

Guidance Note on Emergency Marriages in Hospitals



UK Sikh Healthcare Chaplaincy Group

This guidance note is set out in two parts, part one answer the question - Are Sikh Marriages permitted in Hospitals and under emergency situations. Part two provides information and details about the Sikh Wedding ceremony.

Part One – Allowing emergency marriages in hospitals

1. Our view would be that given the nature and conventions of the Sikh Marriage ceremony it would not be permissible for the Ceremony to take place in a hospital. Primarily, this arises through the need for the Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh Holy scriptures to be present. It is unlikely that this would happen in a hospital setting nor would it be deemed appropriate. Whilst the Guru Granth Sahib is taken outside places of worship, the strict conventions associated with it have meant that in recent years this has been a declining practice within the community. Most weddings take place in Gurdwaras, the Sikh place of worship and in certain circumstances where they do not, separate conventions and practices are adhered to beforehand to ensure that the Guru Granth Sahib is treated with respect.
2. There would also be issues regarding the practice of the ceremony for any patient. Given that the ceremony requires the patient to be mobile. The equivalent of the wedding vows require physical effort alongside verbal effort. In cases where a patient is disabled, the wedding vows are still taken in the same way with the bride or groom being assisted.
3. Having researched the matter, we were unable to find any evidence of the practice of emergency marriages here in the UK and abroad. Whilst our view is based on religious practices, parties would also have to consider the cultural conventions attached to weddings which would also likely be difficult to practice in a hospital or emergency setting.

Part Two – The Sikh Wedding

Anand Karaj (Punjabi: ਅਨੰਦ ਕਾਰਜ, anand kāraj) is the Sikh marriage ceremony, meaning "Blissful Union" or "Joyful Union", that was introduced by Guru Amar Das. The four Lavan (marriage hymns which take place during the marriage ceremony) were composed by his successor, Guru Ram Das. It was originally legalised in India through the passage of the Anand Marriage Act 1909 but is now governed by the Sikh Reht Maryada (Sikh code of conduct and conventions) that was issued by the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC). It dictates that only those who follow the Sikh religion may marry under the ceremony, therefore, Sikhs cannot marry persons professing other religions under it. It also states that child marriage is invalid and that no account should be taken of the prospective spouse's caste.

The Anand Karaj usually takes place at a gurdwara (Sikh temple), although not necessarily so; the marriage may also be conducted at the bride's residence or any other place where the Guru Granth Sahib (Sikh holy book) has been installed. If the marriage takes place somewhere other than a gurdwara, the place must be suitable and the Guru Granth Sahib must be installed following the proper procedure. Any Amritdhari (man or woman who is a strict adherent of Sikhism) may perform the marriage ceremony. In a recent verdict of the Sri Akaal Takht Sahib, ie. a Hukumnama, Anand Karaj will take place only in the Gurudwara as Sri Guru Granth Sahib will not be taken to any marriage hall for that purpose.

The following are other important points that must be adhered to by the Sikh couple and their families:

Marriage is a partnership of equals. - No consideration is to be given to Caste, Social Status, Race or lineage. - No Dowry is allowed. - No day is considered holier above any other, hence no astrological considerations are to be made and no superstitions are to be observed in fixing the date of the wedding. - The religious ceremony to take place in a Gurdwara or in the presence of Guru Granth Sahib. -Burden of the cost of the wedding to be shared as equally as possible.

The Anand Karaj ceremony is joyous and festive event in which families and friends from both sides are heavily involved. Most Sikh weddings take place in the morning and are completed before noon. Following the ceremony is a langar or a formal lunch. The wedding event can last for the whole day and may spill into the next day.

Most families combine the wedding ceremony with the engagement ceremony called the "Kurmai", where the Kurmai is held just before the wedding vows or Laava. The engagement ceremony can also be held as a separate event on a different day. It is usually conducted in the Gurdwara or at the home of the Groom-to-be. It involves Ardas, Kirtan , "Sagaan" (Exchange of gifts) and Langar. In the "Sagaan" ceremony, the groom is presented with a kara, kirpan, Indian sweets, fresh fruits, dried fruits and nuts. The bride-to-be's family in turn are presented with garments and sweets for the Bride-to-be.

The laava phere (singular laav) are the four hymns of the Anand Karaj (Sikh wedding ceremony) which form the main part of this ceremony. The four hymns are from the Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh holy scriptures and appear on pages 773 to 774 of the total of 1430.

Guru Ram Das says on page 788 of the Sri Guru Granth Sahib of the meaning of marriage to a Sikh couple: "They are not said to be husband and wife who merely sit together. Rather they alone are called husband and wife, who have one soul in two bodies." The four laava give the Sikh couple spiritual guidance for their life ahead. The Guru tells of the four spiritual stages of married life and how the couple as a team have to first begin by following the path of righteousness and sinless-ness. Secondly to only have fear of the Lord and remove the ego from within the souls; then to remember and sing the Lord's name with the holy congregation. Finally, the couple will find divine peace; come to accept the Will of the Lord and find unending happiness in the Lord.

The Four Rounds

The main part of the Anand Karaj (Sikh Marriage Ceremony) is the reading and then the singing of each laav in turn. When the Laav is sung, the couple, joined by a piece of cloth, circle the Guru Granth Sahib. This has relevance to the occasion and should not be considered a ritual without meaning. When the couple circle the Guru Granth Sahib

each time they are making a commitment to God with the Guru as their spiritual witness and support. And as one circles the Sri Guru Granth Sahib you are reminded that the Guru should be the centre of your life, from which springs your spiritual leadership and understanding that you require for your soul's long journey across this 'world ocean'. The Sri Guru Granth Sahib is the spiritual centre and the Sadh Sangat is your worldly (temporal) witness and support.

The four nuptial rounds were written by Guru Ram Das for his own wedding. They explain the journey of the souls toward the Almighty. In them he tells us of the duties that a person undertaking a life of marriage should perform.

In the first round, the Guru asks the partners to:

Commit to righteousness.

Renounce sinful actions.

Remember, mediate and embrace Naam.

Only by good fortune, is real peace obtained and Lord seems sweet to the mind.

Worship the one Waheguru and all your sins will vanish.

In the second round, the Guru asks the partners to advance further towards meeting the True Guru - God:

The Lord leads you to meet the True Guru, the Primal Being - the enlightener

Have fear of fearless God and your ego will disappear

Sing God's praises and feel His presence before you.

God is everywhere, outside and within, sing in Joy

In the third round, the Guru says that the partners mind is filled with "Divine Love":

Meeting the Sadh Sangat (Holy Congregation)

Speak the Word of the Lord's Bani.

Which is only obtained by good fortune

Recite Gurbani and sing the Glorious Praises of the Lord

The Naam will vibrate and resound within your heart

And you will know your future destiny.

In the final round, the Guru says that the partners' mind become peaceful and they will have found the Lord:

God's Will seems sweet to these Gurmukhs.

You will lovingly focus your consciousness on the Lord, day and night

All your desires will be fulfilled

The Souls will blend with Waheguru and only Naam will occupy your heart.

Further Resources

<http://www.sikhs.org/wedding/>