Gurbani outlines three distinct phases in man's life, childhood, youth and old age. The most conspicuous events in the life of a person are, birth, marriage and death, besides other events like namkaran, mundan, going to a school for the first time, wearing sacred thread (janeoo) and kurmai (betrothal) etc. Several rites and ceremonies are associated with these events which in Hinduism are known as samaskaras or sacraments. Guru Nanak's hymns reveal an awareness and description of these rites which in his own opinion were meaningless and extraneous. His attitude towards some of the prevalent customs and rituals can be seen and observed from his compositions (Bani) which are an integral part of the Adi Granth.

Birth Ceremony

The birth of a child was a very impressing scene for the medieval man. Owing to its wonderfulness, he attributed this event to some superhuman agency. He also apprehended many dangers on this occasion for the avoidance of which various taboos and observances arose. The helplessness of the mother and the new born during her confinement required natural care, from which ceremonies
connected with the birth of a child originated. The man, who shared the pleasures in the company of his mate, sought to protect her and the baby during the critical time from natural and supernatural dangers. Thus, birth ceremonies had a natural basis in the physical conditions of child birth. In due course these ceremonies assumed socio-religious character which became an inseparable part of the Hindu way of life.  

All these customs had been elaborated with scrupulous regard to every detail. The religious emotions found the best expression in them. Society even judged the respectability of a person by the amount of care and attention he gave to the fulfilment of these social and religious rites.  

The birth of a child in the family was an occasion of rejoicing and an event of great importance. If it was a male child there were special festivities and the mother was praised for bearing a son, the hope of the family. The birth of a son strengthened mother's position in the family. He was like a bridge between his mother and the father. The chances of a women being abandoned or divorced by her husband minimised because the son was there to unite them in a perpetual bond of love. The importance of a son to a family can be ascertained from the following couplets of Guru Nanak:
If a piece of bronze or gold or iron breaks into bits, the smith welds them again in fire.
If the husband breaks off from his wife, the sons unite the two again.  

After the birth of the child, the naval-cord was severed and the child washed and given the breasts of the mother.  
The father put some honey or butter in the mouth of the infant.  
Prayers were offered to ward-off the evil spirits. Money and other goods were distributed to the poor and the needy as a part of alms and charity. The purohit or pandha (pandit) prepared a horoscope (janampatri) of the child recording the precise moment of birth, to infer the particular stellar conjunction (lagan) under which it was born.  
It is stated that even the horoscope of Guru Nanak was prepared by pandit Hardyal, the family priest of Mehta Kalu.  
Guru Nanak criticised such pandits who prepared horoscopes and misguided the people only to earn their livelihood.  

Sutak (Days of Impurity)

The woman to whom the child was born was considered ceremonially impure and unclean for ten days.  
The period of impurity, popularly known as sutak for women of different castes was different. Alberuni states that these days are eight for the brahmin, twelve for the kshatriya, fifteen for the vaishya and thirty for the sudras. For the low-
caste people which are not reckoned among any caste, no term is fixed. During the period of *sutak* (impurity), the woman was not permitted to touch any vessel or to cook food in the kitchen. Even the very touch of a woman in *sutak* was supposed to defile all the cooked food making it impure for consumption. At the expiry of impurity caused by birth, the house was washed and purified and the child and mother bathed. Guru Nanak was very critical of such futile and superstitious practices prevalent in the society. He strongly condemns the idea of *sutak* (impurity) and writes:

> If impurity attaches (to life's birth),
> then all, all over, are impure.
> In the cow-dung and the wood too is the life of worms.
> As many are the grains of food,
> not one is without life.
> And is not water life,
> that bringeth all to life?
> How can then we believe in life's impurity,
> when impurity is in our very bread.

> Nanak : impurity goes no otherwise save by being wise.

All such impurities and pollutions have no scientific basis whatsoever. Guru Nanak goes on to add that the
real impurities consist in greed, lying, lust and slander which defile the heart, tongue, eyes and ears respectively and lead a man to hell. Only those, who remember the Name of God, know no impurities:

The mind's impurity is covetousness,
the tongue's impurity is falsehood.
The impurity of eyes is coveting another's Woman, beauty, riches.
The ear's impurity is to hear and carry tales.
Nanak: even the purest of men thus bound go to the city of the Yama.
The impurity of impurities is
that one loveth the other,
birth and death, yea, are in His Will,
through His Will one cometh and goeth.
All eats and drinks are pure:
for the Lord hath blest us with them in His mercy.
Nanak: they who realise the truth through the Guru, to them impurity sticketh not. 17

While the woman was still in the child-bed, every care was taken for the safety of the baby and its mother. To keep the evil spirits away from the child, the light was kept burning in the room of the mother and verses from the Holy Scriptures were recited. 18
The Namkarna (Name Giving) Ceremony

There is no mention of this ceremony in the Bani of Guru Nanak. This ceremony was popular among Hindus all over India. It was usually performed on the tenth or the twelfth day of the birth of the child. Namkarna was preceded by a minor purificatory ceremony. The mother and child were bathed, the walls of her room were cow-dunged and her bathroom (usually the room where she had given birth to the child) was carefully cleansed. The pandit or the family purohit was summoned, who after consulting the horoscope and the stars gave a name to the child.\textsuperscript{19}

The ear-boring ceremony was generally performed on the day of the name-giving ceremony. In the case of the girls the nose was also bored.\textsuperscript{20} Although no direct reference is found in Guru Nanak Bani, the items of jewellery worn by the women including nath (nose-ring), bunde and jhumke (ear-rings) etc.\textsuperscript{21} are mentioned in his Bani. These items indirectly indicate that some kind of ceremonies must have been attached to the boring of nose and ears. The boring of nose and ears was done by a goldsmith with a gold-wire, for which operation he received a small fee.\textsuperscript{22} The pandit or the purohit also received some money and gifts. Guru Nanak never approved the manner in which these pandits deceived the people by way of preparing their horoscopes listing the future-events to occur in one's life.
Such pandits were far from the realisation of 'The Ultimate Reality', i.e., God.  

The naming ceremony of a Muslim child was performed on the day of his birth. The auspicious names were usually considered to be those which did not exceed four letters. Generally, the grandfather gave a name to the newly born child. Similar practice appears to be prevalent among the followers of the Gurus. We find Guru Amardas naming his grandson Anand on the day of his birth.

Many more ceremonies were popular among the Hindus and the Muslims which were performed during the first year of the child, but all of them are not mentioned in the Bani of Guru Nanak, for him these rites and ceremonies had no spiritual meaning at all and these led the people astray from the true-path. We know from other sources that these ceremonies included annaprasana (food-giving ceremony) and the ceremony of tonsure (cutting off the hair) among the Hindus and chatti and aqiqah rites among the Muslims.

School-Going Ceremony

The education of a child started at an early age. The Vidyarambha Samskara was performed in the fifth or seventh year of the child. An auspicious day was fixed for sending the child to a preceptor. Guru Nanak does mention chatras (preceptors), young students with pati (wooden-board), qalam (pen) and mas, siah (ink) studying...
under the guidance of a pandha or a pandit, but he does not refer to the type of ceremony which was performed at the time of sending a child to school. He himself was sent to a pandha at the age of seven after the village astrologer had selected the auspicious time for the commencement of his education. Guru Nanak's father Mehta Kalu, took some sweets, nuts and rice which he presented to the school master alongwith some coins on the day of joining the school.

Guru Nanak does not attach much importance to the worldly education for 'it leads to ego and lust for money'. A true pandit (preceptor) is he, who 'cherishes the Name (of God)' and reaps 'the Essence of the Word through a pure mind'. He clearly states that 'the Unwise Dwell not on the word and know naught, realise naught'. In Guru Nanak's views, 'a true educated (wise person) is he who wearth the necklace of the Lord's Name'. 'Mere reading of the Holy scriptures and performing the daily rites would not lead a pandit (preceptor, a teacher) to moksha or mukti (deliverance)'.

One may read scriptures and their grammer and say prayers three times a day. But where is emancipation without the Guru for, without the Lord's Name, one's involved to death.
Education has a meaning and a purpose to perform and it is goodness towards others.

If one dwells on (the essence of) knowledge, one becometh a benefactor of all.  

Regarding the school going ceremony the Muslim tradition was more precise. The Bismillahkhani or more properly the Maktab ceremony was performed when a boy was four years, four months and four days old. At an hour fixed in consultation with an astrologer, the child took his first lesson from the teacher.

Usually in the seventh year, a Muslim child was circumcised (sunat) and the occasion was celebrated with great rejoicings and entertainments according to the means of a family. Kabir who was a contemporary of Guru Nanak was very critical of such a ceremony. In a sarcastical tone he questions that if a person becomes a Musalman only after the circumcision ceremony then what to do of a Muslim lady? The following lines of saint Kabir indicate the prevalence of this ceremony among the Muslims.

Circumcision is made for love of the women, so, I shall not be convinced (of its use).

For, if the Lord so Willeth that I be born a Muslim, I shall be circumcised by Himself.

If circumcision alone maketh one a Muslim, what is to be done to a woman?
Upanayana (or initiation) Ceremony

After passing through various ceremonies in early childhood, whereas a Muslim child was circumcised at the age of seven, a Hindu child belonging to the three upper castes of the twice born proclaimed his boyhood by wearing a sacred thread (janeoo), usually at the completion of nine years in a traditional ceremonial manner. In no case was the upanayana of a brahmin to be delayed beyond the sixteenth year, of a kshatriya beyond the twenty-second and of a vaisya beyond the twenty-fourth. In ancient times the upanayana immediately preceded the boy's education, and soon after this ceremony, the boy was led into (his) preceptor's house (hence the name upanayana, meaning leading one to one's Guru).

An auspicious day and time was fixed by the astrologer for the upanayana ceremony. As per Hindu traditions, 'the day must fall in one of the five auspicious months, in which the sun is moving northwards towards the Ecliptic. The time of the day must be between six a.m. and noon, since that is the most fortunate part of the twenty-four hours'. Before the actual ceremony the boy was bathed and seated on a wooden stool, with the father sitting opposite. The sacred fire was lit and the priest recited the sacred verses (mantras). The sacred thread consisted of three white cotton threads each consisting of three finer threads interwoven into one. The thread was
consecrated before girding the boy.\textsuperscript{46}

When Guru Nanak attained the age of nine, his father Mehta Kalu was anxious and determined to invest him with the sacred thread, a distinguished mark of the twice born.\textsuperscript{47} Guru Nanak who did not attach any religious sanctity and importance to the traditional rites and rituals refused to wear it. He exposed the hollowness of the 'sacred thread' and the ceremony connected with it in the following lines of his \textit{Bani} and laid stress on the moral virtues of eternal value, such as mercy, contentment, truth and self-control:

\begin{quote}
Make the thread of contentment from the cotton of mercy, giving it twists of truth and ties of self-control. The sacred thread thus formed will be for the soul. If thou has it, O 'Pandit' put it on me. It will not break, or become soiled, or be burnt or lost. Blessed is the man, O 'Nanak', who goeth with such a thread around his neck.\textsuperscript{48}
\end{quote}

He also mentions how on the eve of this ceremony 'a goat is slaughtered, cooked and eaten and then every body present saith, 'put on the janeoo'. When the thread wears off, it is exchanged for another'. 'Lord's praise is the true thread', says Guru Nanak. 'For, this pure
thread breaks, never, for with it are we blest in the Lord's court'.

Marriage Ceremonies

Vivaha (or marriage) is the most important of all the ceremonies in an Indian family. It is decidedly the most expensive and colourful occasion. Referring to the importance of marriage in a society, Alberuni writes, 'No nation can exist without a regular married life, for it prevents the uproar of passions abhorred by the cultivated mind, and it removes all those causes which excite the animal to a fury always leading to harm'. He considered matrimony to be a necessary institution and as Abul Fazal puts it at a later stage (at the end of the sixteenth century), 'if there be no marriages then the fountain head of humanity shall become choked and the stream of divine benevolence shall sink into the sand'. Keeping these two views in mind, the following couplets of Guru Nanak (about a woman's importance in the society) become all the more significant to understand the need and the ceremonies connected with the institution of marriage. Guru Nanak writes:

From the woman is, our birth,
in the woman's womb are we shaped.
To the woman are we engaged,
to the woman are we wedded.
The woman, yea, is our friend,
and from woman is the family.

If one woman dies, we seek another:
through the woman are the bonds of the world.
O why call woman evil who giveth birth to kings.
From the woman is the woman;
without the woman there's none.
Nanak: without the woman is the One True Lord alone.  

There was no age restriction in respect of marriage during the period under review. But child marriage had become almost a universal feature both among the Hindus and the Muslims. The girls seldom passed the age of nine or ten years and the boys sixteen or seventeen before they were united in wedlock. Even five centuries before Guru Nanak, Alberuni had observed that 'the Hindu married at a very early age and the parents of the bride and the groom generally arranged the marriage. There are frequent references of 'child-marriage', and 'young bride' in the compositions of Guru Nanak. He himself was married when he was hardly fourteen years old. Referring to early marriages in Muslim families during Feroz Tughluq's reign, Afif writes, 'with the mercy of the sultan the saadaats (Saiyyiada), qazis (judges) and omrahs (nobles) used to marry their daughters at a very early age'.
As mentioned earlier, the settlement of marriage was entirely the concern of the respective parents. With the help of their family priest, jyotshi (astrologer) or a pandit they examined the horoscopes of the boy and the girl. If there was no incompatibility in horoscopes the family priests and the astrologers (of boys and girls' family), got busy checking up the genealogies and pedigrees of the two families. If everything went well, a date was fixed for the betrothal ceremony. Sometimes the match making job was done by the village barber who was paid a fee for it.

The Betrothal Ceremony

The betrothal ceremony known as mangni or kurmai was like a solemnization of the forthcoming marriage of the children. It was an occasion of great joy and rejoicing. The parents of the girl felt greatly relieved on being able to find a good match for the daughter. The ladies of the house sang happy songs to express their inner joy. Even bride's joy was limitless. She invited her friends to come to her house to share the joy and happiness of the family. The following lines from Guru Nanak Bani throw a good deal of light on the prevailing atmosphere at the betrothal ceremony.
Friends have come into my Home:
Yea, the True Lord hath brought about
my union with them.
Through Love, have I met them and the
Lord's mind is pleased:
Yea, meeting with the saints I have found gladness.
And I' Have attained to what my mind longed for.
Eternal is my union, my mind is pleased:
blessed, blessed are my mansion.
And the five strains of music ring
within me unstruck,
now that the friends have come into my home.
Come, loved friends.
Come, come, women, sing the songs of joy.

After this formal recognition (of *mangni* or *kurmai*
as it was called) an auspicious day and time was fixed for
the marriage, with the help of a *pandit*. It was known as
*Saha Kadhna*. The gathered members showered blessing on
the young bride and wished that her union with her 'husband'
would be an occasion of unending bliss.

The day of rendezvous (marriage) is fixed.
Pour oil on the threshold, my mates,
and bless me that I attain
to the union of my Lord (bridegroom).
After the fixation of date for the marriage, elaborate preparations began. Although it is difficult to give comprehensive description of the marriage ceremonies performed in those days yet on the basis of whatever scanty references are available in the *Bani* of Guru Nanak one can draw a fairly good picture of this important event in the life of the Indians of medieval period. The invitations were sent out through the local barber or through special messengers to friends and relations. For about a week or so, on every evening (preferably at night) preceding the marriage ceremony, the neighbouring women gathered at the house of the bride and the bridegroom sang *ghorian* and *suhag* (the marriage songs, meant for this happy occasion). Guru Nanak has used the word *mangal* and Kabir, *manglachar* for the happy songs sung on such occasions.

Religious and social conservatism is so strong in India that the marriage customs have not changed much even since the days of Guru Nanak.

After receiving the verbal or written invitation letters, when the relations and friends gathered and necessary preparations for the marriage had been made, the richly clad bridegroom, seated on a gorgeously caprisoned and beautifully decorated mare proceeded to the house of the bride. His relatives and friends in the best attire either followed him on foot or in coaches according to their status. The marriage procession was headed by a
musical party with drums and wind instruments. Guru Nanak and the other Sikh Gurus have used the marriage symbols (in their compositions) to explain the deeper meaning of man's search for the Ultimate Reality i.e., God. However, these symbols become important for the historians when they try to reconstruct the social history of medieval India. In one of the hymns, Guru Ramdas uses the word 'Aparav Jani', who followed the Lara (bridegroom) to the house of his bride. In the following couplets, Guru Nanak speaks of the Lord (bridegroom) who had come to wed the bride:

When by His grace the Lord (bridegroom) entered into (me), His own Home,
And my mates assembled to celebrate my marriage.
My mind was in ecstasy, seeing this play,
that my Lord had come to wed me.
Sing ye, O' beauteous brides (the song of) wisdom,
for, into my home hath came the Lord,
the Life of the world.
Through the Guru was I wedded,
when I received my spouse.

On arriving at the destination the party was heartly welcomed by the bride's people and the vadhai (geetings), were exchanged. The ladies of bride's family greeted them.
with happy (welcoming) songs. The marriage party was served sumptuous meals according to host's position. Guru Nanak tells us that meat preparations were served to the members of the marriage party. The principal marriage rituals commenced at a fixed hour.

There is no mention in Guru Nanak Bani of couple taking seven circles around the sacred fire as was (and is) the practice among the Hindus. Nor there is any reference to the Muhammadan ceremonies observed at the time of marriage. However, from other sources, we know that the bride and the bridegroom circled seven times around the sacred fire, while the priest recited mantras. After the marriage ceremony, there was the usual feast as is current in our days. The father of the bride gave handsome dowry to his daughter including jewellery, utensils, clothes, articles of domestic use and some cash. Guru Nanak and the other Sikh Gurus were against this practice which was very harsh to the poor people who found it difficult to get their daughters married on account of their inability to pay handsome dowry. Sometimes a poor father had not the means to procure even a wedding outfit for his daughter. Macauliffe notes that a man in straitened circumstances appealed to Guru Nanak to procure a wedding outfit for his daughter. Sant Tukaram could get his daughter married only through the contribution of the villagers. This appears to be the common practice in those days that at the time of the marriage of a village
girl the neighbours, relatives and other village folks would contribute a small-bit towards the marriage-expenses as well as gave blessings to the bride who was leaving her parental home to go to the home of her husband.  

While in a middle class family, the dowry consisted of some gold and silver jewellery, clothes, utensils, articles of various kinds and some cash, the rich parents gave costly clothes, diamonds and rubies, horses, elephants and female servants to their daughters as a part of dowry. We can have some idea from the list of items given by Raja Bhagwan Dass to his daughter at the time of her marriage. Maasir-i-Alamgiri, Tabaqat-i-Akbari and the author of Muntkhub-ut-twarikh, Badauni states that on the marriage of Salim, Raja Bhagwan Dass, the father of the bride - Man Bai gave in dowry several strings of Persian, Arab and Turkish horses, together with one hundred elephants and many male and female slaves besides all sorts of vessels of gold and other costly stuff. He offered to each of the amirs present, Persian, Turkish and Arabian horse with gold saddles. The reference may be made here to another ceremony called tamol in which presents (not part of dowry) were offered in cash, gold and clothes by bride's father to the bridegroom and some of his relatives.  

The rest of the ceremonies were of a secondary propitiatory nature. On the eve of departure a few more ceremonies of lesser importance were performed. The bride
accompanied her husband in a doli for her new home where she was received with great joy and happiness. Before she entered the threshold of the house of her in-laws the ladies of the house poured some mustard oil over the threshold and (in greetings) water was waved over the heads of the bridegroom and the bride. The following couplets of Guru Nanak in Rag Asa present a beautiful description of this ceremony, when the bride was received at her in-law's house:

When these beauties were married,
their glamorous spouses sat by their sides,
Yea, and they were carried in planquins
and bangles of ivory dangled around their arms.
(In greetings) water was waved over their heads,
and they were fanned with glass-studded fans.
A hundred thousand coins were offered to them
when they sat and also when they stood.
And they chewed nuts and dates,
and enjoyed the bridal couch.87

The day of marriage also synchronised with the day of separation for the bride from her parents, friends and relatives. The pangs of the separation for the bride were more acute if she was married at a distant place, for in those days due to the poor means of communication and transport, it was not possible to travel so easily and
frequently as one can travel in the present days. The following line of Guru Nanak in his Bani clearly shows the inner feelings of a bride who has been wedded to a person living far away. The girl says:

'The father hath wedded me in a land-far removed and so I go not back to my parents's world.88

If she was married into an aristocratic family, she was probably confined to a harem, where her intercourse with the rest of the world was severely curtailed for the rest of her life.89

If the marriage ceremonies in a Hindu family were performed by a pandit or a family purohit then a qazi was summoned to perform the ceremonies of a Muslim-wedding. Since they (the priests and the qazis) had become so materialistic and greedy and misguided the people, Guru Nanak uses the word shaitan (the wicked) for them who read the pledge (of marriage) and charge money for it.90

Though polygamy was prevalent among the Muslims91 (among the people of rich classes), monogamy was the generality of the Hindus who would take to a second wife only if the first proved barren or died. In Asa di Var, Guru Nanak writes:
The woman, yea, is our friend, 
and from woman is the family. 
If one woman dies, we seek another: 
through the woman are the bonds of the world.  

It is said that Chaitanya remarried after the death of his first wife. In spite of the freedom by their religion to marry more than one woman, the common Mohammadan, it appears, preferred to have one wife. Guru Nanak also favoured monogamy as is clear from the above couplet.

Divorce was not a common practice among the Hindus, although it was an important social feature of Islam. In matters of divorce the husband enjoyed absolute and unquestioned powers, while the wife was denied the same.

The condition of the widows was very miserable in the society. While widow remarriage was permitted amongst the Muslims, it was almost non-existent amongst the Hindus. A widow had only two alternatives before her - to live a life of hardships and disgrace or to commit sati with the body of her dead husband. Alberuni says 'The women generally preferred the second course. Sometimes the reluctant women were forced to perform sati due to pressure from relatives or public opinion'. It appears, however, that it was confined to the socially respectable groups. All the Hindu widows did not become sati. Many a widows were forced to enter in an immoral type of living to earn
their livelihood. Guru Nanak was opposed to this kind
of life for a widow and advocated their cause and favoured
widow remarriage.\textsuperscript{97}

Death Ceremonies

In the Vedic times, the Indo-Aryans, it appears,
buried their dead. The following verses were repeated at
the time of disposing of the dead body and they clearly
indicate that burial was the Vedic custom.

"Open thy arms, O earth, receive the dead.
With gentle pressure and loving welcome.
Enshroud him tenderly, e'en as a mother
Folds her soft vestments round the child she loves".\textsuperscript{100}

Again

"Return to thy mother earth,
may she be kind to thee and lie lightly on thee,
and not oppress thee".\textsuperscript{100}

Later on, however, cremation replaced burial and
it continues to the present day. Ceremonies connected with
death, cremation and after life were very important to the
Hindus.

From Guru Nanak \textit{Bani}, we get a fairly good account
of the mourning practices and ceremonies after the death
of one's dearest and nearest. Cremation or bruning of the dead body was the most recognised mode of the disposal of the corpse during the period of our study. Two other ways of disposing of the body were to throw it in the running stream or to leave it for the animals to consume, as is clear from the lines of Guru Arjan Dev:

In (any of) the three ways is the body consumed -
by the waters, the dogs or the fire.
And yet one calls oneself immortal
and abideth in his mansions
for asking the cause of causes.

When a Hindu was about to die, people hastened to lay his body on the floor, the priest began chanting mantras and the near relations distributing gifts to the poor and the needy to ease the passage of his soul into the next world. The floor was plastered with cow-dung and covered with Kusa-grass over which the corpse was laid, with the head resting in northern and the feet in southern direction, the face downwards. If sacred Ganges water was available, some drops were poured over the corpse, a cow was offered as a gift to a brahmin, and some leaves of tulsi were put over the dead man's chest and the caste mark on his forehead.

Before putting the dead body on the bier, it was given a bath with freshwater, perfumed and decked with
wreaths and flowers. The body then was wrapped in silk or cotton cloth, the colour of which differed according to the age, sex, status of the person and other circumstances. The corpse of a married woman, according to Abul Fazal was dressed in her usual daily robes. 'If a woman died before her husband', writes Sinclair Stevenson, 'she was considered so lucky that her face and specially her forehead was smeared with red'.

After these preparations, the body was put on the bier made of bamboos and wood shouldered by four persons, the bier was then taken to the cremation ground, usually situated near a river bank. The funeral procession which started for the cremation ground was headed by the chief mourners. Relatives and friends followed the corpse bareheaded and barefooted crying and wailing. Some fire in a new earthen pot, kindled from the domestic fire was carried to the cremation ground. A musical band, however, headed the funeral procession of an aged person and conches were blown. The following lines of Guru Nanak Bani are very significant in this regard:

They wash the dead body clean and robe it in silk,
And they blow the conches, shout out the Lord's word. (Ram Nam Sat Hai).
and the five kindreds (father, mother, wife, son and brother) are benumbed and wail:
'O' cursed be the life of the world' without him. 107

Cremation Ceremony

Ordinary wood was used for the pyre of a commoner while sandal and lignumaloes was employed by the rich. Ghee was put into the eyes, nostrils, ears, mouth etc. of the deceased before the fire was lighted by the eldest son or a nearest male relation if the person died without leaving a son. Prior to the burning of the dead body the priest recited mantras (committed to memory) and performed a petty ceremony. 110 Until the corpse was consumed by the fire all people sat there on one side. After this the relatives and mourners left the cremation ground and purified themselves by bathing in a nearby pond, river or at the well before entering the house. 111 The sons and grandsons of the deceased and the widow too, if she survived her husband got their heads shaved. 112 On the third day after the cremation took place, asthi-chayana or the bone-gathering ceremony. The bones collected were carried to some holy river for immersion, preferably in the Ganges, because it was the belief of the Hindus that if the bones of the dead were consigned to the Holy Ganges, the lost soul was assured of a passage to heaven. 113 The bodies
of the children who were below three years were not burnt. 114

In the dead man's house there was incessant wailing of women. Wailing was accompanied by beating breast with both hands. While wailing, the women sitting in a circle would relate in long verses all the greatness of the departed person. 115 If the dead-man was the head of the family or the son in the prime of his youth, the grief was perhaps more violent and real for the entire family depended on him for sustenance and support. 116 If the deceased was a child then the cries and wailings of the women were little different. Here are a few examples from Guru Nanak Bani of wailing by the women on the death of one's husband, son or a child:

When the True Lord so willeth,
He giveth His command to the soul,
and the soul is separated from the body

The wife is now devoid of the man;
and the dead corpse lieth in the compound
and she crieth to the Lord's Court:
'O' God, with his death
my mind's faculties are deadened.

...
The 'separation of my beloved is death for me, (crieth the wife), 'O cursed be the life of the world. 117

... 

When the pitcher (of the body) breaks, every one sayeth : 'Carry him off' 
In the home the mother waileth, for the brothers take away the bier, and shaking off her bonds the wife cries, but the swan-soul goeth alone. 118

If he died as a child, they remember his sports, and wail, 'O, how playful was he and joyous and beautiful'. But he is recalled by the One to whom he belonged; and men wail, alas, in ignorance, knowing not. If he died as a youth, what could one do except to wail for him saying; 'He was mine, mine'. 
Yea, all wail, goaded and corroded by maya : O cursed is such a life of the world. 119

There was no special mourning dress but the women who had come to express their sorrow wore white dupattas. 120 Generally, the women vied with one another in producing the best melody and rhymes while wailing over the dead.
'Why one should weep over an individual's death when the whole universe is a 'play' of the Creator' writes Guru Nanak. According to him 'only that bewailing is justified which is not for worldly attachment but for the love of God. All other cries are useless, vain and arise from ignorance'. People used to light the earthen lamp for several days after the death of the near and dear in order to give light to the deceased to show him the way to heaven. Guru Nanak criticised such practices and declared that 'the rememberance of 'His Name' is the time lamp. Only such a lamp can show (path to the departed soul) to heaven and can save him from the fear of Yama'.

For ten days (the exact number varying according to caste rules), the family and the house in which the death occurred was considered to be ceremonially impure. No food was cooked or fire burnt in the hearth and the relations provided the family with subsistence. The family slept on the floor on the bed of leaves. All the ten days certain ceremonies were performed to help the deceased's soul to reach its destination. For first ten or twelve days after death food and water was due to him because he was regarded as still living in a sense. At different intervals during the course of one year, sharadha ceremonies were performed to help to provide (to the deceased's soul) further sustenance until at last the soul had assumed another body and was reincarnated in the world according to karma and the 'Law of the Dead'.
The half yearly sharadha was generally richer and more liberal than the usual monthly one. With the pind-dan or the offering of the balls (of rice) or meal on the last day of the year the heir's duties towards the dead were regarded as practically fulfilled. It was more efficacious if the ceremony was performed at Gaya. Guru Nanak condemned these ceremonies with characteristic humour and sarcasm:

They offer rice-balls to the gods
and to the dead souls
but the brahmin eats them all.
Nanak: seek thou the rice ball of
the Lord's beneficence
that is eternally inexhaustible.

At another place, Guru Nanak writes:

If a thief robs a house and
this plunder he offers to propitiate the ancestors:
The thing in the other world is recognised,
and the dead souls are charged with theft.
The hands of the go-between (the brahmin) are chopped off;
thus is the Lord's justice ministered.
Nanak: that alone is received whole in the Yond,
that one giveth out of one's honest day's bread.
No detailed account of the rites and ceremonies performed among the Muslims is available in the Bani of Guru Nanak. It is certain, however, from few scattered references here and there in his hymns that the Hindus burnt the dead bodies while the Muslims buried them. Guru Amardas clearly states that 'some are cremated, others buried'. In one passage of Asa di Var, Guru Nanak talks about the futile but much pronounced difference between the Hindus and Muslims regarding the disposal of their dead bodies.

He says:

The dust of a Muslim's grave becometh lump for the potter's wheel.
And of it he fashions bricks or vessels, and, burning, they wail.
Yea, the hapless clay burns and cries out as fiery coals fall, continuously upon it.
Nanak: He who created the world knoweth alone (i.e. whether cremation is better or burial and what is to become of us hereafter).

That is to say that it is simply vain and whimsical on the part of the Mussalmans to find fault with the Hindu practice of burning the dead bodies, for the Muslim dead bodies which are buried may be dug out by the potter and put into the fire of his oven.
Lamentations over the death of a near and dear were as common among the Muslims as they were among the Hindus. The occasion of death was generally used for the demonstration of grief by mourning friends and relations. The pent up emotions of the whole family and particularly the grief of the women expressed itself in wild outbursts, and the wailing cries created quite an uproar. The ceremonies of mourning went on for days, even for months and in exceptional cases for a whole year.

In this way, the whole life of the two communities - the Hindus and the Muslims, was over burdened with innumerable rites and ceremonies which to Guru Nanak had more superstition than sense in them. Yet the self-styled protectors of Hinduism and Islam, the brahmins and mullahas, professedly attached religious sanctity to all these ceremonies. Guru Nanak not only condemned these but also tried to lift the man out of the moorings to which he was trapped in for centuries.
NOTES

1. *Adi Granth*, p. 1428:

    यहुँ तुमहसि जन्म किवा जीवन
    असि अलमारा नहिं॥

    Gopal Singh, (tr.), *op. cit.*, Vol. IV, p. 1349.

    Childhood, youth and old age,
    three are the stage of thy life.


3. In the words of Guru Arjan, this super human is none other than, God Himself who sustains, the child in mother's womb and gives him the human form and soul:

    *Adi Granth*, p. 1071:

    विभव अयो युग्मसाधनसि निः जेते जावति है॥
    भर चाह विभव निः युग्मसाधनसि॥
    मर्गसि बुद्धीसि जोि मंत्र समस्तगता॥
    महत महतं नयोगिता में नूनय जन्म निः समस्तगता है॥

    Gopal Singh, (tr.), *op. cit.*, Vol. IV, p. 1023.

    Yea, He, who createth and destroyeth in an instant.
    He alone saveth thee ever.
He, who provided thee sustenance
in the mother's womb,
and abiding ever with thee
taketh care of thee.
Dwell ever thou on Him,
Thy only love,
whose glory is great.
Also see, Adi Granth, p. 1004.


Adi Granth, p. 143:

10. Ibid., p. 177. Also see, Chopra, P.N., Some Aspects of Social Life During the Mughal Age (1526-1707), Agra, 1955, p. 3.
12. Adi Granth, p. 904:

O, pundit lie not and speak the Truth, 
for, one attains to one's true Abode. 
If one rids oneself of ego through the word, 
the astrologer maketh our horoscope, 
calculating this and that, 
and he readeth it out to us, 
himself realising not the Reality 
(of the Real).

13. Even during the days of menstrual courses, a 
woman was considered impure. Writing about it 
Alberuni states, 'The longest duration of the 
menstrual courses which has been observed is 
sixteen days, but in reality they last only during 
the first four days, and then the husband is not 
allowed to cohabit with his wife, nor even to come 
near her in the same house, because during the time 
she is impure. After the four days have elapsed 
and she has washed, she is pure again, and the 
husband may co-habit with her, even if the blood
has not yet entirely disappeared, for this blood is not considered as that of the menstrual courses, but as the same substance - matter of which the embroys consist'; see, Sachau Edward, C., Alberuni's India, p. 156. Guru Nanak also notice it and condemned the prevailing custom of calling a woman, impure, during the days of her menstrual courses. 'What about those who are impure by heart? And give only a purificatory bath to clean their body and not the soul'. He writes:

Adi Granth, p. 472:


As the woman hath her periods month after month, so doth impurity abide in the mouth of the impure, and continually he is scorched. Pure are not they who bathe their bodies: Pure, Nanak, are they in whose mind is He, the Lord.


Adi Granth, p. 472:

Similar views are expressed by Saint Kabir, a contemporary of Guru Nanak. He writes:

Adi Granth, p. 331:


contd..
Contaminated is water, contaminated is the earth, yea, the whole creation is contaminated, Our birth is contaminated, as is our death, yea, the whole world is scourged by contamination O pundit, tell me then, who at all is pure? And dwell thou on such a wisdom, O friend which revealeth the pure one to thee. Aren't our eyes contaminated and our tongues too? Aren't the ears contaminated? For contamination is everywhere and we are contaminated in whatever we do and so our kitchen too is contaminated. Many know how to be ensnared but rarely how to be released. Sayeth Kabir: 'He who contemplates the Lord in the heart, is contaminated not'.


Adi Granth, pp. 472-73:

हत समुद्र लेख ते निजर समुद्र तुह॥
अभी समुद्र लेखर रचनितमार भक्ति तुह॥
तैंह समुद्र पूजी ते परम्परायणी धर्म॥
दक्ष जीवर अपराधी चै निराधार नरण॥
...

सरस समुद्र जग तै दुःखी सरस नरण॥
नीमत महादुर जग तै उदाहर सरस नरण॥
धर्म धारा धारी तै दिइए दिशा मंरण॥
दक्ष नित्य उदमिधि सुकित्सा भक्ति समुद्र नरण॥
18. Thomas, P., Hindu Religion, Customs and Manners, p. 88. Writing about the birth ceremonies, the present author states, 'The women of the house keep vigil throughout the night and the family priest repeats verses so that this night supposed to be very dangerous for the child, may pass without evil befalling the child. The Hindus believe that evil spirits are more active when humans sleep, and seldom haunt places where lamps are lit and people keep vigil'.


20. Ibid., pp. 88-89.


23. See footnote 12 of the present chapter.


26. Akbar was named Badr-ud-din immediately after his birth, see Chopra, P.N., op. cit., p. 12.


32. All these items - like pati (tablet or a wooden-board), Mas/Siahi (ink), Qalam (pen) and kagad (paper) etc. are mentioned in Var Malhar, Mahalla I, Adi Granth, p. 1291. For Pandha/Padha (teacher), see Ramakali Mahalla I, Adi Granth, pp. 937-938.
34. Ibid., p. 3.
35. For Guru Nanak's views on education, see Bhai Veer Singh (ed.), Puratan Janam Sakhi, Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji, Amritsar, 1959, pp. 1-5.
For the original text, see Adi Granth, pp. 937-38 :
37. Gopal Singh, (tr.), op. cit., Vol. IV, p. 1077. For original text, see Adi Granth, p. 1127:

For original text, see Adi Granth, p. 1127:


42. Arora, A.C., op. cit., p. 161.

43. Sharma, Brijnarain, Social Life in Northern India (AD 600-1000), p. 252.

44. Thomas, P., op. cit., p. 90.

45. Ibid.

46. Thomas, P., op. cit., p. 90.

48. For (tr.), see, Arora, A.C., op. cit., p. 162.

Adi Granth, p. 471:

उदात्त अनं गृहीत मृदु कु छ है सलोक रद्द॥
देव केवल नीष्ठ वा रद्दौ उ उमे शानु॥
दाह हेंदे उ दया कर रिहा थिया रत नरह॥
यन पु महरस रजहम नै बनि जह रजह॥


Adi Granth, p. 471:

उदात्त अनं गृहीत मृदु कु छ है सलोक रद्द॥
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दाह हेंदे उ दया कर रिहा थिया रत नरह॥
यन पु महरस रजहम नै बनि जह रजह॥

50. Vivaha is the word for marriage which Guru Nanak and other Sikh Gurus have used in their Bani. As is clear from the following couplets in the Adi Granth.

Adi Granth, p. 78:

विवाह है श्री परम पवित्र विवाह नै विवाह॥

contd...
Adi Granth, p. 765:

होषु जी जे मेय मेय गुड़ मक्खी आहिशाः

निम्न वो म्हाँ यापिशाः नदी ज्वाले लगिशाः

Also see, Adi Granth, p. 775.


Adi Granth, p. 473:

उसी शीखी उसी उसी उसी उसी चाठ बारमे लोषु

उसी वो सज वो सज वो सज वो सज लड़्डु

उसी नृत्य उसी उसी उसी उसी नृत्य नृत्य ओसी

वो उसी वो उसी उसी उसी वो उसी वो उसी

उसी नृत्य उसी नृत्य उसी नृत्य ओसी

उसी नृत्य उसी नृत्य उसी नृत्य ओसी


57. Guru Nanak has used the word 'रीवाटी वाली' and 'वाली' for the child-brides; see Tilang Mahalla I, Adi Granth, p. 722 and Ramkali Var, Mahalla I, Adi Granth, p. 954.
58. On the testimony of Bhai Mani Singh, Macauliffe, M.A., states that (Guru) Nanak was married at the age of fourteen. *The Sikh Religion*, Vol. I, p. 18. However, author of Puratan Janam Sakhi says that Guru Nanak was twelve years old when he was married to Sulakshmi daughter of Mula khatri of Batala, pp. 5-6.


Adi Granth, p. 764:

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In an other hymn Guru Nanak writes:

Adi Granth, p. 773:

Embellishing the girl with chastity, contentment and love her father
the Guru has come to betroth her to her Lord.
A sacrifice am I unto my Lord.

65. See, Shalok Farid, Adi Granth, p. 1377:


67. Referred to footnote 62.


69. Adi Granth, p. 764:

...
70. Adi Granth, p. 482:

"बहुः तेजः जो टुकड़ो विलखण्डः

मेरे विष्णु अर्धें तपस्त अर्धें उज्ज्वलः"

Also see, Adi Granth, pp. 242-43.


72. See, Adi Granth, p. 775:

"मृति ठक गर खेलन निश अर्द्धें अभूत नीह घटने॥"


'How wondrous is the wedding party of
the angetic beings, the heavenly
singers, the attendants of gods'.

73. Adi Granth, p. 453:

"अन्ये नष्ट अर्द्धें अर्द्धें आयुःनामहें अर्द्धें ठेव॥

अधिवारिक अर्द्धें सर्वे अर्द्धें मल्ल गइ॥

नृत्य करत नृत्य असु भविष्यः नृत्य बृहत मुखे॥"


He Himself is the groom's party and,
yea, the bride's too,
He Himself is the Master
He Himself the God.

Adi Granth, p. 351:

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See, Adi Granth, p. 242:

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My desire was fulfilled and my friends came to my home. And meeting my groom, my mates sang the songs of joy. Yea, by singing the wedding - songs, I was imbued with the Lord's (bridegroom's) Love, and my mind oozed out joy.

75. See, Adi Granth, p. 1290:

Gopal Singh, (tr.), op. cit., Vol. IV, p. 1231.
And in the yagnas, in marriages and on festive occasions is meat the main food of men.
In one of the hymns of Guru Ramdas, we find a reference of dowry being given at the time of marriage to the bride. The worldly bride (human being) is asking her father, to give her a handsome dowry (of the Lord's Name, goodness, simplicity and virtues) so that she may find favour with her husband (i.e., Union with God). The rest of the dowry is useless, a vain show of egoism.

See, Adi Granth, pp. 78-79:

'O' my father, gift away to me the dowry of the Lord's Name. Let the Lord be my wear, His glory my beauty, that my task be accomplished, blessed is the Lord's worship, the true Guru hath blest me with it.
In all lands, nay, in all the universe pervades the glory of the Lord, yea, the gift of the Lord's (Name) is matchless, and other dowry displayed by the selfwilled is false egoism and a vain show.

82. Chopra, P.N., *op. cit.*, p. 34.
84. Quoted in Chopra, P.N., *op. cit.*, p. 35.

88. *Adi Granth*, p. 764:

Righteousness and sense of shame have hid themselves, and falsehood walks abroad with abandon.
The days of qazis and the brahmins are over, yea, the devil himself playeth the priest.

91. Chopra, P.N., op. cit., p. 22.

92. See footnote 54 of this chapter.

93. Chopra, P.N., op. cit., p. 22.


97. The practice was more common among the rajputs, brahmin and khatri widows. It is improbable that the jats, or the craftsmen, ever adopted the custom. It was confined, in all probability to rajput, brahmin and khatri families. Cf., Upadhyay, V., Socio-Religious Condition of North India, pp. 153-154.
98. Obviously, because otherwise there would be no widows. Sidi Ali states, for instance, that 'if the deceased leaves a wife past child-bearing she is not burnt' : The Travels and Adventures of Sidi Ali Reis, pp. 59-60. Alberuni also observes that very old women and mothers need not become sati: Alberuni's India, p. 155, as quoted by Grewal, J.S., op. cit., p. 56.

99. Adi Granth, p. 226:

The widow offers her body to another, yea, for the sake of lust or money, her mind is swayed thus, (But) without the spouse, she is satiated not.

100. Quoted by Thomas, P., op. cit., p. 93.


Quoted by Thomas, P., op. cit., p. 93.
For details, see Pandey, R.B., *op. cit.*, pp. 234-274.


105. Quoted by Chopra, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

106. *Adi Granth*, p. 1383:

The Body of three and a half maunds lives on water and the grains.

Yea, the man came into the world carrying loads of hope.

(But), when the angel of death shatters all the doors (of the body),
then the loved ones of man present him bound, to death.

Lo, the man, quitteth, carried on the shoulders of four of his kind.

And, hereafter, only the deeds, he did in the world, are of any avail to him.


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Adi Granth, p. 478:


Adi Granth, p. 1027:

120. Sharma, Brijnarain, op. cit., p. 257.

122. Adi Granth, p. 579:

'O' Nanak, one wails truly, if one waileth in love (for Him).
If one waileth, being involved (in worldly possessions)
the all one's wailing in vain
Yea, vain is such wailing if, forgetful of the lord,
one waileth for what is not.
And discriminates not between good and evil,
and so wastes his life away in vain.
Nanak, one wails truly, if one wails in love (for Him).

123. Adi Granth, p. 358:

The Name is my (Luminous) Lamp, 
in it is the oil of pain, 
as the lamp burns bright it sucketh up the oil, 
and no more thereafter is my meeting with the yama.

124. Thomas, P., op. cit., p. 94.
126. Ibid., p. 184 and Sharma, Brijnarain, op. cit., p. 257.

Adi Granth, p. 358:


Adi Granth, p. 472:


132. Arora, A.C., op. cit., p. 162.

133. Chopra, P.N., op. cit., p. 46.