

FAMILY LIFE

Whereas a Sikh is to advance and progress towards Godhead while discharging his duties towards his fellow beings, he cannot achieve the goal by renunciation but he can do so only in *sangat*, or society. Celibacy has not at all, therefore, been applauded in Sikhism. When Sikhism was founded 500 years ago, people who renounced their hearth and home were looked up to with reverence. It was preached to the people that no one could attain to spiritual heights so long as he did not give up his family life and repair to the wilderness, and no one could perform any religious duty except those belonging to the priestly class. In Sikhism, all these ideas were discarded. A family man was declared by the Guru as much nobler, and more righteous than the one who had given up his own family and home, and had become a burden on others. The Gurus set the example themselves by taking to family life and doing all worldly duties. Even today some schools of thought applaud celibates and hermits. But in Sikhism, there is no special place or position for them. Rather, they are generally considered to be drones and parasites.

Love of progeny and urge to bring up, look after, and protect the offspring is a natural instinct in all living beings. The idea of a family originated after the human beings progressed from their wild life. The idea of family life gave rise to mutual attachment and close affinity, the shape of which has varied in different periods and in different countries. So the form of marriage has differed. The Hindu law givers, Manu and other *Rishis*, have referred to eight different forms of marriage amongst the Hindus. They are

Brahm, Daiv, Arsh, Prajapat, Asur, Gandharv, Rakshas, and Paisach. Amongst the Muslims, there is generally one kind of marriage ceremony which is called *Niqah* while there are three kinds of divorces which only the husband can announce and which the wife is not entitled to do. There is another sort of marriage also justified for them which is for a specific period. For instance, if a person goes to a far off land, he marries a woman there and divorces her when going back. It is very much like hiring a wife on landing and firing her when taking off. Except in Christianity, where a person can have only one wife and a woman only one husband at a time, amongst Hindus and Mohammedans, there has been no ceiling on the number of wives and in certain hill tribes there has been no ceiling on the number of husbands. Great men, both spiritual preceptors and rulers, have been keeping numerous wives and mistresses. But womenfolk were not generally allowed to have more than one husband, though sometimes exceptions are noticed as was the case of five Pandavs having one consort. Nowadays, there is a general tendency to limit the numbers on both sides to one.

The custom amongst the Sikhs has also not been very different. The Sikh outlook and ideal of morality is generally given in the *Shabds* that are sung and recited at the Sikh Anand Marriage ceremony. This is contained in a sample of wedding sermon delivered by me on the occasion of the marriage of the Faridkot Princess on December 14, 1959. Excerpts from that sermon are given below :

Anybody can perform any ceremony. This honour has been given to me because of my very old connections with Sikhism which date back to the beginning of the seventeenth century, when appreciating his devotion, service, and loyalty, the sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind Sahib initiated my ancestor, Bhai Rup Chand, into Sikhism, gave him the highest honour by declaring him as his brother (Bhai), and entrusted him with the sacred mission of preaching Sikhism. Bhai Rup Chand had the unique privilege and honour to perform the first Anand Marriage when he was chosen to officiate at the wedding of Sri Guru Gobind Singh Sahib.

The ties between the noble and great Brar family of the bride and mine are also centuries old and have bound our families closely. Brars also first came into the fold of Sikhism at Bhai Rup Chand's instance.

All the Sikh ceremonies are very simple. They are based primarily on the principle :

Set fire to such rituals and ceremonies that lead me away from my Beloved.

ਜਾਲਉ ਐਸੀ ਰੀਤਿ ਜਿਤੁ ਮੈ ਪਿਆਰਾ ਵੀਸਰੈ ॥

The ceremony of marriage is also very simple. It consists of prayer and vow. All ceremonies, in fact, whether of joy or of sorrow, begin and end with prayer. As the Guru has said :

Whenever there is any work on hand, address God about it.

ਕੀਤਾ ਲੋੜੀਐ ਕੰਮੁ ਸੁ ਹਰਿ ਪਹਿ ਆਖੀਐ ॥

Sikhism is not a way of renunciation. For our salvation, realisation of truth, for attainment of and to find God, we do not have to give up our homes and hearths and wander in woods and wilderness to seek the Omnipresent, the Universal Soul and the Source of all existence, Who pervades in us all and in Whom we all exist, Who is also the Ultimate Cause and the Ultimate End of all. The Guru says :

Why go and seek Him in the woods; the Omnipresent and Eternal Pure is inseparably within you.

ਕਾਹੇ ਰੇ ਬਨ ਖੋਜਨ ਜਾਈ ॥ ਸਰਬ ਨਿਵਾਸੀ ਸਦਾ ਅਲੇਪਾ ਤੇਹੀ ਸੰਗਿ ਸਮਾਈ ॥

The comforts and pleasures of the world are worth enjoying. Satguru has brought the much dreaded *maya* to our feet and turned it into a useful instrument of service. The only thing is that we must not ourselves become its slaves. In *Sukhmani*, the Psalm of Peace of Guru Arjun Dev, the Satguru has enjoined that while enjoying dainty dishes, anointing our bodies with perfumes, living in comfortable houses and cosy beds happily with our families, wearing jewels, silks and satins, riding horses and elephants (and now cars and aeroplanes), bear always the Supreme Lord in mind and sing His praises in gratefulness for His Great Bounties, His Mercy, and His Grace. Even while drinking pure clear water, thank

Him, for there are many who are not fortunate enough even to receive this Grace of His.

Gratefully thank the Great Giver.

ਜਿਸਦਾ ਦਿਤਾ ਖਾਵਣਾ ਤਿਸੁ ਕਰੀਐ ਸਾਬਾਸਿ ॥

We have to live such a life that when we ultimately face the Master, we do so with an untarnished and bright face and a clear conscience.

In Sikhism, therefore, the family way of life *Grihasth Ashram* is the superior and natural way of life, in which we have to live like a lotus and the swan, unaffected by the turbulent tides and waves of the waters, yet living and enjoying in it.

There are four stages in the progress of man towards his union with the Lord. They are, fear, love, restraint, and harmony. The Satguru wishes that our married life should also be moulded on the ideal laid down for our union with the *Paramatma*.

Our conjugal relations are designed not merely to promote worldly comfort or to perpetuate the human race, but to provide the best means of approaching God and cultivating our lives in such a manner as to make them most useful and fruitful. Marriage is not a mere contract, to be repudiated at will, but is a sacrament, a holy union consecrated in accordance with the Divine Will.

We invoke *Akal Purkh's* (Eternal Person's) presence by holding a holy congregation, with Guru Granth Sahib in our midst as *Sakhi*. This holy *sangat* incorporates the presence of the Almighty, as Satguru has said:

God resides in the *sangat*.

ਵਿਚਿ ਸੰਗਤਿ ਹਰਿ ਪ੍ਰਭੁ ਵਸੈ ਜੀਉ ॥

The bride and the bridegroom are sitting in the lap of God, the source of all love and affection, and the blessings of the whole congregation are with them. As they move round the Holy Granth, they should do so with a feeling and faith that they are walking the course of joint life to make themselves inseparably one, to make their united life a present to the Master. The aim of married life is union which is not physical union only but a union, physical, intellectual, and spiritual. The Guru's own words are :

They are not to be called husband and wife who only sit

together; rather they are husband and wife who have one spirit in two bodies.

ਧਨ ਪਿਰੁ ਏਹਿ ਨ ਆਖੀਅਨਿ ਬਹਿਨਿ ਇਕਠੇ ਹੋਇ ॥

ਏਕ ਜੋਤਿ ਦੁਇ ਮੂਰਤੀ ਧਨ ਪਿਰੁ ਕਹੀਐ ਸੋਇ ॥

This life of union has also four stages of development. One is of fear, the other of love, the next of restraint, and the last of harmony or perfect at oneness.

The first is of fear. This might sound strange to those who have been feeding themselves on Western literature and foreign thought. In the West love comes first and then marriage. Why? It all depends on the psychological developments of different people. In the West, the spring season is celebrated in May, when summer has already begun here. With us spring or *basant* begins in February, when we are still shivering with cold. And yet we celebrate the spring when the branches of trees are still naked and flowers have not yet come. We celebrate our spring in anticipation of the coming flowers. So we celebrate our marriage on the promise and anticipation of love, which when it comes gradually out of mutual contact and understanding, exchange of thoughts and feelings, and opportunities to serve each other more and more, is always deep-rooted and everlasting. But before love comes, there is a stage of fear, not slavish fear, but "*Nirmal Bhao*", holy fear, which dispels all fear, and it is the fear of the unknown around the corner. It also means discipline.

Those who fear the Lord have nothing else to fear; but those who do not fear Him have much fear in store for them.

ਜਿਨਾ ਭਉ ਤਿਨ ਨਾਹਿ ਭਉ, ਮੁਚੁ ਭਉ ਨਿਭਵਿਆਹ ॥

Both the husband and wife are to tread gently towards each other, in awe of each other, but not being afraid of each other. Love is a delicate thing. It may get injured by the slightest departure from truth or sincerity. The least adverse reference to one's parents might wound feelings. It is a great art, as difficult and delicate as life itself to make a strange and unknown individual to feel at home with new people and a new environment, with new elders and new relations. Great sensitivity, loving tact, and patient sympathy are

required to make two strange lives fuse into one. This moral sensitiveness, this accommodating sympathy is called fear by the Guru.

Out of this grows anticipatory pleasure, which is the next stage. The word for this used by the Guru is *chao* (ਚਾਉ), which means enthusiasm, eagerness tinged with hope and optimistic pleasure. For, what is that love which has no enthusiasm, no yearning in it? Usually enthusiasm in marriage wears off in a few years, and then everything appears stale and monotonous. How to keep up enthusiasm in married life, is the problem in question. Nobody can maintain youth and beauty for ever. Age and illness invade our lives, and with the wearing off of freshness our attachments also grow stale and drab. Then how to keep up freshness? The Creator knew what sort of man He was creating. He knew that he could not retain the outer appearance forever. He, therefore, provided an element in his nature which would keep up freshness of relationship, even though youth and beauty might depart. This element was love, which knows no staleness, no growing old. Is not God the oldest being, more old and antiquated than any man or woman could be? And yet His lovers say:

My Lord is ever new and fresh.

ਸਾਹਿਬੁ ਮੇਰਾ ਨਿਤ ਨਵਾ ॥

The secret of keeping the relation young and fresh is not in cosmetics or lipstick, but love, unchanging love, love in all conditions, all troubles, and all diseases. Troubles are a nuisance. But to a loving heart, they provide opportunities for service and sacrifice and are, therefore, conducive to love.

Next comes the third stage. The words in the *Lavan* are:

Love comes into the heart which withdraws itself from all other affections.

ਮਨਿ ਚਾਉ ਭਇਆ ਬੈਰਾਗੀਆ ਬਲਿ ਰਾਮ ਜੀਉ ॥

The affections of the parents, of brothers and sisters, friends and companions, give place to one overmastering love that knows no rival. Just a few minutes ago, the bride owned so much in her parental home. Now after this ceremony she will have to withdraw from it. All her relations will become strangers and their sweetness

will fade, in comparison with the supreme sweetness of the new relation :

When all relations appeared imperfect, I sought thy hand.
ਹਭੇ ਸਾਕ ਵੁਝਾਵੇ ਡਿਠੇ ਤਉ ਪਲੈ ਤੈਠੈ ਲਾਗੀ ॥

But she looks forward, with complacent joy and new *chao*, towards the new life with the protector of her life and honour, of whom she could be proud. But this *chao* is *bairagiya* (ਬੈਰਾਗੀਆ), full of *vairag* or sadness. Her lips are smiling, but her eyes are full of tears. This is the happiest occasion of her life, but also the saddest. It gives her a new home, but it also plucks her out of her old moorings. The last line of *lavan* mentions only the *vairag* stage, which is an essential stage. It can also be called the “transition” stage. In the beginning love is immediate and compelling, and can stand no separation or absence. But constant association and understanding develop restraint and self-control, that make affections sedate and calm. Then absence is no absence. This is *vairag*.

Last of all comes the stage of *sehaj*, which is of complete oneness, of perfect balance, which knows no separation, no mistrust. This is the stage in which effort is eliminated. The bride’s past and present become the bridegroom’s past and present. Her parents become his and his become hers. They feel and think alike and both are completely identified with each other; that is, they become “*Ek jot doe murati*”, one spirit in two bodies.

This is so far as the present social outlook and custom is concerned. It takes pretty long to change, but such social customs always change. The form of marriage and the concept of morality have changed and have been different in different countries, and in different circumstances. And this will, of course, keep on changing. The concept of marriage is quite different in the West from the East even at this moment. In the West, men and women are more free between themselves and society does not mind. In some countries pornography is socially and officially allowed. Recently, homosexuality has been excluded from the list of objectionable acts in the Penal Code, whereas previously it was considered to be a crime. A current member of the British Parliament who is an

unmarried woman has given birth to a child and has refused to disclose the name of the father of the child. And she is there elected by popular vote. A cinema actress in America has bypassed the Christian edict of monogamy by living with two men at a time without marrying them. The brewing revolt against the authority of the male and bondage of marriage in the West is indicated somewhat in these words :

“In primitive times, of course, the heavier musculature of the man was necessary to protect the pregnant female and the immobile young.

“The female brain is not a vestigial organ, like a vermiform appendix.

“Marriage as an institution, is as thoroughly corrupt as prostitution. It is, in fact, legalized and romanticised prostitution. A woman who marries, is selling her sexual services and domestic services for permanent bed and board. There is no human being a man can buy, any more, except a woman.

“Domination of the insubordinate female is an almost instinctive male reflex. We all live in a patriarchy, where men govern women by playing sexual politics. They bought and sold women like cattle. Bound their feet at birth to deform them, so they could not run away like in China. Made widows throw themselves on the funeral pyres of their husbands like in India. Cut off their clitorises so they could bear children but not enjoy sex. Clitoris is the only sexual organ, in either sex, designed by nature solely for sexual pleasure.”

These ideas may astound us in the East, especially in India, but the infection is already in the air, and has been set in motion. The system of divorce which was unheard of in Hindu society has been introduced. And this has been done by a Brahmin Prime Minister, Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru. The efforts nowadays to control the increasing population by justifying abortion; and teaching and training to use contraceptives, are removing the fear of pregnancy, the only practical check to adultery. The change in the Hindu Succession Act has further divided the Hindu society and the female sentiments. All these are, in a way, preludes to the

coming infection from the West. With emergence of such formulas as nexus, plexus, and sexus — meaning “a connection”, “a complex of erotic nerves”, and “the resultant orgasm” and freedom for propagation and exhibition of pornography, and increasing tendency towards nudity and semi-nudeness, decontrol on rigidity and decreasing discipline on morality, acceptance by society of free mixing of men and women, and tolerance of free-lancing, and increasing pastime of sowing wild oats, lessening and demoralization of sanctity of wedlock, no wonder the society is heading back to the jungle and Stone Age, thus, perhaps completing the circle of civilisation and life on earth.

This is one aspect of life; otherwise too we see the world has started behaving in a way which is even worse than the so-called “jungle life”. People then settled their scores themselves direct in a frontal way. But now to get scores settled according to one’s dictates, third parties, who are innocent and unconcerned, are being tortured and massacred. People against whom there is no grievance and who are unarmed are being kidnapped and held to ransom and planes are hijacked to collect money and to have demands fulfilled. Electricity, transport and other necessities of life are being cut off to coerce the public to pressurise the government to get wages increased. Public and private property is being destroyed to get some thing done somewhere. To get through examinations students resort to strikes and teachers stop work to get their demands fulfilled. Without any rhyme or reason, people are being clandestinely expelled and their property, belongings confiscated. Science and technology were expected to do good to humanity and better the standards, but have only provided human beings with instruments of destruction and devastation. The indicators of civilization were supposed to be social and ethical advancement. But they are disappearing altogether. With our various sorts of explosions, we have even disturbed nature vis-a-vis which harmony should be maintained. Nature has never tolerated encroaching. This we have forgotten. Very likely, civilization has crossed the zenith and is now coming down headlong, beating a retreat.

There are no special injunctions in Sikhism about the number of children. It should depend on need, circumstances and one's capacity to bring them up. There was a time when Aryans invaded India and settled down here. They naturally wanted to increase their numbers as much as possible to make their hold of the country pukka. Procreation in any and every way was encouraged and justified. A male issue was declared to be a religious necessity. The last rites of a dead person were invariably to be performed by the male issue. If Raja Vachittar Vir, in spite of having two wives, Ambika and Ambalika, could not produce an issue, he had to seek help of Rishi Vyas. Dhritrashtra and Pandu, of the Mahabharata fame, were thus fathered by Vyas. *Rishis* at that time generally carried long knots of hair, big beards, and almost naked hairy bodies besmeared with ashes. They had potent awe-inspiring images. It is said that when Vyas stepped on Rani Ambika's bed, out of fear, she closed her eyes. It was, thus, that she gave birth to Dhritrashtra as a blind child. Similarly, when the Rishi went to the other Rani, she paled with fear. Her issue was thus as pale as Pandu clay and was called Pandu. The five sons of Pandu were also issues brought about in the same way. Now the position has changed. Human population has begun to almost overflow. Now the requirement will naturally be to slowdown. So acceleration or slowing down of the rate of birth does not contravene any religious or spiritual edict.