

13 August 2015

Marriage and Anand Karaj Ceremony

The Sikh Council UK is concerned by recent events at some Gurdwaras where Anand Karaj ceremonies have taken place where one partner is not of Sikh origin and also by the protests that have taken place in an attempt to stop these ceremonies.

Sikh Council UK believes there is a clear distinction between the act of marriage in the UK which is a civil act and defined and carried out in accordance with the laws of the UK and the religious Anand Karaj ceremony which is pursued in addition by Sikhs.

The recent protests have resulted in increasingly acrimonious rhetoric which is damaging to relations within the community and will not assist in resolving these issues. Sikh Council UK believes there is no place for any behaviour or rhetoric in Gurdwaras that is aggressive and would ask individuals and organisations including Gurdwara managements to carefully consider the impact of their speech and actions on the wider community. Sikh Council UK believes there is no place for violent behaviour in Gurdwaras.

In October 2014, Sikh Council UK approved and published guidelines to help develop a consistent approach towards Anand Karaj ceremonies where one partner is not of Sikh origin. The guidelines were developed over two years and following four rounds of comprehensive consultation with all sectors of the community including Gurdwara managements, Sikh organisations and individuals.

The guidance was prepared in response to requests from Gurdwaras for assistance in reconciling different aspects of established Sikh beliefs with practices that had developed over a period of time. In preparing the guidance detailed consideration was given to four key aspects:

1. The teachings of Gurbani and of the Gurus.
2. The requirements of the adopted Sikh Rehat Maryada (Sikh code of conduct and conventions).
3. The requirements of the Sandesh (clarifying edict) issued by Sri Akal Takhat Sahib (the temporal authority for Sikhs based in Amritsar) in 2007 on this subject.
4. The practice amongst some communities who have a historical tradition of following many tenets of the Sikh faith and regularly engage in Sikh religious ceremonies and contribute to Gurdwaras yet do not practice the use of 'Singh' or 'Kaur' in their names.

The guidelines defined the basis of an approach that could be followed or used at local level by Gurdwaras and communities to overcome any contradictions or perceived differences in practice whilst maintaining adherence to Sikh beliefs and accommodating local communities. Sikh Council UK has no enforcement powers over Gurdwaras.

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Similar to any other faith, Sikhs have long established institutions and conventions as well as processes for determining and issuing changes to these conventions from time to time.

Similar to any other faith, the operation of Sikh Gurdwaras is in accordance with and subject to agreed norms albeit there are occasionally local differences. Gurdwaras are generally expected to comply with the requirements of the Sikh Rehat Maryada and with edicts issued from time to time by Sri Akal Takhat Sahib.

Similar to any other faith, Sikh Gurdwaras will have in place conventions to be followed for the Anand Karaj ceremony. Sikh Council UK has no opposition to individuals of Sikh origin choosing to marry somebody who is not of Sikh origin but there are clear conventions that Gurdwaras must adhere to in the practice of the Anand Karaj ceremony. It is a matter of personal choice for any person who chooses to marry somebody who is not of Sikh origin whether they choose to live life as a practicing Sikh. It is also the case that people of any background are always welcome in any Gurdwara.

Sikh Council UK have called a meeting of all UK Gurdwaras to take place on Sunday 23rd August in response to requests from many of our affiliated member Gurdwaras where we expect to receive feedback on the guidelines and we hope Gurdwaras can agree a consistent approach to minimise the possibility of such events being repeated.

Sikh Council UK is also seeking meetings with those individuals and groups who have protested at these ceremonies with a view to fully understand their concerns to help inform Gurdwaras in developing a consistent approach.

Sikh Council UK believes that Gurdwara managements are generally focused on providing a safe and welcoming place for all manner of Sikh religious observance and ceremonies and that operates in line with established Sikh practice but that also respects the wishes of their community and congregation.

Sikh Council UK also believes those who are protesting to ensure compliance with edicts from Sikh authorities are doing so in the best interests of the community.

Use of derogatory terminology such as 'taliban' etc towards any person is not helpful and only serves to further distance a solution. In a free and democratic society it is fully acceptable for a person of faith to protect ones beliefs and practices by peaceful means. Those who do not follow a particular faith should exercise due care when commenting on the beliefs or practices of others and particularly when choosing to do so using inflammatory and provocative language or by attempting to force their understanding of the faith and its practices on others.

END

Notes for Editors:

- The Sikh Council UK is an accord of Gurdwaras and Sikh institutions in the UK and Europe.
- The Sikh Council UK is recognised as the national advocate for British Sikhs and at the European Union
- The Sikh Council UK unites the Sikh community by providing a common platform for Gurdwaras and organisations, whilst supporting and promoting their religious, educational, welfare & charity, heritage and political objectives.
- The Sikh Council UK addresses Sikh issues and concerns with governments, agencies, public and private sector bodies.

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