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Mehendi

In Indian weddings, a lot of emphasis is given on customs and rituals and the same is reflected in the Mehendi ceremony before marriage. Mehendi is one of the sixteen adornments of the bride and her beauty is incomplete without it. Mehendi ceremony usually takes place just before marriage. According to the ritual, the bride does not step out of the house after this ceremony.

The Mehendi Ceremony generally takes place the day before the wedding, in the morning. The bride and the groom's family observe this ritual separately at their own residences. It is traditionally a women centric ceremony with the men of the family generally not participating. The outfits preferred for the ceremony are simple, in light colors, nothing too flashy.

Use of Mehendi in a pre-wedding ritual is not just cosmetic but has deep underlying scientific reasons behind it. Henna is known for its cooling properties and is supposed to calm the bride's nerves when applied to her hands and feet.

Bhaat

This *rasm*(ritual) takes place at both the bride and the groom's place, where the mother of the bride/groom goes to her brother's home to invite him and his family to her child's wedding. Generally all close relatives of the family take part in the ceremony. The invitation ceremony is also called as *Bhaat Nyutna* ritual. As all Indian customs have songs and sangeet, bhaat ceremony too is celebrated with the same fun and joy.

After the sister invites her brothers to the wedding, the brothers along with their families arrive at the sister's house with gifts and of course lot of love. The welcoming ceremony of the brothers starts right from the door or *chaukhat* of the sister's house. The brother or mama of the bride/groom is made to stand on a raised pedestal, a *patra*, along with his family. The welcome, starts with the eldest brother and his family, followed by the younger brothers. The mother of the bride/groom applies *tilak* on the forehead of her brother and his family and gives them coconut and money as a token of welcome and good wishes. The others shower the brother and his family with flowers, welcoming him to the house.

The brothers return the sisters favour and love by showering her with gifts. The kind of gifts that are given can vary from person to person, also depending on their closeness with the sister and involvement in the wedding. Generally clothes, jewellery and sweets are gifted to the sister and her family. The other close relatives of the sister's family are also honoured by the brother, as he applies *tilak* on their foreheads and gifts them with money and coconut.

Tilak Ceremony

It can be said that the commencement of the wedding alliance begins from this ceremony itself. Indian Hindu weddings are very traditional and particular with regard to respective customs and traditions.

In India, the bridegroom and his family is placed in high regard. Therefore, after they get ready for the wedding the first ceremony which locks the seal is Tilak ceremony. It is usually attended by the male members of both the families. The father of the bride along with other associates visits the house of the groom. There he applies the auspicious tilak on the forehead of the groom to ensure that he is finally ready for marriage and also that the bride's family has accepted him as their would-be son in law.

A small event also takes place, wherein the priest chants prayers to seek blessings of the Lord. After this the brother of the bride applies tilak to the groom as a mark of respect and acceptance. He then endows him with gifts such as clothes, sweets, fruits, flowers, garlands and token money. All the other male members of the bride's family such as uncles, cousins etc also perform the same ritual to state their loving approval of the groom. The ceremony is followed by refreshments to celebrate the new accord between the duo families.

Sangeet

One of the most talked about pre-wedding events, the Sangeet, is a celebration of coming together of the two families in the union of their children. The ceremony offers respite from all the hectic seriousness of the wedding preparations.

Sangeet is celebrated by both the bride's and the groom's family together at a common venue. A grand stage is set where the performances take place. The choreographers teach cool dance steps to the entire relative bandwagon. The relatives perform in pairs or in groups. Generally the bride's and groom's parents have a set. Several sets of uncle and aunties from each side also prepare dance performances to popular Bollywood tunes. The sisters and brothers from each side will generally dance in groups or will perform skits. Even the bride and the groom take part in the performance, dancing to romantic numbers. DJs are hired to create an ambience where guest can dance their hearts out.

Haldi Ceremony

In Indian culture, *haldi* or turmeric holds a special place of honour. It is known for its anti-inflammatory and other healing properties, because of which it has become popular as a medicine as well. And, one area where it holds the most important place is when it comes to Indian traditions. In Indian weddings, this amazing ingredient has an entire ceremony to its name.

The *haldi* ceremony is the one in which a paste of *haldi* (*turmeric*) is applied on the bride and the groom's body before their wedding. This ceremony is held at both the bride and the groom's place, on the morning of the wedding day.

Why haldi holds such a special place?

1. To keep buri nazar (evil eye) away
2. The colour is auspicious
3. For that extra glow on the skin
4. As an antiseptic

Baraat

The following ceremonies are celebrated in Baraat event:

Nikasi – Just before the groom heads out for the wedding venue, an elaborate ritual involving tying of a headgear known as Sehra is practiced. The Sehra is tied around the groom's head and is either made of flowers or zari danglers or sometimes even with strings of pearls. This covers the groom's face. The Sehra is traditionally tied by the groom's brother-in-law, his sister's husband. His sister-in-law, brother's wife, then applies kajal from her eyes on the side of the groom's face to ward off evil energy. She also ties golden thread on the reins of the mare that the groom is supposed to mount.

Baraat – Baraat refers to the wedding procession accompanying the groom as he sets off for the wedding venue. He rides on a mare and has to carry a sword, a traditional reminder of the royal and military heritage of the region.

Varmala: The Varmala Ceremony, also referred to as Jaimala, is the commencement of the Hindu wedding, serving as the first time the Bride and Groom meet before starting the wedding ceremony. Mala is the Hindi word for garland, usually consisting of flowers bunched together on a string. The exchange represents the acceptance and union of their forthcoming nuptials.

Wedding

Here, the bride and the groom go around the sacred fire seven times. For the first three Pheras, the bride precedes the groom, and during the last four she follows the groom around the fire. They utter the seven sacred vows of marriage while taking the Pheras and this seals their intent to stay together for the rest of their lives.

Phera is followed by Bidai where the newlyweds then proceed to leave the bride's paternal home (the marriage venue) and leave for the groom's home. The bride's family bids her a tearful goodbye. A coconut is placed under the wheel of the car, which is supposed to be crushed once the car starts, bringing good omen for the trip. The bride lifts her veil for the first time in front of her husband and he gifts her a piece of jewelry.