

## The Anand Karaj – LGBT modern challenges to Sikhs

*This article addresses the question: ‘Can you be from the LGBT community & be a Sikhi?’ If we study Sikh history, philosophy, scripture and codes of conduct, we find that only heterosexual relationships in marriage are allowed. Having LGBT sexual urges does not make a person an apostate of Sikhi but the individual is not allowed to follow up these urges into sexual relationships.*

This article was written some time ago and is now being presented with additional information and clarification with regards to a recent marriage ceremony that took place between a same sex couple, allegedly in the USA. The aim of the article is to provide an intellectual debate – based on evidence, not opinions; this is to be framed within Sikh history, Sikh Scriptures, the teachings of the Ten Gurus, the teachings of the current and eternal Guru of the Sikhs (*Sri Guru Granth Sahib Jee Maharaj*) and Panj Pyare (who are the current physical representation of the Sikh Guru that officiate Amrit Sanchars [initiation ceremonies to become Sikhs]).

The social media age has brought on a rampant misrepresentation of Sikh beliefs, as now ‘everyone’ has a voice and a social media account to make an opinion heard. That does not mean these opinions are correct or backed by any evidence and/or approved by any Sikh authority. Unscrupulous businesses will profit from this and provide whatever people want or ask for, with scant regard for the Guru:

ਮਾਥੇ ਤਿਲਕੁ ਹਥਿ ਮਾਲਾ ਬਾਨਾਂ ॥

Some apply ceremonial marks to their foreheads,  
hold malas (rosaries) in their hands and wear religious robes.

ਲੋਗਨ ਰਾਮੁ ਖਿਲਉਨਾ ਜਾਨਾਂ ॥੧॥

Some people think that the Lord is a play-thing. ||1||

(Bhagat Kabeer Jee, 1158 Ang)

The religious garbs these imposters wear does not make them true representatives of the Guru or Sikhi. I will give an example of what I mean: I was on tour once and I heard people singing the praises of a Granthi (a reader and custodian of a Gurdwara). The Granthi was known to do whatever people asked of him, therefore, he was liked as he was so flexible. I thought to myself – he must have no discipline/rehat nor impose what the boundaries are for his role. The next day, I found the same Granthi drunk. The Gurdwara committee took action against him afterwards.

Going back to the point of opinions shared on social media – we all know it takes the average person 21 years to get a degree, yet without any real research or practice of Sikhi, we all become experts on social media and throw about comments that ‘*the Guru does not judge*’ completely out of context. So, just for reference, let’s actually share some instructions from Sri Guru Granth Sahib Jee, just to show you some context as a dash of reality is a good starting point for the purpose of this article:

ਰਸਨਾ ਜਪੈ ਨ ਨਾਮੁ ਤਿਲੁ ਤਿਲੁ ਕਰਿ ਕਟੀਐ ॥

The tongue which does not chant the Naam (God’s Name) ought to be cut out, bit by bit.  
(Sri Guru Arjan Dev Jee, 1361 Ang)

ਗੁਰ ਮੰਤ੍ਰੁ ਹੀਣਸੁ ਜੋ ਪ੍ਰਾਈ ਧ੍ਰਿਗੰਤ ਜਨਮ ਭ੍ਰੁਸਟਣਹ ॥

That mortal who lacks the Guru's Mantra - has cursed and contaminated his/her life. The Guru's Mantra is received and infused in you when you take Amrit and/or take on a Guru.

ਕੂਕਰਹ ਸੂਕਰਹ ਗਰਧਭਹ ਕਾਕਹ ਸਰਪਨਹ ਤੁਲਿ ਖਲਹ ॥੩੩॥

That blockhead is just a dog, a pig, a jackass, a crow, a snake. ||33||  
(Sri Guru Arjan Dev Jee, 1356 Ang)

Listen to respected, knowledgeable, practising Sikhs whose lives reflect and embody that which the Sikh Gurus teach, unless you just want to do whatever you like, by all means carry on and the Guru then says:

ਕਬੀਰ ਸਾਕਤ ਸੰਗੁ ਨ ਕੀਜੀਐ ਦੁਰਹਿ ਜਾਈਐ ਭਾਗਿ ॥

Kabeer, do not associate with the faithless cynics; run far away from them.

ਬਾਸਨੁ ਕਾਰੇ ਪਰਸੀਐ ਤਉ ਕਛੁ ਲਾਗੈ ਦਾਗੁ ॥੧੩੧॥

If you touch a vessel stained with soot, some of the soot will stick to you. ||131||  
(Bhagat Kabeer Jee, 1371 Ang)

### **The Creation of a Perfect Faith - Sikhi**

The arrival of Sri Guru Nanak Dev Jee (1469 – 1539CE) came at a time when empty ritualism and falsehood pervaded those professing to be on the path to discovering God. Guru Nanak fought for women's rights, challenging bigotry, inequality and shallow ritualism. They were a charismatic, spiritually enlightened social reformer, whose mission was perfected and completed by nine further Gurus, appointed in succession. This mission of 'Sikhi' is a tradition of discipleship to the teachings of the 10 Gurus, lasted from 1469 – 1708 CE. During these 239 years the Gurus did not shy away from any social, political or religious questions – rather they answered all queries made and stood firm in the face of adversity, challenging rulers, bigots and tyrants. This led to two Gurus becoming martyred (peacefully) and another two Gurus entered many battles with rulers of princely states and the emperors of India. The phenomenal Guru Nanak Dev Jee would transform the minds and actions of all those who they came across.

These 10 Gurus left their eternal teachings in their spiritual embodiment, the Sri Guru Granth Sahib Jee; today, this is the eternal Guru of the Sikhs. Sri Guru Granth Sahib Jee is an anthology of enlightening scriptures, which includes divine hymns from the Gurus, Hindu Saints (Bhakti tradition), Sufi Saints and Sikhs. Sri Guru Granth Sahib Jee is the spiritual Guru of the Sikhs and the physical Guru (in human form) resides in the 'Panj Pyare' – five Sikhs who conduct an initiation ceremony (conducted in the presence of Sri Guru Granth Sahib Jee). Sikhs can converse with their physical Guru 'Panj Pyare' at initiation ceremonies should they wish to.

### **The Gurus & Sikhi on LGBT Communities**

Some argue that the Gurus did not talk about LGBT communities and promoted an inclusive anti-discriminatory faith. They build upon this by then making the leap from these principles of

inclusivity and equality to then say being LGBT and practising this lifestyle is allowed and Sikh marriages of LGBT couples should also be allowed.

The Gurus perfected Sikhi in the 229 years that They graced the earth with Their physical presence. We mere mortals cannot add or change anything to the perfection that They created, for the word 'Sikh' actually means disciple and a disciple is one who surrenders to the commands of his/her Guru. To practice this path of 'Sikhi', the Guru asks for complete surrender and at all initiation ceremonies, it is stated that your 'head' now belongs to the Guru and it is on acceptance of this condition that you are initiated (Amrit – immortal nectar) to become a practising Sikh. So, if this means relinquishing a sexual life, that may be the sacrifice you have to make – we will delve on this further later in the article.

Some may argue that the Panj Pyare can change things or issue edicts – my personal view is that the Gurus already gave all the answers so all that the Panj Pyare can do is reinforce the existing theological/historical precedence's set by the Gurus. New issues of political challenges, such as fake cult leaders and so forth, can be addressed by the Panj Pyare as there may be new issues, but even decisions on such issues would root from the Gurus teachings and previous historical precedents. So trying to get new edicts or directions from the Panj Pyare will also not lead to an inclusion of a LGBT lifestyle; to the contrary, all Sikhs that I know who officiate in Panj Pyare in Amrit Sanchars (initiation ceremonies), actually do issue punishment for indulgence in such sexual activity – whereby the individual has to become initiated again and complete their punishment (usual a fixed meditation or seva – some sort of physical voluntary service) for them to be accepted back into the Sikh fold.

### **What is the aim of life for Sikhs?**

The aim of life for a Sikh is to rediscover their true identity, which is that they are one with God:

ਮਨ ਤੂੰ ਜੋਤਿ ਸਰੂਪੁ ਹੈ ਆਪਣਾ ਮੂਲੁ ਪਛਾਣੁ ॥

O my mind, you are the embodiment of the Divine Light - recognize your own origin.

ਮਨ ਹਰਿ ਜੀ ਤੇਰੈ ਨਾਲਿ ਹੈ ਗੁਰਮਤੀ ਰੰਗੁ ਮਾਣੁ ॥

O my mind, the Dear Lord is with you; through the Guru's Teachings, enjoy His Love.

ਮੂਲੁ ਪਛਾਣਹਿ ਤਾਂ ਸਹੁ ਜਾਣਹਿ ਮਰਣ ਜੀਵਣ ਕੀ ਸੋਝੀ ਹੋਈ ॥

Acknowledge your origin, and then you shall know your Husband Lord (God as we are all his brides), and so understand death and birth.

ਗੁਰ ਪਰਸਾਦੀ ਏਕੇ ਜਾਣਹਿ ਤਾਂ ਦੂਜਾ ਭਾਉ ਨ ਹੋਈ ॥

By Guru's Grace, know the One; then, you shall not love any other.

ਮਨਿ ਸਾਂਤਿ ਆਈ ਵਜੀ ਵਧਾਈ ਤਾ ਹੋਆ ਪਰਵਾਣੁ ॥

Peace comes to the mind, and gladness resounds; then, you shall be acclaimed.

ਇਉ ਕਹੈ ਨਾਨਕੁ ਮਨ ਤੂੰ ਜੋਤਿ ਸਰੂਪੁ ਹੈ ਅਪਣਾ ਮੂਲੁ ਪਛਾਣੁ ॥੫॥

Thus says Nanak: O my mind, you are the very image of the Luminous Lord;

recognize the true origin of your self. ||5||  
(Sri Guru Amar Das Jee, 441 Ang)

God and the perfected Sikh are one and always have been.

ਏਕ ਅਨੇਕ ਬਿਆਪਕ ਪੂਰਕ ਜਤ ਦੇਖਉ ਤਤ ਸੇਈ ॥

In the one and in the many, He is pervading and permeating; wherever I look, there He is.

ਮਾਇਆ ਚਿਤ੍ਰ ਬਚਿਤ੍ਰ ਬਿਮੋਹਿਤ ਬਿਰਲਾ ਬੂਝੈ ਕੇਈ ॥੧॥

The marvellous image of Maya is so fascinating; how few understand this. ||1||

ਸਭੁ ਗੋਬਿੰਦੁ ਹੈ ਸਭੁ ਗੋਬਿੰਦੁ ਹੈ ਗੋਬਿੰਦੁ ਬਿਨੁ ਨਹੀ ਕੇਈ ॥

God is everything, God is everything. Without God, there is nothing at all.

ਸੂਤੁ ਏਕੁ ਮਣਿ ਸਤ ਸਹੰਸ ਜੈਸੇ ਓਤਿ ਪੋਤਿ ਪ੍ਰਭੁ ਸੇਈ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥

As one thread holds hundreds and thousands of beads,  
He is woven into His creation. ||1|| Pause ||

ਜਲ ਤਰੰਗ ਅਰੁ ਫੋਨ ਬੁਦਬੁਦਾ ਜਲ ਤੇ ਭਿੰਨ ਨ ਹੋਈ ॥

The waves of the water, the foam and bubbles, are not distinct from the water.

ਇਹੁ ਪਰਪੰਚੁ ਪਾਰਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਕੀ ਲੀਲਾ ਬਿਚਰਤ ਆਨ ਨ ਹੋਈ ॥੨॥

This manifested world is the playful game of the Supreme Lord God; reflecting upon it,  
we find that it is not different from Him. ||2||

ਮਿਥਿਆ ਭਰਮੁ ਅਰੁ ਸੁਪਨ ਮਨੋਰਥ ਸਤਿ ਪਦਾਰਥੁ ਜਾਨਿਆ ॥

False doubts and dream objects - man believes them to be true.

ਸੁਕ੍ਰਿਤ ਮਨਸਾ ਗੁਰ ਉਪਦੇਸੀ ਜਾਗਤ ਹੀ ਮਨੁ ਮਾਨਿਆ ॥੩॥

The Guru has instructed me to try to do good deeds,  
and my awakened mind has accepted this. ||3||

ਕਹਤ ਨਾਮਦੇਉ ਹਰਿ ਕੀ ਰਚਨਾ ਦੇਖਹੁ ਰਿਦੈ ਬੀਚਾਰੀ ॥

Says Naam Dayv, see the Creation of the Lord, and reflect upon it in your heart.

ਘਟ ਘਟ ਅੰਤਰਿ ਸਰਬ ਨਿਰੰਤਰਿ ਕੇਵਲ ਏਕ ਮੁਰਾਰੀ ॥੪॥੧॥

In each and every heart, and deep within the very nucleus of all, is the One Lord. ||4||1||  
(Raag Asa, Bhagat Naamdev Jee, 485)

This human life is the only life in which realisation of the true self/God can be made. Human life is supreme on earth and the other 8.4 million life forms cannot break the cycle or reincarnation to become one with God. It is only in human life that this can be achieved as it is only in human life that this comprehension/realisation of God can take place.

Thus, all that we do in this human life should be to attain realisation of oneness with God. This is what Gurbani (divine words of the Gurus) repeatedly teaches us – that we are only given human life to realise God and that all other acts are of no avail. It is within this context that we should frame the question of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender communities and Sikh marriage: Can those who see themselves have an Anand Karaj? A Sikh marriage ceremony.

The Gurus were the most radical revolutionaries to grace this earth. They said and did what They liked. In the 239 years that They existed in human form, They did not at any point say being a practising homosexual (indulging in homosexual sex) was allowed in Sikhi. On the contrary, they promoted heterosexual marriage which is necessary to continue the human population – sex being for procreation, not indulgence.

In Gurbani, the only word/reference I have found which slightly refers to LGBT communities is 'Kusra' meaning eunuch. In South Asian communities, many people who are actually LGBT either became or become 'kusras' as they are accepted in the Asian culture. Therefore, this is a way in which they can coexist in society without being overtly discriminated against. Don't get me wrong, Kusras still face discrimination– but they are also widely accepted.

ਬਿੰਦੁ ਰਾਖਿ ਜੈ ਤਰੀਐ ਭਾਈ ॥

If someone could be ferried across the world (become liberated) by being a celibate

ਖੁਸਰੈ ਕਿਉ ਨ ਪਰਮ ਗਤਿ ਪਾਈ ॥੩॥

why then haven't eunuchs obtained the state of supreme realisation? ||3||

ਕਹੁ ਕਬੀਰ ਸੁਨਹੁ ਨਰ ਭਾਈ ॥

Says Kabeer, listen, O brothers:

ਰਾਮ ਨਾਮ ਬਿਨੁ ਕਿਨਿ ਗਤਿ ਪਾਈ ॥੪॥੪॥

without the Lord's Name, who has ever found salvation?

(Meaning no one has ever been liberated without God's name)."

(Bhagat Kabeer Jee, 324 Ang – translation edited from Sant Singh's original)

Furthermore, Sri Guru Nanak Dev Jee teaches us:

ਪਥਰ ਪਾਲਾ ਕਿਆ ਕਰੇ ਖੁਸਰੇ ਕਿਆ ਘਰ ਵਾਸੁ ॥

What can cold do to a stone? What is married life to a eunuch?

(Sri Guru Granth Sahib Jee, 143 Ang)

The above quotation makes it clear that a eunuch getting married is futile. ਘਰ ਵਾਸੁ translates to setting up a household, which would mean getting married. This is the clearest instruction from Gurbani for LGBT communities as it is stating that without procreation, households do not exist nor do marriages. I will explain this further below in the section on 'Sexual Relations & Sikhi.'

I haven't found any reference to LGBT communities in Gurbani, codes of conduct or Sikh history (if more learned Sikhs do know of sources on this, please do share). However, this does

not mean that being LGBT and practising a life in such a sexual manner is accepted in Sikhi. The Gurus would have clearly allowed this, if They so wished. Only heterosexual marriage has been allowed from the onset of Sikhi and this is the tradition instilled by the Gurus.

## **Sexual Relations & Sikhi**

The first Sikh Guru, Sri Guru Nanak Dev Jee, was married and had two sons. A householder's life is promoted by Sikh discipline: living in the world, whilst also discovering God. Sikhs can also choose to remain unmarried - marriage is not compulsory. What is compulsory is the pursuit of realising God. Out of the ten Gurus, nine were married as only the eighth Guru was not married as he was a child Guru and They merged back with God at a young age. The first Panj Pyare of 1699 (the first Khalsa initiation ceremony) did not get married; three of them attained Shaheedi (martyrdom) in the battle of Chamkaur; the remaining two lived on to merge back with God at Sri Hazur Sahib, Nanded. The precedent for both marriage and non-marriage thus exists.

Let me be clear: if a Sikh chooses not to get married, it does not automatically mean they are LGBT, queer or weird! We have fallen foul of an accepted view of marriage that anything outside the norm is frowned upon, criticised and seen as divergent. The aim of life is to realise God – not to get married and fit in! (Glad to clear that up).

The Gurus promoted a householder's life in a heterosexual relationship. Gurbani talks extensively about lust, repeatedly teaching us to refrain from indulging in this vice. If we look at the 8.4 million life forms, we see that these animals, birds, species only indulge in sex to procreate and only when they have a monthly or periodic sexual urge. Now, this is where we humans differ, in that we have free will: we can choose to be celibates (have no sexual activity at all) or indulge in sexual activity extensively at will. In the strictest sense, the Gurus promoted sex for procreation only – this is the high thinking and belief we should all strive to aim for.

## **So where does this leave LGBT communities and practising Sikhi?**

As outlined earlier, to be a Sikh or a disciple of the Guru you have to relinquish your own traits and surrender to the Guru's commands. The only way you can formally be called a Sikh by your Guru is by taking Amrit (become initiated). It is at this initiation ceremony that you accept to follow the tenets of Sikhi and the Guru becomes your point of call for all that you need or want.

The Gurus' code of conduct, in summary, is that anyone who commits these sins is an apostate:

- One that cuts, dyes, plucks their hair
- One that takes intoxicants
- One that has sexual relations outside of heterosexual marriage
- One that eats meat

But to become an apostate you must have first taken Amrit. So, this leaves out the majority of those who we refer to as 'Nanak Naam leva Sikhs' (those professing to follow the teachings of the Gurus but are not able to commit to becoming practising Sikhs). It is in this majority that we must frame the LGBT community rather than being judgemental.

Those who are seeking to be Sikhs need to follow the discipline of the Gurus. Sacrifices may have to be made but the Guru only has your best interests at heart - this is the crux and conclusion of this article. I hope it brings some clarity and does not add to confusion. For those who are more interested, I will now address a number of questions that I think will arise in response to the above. Read on if you so wish to desire:

*Q. I am Gay – God made me this way, yet you are now telling me that I cannot express my sexuality and be a Sikh. I cannot control the way I feel sexually, it is inert. Can you explain your seemingly judgemental and extreme stance on the issue?*

A. God did not make us gay or endear us with our characteristics or personality. We created our own destiny through actions we committed through numerous lives – what we are today, is the sum total of past and present deeds. The Guru says:

ਦਦੈ ਦੇਸੁ ਨ ਦੇਉ ਕਿਸੈ ਦੇਸੁ ਕਰੰਮਾ ਆਪਣਿਆ ॥

Dadda: Do not blame anyone else; blame instead your own actions.

ਜੇ ਮੈ ਕੀਆ ਸੇ ਮੈ ਪਾਇਆ ਦੇਸੁ ਨ ਦੀਜੈ ਅਵਰ ਜਨਾ ॥੨੧॥

Whatever I did, for that I have suffered; I do not blame anyone else. ||21||

(Sri Guru Nanak Dev Jee, 433 Ang)

The above quotation of Gurbani is not talking about being gay - rather it is a general line about us putting the blame upon others for what has happened in our lives. More simply, in Sri Japji Sahib, Sri Guru Nanak Dev Jee says

ਆਪੇ ਬੀਜਿ ਆਪੇ ਹੀ ਖਾਹੁ ॥

You reap what you sow.

(Sri Guru Granth Sahib Jee, Ang 4)

We do have a lot to answer for in terms of what we are and what we suffer for in our lives. Now, let me be clear: the above may sound harsh so you need to contextualise it in general terms for everything that happens in our lives – this is not restricted to our sexuality. Some may argue a circular argument and say everything happens in God's command so we actually have no control over such matters. My answer would be that we have both free will and determination of karma – so we can change our destiny in human life but cannot change everything as we also need to endure previous karma of past lives that we have enacted or started a chain reaction in. What most of us will never have is 'antarjamta' – a spiritual gift of seeing things of the past, present and future, which would then show us why things have happened and/or have happened. So, we just need to keep the faith in the Gurus' ways and do as taught by Them.

*Q. Gurbani states that via an Anand Karaj two souls merge as one. The soul is gender neuter. Gender is not specified so why are you going against this in this article?*

A. Firstly, the Anand Karaj has only ever occurred between heterosexual couples in Sikh history, this is a new age trend to change that by LGBT communities and those facilitating such weddings. Secondly the Gurbani verse being referred to is,

ਧਨ ਪਿਰੁ ਏਹਿ ਨ ਆਖੀਅਨਿ ਬਹਨਿ ਇਕਠੇ ਹੋਇ ॥

They are not said to be husband and wife, who merely sit together.

ਏਕ ਜੋਤਿ ਦੁਇ ਮੂਰਤੀ ਧਨ ਪਿਰੁ ਕਹੀਐ ਸੋਇ ॥੩॥

They alone are called husband and wife, who have one light in two bodies. ||3||  
(Sri Guru Amar Das Jee, 788 Ang)

All translations of this verse state that the words ਧਨ ਪਿਰੁ translate to husband and wife, so gender is actually clearly stated contrary to the view that many espouse online. The soul is gender neuter, our physical bodies are not. The soul is the cosmic energy of God within us, this is not to be confused with our 'Jeev' living being body which goes through the cycle of births and deaths, which is linked with our mind and personality. The soul realisation is the ultimate aim, first we attain self-realisation of our soul then God realisation. So the nature of the Anand Karaj is to get to this point of bliss where both husband and wife work in tandem to support each other achieve the bliss of these realisations and nirvana with God.

*Q. Can I change my gender as a Sikh as I have transgender tendencies?*

One of the first principles of Sikhi is to not deface the body – so we do not cut, pluck or dye our hair. Similarly, changing one's gender would not be allowed. Having these tendencies of being transgender may be challenging to live with, yet we all have issues due to our previous karma. We have all most likely been both male and female in the numerous life forms we have undergone in the cycle of births and deaths.