similar verses in instructing the bride and groom about the spiritual aspect of marriage. Nowadays, such instruction is limited to a few minutes. The bridal pair is then asked to show their commitment to marry by bowing before Guru Granth Sahib and touching their foreheads to the ground.

The officiating person then lifts the *rumala* in order to read the holy verses, starting from the bottom and gathering the *rumala* at the top of the open pages. The First *Lavan* of the Marriage Hymn, composed by Guru Ram Das, the Fourth Guru, is then read, after which the *rumala* is again lowered over the open pages. The open volume of the Granth Sahib is uncovered only for reading. Open or closed, the sacred volume is never without its mantle.

Microphones should be provided so that the whole congregation may hear the sacred readings clearly: Two for the *raagis*, another for the reader of the *Lavans* and a fourth for the *Ardas*. This fourth microphone is placed in front of the Granth Sahib, a little to the right of the couple, and should be of adequate height as the *Ardas* is always recited while standing up and facing Guru Granth Sahib.

Following the reading, the First *Lavan* is sung by the *raagis*. The bride and groom touch their foreheads to the ground and rise, and slowly walk around the Granth Sahib, the bridegroom leading and the bride following, while the *Lavan* is being sung. The four rounds or *pheras* symbolise the warding off of evil by circumambulating a purifying and transforming object, in this case the holy book, the Granth Sahib:

*Pothi Parmesar ka thaan,*

The Granth is the place of the Eternal One.

SGGS, p1226

The groom leads in a clock-wise direction and the bride, holding the *palla*, follows as nearly as possible in step. They proceed at a measured pace, clockwise round the Granth Sahib, till the bridegroom reaches his designated place in front of Guru Granth Sahib. The bride walks behind him to reach her designated place on his left, and not between the bridegroom and Guru Granth Sahib, that is, in front of the groom, in order to do so. When both are back in their original position, they bow before Guru Granth Sahib, touch their foreheads

to the ground, and sit down as before. The same protocol is repeated for the remaining three rounds.

To facilitate the couple's perambulation around Guru Granth Sahib, the bride's closest male relatives stand behind Guru Granth Sahib in a semi-circle and gently take the bride by the shoulder, turn by turn, and lead her forward, symbolically easing her passage to a new life with a show of family strength and support. The congregation remains seated during the *phas*. The bride's female relatives and friends also remain seated while helping her to rise and sit, adjusting her veil, arranging her heavy embroidered garments and generally administering to her needs during these most solemn moments of her life.

The ceremony is concluded with the customary singing of the six stanzas of the *Anand Sahib*, Song of Bliss, followed by *Ardas* and *vaak*, a reading of a verse from the Granth Sahib deemed the message for the day. The ceremony, which takes about an hour, ends with the serving of *karah prashad* to the congregation. Relatives and friends then rise and exchange greetings and congratulate each other.

### THE FOUR LAVANS

The Four *Lavans* may be interpreted as explaining the four stages of married love and family life. The first verse emphasises the performance of duty towards the family and community. The second verse acknowledges the stage of mutual love and yearning. The third verse celebrates the achievement of detachment or *vairag* in the midst of family life. The fourth verse refers to the final stage of harmony and union, in the company of saints, during which human love sublimates into the love for God.

*Lavan* is a Sanskrit word literally meaning 'break away', that is, the bride breaking away from her parents' home in the course of the four *phas* around the holy Granth Sahib. Based on spiritual precepts delineated in the *Lavans*, the Sikh marriage rite is viewed not as a contract but as a sacrament, a holy union dissolved only by death, in which two souls, appearing in two individual bodies, unite as one: *Ek jot doe murti*, one spirit in two forms.

In the First *Lavan*, Guru Ram Das instructs the couple to fulfil the duties of married life and attain the Divine in the midst of domestic life:

*Har pahilaree laav parvirtee karam driraa-i-a bal Ram jeeo*  
*Bani Brahma Ved dharam drirah paap tajaa-i-a bal Ram jeeo*  
*Dharam driroh Har naam dhi-aa-voh simrit naam driraa-i-a*  
*Satguru gur poora aradhoh sab kilvikh paap gavaa-i-a*  
*Sahaj anand hova wadhbhagee man Har Har meetha laa-i-a*  
*Jan kahai Nanak laav pahlee arambh kaaj rachaa-i-a*

The Lord with the First *Lavan* makes steadfast the performance of active worldly life and household duties, I am a sacrifice unto Him!

The instructions of Brahma and the Vedas strengthen righteousness and the renunciation of sin, I am a sacrifice unto Him!

Establish dharma, contemplate the Name of Hari, for through remembrance the Divine Name is established,

Invoke Satguru, the Guru second to none, and forfeit all poisonous weaknesses and sins.

The ultimate state of mystical union brings bliss to the fortunate who experience in their hearts the sweetness of Hari's Name.

Says Nanak, with the first encircling the commencing rite has begun.

SGGS, p 773

After both the bridegroom and the bride have reached their appointed places before Guru Granth Sahib, they touch their foreheads to the ground and sit down. The Second *Lavan* is then read from the Granth Sahib and sung by the *raagis* as the couple takes the second round of the Granth Sahib.

In the Second *Lavan*, Guru Ram Das assures mankind of the nearness of *Satguru*, the Fearless, Pure, Immanent Lord, in the midst of family life:

*Har doojaree laav satgur purakh milaa-i-aa bal Ram jeeo*  
*Nirbhao bhai man hoe haomai maill gavaa-i-a bal Ram jeeo*  
*Nirmal bhao paa-i-a Har gun gaa-i-a Har wekhai Ram hadoorai*  
*Har aatam Ram pasar-i-a suamee sarab rahia bharpoorai*  
*Antar baahar Har Prabh eko mil Har jan mangal gaa-ai*  
*Jan Nanak doojee laav chala-ee anhad sabad vaa-jai*

Hari in the Second *Lavan* unites one with *Satguru*, the *Karta Purakh* or Eternal Creator, I am a sacrifice unto Him!

With fear of the Lord, the Fearless One, the mind is rid of the slime of ego, I am a sacrifice unto Him!

Fearing the Immaculate One, singing the praises of Hari, one beholds Ram face to face

Hari is all-pervading, the inner Ram, Lord of the universe, everywhere He is all-in-all

Deep within, and without, there is only one Lord, meeting the servants of Hari hymns of rejoicing are sung

Says servant Nanak, when the Second *Lavan* is begun the unheard melody of the Divine *Sabad* is struck.

SGGS, p 773-74

The Third *Lavan* is then read and sung and the bridegroom and bride circumambulate the Granth Sahib for the third time:

*Har teejaree laav man chaa-o bha-i-a bairagee-a bal Ram jeeo*  
*Sant janaa Har mel Har paa-i-a wadhbhagee-a bal Ram jeeo*  
*Nirmal Har paa-i-a Har gun gaa-i-a mukh bolee Har bani*  
*Sant janaa wadhbhagee paa-i-a Har kathee-ai akath kahaanee*  
*Hirdai Har Har Har dhun upjee Har japee-ai mastak bhag jeeo*  
*Jan Nanak bole teejee laavai Har upjai man bairag jeeo*

With the third round the yearning for detachment wells up in the mind, I am a sacrifice unto Him!

In the company of saints the fortunate meet Hari and are united with him, I am a sacrifice unto Him!

The pure find Hari, sing His praises and utter only his Bani

Fortunate are the saints who attain Hari and narrate his indescribable tale.

The melody of Hari's Name resounds in their hearts, reciting his Name they realize the destiny inscribed on their foreheads.

Says Nanak, with the Third *Lavan* Hari brings forth in the mind detachment from the world.

SGGS, p 774

In the Third *Lavan*, Guru Ram Das blesses the couple with the prayer that they may reach the Divine by keeping the company of holy men and practicing detachment in the midst of conjugal life. The sublime bliss that ensues is celebrated in the final *Lavan*.

In the Fourth *Lavan*, Guru Ram Das says, Hari himself has brought about the happy union of the bride with her Divine Lord:

*Har chaotharee laav man sahaj bha-i-a Har paa-i-a bal Ram jeeo  
Gurmukh milia subhai Har mun tan meetha laa-i-a bal Ram jeeo  
Har meetha laa-i-a mere prabh bhaa-i-a an-din Har liv laa-ee  
Man chindia phal paa-i-a suamee Har naam wajee waadha-ee  
Harprabh thakur kaaj rachaa-i-a dhan hirdai naam wigaasee  
Jan Nanak bole chaothee laavai Har paa-i-a Prabh avinaasee*

By Hari's grace, in the fourth round, the mind attains the state of true bliss. Hari is attained, I am a sacrifice unto Him!

Meeting with the god-willed, my mind and body are filled with sweetness, I am a sacrifice unto Him!

Fulfilled is my heart's desire, the fruit obtained is Hari's Name, felicitations resound

The Lord Hari Himself enacted this union, His Name flowers in my heart.

Says Nanak, servant of the Divine, with the fourth round, the Eternal Lord is found.

SGGS, p 774

As soon as the fourth round is completed, the congregation showers the couple with rose petals to felicitate them and bless their entry into a new life. This should be done without undermining the sanctity of the moment or the respect due to the installed Granth Sahib. Sisters and friends of the bride usually distribute rose petals to everybody present by the end of the Third *Lavan* so that all may participate in the joy of the moment by strewing flower petals in the path of the couple during the final *Lavan*. The congregation has to stand to shower the couple with flower petals but they must immediately seat themselves again and remain in silence in spite of the excitement of the moment.

Guru Ram Das originally composed the verses of *Lavans* to celebrate the union of the human soul or *atma* with God or *Parmatma*. The phrase *balram jeeo* in the *Lavans* may be a reference to Balarama, the brother of Krishna, a poetic evocation of the slayer of the wicked Kansa, hence the destroyer of evil and the protector of virtue. However, the phrase primarily invokes God (Ram) to whom Guru Ram Das is beholden, hence the phrase *bal bal jaon*, or *balihar hona*, meaning *kurban jaon* (I sacrifice myself to you, I devote myself to you), or 'I am a sacrifice unto the Divine.'

After the four *phas* or rounds, the *raagis* then sing the first verse of Guru Ram Das' celebratory hymn in *Sri Raag*:

*Vi-aah hova mere babula, gurmukhe Har paya  
Agian andhera katiyaa, gur gyan prachand balaiya  
Vi-aah hova mere babula...*

*Baliya gur gyan andhera binasiya, Har rattan padarath ladha  
Haumai rog gavaiya, dukh latha, aap aape gurmat thadha  
Viah hova mere babula...*

*Akal moorat var paya avinaasee, na kade mareh na jaaya  
Viah hova mere babula...*

My marriage is performed, O my father, through the Guru's guidance I have obtained Hari

Darkness and ignorance are dispelled, the Guru has revealed the blazing light of spiritual knowledge.

My marriage is performed, O my father...

The lustre of Guru-bestowed knowledge has destroyed darkness. I have found the priceless gem of Hari's Name.  
 The malady of ego has left me, I have shed my troubles, with the Guru's guidance I have consumed away self-conceit.  
 My marriage is performed, O my father...  
 I have obtained the Lord of everlasting form as my spouse, who is immortal and will never desert me.  
 My marriage is performed, O my father...  
 SGGS, p 78

Another hymn of gratitude, composed by Guru Arjun Dev in *raag* Wadhans, is then sung:

*Poori asa ji mansa mere Ram poori asa  
 Moh nirgun jio sabh gun tere Ram  
 Sabh gun tere, Thakur mere  
 Kit mukh tudh salahee  
 Gun avgun mera kich na beechariya  
 Baksh leeya khin mahee.  
 Nau nidh payee, vajee vadhayee, vajey anhad toorey  
 Kaho Nanak main var ghar pahiya  
 Mere lathe ji sagal visoorey.  
 Poori asa ji...*

My hope is satisfied, fulfilled are my wishes, O Ram.  
 I am without merit, what merits exist are thine, O Ram.  
 All merits are thine, O my Thakur, how am I to praise thee?  
 You have not considered my merits or demerits but saved me in an instant of grace.  
 I have received the nine treasures of Thy Name, felicitations abound, the unheard melody of Bliss is struck.  
 Says Nanak, I have found a Spouse in my own abode and all my anxieties are dispelled.  
 SGGS, p 577

The final hymn showers the blessings of parents, grandparents and all ancestors on the couple with the following hymn by Guru Amar Das:

*Poota mata kee aasees  
 Jis simrat sabh kil vikh naseh pitri hoi udharo  
 So Har Har tum sad he japoh ja ka ant na paro  
 Poota mata kee aasees...  
 Nimakh na bisro tum ko Har Har sada bhajo Jagdish  
 Satgur tum ko hoi dayala sant sang teri preet  
 Kaparh pat Parmeshar raakhi bhojan kirtan neet  
 Amrit peevo sada chir jeevo Har simrat anand ananta  
 Rang tamasa pooran aasa kabheh na biyape chinta  
 Bhavar tumara eh mun hovo Har charanaa ho kaola  
 Nanak dass un sang laptaa-i-o jee-on boondeh chatrik moulah.*

O son, such are thy mother's blessings...  
 By remembering whom all sins are destroyed and even ancestors redeemed,  
 Ever take the name of the Lord who is eternal and infinite.  
 O son, this is thy mother's blessing...

Not for a moment may you forget the Lord. May you ever sing the praise of Jagdish.  
 Satguru has been benevolent towards you and imbibed in you the love of saints.  
 The Lord has kept your honour as your garment and your daily kirtan as your food.  
 May you ever drink the nectar of his Name, live life eternal, and enjoy everlasting bliss in meditating on His name.  
 May you be imbued with the colours of life's carnival, have your wishes fulfilled and suffer no disquiet.  
 May your mind be like the humming bee, attracted by the lotus-feet of the Lord.  
 Slave Nanak is entwined around his Lord's feet like the pied cuckoo thirsting for a raindrop.  
 SGGS, p. 496

The rose petals, with which the congregation showers the couple as they complete the Fourth *Lavan*, are distributed to everybody by the bride's family, usually by the younger sisters and cousins of the bride, before the Fourth *Lavan* begins. At this time, paper napkins may also be distributed, to wipe one's hands after eating *karah prashad*.

The bridegroom's father pays the fee of the *raagis*. The money is put in an envelope and before the kirtan ends quietly placed before the chief *raagi* who sits in the middle. If the *raagis* have been booked from a gurdwara controlled by the Sikh Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, then the *raagis* have to be paid only the sum fixed by the gurdwara. If the *raagis* are booked privately, their charges are not regulated by the SGPC. The fee should always be determined at the time of the booking.

It is customary for members of the congregation also to give small *bhaeta* or offering of money to the *raagis* in appreciation of their talent and their service to the Sikh community. Since statues and paintings form no part of sacred experience, it is *bani*, the sacred poetry of the Granth Sahib, wherever read, recited, or sung, that makes the Sikhs' sacred space. Therefore, at the end or during the kirtan, it is customary for members of the congregation to get up and give money to the *raagis*, without disturbing others or the *raagis*.

When everybody is seated again, the *Anand Sahib* prayer (first five stanzas and the last), composed by Guru Amar Das, are recited by the whole congregation. The *shlok* follows, then the *Ardas* and finally the *vaak*, after which *prashad* is distributed. The congregation remains seated while eating *prashad*.

If the couple decides to exchange wedding rings, then this is the best time for the groom to slip the wedding ring on the third finger of the left hand of the bride. She will already be wearing her engagement ring on this finger. The bride then presents her newly wed husband with a ring, usually a gold band, which he wears on the third finger of his left hand, as a sign of his married status.

The father of the bridegroom is the first to garland the new couple, first the groom, usually with a garland of flowers, then the bride, usually with a necklace or gold chain. The bridegroom's mother then garlands the couple, followed by the parents of the bride. This honour is often accorded to the grandparents of the bridegroom, followed by the grandparents of the bride. After which close relatives and friends, and indeed everybody present, showers congratulations and good wishes upon the newly married couple.

The bride's sisters and cousins help her to remove the garlands around her neck before she proceeds with the groom to where lunch has been laid out for

the wedding guests. The couple is sometimes made to sit on decorated chairs placed on a dais where guests can easily find them. The bride's sisters bring lunch to them or arrange for lunch to be served at a table specially laid out for them and their parents. After lunch, the couple mingles with the guests, greeting and thanking them for their presence at the wedding and for their good wishes and presents.

While the bride's friends banter with the bridegroom or pester him for *kaleecharis*, tokens of his affection for his wife's sisters and cousins and friends, or tease him by hiding his shoes so that he cannot depart with their loved companion, the bride begins preparations for her departure. The parting is real. Her own children, her new duties towards her parents-in-law, and finally her commitment to make her union with the man she loves an instrument for union with the Divine, will take her away further from her parents, further than she can ever imagine.

Soon the bride changes from her wedding attire into garments, usually a sari or *salwar-kameez*, gifted to her by her husband's family. This change of her entire attire is symbolic of her separation from her own family. She even wears jewellery and accessories, such as shoes and shawl, brought to her by her in-laws. After her luggage and wedding presents are packed into a waiting car, she is ready for *doli* or departure from her parental home.

Punjabi literature and folk culture are replete with the most powerful emotions evoked at this parting between the young bride and her parents, perhaps more powerful than the emotions of love and fulfilment she experiences in the arms of her husband following this separation.

So powerful is the feminine desire for nuptial bliss that the term *sadaa suhagan* is used as a blessing, to wish the bride everlasting enjoyment of her married status, that she may depart from this world before her husband and never experience widowhood. Guru Nanak, however, uses the term *suhagan* and its opposite *duhagan* to represent two categories of human beings: *Suhagan* is the fortunate married woman who enjoys the love of her husband and never suffers the pains of widowhood or desertion, while *duhagan* is the unfortunate wife whose husband dies or deserts her, the 'husband' being the Divine Lord and the 'wife', humankind, aspiring for eternal love.

Sikhism regards marriage as an indissoluble, sacred bond that provides worldly and spiritual happiness to the *gurmukh* who has surrendered body, mind and soul to the will of God, and not to the *munmukh* who flounders in egotistical pride, *haumai*:

*Gurmukh sukhi-aa manmukh dukhi-aa*

The Guru-willed is content, the self-willed miserable

SGGS, p 131

There is no mention of separation by divorce in the Sikh scriptures. The Sikh marriage is monogamous. In the case of a broken marriage, divorce is not offered as a solution in the Sikh religious tradition. The couple may, however, obtain a divorce under the civil law of the land.

The ceremony of the *Anand Karaj* is legally binding. If proof of marriage is required, then a photograph of the married couple taken immediately after the wedding ceremony, signature of two witnesses who were present on the occasion, and a letter from the officiating *granthi* (or the person who read the *Lavans*) detailing the names of the couple and their parents, and the date, time and place of the *Anand Karaj*, suffices as proof of marriage even for purposes of

obtaining a visa. If the marriage ceremony takes place in a gurdwara in which marriages are regularly solemnised, the person in charge of the gurdwara is what the law describes as an 'authorised person' to certify that a marriage has taken place. The *Anand Karaj* is a legal and proper ceremony in every sense and is recognized as such all over the world.

### *DOLI*

The bride's formal leave-taking from her parent's home after the *Anand Karaj* is called *doli*. The word *doli* literally means the wooden sedan-like structure (*palki*) of earlier times in which the bride was carried to her husband's home. To mitigate the pain of parting and lift the atmosphere charged with the tears of the bride and her mother, certain social customs are performed at the time of *doli*. These always include some form of blessing by the bride for the well being of her parental home, and by the bride's parents for the newly wed couple before their departure.

The bride scoops up rice grains with both hands and flings them over her shoulders to replenish symbolically with abundance and joy the home from which she herself is departing. Her married female relatives pour ritual oil at the doorstep as she leaves, as an auspicious rite of fertility, wishing her conjugal happiness. She may playfully beat an unmarried sister or friend on the head with the *kaleeras* tied to her wrists – folklore has it that whoever is thus subjected will marry next. The bride's family may also fling rice (symbol of fruitfulness) at the bridal couple and shower them with rose petals as they get into the gaily-festooned *doli* car. Sometimes the groom's family strews fistfuls of coins as the *doli* procession leaves the bride's house. This is done to avert the evil eye through a charitable gesture and to secure prosperity for the pair by propitiating adverse powers.

However, these social customs have no basis in Sikh religious practices except for the *Ardas*. Departure from the bride's home and arrival at the groom's residence are moments sanctified by *Ardas* and *Ardas* alone. Sikh culture has its roots exclusively in the land of the five rivers, Indus, Ravi, Chenab, Sutlej and Beas, known as the Punjab before its partition, and the influence of local norms and the mixed religions of the Punjabi community have played a part in shaping Sikh marriage traditions, however prayer in the form of *kirtan* and *Ardas* still remains its chiefest ceremony.

The bride formally bids farewell to all her relatives, especially her elders, before she leaves. Guru Nanak's counsel is her support at this hour and always:

*Rehan kehan te rahai na koe kish peh karon binanti*

*Ek shabad Ram Nam nirodhar Gur devai pat matee*

Everyone says they will remain by your side but none do; unto whom should you appeal? The one *sabad*, the Name of the Lord, will never fail you; the Guru will favour you with honor and understanding.

SGGS, p 931

The groom's family should show sensitivity towards the feelings of the bride and her family as she bids farewell to them. By custom, the bride changes out of her wedding garments and dons a new suit of clothing brought for her by her in-laws before leave-taking. She is gifted gold ornaments to wear on the occasion along with the *doli salwar-kameez*. The symbolic change into new vestments is also motivated by practical considerations. After the long or short journey to the bridegroom's home, the bride has yet to meet more of her

husband's friends and relatives. A joyful welcome with much celebration and revelry awaits her in her new home. She has to enthusiastically, though somewhat shyly, engage in the games and revelry, jokes and teasing, which are part and parcel of the welcome accorded to her by her husband's family. Departure from the bride's home is preceded by *Ardas*, and *Ardas* is also recited upon arrival at the groom's residence.

The car in which the bridegroom and bride ride to the home of the husband and his parents is lavishly decorated with fresh flowers, ribbons and tinsel so that no one is in doubt that it contains newly weds. They do not themselves drive, but are driven by a close family member and the normally the parents of the bridegroom also ride in this car with the bride and groom. The *doli* car is followed by more cars carrying family members and close friends who must accompany the couple back to the groom's house. Etiquette demands that close relatives and friends of the bride's parents should take their leave after *doli* and not before.

### **ARRIVAL AT GROOM'S RESIDENCE**

It is customary for relatives and close friends to accompany the *doli* to the bridegroom's house where the bride is welcomed with great enthusiasm. Ceremonies vary from place to place, but welcoming the newly wed couple by *tel chona*, pouring the sanctifying ritual oil, welcoming with *aarti* or showering of rose petals to show devotion, offering sweets to all, and lighting oil-lamps, even fireworks, is common.

The mother-in-law may present the bride jewellery as a gift when she crosses the threshold of her new home. The mother-in-law's parents, too, have a role to play: They host the dinner on the evening after the *doli*, offer gifts to their own daughter and the bride, and actively participate on this day in the happiness of their son-in-law and grandson.

As senior-most members of the bridegroom's family, the grandparents of the bridegroom are accorded due respect throughout the wedding celebrations, even though their age may not permit them to participate very actively. Wisdom, however, dictates that they leave important decisions to their son and daughter-in-law during the course of the wedding. Depending on their financial position, they are expected to contribute to the wedding arrangements by defraying some of the expenses or gifting a piece of family jewellery to the new couple.

## **THE RECEPTION**

### **WEDDING FINALE**

The wedding reception is hosted by the groom's parents and is the final event in celebrations that could last a week. All the friends and relatives of the groom's parents and the new couple are invited to the reception, which is usually held on the day after the *Anand Karaj*. The reception is the one event to which business or professional colleagues, neighbours and even friendly acquaintances are invited and generously offered food and drink according to the hosts' budget. The guest list is the longest on this occasion. The bride's parents and close relatives are also sent formal invitations. Old-fashioned ways of entertaining guests have been replaced by the practice of inviting popular singers, *bhangra* or rock bands, *qawaals* and even film stars to add glamour and excitement to the

occasion, the only limit being the budget. The bride wears clothes and jewellery gifted to her by her in-laws. Her attire and demeanour must accord with her new status as a wife and daughter-in-law.

The reception may be a tea or dinner reception but the latter is more often the case. There is no religious ceremony at this time. Even if a buffet dinner is laid out for the wedding guests, the bridal pair is always served a sit-down meal at which their closest friends are also seated.

Receptions are large because everybody in the groom's extended family is invited to meet the new entrant into the fold, to enjoy good food and music and to offer gifts to the newly weds. A bride is auspicious and said to bring good fortune, so all present are invited to look at her. For this reason, the newly married couple is made the center of attention. The pair sit on a decorated stage, under a flower-bedecked *kanat* or canopy of gaily-coloured cloth on four poles, symbolizing the sanctity of the union. Guests are expected to go up to them to congratulate them. Photographers must be hired to take photographs and videos of the bridal couple and their guests. However, they must be coached not to interfere with ceremonies in a bid to get good shots or footage.

By custom, the couple is not expected to move about informally welcoming guests. The hosts are always the parents of the groom. Naturally their guests and relations outnumber the friends of the bride and groom. It is a time of great happiness and satisfaction for the groom's family, so food and drink are generously served. Music sets the mood for revelling, whether live or recorded, and dancing is often spontaneous. Usually, on the following day, the couple departs on their honeymoon.

## CONCLUSION

Sikh wedding ceremonies and customs are nowhere laid down in the sacred scripture of the Sikh community. They have evolved over the years out of the inspiration provided by the *Lavan* verses of Guru Ram Das and the ethical and social principles laid down by the founder of Sikhism. Fundamental to Guru Nanak's teachings was the faith that the road to salvation could run through the householder's life:

*Satgur kee aisee vadiyaae*

*Putr kalatr viche gat payee*

Praised be the glory of the true Guru

Who grants salvation in the midst of sons and wives

SGGS, 661

The Guru Granth Sahib is an awe-inspiring mystical text, which Sikhs believe contains revelations of the Word of God given to Guru Nanak. Guru Arjun Dev gave it its present form and Guru Gobind Singh installed it as the Guru of the Sikhs for all time, hence the name, Guru Granth Sahib. The term Granth Sahib is used to distinguish this holy book from the Dasam Granth, or religious book containing works of the Tenth (*Dasam*) Guru, Guru Gobind Singh. Whoever identifies himself as a Sikh must read the Granth Sahib in Gurmukhi (the Punjabi script created by the Gurus) to enjoy, understand, accept and emulate its spiritual teachings, the knowledge of which has profoundly transformed the land known as the 'cradle of civilisation' -- socially, politically and economically.

Thus, in talking about the *Anand Karaj* it is important to make a distinction between the Sikh religion, enshrined in the holy Granth Sahib, and the social practices of the people called Sikhs. For example, Sikhism teaches that every Sikh is equal before Guru Granth Sahib, in the *sangat* and in the *langar*, but in Sikh society social differences exist. A *Rehat Maryada* or Code of Conduct for Sikhs was formulated in Guru Gobind Singh's lifetime but it does not go beyond stipulating, with respect to the wedding ceremony, that the bridegroom and his bride must circumambulate Guru Granth Sahib four times and that these four rounds must be taken while verses composed by Guru Ram Das are being recited.

The social customs of the Punjab, the land to which the Sikh religion is geographically linked, have filled in other details, while the overarching religious observances, such as *kirtan*, recitation of fixed passages from *Anand Sahib*, *Ardas*, *vaak* and distribution of *karah prashad*, have remained common to ceremonies observed at all major undertakings. These may include the first day of a new job, or a child's naming ceremony (*namkaran*), or the auspicious beginning of a calendar month (*sankrant*), or the holy birth and death anniversaries of the Sikh Gurus (*gurpurabs*).

It cannot be confirmed that Guru Ram Das meant by the words *lavan phera* the round taken of Guru Granth Sahib. What is absolutely certain is that the word *lavan* was used in a spiritual context, and that by the Four *Lavans* Guru Ram Das was pointing out the path in four stages, by which human beings may aspire to reach God.

The word *lavan* also means the separation of the bride (the individual) from her parents (the world or *payerai*) when departing for her in-laws' home (*sahurai* or the other world). Here the bride, symbol of the human soul, takes four rounds or undergoes four life stages, before she leaves her earthly existence to find a place in the arms of her *Pir* or Divine Beloved. The human yearning for escape from worldly existence is movingly expressed in the Granth Sahib:

*Khambh vikaanderai je lahan khinnaa saavi taul*

*Tann jaran-ye aapne lahan su Sajjan taul*

If I could find wings for sale, I would barter my flesh by weight.

I would attach them to my body, and fly away to my Beloved.

SGGS, p1426

Guru Ram Das' verses on the four ages of man belong to an old philosophical tradition, expressed in almost all religious literatures, drawing a parallel between the stages of physical development, such as childhood, adulthood and old age, and the stages of spiritual development human beings can aspire to. Over the century that marks the span of years between the first and the last Sikh Guru, these verses were chosen to be recited at the time of marriage because the symbolism was obviously appropriate, but also because by giving importance to the feminine psyche of the bride in these sacred verses, the Sikh Gurus were highlighting an important spiritual tenet, namely the importance of love, the passionate intensity and intimacy in inner devotion to God, which assists human beings in spiritual advancement and eventual union with the Divine. The soul-bride then is never widowed. She is forever wedded to her Lord (*sadaa suhagan*):

*Sej suhaavee sadaa pir raavai Har var paa-i-aa naar*

*Naa Har marai na kade dukh laagai sadaa suhaagan naar*

The bride's couch is beautiful on which she enjoys forever the love of her spouse: She has obtained her Husband-Lord.

Her Lord will never die, she will never suffer pain, forever she will remain a wedded woman.

SGGS, p 651

There are many verses in the Granth Sahib that express disapproval of extreme asceticism even in spiritual undertakings, and advocate wholeness of life, not only in the family but also in the community. To overcome the problems of family life and one's own shortcomings is deemed more ennobling than turning one's back on them. Says Guru Nanak:

*Raajan Ram ravai hitkaar*

*Rann meh loojhai manooaa maar*

He who lovingly chants the Name of the Lord King

Fights life's battles conquering his own mind.

SGGS, 931

The bride's yearning for union with her groom is celebrated because the Sikh Gurus, themselves all married men except Guru Har Krishan, the eighth Guru, who it is believed died between the age of five and eight, taught that the experience of love ennobles men and women and brings them that much closer to the love of the Divine. Verse upon verse celebrates a humanistic ideal of 'the middle way' without formulating the concept in so many words. The vision is stark, painfully realistic, sometimes even harsh in language, but tempered by love, wisdom and a vision of social democracy that common people found irresistible at the time, and which proved prophetic of the democratization of almost all the countries of the world by the twenty-first century.

## ON SIKHISM

### A YOUNG FAITH

Sikhism is a young faith compared to the major religions of the world such as Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Christianity. The adherents of Sikhism are called Sikhs, The word *Sikh* derives from the Sanskrit word *shishya*, or 'disciple', a seeker of truth. The Sikhs follow the teachings of the Ten Gurus who lived in the Punjab in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. The area known as the Punjab is the land of the five (*punj*) rivers (*ab*) that flow across its fertile plains and which is now divided between India and Pakistan.

The teachings of the founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak (1469-1539), were confirmed and reinforced by the nine Gurus who succeeded him. Together, the ten Sikh Gurus provided guidance for about 240 years, nurturing and developing Guru Nanak's precepts till the Tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh (1699-1708), brought this lineage to a culmination and established the authority of a scriptural Guru: In 1708 he installed Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh holy book, as the Eternal Guru of the Sikhs.

The Arabic word *Sahib* is one of the several names of God used by the Sikh Gurus. It is attached to the word *granth* as an honorific, hence the names *Granth Sahib* and *Guru Granth Sahib*. Sanctified villages or towns, for example Anandpur Sahib, and also important gurdwaras, for example Paonta Sahib, are similarly addressed.

Sikhs believe in the Eternal One, *Akal Purakh*, and the equality of all before Him, regardless of caste or creed. The first sentence of the Granth Sahib expresses the quintessential Sikh belief: *Ik Oankar* or There is One Being. *Ik Oankar* is the most often used symbol of the Sikhs. It is formed from the numeral 1 and the word *Onkar*, which corresponds to the word *Om* in Hinduism.

The Sikh doctrine of God as a formless, all-pervading Being is stated in the lines that follow, known as the *Mul Mantra*:

There is but One God  
Eternal Truth is His Name  
Creator of and pervading all things  
Fearless, without hatred  
Timeless, formless  
Beyond birth and death  
Self-enlightened  
Known by the grace of the Guru.

Guru Nanak taught his followers that although God is without form, *Nirankar*, God is known to man by the Guru's grace. He reveals himself to those whom He decides to bless, for He is immanent in all creation. God's Name or *Naam* constitutes his creation, and Name-adoration is His worship and contemplation. The devotee who comprehends His Name grasps the essential means of salvation. Thus, Sikhs also designate God as *Satnam*, the True Name.

### **KHALSA CODE**

A Sikh then is a follower of the teachings of the Ten Gurus and *Waheguru* (the Eternal Guru) embodied in the Guru Granth Sahib. Additionally, he or she accepts *Amrit*, the Sikh initiation into the *Khalsa Panth* or Fellowship of the Pure. This rite of Sikh initiation, also called *Khande ki Pahul*, follows the ceremony adopted by Guru Gobind Singh at the time of the creation of the *Khalsa*, and is performed by stirring holy water or *amrit* with a double-edged sword and offering it to the devotee to drink, while certain scriptural verses are recited. All who accept initiation must vow to live according to the *Rahit Maryada* or *Khalsa* code of discipline, and believe in no other religion. Men must add 'Singh' to their given names and women must add 'Kaur'. They must recite the five sacred *banis* daily: *Japji Sahib*, *Jaap Sahib*, *So Dar*, *Rehraas* and *Kirtan Sohila*.

Sikhs must also keep the five sacred symbols prescribed by Guru Gobind Singh to give his followers a new, fearless, easily recognized identity. These five emblems are known as the five Ks because they start with the letter K representing '*Kakka*' in the Punjabi alphabet. They are:

1. *Kes* or uncut hair, regarded as a symbol of saintliness, including turban.
2. *Kangha* or the comb necessary to keep the hair tidy.
3. *Kara* or steel bangle worn on the right wrist, symbol of restraint, resolve and discipline.
4. *Kachh* or the soldier's shorts
5. *Kirpan* or the sword, emblem of courage and weapon of self-defense. It symbolises dignity and self-reliance, the capacity and readiness to resort to arms in the interest of justice.

The Five Ks, along with the turban, have been the outward emblems of Sikhism since Guru Gobind Singh's time and identify millions of Sikhs all over the world to this day.

Sikhism is a monotheistic faith, preaching the existence of only one God, who is Eternal Truth. Guru Nanak proclaimed his spiritual message, mystically revealed to him on the banks of the river Bein, with the simple statement 'There is no Hindu, there is no Musalman'. He taught that all human beings are equal before God and thus repudiated centuries-old divisions of caste and creed, fundamental to the society of his time but unfortunately prevalent even today.

Faith in the one God is the ground on which he built his philosophy of ethics, social justice and appreciation of the natural world. He opposed religious divisions of all kinds and pronounced, for the benefit of all:

*Ek pita ekass ke hum baarik*

There is only One Father and we are all His children  
SGGS, p 611

### **THE GURUS OF SIKHISM**

Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith, was a mystic who, after a deeply transforming experience, undertook to enlighten men and women through remembrance of God's Name. He gave to his community of followers a new concept of Guru. The word 'Guru' does not always refer to a physical or living person, the Name of Eternal Truth, scriptural revelation or the Divine Word (*Sabad*) is also Guru.

*Eh bhaojal jagat sansar hai Gur boith Naam tara-ee*

This world is a terrifying ocean, the Lord's Name a boat in which we are saved by the Guru.

SGGS, p 142

*Bin Gur bhaetae mukat ne kahoo milat nahi Jagdeesai*

Without the Guru's grace one cannot be enlightened or meet the Lord of the Universe.  
SGGS, p 1205

Sikhs believe that there is hardly an aspect of mundane or spiritual life that has not been enlightened by Guru Nanak. However, the best and most authentic source of information about the teachings as well as the life of Guru Nanak is the Granth Sahib itself. Idealized portraits, illustrations, and now prints, are centered upon the *janam-sakhis*, traditional accounts of the life and missionary travels of the founder of the Sikh faith, but often these consist of no more than simple-minded legends about the miraculous powers of Guru Nanak and his successors. In the Granth Sahib, verse upon verse of Guru Nanak deploras empty ritualism, neither Hinduism nor Islam is spared, and devotees are encouraged to perceive the Truth that exists within them.

The Second Guru, Guru Angad, invented and introduced Gurmukhi, the written form of Punjabi, which was subsequently used by Guru Arjun as the script for the entire volume of the Granth Sahib. Bhai Gurdas (1551-1636), writing a historical and spiritual history of the first three Gurus, tells us that Guru Nanak carried a *pothi* or small manuscript under his arm. Other accounts relate that Guru Nanak bequeathed his hymns, written in a *pothi*, to Guru Angad as a sign of his having chosen Guru Angad as his spiritual successor. Guru Angad in turn composed more hymns and added them to the original collection. The Granth Sahib became a repository of the writings of each succeeding master for the edification of the growing body of disciples now adhering to Guru Nanak's spiritual principles, till the Fifth Guru set about compiling all the verses in one authorized *Granth*. This book would eventually become the Guru Eternal after the Ninth Guru's hymns were added to it and Guru Gobind Singh installed it as Guru Granth Sahib for all times.

The Third Guru, Guru Amar Das, spoke and acted against the caste system and worked to remove the practice of untouchability. He strengthened the tradition of the free kitchen, *Guru ka langar*, started by Guru Nanak and made his disciples eat together, thus establishing the ideal of social equality amongst the Sikhs. He completely abolished the custom of *sati* amongst the Sikhs. It was Guru Amar Das who introduced the *Anand Karaj* marriage rites for Sikhs, replacing the Hindu form.

The Fourth Guru, Guru Ram Das (1534-81), was the son-in-law of Guru Amar Das and his spiritual successor. He was the founder of the city of Amritsar and started the construction of the sacred tank at Harmandir Sahib:

*Santoh, Ram Das sarowar neeka*

*Jo naaveh so kul taraveh udhaar ho-aa hai jee kaa*

O Saints, the purifying pool of Ram Das is sublime.

Whoever bathes in it, his family and his soul are saved.

SGGS, p 623

Within the *amrit sar* or pool of nectar was eventually set the Golden Temple, known as Darbar Sahib, open on all four sides, at all times, to all people regardless of their caste or religion. Although it was during the time of Guru Arjun Dev, third son of Guru Ram Das, that the pool and the first temple were completed, this chief shrine of the Sikhs is firmly associated with the name of the Fourth Guru, who also contributed to the Sikh *Panth* the verses of the *Lavans*, which are read during the marriage ceremony, the Anand Karaj.

The Fifth Guru, Guru Arjun Dev, was a saint and scholar. In 1603-4 he compiled compositions of his four predecessors, together with the verses of Hindu and Muslim saints or *bhagats*, and his own hymns into a volume originally called *Adi Granth*. In 1608 the volume was placed in the Harmandir Sahib (Temple of God) at Amritsar. Harmandir Sahib came to be known as the Golden Temple when it was given its present appearance by Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who embellished its domes with gold, shimmering in the surrounding pool of water, which gives the city its name.

In the first decade of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Guru Arjun Dev laid down his life to uphold human dignity and freedom. His martyrdom injected a strong spirit of resistance in the common people, long demoralized by subjugation, and especially in the burgeoning Sikh community, and this will to fight oppression distinguishes the Sikh community from other communities to this day.

His son, the Sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind Singh, urged the Sikhs to be well versed in the use of the sword and other arms for self-defense. He himself wore two swords on his person, representing *miri*, political sovereignty, and *piri*, spiritual sovereignty, signifying a balance of the material and spiritual in life. Henceforth, recourse to the use of arms was regarded by the Sikhs as a lawful alternative, when all efforts at peaceful resistance to oppression had failed. He built the Akal Takht or Throne of the Timeless One, close to Harmandir Sahib, for the conduct of the Sikh community's temporal affairs.

The Seventh Guru, Har Rai, spent most of his life in devotional meditation and in preaching the message of Guru Nanak. He died early, naming his second son, Har Krishan, his successor. His eldest son, Ram Rai, was overlooked for the succession after he appeared before Emperor Aurangzeb and endeavoured to win his favour by misinterpreting the sacred words of Guru Nanak.

The Eighth Guru, Sri Har Krishan, was a little more than five years old when he succeeded his father in 1661 and died three years later in the service of the epidemic-stricken people of Delhi. Sikhs believe that anyone who invokes the child Guru with a pure heart can rid himself of his sorrows.

The Ninth Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur, established the town of Anandpur Sahib. He traveled extensively, teaching *sangats* in the Punjab and beyond. While in Assam, he was given the good news of the birth of his son, Gobind Rai, in Patna. In Anandpur Sahib the finest all-round education was given to the young Guru Gobind Rai. When the *pandits* of Kashmir appealed to Guru Tegh Bahadur for protection against the Moghul Emperor, Aurangzeb, his son pointed out that Guru Tegh Bahadur had the highest

spiritual credentials for opposing the mighty Emperor. Guru Tegh Bahadur reached Delhi and openly defied the Emperor's attempts to secure his conversion to Islam. He died a martyr's death, defending the right to freedom of worship in a multi-religious society. His execution led to open warfare between the Sikhs and the Moghul rulers during the lifetime of his son Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708).

Guru Tegh Bahadur had always challenged the religious intolerance of Muslim rulers, even as he had opposed the Hindu practice of ritual fasting and pilgrimage:

*Kahaa bha-io teerath bratt kee-ai Ram saran nahee aavai.*

*Jog jag nih-phal tih maanao jo Prabh jas bisraavai.*

To what avail are pilgrimages and fasting, if one does not surrender oneself to the Lord?

Know that yoga and sacrificial feasts are fruitless, if one forgets to praise the Lord.

SGGS, p 830

Sikhs believe that when the Ninth Guru became the second martyr of the *Panth* in the cause of the *Kashmiri pandits*, he did so to establish defiance of evil and oppression as an ideal of the Sikh faith.

The Tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, became Guru after the martyrdom of his father Guru Tegh Bahadur. He created the *Khalsa* in 1699, changing the Sikhs into a saint-soldier order with special symbols and sacraments for protecting themselves, providing succour to the helpless and fighting oppressors. They were enjoined to have faith in the Transcendent One and to consider all human beings equal, irrespective of their caste, religion, gender or nationality. Like Guru Nanak, Guru Gobind Singh underscored universal harmony and equality. Recognise that there is only one 'caste' of humanity, he exhorted his followers: *maanias ki jaati sabai ekai pahichaanbo*. For all his martial spirit, Guru Gobind Singh also gifted to his followers faith in the primacy of loving devotion. In his hymn *Akal Ustati* he urges his disciples to love all for only those who love realize God: *jin prem kio tin hi prabh paio*.

In 1708 he appointed Guru Granth Sahib as the Guru of the Sikhs for all times. He commanded that all should own Guru Granth Sahib as his successor; the Word was henceforth Guru in his place and was to be revered as the embodiment of *Waheguru*. Since then the *Bani* of the Granth Sahib is the focus of devotion and the sole religious reference of the Sikhs:

*Gur kaa bacchan basai jee-a naale.*

*Jal nahi doobai taskar nahi levai bhaahe na saakai jaale. Rahaa-o.*

*Nirdhan kao dhan andhulai ko tikk maat doodh jaisai baalai.*

*Saagar meh bohith paa-io Har Nanak karee kripa kirpaale*

The Guru's Word abides within my heart.

Water cannot drown it, thieves cannot steal it and fire cannot set it ablaze.

The Word is wealth to the poor, a cane to the blind, like mother's milk to the infant.

In the world-ocean I have found a boat, says Nanak, the Benign Lord has been benevolent.

SGGS, p 679

All Sikh ceremonies from *Naam Karan* to *Bhog* (funeral service) are performed in the presence of the Granth Sahib. The Granth Sahib contains the actual verses composed, authenticated and recorded in manuscripts by the Sikh Gurus themselves. Initially known as the *Adi Granth* (First Granth), it was compiled by the Fifth Guru, Arjun Dev, and installed in 1604 in the Harimandir Sahib in Amritsar. The Tenth Guru, Gobind Singh, added to the *Adi Granth* the compositions of his father, Guru Tegh

Bahadur. One can surmise that Guru Gobind Singh did not include his own verses in the Granth Sahib out of saintly humility. He compiled many of his compositions separately in a volume that came to be known as the Dasam Granth, but not all the works in this Granth appear to have been written by him.

Every copy of the Granth Sahib, officially published since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, consists of 1430 pages. It contains the *banis* (the sacred compositions) of the first five Gurus and the Ninth Guru, as well as a number of verses written by Muslim and Hindu saints known as *bhagats*. In the Granth Sahib, the word *bhagat* is applied to all the poet-saints, other than the Gurus, whose verses are included in the volume. Altogether, the Granth Sahib contains 5894 *shabads* or hymns, arranged in 31 *raags* or musical measures.

In the Granth Sahib, revelation and *raag* go hand in hand. The Gurus were emphatic about the religious value of *kirtan* and stressed its use as a key to spiritual exaltation. As the Granth Sahib does not promote ritualism, but encourages instead recitation of the Name and inner contemplation, they believed that religious music would attract ordinary people, lacking spiritual development or discipline, to the True Name.

### THE SIKH INSIGNIA

The *Khalsa* insignia constitutes three symbols in one. However, its name is derived from the central symbol, the *khanda* or two-edged sword, symbolic of Sikh militancy, the readiness to wage a *dharma yudh* or holy war on behalf of truth and justice.

This symbol comprises a steel quoit or *chakra* and a vertical two-edged sword, flanked by two small curved swords or *kirpans*. The *khanda* in the middle represents the creative power of God, which controls the destiny of the universe and has sovereign power over life and death. The *chakra* is a symbol of Divine manifestation on earth – all-embracing, without beginning or end, timeless and benevolent. The two curved swords represent the fusion of spiritual sovereignty, *piri*, with political sovereignty, *miri*.

### THE SIKH FLAG

The Sikh pennant is a saffron-colored, tapering cloth, bearing the Sikh insignia in blue. It is attached to a long steel pole, sheathed in saffron-colored cloth, and tipped with a *khanda*. The Sikh flag and staff, called the *Nishan Sahib*, are usually raised near the entrance to a gurdwara. The *Nishan Sahib* is usually of a great height so that it can signal the presence of the gurdwara and free *langar* to people who may not know about its existence. Sikhs show great respect to the *Nishan Sahib* as it is a symbol of the *Khalsa*.

### LANGAR

The institutions of *sangat* and *langar* are very important in Sikhism. *Sangat* means the fellowship of seekers, and *langar* means the community kitchen, which is attached to every gurdwara and in which vegetarian food is prepared by voluntary service. Guru Nanak established the *langar* as an anti-caste measure. Food was served at the same time to all, regardless of their religion, caste, gender or nationality. Guru Amar Das required that his all devotees, men, women and children, from all walks of life, should sit in rows on the ground and eat together, before meeting him. Each successive Guru strengthened *langar* as an institution of social transformation.

## SIKH CEREMONIES

Important Sikh ceremonies of worship, such as those performed at birth, initiation, marriage and death can be performed at any time, anywhere, by individuals themselves, male or female, or by gurdwara functionaries, known as *bhais*. Of course, they are best held in the presence of Guru Granth Sahib, and this is a must in the case of the marriage ceremony, the *Anand Karaj*, according to law. However, even if *Bani* cannot be recited in the presence of the Granth Sahib for any reason, the dignity and decorum of the Sikh forms of worship are always maintained.

A small prayer book, known as a *gutka*, bearing a selection of the key *banis* and the text of *Ardas*, may be used for prayer in the absence of the Granth Sahib. *Ardas* is the name of the formal Sikh prayer that is offered aloud on behalf of all present by an individual, and anyone may be requested by others to do so. It begins and ends almost every Sikh ceremony. Sikh ceremonies include *kirtan*, the singing of appropriate hymns for the occasion, the recitation of Anand Sahib or Hymn of Bliss, the congregational prayer or *Ardas*, followed by *vaak* and the distribution of *karah parshad*.

The Sikh naming ceremony or *naam karan* is well established and takes place in the presence of Guru Granth Sahib. Relatives and friends are invited to listen to *kirtan*, *Ardas* and *vaak*. Prayers are offered seeking a special blessing, the Sikh way of life or *gursikhi*, for the child.

After *Ardas*, when the Granth Sahib is opened at random for the *vaak*, the first letter of the first word of the *vaak* is chosen as the first letter of the child's name. The parents are free to choose any name for their offspring of which the first syllable is the auspiciously revealed syllable. By tradition, Sikhs choose common names for girls and boys, to signify gender equality, the only difference being the surname 'Kaur', meaning 'princess', which is added to a girl's given name, and the surname 'Singh', meaning 'lion', which is added after a boy's. For example, if the revealed letter is 'P' (the alphabet *pappa* in Punjabi), the male child would be named Pratap Singh or Paramjit Singh. If the newborn is female, her name would be Pratap Kaur or Paramjit Kaur.

When the name is selected by the family, the congregation gives approval by a *jaikara*: *Boley so Nihal! Sat Siri Akal!* The ceremony ends with the distribution of *karah prashad* and the offering of new *rumalas* for Guru Granth Sahib made of fine fabric and usually embroidered.

For the Last Rites, the Sikhs prescribe dignified rituals of prayer, unmarred by excessive mourning. The dead are cremated usually within a day. Close family members bathe and dress the body, ensuring that it is wearing the outward symbols of the faith, before cremation. After *Ardas*, the body is taken in a solemn procession to the cremation ground, where the son or the closest relative of the deceased lights the funeral pyre after prayers. Prayers always include the evening hymn *Sohila* and conclude with *Ardas*.

The ashes are collected on the third day and immersed in a river, at a place of worship or pilgrimage. *Akhand Paath* is held in the home of the deceased. The *bhog* ceremony is usually a public affair with distant relatives, colleagues, business associates, family acquaintances and neighbours attending the *kirtan* followed by *Antim Ardas*. No invitation is needed for people to attend a funeral or *bhog* to pay their last respects to the deceased.

## SIKH FESTIVALS

Sikh families are expected to participate in the ceremonies of birth, baptism, marriage, death and commemorations or celebrations of Sikh holy days. A Sikh festival or holy day is called a *gurpurab*, meaning day of remembrance of the Guru. The ceremonies are

by and large similar for all *gurpurabs*: *kirtan*, *katha*, *Ardas*, distribution of *karah parshad* and *langar*.

The birthday of Guru Nanak, founder of the Sikh religion, is now celebrated on the basis of the new Nanakshahi Calendar. Sikhs celebrate this most important day in the year in many ways. One or two days before the *gurpurab* a procession is organized, which is led by the *Panj Pyaras* or the Five Beloved. The *palki* or palanquin bearing Guru Granth Sahib is carried on a flower-decked float or van through the main streets of Indian towns and cities, followed by devotees singing *Gurbani*, distributing *karah parshad*, school children marching to brass bands, and young men displaying *gatka* or martial-art skills. The procession passes with much jubilation through roads lined by devotees and decorated with welcoming banners, buntings and floral gateways.

*Akhand Paath* (the forty-eight-hour uninterrupted reading of the Granth Sahib) is held in many gurdwaras. On the day itself the program begins before dawn with the singing of Guru Nanak's *Asa di Var* (early-morning hymn) followed by *katha* or exposition of the Guru's Word, and recitation of poems or ballads in praise of the Guru. After *Ardas* and distribution of *karah parshad*, *langar* is served.

Some gurdwaras also hold celebrations at night. These begin around sunset when *Rehras* (the evening prayer) is recited. *Kirtan* follows and continues late into the night. Sometimes a *Kavi Darbar* or poetic symposium is also held in which noted poets recite their own verse tributes to Guru Nanak. Sikhs who cannot join community celebrations celebrate in their own homes with *kirtan*, *paath*, *Ardas*, *karah parshad* and *langar*.

The birthday of Guru Gobind Singh, the Tenth Guru, generally falls in December or January. The celebrations are similar to those of Guru Nanak's birthday, and take place with great fervor at Patna Sahib in Bihar where Guru Gobind Singh was born.

The anniversary of the martyrdom of Guru Arjun, the Fifth Guru, falls in May or June, the hottest months in India. Religious observances are the same as for other *gurpurabs*. A chilled, sweetened drink made from milk, sugar, and water is freely and generously distributed to everybody as *seva*.

The martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur, the Ninth Guru, is commemorated similarly. A large number of devotees visit Gurdwara Sis Ganj and Gurdwara Bangla Sahib, scenes of his martyrdom and cremation respectively.

Baisakhi is celebrated as the day of the creation of the *Khalsa*. It is generally celebrated on the 13th of April each year. On this day, in 1699, Guru Gobind Singh founded the *Khalsa* brotherhood through the rite of baptism by steel. *Amrit* or sanctified water was stirred by a dual-edged sword and administered to those of his followers who willingly embraced the *Khalsa* brotherhood. This Sikh ceremony of initiation, known as *Amrit Chhakna*, is open to adult men and women who choose to join the *Khalsa*. Sikhs must follow vows taken at this ceremony, also known as *Amrit Pahul*. The ceremony can be held on days other than Baisakhi.

On the occasion of Diwali, the Festival of Lights, Sikhs commemorate the joyous return of Guru Hargobind to Amritsar in 1620, after his release from the custody of the Moghul ruler. The Sikhs also light candles and oil lamps on this day, which generally falls in November.

## **THE SIKH TEMPLE**

Gurdwara, meaning the 'gateway to the Guru', is the name given to the Sikh place of worship. The Guru Granth Sahib is the sole object of worship in a gurdwara, which is architecturally of a simple design, consisting primarily of a large central hall, at the end of which the Granth Sahib is placed on a dais, under the traditional canopy or *chandni*. The gurdwara is central to the life of the Sikh community in towns and cities in India and abroad. However, it is open to people of all communities, regardless of their caste, creed,

gender and nationality. Inside gurdwaras all are treated as equals. Women participate in all the ceremonies of worship and *seva*. Gurdwaras offer free food and shelter to Sikhs and non-Sikhs equally. The pattern of congregational worship in a gurdwara can be divided into two main categories: *katha*, the reading of the holy verses followed by their explication; and *kirtan*, the singing of hymns.

A description of the centrality of the gurdwara, or the place where Guru Granth Sahib is installed, is a fitting way to conclude this section. Not only in public worship but also in the home, as well as in the community life of the Sikhs, the message of Guru Granth Sahib is so overwhelmingly powerful, true, loving and beautiful, that ordinary people have quaked at the first real contact with it. Once touched, they many linger in wait for its power to manifest itself in their lives and irrevocably transform it for the better, as the author, her husband and two sons and their wives have done, coming face to face with their own smallness, and, in turning to serve the Sikh community, are only in wait for His merciful grace.

## **APPENDIX 1**

### **Method of Preparation of *Karah Prashad***

Take equal portions by volume of flour (*atta*), ghee (clarified butter) and sugar. Brown the *atta* (alternatively *suji* or semolina may be used) in a *karahi*, a large pan with handles, till it is golden brown in colour. Add ghee and brown further, till its aroma is released. Then pour the sugar, dissolved in three times its volume of boiling water, into the browned *atta*. Stir vigorously for a few minutes till ghee is released and the *prashad* turns a light chocolate colour. Another method is to add the sugar directly to the browned *atta*, stir for a few minutes, then add boiling water equal to three to four times the volume of sugar, depending upon the dryness of the *atta* used, and stir till the *prashad* turns golden-brown. *Paath*, by custom the first five verses of the *Japji Sahib*, is recited during its preparation.

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **The Wedding Invitation Card**

The matter of wedding invitations follows western traditions. The invitations are engraved or printed on thick art card, the symbol of *Ikk Oankar*, the Eternal One, is often emblazoned on the front of a folded card or at the top of an unfolded standard-sized card. The main card invites guests to the *Anand Karaj*. Extra cards, often smaller, are enclosed with the main card inviting select guests to the *sangeet*, *mehndi* or reception dinner organised before the day of the *Anand Karaj*. Normally, the dispatch of wedding invitations is not delayed beyond a fortnight before the marriage date.

Wedding invitations are different from all others in size and quality of paper and printing or engraving. They are bigger and the finest quality of paper affordable is used. The card should not bend between the thumb and index finger otherwise it will not arrive in very good shape after handling in the post. Gold engraving is popular and the symbol of *Ikk Oankar* on the cover page of the folded card is much preferred.

The standard text is:

Sardar and Sardarni Pritam Singh  
request the pleasure of your company  
at the Anand Karaj of their daughter

Tejinder  
to  
Satinder  
son of Sardar and Sardarni Satwant Singh  
at 10:00am on Sunday, 15<sup>th</sup> October, 2001  
at D-13 Kailash Colony, New Delhi

RSVP  
2683452, 2687149

There will be variations on this if a grandparent or both grandparents are alive and the bride's parents (or bridegroom's parents) wish to give them their due respect by issuing the invitation in their name:

Sardar and Sardarni Prem Singh  
request the pleasure of your company  
at the Anand Karaj of their grand-daughter  
Tejinder  
Daughter of Sardar and Sardarni Surjit Singh  
to  
Satinder  
son of Sardar and Sardarni Satwant Singh  
at 10:00am on Sunday, 15<sup>th</sup> October, 2001  
at D-13 Kailash Colony, New Delhi

RSVP  
2683452, 2687149

In the case of an invitation from the bridegroom's family, the standard wording is:

Sardar and Sardarni Harbans Singh  
request the pleasure of your company  
at the Anand Karaj of their grand-son  
Satinder  
son of Sardar and Sardarni Satwant Singh  
to  
Manpreet  
Daughter of Dr and Sardarni Manmohan Singh  
at 10:30am on Sunday, 23<sup>rd</sup> November, 2001  
at 36 Dilshad Gardens, New Delhi

RSVP  
683452, 687149

## **GLOSSARY**

*Adi Granth*: the First Book, the principal Sikh scripture, known as Guru Granth Sahib after the termination of the line of personal Gurus in 1708.

*Akal Purakh*: the Eternal One, term used by Guru Nanak for God.

*Akal Takht*: the Immortal Throne of temporal authority, a building facing the Golden Temple.

*Akhand-Paath*: unbroken reading of the Guru Granth Sahib, from beginning to end, for forty-eight hours.

*amrit*: nectar, sanctified water.

*Ardas*: petition, a formal prayer, which follows an approved published text. It is recited at the conclusion of Sikh religious services.

*baba*: father, a term of respect applied to holy men and the very elderly

*bani*: the utterances of the Gurus and *bhagats* recorded in the Granth Sahib

*bhagat*: devotee, name for the religious poets whose works are included in the Granth Sahib.

*Bhai*: brother, gurdwara functionary, a title applied to Sikhs of piety.

*bhangra*: folk dance of the men of Punjab, now popular in discotheques around the world.

*bhog*: general term for the completion of a sequence of events usually including *akhand-paath*, recitation of the Anand Sahib prayer, *Ardas* and *vaak*, followed by distribution of *karah parshad*.

*chandni*: *chandua*, brightly coloured or richly decorated awning stretched over the Granth Sahib; also held over bride or bridegroom during pre-nuptial ceremonies, such as *mehndi*.

*chauki*: stool, small throne

*chaur*: whisk made of yak's hair, waved over Guru Granth Sahib as act of veneration.

*chuhare*: dates, considered auspicious for ritual gifts to bride and bridegroom.

*chunni*: a two-and-a-half yards long unstitched cloth worn with the Punjabi *salwar-kameez* as a veil or shawl.

*daaj*: dowry given by the bride's parents.

*Darbar Sahib*: another respectful name for the Golden Temple at Amritsar.

*darshan*: visit to holy place, audience with a person of royal or saintly stature.

*Dasam Granth*: Book of the Tenth Guru, not all compositions in it, however, are accepted as the work of the Tenth Guru, Gobind Singh.

*doli*: bride's departure from her parent's home; the traditional litter in which the bride was carried to her husband's home after the wedding.

*duhagan*: deserted wife, widow.

*dupatta*: similar to *chunni*, worn by women over the shoulders or as a veil.

*ghee*: clarified butter made from cow or buffalo milk

*gidda*: folk dance of the women of Punjab performed with much clapping of the hands.

*granth*: book.

*granthi*: reader of the Sikh holy book, Granth Sahib.

*gunvantee*: virtuous woman.

*Gurbani*: the *bani* or utterances of the Sikh Gurus recorded in the Granth Sahib.

*gurdwara*: Sikh temple where Guru Granth Sahib is installed.

*gurmukh*: God-willed, as opposed to the self-willed, individual.

*Gurmukhi*: script in which Granth Sahib is written and of modern Punjabi.

*gurpurab*: anniversary of events, such as birthdays and martyrdom days, associated with the lives of the Sikh Gurus.

*Guru*: one of the ten Gurus worshipped by Sikhs, the Word of God (*bani*). In Sikhism, also the divine presence, the inner voice of God, in man.

*gutka*: small prayer book containing the five daily prayers and *Ardas*.

*Hukam*: Divine Command, also *vaak*.

*jamaatis*: members of the wedding party from the bridegroom's side.

*janam-sakhis*: hagiographic accounts of the life of Guru Nanak.

*junj*: wedding procession led by the groom to the bride's house.

*juttee*: shoe

*kaleechari*: ring.

*kaleeras*: ornaments of beaten silver tied to the wrists of the bride after the *choora* ceremony by female relatives and friends.

*kalgi*: turban jewels with plume.

*karah-parshad*: sacramental food made of wheat flour, sugar and ghee, served to and partaken of by all at the end of Sikh religious ceremonies, regardless of caste or creed.

*katha*: religious discourse, scriptural explication.

*Kaur*: princess, surname given to all Sikh women to free them from caste identification.

*kesar*: saffron, the colour associated with Sikh martyrs.

*Khalsa*: the Brotherhood of the Pure established by Guru Gobind Singh in 1699.

*khanda*: double-edged sword.

*kirtan*: devotional singing of the hymns contained in the Granth Sahib.

*kurmai*: engagement.

*langar*: institution established by Guru Nanak for cooking and partaking of a community meal, symbolising equality and brotherhood.

*Lavan Pheras*: Sikh marriage ceremony.

*manji*: bed.

*manjithara*: red, vermilion.

*mirasi*: caste of musicians, bards and genealogists.

*miri-piri*: doctrine of temporal and spiritual authority of guruship, symbolised by two swords worn by Guru Hargobind.

*mithai*: traditional Indian sweets.

*Mul Mantra*: Essential *Mantra* or sacred formula for invoking divine grace; opening lines of the Granth Sahib attributed to Guru Nanak.

**Naam Jaap: remembering, reciting, meditating on, the Divine Name.**

*paathi*: paid reader of the Granth Sahib.

*palki*: palanquin.

*pandal*: tent.

*Panth*: Sikh community.

*parkash karna*: The daily installation (including the opening and reading) of the Granth Sahib.

*payerai*: the wife's side of the family, her parental home.

*pothi*: book.

*qawaal*: Muslim group singer of classical and semi-classical forms of music in the Sufi tradition.

*raag*: particular arrangement of notes and melodic-patterns in Indian classical music.

*raagi*: Sikh devotional singer of hymns from the Granth Sahib.

*raagmala*: a composition in the Granth Sahib listing different *raags* by name.

*rabab*: string instrument played with a wooden plectrum.

*Rehat Maryada*: Sikh Code of Conduct.

*roka*: ceremony to stop a girl from being betrothed to another man, pre-engagement ceremony.

*rumala*: mantle, usually four are used to cover and drape the Granth Sahib.

*Sache Patishah*: True King, God.

*sahurai*: home of the wife's in-laws, the husband's home.

*salwar-kameez*: baggy trousers and shirt worn by women with a *dupatta*.

*sangat*: Sikh congregation, group of devotees.

*sangeet*: event at which a forthcoming marriage is celebrated with singing and dancing.

*sant*: saint, devotee.

*Satguru*: the True Guru, God.

*sati*: self-immolation by the widow on her husband's funeral pyre.

*sehra*: garland of eulogising verse; wreath, veil, worn by bridegroom while riding in procession.

*sevadar*: gurdwara functionary.

*shabad*: Word of God, hymn included in Granth Sahib.

*shehnai*: Indian double-reeded wind instrument played on auspicious occasions, especially weddings.

*shishya*: pupil, disciple.

*shlok*: couplet, verse.

Sikh: follower of Guru Nanak and the nine Gurus who succeeded him.

Singh: lion, surname given to all Sikhs as an anti-caste measure.

*sooji*: granulated form of wheat-flour.

*suhagan*: term used for a woman whose husband is alive.

*sukh-asan*: resting place, putting to rest Guru Granth Sahib at nightfall.

*sumangal-dhun*: auspicious melody.

*tabla*: percussion instrument, two upright drums played by each hand.

*tappa*: love song of Punjab with strong rhythm and fast tempo.

*thaka*: social custom enjoining the girl's parents to reserve their daughter for a particular man, pre-engagement ceremony.

*tilak*: mark applied to the forehead of the groom-to-be with saffron paste, as a sign of betrothal during the engagement ceremony.

*vaak*: Holy Word, advice for the day, or Guru's command at the conclusion of prayers, obtained by randomly opening the Granth Sahib and reading the first hymn on the page.

*vari*: gifts given to the bride by the groom's parents.

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