



Anand Kaaraj (Wedding Ceremony)



The wedding ceremony in Sikhism is referred to as "Anand-Kaaraj" that means "The Ceremony Of Eternal Joy or Bliss". The Anand-Kaaraj always takes place in the auspicious presence of the Sikh Guru, Guru Granth Sahib ("The spiritual teacher in the form of "The Divine Word"). The ceremony takes place in the Gurdwara ("Guru's House" i.e. a Sikh place of worship). "Anand-Kaaraj" was legalised under the British law in 1909 and is legally accepted almost all over the world.

In Sikhism, great significance has been given to the married / family life. The marriage in Sikhism is not only considered to be a biological necessity for continuation of the human race but it also plays a significant role in spiritual advancement. Married life teaches one to be compromising, understanding, tolerant, sympathetic, loving & caring towards the partner, children and all the family members. Exercising love & respect for the creation is the first and the foremost step towards expressing love for Waheguru "The Creator and Father of all".

Sikhism ideology is that the only objective of human life is to be devotional to God (Waheguru) and love the creation in order to unite with Waheguru. This union with God is referred to as "spiritual marriage" or "Anand-Kaaraj" in real terms.

The key events relating to the "Anand-Kaaraj" ceremony take place in the following sequence:

1. **Engagement** (also known as "Kurahmaayee") takes place quite sometime before the wedding. Normally, the bride's family visits the groom's family and formal ceremony takes place in the presence of Guru Granth Sahib. It is a formal consent for the marriage and besides, it gives two families the opportunity to form a closer relationship.
2. **Milnee** is the family "introductory meeting" that takes place outside the Gurdwara on the wedding day. The key family members of the groom embrace the counterpart or equivalent from the bride's family turn by turn as a cordial gesture to mark the beginning of a new relationship between the families. For example, father embraces father, mother embraces mother and so on ... Light refreshments are served subsequently.
3. **Kirtan** (singing of religious hymns using harmonium & twin drums called "Jorhee") is performed in the Gurdwara divan hall (assembly hall) where all the Sangat (congregation) joins to listen.
4. **Bridegroom** bows to Guru Granth Sahib and sits in the front, facing the Guru. Then **bride**, after bowing, sits next to the bridegroom (generally on left side). Bowing signifies respect and vow to practice Guru's teaching.
5. **Ardas** (A prayer) is performed by Bhai Sahib (priest) to request Guru's blessing in order to initiate the ceremony. Bridegroom, bride & their parents stand up during the Ardas while the sangat (congregation) remains seated.
6. **Hukamnama** (A Hymn read from Guru Granth Sahib by opening a page randomly) is read by Bhai Sahib, that serves as the message & blessing for the couple.
7. **Pullaa Ceremony** is performed. Pullaa means "end of a garment or scarf". Bride's father gives one end (Pullaa) of about 1.5 meter long sheet to the bridegroom and the other end (Pullaa) to the bride to hold. The ceremony symbolises father's blessings & prayer for the couple to remain committed to each other in their new relationship.
8. **Actual Anand-Kaaraj ceremony is initiated by reciting four "Laawaan" (union / wedding) hymns** from Guru Granth Sahib (page 773, in Raag Soohree) by Bhai Sahib (Priest). "Laawn" literally means "stage or

circle for the union". First Laawn Hymn is recited, the same Laawn Hymn is then sung by the Raagees (musician priests) and the couple after bowing, circles around Guru Granth Sahib in clockwise direction as the singing continues. After reaching the original sitting position, the couple waits until singing is complete and then sits down after bowing. Similarly, the remaining three Laawaan are completed. **Circling** Guru Granth Sahib implies accepting Guru Granth Sahib as the Guru & the focal point of life and **bowing** signifies respect and a vow to practice the message contained in the Hymns.

The four Laawaan Hymns contain the instructions & description of four stages for development of a perfect relationship as follows:

- i) In the first stage, the perfect Guru instructs that one should practice the TRUE RELIGION of **meditation upon Waheguru's (God's) virtues**. Through Guru's blessings, such meditation turns into sheer devotion and the sinful thoughts are dispelled and thus, a joyful relationship begins.
- ii) In the second stage, one firmly adheres to Guru's teachings those make one fearless and remove the self-pride. "Worldly fear" is replaced by the **"immaculate-God's fear"** ("Nirmal Bhau"). "Nirmal Bhau" prevents one from taking inappropriate action and thus not become displeasing to Waheguru. Presence of Waheguru in all beings is realised and one begins to exercise respect & tolerance for all. Thus, harmony begins to prevail.
- iii) In the third stage, **a deep loving desire** referred to as **"Bairaag"** is developed. One remains detached from the worldly temptations (five vices i.e. lust, anger, greed, illicit attachments & pride). The mind rejoices the ineffable melodious tunes of Waheguru (harmony / bliss) in the company of the saints (virtuous souls). "Bairaag" is ever-increasing love that sustains without making effort.
- iv) In the fourth stage, one becomes peaceful, contented & blissful as Waheguru present within the mind is realised. It is referred to as **"Sehaj"**. The eternal marriage (union) is established with the immortal Lord and there is no further separation. Full trust in the relationship prevails.

Such relationship is described in Guru Granth Sahib as: "Those, who merely live together, are not said to be the husband and wife. Rather, they alone are called **true husband and wife**, who despite having two different bodies enshrine One Divine light within their hearts. || (page 788)

Dn ipruejh n AnKIAn bhin iekTyhõe] ek j iq die mtrql Dn iprukhiAIsõe] (p111 788)

Dhan pir eh naa aakheeyan behan ikatthey hoye, ek jot` d`oyey mooratee dhan pir kaheeyey soye (P 788)

Thus, the couple vows to exercise Guru's instructions to attain a harmonious relationship and for spiritual advancement such that the soul (bride) is united (married) to the bridegroom (Waheguru, the supreme Soul). Such "Spiritual Marriage" is the real objective of human life.

9. **"Anand Sahib Hymns"** ("Song-of-Bliss" composed in melody "Raamkali") are sung by the Raagees.
10. Thanksgiving Ardas is performed in the end to thank Guru Granth Sahib for the blessings & successful completion of the ceremony, which is followed by the Hukamnama. Thus "Anand-Kaaraj" is concluded.

Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa | Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh

Waheguru fashions the "Spiritually enlightened ones" (The Khalsa) and Waheguru confers them victory.

ੴ ਸਤਿਨਾਮੁ ॥ ਸਤਿਗੁਰੁ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ ॥ ਅਨਮੋ ਗੁਰੋ ਨਾਨਕ ॥