

Marriage Ceremonies of the Sikhs as Depicted in 'PREM SUMARAG'

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ABSTRACT

The use of literature as a form of evidence on the past is known to almost every working historian. A lot of such literature is available on Sikh History, but to determine the significance of literary evidence for past modes of life is neither simple nor easy work. The *Prem Sumarag* is an important work of Sikh literature which by modern researchers have, prima facie, been shown that this work is certainly a product of late nineteenth century but not of eighteenth century as before majority of scholars hold the view. Exact period in which the *Prem Sumarag* was written is yet to be determined. The Present paper is strictly based on published version of *Prem Sumarag* edited by Bhai Randhir Singh in 1965 (2nd edition). The literature under study is highly important for religious, social and political conditions of the Sikhs in a given historical situation. Hence my paper is on marriage ceremonies of the Sikhs as depicted in the *Prem Sumarag*.


Keywords: *Prem Sumarag, Sikh History, Marriage Ceremonies*

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Description of marriage:

The author of *Prem Sumarag* is of the view about the wedding of the girl that the parents of girl should make efforts to arrange the marriage of their daughter when she attains a suitable age of 17 years. In the eyes of the author, it is preferable age for the girl to be married off.¹ The parents of girl should not determine the wealth of the bridegroom, (*larra*) but the family of the boy should be follower of the *Sri Akal Purakh* or be a *Khalsa*. Although the boy is to be poor, the girl will find happiness in her in-laws with the grace of the Guru.²

The distinction should not be made while betrothing the girl whether she is born from the mother belonging to the other caste or the girl is daughter of slave girl. She should be married off in the well of family.³ However, the author prefers the caste of the *Khalsa* and requests to all the castes to be one by the means of marriage if these castes cannot be one by it then he suggests to arrange marriages within the *varna* system to unite all the castes in one caste. He suggests marrying as *khatri-khatri*, *sood-sood*, *arora-arora*, *suniar-suniar*, *bhatia-bhatia*, *rajput-rajput*, *lohar-tarkhan*, *jat-jat*, etc.⁴ If these castes cannot arrange marriages within the *varan* system then he suggests to arrange marriages like *khatri* can marry with *brahman*, *arora* with *khatri*, *suniar* with *arora*, *sood* with *arora*, *kambo* with *kaib*, *kambo* with *suniar*, *jat* with *kambo*, *chhimba* with *dhobi* or *kambo* and *kalal*. He also suggests to the other castes to follow the suggested manner that after the lapse of time all the *varnas* would merge into one.⁵ In addition, the author makes request to *kshatriyas* to be united as *sareen*, *bavanjai*, *varahi*, *athai ghar* and do not observe high or low *varna* (caste). It seems that

¹ Randhir Singh (ed.), *Prem Sumarag Granth*, New Book Company, Jullundhar, 1965, p. 41

² *Ibid*, p. 27

³ *Loc cit*

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 44

⁵ Randhir Singh (ed.), *Prem Sumarag Granth*, New Book Company, Jullundhar, 1965, pp. 44-45

the author of *Prem Sumarag* acquainted to the *varan* system of *kshatriyas* and their social obligations.⁶ The author only advises not to marry with the children of *phoophi* (paternal aunt). If the girl happens to be from maternal grandfather, then previous three generations should be avoided for the purpose.⁷

The author of *Prem Sumarag* writes about the two Panths: the Muslim Panth and the Hindu Panth. He is of the view that The Muslim Panth and the Hindu Panth will not adhere to their religious beliefs. So, there will emerge a single Panth from all of these religious beliefs and all the castes will be mixed together. Firstly, the author puts up a question how would this happen. Secondly, he gives his plea regarding his statement such as a *brahman* will marry a Muslim woman and a Muslim will marry a *brahman* woman. A *brahman* will marry a *khatri* woman, and a *khatri* will take a Muslim woman. A Muslim will marry *khatri* woman. A *shudara* will marry a *brahman* woman. A *vaishya* will marry a female *khatri* and a *khatri* will take a female *vaishya*. A *shudara* will enjoy a *khatri*. A father will lay with his daughter, a son with his mother, brother with sister.⁸ It seems that the author's statement is like a prophecy but it cannot be created in vacuum so it seems that the political administration had changed. So with this change, the society has been likely to be changing therefore the people are let free to adopt any religion or cultural values and they can decide according to their will without any fear of the king or else. Perhaps, it prophesies after the fall of Sikh empire in 1849 particularly when the British started to rule over the Punjab and interfere in the social and religious matters of the Sikhs.

The author puts up his view to arrange the marriage ceremony on *pancham sudi* (fifth day of the light half of the month) by sending money *mishri* (sugar candy), a set of clothes, weapons and sword belt of gold to the bridegroom before half and a month. If the parents of bride cannot afford sword belt of gold, then should arrange steel gilded of gold. In addition, the author writes to send clothes, a coconut and a set of bangles to the mother of the bridegroom according to the financial condition of bride's father.⁹ After it, the father of bridegroom should do arrangements of the marriage within a month and half of the appointed marriage and complete the give and take rites within the family lineage.¹⁰

The author prescribes the people to follow the instruction regarding expenditure on the marriage that they should not follow the example of the wealthy people. The father of the bridegroom should spend on the marriage in the manner that if he possesses 100 rupees then he should arrange marriage in 25 rupees if he possesses 1000 rupees then he should arrange marriage in 250 rupees.¹¹ The author instructs the people of his times to remain within the stipulated limit so that society can be saved from the limitless expenditure on the marriage. It seems that the society had been debt ridden due to the exorbitant expenses on the marriage so the author of *Prem Sumarag* tried to reform the society.

The author of *Prem Sumarag* is of the view that the wedding ceremony be performed during the ambrosial hour, the last watch of the night, first plaster the wedding mud floor by cow dung or else and then excavate one and quarter of a *gaz* in length, a quarter of a *gaz* width and quarter of a *gaz* deep pit. After excavating the pit, place low wooden stools on the either side of the pit facing to the north and south for the sitting of bridegroom and bride.¹²

In *Prem Sumarag*, the author prescribes the diet of the bride and bridegroom that the bride should be given to eat in small quantity of pulse, rice and clarified butter and *karah prasad* (the consecrated food), on the wedding day.¹³ The bridegroom should be given to eat he-goat meat with *phulka* (wheat bread) at noon, milk at night according to capacity then ten betel leaves folded with nutmeg, mace, clove, musk and a green cardamom during twenty-four hours. The boy should get bath with warm water before the wedding day.¹⁴ The bride should wear new clothes, dye *heena* on her hands and wrap her with *salu*, (red colored embroidered cloth usually worn on marriage by the bride). The bride's hair should tie into knot with *mauli* (untwisted multi strand red yarn used on the ceremonial occasion), sprinkle on her scent and then be seated on new *tulai* (light quilt), opposite to bridegroom.¹⁵ The bridegroom should don white clothes as *jama* (shirt), *paijama* (trouser), *mauja* (stockings) and underneath short breech. Every garment should be white and finally *prem janneu* (sword belt). He should adorn himself with ornaments like *kanni moti* (earrings of pearl)¹⁶, *jarrow bajooband*, *sarpaich*, *jarrowbandhia*, *jarraru*, *jahangirria*, *paijaban*, particularly of gold, *sehra* of gold with strings of real pearls and put a garland of flowers around his neck, lastly sprinkle saffron on his clothes.¹⁷

⁶ Ibid, p. 43

⁷ Ibid, p. 45

⁸ Randhir Singh (ed.), *Prem Sumarag Granth*, New Book Company, Jullundhar, 1965, p. 149

⁹ Ibid, p. 27

¹⁰ Randhir Singh (ed.), *Prem Sumarag Granth*, New Book Company, Jullundhar, 1965, p. 28/3

¹¹ Ibid, p. 28/2

¹² Randhir Singh (ed.), *Prem Sumarag Granth*, New Book Company, Jullundhar, 1965, p. 28/2

¹³ Ibid, p. 28/4-2, 3/1

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 29/3

¹⁵ Loc cit

¹⁶ Randhir Singh (ed.), *Prem Sumarag Granth*, New Book Company, Jullundhar, 1965, p. 71

¹⁷ Ibid, pp. 30-31

The author of *Prem Sumarag* seems to emphasize for inquiring about bridegroom's name, his parents and grandparents, his caste, *jati*, *varan* and age at the time of marriage.¹⁸ The *gursikh* man (the disciple of the Guru), addresses to the father of bride for her name, daughter of, granddaughter of, caste, *jati*, *varan*, complexion, age.¹⁹ After the acceptance of the bride for the marriage, the boy's *chacha* (father's younger brother) or his father's elder brother or someone other should response for the acceptance for the marriage.²⁰ The acceptance of bride is taken for the proceeding of the marriage ceremony to which she accepts for it and then her father consents for the marriage ceremony.²¹ After the acceptance of the marriage from both sides, then the bride and the bridegroom puts garland of flowers around the neck of each other. After it, the author writes to kindle a fire in the pit with the wood of *plah* (*butea frondosa*) and the bride and the bridegroom sit around it on their respective tools for the culmination of the marriage ceremony. It seems that author was under the influence of the Hindu rites to which he witnesses here.²²

The author suggests that both the stools should move together to the direction of west for sitting of the bride and the bridegroom facing the direction of east. The bridegroom should seat on the right side of the bride and then tie the knot of sash of the bridegroom with the shawl of the bride after²³ inserting a green cardamom in the knot of them. The bridegroom should proceed before the bride for circling around the kindled pit and the hymns of *Rag Soohi Patshahi Chauthi* of the marriage ceremony be sung with each circle by the sitting Sikhs around the fire pit.²⁴ Such type of the marriage is found in the Namdhari Sect of the Sikhs which seems that the author of the *Prem Sumarag* is somewhat related with them, he had experienced about it or vice a versa. Thereafter, the bride should seat on the left stool of the bridegroom, bridegroom should seat on the right stool of the bride and then the both should initiate in the Khalsa fold by baptizing of the double-edged sword.²⁵

The father of the bride should put *karah prasad* on her hand to handing over to the bridegroom which he takes *karah Prasad* from her hand and consumes it.²⁶ Then *karah prasad* should be distributed among the present people after singing the five stanzas of *Anand Sahib* and to the relatives, friends and to the homes on the next day.²⁷

The author gives the description of hospitality for the marriage party on the next day of the wedding, very vividly. The father of the bride should serve sweets, fruit, and different kinds of food to the marriage party and at evening; serve meat, fish and other kinds of food. If he has capacity to serve the others, then he should serve to his own *baradari* (ethnic community), friends.²⁸

The author of *Prem Sumarag* describes about *suhaag raat*, (the first night for the newlywedded for the sharing the bed), that the clothes for bride's wearing be sent by the bridegroom in which *jora jamma*, *a burka and salu*. The bride should get bath with warm water and be seated by her father on the bed covered with light quilt and bed sheet²⁹ and left for the bride's home with the company of playing musical instruments.³⁰

Whenever the parents of the girl pay visit to their daughter's in-laws, they should get meal there and never to observe the orthodox tradition regarding to have the meal at there is a curse. The author condemned such type of traditions that are ruthless and baseless.³¹ The *laagi* (the functionaries in marriage) should be relieved after paying them off accordingly.³²

Widow Remarriage

The author of *Prem Sumarag* describes the characteristics of a young woman and the feelings and likings of the widow to which he culminates with remarriage which was considered a taboo in author's times. The author is of the opinion regarding the young woman if she and her son sleep in their home alone, and it should not assume that they would observe the chastity. The author believes that the woman has seventeen percent more sexual desire than the man does has therefore, she is unable to distinguish between good or bad although the man and the woman cannot exist without each other.³³ It seems that the author of *Prem Sumarag* was very versed

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 32

¹⁹ Loc cit

²⁰ Loc cit

²¹ Loc cit

²² Randhir Singh (ed.), *Prem Sumarag Granth*, New Book Company, Jullundhar, 1965, p. 34

²³ Ibid, p. 35

²⁴ Loc cit

²⁵ Randhir Singh (ed.), *Prem Sumarag Granth*, New Book Company, Jullundhar, 1965, p. 35

²⁶ Ibid, p. 38

²⁷ Loc cit

²⁸ Ibid, p. 39

²⁹ Randhir Singh (ed.), *Prem Sumarag Granth*, New Book Company, Jullundhar, 1965, p. 40

³⁰ Loc cit

³¹ Ibid, p. 42

³² Loc cit

³³ Randhir Singh (ed.), *Prem Sumarag Granth*, New Book Company, Jullundhar, 1965, p. 47

with the feelings of the woman therefore he puts up his views regarding a widow remarriage that she should not arrange her remarriage if she happens to have her offspring. Nevertheless, she arranges remarriage then the society should expel her out owing to it. However, her children remain no more after her delivery. She is advised to marry in the prescribed manner.³⁴ If the widow woman wants to remarry then she should first express her desire with the Sikh woman of her parents, but they should dissuade her for it and ask to maintain chastity. If she persists on her demand regarding remarriage then she should live with her parents or her parent's caste family if her parents are no longer then she should live with a distant relatives.³⁵ First she should send round ring, five betel wads or twenty-one cloves to the proposing spouse. On the other hand, the purposing man should send *natth*, *mauli* and *mehndi* to her and after it he should go at her home having with a new *salu*, *ghaghri*, *kajli*, *suthan* like *maujian*, *lachha*, jewelry and other things.³⁶

The author describes the process of cleansing to the widow woman for the remarriage should plaster her with *aragaja* of *sandal chandan* and attire with three *anga* (costumes) that no part of her body remains uncovered except eye balls.³⁷ Next, she should be directed to jump over the kindled pit, cast the wrapped clothes around her body into fire after pouring clarified butter over her body and then bathe with warm water. Then she should attire clothes and decorate with the jewelry which was presented by her bridegroom and lastly, she should be initiated in the *Khalsa* by baptizing.³⁸

The author of *Prem Sumarag* portrays the splendid appearance of the bridegroom that he should bathe, put on white clothes and apply fragrance. In addition, He should decorate with *sirpaichbadhia*, *jahangiria jarrau*, and ankle chain of gold, jewelry and plume on turban, strapped sword and place garland of flowers around his head and then he should set off with the company of few men at the ambrosial hour.³⁹ The newly married woman should also adore herself again for *suhaag raat* (connubial night of the newly married couple).⁴⁰

The author puts up his view regarding remarriage of a woman relating to higher *varan* than the purposing person that first she should read five stanzas of *Anand Sahib* then baptize after it, the other process of passing through the fire be followed.⁴¹ If the *varan* of the woman is lower than the person (who purposed for the marriage) or she is bought slave then the author recommends her that she should live in the home relating to the *varan* of the person. They should treat her as their own daughter and baptize her.⁴² If unmarried girl belongs to the different *varan* or is a slave should be placed to live in a family of the man and follow the rest of the process of the marriage. If the daughter of *malechh* opts to marry with the *Khalsa* person, first she should be buried in ground only keeping her mouth, eyes out of the pit and then dig her out and have washed her. After it, be followed the procedure of plastering with *aragaja* and follow the process of passing through the fire. Before baptizing her, the meat of pig should be given to her to eat for fifty-one days and then be allowed her to prepare *karah prasad* with her own hands, then the present person should eat from her hand's preparation after that she can be considered to be purified *Khalsa*.⁴³ The author puts his views up regarding the offspring of inter caste marriages if the children are born from these type marriages then their marriage should be arranged with each other without observing any type of discrimination regarding the offspring born from the low caste marriages. In addition, if any person observes the discrimination, he should be excommunicated from the society. The author argues that such type of marriages would produce mighty persons.⁴⁴ Moreover, it seems that the author of *Prem Sumarag* wanted to create classless society of his times for the specific purpose perhaps to unite the Sikh community for liberation from foreigner rule. So, in this way *Prem Sumarag* gives us a detailed description about marriage ceremonies of Sikhs at the time in which it has been written.

³⁴ Ibid, p. 48

³⁵ Ibid, p. 49

³⁶ Randhir Singh (ed.), *Prem Sumarag Granth*, New Book Company, Jullandhar, 1965, pp. 49-50

³⁷ Ibid, p. 49

³⁸ Ibid, pp. 52-53

³⁹ Randhir Singh (ed.), *Prem Sumarag Granth*, New Book Company, Jullandhar, 1965, pp. 50

⁴⁰ Ibid, pp. 54-55

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 55

⁴² Ibid, p. 56

⁴³ Randhir Singh (ed.), *Prem Sumarag Granth*, New Book Company, Jullandhar, 1965, pp. 57-58

⁴⁴ Loc cit