

# The Sikh Wedding: Significance of 'Lavan'

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WE ARE OFTEN EXPECTED TO perform 'lavan', with *kirtan* at a number of Sikh Wedding ceremonies (Anand Karaj) on our tours. I am often requested to explain the significance of the 'lavan'. I have attempted this below:

'Lavan' means circumambulation. 'Anand Karaj' (the Sikh nuptial rites) means ceremony of bliss. The couple walk clockwise, four times, around the Guru Granth Sahib while four specified hymns are sung. I attempt here my interpretation of the significance of these four 'laps', which is the main, and most significant part of the Sikh marriage ceremony.

Though there are a variety of views on the significance of these four 'rounds', let me give you my views gleaned from my 'peers' and elders, and my own modest understanding, but placed in a 21st. century context.

The first three 'rounds' celebrate the three elements which go towards making up our 'being', namely body, mind and soul. The fourth and last circumambulation signifies ultimate union with God, the true 'anand' (bliss) of every human being.

The first round signifies the physical and materialistic aspects of married life - physical attraction between man and wife which leads to the birth of offsprings; working hard to earn a living and acquiring the trappings of a comfortable life - a good house, car, and so on.

The second 'round' signifies the method of living. To bring Sikhi, 'gurmatt' and 'gurbani' into the house. Are husband and wife, and later mum and dad spending time in doing *Nitnem*, listening to *kirtan*, doing self-research into Sikhi and also going to gurdwara regularly to do *sewa* and joining in the service? Is there '*Babay-dha-Parkash*' in the house? If such an environment is maintained in the household then that will create a conducive environment for the children and those visiting, to be drawn towards Sikhi. If the household is one where the most prominent feature in the house is the 'bar', alcohol is served, noisy parties are held every other day; there is violence between mum and dad, then the children will grow up with bad habits. But, if a happy and spiritually uplifting environment is created from the outset and a concerted effort is made to maintain that environment by both husband and wife, then there are greater chances of happiness within the home, and well brought up children. So, this circumambulation signifies the mental attitude and discipline necessary for the Sikhi path.

The third 'round', signifies the 'soul', when both husband and wife discover that they might have two bodies but share one soul within their two bodies - '*aik jyot doe moorti*' because they have created the right spiritual environment and discipline leading towards a state of realising 'detachment' from the first two elements. The bodies start to age and the lure of more materialism dims as one finds contentment in gurbani. Also, the ability to 'let go'. To feel that one has done one's duty towards ones offsprings and that they, the offsprings must now find their own wings - find the right spouses for themselves and hopefully begin '*grahast marg*' (the married path of a householder as preferred in Sikhism) on the right footings. But, whether the

offsprings are appearing to do the right thing or not, one must have the ability to 'let go'. Letting the offsprings deal with their lives. Also remembering that these days parents do not depend on their offsprings in old age and, to have the ability to accept that!

The fourth and final circumambulation signifies the ultimate marriage as decreed in Sikhism. Two bodies, but one spirit, which then finds blissful union with God. '*Dhan pir eh n aakhian, behen aikethay hoe, aik jyot doe moorti, dhan pir kehiyai soe*' - Just because they (husband and wife) sit together does not make them a couple, BUT, one soul in two bodies, now that is a true couple!

So, truly, a Sikh marriage ceremony, the Anand Karaj (ceremony of bliss), represents the wholistic Sikh view of moving through body, mind and soul to reach union with God, not as a single person, but as a married couple and going through the agony and ecstasy of raising a family.

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## **Guru Gobind Singh Foundation Salutes Mothers**

### ***A REPORT BY AMRIT KAUR\****

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THE SIKHS HAVE MORE than one reason to celebrate Mother's Day, to remember Mata Tripta and Mata Gujari. In USA May 13<sup>th</sup> is earmarked as Mother's Day, because it is commonly believed, Anna Jarvis, after her mother's death on May 9<sup>th</sup>, 1905, focused all her efforts in establishing Mother's Day as a National holiday. In 1914 President Woodrow Wilson declared such a Mother's Day to salute women whose sons had died in World War I. Now this day is celebrated world wide in honor of Mothers.

Guru Gobind Singh Foundation in Rockville, MD, observed this wonderful day by saluting the mothers in a very specially designed program which was conducted by women only. The egalitarian concept of equality in Sikhism has accorded an equal status to women. In the ancient Indian society where women were treated as low and degraded beings, Guru Nanak and succeeding Gurus exalted their status by their words and actions.

Dharmender Kaur, an Administrative Assistant of a bank and wife of the Granthi Gurdarshan Singh of GGSF started the program with a rendition of a hymn by Guru Arjun Dev ji.

" Bebe Nanaki was the first Sikh who recognized divinity in her brother Guru Nanak," exclaimed Amrit Pal Kaur, a US Postal worker. She sang a beautiful hymn and exhorted the Sikh mothers to be more responsible and infuse Sikhi spirit in their young ones right from infancy.

Bhupinder Kaur a Sales Associate, sang a very poignant Geet (song) describing the sorrows, sufferings and steadfastness of Mata Gujri. Mohini Kaur, a very dedicated woman, in charge of Langar at GGSF, and a retiree from senior sales management of prestigious store Lord and Taylor, along with Vibha Nayyar a house wife, sang a shabad. Dr. Balwinder Kaur, a psychiatrist, rendered a hymn from

Gurbani, while her 13 year old daughter Sahej accompanied her on violin. Sarjit Kaur a senior citizen who became a US citizen a day earlier sang a shabad. Surinder Kaur, a retired renowned music teacher vibrated the hall with her soulful singing.

The program was not limited to shabads only. Gagan Kaur, a young mother of three kids and a Technical Training Manager in University of Maryland, wrote and recited a poem on Sikh Mothers . She outlined struggles and frustration of a working Sikh mother and then revealed her pool of inspiration that comes from mothers of Gur Ithas. Here is a sample of her strength and inspiration- "Just when I get to the end of rope, I see on the horizon, a ray of hope I am not ordinary, I am A Sikh mother. How did I forget I don't need to bother. I have the Spirit of Mata Sahib Kaur, Mata Gujri's courage is in my soul, Mata Bhani's blessings are with me. Mata Tripta and Daya Kaur are always with me." So sublime and soul stirring !

Aranchan Kaur, a banker well known for her talent for kirtan singing in "*Raag Ratan Parivar*" articulated in a very powerful voice her views on how Gurus exalted status of women She talked about mothers of Sikh history and infused inspiration and courage in the audience and enthralled them. Her motivational speech made quire an impact and moved the hearts of many. Ardas was performed by Manjit Kaur, an IT specialist and Hukamnama was taken by Aranchan Kaur.

To the sheer amazement of many, women got up and took turn to sit behind Guru Granth Sahib to do Chaur Sewa. They even came forward voluntarily to distribute *Prashad* as well. This was a beautiful example of women being inspired and enthused to come forward to take lead in public places.

In most Gurdwaras there are women Jathas and they know a few shabads and sing those every now and then. However, at Guru Gobind Singh Foundation, it was not a Nari Jatha but very talented and professional individuals from diverse backgrounds who came forward to express themselves in unique ways. They drew inspiration from Mothers of Gur Ithas, strengthened each other and as a candle lights another candle, they all came together and enlightened the whole place. It was a bonding time for women and celebration of motherhood by men and women alike. What a show of grand performance and participation by all alike!

It may be worth mentioning that Guru Gobind Singh Foundation celebrates all the special days: Mothers Day, Fathers Day, Earth Day, UN Peace Day, etc. Gurbani and Gur Ithas is the treasure house of all worldly and spiritual wisdom and all resources are drawn from there. These special days are celebrated from the Sikh perspective. There is no dearth of shabads and concepts in salutation of motherhood or fatherhood or reverence for earth and nature or to perpetuate peace and universal brotherhood in our scriptures. Sikhism is a way of life as it celebrates life and extols the faithful to embrace it and not renounce it. So why not intertwine the celebration with our own religious belief system? This way we can be part of the main stream American life while maintaining our distinct identity.

Dr. Harminder Kaur said, "The special program in honor of mothers was the best gift a mother could get. I congratulate the Sangat of GGSF for giving this honor to the Mothers. With Waheguruji's blessings moms will pay back by carrying out their

duties in raising their children as good Sikhs. Thank you for the invaluable gift. It goes a long way!"

Dr. Rajwant Singh concluded:

"The whole program was coordinated and presented by Amrit Kaur, Secretary of Guru Gobind Singh Foundation.. She assured the men that they would not be left behind and will get their turn to do every thing including cooking langar, next month on Father's Day."

