

The Anand Marriage Act

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Recently some attempts have been made to suggest that the Anand marriage ceremony was initiated by the Namdhari Guru Baba Ram Singh. Both Dr. Fauja Singh Bajwa and Dr. M. M. Ahluwalia in their works on the Kukas contend that the Namdhari Guru was the initiator of this form of marriage. Dr. Ahluwalia has even written that "The Namdhari sources claim that the Anand Marriages were not initiated by anybody except their Guru Ram Singh" and also that "the Anand Marriage Act was passed by the Government of India due to the efforts of the then Namdhari Satguru Pratap Singh, Tikka Ripudaman Singh of Nabha and some others."¹ A study of the papers relating to the Act does not support this sweeping contention. True, the Kuka Guru did send a letter to the Government to support the measure.² But in this he was acting in concert with several other Sikh leaders and associations. In fact, neither he nor his followers claimed the Anand marriage to be their innovation.

The Anand ceremony "was initiated by the third Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Amar Das and the marriages of Bhai Kamlia and Matho Murari were performed in accordance therewith in the time of third and fourth Gurus, the last of whom composed the four *Laawaan* in the Suhi Rag of the *Guru Gnanth Sahib*, the sacred book of the Sikhs."³ The occasion and circumstances for the initiation of this form of marriage has been detailed in a note prepared by [?] the then professor of the Khalsa College, Lyallpur. He wrote:

Guru Amar Dass tried to barter down all the injurious caste barriers, and, incensed at this noble effort of the third Guru, the Hindus excommunicated those Sikhs of the Guru who in obedience to his teachings had ceased to observe caste. Among those Sikhs was one named Randhawa. When he wanted to marry his daughter, the Brahmins refused to come and officiate at the solemnisation of the marriage, saying that having become a Sikh of Guru Amar Das he had ceased to be a Hindu, and thus had forfeited every right to have the marriage of his daughter performed according to Hindu rituals. Upon this the Sikh went to Guru Amar Das Ji, and said he was prepared to keep his daughter unmarried, but would on no account consent to the ceremony being performed according to Hindus who were so wrath at his having given up the whimsical caste distinctions. Realizing the fix in which the Sikh was, the Guru ordered his son-in-law (afterwards Guru Ram Das Ji) to go and officiate at the marriage of the Sikh's daughter. It was on this occasion that the four *laawaan* were originally composed by the fourth Guru.

The next noteworthy occasion on which the entire form prescribed conjointly by the third and fourth Gurus was observed was the marriage of the sixth. Guru's daughter (Bibi Viro) at the village Jhabal in the Amritsar district.⁴

Henceforth a fair came to be held annually to commemorate this remarkable marriage. Ever since that day the Anand *riti* became the recognised form of marriage among the Sikhs.

This ceremony however fell into partial disuse soon after the Sikh power was established in the Punjab. Earlier and so long as they had no settled home, "the Sikhs united by the bonds of

common faith lived a free untrammelled, selfless life, acknowledging no leaders, ordaining no priests and acting independently of each other, yet ready to share the weal and woe of a brother Sikh. Occasionally they met in a general council called *Gurmata* to decide matters of common interest and of an importance which required united action. They led plain simple lives as members of a single household, sharing whatever they had and owing obedience to none, performing their own marriages and reciting hymns from the *Granth* when anyone passed to the land of Gurus.⁵ But soon after the founding of the Sikh power in the Punjab, “the republican fraternity broke up, strong men asserted themselves as leaders and surrounded themselves with power, wealth and luxuries of life, and the Sikh settled down in a population of Hindus. Scattered and small in number they could not resist the influence of Hinduism, which gradually asserted itself till all but in dress they became identified with the Hindus. They began to observe all Hindu customs, all Hindu ceremonies, to which recitation from the *Granth* were sometimes superadded.”⁶ The influence of the Dogras in the employ of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, in this process of degeneration of the Sikhs, was no less great and even “the idol worship, the practice most vigorously denounced by the Gurus, found its way into the Darbar Sahib at Amritsar.”⁷

Yet, the Anand ceremony escaped absolute obliteration as a result of widow marriages because these were not recognized by Hindu Law. It also remained in vogue among the Nihangs, Bandeis (adherents of Banda Singh Bahadur) and Sikh residents of far off places from the Punjab like Nander and Patna.

The first serious attempt at the revival of the Anand marriage ceremony was made during the time of Ranjit Singh by Baba Dyal, founder of the Nirankari movement. This ceremony as propagated by him apparently consisted of the bride and bride-groom walking round *Guru Granth Sahib* while the *Granthi* read out certain sacred scriptures from the text.⁸

The second attempt was made by the Namdhari Guru Baba Ram Singh who also adopted the Anand ceremony, but with a major difference. Whereas the Nirankaris performed their marriages without the sacred fire and without the interposition of Brahmans, the Kukas continued to dig, like the Hindus sacrificial pit for burning fire and put fragrant substances into it at the time of their marriages.

The third and the most important attempt at the widespread propagation of the Anand form of marriage was made by the Singh Sabha movement. The marriage ceremony as propagated by the Singh Sabha resembled the Nirankari rather than the Namdhari version of the Anand marriage. The chief requisites of this form of marriage were:

1. The presence of *Guru Granth Sahib*, the Sikh scripture, on the occasion of marriage to serve as witness, dispensing with the burning of fire and the invocation of gods marked out on ground with flour in symbolic figures.

2. Citation of four *Shabads* (hymns), known as *laawaan* from the said scripture to solemnize the tie of union between the bride and the bridegroom after they are questioned as to their willingness to enter into the sacred union. The couple, in token of solemn pledge before and homage to the scripture, walks around it when each of the said four hymns is read, thus doing four rounds in all.

3. The singing in chorus of the hymns which after the word *Anand* (pleasure) with which the hymn begin are called *Anand Sahib*. In these hymns thanks of Almighty accompanied with joys are expressed for having gained the desired object and one is instructed to look to Him for every success and pleasure.

4. The reading out of *Ardas* (prayer) invoking the benediction of the Ten Gurus and of the sacred scripture to grace the union which is declared complete after a sermon is delivered as to the respective duties and responsibilities of the couple enjoining on the bride to be always submissive to her husband who in return is bound to have every regard for her feelings and to think always of her convenience and pleasure in preference to his own keeping thereby the balance of perfect harmony and happiness of home.⁹

This form of the Anand ceremony even to this day continues to be performed at the Sikh marriages, in the presence of the bride, the bridegroom, their relatives, friends, etc., and is conducted by a religious person known to be well versed in Sikh tenets, and sacred hymns are also sung to add grandeur to the occasion.

For the proper understanding of the genesis of the Anand Marriage Act, it is worthwhile here to describe briefly some of the major effects of the Singh Sabha movement in this regard. Launched during the last quarter of the nineteenth century to restore Sikhism to its pristine purity, this reform movement caused a schism in the Sikh community by dividing it into the 'puritans' or 'reformist' who observed all the ordinances of the Gurus, and the 'degenerates', as they were called by the reformists, having leanings towards Hinduism. The 'puritans' regarded themselves as the true sons of the Khalsa and the *Granth Sahib* as containing the whole law. Discarding the old Hindu customs, they started performing their birth, marriage and death ceremonies in the old simple Sikh fashion. The 'degenerates' or the Hinduised Sikhs—an important section of the Sikh community, although a small minority—on the other hand, practised mostly the observances of Brahmanical religion and were Sikhs only in name.

At a time when Sikhism was fast sinking into the fold of Hindu religion, this reform movement led to the emergence of numerous Singh Sabhas all over the country and the despatch of missionaries by the Chief Khalsa Diwan. The result of this was that, unlike other reform movements, the Singh Sabha movement did not remain confined to educated few, but touched the Sikh people in general. Soon there was a feeling that they were not Hindus and so desired to have a body of laws of their own, laws of marriage, inheritance and succession based on social justice and equal rights for men and women, free from all taint of inequality and compulsion, worthy of a free God-fearing Sikh community."¹⁰ This was greatly resented by those who preferred Brahmanical customs and by the Brahman priests who viewed with displeasure the loss of so large a clientele as that represented by Sikh population. In the heat of the religious controversies that ensued the opponents of the 'puritan' even questioned the validity of the Sikh customs. Their bitterest attacks were, however, on the Anand marriage ceremony.

It was against this background and in an atmosphere of tension and uncertainty in the first decade of the present century that Tikka Ripudaman Singh of Nabha, Member of the Imperial Legislative Council, thought of statutory recognition for the Sikh marriages to dispel doubts as to their validity. With this end in view Tikka Sahib held discussions with the Law Member of the Viceroy's Council, Sir Erie Richards, at Simla, and afterwards wrote to him that "nearly all leading Sikhs badly feel the want of codifying their laws, and also think that the proposed Sikh Marriage Act

will be the first and most appropriate step in that direction.” In support of his contention, he forwarded the opinions of ninety-three leading members of the Sikh community. He also sent a draft bill of the proposed legislation and, urging for its adoption, wrote that there were “good reasons to believe that, in the absence of a validating enactment, doubts may be thrown upon it and Sikhs may have to face great difficulties in the future, and incur heavy expenditure on suits instituted in the Civil Courts.” He also wrote that the passing of this enactment involved no new principles but merely validated an existing rite.¹¹

Tikka Sahib’s letter along with the draft bill was referred to the Home Department which, in turn, sent it to the Government of the Punjab for an opinion on the subject. The first reaction of the provincial Government was not in favour of the bill and it wrote back that “in the absence of any established necessity for legislation, the Lieutenant Governor, would be adverse to the adoption of any such action” but suggested that “the real object of the proposed legislation” should be ascertained from the Tikka Sahib personally.¹²

Sir Louis Dane, the succeeding Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab, was therefore asked to discuss the question with Tikka Sahib. After meeting Tikka Sahib and making necessary enquiries from other sources, the Lieutenant-Governor felt “inclined to take somewhat different view of the proposed legislation, from that put forward by his predecessor.” The Chief Secretary to the Government of the Punjab further wrote that “the Lieutenant-Governor has satisfied himself that the Anand form of marriage has been impugned by non-Sikhs and more especially by the members of the Arya Samaj, and that there has been a certain amount of pamphlet warfare in which the children of such marriages have been branded as illegitimate by the opponents of the Neo-Sikh party,”¹³ Even though, there had yet been no case where the validity of such marriage was contested in a law court, the Lieutenant-Governor recognized the force of Tikka Sahib’s argument that “the object of the proposed legislation is to avoid the uncertainty and the expense which the process of obtaining a judicial decision would entail.” Moreover since the ceremony was “a simple and less expensive one than that ordinarily in force among Hindus,” it was also suggested that the proposed bill be “introduced in the Imperial Legislative Council as it was to apply to the whole of British India.”¹⁴

The Bill was introduced in the Imperial Legislative Council meeting at Simla on 30 October, 1908. It was widely acclaimed by the Sikhs. That the Bill had the popular support of the community was evinced by the numerous communications received by the Government in favour of it. Still there was a small section of the Sikhs who published pamphlets and sent representations to the Government demanding the withdrawal of the Bill.¹⁵ Since it happened to be an important segment of the community, their viewpoint should be examined.

It was contended that the supporters and sympathisers of the Bill did not represent the main body of the Khalsa; and the support that the Bill had received was the product of an agitation and not the outcome of the genuine feelings of the Sikhs.

They further argued that ‘Anand’ signified pleasure or joy, and it was not a form of any marriage ceremony common among the Sikhs; that it was a prayer and name of a collection of certain sacred hymns in the *Granth Sahib*.

They also claimed that though the Sikhs by strictly following the teachings of *Guru Granth Sahib* were distinct in their religious tenets from Hindus, in their social customs they were one with them having little desire to break away from the Hindu social or customary laws.

Finally, according to them, this was the creation of the Singh Sabha sect among the Sikhs, the members of which wished to establish new customs and ceremonies in accordance with the dictates of their new faith.

The supporters of the Bill took up these contentions and exposed their hollowness. They showed that 'only bare hardihood' produced and sustained by vested interests could claim general Sikh opposition to the measure. As against a total of five adverse communications to the Government, they referred to the hundreds of communications which included the opinions of the leaders of the Panth, the Sikh bodies, the Reises, Jagirdars, the Sikh Rajas and the general public both from inside and outside India, wherever the Sikhs were. In these circumstances only the wilfully blind could doubt the *bona fides* of the Sikhs in supporting the Bill.

The reformists claimed that the term 'Anand' also meant marriage contracted according to Sikh ceremony. Giani Gurbakhsh Singh, Manager of the Golden Temple Works, Amritsar, put forwards the following arguments in support of this claim of the reformists:

- (a) Just as in Persian the word *Shadi* means both 'joy' and 'marriage,' so in Panjabi the word '*Anand*' means both 'joy' and 'marriage.'
- (b) Sir Guru Das Bannerji had admitted in his *Hindu Law* that 'Anand' is the name of a marriage ceremony among the Sikhs. It is so called because during its performance a text from the Sikh scriptures called 'Anand' is recited.
- (c) In Punjabi papers, 25 years old, we find notes on marriages performed according to Anand ceremony.
- (d) In the *Prem Sumarg* and other Sikh books, the word 'Anand' has been used in the sense of 'marriage'.¹⁶

Describing how essential it was for the Sikhs to solemnize their marriages according to Anand ceremony, Gurbakhsh Singh further wrote:

Guru Granth Sahib strictly prohibits idol or element worship, but in the Hindu marriage ceremony the worship of nine constellations of the stars is necessary element and *Agni* (fire) is set up as witness god. So how can monotheists like Sikhs follow such customs? Again, our scriptures say! "do not pay any heed to the auspicious-ness or otherwise of the constellations; there is one God above all these;" but the Hindus have to wait for months and years for the auspiciousness to these occasions. Again, as a reward of conducting the marriage ceremony, the officiating Brahmin priest receives some money in charity; but our scriptures say: "Oh, priest, the *jajman's* daughter is thy daughter. By accepting this money thou spoilest thy chance of salvation."

Again, we find in a commentary on Shikh customs, "whoever accepts any reward for conducting marriage ceremony is an infidel."¹⁷

That the Anand form of marriage was an old ceremony among the Sikhs and not an innovation of the reformists has been described above. The supporters of the Bill quoted several instances from Bhai Santokh Singh's *Suraj Prakash*, then considered the oldest and the most

authentic complete record of Sikh history, to show that this form of marriage was introduced by the third Guru. Since the *Anand* composed by the third Guru and the *laamaan*, i.e., ties composed by the fourth Guru, the *sine qua non* of the Anand ceremony, were embodied in the Sikh scriptures, the reformers put this forth as an irrefutable proof of the ceremony having been enjoined by the Gurus. While the Government was still getting reports both for and against the Bill, an obstacle appeared in the way of carrying out the proposed legislation. Tikka Sahib's term of office as a Member had expired and the Government on its part had allowed the introduction of this Bill on the clear understanding that it was not to take any part in the debates or voting on the Bill. However, the Government of India facilitated the measure by specially nominating Sardar Sunder Singh Majithia to the Legislative Council. The original draft of Tikka Sahib underwent some changes in the Select Committee and the Bill was passed on 22nd October as 'Anand Marriage Act, 1909.'

These, then, were the circumstances that led to the passing of the Anand Marriage Act. As for the Kukas, whose role in this regard has been almost fabricated by recent writers, not only accepted it as a legalisation of "the ancient Sikh marriage rite," but also felt unhappy about its final form.¹⁸ Obviously then, they were neither the initiators nor the main force behind the passage of this Act. The main bodies for the propagation of this form of marriage ceremony were the various Singh Sabhas, Khalsa Diwans and the Chief Khalsa Diwan, and the main force that carried the Bill through the Imperial Legislative Council were Tikka Ripudaman Singh of Nabha, Sardar Sunder Singh Majithia and the Sikh masses in general.

[Note—One of the prominent Sikh leaders who supported, through the press, the Anand Marriage Bill in 1909 was Bhagat Lakshman Singh. While the bill was on the anvil, awaiting passage through the Viceroy's Council, the Arya Samajists of the Panjab and their friends raised a storm of agitation against it. It was at this time that Bhagat Lakshman Singh wrote a number of letters to the editors of the *Tribune*, Lahore, and the *Khalsa Advocate*, Amritsar. These letters, and those of Giani Gurbakhsh Singh, Bhai Lehna Singh and others addressed to the Government, greatly strengthened the hands of the Hon'ble Sardar Sunder Singh Majithia, the mover of the Bill, and facilitated its passage through the Council (*vide the Tribune*, Lahore, October 5, 7, 13 1909, and the *Khalsa Advocate*, Amritsar, October 9, 16, 23, 30). These letters were highly appreciated by Sardar Sunder Singh Majithia who wrote to Bhagatji on October 19, 1909, saying that these letters were "Capital" and "the L(ieutenant) G(overnor) was speaking in high terms about them". —*Editor*]

Footnotes:

1. M. M Ahluwalia, *Kukas—The Freedom Fighters of the Punjab*, pp. 50-51.
2. Namdhari Guru Pratap Singh to Government of India, 13 December. 1908, *Papers relating to Act VII of 1909*, Vol. I, Legislative Department.
3. Speech by Sardar Sunder Singh Majithia in the Imperial Legislative Council. 27 August, 1909.
4. Government of Punjab to Government of India, 20 April, 1909, enclosure. Home Department, Judicial B Proceedings, July 1909, 55-56.
5. *The Pioneer* Allahabad, 6 February 1909.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Government of Punjab to Government of India, 20 April 1909 enclosure. Home Department, Judicial B Proceedings July 1909, 55-56.
8. Baba Gurdit Singh, Nirankari Guru to Government of India, 10 January, 1909. *Papers relating to Act VII of 1909*. vol. I. Cf A. H. Bingley, *Sikhs (Handbook for the Indian Army)*, p. 69.

9. Note by Munshi Sohan Singh, Tahsildar of Shakargarh, 11 January, 1909 Home Department, Judicial B Proceedings, July 1909, 55-56.
10. *The Pioneer*. Allahabad. 6 February, 1909.
11. Demi official, Tikka Ripudaman Singh to Sir Erie Richards, 1 March, 1908. Legislative Department, A Proceedings, November 1909, 9-101.
12. Demi-official, E. D. Maclagan, Chief Secretary to the Government of Punjab, to G. B. H. Fell, Deputy Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, 10 April 1908. *Ibid*.
13. Demi-official, E. D, Maclagan, Chief Secretary to the Government of Punjab to G. B. H Fell, Deputy Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, 31 July, 1908. *Ibid. Cf.* Note from Bhai Lehna Singh, Extra Assistant Commissioner, Dera Ismail Khan, 7 January, 1909:
 “Not only the preachers of the Arya Samaj but its organs in the press also have thrown out broad hints that the earliest opportunity will be utilised” to impeach the validity of Sikh marriages in law courts. Home Department, Judicial B Proceedings, March 1909, 40.
14. Demi-official, E. D. Maclagan, Chief Secretary to the Government of Punjab to G. B. H. Fell, Deputy Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, 31 July, 1908; Legislative Department, A Proceedings, November 1909, 9-101.
15. The views of the opponents of the Bill were contained in two almost identical letters to the Government of India; one from Maya Singh and 24 Sikhs of Lahore and the other in Gurmukhi from Granthis, Pujaris, Mahants, and Sants of Amritsar on behalf of Golden Temple and other temples connected with it. Arur Singh, Manager of the Golden Temple, however, was in favour of the Bill, *vide* his letter to Tikka Sahib of Nabha on 29 July, 1909. *Papers relating to Act VII of 1909*, Vol. II.
16. Home Department, Judicial B Proceedings, October 1909, 83.
17. *Ibid*.
18. (a) Letter in Gurmukhi from Sant Singh and 53 other Kukas. *Papers Relating to Act VII of 1909*, Vol. I.
 (b) Telegram, from Namdhari Guru Partap Singh to Government of India, 13 October, 1909.
 “Kindly omit clause 4. Substitute Sikh tenets and customs for personal law in clause 5 of Anand Marriage Bill. Otherwise, drop Bill.” See *Papers Relating to Act VII of 1909*, Vol. III.