A MAHESHWARI FAMILY GUIDE

The Maheshwari Wedding *Rituals*

Why we do what we do

ARUN AGRAWAL



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Wedding practice varies from family to family and from region to region. This book describes what Maheshwari families commonly do, as the community's own written sources record it, and notes the variations it knows of. On the day, the tradition of your family and of your family pandit prevails.

All illustrations in this book are original.

For the young couples who will carry these customs forward, and for the elders who have kept them for us.

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Every ritual in brief

All thirty-three rituals in the order they usually happen, each in one line. For timings, places and who leads, see The wedding week at a glance.

Part 1: The Promise

1. Sagai and Rokna: the public promise The two sides fill each other's laps and say in public that the search is over.

2. Mudda Tika and Chikni Kothli: the two tilak visits The bride's brother marks the groom's forehead at his home; the groom's women return the visit.

3. The months between: festival negs and the invitations Every festival carries gifts across, and the cards go out three months and one month ahead.

Part 2: Opening the Home

4. Nandimukh: the ancestors first The ancestors are honoured first, and from now nothing in the family can stop the wedding.

5. The songs: five to the gods first Five songs to the gods first, then banna and banni; every rite has its song.

6. Battisi Nyotna: inviting the mother's brothers The mother goes home with thirty-two of everything to invite her brothers to fill the Mayra.

7. Vivah Hath and Moong Bikherna: the house enters the wedding The house enters the wedding; green moong is picked over so the household stays green.

8. Sava Pujan, the Vinayak boy and the lagan Ganesh is invoked, a small boy of the family becomes his presence, and the hour is written on pink paper.

9. Baan and Tani: the confinement and the cord The bride or groom is kept home and protected, and the cord goes up across the mandap.

10. The wedding kitchen: Dhan Rolna, Chak Puja and Moongdhana The women pass the grain seven times; the pots and the fuel are blessed before use.

11. Mayra and Bir Bhojan: the mother's brothers arrive The mother's brothers arrive with clothes and the ivory chuda, and their sister feeds them.

Part 3: The Celebrations

12. Mehendi The groom's house sends the colour; a circle is left bare on the right palm for the Hathleva.

13. Banori, Sanjha and Sankadi: the evenings and the night before The evening processions and songs, the night awake, and the dawn that opens the wedding day.

14. Pithi, Jhol and Lakh: turmeric, curd and the wish for plenty Turmeric up and down, curd poured by the father, the wish that you become a lakhpati; the mama lifts you off the seat.

15. Kankan Dora, the Maya and Gangaur: the thread, the shrine and Gauri The protective thread goes on, the wedding shrine is set up, and bride and groom each worship Gauri.

16. Bari, Stambh Ropan and Kanyaval: the groom's house at the bride's door The groom's house dresses the bride, its elders plant her mandap post, and her parents begin their fast.

Part 4: The Wedding Day

17. Beend Raja: dressing, Ghodi Puja and Nikasi The groom is dressed, his mother worships the mare, the jamais hold the reins, and a small girl guards him.

18. Varana: the gotra spoken aloud The bride's father washes the groom's feet and both pandits announce the two lineages aloud.

19. Dhukav and Toran: the groom at the door Seven strikes with neem and katar, and the bride's mother takes the groom by the nose.

20. Suvali and Varmala: the garlands Seven fried discs and a rice ball, then the garlands, the bride first.

21. Mama Phere: the circuits outside Led by her mama, the bride circles the groom three times with flowers, remembering Parvati's story.

22. Kanyadaan, Gathjoda and Hathleva The father entrusts, the groom takes her hand, and the knot is tied with moong and rice.

23. Lajahoma, the stone and the four fire rounds Her brother fills her hands with puffed rice; she steps on the stone; four rounds, three led by her.

24. Saptapadi, Dhruva darshan and Sindoor Seven steps, the fixed star, the heart touched, and she moves to his left.

25. After the pheras: Suhag-bidi, Joota Chhupai and Bada Bhat The women's gifts, the hidden shoes, the parents' fast broken, and the gods fed before the in-laws.

26. Pehravani, Sir-gunthi and Thali Puja: the bride's side honours the groom's The bride's side honours the groom's; she sits on her mother-in-law's lap; the threshold is blessed.

Part 5: The New Beginning

27. Vidai A coconut under the wheel, water on the wheels, sixteen rotis tied to the trunk.

28. Vadhu Pravesh and Thaledi: the seven thalis The sisters bar the door; the groom parts seven thalis with his katar and the bride stacks them silently.

29. Suhag Thal, Kothli and Munh Dikhai: the house meets its bride The women's table, the money bag with the gold coin, and the house meets its bride.

30. Juva-jui and the Kankan Dora untied: the games The ring fished for with one hand against two, and the wrist threads taken off.

31. Kanwar Kaleva and Manda Jhankna: the bride's home calls The groom's breakfast at the bride's home, and the couple's first visit back, fetched by her brother.

32. Maya Uthana, Ganesh's churma and the Sikh: closing the house The shrine is lifted, Ganesh is thanked, and the bride goes home for the first time.

33. The Chuda and the Gathjode ki Jaat The ivory bangles changed for lac, and the couple presented to the family's own gods.

Why I wrote this book

Before this book I wrote one on the Agarwal wedding. At the end of its preface I said that a Maheshwari edition might follow. This is that book.

The reason for writing it is the same reason I wrote the first. In many families the rituals of a wedding are carried out with great care, yet nobody explains them. Ask why a particular thing is done and the answer is often "because it has always been done this way". That answer satisfied earlier generations. It does not satisfy many young people today, who ask why about everything else in their lives. When nobody can tell them, they decide the rituals are old habits without sense, to be sat through for the sake of the elders, and some lose interest in them altogether.

I think this is a loss, and an avoidable one. The rituals are not empty. Most of them carry a clear meaning, about blessing, about protection, about the bond between two families, about a promise made in front of witnesses, about a daughter leaving one home and entering another. The meaning has simply not been handed down along with the actions.

So for every ritual this book does two things. It describes what happens, step by step, so that nobody is lost on the day. And it explains why it is done, so that the bride, the groom, the brother with the puffed rice and the cousin holding the flower basket know what they are doing. A young person who understands a ritual takes part in it with real engagement, not as a spectator following instructions.

Why a Maheshwari edition

A Maheshwari wedding shares a great deal with other Marwari weddings: the mother's brothers arriving for the Mayra, the turmeric of the Pithi, the toran at the door, the tears of the Vidai. But the community has rites, words and an order of its own, and they deserved more than a note in someone else's book.

A small boy of the family becomes Vinayak and sits beside the bride or groom through every rite. The bride and the groom each worship Gangaur with seven married women. Before the fire, the bride's mama leads her three times around the groom in the Mama Phere, remembering the story in which Parvati and Mahesh restored the first Maheshwari marriages. At the fire the couple take four rounds. At the groom's door the bride lifts seven thalis without a sound in the Thaledi, and the ivory chuda she wears is changed only weeks later. Each of these has its own chapter here.

Whose word this book follows

I have tried to write with respect for the community and to follow its own sources rather than my own assumptions. The book rests mainly on what Maheshwari families and the samaj have written down themselves, and on the Mahasabha's account of its own history. Where those sources stand alone or disagree, the chapter says so.

No book can hold every family's way. Each chapter ends with questions to ask your elders, with space to write their answers. Please use it. Add your family's version, the songs your grandmother sang, the step your pandit does differently. If something here does not match what your family knows, I would like to hear it; the details are on the About the author page.

On the day, the tradition of your family and of your family pandit always comes first. This book is here to help you understand it, not to replace it.

Jai Mahesh.

Arun Agrawal

Acknowledgements

My first thanks go to the Maheshwari elders and families whose memory and written records carry these customs. Two community sources stand behind almost every chapter: the written manual in which a Mumbai Maheshwari family set down its wedding practice, rite by rite and song by song, so that others could learn it, and the ritual list compiled by the Maheshwari Samaj Ludhiana. Without the care of the people who wrote these down, this book could not have been written.

I am grateful to the generations of Maheshwari women whose wedding songs kept the customs alive long before anyone put them on paper, and who still sing the five songs to the gods before every rite. I am grateful too to the family pandits who keep the rites going and who adapt them, wedding after wedding, to each family's own way.

This book was written with Claude.ai, the AI assistant made by Anthropic, as my co-author. Claude.ai helped me research the rituals and the old texts behind them, organise them in the order they happen, draft the chapters and draw the illustrations, all under my direction. The choices about what the book says, and the responsibility for any errors in it, are mine.

Arun Agrawal

How to read this book

You do not have to read this book from first page to last. Most readers will turn to the rituals they are part of, or to the one happening tomorrow.

It begins with Part 0: who the Maheshwaris are, why a wedding has rituals at all, and a table of the whole wedding week. Then come thirty-three ritual chapters in five Parts, in the order they usually happen: The Promise, Opening the Home, The Celebrations, The Wedding Day and The New Beginning. Each Part ends with a page of common questions. For the whole wedding on two pages, see Every ritual in brief.

How each chapter is laid out

Every ritual chapter follows the same pattern, so you always know where to look.

- **In one minute:** a short box that says what the ritual is for.
- **At a glance:** when it happens, who leads it, where it takes place and which theme it belongs to. Where a song for the moment is recorded, its first line is given here.
- **What happens:** the sequence, in plain numbered steps.
- **Why we do it:** the meaning, with the sceptic's doubts answered first. Where no source records a reason, the chapter says so.
- **Roots:** where the ritual comes from, with a label explained below.
- **In some families:** how practice differs.
- **Your part in it:** small, concrete things the bride, groom, siblings and cousins can do.
- **Ask your elders:** two questions for your parents or grandparents, with space for their answers. Filled in, they record your family's way.

A few chapters add a box, What the guests see, on what is really happening behind a puzzling moment.

The Roots labels

Each chapter carries one Roots label, or two where needed.

- **Vedic rite:** found in the Grihya Sutras (above all the Paraskara Grihya Sutra) or the Rigveda's wedding hymn. The fire rounds and the saptapadi are examples.
- **Shastric or Puranic rite:** laid down in later Dharmashastra, the Puranas or the pandit's wedding manual. Ganesh puja and the sindoor are examples.
- **Community custom:** Maheshwari, Marwari or wider Rajasthani practice, carried by families and the women's songs. The Battisi, the Mayra and the Thaledi are examples.
- **Protective or folk belief:** done to keep away nazar and misfortune. The kankan dora and the lunrai of salt and mustard are examples.

One rule matters more than the labels themselves. A label says where a ritual comes from, not whether it matters. The Mama Phere is a community custom with no basis in the Sutras, and it is the most Maheshwari moment of the whole wedding. Please do not read "community custom" as "optional".

Reader markers and reading paths

The markers under each chapter title (Bride, Groom, Siblings) show who has a part in that ritual. These paths follow them.

- **Bride, Groom, or a sibling or cousin with a job to do:** read the chapters with your marker.
- **Mama, or the mother's side:** read chapters 6, 11, 14, 17, 21, 22 and 31. The mother's family carries a large share of a Maheshwari wedding.
- **Marrying in from another community:** start with Part 0, then read The Wedding Day.
- **In a hurry:** read only the In one minute box in each chapter.

The five themes

Almost every ritual serves one or two of five purposes, named in each At a glance box and explained in Part 0.

- **Blessing:** asking for the goodwill of God, the kuldevi, the ancestors and the elders.
- **Protection:** guarding the bride and groom during days the family has always treated as delicate.
- **Bonds between families:** tying two households, and their relatives, to each other, with the mother's side given a large part.
- **Consent and witness:** making the marriage public, agreed and seen.
- **Moving home:** the bride's passage from her parents' house to her new one.

Where this book's information comes from

There is no published Maheshwari Mahasabha wedding manual. This book rests on two detailed community sources (a Mumbai Maheshwari family's written manual, reetrivaz.in, whose roots are in Jaswantgarh in Nagaur district, and the Maheshwari Samaj Ludhiana's ritual list), a 1916 ethnographic record, the Mahasabha's own history, and the Paraskara Grihya Sutra. The chapters call these two "the family manual" and "the Ludhiana list" for short. Where they stand alone or disagree, the chapter says so. A detail found in only one source is marked in the text with words such as "one family manual records" or "in some families". The full list is on the Sources page.

Variations, and who decides

No two Maheshwari families do every ritual the same way. Families in the Rajasthan homeland, Maharashtra, Malwa, Punjab, Hyderabad and Kolkata differ in names, order and detail, and so do households in one city. The book describes what is common and marks the variations. If your family does something differently, your family is not wrong.

The book never tells you what you must do. It explains what each ritual means so that the choice is yours and your family's. On the day itself, the tradition of your family and of your family pandit prevails.

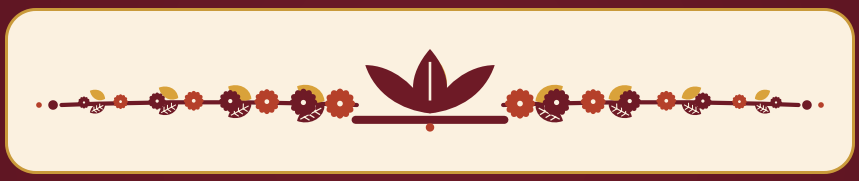
A word about gifts

Many rituals in this book involve gifts: at the Mudda Tika and the Chikni Kothli, at every festival before the wedding, at the Mayra, with the Bari, at the Pehravani and in the Kothli. They are tokens of goodwill between families.

Every gift described in this book is voluntary. Indian law, under the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, forbids giving, taking or demanding any such payment. A demand, open or hinted, turns a ritual of goodwill into something else entirely. The community has long worked on this itself: its first conference, in 1894, set limits on wedding expenses, and the Mahasabha has since spoken out against compelled gifts and against display. The chapters that follow do not return to this point, because it applies to all of them.

PART ZERO

Before the Rituals



Who the Maheshwaris are, why rituals matter at all, and the whole wedding week on two pages.

Who are the Maheshwaris?

Maheshwaris are a Vaishya trading community whose homeland is Rajasthan: Shekhawati, Marwar and the Bikaner country. The name comes from Mahesh, that is Shiva, and the community's greeting is "Jai Mahesh". Maheshwaris are counted among the Marwaris, and their weddings share much with other Marwari weddings, but some of their rites come straight out of the community's story of its beginning.

The story of the beginning

In the utpatti katha, as the community tells it, a Kshatriya king named Khadgalsen ruled Khandela, a town in today's Sikar district. Childless, he worshipped Mahadev and was blessed with a son, Sujan Kanwar. The grown prince rode out with seventy-two umravs, his nobles, and came to the Surya Kund, where rishis were performing a yagya. The riders disturbed it, and the rishis' curse turned them to stone.

Their wives, led by the prince's wife Chandravati, prayed for them. Parvati was moved and asked Mahesh to restore the men. He did, on one condition: that they lay down arms and take up trade. Their weapons dissolved in the kund, which is why, in several tellings, the place is called Lohargal. "You will all be called Maheshwari," Mahesh told them. The seventy-two became the founders of the seventy-two khaps, and five more Kshatriya families are said to have joined later.

But the husbands were now Vaishyas and the wives still Kshatriya women. In one telling they were told to circle their husbands three times; in others, to circle Parvati four times. The circuits made them Vaishya too and joined the marriages again. This is the story families remember at the Mama Phere (chapter 21).

The story is told in more than one way

The king is Khadgalsen, Khadaksen, Khadgsen or Khandelsen; one telling gives him twenty-four queens. The rishis are seven or six. All tellings say the prince disturbed the yagya; some add that he had come under Jain influence, and one says only that the hunt was noisy. The wives circle their husbands or a neem tree three times, or Parvati four times. Your family may tell it differently again.

The oldest outside record, R. V. Russell and Hira Lal's account of 1916 from the Central Provinces, tells of a Raja and seventy-two followers turned to stone by ascetics they had disturbed; when the wives came to commit sati by the stones, Shiva revived the men and told them to give up arms for trade. It has no Parvati, no circuits and no Mahesh Navami; those reach us through the community's own tellings. The core, though, was well established a century ago, far from Rajasthan. The earliest printed telling that scholars cite is Darak's history of 1923.

Lohargal and its Surya Kund are a real pilgrimage place in Jhunjhunu district, where the dissolving of weapons is also told of the Pandavas, and Khandela is a real town linked by tradition with several communities. Tradition gives the day as Jyeshtha Shukla Navami and counts the year in the Yudhishthir era. Historians do not agree on a date, and this book does not try to settle one.

The anthropologist Lawrence Babb reads it as the story of a group leaving violence behind and returning to society through trade. The community's founding act is the laying down of arms. It echoes in everyday Maheshwari speech: strict vegetarian homes speak of vegetables being arranged, "bandarna", not cut, and a shop is "extended", never closed.

Mahesh Navami, Mahesh and Parvati

Jyeshtha Shukla Navami, which falls in May or June, is kept as Mahesh Navami, the community's foundation day. It is marked with Shiva puja, prabhat pheris and processions, the Mahesh Vandana, bhajans, service camps and meals where everyone eats seated on one mat.

The Mahasabha honours Mahesh as the community's maker and Parvati as Mata Maheshwari. In daily devotion most households also follow a Vaishnav or Smarta tradition, so a Maheshwari home typically has Shiva, Thakurji and the kuldevi side by side. Russell wrote in 1916 that Maheshwaris were "Vaishnava by sect". Others reply that the community is Shaiva by its very origin. This book does not take a side.

Khaps, gotras and the marriage rule

A khap is the clan descended, in tradition, from one of the seventy-two umravs; its name is usually the surname. A gotra is the rishi name attached to a khap, recited at the Varana and the kanyadaan. Several khaps share a gotra: Birla, Baldwa, Biyani and Jaju are all Balans; Rathi, Totla and Kankani are Kapilans. Khaps divide further into up-khaps or nakhs.

Seventy-two is the number in every telling, but lists printed today run to between seventy-seven and eighty-five names, because families joined later and names divided. Well-attested khaps include Ajmera, Baheti, Bajaj, Biyani, Birla, Chandak, Daga, Darak, Dhoot, Kabra, Lahoti, Malpani, Mundhra, Rathi, Sarda, Somani and Tapadia. Lists differ, and some popular ones wrongly include Oswal or Khandelwal names.

Maheshwaris do not marry within their own khap or gotra. One community journal records that the mamas' khaps were once avoided too, and no source settles whether the rule goes by khap name or rishi gotra. In most families today the rule is one's own khap; some elders remember a wider rule; ask yours. The rule is about lineage, and this book makes no biological claim for it.

Some twenty-eight regional sections, such as Jaisalmeri, Bikaneri, Dhakar and Kolwar, once did not intermarry. The conferences of 1894 and 1908 worked to end this, and in 1924 a Mahasabha commission found Kolwar Maheshwaris to be Maheshwaris in full, free to marry within the community.

The kuldevi

Maheshwaris have no single kuldevi. Each khap has its own, almost always the goddess of a Rajasthani shrine: Sachiyay Mata of Osian for many khaps, and Naganechi, Chavanda, Ashapura, Jeen Mata and Hinglaj for others. The kuldevi passes down the father's line, and a bride takes her husband's at marriage. Online tables differ, so your family's knowledge prevails (chapter 33).

The Mahasabha

Community organisation began at Ajmer in 1891. The first conference, at Saharanpur in 1894, called for marriage across regional sections, limits on wedding and funeral spending, an end to taking money for a daughter, and minimum marriage ages of fourteen for a girl and eighteen for a boy, before the law of the land caught up. The Mahasabha in its continuous form dates from the Amravati session of 1908, and its present name from Calcutta in 1922; it is headquartered at Nagpur. Its emblem is a white lotus of nine petals bearing Mahesh in linga form, with a three-leaved bilva below for service, sacrifice and right conduct. Later sessions banned social boycott and founded the Mahila Parishad (1927), spoke against purdah (1929), urged that the ghunghat be given up (1934), accepted widow remarriage (1931 and 1940), and opposed the giving and taking of wedding gifts under compulsion (1946). More recently it and local samaj bodies have discouraged display at weddings.

Where Maheshwaris live

Families moved with Marwari trade to Hyderabad, Bombay, Berar and Nagpur, and Calcutta. Today about 160 Maheshwari bhawans stand across India, most in Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Malwa and West Bengal. The community's own estimates put its numbers at between one and three million worldwide.

When one partner is not Maheshwari

The rituals in this book can be done, and often are, when one partner is not Maheshwari. The pandit adapts the Varana and other details, and the two

families agree which customs to keep.

Why rituals at all?

A registrar can marry two people in ten minutes with a signature and two witnesses. A Maheshwari wedding runs from the Nandimukh, days or weeks before, to the Jaat, weeks after, and involves hundreds of people. What is all the rest for?

The short answer is that a Maheshwari wedding was never only about two people. It is about two families, with all their relatives, agreeing to treat each other as their own. A signature records a marriage. The rituals build the relationships around it. Read through all thirty-three chapters and five purposes come up again and again. Each chapter names one or two of them.

Blessing

Before anything new begins, the family asks for goodwill. The Nandimukh honours the ancestors first. At the Sava Pujan Ganesh is invoked, and a small boy of the family becomes Vinayak, Ganesh's presence beside the bride or groom through every rite. At every singing session the women begin with five songs to the gods: Vinayak, Balaji, Shyamji, Mataji and the Pitarji. Before the wedding the bride and the groom each worship Gangaur, Gauri with Isar, the divine married pair. At the end the couple thank Ganesh with churma and go on Jaat to the family's gods.

Protection

The days before a wedding were always treated as delicate. In the Baan the bride or groom is kept at home, with salt, coal and a silver ring set before them. The kankan dora, with its iron, cowrie and lac, goes on wrist and ankle. Salt and mustard are waved at the door as lunrai, a small girl rides behind the groom on the mare waving her own bundle, and at the toran neem and a rattle guard him. Whatever one thinks of nazar, the care these customs show is real.

Bonds between families

The mother's side carries more of a Maheshwari wedding than of most. The mother goes home with thirty-two of everything to invite her brothers in the Battisi. They come for the Mayra with the wedding clothes and the ivory chuda. The mama lifts the bride or groom off the seat at the Lakh, and leads the bride around the groom in the Mama Phere. At the fire her brother fills her hands with puffed rice. At the Pehravani the bride's elders seat her on her mother-in-law's lap.

Consent and witness

A marriage has to be agreed and it has to be seen. The Sagai is a public promise. At the Varana both families' pandits announce the two gotras and three generations of names aloud, three times each. The fire witnesses the four rounds and the seven steps. Then the bride moves from the groom's right to his left: from that moment she sits as his wife.

Moving home

For the bride the wedding means leaving the house she grew up in. At the Vidai a coconut goes under the car's wheel and sixteen rotis travel tied to her trunk. At her new door the groom parts seven thalis with his katar and she lifts them without a sound for her mother-in-law; she draws coins from the Kothli. Then her brother fetches her home for the Manda Jhankna: she has not been lost to either house.

The shape of a Maheshwari wedding

Set beside other Marwari weddings, the Maheshwari sequence has, in this book's reading, three features of its own. First, a long opening of named rites at home, in which the women's rites and songs are the main event, with the Vinayak boy and the Maya, the household's wedding shrine on the wall, as fixed points. Second, a wedding-day core of three circuits outside and four rounds at the fire, with the groom's katar at the toran and again at his own

threshold. Third, a longer and more formal welcome at the groom's home, ending with the ivory chuda changed for lac and the Jaat.

Families who tell the Kshatriya origin story see the katar and the four rounds in its light, and the Rajput wedding also takes four rounds at the fire with the bride leading three. And if you wonder where Mahesh is in all this, he is present in two places: in the Gangaur puja, which honours Shiva's own household, and in the Mama Phere, which carries the story of how he and Parvati restored the first Maheshwari marriages.

Doing them with understanding

None of this means every ritual must be kept exactly as it was. Families have always adapted, and the Mahasabha itself has asked them to. What this book hopes for is that the adapting is done with knowledge. A family that knows what the Mayra or the kankan dora is for can decide what to keep and what to shorten for good reasons, not out of impatience. And a young couple who know what a ritual means usually find they want to take part in it properly.

The wedding week at a glance

This table lists every ritual in the book in the order it usually happens. Timings are typical, not fixed: many families combine some rituals, move others or leave some out. Your family and your pandit will set the actual order.

Ritual	When	Where	Who leads
Part 1: The Promise			
1. Sagai and Rokna: the public promise	Months before	Both, now often one venue	Elders of each side
2. Mudda Tika and Chikni Kothli: the two tilak visits	After Sagai	Groom's home; then bride's	Bride's brother; groom's women
3. The months between: festival negs and the invitations	Every festival until the wedding; cards 3 months and 1 month before	Both	Both households
Part 2: Opening the Home			
4. Nandimukh: the ancestors first	About 10 days before	Both	Pandit with the parents
5. The songs: five to the gods first	Every singing session from Battisi onwards	Both	Women of the house
6. Battisi Nyotna: inviting the mother's brothers	Days before the Mayra	Mother's natal home	The mother
7. Vivah Hath and Moong Bikherna: the house enters the wedding	5, 7 or 11 days before	Both	Women of the house; bua or sister
8. Sava Pujan, the Vinayak boy and the lagan	5 to 21 days before; now often with the Baan	Both	Pandit; eldest of the house
9. Baan and Tani: the confinement and the cord	Days before; now with the Sava Pujan	Both	Pandit; parents; elder women
10. The wedding kitchen: Dhan Rolna, Chak Puja and Moongdhana	Days before	Both	Mother and daughters-in-law
11. Mayra and Bir Bhojan: the mother's brothers arrive	Wedding week	Both, separately	Mother's brothers
Part 3: The Celebrations			

Ritual	When	Where	Who leads
12. Mehendi	After the Sava Pujan or Baan	Both	Women; mehendi from the groom's side
13. Banori, Sanjha and Sankadi: the evenings and the night before	Evenings after the Baan; night before; dawn of the wedding day	Both	Family; a Brahmin; women of the house
14. Pithi, Jhol and Lakh: turmeric, curd and the wish for plenty	Wedding morning or the day before	Both	Suhagins; father; mama
15. Kankan Dora, the Maya and Gangaur: the thread, the shrine and Gauri	After Pithi	Both	Pandit; seven suhagins
16. Bari, Stambh Ropan and Kanyaval: the groom's house at the bride's door	Wedding morning	Bride's home	Groom's elders or jamai; bride's parents
Part 4: The Wedding Day			
17. Beend Raja: dressing, Ghodi Puja and Nikasi	Wedding day, before the baraat	Groom's home	Mother; sister or bua; mama; jamais
18. Varana: the gotra spoken aloud	Before Dhukav, or at the mandap	Groom's lodging or venue	Both pandits; bride's parents
19. Dhukav and Toran: the groom at the door	Baraat arrives	Venue	Groom; bride's mother and women
20. Suvali and Varmala: the garlands	Wedding evening	Venue	Bride and groom; her sister or friend
21. Mama Phere: the circuits outside	Straight after the Varmala	Stage or door	Bride's mama
22. Kanyadaan, Gathjoda and Hathleva	At the mandap	Venue	Pandit; bride's parents; mama
23. Lajahoma, the stone and the four fire rounds	At the mandap	Venue	Pandit; bride's brother
24. Saptapadi, Dhruva darshan and Sindoor	At the mandap	Venue	Pandit; bride and groom
25. After the pheras: Suhag-bidi, Joota Chhupai and Bada Bhat	After the pheras	Venue	Bride's women; siblings; both households
26. Pehravani, Sir-gunthi and Thali Puja: the bride's side honours the groom's	After the feast	Venue	Bride's elders; bua; pandit
Part 5: The New Beginning			
27. Vidai	Leaving the bride's home	Venue or bride's home	Bride's mother and women

Ritual	When	Where	Who leads
28. Vadhu Pravesh and Thaledi: the seven thalis	Arrival	Groom's home	Groom's sisters; mother
29. Suhag Thal, Kothli and Munh Dikhai: the house meets its bride	First days	Groom's home	Senior women; eldest of the house
30. Juva-jui and the Kankan Dora untied: the games	Next day	Bride's home, then groom's	Bhabhis and sisters
31. Kanwar Kaleva and Manda Jhankna: the bride's home calls	Next day; one or two days after	Bride's home	Bride's women and brother
32. Maya Uthana, Ganesh's churma and the Sikh: closing the house	A good day after	Groom's home; Ganesh temple; bride's home	Groom's parents; the couple
33. The Chuda and the Gathjode ki Jaat	7, 11 or 40 days after; a good season	Groom's home; family shrines	Mother-in-law; pandit; the couple

PART ONE

The Promise



The two families give their word, the tilak visits are made, and the months between carry gifts and invitations.

Sagai and Rokna · Mudda Tika and Chikni Kothli · The months between

CHAPTER 1

Sagai and Rokna: the public promise

सगाई, रोकना

BRIDE GROOM SIBLINGS



IN ONE MINUTE

Sagai is the day the two families say in front of witnesses that the search is over. Rokna, from rokna, to stop, names the same promise: each side stops looking. Traditionally there were two parts, one at each home, where the visiting side marked the forehead and filled the lap (khol) of the girl or the boy. Today both are usually done together at one venue, and a ring exchange has been added.

WHEN	Once the match is settled, on a good day; usually months before the wedding
WHO LEADS	The elders of each side
WHERE	Traditionally each home in turn; now usually one venue
THEME	Bonds between families; Consent and witness

What happens

1. A good day is chosen once the match is settled. Traditionally the ceremony had two parts, called dastoors, held at the two homes.
2. At the girl's home, the boy's side does her tilak, garlands her and gives her jewellery. They fill her khol, the lap of her sari or odhni held open, with coins, a coconut and dry fruit, and give her saris.
3. At the boy's home, an elder of the girl's family does his tilak, garlands him, fills his khol and gives him clothes and a watch.
4. Today, as a Mumbai Maheshwari family's written manual, reetrivaz.in, records (the family manual, as this book calls it from here on), both sides usually gather in one place and do the two dastoors together.
5. The manual describes the ring exchange as a present-day practice, added on top of the Rokna dastoor.
6. From this first rite until the Saptapadi, the girl sits at the boy's right. She moves to his left only when the seven steps are complete (chapter 24).

Why we do it

By the time of a Sagai the couple have usually said yes to each other, sometimes months earlier. What the ceremony adds is the families' yes, said in front of witnesses. Until this point either side could withdraw quietly. After it both circles of relatives know, and the old word Rokna says what that means: the search has stopped.

The two dastoors make the promise run both ways. Each family goes to the other's home, or in the one-venue form takes its turn, and honours the child of

that house. Neither side only receives. A promise made by one side alone is a request; made by both, in each other's presence, it is an agreement.

The gestures are the ordinary Hindu marks of honour. Tilak is the mark put on an honoured guest. Filling the khol is one of the oldest Indian pictures of plenty: the visiting family wishes that the life of this girl or boy will be full. Maheshwari families call it khol bharna; readers of the Agarwal edition will know it as godh bharai, or filling the jholi. The coconut is the standard offering at the start of any good work.

The coconut also has a recorded history in this community. In 1916 Russell and Hiralal, describing the Maheshwaris of the Central Provinces, noted "the Rajput custom of sending a cocoa-nut as a symbol of a proposal of marriage". The coconut as a sign of serious intent between two Maheshwari families is at least a century old.

The ring is the newest part. The family manual calls it a present-day practice, and the older Marwari Sagai had no ring at all: the tilak, the gifts and the filled lap did the work. A Sagai without rings is the older form, not an incomplete one.

ROOTS **Community custom**

Neither Sagai nor Rokna appears in the Grihya Sutras. Both belong to Maheshwari and wider Marwari family practice, and both Maheshwari sources used in this book describe the two dastoors.

In some families

Some families still hold the two dastoors on separate days, each at the home of the side being honoured. Most now combine them, since one gathering is easier for travelling relatives.

The seating is not settled everywhere. The Maheshwari Samaj Ludhiana's ritual list says that nowadays the girl is seated on the boy's left, but that by the old rites she sat on his right until the pheras. If the photographer or the stage

manager arranges the couple, it helps to have agreed the side with the pandit beforehand.

A note for readers who know the Agarwal edition: it mentions that Sagai is sometimes called Mudda Tikka in Rajasthani usage. In the Maheshwari family manual Mudda Tika is a separate rite, the bride's brother's visit to the groom (chapter 2). An older relative who says Mudda Tika may mean that visit, not the engagement.

What goes into the khol, and whether a watch or another gift is given to the boy, varies from house to house.

Your part in it

- **Bride:** Hold the khol open firmly until the women have finished; a dropped coconut is the one thing everyone remembers. Learn the names and relations of the groom's elders before the day.
- **Groom:** Your khol is filled too. Keep it steady and let the elders take their time. Remember that your bride sits on your right until the Saptapadi (chapter 24).
- **Siblings and cousins:** Be the person who introduces the two families to each other by name and relation. Keep a list of who gave what.

Ask your elders

1. *At your own Sagai, were the two dastoors held at the two homes on different days, and what went into the khol?*

2. *In our family, does the bride sit on the groom's right until the seven steps, or on his left from the start?*

CHAPTER 2

Mudda Tika and Chikni Kothli: the two tilak visits

मुद्दा टीका, चीकणी कोथली

GROOM BRIDE SIBLINGS



IN ONE MINUTE

In the Maheshwari sequence the tilak is not folded into the engagement; it is a visit of its own. At Mudda Tika the bride's brother goes to the groom's home with gifts and laddoos counted for every relative, marks the groom's forehead and fills his lap. At Chikni Kothli four or five women of the groom's family return the visit to the bride. Two visits, in two directions, each to the other's house.

WHEN	After the Sagai, before the wedding
WHO LEADS	The bride's brother (in some homes an elder); then the groom's sister, bua and bhabhi
WHERE	The groom's home; then the bride's home
THEME	Bonds between families; Blessing

What happens

1. Mudda Tika: the bride's brother and family go to the groom's home with clothes, jewellery, a silver cup of dry fruit, envelopes and the mudda laddoos, counted by the number of the groom's relatives.
2. The pandit does a Ganesh puja first.
3. The brother does the groom's tilak (in some homes an elder of the family does it), garlands him and fills his khol.
4. The groom's sister or bua does the aarta.
5. The brother does uvari: he circles money over the groom's head, and the money goes to the barber or a servant of the house. It is not kept.
6. Chikni Kothli: on another day four or five women of the groom's side, his sister, bua and bhabhi, visit the bride.
7. After a Ganesh puja they do her tilak, garland her, give her jewellery, fill her khol and give her four saris and a purse.

Why we do it

The family manual, the main source for both visits, gives them no meaning beyond shagun. What follows is what the rites themselves show.

Start with who goes. Mudda Tika is led by the bride's brother, not her father. It is his first formal act toward the man his sister will marry, done in that man's house, in front of his relatives. Her brother will also pour puffed rice into his sister's hands at the fire (chapter 23). Here, months earlier, he is the one who greets the groom.

The laddoos make a quiet point. Because they are counted by the number of the groom's relatives, nobody in that household is left out. The bride's side has taken the trouble to learn who is in it.

Then look at who returns the visit. Chikni Kothli is carried by the groom's women, the sister, bua and bhabhi who will be closest to the bride in her new home. Their filling her khol mirrors the brother filling the groom's. Between them the two visits do for the tilak what the two dastoors did for the Sagai (chapter 1): each side goes to the other.

Uvari, as the family manual spells it, is the gesture seen across Rajasthan of circling money over someone's head to draw away nazar, the evil eye. That is why the money is passed on rather than kept. You will see it again at the Mayra and before the groom rides out.

A word on scale. The Akhil Bharatvarshiya Maheshwari Mahasabha lists "mudda pratha" among the customs it has worked to remove. Its page does not define the term, and this book takes it to mean the Tika gifts taken to excess. Read that way, the objection was to the excess, not to a brother arriving with a tray of laddoos and a tilak.

ROOTS **Community custom**

Neither visit is in the Grihya Sutras. The Tika and the Chikni Kothli are recorded in the standard Rajasthani lexicon; the name Mudda Tika, and the detail of both visits, come from one family manual.

In some families

In some homes an elder of the bride's family, rather than her brother, does the tilak at Mudda Tika. The family manual records both.

The Rajasthani lexicon defines Chikni Kothli as the gifts and sweets sent by the groom's side to the bride after the engagement, and gives another name for it, Raawni God Bharna. In some families the gifts are sent rather than carried by a party of women.

Readers who know the Agarwal edition should not assume the same pattern. There, Tilak sits beside the Roka and is led by the bride's father or brother. In the Maheshwari manual it is a separate occasion, and its return visit has a name of its own.

How many laddoos, what kind, and what else travels with them varies with every family.

Your part in it

- **Groom:** Sit still while the brother does the tilak and let him take his time; he may be nervous. Greet him properly, and touch the feet of any of the bride's elders who come with him.
- **Bride's brother:** This rite is yours. Ask the groom's family for the number of relatives in good time so the laddoos can be counted, and practise the tilak: thumb in roli, one firm upward stroke.
- **Bride:** At Chikni Kothli, hold the khol open until the women have finished. Learn the names of the sister, bua and bhabhi who come; they are your first friends in the new house.
- **Groom's sister or bua:** You do the aarta at Mudda Tika and lead the visit at Chikni Kothli.

Ask your elders

1. *Was Mudda Tika a separate day at your wedding, and who did the tilak, a brother or an elder?*

2. *How many mudda laddoos were made, and how was the count of relatives decided?*

CHAPTER 3

The months between: festival negs and the invitations

त्योहार के नेग, सिंजारा, मनुहार पत्रिका

BRIDE GROOM SIBLINGS



IN ONE MINUTE

Between the Sagai and the wedding, every festival becomes an occasion for the two families. The girl's side sends the jamai clothes and sweets; the boy's side sends the bahu bright clothes and mehendi for the Sinjaras of Teej and Gangaur. In the same months the invitations go out: the manuhar patrika about three months ahead, so relatives can book their travel, and the kumkum patrika about one month ahead.

WHEN	Every festival from the Sagai to the wedding; cards about three months and one month before
WHO LEADS	Both households
WHERE	Gifts travel between the two homes
THEME	Bonds between families

What happens

1. At each festival between the Sagai and the wedding (Diwali, Sankranti, Holi, Teej, Gangaur, Chandni Chauth) gifts cross between the two homes. Both Maheshwari sources used in this book treat this as a stage of the wedding in its own right.
2. The girl's side sends the jamai clothes and sweets. The family manual names a silver pichkari and saffron at Holi, and ghevar and feeni at Sankranti.
3. The boy's side sends the bahu clothes in bright, happy colours (red, yellow, saffron) and mehendi for the two Sinjaras, at Teej and at Gangaur.
4. About three months before the wedding the manuhar patrika goes out, the early invitation, so that relatives in other cities can book trains in time.
5. About a month before, the kumkum patrika follows: the formal card.
6. Some families still send the old formal lagan patrika, addressed from every male of the bride's side to every male of the groom's side. The family manual says this is no longer the general custom.

Why we do it

A betrothal can last months, sometimes a year. In that time two families who may barely know each other have to become relatives, and the festival negs are how they practise. Each festival gives one side a reason to think of the other's child, pack something and send it. By the wedding the jamai has been looked after at Holi, and the bahu has worn the colours her future house chose for her at Teej.

The directions match the tilak visits of chapter 2. The girl's family looks after the man who will be their jamai; the boy's family looks after the girl who will be their bahu. Neither side only gives or only receives, and neither has to wait for the wedding to start behaving like family.

The Sinjara gift matters most to the bride. The mehendi sent by the groom's household for Teej and Gangaur is its first gift for her hands. The Gaur ka Sinjara also ties the engagement to Gangaur, the worship of Gauri that is among the Maheshwari community's great festivals, and that the bride will perform again with seven married women just before her wedding (chapter 15).

The two invitations are plain good sense. The family manual says outright that the manuhar patrika goes early so that outstation relatives can book their travel. Manuhar is the Rajasthani word for a warm, pressing request: the first card is the family asking you, insistently, to come. The kumkum patrika, marked with kumkum, is the auspicious card that follows.

The lagan itself, the fixed hour of the wedding, belongs to a later rite. In the family manual it is written at the Sava Pujan (chapter 8) and carried to the groom at the Varana (chapter 18). The cards of these months announce the wedding; they do not fix it.

ROOTS **Community custom**

The festival exchanges and the invitation cards are Marwari household practice, not part of the priestly texts. Both Maheshwari sources record the exchanges; the timing of the two cards is one family manual's.

In some families

The Maheshwari Samaj Ludhiana's ritual list adds Kajli Teej to the festivals, has the girl's side send mangoes and charoli, and names sweets at Sankranti and Holi. The family manual adds a Sinjara at Chandni Chauth. Some families now send something on birthdays as well.

Many Rajasthani families are said to send their first wedding card to Ranthambhor Ganesh, the great Ganesh shrine of Rajasthan, before any person receives one. Others offer the first card at their own family temple. This is a widely reported custom rather than one the Maheshwari sources describe.

The size of the negs is for each family. A box of sweets at Sankranti carries the same meaning as a tray of clothes, and when the wedding is a year away families often keep the later festivals small.

Your part in it

- **Bride:** The Sinjara clothes and mehendi are meant to be worn. Wear them for the festival and let the groom's family see you did.
- **Groom:** The Holi pichkari and the Sankranti ghevar come with your future in-laws' attention. A call to thank them is noticed.
- **Siblings and cousins:** Build the address list early, with the outstation relatives first, so the manuhar patrika can go out three months ahead. Keep a note of what came at each festival.

Ask your elders

1. *Which festivals carried negs between your engagement and your wedding, and what came for you?*

2. *Does our family send the first wedding card to Ranthambhor Ganesh, or to a temple of our own?*

Common questions

Do we need a ring?

Not for the tradition. A Mumbai Maheshwari family's written manual, reetrivaz.in, calls the ring exchange a present-day practice added to the Rokna, and the older Marwari Sagai had none: the tilak, the gifts and the filled khol did the work. Families who leave the ring out are following the older form.

Who gives first?

At the Sagai the sources describe two dastoors, one by each side, and today they are usually done together, so neither side clearly goes first. With the tilak visits the order is plain: the bride's brother goes to the groom at Mudda Tika, and the groom's women return the visit at Chikni Kothli. What matters is that both directions are covered.

What is the difference between Mudda Tika and Sagai?

Sagai is the engagement itself, the public promise between the two families. Mudda Tika comes after it: the bride's brother's visit to the groom's home with laddoos and gifts, to mark his forehead. Some older relatives, and the Agarwal edition, use "Mudda Tikka" loosely for the engagement, so it helps to ask which one a relative means.

The wedding is a year away. Must the festival negs continue all year?

Both Maheshwari sources describe exchanges at every festival between the Sagai and the wedding, but nothing fixes their size. Many families keep the later ones small: a box of sweets, a set of clothes at Teej. The two families can agree this between themselves; the gesture is what carries the meaning.

When should the cards go out?

The family manual sends the manuhar patrika about three months ahead, so that relatives in other cities can book their travel, and the kumkum patrika about a month ahead. With today's travel and venues, three months is still a sensible lead for anyone coming from far away.

What if one partner is not Maheshwari?

The rites in these chapters can be done, and often are, when one partner comes from another community. The pandit adapts the details, and the other family can be told in advance what each visit means. The shape of the promise, each side honouring the other's child in front of witnesses, works for any two families.

PART TWO

Opening the Home



The ancestors are honoured, the songs begin, the mother's brothers are called and the house enters the wedding.

Nandimukh · The songs · Battisi Nyotna · Vivah Hath and Moong Bikherna · Sava Pujan, the Vinayak boy and the lagan · Baan and Tani · The wedding kitchen · Mayra and Bir Bhojan

CHAPTER 4

Nandimukh: the ancestors first

नान्दीमुख

BRIDE GROOM



IN ONE MINUTE

About ten days before the wedding, the pandit sits with the parents and performs Nandimukh, a shraddh for the family's ancestors. Beginning a wedding with a rite for the departed sounds strange, but this is a shraddh for a happy occasion, not a rite of mourning. A Mumbai Maheshwari family's written manual, reetrivaz.in, gives its purpose plainly: once Nandimukh is done, a birth or a death in the family cannot halt the wedding.

WHEN	About ten days before the muhurat; about a week in some homes
WHO LEADS	The pandit, with the parents or the couple who will sit for the kanyadaan
WHERE	At each home, for its own ancestors
THEME	Blessing; Protection

What happens

1. The pandit fixes the day, about ten days before the wedding muhurat. In some homes it is about a week before.
2. The parents sit before the pandit. On the bride's side, if another couple of the family will sit for the kanyadaan, it is that couple who sit.
3. In the Maheshwari Samaj Ludhiana's ritual list, Nandimukh follows the Ganesh puja.
4. The pandit performs the Nandi shraddh from his paddhati, making offerings to the family's ancestors and asking their blessing on the wedding to come.
5. From this point, the family manual records, a birth or a death in the family no longer brings sutak on the wedding, and the wedding goes ahead.

Why we do it

Sutak is the key to this rite. In Hindu household practice a birth or a death in the family brings a period of ritual impurity, sutak, during which auspicious ceremonies are not performed. A wedding is planned months ahead: halls are booked, relatives travel, cards have gone out. The death of an elderly grandparent in the final week could otherwise put everything off.

The family manual says this without any ceremony. A death can come at any time, it notes, so Nandimukh is done so that the auspicious work is not obstructed; it adds that the same is done ten days before a griha pravesh or any other auspicious work. The Ludhiana list gives the same reason in fewer words: it is done "so that no mishaps take place". This is the community's own explanation, written down by two separate sources.

Behind the practical answer stands an older one. Nandimukh is the abhyudayik shraddh, the shraddh for a time of increase and good fortune, which the pandit's paddhati places before every samskara, the rites that mark a life, and not only before weddings. The name is usually explained as "joyful-faced": the ancestors are invoked as glad witnesses to the family's good news,

not as the grieving dead. In the paddhati barley takes the place of the black til used in a shraddh for the dead, a small sign that this is a rite of increase.

Put simply, the family tells its ancestors first. Before Ganesh is seated with the Vinayak boy, before the songs and the turmeric, the people who made this family are asked to bless its next generation. The Pitarji song says the same later (chapter 5). Once the ancestors have been asked, the family treats the wedding as under way, and a birth or death in the household cannot call it back.

The rite has limits worth stating. It keeps sutak from stopping the wedding; it does not tell a grieving family how to feel or what else to change. If a death does occur after Nandimukh, how the family marks it during the wedding days is a matter for your pandit and your elders.

ROOTS **Shastric or Puranic rite**

Nandimukh is the abhyudayik shraddh that the paddhatis place before every samskara. Its stated purpose here, keeping sutak from halting the wedding, is recorded in both Maheshwari sources used in this book.

In some families

The family manual gives ten days before the muhurat and notes that some homes do it about a week before. The Ludhiana list places it straight after the Ganesh puja.

No written source describes regional differences in how Maheshwari families keep it. Whether yours does it at home or at the pandit's, and on what day, is a question for your elders.

Your part in it

- **Bride and groom:** Learn the names of your father's father and his father before the day. The pandit may ask for them, and you will need three generations again at the Varana (chapter 18).

- **Bride and groom:** Even if only your parents sit for the rite, try to be in the room. It is the one ceremony in the wedding addressed to the people who are not there.

Ask your elders

1. *When was Nandimukh done before your own wedding, and who sat for it?*

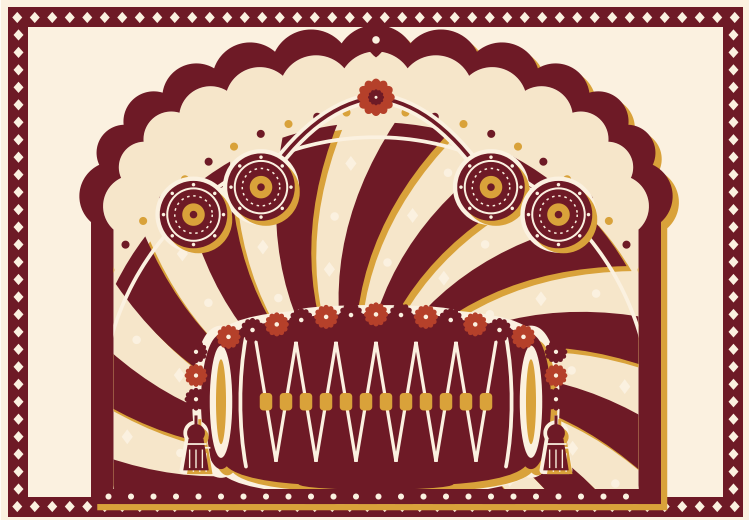
2. *Has our family ever had a birth or a death between Nandimukh and a wedding, and what did the family do?*

CHAPTER 5

The songs: five to the gods first

गीत: देवी-देवताओं के पांच गीत, बन्ना-बन्नी

BRIDE GROOM SIBLINGS



IN ONE MINUTE

Neither Maheshwari source used in this book describes a separate Sangeet evening. The songs live inside the rites, and every singing session from the Battisi onwards follows one order: five songs to the gods first (Vinayak, Balaji, Shyamji, Mataji, Pitarji), then the songs of the occasion. A boy's session ends with the ghodi and the sevra, a girl's with the kaman. Learn the order here, and later chapters can simply name the song.

WHEN	Every singing session, from the Battisi onwards
WHO LEADS	The women of the house
WHERE	At each home
THEME	Blessing; Bonds between families
THE SONG FOR THIS MOMENT	"Kisa nagar syun aaiya o baba Dundala", to Vinayak, which opens every session

What happens

1. The women gather round the bride or groom, with a dholak. In the family manual (a Mumbai Maheshwari family's written manual, reetrivaz.in, which supplies every song title in this chapter) Brahmin women attend and are given envelopes.
2. The first song is to Vinayak, that is Ganesh: "Kisa nagar syun aaiya o baba Dundala". Dundala is the name the songs give him.
3. Then Balaji of Salasar ("Kathod to baja o Bajrang bajiya"), Shyamji of Khatu ("Dhan Khatu dhan Sanwala Shyamji"), Mataji ("Dungar syun Mataji utari") and Pitarji, the ancestors ("Utar dikhan syun o Gandhi ko aayo").
4. In the Mataji and Pitarji songs the family puts in its own members' names, verse by verse. A family that honours a Bhairun adds a Bhairunji song.
5. Then come the songs of the occasion: banna songs for the groom, banni songs for the bride, and the song of the rite in hand, such as the pithi song "Mhari haldi ro rang surang, nipaj Malve".
6. At the groom's home the session ends with the ghodi ("Indralok sun aai o raj ghodi") and the sevra ("Banna kaheri thari duvat lekhan"). At the bride's it ends with the kaman ("Banadi suhag mangan chali aap ra dada ra darbar").

Why we do it

The order is the point. Before anyone sings about the groom's mare or the bride's beauty, the house invites its gods and its departed, in a fixed sequence, every time. The family manual states the rule three times, and folklorists who have recorded Rajasthani women's singing note the same thing: the family deity comes first, and the order matters.

Look at who is invited. Ganesh, because every auspicious work begins with him. Balaji of Salasar and Shyamji of Khatu, two great shrines of Shekhawati. Mataji, the goddess of the family. Pitarji, the ancestors. The list maps one family's world, with roots in Marwar near the Shekhawati border. A family

from elsewhere may name a different Mataji or add its own Bhairun; the shape stays the same.

The names sung in verse by verse do something a printed song cannot. At each session the women sing the family's own dadaji, babaji, kakaji and mamaji into the song, the living and the departed together. A bride or groom sitting in the middle hears the family tree sung around them a dozen times before the wedding.

The ending tells you whose wedding it is. The ghodi and the sevra are the groom's mare and his wedding headdress: songs for the boy who will ride out. The kaman carries two senses. In folklore lists it is a protective song, a guard against charms; in the family manual's version the bride goes to her grandfather's court to ask for suhag. Protection and a plea for a happy marriage sit in one song. (The English given for song lines in this book is approximate; the originals are in Rajasthani.)

One thing readers of the Agarwal edition may look for and not find. Rajasthani weddings have sithne, teasing songs aimed at the other side. The family manual has none; its only teasing is the Thaledi mock-quarrel when the bride arrives (chapter 28) and an exchange between nanad and bhojai in the aarta song. Some families may have had sithne; the sources do not show them, so ask rather than assume.

ROOTS **Community custom**

The songs have no place in the pandit's rites. They belong to the women of the house and travel by memory; the order of five deity songs is stated in one family manual and matches what folklorists record across Rajasthan.

In some families

Banna songs call the groom rayjada and umrav, prince and noble. Some listeners hear in this an echo of the community's Kshatriya origin story. Whether the songs mean it, or simply use the old courtly words every Rajasthani wedding uses, is a question for your elders.

In some families the bride's women go to see the baraat's camp, singing the Jala song "Mhain to thara dera nirkhan aai o", roughly "I have come to look at your camp". The sources do not settle whether Maheshwari families still do it.

For anyone who wants to hear the songs, reetrivaz.in has an indexed collection of some two hundred geet with audio. The Rupayan Sansthan's field recordings from Jodhpur, Komal Kothari's collection, are on the Internet Archive; they cover many communities, not Maheshwaris alone.

Your part in it

- **Bride and groom:** Find out which Mataji and which ancestors your family names in the songs.
- **Siblings and cousins:** Record the older women singing, and write down the order of names they use in the Pitarji song. If anyone has a handwritten song copy, photograph every page.
- **Anyone planning a music evening:** Ask an elder to open it with the five deity songs.

Ask your elders

1. *Which Mataji and which ancestors does our family name in the songs, and in what order are they sung?*

2. *Are the five deity songs sung before every session in our house, and does anyone still keep a handwritten song copy?*

CHAPTER 6

Battisi Nyotna: inviting the mother's brothers

बत्तीसी न्यूतना, भात न्योतना

SIBLINGS



IN ONE MINUTE

Before her brothers come with the Mayra, the mother of the bride or groom goes to them. With mehendi on her hands and the women of her house singing, she visits her parents' home, seats each brother with his wife, does tilak and gives them thirty-two of everything: rupees, supari, cloves, cardamoms, almonds, chhuhara and patasa. This is the Battisi, the formal invitation to fill her Mayra. She is fed lapsi before she leaves.

WHEN	A good day before the Mayra
WHO LEADS	The mother of the bride or groom
WHERE	Her natal home (pihar)
THEME	Bonds between families
THE SONG FOR THIS MOMENT	"Kaga Re Keeji Beeraji Ne Jaay", the crow sent as messenger to the brother

What happens

1. The mother has mehendi put on her hands first.
2. With the women of her house she goes to her own natal home.
3. The five deity songs are sung (chapter 5), then the nyota songs of invitation, such as "Beero Bhat Bharan Ne Aavego" and "Kaga Re Keeji Beeraji Ne Jaay".
4. Each brother and his wife are seated together as a couple. The sister does tilak, feeds them sweets, gives the brother a gift and the bhabhi a blouse.
5. She gives her brothers thirty-two of each item: 32 rupees and 32 each of supari, cloves, cardamoms, almonds, chhuhara and patasa, with sava kilo of wheat and sava kilo of jaggery. Her cousins, the sons of her kaka, bua and mama, receive a coconut and an envelope.
6. From the wheat and jaggery, lapsi and badi ki sabzi are cooked, and the sister is fed.

Why we do it

No source explains the number thirty-two. Neither the family manual nor the Ludhiana list gives a reason, and this book will not invent one. The number gives the rite its name, and the record stops there.

What the rite shows is much clearer. The sister goes to her brothers, in person, at the house where she grew up, before they come to hers. The Mayra (chapter 11) is the brothers' great gift to her at her child's wedding. Battisi makes sure that gift is answered, not demanded: she asks with song, with gifts in her hands, and she gives first.

Then follow the wheat and jaggery. She brings them as part of her gift, and they come back to her cooked, as lapsi, served to her in her parents' house. For an afternoon she is again the daughter of that home, fed by it. The point the Agarwal edition makes about the Mayra holds here too: a married woman still has her parents' home behind her, and her brothers show up when it counts. Battisi is the day she goes home to ask.

Seating each brother with his wife matters as well. The bhabhi receives her own gift, and when the Mayra comes, brother and bhabhi will stand side by side on the chauki to receive the sister's welcome (chapter 11).

ROOTS **Community custom**

Battisi is shared across Rajasthan; Pareek Brahmin families sing songs of the same kind for inviting the brother. The Maheshwari form, with its thirty-two items, is recorded in both community sources used in this book.

In some families

The Ludhiana list gives 32 laddoos and 32 rupees, with betel, supari, almonds, cloves, cardamom, kharek and cashew, placed in the lap of the elder brother. It says the rite is done at the sister's parents' house, or just before the Mayra if that house is far away, which suits families whose pihar is now in another city.

Many families also call the day Bhat Nyotna. In the Agarwal edition the invitation is one line inside the Mayra chapter; in the Maheshwari sources it is a separate, named day with songs of its own. The family manual adds that when the sister leaves, her brothers give her tilak and a sari, and her husband, if he has come, tilak and an envelope.

Your part in it

- **Siblings and cousins of the bride or groom:** Go with your mother and carry the thali. Count the thirty-two of each item the day before and pack them in small bags, so nothing is counted in a hurry at your nani's door.

- **The mama's household:** The lapsi and badi ki sabzi are cooked in your kitchen from the wheat and jaggery she brings. Serving her yourselves is the whole point.
- **The mama's children:** Sit with your parents while your bua seats them. You are watching what a sister and a brother owe each other.

Ask your elders

1. *Was Battisi a separate day before your children's weddings, and what exactly went into the thirty-two?*

2. *Which nyota songs were sung, and does anyone remember the words of the crow song?*

CHAPTER 7

Vivah Hath and Moong Bikherna: the house enters the wedding

विवाह हाथ लेना, मूंग बिखेरना

BRIDE GROOM SIBLINGS



IN ONE MINUTE

A few days before the wedding, at a fixed hour, the bride or groom sits facing east and is marked with tilak and a moli thread. The mother and the daughters-in-law of the house then pick over a heap of green moong while the women sing. This is the day the household takes the wedding in hand. The family manual explains the moong in one line: may the house stay green and loving through the wedding.

WHEN	5, 7 or 11 days before the wedding, at a muhurat
WHO LEADS	The women of the house; the bua or sister does the tilak
WHERE	Both homes, separately
THEME	Blessing
THE SONG FOR THIS MOMENT	The five deity songs, then for a boy the ghodi songs ("Indralok sun aai o raj ghodi") and for a girl the kaman ("Banadi suhag mangan chali aap ra dada ra darbar")

What happens

1. At the muhurat the banda or bandi (the family manual's words for the groom and the bride) sits on a chauki facing east, and the women of the house sit around on a carpet.
2. The bua or a sister puts tilak on the forehead and ties moli on the wrist. The mouth is sweetened with gud.
3. The mother, or the eldest woman of the house, draws a swastik in roli on each of seven thalis.
4. Sava kilo of moong (one and a quarter kilos) is handed first to the mother and then to six daughters-in-law of the house, who pick it over.
5. The women sing the five songs to the gods first, then the songs of the occasion: banna songs, ghodi and finally sevra at a boy's house; banni songs and finally kaman at a girl's.
6. The Brahmin women who have come are given envelopes.

Why we do it

Picking over lentils is ordinary kitchen work that needs no muhurat. That is the point. The first act of the Maheshwari wedding is done by the women of the house, with their hands, on the food the house will cook. The manual puts it plainly: when the work of a wedding begins, moong is scattered first.

It also gives the reason in its own words, and it is a family's explanation rather than a scriptural one. Moong is green. A green land is a fertile land. As the

moong is green, so may we stay green and loving through our son's or daughter's wedding. A wedding crowds money worries and old family frictions into one house, and the wish is aimed squarely at that.

Notice who sits down: the mother, then six daughters-in-law, the same company of seven that will pass the grain at Dhan Rolna (chapter 10). The rite gathers the women who will carry the wedding and puts the first shared task in front of them before anything goes wrong.

Moong then keeps turning up. It goes under the chauki at the Sava Pujan (chapter 8), into the knot of the Gathjoda (chapter 22), into the thalis of the Thaledi and onto the leaf at the Thali Puja. The seven swastik thalis come back too, at the bride's entry into her new home (chapter 28). They begin here.

ROOTS **Community custom**

A Rajasthani household rite carried by the women and their songs. No priestly text prescribes it; the meaning given for the moong is the family manual's own.

In some families

The Maheshwari Samaj Ludhiana's ritual list has its own version: on the day of the Ganesh puja, four women take moong dal in their hands, and moong pakoras are cooked. The detail differs, but two distant sources agree that moong opens the wedding: good evidence of Maheshwari practice, not one family's habit.

Agarwal families know this stage as byah haath, the house taking the wedding in hand. In their practice it begins with the Ganesh puja and there is no moong rite. Here the household's entry into the wedding has a day and a ritual of its own.

Your part in it

- **Bride and groom:** Sit facing east and stay for the songs. This is the first rite in which you are the banda or bandi, and the women are singing about you.

- **Siblings:** Weigh out the sava kilo in advance and keep the seven swastik thalis together afterwards. Some of them are needed again.
- **Everyone:** Learn the five deity songs in order (chapter 5); they open every session from now on.

Ask your elders

1. *How many days before your wedding was Vivah Hath done, and who picked over the moong?*

2. *What was done with the moong afterwards, and do you remember any song sung only on this day?*

CHAPTER 8

Sava Pujan, the Vinayak boy and the lagan

सावा पूजन, विनायक, लग्न लेखन

BRIDE GROOM SIBLINGS



IN ONE MINUTE

Ganesh is invoked at both homes, and a small boy of the family is made Vinayak, understood as Ganesh's own form. From now on he sits at the right hand of the bride or groom and receives every rite first. At the bride's home the pandit writes the lagan on pink paper; at the groom's, turmeric rice is tied up for the men of the baraat. A kalash with the wedding card marks where the Maya will stand.

WHEN	5 to 21 days before the wedding in the older reckoning; today often on the same day as the Baan
WHO LEADS	The pandit, with the eldest man of the house; the bua or sister does the aarta
WHERE	Both homes, separately
THEME	Blessing; Protection

What happens

1. Two chaukis are set out, in the family manual's account: the Vinayak on the right, the bride or groom on the left. Moong and a rupee go under the chauki.
2. The pandit has the eldest of the house, the dada or baba, perform the Ganesh puja. The bua or a sister does the aarta.
3. A clay kalash with mango leaves and a coconut is placed where the Maya (the household's wedding shrine, chapter 15) will later be set up. The wedding card is tied to it with moli.
4. At a bride's wedding the pandit writes the lagan, the hour of the wedding, on pink paper, and it is kept with the kalash. At a groom's wedding peele chawal are made instead: rice rubbed with ghee and turmeric, tied in white cloth.
5. The women sing the five deity songs, then banna, ghodi and sevra for a boy, or banni and kaman for a girl.
6. The Mayardar, the mother's natal family, are formally invited to the wedding.

Why we do it

Almost every Hindu undertaking begins with Ganesh, the remover of obstacles, and a wedding is the largest most families attempt. The manual says so in its own terms: every auspicious work is a gift of divine grace, and Ganeshji and the family's own gods are worshipped at the start so that the wedding goes forward without hindrance. The Agarwal wedding shares this much.

What the Maheshwari wedding adds is the boy. An idol stays in its corner; a child seated at the right hand of the bride or groom goes everywhere they go. The manual describes him as understood to be Ganeshji's form, and the later rites take that literally. At the Pithi, the Jhol and the Lakh (chapter 14), the turmeric, the curd and the lakhdhan go to the Vinayak first and only then to the bride or groom. The remover of obstacles goes ahead of the couple at every step, until he is sent home with new clothes at the Gangaur puja (chapter 15).

The manual adds a rule: a real brother is never made Vinayak; a boy is chosen from the kaka's, baba's, bua's, sister's or mama's side. It gives no reason. The real brother, it may be noted, has his own part later, at the fire (chapter 23).

The two homes mark the lagan differently. The lagan goes from the bride's side to the groom's, carried with the Varana (chapter 18), so it is written at her home and sits with the kalash where the household's gods will be. Why pink and not the yellow of many Agarwal homes is not recorded. The groom's side has guests to summon, so its sign is an invitation: the yellow rice used to go to every man asked to join the baraat. Today, in the manual's family, it goes to four or five men of the house.

ROOTS **Shastric or Puranic rite and Community custom**

Ganesh puja before a samskara comes from the pandit's paddhati, not the Grihya Sutras. The Vinayak boy and the peele chawal are Rajasthani family custom, and the muhurat rests on jyotish.

In some families

The name Sava Pujan is the family manual's. The Maheshwari Samaj Ludhiana's ritual list calls it simply the Ganesh puja, places it at least 5 to 21 days before the wedding, and has the Vinayak take the puja things and the wedding card to the Ganesh temple. It also records a Pancha Pujan at which the Vinayak sits, with grain, haldi, moong and coriander.

The Ludhiana list alone records a Mata Pujan: a puja to Shitala on a Monday, Wednesday, Thursday or Friday before the wedding, when the parents and the

bride or groom eat only cold food that day.

In the Agarwal book the boy appears only as a regional variation called Bindayak. In both Maheshwari sources he is standard. Agarwal families also have a separate lagan-reading visit, which neither Maheshwari source describes.

Your part in it

- **Bride and groom:** Your Vinayak sits on your right for days. Keep him fed and amused; he is working too.
- **Siblings:** Volunteer as Vinayak's minder. He must be dressed and awake for every rite until Gangaur, which is hard on a small boy and on whoever looks after him.
- **Siblings:** At a groom's wedding, find out which men of the house receive the peele chawal and make sure each one does.
- **Everyone:** Keep the pink lagan paper with the kalash, not in a drawer.

Ask your elders

1. *Who was Vinayak at your wedding, and is "never a real brother" our family's rule too?*

2. *Was our lagan written on pink paper, and who in the family received the peele chawal?*

CHAPTER 9

Baan and Tani: the confinement and the cord

बान, तणी बांधना

BRIDE GROOM SIBLINGS



IN ONE MINUTE

"Baan bithana" means applying ubtan to the bride or groom and keeping them inside the house. The Baan once ran for days; today it is usually done on the Sava Pujan day. Salt, coal, durva, a silver ring and water are set before the child, who makes seven moong badis by hand, and the elder women feed a patasa with ghee. The parents tie the Tani, the auspicious cord across the mandap.

WHEN	Days before the wedding; now usually with the Sava Pujan
WHO LEADS	The pandit and the parents; the elder women of the house
WHERE	Both homes, separately
THEME	Protection

What happens

1. The bride or groom sits on one chauki and the Vinayak on the other, as at the Sava Pujan. The order that follows is the family manual's.
2. The parents sit before the pandit and tie the Tani, the auspicious cord stretched across the mandap.
3. On a white cloth in front of the child are placed a piece of coal, a lump of salt, durva, a silver ring and a pot of water.
4. The bride or groom makes seven badis of ground moong with their own hands. Unmarried girls of the family make the rest.
5. The dadi, the badi ma, the ma and the kaki each feed the child a patasa with ghee. Anyone who wishes does tilak and gives money; this is called "baan bharna".
6. The child is told to carry a silver chitiya and a pan-supari box at all times from now until the wedding.
7. Baan ka Jiman: the family eats together, and the women leave with one packet of gud and one of mishri.

Why we do it

Keeping an adult indoors before their wedding sounds like a rule from another age, and in origin it is one. The manual gives no meaning for the Baan beyond calling it shagun. The Rajasthani lexicon's definition is the plainest account there is: ubtan for the bride or groom, and no going out of the house.

Read that way, the Baan does two things. It takes the child out of ordinary life for the last days before the wedding, so that the turmeric and the songs work on someone who is at home, rested and among family. And it guards them. Salt, coal and metal are what Rajasthani households have long set out against nazar and misfortune, and the silver chitiya the child now carries everywhere belongs to the same kit. That is what these objects mean in the household's eyes; whether they work is not a question the rite asks.

The seven badis are the child's own contribution. After weeks of others working for them, they put their own hands into the moong, and the girls of the family finish the batch. The patasa with ghee, fed by four women of the house in turn, is the elder women's blessing in its most literal form. Why the pan-supari box is to be carried is not recorded.

The Tani says the same thing about space that the Baan says about the person. Until the cord goes up, the place where the pheras will happen is a courtyard or a hall. Once the parents have tied it, it is a mandap. At a bride's home the cord her parents tie is untied by the groom after the pheras (chapter 26), so the man who came to marry their daughter is the one who closes the space they opened.

ROOTS **Community custom and Protective or folk belief**

Baan and Tani are Rajasthani household institutions, in the regional lexicon as well as both Maheshwari sources. The confinement, the salt and coal and the chitiya belong to protective belief.

In some families

The Maheshwari Samaj Ludhiana's ritual list describes the Tani in more detail: religious strings tied at the marriage dais, a rakhi tied on top of a shade, and a sari kept there. Under this shade oil is put on the bride or groom seven times and the parents bathe them with curd, so in the Ludhiana order the curd bath of chapter 14 follows at once. The list names thuli and guvar raita as the dishes of the day.

The family manual asks that when the wedding is held in a hall, someone responsible carries the Tani home afterwards and ties it in the family's Thakur bari. That is one family's instruction, and a sensible one wherever ritual objects get left behind with the decorations.

In the older practice the Baan began days before the wedding and the child stayed in for the whole stretch, with a procession each evening (chapter 13). The manual notes that the Baan is now done with the Sava Pujan; how strictly the staying-in is kept after that is for each family to decide.

Your part in it

- **Bride and groom:** Make the seven moong badis yourself, badly if necessary. Nobody can do this one for you.
- **Bride and groom:** Keep the chitiya on you from this day. If the family's rule is that you stay home, say so to your office in advance rather than on the day.
- **Sisters and cousins:** If you are unmarried, you make the rest of the badis. Ask an aunt how big they should be.
- **Siblings:** Make a note of who did baan bharna, and appoint one person to bring the Tani home from the venue.

Ask your elders

1. *How many days were you kept in Baan, and what were you not allowed to do?*

2. *Where did our family's Tani go after your wedding, and what did you carry as your chitiya?*

CHAPTER 10

The wedding kitchen: Dhan Rolna, Chak Puja and Moongdhana

धान रोळना, चाक पूजन, मूंगधणा

SIBLINGS



IN ONE MINUTE

Three old rites open the wedding kitchen. In Dhan Rolna the mother and six daughters-in-law, under an odhna held up as a canopy, pass a winnowing tray of grain back and forth seven times. In Chak Puja the mother once worshipped the potter's wheel and brought home eleven pots. In Moongdhana a bundle of firewood with a green neem branch is worshipped at the door. Grain, pots and fuel are blessed before the cooking starts.

WHEN	In the days before the wedding, around the Baan
WHO LEADS	The mother of the bride or groom and the daughters-in-law of the house
WHERE	Both homes, separately (formerly also the potter's house)
THEME	Blessing
THE SONG FOR THIS MOMENT	"Dhan rol, dhan rol ji kulbahuvan", sung while the grain is passed

What happens

1. Dhan Rolna, in the family manual's account: four women hold the four corners of an odhna as a canopy.
2. Beneath it the mother, and then in turn six daughters-in-law of the family, pass a winnowing tray back and forth seven times. In it are a rolling pin, turmeric knots, cash, barley, rice, moong and lumps of salt. At the end the grain must be left in the mother's tray.
3. The same women pound barley and gram in the okhli with the musal, touch the grinder (today, often the mixer), and grind the shagun mehendi.
4. Chak Puja: in the old days the mother went to the potter's house and worshipped his wheel, and eleven pots came home: a kalash each for the Thamb, the Bihana, the curd and the Maya puja, and seven stacked "beh ki handi". Today, the manual says, the pots are bought from the market.
5. Moongdhana: a small bundle of firewood with a green neem branch is set on the head of a household helper or the barber at the door. The mother worships it and gives a neg, and the bundle stays in a corner of the house until the wedding is over.

Why we do it

Neither Maheshwari source says what the passing of the grain means, and this book will not supply one. What it can describe is what the rite shows.

Seven women of the house sit under one cloth with the tools of a kitchen: a winnowing tray, a rolling pin, grain, salt and turmeric. They pass it all between

them seven times. Then they pound grain, touch the grinder and make the mehendi. Whatever else it is, Dhan Rolna is the women of the family opening the wedding kitchen together, before any cook arrives. And whoever handles the tray along the way, the grain has to end with the mother.

Chak Puja is easier to explain. Before there were shops for everything, water had to be stored, lamps lit, curd set and a kalash raised, and all of it came off the potter's wheel. So the family went to him, honoured the tool of his craft and paid him well, much as workers honour their machines at Vishwakarma puja. A kalash of earth filled with water is also one of the oldest Hindu signs of fullness.

Even bought, the eleven pots matter, because each has a job. The kalash and the seven beh pots are worshipped at the Stambh Ropan (chapter 16). The groom does a neg for the beh pots at the Pehravani and they go to his house (chapter 26). The lowest one comes back filled with sweets when the bride's brother fetches the couple at the Manda Jhankna (chapter 31).

Moongdhana is a matter of fuel. Wedding feasts were cooked on wood for days, and the Ludhiana list remembers that the wood once came from the jungle by cart, so the cart was worshipped. A bundle and a neem branch now stand for the whole load. Green neem appears again at the toran (chapter 19).

ROOTS **Community custom**

All three are Rajasthani household customs. Mugdhana appears in the regional lexicon as the worship of dry firewood for the kitchen; none of the three is in the priestly texts.

In some families

The Maheshwari Samaj Ludhiana's ritual list calls the grain rite "Dhan Hath": four to eight women under the shade, with rice, moong, turmeric, a silver ghungra, money, seven fruits, two soop and two rolling pins. It calls the pot rite "Chak Bhaat", with the women bringing the pots home singing, and adds,

without explanation, that on that day no dal is cooked at the bride's house and no papad fried at the groom's.

Readers of the Agarwal book should note a correction. That book describes Chak Puja as mainly a Haryana and Delhi custom, less common among Rajasthan-origin families. For Maheshwaris it does not hold: both sources describe Chak Puja as old community practice, now shortened.

Where there are not six daughters-in-law at home, the manual allows a mami or a mausi to sit.

Your part in it

- **Siblings and cousins:** Offer to hold a corner of the odhna, steadily, for the whole of the passing.
- **Siblings:** Take charge of the eleven pots. Label the seven beh pots and keep them stacked together; they travel through the rest of the wedding.
- **Siblings:** In a city, ask the elders a week ahead what will stand in for the firewood and neem.
- **Everyone:** Record "Dhan rol", with the singer's permission. The general Rajasthani song collections this book found do not have it.

Ask your elders

1. *Did the women of our house pass the grain under an odhna at your wedding, and who sat?*

2. *Did anyone go to the potter, and where did the seven beh pots end up?*

CHAPTER 11

Mayra and Bir Bhojan: the mother's brothers arrive

मायरा, बीर भोजन

BRIDE GROOM SIBLINGS



IN ONE MINUTE

Invited at the Battisi (chapter 6), the mother's brothers arrive with their wives and the whole natal family, the Mayardar. Their sister receives them at the door, measures each brother with the netra cord and serves sherbet; together they drape a chunri over her. They bring the wedding clothes of her child, and for a bride the ivory chuda. Afterwards, at the Bir Bhojan, she feeds her brothers with her own hands.

WHEN	The wedding week, after the Battisi
WHO LEADS	The mother of the bride or groom and her brothers
WHERE	At each home separately
THEME	Bonds between families
THE SONG FOR THIS MOMENT	Mayra songs such as "Bhat Bharan ki Bela Aayi" and "Beero Binjaro", the brother arriving like a laden trader

What happens

1. In the order the family manual gives: the sister goes singing to the door with her women. The brothers lay a sari at the door as shagun.
2. Inside, a brother and his wife stand on a chauki. The sister does tilak with a silver rupee, garlands him, gives her bhabhi a gajra and a gift, and serves sherbet from a silver glass covered with red cloth.
3. She takes the netra, a cord of churning rope, silver chain, pearls and moli, measures her brother crosswise four times, and embraces him.
4. All the brothers together drape the chunri over her. If the family has a pitar, clothes for him go first to a Brahmin or Brahmani. Then come the aarta, the envelopes, and the uvari, money waved over the head, each way.
5. The brothers give envelopes to the other sisters and daughters of the house, and tilak and envelopes to the jamais and bhanejas.
6. The bride or groom is seated and given the clothes and jewellery the Mayra has brought. Last, the brothers seat their own sister and her husband and give them theirs.
7. Bir Bhojan: the sister invites her brothers to a meal and serves them herself.

Why we do it

From outside, a Mayra can look like an expensive show that leans on the mama's family. It can become one. Its meaning lies in what happens to a

woman's place in her parents' home once she marries.

In the traditional family a daughter left her parents' house for her husband's. She could visit, but she was counted differently. The Mayra is the moment, at her own child's wedding, when her natal family arrives in full view of her in-laws and says that she is still theirs. A woman whose brothers fill her Mayra with care is visibly not alone. Some add that the brother's gifts stood in for a sister's share of an estate that passed to sons; that is a reconstruction, not a record.

The Maheshwari form sharpens the point in a way you can see. The bride's wedding dress comes from her mama's house, down to the kora bhata, the plain white cloth worn under it and later dyed. So does her ivory chuda (chapter 33 explains it). The Ludhiana list says the groom wears his mama's clothes throughout the wedding, and the bride bathes and dresses in her mama's gift before the baraat arrives. The child stands at the centre of the wedding dressed, literally, by the mother's side of the family.

The clothes for the household's deity and pitar show that the Mayra is also an offering to the household's gods and ancestors. And it is not one-way. At the Bir Bhojan the sister, who has received everything, serves her brothers with her own hands.

No source explains the netra. It recurs: the groom's mother measures him the same way before he rides out (chapter 17), and the bride's mother at her door (chapter 19). In every case a woman of the family does the measuring. Beyond that, ask your elders.

For readers who know the Agarwal book

The shape is the same: brothers to sister, at her marital home. The differences: there is no yellow peela or pomcha, and the garment is a chunri; the ivory chuda and the couple's wedding clothes arrive in the Mayra; the netra measuring and the Bir Bhojan have no Agarwal counterpart; and the invitation is a separate day, the Battisi.

ROOTS **Community custom**

Mayra belongs to Rajasthani family practice and its women's songs. It is not in the priestly texts.

In some families

The Maheshwari Samaj Ludhiana's ritual list has the sisters serve sherbet to all their brothers and their wives, give the brother's wife a sari and blouse, and give the men a coconut and tilak. It adds "Kaalash bandhna", in which the brothers take a pot of money from their sisters.

Many Rajasthani families sing Nanibai ro Mayro, the story of the saint Narsi Mehta (usually placed in the fifteenth century, though his dates are disputed), too poor to fill his daughter's Mayra until Krishna came and filled it for him. Neither Maheshwari source mentions it. Ask whether it is sung in yours.

Your part in it

- **Bride:** If your dress and chuda come from your mama's house, thank your mama and mami by name before the wedding.
- **Groom:** If your safa and sherwani come from your mama, arrange the fittings early.
- **Siblings:** Help your mother set out the silver glass, the red cloth and the netra before the brothers reach the door.
- **Mama's children:** Carry a tray. You are watching what a brother does for a sister.

Ask your elders

1. *Did your wedding clothes and chuda come in your Mayra, and who measured whom with the netra?*

2. *Is Nanibai ro Mayro sung in our family, and was a Bir Bhojan held at your wedding?*

Common questions

Who can be Vinayak?

A small boy of the family, understood for these days as Ganesh's own form. A Mumbai Maheshwari family's written manual, reetrivaz.in, adds that a real brother is never chosen; the boy comes from the kaka's, baba's, bua's, sister's or mama's side. That is one family's rule, so check yours. Choose a boy old enough to sit through long rites, and give him an adult minder until he is sent off at the Gangaur puja.

My mother has no brother. Who fills the Mayra?

The Mayra comes from the Mayardar, the mother's whole natal family, not from one man. Many families turn to a cousin, an uncle or her father. Rajasthani families have long told the story of Nanibai's Mayra, filled by Krishna when her father could not, for exactly this worry: what matters is that her side comes forward.

We live in a flat and both work. Must the Baan confinement be kept?

The manual itself records that the Baan, which once ran for days, is now done on the Sava Pujan day. The objects, the seven moong badis, the patasa with ghee and the chitiya you carry from then on can all be kept in a city flat. How strictly you stay indoors afterwards is a question for your elders, and better settled before you book leave than after.

Can Nandimukh be done if there has been a recent death?

Both Maheshwari sources describe Nandimukh as the rite that stops a birth or death after it from halting the wedding. Neither says what to do when a death comes before it. That is a decision for your pandit and your elders together.

Do we still need the potter?

Not in person. The manual says the pots are now bought from the market. What it does not drop is the pots themselves: a kalash each for the Thamb, the Bihana, the curd and the Maya, and seven beh pots that travel through the rest of the wedding. Buy all eleven and keep them together.

Nobody in our house knows the songs. Who sings?

Start with the order: five songs to the gods (Vinayak, Balaji, Shyamji, Mataji, Pitarji), then the songs of the occasion. reetrivaz.in has an indexed audio collection of some 200 geet, and the Rupayan Sansthan field recordings of Rajasthani wedding songs are on the Internet Archive. One aunt who knows a few songs, and cousins willing to learn one each, is enough to begin.

PART THREE

The Celebrations



Henna, evening processions, turmeric and curd, the protective thread, Gangaur, and the groom's house at the bride's door.

Mehendi · Banori, Sanjha and Sankadi · Pithi, Jhol and Lakh · Kankan Dora, the Maya and Gangaur · Bari, Stambh Ropan and Kanyaval

CHAPTER 12

Mehendi

मेहंदी

BRIDE GROOM



IN ONE MINUTE

Mehendi goes on the hands and feet of both the bride and the groom, each at their own home, after the Sava or the Baan. In many Maheshwari families the bride's henna comes from her mother-in-law's side, as it did for her Sinjaras. One detail is particular: a swastik is drawn on the left hand, and a circle the size of a rupee is left bare on the right palm. That space is kept for the Hathleva.

WHEN	After the Sava Pujan or the Baan; the mother's mehendi comes before the Sava
WHO LEADS	The women of each house; the bride's henna is sent by the groom's side
WHERE	Both homes, separately
THEME	Bonds between families; Blessing

What happens

1. Before the Sava Pujan, the mother of the bride or groom has her own mehendi: a swastik on the left hand and a kalash on the right.
2. The bride's mehendi arrives from her in-laws' side, just as the Sinjara mehendi did at Teej and Gangaur (chapter 3).
3. After the Sava or the Baan, mehendi is applied to both hands and both feet of the bride at her home, and of the groom at his.
4. On the left hand of each a swastik is drawn. In the middle of the right palm a round space, about the size of a rupee coin, is left empty.
5. The women sing while the paste dries and darkens. Until it comes off, others feed the bride or groom.

Why we do it

The bare circle is the place to start, because it is the one thing in this chapter that a guest from another community would not see. A Mumbai Maheshwari family's written manual, reetrivaz.in, explains it plainly. At the Hathleva in the mandap (chapter 22), a ball of mehendi is placed between the right palms of the bride and groom as their hands are joined, and the colour of that mehendi is held to be important. So the right palm is kept clean for it.

So the most elaborate design of the week leaves a gap, and the gap is for the smallest dab of henna in the wedding, the one the couple share.

The decoration matters too. Mehendi is counted among the solah shringar, the sixteen adornments of a married woman.

Who sends it is what turns adornment into a tie between houses. When the groom's family provides the bride's henna, the colour on her hands has come from them. Before the sindoor, she already wears something from the house she will go to.

Readers who know an Agarwal wedding should note one difference. There the groom usually has only a token dot. The family manual has full mehendi on

the groom's hands and feet as well as the bride's, with the same swastik and the same bare circle, because his right palm will be joined to hers too.

The saying that a dark colour means a loving husband, or a loving mother-in-law, is a tease, not a forecast. The claim that henna cools the body before a stressful day is a reason often given today, not the reason families do it. When mehendi entered the Marwari wedding is not recorded.

ROOTS **Community custom**

Mehendi has no place in the Grihya Sutras. It belongs to the women's side of the wedding, tied here to a mandap rite by the circle kept for the Hathleva.

In some families

Mehendi runs through the whole Maheshwari wedding. In the family manual the women grind the shagun mehendi at the Dhan Rolna (chapter 10), dab it on their nails at the dawn Bihana (chapter 13), and the bride or groom presses a left handprint in mehendi beside the Maya (chapter 15). The groom's mother puts mehendi on the mare's hooves (chapter 17), and the bride's bua and fufa grind the Hathleva mehendi on a sil (chapter 22).

Today it is often an evening with a professional artist, and in some homes the groom's mehendi has shrunk to a mark. Rajasthan is proud of its henna: Sojat, in Pali district, was given a Geographical Indication tag for its mehendi in 2021, and some families still ask for it by name.

Your part in it

- **Bride:** Tell the artist about the bare circle on the right palm before she starts. A full design is hard to undo.
- **Groom:** If your family follows the manual, sit for mehendi on hands and feet, swastik and circle included. Your right palm has an appointment at the Hathleva.

Ask your elders

1. *In our family, does the bride's mehendi come from the groom's side, and do we leave a bare circle on the right palm?*

2. *At your wedding, did the groom have full mehendi on his hands and feet, or only a mark?*

CHAPTER 13

Banori, Sanjha and Sankadi: the evenings and the night before

बनोरी, सांझा, सांकड़ी, बिहाणा

BRIDE GROOM SIBLINGS



IN ONE MINUTE

Once the Baan is set, the evenings belong to the bride or groom. In the old days a Banori procession took them out every evening, with a grand one on the last night. On the Baan evening a Brahmin gives the first blessing at the gate and the women sing the sanjha, the evening songs. Sankadi is the night before the wedding, kept awake with festivity. At dawn, Bihana calls the deities to open the wedding day.

WHEN	Evenings after the Baan; the night before the wedding; dawn of the wedding day
WHO LEADS	The family; a Brahmin at the Brahman Banori; the women of the house
WHERE	Both homes, separately, and once the lanes of the town
THEME	Blessing; Protection

What happens

1. **Brahman Banori,** on the evening the Baan is set (chapter 9). Formerly the child was taken to a known Brahmin family's house. Now the child sits on a chair outside the gate, and a Brahmin sweetens the child's mouth with jaggery and fills the khol with a coconut and eleven rupees.
2. Four women hold an odhna by its corners as a chandwa, a canopy, and the child is brought in beneath it with songs. At the door the bua does tilak and lunrai, waving salt and mustard round the child against nazar.
3. The lamp is lit and the sanjha, the evening songs, are sung. The manual adds that "varana is taken" that evening, which this book reads as the Rajasthani word for waving away nazar, as in the uvari, and not the Varana of chapter 18; ask your elders which they mean.
4. **Banori:** in the old days a Banori of the bride or groom was taken out every evening of the Baan days. On the last night came the Badi Banori: the bride in a carriage, the groom on a mare, through the whole village with a band and fireworks.
5. **Sankadi:** the night just before the wedding, kept with festivities and staying awake. The family manual calls the main day before the wedding the "Virad Vinayak (Sankadi rakhi) day".
6. **Bihana,** at dawn: a kalash is set on moong on a chauki, with wheat and jaggery below. Pithi and mehendi are mixed. Every woman does tilak, rubs a little pithi into her own hands, dabs mehendi on her nails, and the Bihana songs are sung, calling the deities.

Why we do it

A household in its last wedding days has two jobs that pull in opposite directions. It must show its child to the whole town, and it must guard that child closely. These evening customs do both.

The Banori is the showing. Walking the bride or groom through the lanes told every neighbour: this child of ours is about to marry, come and see, come and bless.

The Brahman Banori puts a blessing at the front of all that. The manual gives no reason beyond custom, but the shape is clear: before the family's own celebrations, a Brahmin sweetens the child's mouth and fills the lap. The lunrai at the door is the guarding half. Salt and mustard waved round a person and thrown away is the Rajasthani household's answer to the evil eye, and a child much looked at is thought most exposed to it.

The night customs are a watch. Across Rajasthan many families have the women keep an all-night vigil before a wedding, singing in a fixed order to the kuldevi, to the Bhairuns who attend her, to the pitars and pitranis, and to the household's other protectors. Folklorists call it the ratijaga, the all-nighter, and its last song, at cock-crow, is the kukdi. Calling every protector by name means none is forgotten, and songs that name the ancestors say this marriage belongs to a longer line than one generation.

The family manual does not use the word ratijaga. It records the evening sanjha songs, the Sankadi, and a shorter rati-juga at the groom's house after the bride arrives (chapter 29).

Bihana closes the night. The wedding day opens with the deities invited in song, as every singing session has opened since the Battisi (chapter 5), and with every woman touching the two pastes the day will use.

ROOTS **Community custom and Protective or folk belief**

The Banori, the evening songs and the vigil are Rajasthani family practice carried by the women, with the ancestors among those sung to. The lunrai at the door is a protective belief.

In some families

The name varies: Banori in the family manual, Bindori in much of Rajasthan. The Agarwal edition noted that the Bindori is strongest among Maheshwari and Oswal families. The manual itself describes the nightly Banori and the procession through the village as the practice of the old days.

The thapa painted on the wall at an Agarwal Ratijaga has its Maheshwari counterpart in the Maya panel (chapter 15), not in the Sankadi.

One family manual records a private Ghat Vivah for the bride after ten on the night before the wedding: seven circuits round a clay pot taken as a form of Vishnu, done where a girl's grahas are judged strong, and extended in that family to every daughter as a prayer for long suhag. It is a jyotish remedy known in many communities; some families keep it quietly, and many have never heard of it.

Your part in it

- **Bride and groom:** At Bihana, be there when the women sing; the songs call blessings on you.
- **Siblings and cousins:** Hold a corner of the odhna. Write down the names the women sing at the Sankadi, in order: it is your family's list of protectors.

Ask your elders

1. *Does our family stay awake the night before the wedding, and what do we call it: Sankadi, Ratijaga, Rati-juga or something else?*

2. *Was a Banori taken out for you, and on how many evenings?*

CHAPTER 14

Pithi, Jhol and Lakh: turmeric, curd and the wish for plenty

पीठी, झोळ, लख लेना

BRIDE GROOM SIBLINGS



IN ONE MINUTE

Seven married women rub turmeric paste on the bride or groom, up the body and then down. The father pours warm curd over the head with a rolling pin. The women wave the lakhdhan, a ball of jaggery, spices, lac and metals, singing that the child may become a lakhpati. Then the mama lifts the bride or groom down from the low seat, and a clay saucer is broken underfoot. The Vinayak boy receives every step first.

WHEN	The wedding morning or the day before
WHO LEADS	Five or seven suhagins; the father and mother; the mama
WHERE	Both homes, separately
THEME	Protection; Blessing
THE SONG FOR THIS MOMENT	"Mhari haldi ro rang surang, nipaj Malve" for the pithi; "Lakh le re mhara balak banada" for the lakh

What happens

1. Two chaukis: the Vinayak boy on the right, the bride or groom on the left. Five or seven suhagins apply pithi, first to the Vinayak seven times, then to the child seven times.
2. Going up (chadhana), the paste is laid on the feet, knees, hands, shoulders and head with crossed hands. Coming down (utarna), it is taken from head to feet with straight hands.
3. **Jhol:** a woman whose own parents and parents-in-law are all living brings a small clay pot of warmed curd with turmeric, moong and a coin, covered in red cloth, a rolling pin standing in it. The father pours it with the rolling pin seven times on the Vinayak's head, then on the child's. The mother rubs it in, and the bath follows.
4. **Lakh:** the groom stands on a pata, a low wooden seat, with a Hanumanji image round his neck. The seven suhagins wave the lakhdhan, a ball of jaggery, coriander, cumin, ajwain, lac, silver, gold and copper, first over the Vinayak and then seven times over the groom.
5. The mama lifts him down from the pata. A clay saucer (sikora) with a lump of jaggery is set upside down over moong and a rupee, and he breaks it with his right foot. The mama gives him an envelope.
6. The bride is dressed on the pata: the kora bhata under her sari, the Hanumanji image, then the chuda from her Mayra (chapter 11), five bangles on the right hand and six on the left, the twelfth going to the woman who puts them on; then the nath, the senasut (a silver-wire wristband sent by her in-laws; the Bari of chapter 16 carries one), payal

and bichhudi. The same lakh follows, the mama lifts her down, and she breaks the sikora.

Why we do it

Turmeric first. In a Hindu home haldi and yellow mark things set apart for an auspicious purpose, and pithi does that to a person: it marks the bride or groom as someone the wedding has claimed. It is also ubtan, a skin preparation Indian women have used for centuries. That turmeric is antiseptic is a reason often given today, not the reason seven married women gather to sing.

The family manual records that the Virad Vinayak once ran for five or seven days, with pithi going up on the first day and coming down only on the last. Today both happen in one sitting. The manual gives no reason for the crossed and straight hands.

The Jhol is unusual because of who pours. Most pre-wedding rites belong to the women; here the father takes the pot. No source explains the rolling pin. What the rite shows is both parents' hands on the child together, before the bath.

The Lakh states its own meaning, because the song does. "Lakh le re mhara balak banada... jyun re lakhesar hoy": take the lakh, my boy, so that you become a lakhesar, a man of lakhs. The word plays on lakh, the lac in the ball, and lakh, a hundred thousand.

The manual does not explain the broken sikora; the nearest parallel is the heap of earth the groom stamps at Nikasi in the Ludhiana list, "which shows he is going to get married" (chapter 17). Why the mama lifts is easier to see: as at the Mayra (chapter 11), the mother's family stands behind her child as the child steps out of childhood. The manual adds that in the old five or seven day form the father lifted the child down on the earlier days, and the mama only on the last, the day the groom was dressed.

The Agarwal Telbaan, oil in seven strokes, does the work that the Jhol and the Lakh do in the Maheshwari morning.

ROOTS **Community custom and Protective or folk belief**

Pithi, Jhol and Lakh are carried by family practice and the women's songs, not by the Grihya Sutras. The Lakh joins a wish for wealth to a protective belief.

In some families

The Maheshwari Samaj Ludhiana's ritual list agrees on the core: oil is put on the bride and groom seven times under the Tani, and "the parents make the bride and the bridegroom have bath with curds from head to toe". For the Lakhdan it has four women, not seven, with a coin and a silver ghungra among the spices and lac.

The sikora and the mama's lifting rest on the one family manual. In cities the morning is often a "haldi" with a yellow dress code; ask whether the curd pot and the lakhdhan survive at yours.

Your part in it

- **Bride and groom:** Wear something old, and let the Vinayak boy go first every time.
- **Mama:** Be in the room when the Lakh ends. Lifting your bhanja or bhanji down from the pata is your job, and so is the envelope.
- **Siblings and cousins:** Have the sikora, moong and rupee ready, and find the woman of a whole family for the Jhol pot before the morning starts.

Ask your elders

1. *In our family, does the father pour the curd with a rolling pin, and who carries the pot?*

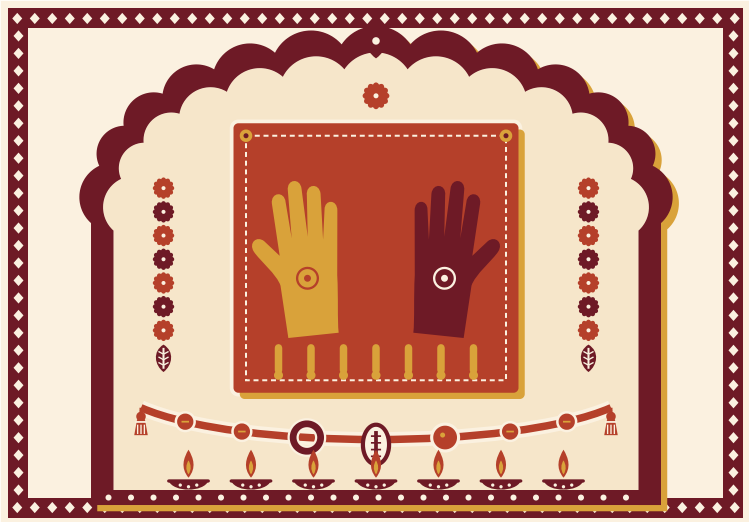
2. *Does the mama lift the bride or groom off the pata, and is a sikora broken?*

CHAPTER 15

Kankan Dora, the Maya and Gangaur: the thread, the shrine and Gauri

कांकण डोरा, मायां की थरपना, गणगौर पूजन

BRIDE GROOM SIBLINGS



IN ONE MINUTE

After the Pithi, three things happen. The Maya, the household's wedding shrine, is set up against a wall, and the bride or groom leaves handprints in turmeric and henna beside it. At the Maya the kankan dora, a seven-knot protective thread, is tied on a hand and a foot. Then the bride worships Gangaur, that is Gauri, with seven married women, and the groom does the same once he is dressed. The Vinayak boy is thanked and sent off.

WHEN	After the Pithi and Lakh, on the Sankadi day or the wedding morning
WHO LEADS	The pandit for the Maya; seven suhagins for Gangaur, the eldest first
WHERE	Both homes, separately
THEME	Protection; Blessing
THE SONG FOR THIS MOMENT	"Chadh chadh e chaitadla ra maas goral pujo na"

What happens

1. **The Maya:** a printed auspicious panel (formerly painted on the wall itself) is set on a board against the wall. The board will later travel to the wedding venue.
2. Beside it, on pink paper, the bride or groom presses a right handprint in pithi and a left handprint in mehendi, with seven streaks of ghee beneath. Seven lavana, as the family manual calls them, each with a red lac bangle on it, are set out and the child touches them. The manual does not say what a lavana is; ask whoever has set one out.
3. **The kankan dora:** moli is twisted and tied with seven knots into two rakhis, holding lunrai in red cloth, gold, silver, iron, lac beads and a cowrie. At the dhok to the Maya one is tied on the groom's right hand and one on his right foot; on the bride, the left hand and the left foot.
4. **Gangaur:** the bride worships Gangaur with seven suhagins, first with her dadi, then her badi ma, then her mother, then others until there are seven. The women sing the Gangaur songs.
5. The groom, once dressed as Beend Raja, bows to the Maya and worships Gangaur with seven suhagins in the same way (chapter 17).
6. The Vinayak boy is sent off: the father or mother does his tilak and gives him clothes, dry fruit and an envelope.

Why we do it

The thread is the simplest to explain. The sources describe the kankan dora as protection: the Rajasthani lexicon calls it a guard against the evil eye, and the Maheshwari Samaj Ludhiana's ritual list says the iron in it is so "they may lead a married life as strong as iron". No source explains why the bride's thread goes on the left and the groom's on the right. It is the one wedding sign both wear, and they untie each other's in a game afterwards (chapter 30).

The Maya is the household's own wedding shrine. Once set up, it is honoured at every turn: by the dressed groom before he leaves, by the couple after the Mama Phere and again after the pheras, at the Vidai, at the groom's house, and finally lifted with lapsi and a coconut (chapter 32). It is the Maheshwari counterpart of the Agarwal thapa.

Gangaur needs more care, because it carries the community's own devotion. Gangaur is Rajasthan's festival of Gauri and Isar, that is Parvati and Shiva as a married pair. Girls keep it for a good husband and married women for their husbands' lives, and a newly married woman keeps the full Gangaur after her wedding. Maheshwari writers rank Gangaur with Shravani Teej as the community's foremost women's festivals, "as Mangala Gauri is to Maharashtrians". The wedding song is a Chaitra song, from the festival's month, carried over to this day.

So the girl who kept Gangaur for years worships Gauri once more on the day the husband arrives. The family manual's gathjoda song makes the link itself: "brother, you had me worship so many Gangaurs". Two independent Maheshwari sources, the family manual and the Ludhiana list, place a Gangaur puja before the pheras, and the manual has bride and groom each perform it. General guides to Marwari weddings do not mention it.

Where is Mahesh in a Maheshwari wedding?

No source describes a separate Shiva puja at the mandap. What the sources show is this: the goddess puja both place before the pheras is Gangaur, and Gangaur is the worship of Gauri together with Isar, Shiva's own household as a

married couple. And at the Mama Phere (chapter 21) the wedding carries the katha in which Parvati and Mahesh restored the marriages of the first Maheshwaris. The sources do not record whether families add a Shiva puja or a Shiva temple visit of their own. Ask whether yours does.

ROOTS **Community custom and Protective or folk belief**

The Maya and the Gangaur puja are family practice carried by the women and their songs. The kankan dora is a protective belief.

In some families

The Agarwal kangan dora is tied at the Pithi on the right wrist of both. The family manual ties it at the Maya, on a hand and a foot. The Ludhiana list has an iron key bunch, lac, a cowrie and a silver ghungra tied on the wrist, and the lexicon has iron, a clove and a cowrie, tied two days before.

Your part in it

- **Bride:** Begin the Gangaur puja with your dadi, and learn the song's first line from her.
- **Groom:** Keep the dora on hand and foot. You only lose it in a game with your wife.
- **Siblings:** Someone must carry the Maya board to the venue and bring it home. Decide who, now.

Ask your elders

1. *Do the bride and groom each worship Gangaur with seven suhagins before the wedding, and which song do we sing?*

2. *Does our family add a Shiva puja or a Shiva temple visit of its own during the wedding?*

CHAPTER 16

Bari, Stambh Ropan and Kanyaval: the groom's house at the bride's door

बरी, स्तम्भ रोपण, कन्यावल

BRIDE SIBLINGS



IN ONE MINUTE

On the wedding morning the groom's house comes to the bride's door twice. Its people bring the Bari: the bride's jewellery and the things of a married woman, from the sindoor box to the toe rings. Its elder or jamai worships the post of her mandap with the pandit. Meanwhile the bride's grandparents and parents, and in some families her mama and mami, begin the Kanyaval: they will not eat until she is married.

WHEN	The wedding morning
WHO LEADS	The groom's elders or a jamai; the bride's parents and elders
WHERE	The bride's home or the venue
THEME	Bonds between families; Moving home

What happens

1. **Bari:** at least five people of the groom's side, the groom's father and a jamai among them, carry the Bari to the bride's house.
2. One family's list gives its contents: three and a half "bes" (sets of clothes: ghaghra, chunni, saris and a chunri), a gold chain with a Balaji image, gold ornaments, payal, bichhudi, a key bangle, the senasut, four small silver boxes for sindoor, wax, bindi and chamki, a sevra marked with Lakshmi, a mirror, comb, oil, choti, itr, slippers, mishri, a "suhagpuda", two sets for filling the bride's khol, and the sari for the Pher-pata.
3. The bride's khol is filled with the first of those sets. The second waits for the moment after the pheras (chapter 25).
4. **Stambh Ropan:** the bride's side sends word to the groom's side, who send an elder of the family or a jamai at the muhurat. The pandit has them worship the stambh, the post of the mandap, with a clay kalash and the seven beh pots stacked from large to small. They are fed and given an envelope.
5. **Kanyaval:** the bride's elders and parents, and in some families her mama and mami, vow to eat nothing until the marriage is solemnised.

Why we do it

Look at which way the giving runs through the week. Much of it runs from the bride's side: the Mudda Tika, the Varana still to come, the Pehravani. The Bari, like the Chikni Kothli and the bride's mehendi before it, runs the other way, and it comes at the last moment. On the morning of the wedding the groom's household comes to her door and puts in her hands the things she will wear as a married woman of their house.

Here the Maheshwari wedding differs from the Agarwal one in a way worth getting right. In an Agarwal wedding the bride wears the palla outfit for the pheras. In the Maheshwari sources her wedding clothes come from her mama in the Mayra (chapter 11); the Ludhiana list says the bride dresses in the clothes her mama gave before the baraat arrives. What the Bari brings is the married state itself: the sindoor box, the senasut, the bichhudi, the Lakshmi sevra that the family manual has tied on her before the Mama Phere, and the sari she will put on at the Pher-pata after the pheras (chapter 26). Her mother's family dresses her for the giving; her husband's family equips her for what comes after.

The Stambh Ropan states no meaning in the sources, but what it shows is plain. The mandap where the bride will be given stands on a post blessed by the house that will receive her. The seven beh pots stacked at its foot, once fetched from the potter at the Chak Puja (chapter 10), later go home with the groom's family. Before the baraat has even set out, the receiving house has put its hand on the bride's mandap.

The Kanyaval is the giving family's side of the same day. Fasting until a sacred act is complete is an old Hindu way of marking it, and many North Indian families have the parents fast until the kanyadaan. The Maheshwari form, in the Ludhiana list, widens it to the grandparents and the mama and mami. The family manual records how it ends: after the pheras the bride's grandparents and parents keep their vow by seeing their married daughter's face (chapter 25).

ROOTS **Community custom**

Bari, Stambh Ropan and Kanyaval are Rajasthani and Marwari family practice. The Rajasthani lexicon defines Kanyaval as a fast kept by the bride's close relatives until the wedding rounds.

In some families

The Bari list above is marked in the family manual as its own household's practice, so treat it as one family's list, not a rule. The Maheshwari Samaj Ludhiana's ritual list is shorter: silver thread, four small silver boxes, kumkum and a tika for the bride, then her godh bharai. The four silver boxes and the senasut appear in both.

The Stambh Ropan rests on the one family manual among Maheshwari sources; general guides list a "Thamb Puja" among Marwari wedding rites. In hotel weddings the kalash and beh pots still need someone to take them home.

Whether the Kanyaval is kept by everyone named or only by the parents, and whether elderly or unwell members are excused, is for each family to settle.

Your part in it

- **Bride:** Sit with the women who bring the Bari and ask which piece is for which moment.
- **Bride's siblings:** Receive the Bari party at the door and serve them yourselves. On a long fasting day, look after your grandparents, and bring them word the moment the pheras are done.
- **Groom's jamais and cousins:** If you are sent for the Stambh Ropan, go on time. The muhurat is fixed.

Ask your elders

1. *Which of our family keep the Kanyaval fast, and how is it broken?*

2. *Who from the groom's side came for the Stambh Ropan at your wedding, and what was in your Bari?*

Common questions

Where is Shiva in all this?

No source describes a separate Shiva puja at the mandap. Mahesh is present in two ways. The bride and groom each worship Gangaur, which is Gauri together with Isar, Shiva and Parvati as a married pair (chapter 15). And the Mama Phere carries the katha in which Parvati and Mahesh restored the first Maheshwari marriages (chapter 21). If your family adds a Shiva puja or temple visit, keep it; the sources simply do not record one.

Can the groom's family send the Bari the day before?

The sources place it with the rites of the wedding morning, but none forbids an earlier day, and some families move it to the evening before to free the morning. What matters is that the bride has the Bari's things in hand for the moments they are meant for: the khol filling, the Pher-pata sari after the pheras, and the suhag items she begins to wear as a married woman.

Which hand does the kankan dora go on?

In the family manual, the groom's right hand and right foot, and the bride's left hand and left foot, tied at the Maya. The Ludhiana list says only "the wrist", and Agarwal families tie it on the right wrist of both. Ask the elder who ties it, and keep it on until the two of you untie each other's at the Juva-jui (chapter 30).

Must the bride's parents really fast all day?

The Kanyaval is a vow, and a vow is kept by those who take it. The Ludhiana list records the vow to eat only after the marriage, and the family manual records it broken on seeing the married bride's face. Families decide who keeps it, and may excuse anyone elderly or unwell; a vow is not meant to put health at risk.

Can we have a Sangeet night as well as the songs?

Yes. Neither Maheshwari source has a separate sangeet rite; the songs are built into every rite, five to the deities first (chapter 5). A dance evening sits alongside them happily. Just make sure the old songs are still sung at the Baan, the Pithi and the Gangaur puja, where both sources place them.

Do we need to keep the whole night awake?

Many Rajasthani families once kept the whole night; the family manual records evening sanjha songs and a shorter vigil. What matters is that the family's protectors and ancestors are sung to by name; how late the singing runs is for the house to decide.

PART FOUR

The Wedding Day



From the groom's ride to the circuits outside, the joined hands, the four rounds of the fire and the seven steps.

Beend Raja · Varana · Dhukav and Toran · Suvali and Varmala · Mama Phere · Kanyadaan, Gathjoda and Hathleva · Lajahoma, the stone and the four fire rounds · Saptapadi, Dhruva darshan and Sindoor · After the pheras · Pehravani, Sir-gunthi and Thali Puja

CHAPTER 17

Beend Raja: dressing, Ghodi Puja and Nikasi

बीन राजा बनाना, घोड़ी पूजा, निकासी

GROOM SIBLINGS



IN ONE MINUTE

This is how the groom leaves home. He is dressed as Beend Raja, the bridegroom king, with a safa, a katar and two sevras, and he bows to the Maya and worships Gangaur. He mounts; his mother worships the mare, then marks, measures and blesses him. The jamais hold the reins until they are paid, and a small girl rides behind him waving salt and mustard against nazar.

WHEN	The wedding day, before the baraat sets out
WHO LEADS	His mother at the mare; sister or bua for the aarta; in some families the mama brings him out; the jamais at the reins
WHERE	The groom's home or lodging, and the gate outside
THEME	Protection; Bonds between families
THE SONG FOR THIS MOMENT	"Banado mharo lul lul pacho ji jov", roughly "my groom keeps turning to look back"

What happens

1. **Dressing.** Safa or pecha (traditionally nine metres of starched cotton), sherwani, churidar and mochadi, with a kilangi plume, a katar, a kantha and a ring. A gathjoda cloth and a small coconut are tied at his waist and a kas pin is fixed on his coat. The Maheshwari Samaj Ludhiana's ritual list says he wears the clothes his mama gave him.
2. **Two sevras.** The family manual ties two sevras on the right of his safa: one of Surya, one of Lakshmi. The Lakshmi sevra will later be tied on the bride (chapter 20).
3. Dressed, he bows to the Maya (chapter 15) and worships Gangaur with seven suhagins. His sister or bua does the bada aarta.
4. **Nikasi.** At the gate a married daughter of the house (bua, sister or daughter; the manual calls her the suhasini) stands on his right with a silver lota of water, mango leaves and a coconut, and as he goes to mount he drops a rupee into it. In the Ludhiana list his mama brings him out to the mare, and he stamps on a small heap of earth with mustard seed and money under it.
5. **Ghodi Puja.** Once he is seated on the mare, his mother worships her: she feeds the mare soaked gram dal, puts tilak on her, plaits her mane, drapes a sari over her and puts mehendi on her hooves.
6. Then she turns to her son: tilak with a silver rupee, and she measures his chest four times, crosswise, with her pallu and the netra cord. Jaggery, the

aarta, kajal from the kaki and bhabhi, a mirror, and the uvari, in which each woman circles a token over his head. In the Ludhiana list she blesses him to come home with his bride, and not alone.

7. Every jamai present takes hold of the reins and is paid to let go. A small girl of the family sits behind him with a bundle of salt and mustard (lunrai) and keeps waving it over him.
8. The women follow a short way, singing, and turn back. The groom's first stop is a temple.

Why we do it

Take away the band, and Nikasi is a mother sending her son out of the house. The sources do not say why it is the mother, and not the sisters as in many Agarwal homes, who worships the mare. What they do show is that this morning belongs to her. She feeds the mare, marks her son, measures him and gives the blessing that matters: come back with your bride.

The mare, safa and katar come from the royal style of Rajasthan. Beend is simply the Rajasthani word for the bridegroom; add Raja and he is a king for the day, riding out for his bride.

Under the costume runs protection. Kajal, the mirror, the uvari and the girl with the lunrai are guards against nazar on the day every eye in the street is on him. The Ludhiana list says the girl rides behind "so that the groom will not fall prey to a bad omen", and that stamping the earth shows he is going to be married and will return with his bride.

The measuring with the pallu and the netra is not explained in either source. Watch for it anyway: the bride's mother will do the same to him at her door a few hours later (chapter 19). Two mothers measure one man on the same day.

The jamais at the reins once rode up as grooms to this family's own daughters. Holding the mare, they escort the newest; their neg gives the family's sons-in-law a named place in his leaving.

ROOTS **Community custom and Protective or folk belief**

The mare, the dress and the mother's puja are Rajasthani and Maheshwari custom. The kajal, the uvari, the lunrai and the girl on the mare are protective beliefs against nazar.

In some families

In cities the mare often meets the groom only for the last stretch, or a car stands in for her.

The family manual remembers Toontiya. Once the men had left with the baraat, the women at home staged a mock wedding, one woman dressed as the groom and another as the bride. The manual says plainly that it is no longer held. It answers a fair question: what did the women do while the men were away?

Your part in it

- **Groom:** Stand still while your mother measures you. She will remember it longer than the photographs.
- **Jamais:** Hold the reins together, bargain with good humour, and let go once the neg is settled.
- **Siblings and cousins:** Choose the small girl in advance, tie her lunrai bundle securely and walk beside the mare while she rides.

Ask your elders

1. *Who brings the groom out to the mare in our family, the mama or someone else, and does he stamp a heap of earth?*

2. *Did the women of our house keep Toontiya when the men left with the baraat, and what do you remember of it?*

CHAPTER 18

Varana: the gotra spoken aloud

वरणा, गोत्रोच्चार

BRIDE GROOM SIBLINGS



IN ONE MINUTE

The bride's parents receive the groom as the most honoured guest: her mother pours milk-water and her father washes both his feet, then worships them with roli and rice. Then the two pandits stand up and announce, three times each and aloud, the gotra and three generations of the bride and of the groom. It is the moment the two lineages are named before everyone, and the khap rule is seen to be kept.

WHEN	Before the Dhukav, or at the mandap before the kanyadaan
WHO LEADS	Both families' pandits; the bride's parents
WHERE	The groom's lodging, or the mandap at the venue
THEME	Bonds between families; Consent and witness

What happens

1. **Where it happens.** In the old days, the family manual records, the baraat was stopped at a crossroads on its way to the bride's house. The groom dismounted, both pandits did a short puja and recited the gotras, and the milni took place there on the road. Today that family does the Varana at the mandap; in other families the bride's side takes the Varana to the groom's lodging.
2. The bride's pandit ties a gathjoda on the bride's parents, and Ganesh is worshipped.
3. **The feet.** The bride's mother pours milk-water and her father washes both the groom's feet. The feet are worshipped with roli and rice. The groom receives tilak, jaggery, a garland, a set of clothes and an envelope.
4. **Gotrochar.** The bride's pandit recites her gotra and the names of three generations. Then the groom's pandit does the same for him. Each says it three times, aloud.
5. **Milni.** The two fathers meet and embrace, and the relatives of the two sides greet each other in pairs. The women may sing "Swagat shubh di aaj samadhiji", a song of welcome to the samdhi.

Why we do it

A father-in-law washing a young man's feet in public can look like the wrong way round. It makes sense once you know how old Indian households treated a guest. The Grihya Sutras, the household manuals behind the Vedic wedding, set out a full welcome for a short list of honoured guests, and the bridegroom is received in this way in the Paraskara Grihya Sutra. The Maheshwari sources do not name madhuparka, the honey and curd of that old reception, but water for the feet and worship of the guest are its plain echo. For one evening the groom is the most important guest the bride's house will ever receive.

The family manual states the purpose of the gotrochar in a single line: to announce the gotra and lineage of both bride and groom to the gathering. The

Maheshwari Samaj Ludhiana's ritual list adds the reason the announcement matters: the bride and groom "should not be of the same Kul or Gotra".

For Maheshwaris this is the moment the khap and its rishi gotra, described in Part 0, are spoken aloud. In most families today the rule is that one does not marry into one's own khap; some elders remember a wider rule that also avoided the mothers' khaps. The rule is about lineage, as the family has always counted it. The pandits' recitation is how the whole hall witnesses that it has been kept.

Saying it three times, by two different voices, leaves no room for anyone to say later that they did not hear.

What the guests see

Two priests chanting lists of names while the food waits. What is really happening is the public record of the marriage, made the old way: each family's line named for three generations, before witnesses, by its own pandit.

ROOTS **Vedic rite and Community custom**

Honouring the groom as guest echoes the Grihya Sutra reception of the bridegroom; the gotrochar comes from the pandit's standard paddhati. The crossroads Varana and the milni are community custom.

In some families

Agarwal weddings have the Korath, when the bride's men go to invite the groom. Neither Maheshwari source names it; the Varana carried to the groom's lodging is its nearest equivalent. The Ludhiana list has the bride's mama and mami, rather than her parents, wash the groom's feet.

The crossroads Varana has lapsed in city weddings, and the family manual records it only as old custom. The Rajasthani wedding vocabulary also has Jala, when the bride's women go to view the baraat's camp; ask whether your family

kept it. In some weddings the gotrochar is brief; in others the pandit recites the pravar and the Veda as well.

Your part in it

- **Bride and groom:** Learn the names. Write down your father's, grandfather's and great-grandfather's names, your khap and your gotra, and if your elders know them, the pravar, Veda and shakha. Give the list to your pandit in advance. Hearing your own line said aloud is a strange and moving thing.
- **Bride's parents:** Keep the thali, the milk-water and the clothes for the groom ready before he is brought in.
- **Siblings and cousins:** Make a list of milni pairs for both sides and hand it to whoever is calling the names. It saves the hunt for "the other mama".

Ask your elders

1. *What are our khap, gotra and three generations of names, and does our purohit also recite a pravar, Veda and shakha?*

2. *At your wedding, was the Varana done on the road, at the groom's lodging or at the mandap?*

CHAPTER 19

Dhukav and Toran: the groom at the door

ढुकाव, तोरण

GROOM SIBLINGS



IN ONE MINUTE

Dhukav is the baraat's arrival at the bride's door. Still on the mare, the groom strikes the toran above the entrance seven times with a neem branch and his katar. Then, at a silver chauki, he is received by the bride's mother: a coin stuck to his forehead with curd, his chest measured, his coat pin taken, and his nose held. Her women add kajal, a mirror, neem and a rattle against nazar.

WHEN	Wedding evening, as the baraat arrives
WHO LEADS	The groom at the toran; the bride's mother, bhabhi and kaki at the door
WHERE	The gate of the bride's home or the venue
THEME	Protection; Bonds between families

What happens

1. The baraat reaches the gate. The baratis are given garlands and gajras.
2. **Toran.** The family manual has the groom, still mounted, strike the toran seven times with a decorated neem branch and his katar. If the toran hangs indoors, he dismounts first. The Maheshwari Samaj Ludhiana's ritual list has him touch it with a neem stick, after which he is asked to dismount.
3. **At the silver chauki.** The bride's mother does tilak with a silver rupee and sticks the coin to his forehead with set curd. She measures his chest four times, crosswise, with the netra cord and her pallu. She unpins the kas from his coat and keeps it. Then she takes hold of his nose. The aarta follows.
4. The bride's bhabhi applies kajal. The kaki holds up a mirror and does neemjhari, passing a green neem branch down from his shoulder to his chest four times. Another woman rattles a khunkhuniya by his ear.
5. The groom is led in. The garlands and the Mama Phere lie ahead.

Why we do it

No Maheshwari source gives a reason for striking the toran. It is a custom of Rajasthan, the pandit has no mantra for it, and the explanations families offer are popular ones: that the groom shows he can protect the house he is marrying into, which is why the katar is used, or that the neem keeps off ill will at the moment the whole baraat crowds an open door. Both are told with conviction; neither is scripture. What the toran itself says is plain enough. A toran over a door announces a celebration, and at it the groom stops being a traveller and stands at the threshold of his bride's home.

Most of what happens next is protection. The curd coin, the kajal, the mirror, the neem and the rattle are all guards against nazar, gathered at the one point where the groom is most exposed. Watch the measuring: his own mother did the same with her pallu and the netra before he left home (chapter 17). Neither source explains it, and it is striking that both mothers do it on the

same day. The manual records the kas being taken and kept, and gives no reason for that either.

The nose is the part people ask about. It is a joke, a licensed one, and it is very old. Russell and Hiralal's survey of the Central Provinces, published in 1916, records of Maheshwari weddings that "the bride's mother ties a scarf round his neck and takes hold of his nose and drags him into the shed". The same survey adds that "sometimes they make the bridegroom kneel down and pay reverence to a shoe as a joke". More than a century later the family manual has the mother taking hold of his nose at exactly this point. Few customs in this book can show a written record that long.

What the guests see

A great deal of tugging, laughter and fuss around a man who would like to sit down. What is really happening is the bride's side taking charge of him: guarding him from the evil eye, and teasing him, as a family teases one of its own.

ROOTS **Community custom and Protective or folk belief**

Toran marna and the mother-in-law's welcome are Rajasthani and Maheshwari custom, carried by families rather than by the pandit's texts. The neem, kajal, mirror, curd coin and rattle are protective beliefs against nazar.

In some families

In many Agarwal homes the groom only touches the toran; the Maheshwari form, mounted and seven strikes, is the more specific. In city venues the toran is often fixed to a temporary gate, and the mare may not reach it at all. Some families have dropped the nose-holding as improper; in others it is the moment everyone waits for.

Who does what at the door also varies. In the Agarwal edition the bride's sister brushes the groom with neem; in the family manual it is the kaki. Ask which women of your family take which part.

Your part in it

- **Groom:** Keep the neem branch and the katar within reach as the baraat slows. Then stand still at the chauki and let your mother-in-law finish. It is the first time she receives you as family, and she will notice whether you were looking at her.
- **Bride's siblings and cousins:** Set up the silver chauki, the curd, the coin, the mirror, a green neem branch and the khunkhuniya before the band is heard.
- **Groom's siblings and cousins:** Make sure the baraat actually stops at the gate, which is harder than it sounds.

Ask your elders

1. *Does the groom strike the toran in our family, and how many times, with neem, katar or both?*

2. *Did the bride's mother hold the groom's nose at your wedding, and did she stick the coin with curd?*

CHAPTER 20

Suvali and Varmala: the garlands

सुवाली की माला, वरमाला

BRIDE GROOM SIBLINGS



IN ONE MINUTE

Before the garlands, the bride's sister or friend brings a string of seven suvalis, small fried wheat discs, on blue thread, with a ball of cooked rice. The bride threads four more suvalis onto it and throws the rice ball over the groom's head. Then come the garlands, the bride first. The garland stands for her choice, made in front of everyone; it is later tradition, not a Vedic rite.

WHEN	Wedding evening, after the Dhukav and just before the Mama Phere
WHO LEADS	The bride and groom; her sister or friend with the suvalis
WHERE	The stage at the venue
THEME	Consent and witness

What happens

1. The groom waits on the stage. The bride is brought to him by her family.
2. **Suvali.** The family manual records that her friend or sister brings a garland of seven suvalis threaded on blue thread, and a ball of cooked rice.
3. The bride takes four more suvalis and threads them onto the garland with her own hand.
4. Facing the groom, she holds the rice ball in both hands and throws it over his head.
5. **Varmala.** The bride garlands the groom first, then he garlands her. Petals fly and the guests cheer.
6. In the family manual, the Lakshmi sevra that the groom wore from home (chapter 17) is now tied on the bride's head before the Mama Phere (the manual says on her right in one place and on her left in another). Today it is often sent ahead with the Bari instead.

Why we do it

The garland is the easy part to explain, and the most often misunderstood. In the epics and Puranas, a princess at her swayamvara walked among the suitors and placed a garland on the one she chose: Damayanti chose Nala this way, and Draupadi's contest ended with her garland on Arjuna. In Tulsidas's Ramcharitmanas, the Ramayana most North Indian families know, Sita places the jaymala on Rama after he breaks Shiva's bow. Valmiki's older telling has the bow but no garland; Janaka simply gives his daughter to the winner. Whatever else the evening holds, the garland stands for the bride's choice, shown in public.

That is why the bride garlands first in most families. The order is not about rank; it remembers that the garland was hers to give. When he answers with his own, both have said "I accept you" without a word, before both families.

Be clear about what the Varmala is not. The Grihya Sutras, which give the fire, the hand-taking and the seven steps, say nothing of garlands. The marriage is

not made on this stage; it is made at the fire, later in the evening.

The suvalis are harder. The family manual calls the four the bride adds "shagun", an auspicious token, and gives no further reason for them or for the rice ball. General Marwari guides describe seven suhalis placed on the groom's head, so the custom is shared; the garland of seven, the four added and the rice ball thrown are the Maheshwari manual's fuller form. What the gesture shows is simple enough: food from the bride's side, offered to the groom by her own hand before she garlands him.

ROOTS **Shastric or Puranic rite and Community custom**

The garland of choice comes from the swayamvara of the epics and Puranas, not from the Grihya Sutras. The suvalis and the rice ball are Marwari and Maheshwari custom.

In some families

The family manual notes that some families recite a mangalashtak, a verse of auspicious blessing, before the garlands. The mangalashtak is best known from Maharashtrian weddings, and the manual belongs to a Mumbai family, but the manual does not say where its families took it from. If yours recites one, ask how it came in.

Then there is the lifting. As the bride comes close, the groom's friends hoist him so she cannot reach, and her brothers lift her in reply. Some families love it; others find it undignified. It is a joke, not a rite, and nothing depends on it. It is easy to agree beforehand that nobody gets lifted.

Your part in it

- **Bride:** Practise threading four suvalis quickly; the stage will be crowded. Then take your time with the garland. This is your choice being shown, and it can last a second longer.
- **Groom:** Bend your head a little for the garland and for the rice ball. Guests notice.

- **Bride's sister or friend:** The suvali garland and the rice ball are your charge. Thread the seven on blue thread the day before, keep four spare, and stand at the bride's elbow.

Ask your elders

1. *Does our family bring a suvali garland and a rice ball before the Varmala, and how many suvalis go on it?*

2. *Is the Lakshmi sevra tied on the bride in our family, and is it done at the stage or sent with the Bari?*

CHAPTER 21

Mama Phere: the circuits outside

मामा फेरे, बाहर के फेरे

BRIDE GROOM SIBLINGS



IN ONE MINUTE

Straight after the garlands, before any fire is lit, the bride's mama stands behind her with his hands on her shoulders and walks her round the standing groom, three times in most families. Four girls hold flower baskets at the corners, and she showers him with petals as she passes. The community explains it with its own origin story, in which Mahesh and Parvati had the wives circle their husbands and the marriages were made again.

WHEN	Straight after the Varmala, before the rites at the fire
WHO LEADS	The bride's mama, after the pandit's tilak
WHERE	The stage, or at the door
THEME	Bonds between families; Consent and witness

What happens

1. The pandit puts tilak on the bride's mama.
2. The groom stands at the centre. Four girls with decorated flower baskets take the four corners of the stage.
3. The mama stands behind the bride with both hands on her shoulders and takes her round the groom three times, from his left round to his right. So a Mumbai Maheshwari family's written manual, reetrivaz.in, describes it.
4. At each basket the bride takes flowers in both hands and throws them over the groom as she passes.
5. Then the bride goes ahead, the groom holding one end of her chunri, and the two bow to the Maya (chapter 15). They come back with the groom in front.
6. The rites at the fire follow (chapters 22 to 24). After the fire rounds, the family manual records the "mama sevra" sung or done four times in the mandap, naming the mama.

Why we do it

No Grihya Sutra describes this rite. The community explains it with its own story, the utpatti katha told in full in Part 0. The king's son and his seventy-two companions were turned to stone for disturbing the rishis' yagya. Their wives prayed, Parvati pleaded with Mahesh, and he restored the men on condition that they lay down arms and take to trade. The men were now Vaishyas.

In the community's telling, Mahesh then told the wives to go round their husbands three times, so that they too would enter the Vaishya varna, and the marriages were made again. "Since then," a community article in Hindi Vivek says, "this custom has continued." The same article names the three circuits at the door as one of the marks that set Maheshwaris apart from other Marwari Vaishya communities.

The story has variants, and they matter because the rite follows them. In some tellings husband and wife went round a neem tree together. In others, given by

the Mumbai Maheshwari Samaj, themaheshwari.com and a community account on Indpaedia, the wives went four times round Parvati herself. One devotional writer says the circuits are made round an image of Mahesh and Parvati. Most families take three; some take four, and tell the story to match. Your family's number stands.

Then the arithmetic. Three circuits outside and four rounds at the fire (chapter 23) make seven. Some families count three outside and seven at the fire. Either way, the Maheshwari wedding reaches its seven partly through the story of its own founding.

Why the mama? No source says. What the sources do show is how often the mother's brother stands at the turning points of a Maheshwari wedding: his Mayra brings the clothes and the chuda (chapter 11), he lifts the child off the pata (chapter 14), he brings the bride into the mandap (chapter 22), and his sevra is sung at the fire. Here he walks behind her with his hands on her shoulders while the founding story is retold.

One honest note on the record. The oldest outside account of the origin story, written in 1916, has the stone, the wives and Shiva's command to trade, but says nothing of circuits. The circuits live in the community's own tellings and in the rite itself. The scholar Lawrence Babb reads the story as a group leaving violence and rejoining society through trade. At the Mama Phere, each bride walks through that founding act.

What the guests see

A pretty moment with petals and photographs. What is really happening is the rite that most marks a Maheshwari wedding: the bride, with her mother's family behind her, re-enacts the circuits by which the community's first marriages were made whole.

ROOTS **Community custom**

The Mama Phere has no basis in the Grihya Sutras. It is carried wholly by the community's katha and its families, and that is exactly why it is the most Maheshwari moment of the wedding.

In some families

Families call these circuits mama phere or bahar ke phere, the circuits outside. The Hindi Vivek article places them at the door; the family manual places them on the stage, and city weddings usually follow the stage. The Maheshwari Samaj Ludhiana's ritual list says simply that three pheras are taken by the bride round the groom at the dais. Where the bride has no mama, ask the elders who stands in; the sources do not say.

Your part in it

- **Bride:** Take the flowers in both hands at every basket. Walk slowly; your mama is steering.
- **Groom:** Stand still at the centre and let the petals land. Afterwards hold the end of her chunri as you both go to the Maya.
- **Mama:** Ask the pandit beforehand which side to begin from. Your hands on her shoulders are the whole rite.
- **Siblings and cousins:** Four of you hold the flower baskets at the corners. Fill them generously.

Ask your elders

1. *How many circuits did you take at your wedding, round whom, and what does our family call them?*

2. *Which telling of the Parvati story does our family tell to explain them?*

CHAPTER 22

Kanyadaan, Gathjoda and Hathleva

कन्यादान, गठजोड़ा, हथलेवा

BRIDE GROOM



IN ONE MINUTE

At the mandap the bride's mama brings her in. Her father gives the groom four cloths, yellows her hands with haldi, and with her mother entrusts her to the groom with a sankalp and a gift of gold. The groom takes her right hand with a ball of mehendi between their palms: the hathleva, the Vedic hand-taking. The pandit ties his gathjoda to her odhni, with moong and rice in the knot.

WHEN	At the mandap, after the Mama Phere and before the fire rounds
WHO LEADS	The pandit; the bride's parents; her mama brings her in
WHERE	The mandap, seated on gaddis before the fire
THEME	Consent and witness; Bonds between families

What happens

1. **Opening.** The family manual gives the order. A gathjoda is tied on the bride's parents. They and the groom worship Ganesh, the planets and the kalash, the var puja follows, and the fire is installed. The bride sits at the groom's right. The manual notes that sofas have come in, "but the vidhan is puja seated on gaddis".
2. The bride's mama brings her into the mandap, and she does her own dev puja.
3. **Cloths and haldi.** Her father gives the groom four cloths; the groom gives two to the bride to wear and wears two himself. Bride and groom look at each other for the first time in the rite. Her father yellows her hands with haldi.
4. **Kanyadaan.** The parents make the sankalp, with the gotra and three generations recited three times. They give the groom gold, a ring placed in his hand; the manual says that in kanyadaan the gift of gold has importance. Godaan follows, a gift made in the name of a cow. The couple look at each other a second time.
5. **Hathleva.** The pandit joins their right hands with a ball of mehendi between the palms. The mehendi is ground on a sil beforehand by the bride's bua and fufa, or her sister and jija. A cloth screen, the antarpat, is held between them.
6. **Gathjoda.** Before the fire rounds, the pandit ties the groom's gathjoda cloth to the bride's odhni, with moong, rice, a turmeric knot, a supari and a rupee in the knot.

Why we do it

Start with the hands, the oldest part. In the Paraskara Grihya Sutra the groom takes the bride's hand with the words "I seize thy hand for the sake of happiness, that thou mayst live to old age with me, thy husband." Panigrahan, the taking of the hand, is so central that it became an old Sanskrit word for marriage itself. The family manual gives its meaning in Hindi terms: the groom

takes responsibility to look after the bride for life. The bare circle left on her right palm at the Mehendi (chapter 12) was kept for this ball of colour.

Kanyadaan frames that moment from the parents' side. In the Sutra and Dharmashastra tradition the father entrusts his daughter, and the groom accepts responsibility before witnesses. It is the groom who is placed under obligation. "Haath peele karna", to yellow the hands, is the everyday phrase for a daughter's marriage, and here her father does it literally.

The knot is a sign the back row can read: from here on nothing is done by one without the other. The Grihya Sutras do not describe tying the clothes together; it comes from later custom. In the Agarwal edition the groom's sister ties it. In the family manual it is the pandit.

About the word "daan"

"Daan" means a gift, and to many young readers giving away a daughter sounds like handing over property. That discomfort is real and worth saying aloud. The rite's own words speak of trust and of the groom's responsibility; they are a vow he makes, not a sale.

One Maheshwari family has its own answer. The family manual records that after the wedding the groom's side gives a sum or a silver item to a goshala or temple in the bride's town, "in celebration of bringing a bahu, and to be freed of the burden of accepting the daan of a daughter" (chapter 26). That is one family's practice, not a rule, but it shows the question has been thought about from inside the tradition.

Families today handle it in different ways: both parents together, the bride's consent spoken aloud, the wording kanya-samarpan, an entrusting. This book offers no verdict.

ROOTS **Vedic rite and Shastric or Puranic rite**

Panigrahan is in the Paraskara Grihya Sutra. Kanyadaan rests on the Grihya Sutra and the later Dharmashastra. The gathjoda and the mehendi of the hathleva are community custom.

In some families

The order varies. In the Maheshwari Samaj Ludhiana's ritual list the daan comes after the fire rounds, once the mama has led the bride from the dais. Ask your pandit which order he follows.

The antarpat appears twice in the family manual. It is better known from Maharashtrian and Gujarati weddings; whether it came into Maheshwari practice from there, no source settles.

Your part in it

- **Bride:** Keep that circle on your right palm clear at the Mehendi. If you would like to state your consent aloud, tell the pandit beforehand.
- **Groom:** When the pandit explains the hand-taking, listen. This promise is yours alone; ask him for the meaning in Hindi if you need it.
- **Both:** Keep your hands still once the mehendi ball is in place. The colour will tell everyone if you did not.

Ask your elders

1. *At your wedding, who brought the bride into the mandap, and who tied the gathjoda?*

2. *In our family, does the kanyadaan come before the fire rounds or after, and what goes into the knot?*

CHAPTER 23

Lajahoma, the stone and the four fire rounds

लाजाहोम, शिलारोहण, फेरे

BRIDE GROOM SIBLINGS



IN ONE MINUTE

This is the rite at the fire. The bride's brother fills her cupped hands with khil, puffed rice, and she offers it into the flames. At each round she treads on a small stone, asked to be as firm as it is. Maheshwari families take four rounds of the fire: the bride leads three, the groom the fourth. With the three Mama Phere taken earlier, that makes seven. These are among the oldest acts of the wedding.

WHEN	At the mandap, after the Hathleva
WHO LEADS	The pandit; the bride and groom; the bride's brother for the laja
WHERE	Round the havan kund in the mandap
THEME	Consent and witness; Bonds between families
THE SONG FOR THIS MOMENT	"Mhari sarab suhagan banadi phera ji baithi", one verse for each round

What happens

1. The pandit moves aside the board of the matrikas and nine planets, so that only the fire is circled. The couple rise, joined by the gathjoda.
2. The bride's brother pours khil from his hands into her joined hands. She offers it into the fire in three oblations while the pandit recites. This is lajahoma.
3. With the bride in front, the couple go round the fire, and she places her foot on a small stone (shilarohan). Laja, oblations, round and stone are repeated three times.
4. For the fourth round the groom goes in front. Three more oblations are made and the stone is touched again. The bride then pours the khil that remains into the fire from the edge of the soop, the winnowing fan.
5. The women sing the phera song through the rounds. In one family manual the "mama sevra" is then sung four times, naming the mama.

Why we do it

Count the rounds at a Maheshwari wedding and you get four. A guest used to other weddings may expect seven and think someone lost count. No one did: the four stand closer to the oldest text than the seven do.

The Paraskara Grihya Sutra, which most North Indian pandits follow, has the bride's brother pour fried grain into her joined hands; she offers it, and the couple go round the fire. This happens three times. Then, in Oldenberg's translation, "the fourth time she pours the whole fried grain by the neb of a

basket into the fire with 'To Bhaga svaha'", without a round. Maheshwari families keep the three laja rounds, add a fourth led by the groom, and still pour the last grain from the soop. That fourth round is a local elaboration, not an error; Rajput weddings in Rajasthan are recorded with the same four. Seven fire rounds is the norm many pandits now follow; the Maheshwari count reaches seven with three rounds at the door and four at the fire.

The brother's part is the warmest moment of the night. The Sutra's mantra asks long life for her husband and prosperity for her own relations, so her birth family stays in her prayer. A Mumbai Maheshwari family's written manual, reetrivaz.in, compares her to a rice seedling, which fruits only when moved to another field. The brother promises that all his life he will keep filling her cupped hands with love and help.

The stone is plainer. The Sutra has the groom ask her to tread on it: "Tread on this stone; like a stone be firm." The family manual adds that when a clod of earth strikes a stone, the clod breaks, never the stone.

Behind it all is the fire. In Vedic thought Agni carries offerings to the gods and sees what is promised before him. Moving the board aside fits that idea: for these rounds the fire alone is the witness.

What the guests see

Guests see a couple walk round a fire while a young man keeps pouring rice into the bride's hands. In fact her brother is standing by her as she leaves his family, and the women's song counts her out of her father's house one round at a time. Its fourth verse says it plainly: "chautho phero le bai mhari hui e parayi", with the fourth round, my girl, you have become another's.

ROOTS **Vedic rite**

Lajahoma, the stone and the rounds of the fire are in the Paraskara Grihya Sutra (I.6 to I.7). The fourth round led by the groom is Maheshwari and wider Rajasthani practice built on that base.

In some families

The Maheshwari Samaj Ludhiana's ritual list agrees with the family manual: four rounds, the last with the groom ahead, the brother's laja, and a small stone touched with the bride's foot.

Practice still varies with the pandit. Many Maheshwari families are now married by pandits who follow seven fire rounds, and some count three at the door plus seven at the fire. In the manual's phera song the verses name who blesses the bride: her mother, her father, her brother and bhojai. Where the bride has no brother, a cousin or another man of her family usually pours the laja.

Your part in it

- **Bride's brother:** The laja is yours, at every round. Keep the khil in your lap and fill her hands generously.
- **Bride:** You lead three rounds. Find the stone with your foot each time; the pandit will wait for you. The khil left in the soop at the end is yours to pour.
- **Groom:** The fourth round is yours to lead. Walk at her pace and keep the knot clear of the fire.
- **Siblings and cousins:** Ask an aunt to sing the phera song, a verse a round, and record it.

Ask your elders

1. *At your wedding, how many rounds of the fire did you take, and who led which?*

2. *Who poured the laja into your hands, and does anyone in the family still sing the phera song?*

CHAPTER 24

Saptapadi, Dhruva darshan and Sindoor

सप्तपदी, ध्रुव दर्शन, हृदय स्पर्श, सिन्दूरदान

BRIDE GROOM



IN ONE MINUTE

After the fire rounds the couple take seven steps together, each with a short Sanskrit line asking for something a household needs. The bride is shown the sun, or at night the pole star, as a pledge of steadiness. Each touches the other's heart. Then comes the Maheshwari moment that says she is now his wife: the bride moves from the groom's right side to his left, and he fills her parting with sindoor.

WHEN	At the mandap, after the fire rounds and the release of the Hathleva
WHO LEADS	The pandit; the groom, who applies the sindoor
WHERE	On the vedi, beside the fire
THEME	Consent and witness

What happens

1. The joined hands of the Hathleva are released (hathleva chhudai). The couple stand on the vedi, the gathjoda still tied.
2. Saptapadi: seven steps, the right foot forward each time. The rule in one family manual is that the left foot must never pass the right. With each step the pandit recites a line, and many pandits read a vow in Hindi.
3. At a day wedding the couple are shown the sun (Surya darshan); at night, the pole star (Dhruva darshan), with the verse "dhruva dyaur dhruva prithivi", firm is the sky, firm is the earth.
4. Hridaya sparsha: each touches the other's heart with the right hand as the pandit says "mama vrate te hridayam dadhami".
5. The bride, who has sat at the groom's right since the start of the rites, now moves to sit at his left.
6. The groom fills her parting with sindoor. The pandits receive their dakshina.

Why we do it

If the fire rounds are done, what is left to make the marriage? In the old texts, the steps. The Paraskara Grihya Sutra has three rounds of the fire and a fourth offering of grain, and seals the marriage with seven steps. In Oldenberg's translation the groom says: "one for sap, two for juice, three for the prospering of wealth, four for comfort, five for cattle, six for the seasons. Friend, be with seven steps united to me." Cattle were the wealth of that age; the list you may hear today, with children in the fifth place, is a loose modern rendering.

The law agrees on the moment. Section 7 of the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 says that where the customary rites include the saptapadi, "the taking of seven steps by the bridegroom and the bride jointly before the sacred fire", the marriage becomes complete and binding when the seventh step is taken.

The family manual glosses the left foot that must not pass the right: the heart's wishes are not to run ahead of judgement. That reading is the compiler's, and a

good one. The manual also prints seven Hindi vows and the bride's conditions with the groom's one. These are a twentieth-century composition; many pandits read vows of this kind, but the Sanskrit lines are the old core.

The pole star is shown because it does not move: "Firm art thou; I see thee, the firm one. Firm be thou with me, O thriving one!" Arundhati, shown in some other traditions, belongs to other Sutras.

The heart touch needs one honest note. In the Sutra the groom alone touches the bride's heart, over her right shoulder: "Into my will I take thy heart; thy mind shall follow my mind." The family manual has each touch the other's, and calls it "the registry of the Indian marriage", with the mandap as the court, the pandit and guests as witnesses and a whole palm in place of a thumbprint. The mutual form and the registry image are modern readings.

Then the bride changes sides, from his right to his left. That small move, made before everyone, is the clearest Maheshwari answer to "when does she become his wife". Sindoor follows at once. It is not in the Sutras; it rests on later custom, and the parting will be filled again at the Sir-gunthi before Vidai (chapter 26).

The signs she wears

A Maheshwari bride's suhaag signs are worn by her alone. The ivory chuda comes from her mama in the Mayra and is put on at the Lakh (chapter 14); lac bangles are added at the groom's home (chapter 33, which also covers what families wear now that ivory cannot be traded). With it come the nath, the bichhudi (toe rings) and the senasut. The mangalsutra is not mentioned in any Maheshwari source; it may be more common among families in Maharashtra. The groom's mark is the kankan dora, untied at the Juva-jui (chapter 30).

ROOTS **Vedic rite and Shastric or Puranic rite**

Saptapadi, Dhruva darshan and the heart touch are in the Paraskara Grihya Sutra (I.8). Sindoor rests on later Shastric and regional custom.

In some families

Some pandits fold the step mantras into the fire rounds, so no separate seven steps are taken. The Hindi vows vary most of all: some pandits read the bride's conditions, some promises from both, some only the Sanskrit with a line of meaning.

Your part in it

- **Bride:** Ask the pandit to give the meaning of each step as you take it, and whether his fifth step is cattle or children. Remember the side change; it is yours to make.
- **Groom:** Learn the last line, "sakha saptapadi bhava", be my friend with seven steps, and say it yourself. Practise the sindoor with the coin or ring; a steady line reads as care.
- **Both:** Read the Hindi vows beforehand; if a line sits badly, ask the pandit.

Ask your elders

1. *Were you shown the sun or the pole star at your wedding, and did you touch each other's hearts?*

2. *When the bride moved to the groom's left, did anyone say anything, and what signs of a married woman were you given that day?*

CHAPTER 25

After the pheras: Suhag-bidi, Joota Chhupai and Bada Bhat

सुहागबीड़ी, जूता छुपाई, बड़ा भात

BRIDE GROOM SIBLINGS



IN ONE MINUTE

Once the fire rites end, the bride's women give her a sari, the suhag-bidi, and the groom an envelope. Her sisters hide his shoes and bargain. Her grandparents and parents, who have fasted all day, see their married daughter's face and break their fast. The couple are sung to the gate. Later, at the Bada Bhat, the gods and ancestors of both houses are served before anyone eats, and the groom's parents are fed as honoured guests.

WHEN	Straight after the pheras; the Bada Bhat after the reception
WHO LEADS	The bride's women and siblings; her parents and grandparents; the bride's household for the feast
WHERE	The mandap, the hall gate and the dining area
THEME	Blessing; Bonds between families

What happens

1. The bride's sisters, buas, mausis, mamis and bhabhis give her the suhag-bidi, a sari, and give the groom an envelope. The barber spreads his cloth behind the couple (the chhat) and receives a neg.
2. Joota chhupai: the bride's brothers and sisters hide the shoes the groom left at the mandap, and the bargaining begins. The elders step in to settle the sum.
3. The couple bow to the Maya. Then the bride's dada-dadi and her parents do her munh dikhai, give her a neg, and break the Kanyaval fast they began before the wedding.
4. Pheron ki vidai: the women sing the couple to the gate of the hall. Outside, the groom's side fills the bride's khol with the second set of clothes sent in the Bari.
5. The gathjoda is untied, and each returns to their own side until the reception.
6. Bada Bhat: before anyone eats, bhog is offered and a thali is set out for each deity, and one for the pitar or pitrani with an envelope, for a Brahmin or Brahmani or a temple. The groom's parents are asked to set out thalis for their own deities and ancestors, each with Rs 101 from the bride's side.
7. Then the groom's parents and the couple are seated and fed. One woman of the groom's family feeds the bride a mouthful by hand. After eating, the groom's parents leave money by their thalis for the household staff.

Why we do it

To a guest it looks like an hour of envelopes, a shoe game and a dinner. Each piece answers a different need, and they make sense taken one at a time.

The suhag-bidi is the women of the bride's own family giving her the first gift of her married life. The aunts and sisters-in-law who sang her through the week are the first to treat her as a married woman. The envelope to the groom says the same thing to him: he is now one of theirs.

The munh dikhai by her own parents is the quiet centre of the evening and is not part of an Agarwal wedding. Both Maheshwari sources record the Kanyaval fast: the bride's parents and grandparents vow not to eat until the marriage is done. Seeing her face as a married woman is what releases them. One way to read it: the fast holds the elders to the rite all day, and the face is the proof that it is complete.

Joota chhupai is a game, and no deeper reading is needed. It gives the bride's siblings their own claim on the night and lets two families who have been formal for hours begin to tease each other. The family manual's detail that the elders settle the sum is a sensible safeguard.

The Bada Bhat carries the most meaning, and the family manual sets it out carefully. Both households' gods and ancestors are fed before any living person, and the bride's family pays for the groom's family's thalis too. The mouthful fed to the bride by a woman of her new family is an acceptance made in public; in older days it came with a piece of jewellery. The money left by the plates remembers the people who cooked and served.

Russell's 1916 account noted that Maheshwaris did not keep the formal seated pangat feast; guests sat down as they came in and were served. The modern buffet is not far from that. The Rajasthani name for this feast, parani jaan ka jiman, means the meal given to the baraat after the wedding rounds.

ROOTS **Community custom**

None of these is in the Sutras. The gifts, the fast, the game and the order of the feast are carried by Maheshwari and wider Marwari families.

In some families

The second khol set at the gate goes by other names in general Marwari guides, which call it aanjhala bharai. The Bada Bhat as the family manual describes it rests on that one source; many families now fold it into the reception dinner, with or without the deity thalis.

The reception and the dinner, which the manual says have taken on special importance, are social events rather than rites, and this book does not treat them as rites. Which woman feeds the bride depends on who is present: the manual names the groom's dadi, his badi ma (his father's elder brother's wife) or his mother.

Your part in it

- **Bride:** When your parents and grandparents come for the munh dikhai, give them a moment. They have not eaten all day.
- **Groom:** Keep cash with a brother for the shoes, and lose the bargaining gracefully.
- **Siblings:** Hide the shoes well and keep the price fair. Let the elders close the deal when they step in.
- **Cousins:** At the Bada Bhat, set out the deity thalis and envelopes before anyone sits down.

Ask your elders

1. *Did our family keep the Kanyaval fast, and who broke it by seeing the bride's face?*

2. *At the Bada Bhat, whose deities and ancestors were given thalis, and who fed the bride the first mouthful?*

CHAPTER 26

Pehravani, Sir-gunthi and Thali Puja: the bride's side honours the groom's

पेहरावनी, सिर-गूंथी, थली पूजन

BRIDE GROOM SIBLINGS



IN ONE MINUTE

Before the bride leaves, her hair is plaited and the groom fills her parting again with a silver rupee. He unties the Tani and is given negs for the kitchen hearth and the beh pots. Then the bride's side honours the groom's: the jamais of both families, and above all the groom's mother, who is dressed, garlanded and given the bride to hold on her lap. Last, the couple bless the threshold.

WHEN	After the pheras and the feast, just before Vidai
WHO LEADS	The bride's bua or sister; the pandit; the bride's elders
WHERE	At the place of the pheras, then the kitchen threshold or the hall gate
THEME	Bonds between families; Moving home

What happens

1. Sir-gunthi: at the place of the pheras, the bride's bua or sister oils and plaits her hair and puts wax along the parting. The groom is called and fills the parting with a silver rupee, then gives her a munh dikhai neg.
2. The pandit has the groom untie the Tani, the cord over the mandap, and do the negs of the bhatti (the kitchen hearth) and the seven beh pots. He is given envelopes for each.
3. Pher-pata: the couple sit on two cushions at the spot of the pheras, the bride in the clothes sent for it in the Bari, and the pandit does the Pher-pata puja.
4. Pehravani: the groom receives tilak and a siropav. On a silver chauki the bride's side honours its own jamais, then the groom's family's jamais, then anyone the groom's mother names, each with an envelope.
5. The groom's mother is seated and honoured with a sari and shringar, a saffron handprint on her back, a shawl (placed on the shoulders, not over the head), a garland of dry fruit or sweets, a silver cup of dry fruit and the Pehravani coconut.
6. The bride's elders seat the bride on the groom's mother's lap. Then they give the couple their vidai envelopes.
7. Thali Puja: the couple bow to the Maya and offer a coconut. At the kitchen threshold, or the hall gate, a leaf with cow dung is set on a board with roli, moli, rice, jaggery, durva, moong and money. The couple fold their hands before it.

Why we do it

The bride's family has spent the week receiving. Here, at the end, it gives, and the giving is aimed with care at the people who will matter most to their daughter tomorrow.

The family manual calls the groom's mother, in this rite, the sagaji: the samdhan, in her role as the bride's mother-in-law. She is honoured last and most. The manual states the meaning of the lap in its own words: now may the

sagaji care for our daughter as her own. Few rites in the wedding say their purpose so plainly. The bride's parents cannot go with her; they place her, in front of everyone, in the lap of the woman who will.

The Sir-gunthi repeats the sindoor of the mandap in a quieter setting. The sindoor at the fire was part of the rite; this one is done among the women, just before she leaves. General Marwari guides record it too, sometimes with the groom's sister applying it.

The Tani and the beh pots close what was opened. The cord went up over the mandap at the start of the wedding; the groom takes it down. The beh pots and the thamb kalash later go to the groom's house and, in the manual's practice, are given at a Brahmani's wedding, so the vessels of one wedding help another.

The Thali Puja asks the house to bless the couple as they go. The kitchen threshold is the house's working heart, and moong, durva and jaggery are the same signs of growth and sweetness used all week.

One family's answer to the daan

The family manual records a gift from the groom's side, made at this point, to a public institution in the bride's town, a goshala or a temple, often with a silver item for the temple. It gives two reasons: in celebration of bringing a bahu, and "to be freed of the burden of accepting the daan of a daughter". It is one family's practice, not a general rule. For anyone uneasy about the word kanyadaan (chapter 22), it is a thoughtful reply from inside the tradition.

ROOTS **Community custom**

Pehravani, the Sir-gunthi, the negs and the Thali Puja are Maheshwari and wider Marwari family practice. Pehravani is recorded by both main Maheshwari sources; the lap and the donation by one.

In some families

The Maheshwari Samaj Ludhiana's ritual list has the son-in-law take down the branch shade of the mandap, and at the Vidai seats the bride's father under the shade of the dais, puts haldi and kumkum on him and gives him money.

The Pher-pata puja and the beh pot neg rest on the family manual alone. What is given in the Pehravani varies widely, from full sets of clothes to a shawl, coconut and envelope.

Your part in it

- **Bride:** When you are seated on your mother-in-law's lap, let it be a real moment; a word or a touch of the hand is enough.
- **Groom:** Keep a silver rupee ready for the Sir-gunthi, and ask the pandit what each neg is for as you do it.
- **Bride's mother:** List beforehand every jamai on both sides, so none is missed at the chauki.
- **Siblings:** Note who carries the Tani, the beh pots and the thamb kalash to the groom's house.

Ask your elders

1. *At your wedding, were you seated on your mother-in-law's lap, and what was said?*

2. *Does our family give anything to a goshala or temple in the bride's town, and has it always?*

Common questions

Three pheras, four or seven: does the number matter?

Maheshwari families count to seven their own way: three Mama Phere at the door, then four rounds of the fire, the bride leading three and the groom the fourth. The Paraskara Grihya Sutra has three rounds of the fire with a fourth offering of grain, so the four are close to the oldest text. Many pandits now follow the North Indian seven fire rounds, and some families then count three plus seven. No count is wrong. Agree it with your pandit a week before, not at the mandap.

Why does my mama lead the Mama Phere and not my father?

No source gives a reason in so many words. What the sources show is that the mama's side carries the bride through the whole wedding: he fills the Mayra, lifts her off the pata at the Pithi, leads her round the groom and brings her into the mandap. The rite itself is explained by the community's story of Parvati and the wives who circled their husbands. Your father has his own place at the Varana and the kanyadaan.

Why does the pandit announce our gotra aloud?

The family manual gives the purpose plainly: to tell the gathering the gotra and lineage of both bride and groom. Each pandit recites his side's gotra and three generations, three times. The Ludhiana list adds that bride and groom must not share a kul or gotra, so the recitation is also a public check. Learn your three generations beforehand; the pandit will ask.

Must the bride's mother really pull the groom's nose?

Nothing in the wedding depends on it. It is the mother-in-law's licensed joke, and an old one: Russell recorded it among Maheshwaris in 1916, and a family manual still records it today. Some families keep it with great enjoyment; others have quietly dropped it. Ask the groom's family how they would take it before you decide.

One of us is not Maheshwari. What changes?

Very little. The pandit adapts the gotrochar to the other family's gotra or lineage, and the other side may add a custom of its own. Decide early who will do each part that falls to a particular relative: who leads the Mama Phere, who pours the laja, who ties the gathjoda.

When is the bride "his wife"?

The law says at the seventh step of the saptapadi, where the couple's custom includes it. The Maheshwari rite shows it in a gesture: after the seven steps the bride moves from the groom's right side to his left, and he fills her parting with sindoor.

PART FIVE

The New Beginning



The bride leaves one home and enters another; the games, the first visit back, and the couple before the family's own gods.

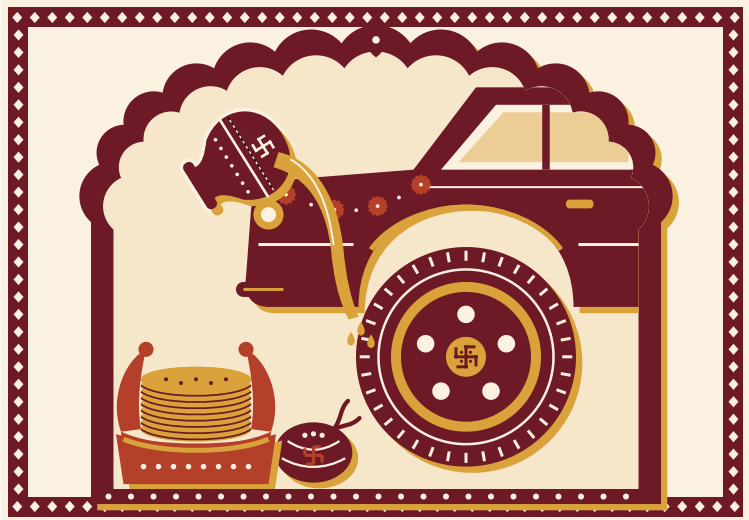
Vidai · Vadhu Pravesh and Thaledi · Suhag Thal, Kothli and Munh Dikhai · Juva-jui and the Kankan Dora untied · Kanwar Kaleva and Manda Jhankna · Maya Uthana, Ganesh's churma and the Sikh · The Chuda and the Gathjode ki Jaat

CHAPTER 27

Vidai

बिदाई

BRIDE · SIBLINGS



IN ONE MINUTE

Vidai is the farewell, when the bride leaves her parents' home for her husband's. Her mother puts tilak on the couple and pats their backs. The bride carries a silver cup of dry fruit for her mother-in-law. A coconut is set before the car's wheel and crushed as it moves off, water is poured on the wheels, and sixteen rotis with jaggery travel tied to her trunk. The women return singing. The tears belong to it.

WHEN	After the Pehravani and the Thali Puja
WHO LEADS	The bride's mother; the eldest woman of the house; the women of the family
WHERE	The door of the bride's home or the wedding venue
THEME	Moving home; Blessing
THE SONG FOR THIS MOMENT	"Chali bai sasariye", and the olyun, "Kanwar bai ri olyun aave o raj"

What happens

1. The bride's mother does tilak for the couple. They bow, and she pats both their backs.
2. The bride is given a silver cup of dry fruit tied in red cloth, to hand to her mother-in-law when she steps out of the car at her new home.
3. Her trunk is packed with food: sixteen phulkas and jaggery in red cloth tied to the handle, and sweets with badi and papad in two decorated steel kothis.
4. As the car leaves, a coconut is placed before its right wheel and the driver runs the tyre over it. The eldest woman of the house pours water on both rear wheels.
5. The women go back into the house or the hall singing badhava.

Why we do it

The bride may be back within a day or two, and she is a phone call away for the rest of her life. So why such a heavy farewell? Because Vidai marks a change of belonging, not of distance. Until today she was a daughter of this house first. From now she is a daughter-in-law of another house first, and a daughter as well. Families feel that change whatever the distance, and Vidai gives the feeling a set time and place. Crying at a ritual is easier than crying alone a week later.

Almost everything the bride carries is for the house she is going to. The silver cup is her first gift to her mother-in-law, from her mother's hands to the sasu's.

The Maheshwari Samaj Ludhiana's ritual list has laddoos in a vessel wrapped in red cloth for the same purpose, so the custom of a food bundle for the sasu is firm across both main sources. The family manual adds the sixteen rotis and jaggery on the trunk: food for the road, and a first gift to the new kitchen.

The coconut under the wheel and the water on the wheels rest on the family manual alone. It records what is done without giving a reason, and none is offered here. What anyone can see is that the household marks the moment the wheels first turn, with an offering in front and water behind.

The songs carry what people find hard to say. The olyun, the songs of remembrance, ask (in rough paraphrase) the koel to sing, the hill to bow and the sun to rise late so that the daughter is not scorched on her way. The women come back singing badhava, the songs of completed good work, because something good has been done.

Agarwal brides throw rice backwards over the shoulder as they leave. Neither Maheshwari source records this; if your family does it, it is worth asking where it came from.

ROOTS **Community custom**

The Grihya Sutras have mantras for the bride's departure from her father's house (vadhu prasthan), which give the farewell its Vedic frame. The cup, the coconut, the water and the rotis are Maheshwari family custom.

In some families

The amount of sweets in the kothis is given in the family manual as 11 or 21 kilos; families scale it to their own household. In some families the brothers push the car for its first few metres, as many Agarwal families do; neither Maheshwari source mentions it, but the gesture is easy to read: they cannot keep her, so they send her off with their own hands.

Your part in it

- **Bride:** Keep the silver cup with you in the car, not in the boot. You will need it the moment you arrive.
- **Brothers and cousins:** Tell the driver about the coconut before he starts the engine.
- **Sisters and cousins:** Stay close to the bride's mother through the morning. The parents are busiest exactly when they most need someone beside them.
- **Anyone:** If an elder knows a vidai song or an olyun, ask her to sing it, and record it.

Ask your elders

1. *At your Vidai, was a coconut put before the wheel, and who poured the water?*

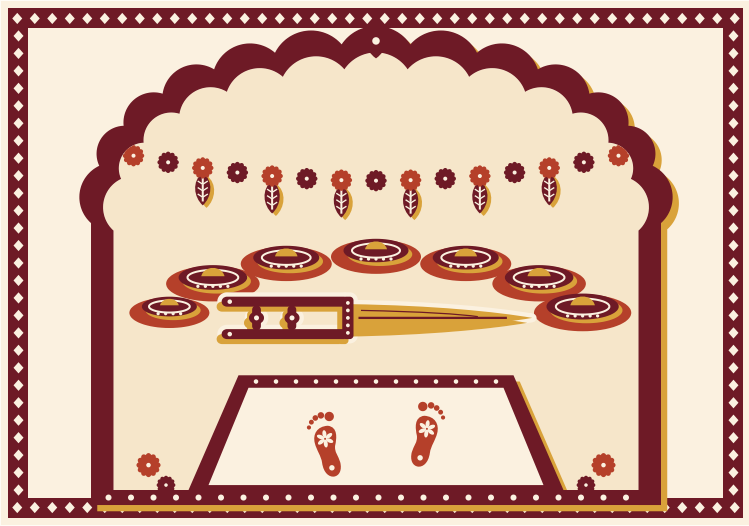
2. *Is there a vidai song our family sang, and can you sing a verse of it?*

CHAPTER 28

Vadhu Pravesh and Thaledi: the seven thalis

वधू प्रवेश, बाड़-रुकाई, थालेड़ी, गुड़-घी में हाथ

BRIDE GROOM SIBLINGS



IN ONE MINUTE

The bride arrives at her husband's home. His sisters bar the door until they are paid. Inside, seven thalis stand in a line. The groom parts them with his katar, and the bride gathers all seven in both hands without letting them clink, then hands them to her mother-in-law. Her hand is dipped in jaggery and ghee. It is her first act in the house, done with care, and the house's first wish for her: sweetness and plenty.

WHEN	On arrival at the groom's home after Vidai
WHO LEADS	The groom's mother; his sisters at the door
WHERE	The main door of the groom's home, then just inside
THEME	Moving home; Bonds between families
THE SONG FOR THIS MOMENT	The Thaledi song, "Na khadkai, na bhadkai"

What happens

1. The groom's mother helps the bride out of the car, and his father helps the groom. The bride touches her mother-in-law's feet and hands her the silver cup from her pihar.
2. Baad-rukai: the groom's sisters block the main door, singing and bargaining for envelopes. Once they are paid, a cloth is stretched overhead and the couple are brought to the threshold.
3. A silver pot of water with durva is set on the bride's head. The groom's mother does aarta and measures the groom four times with the netra.
4. Thaledi: just inside the door, seven circles of geru and lime are drawn in a straight line, with a brass or silver thali on each, the first a little smaller. Each is marked with a roli swastik and holds kharak, batasha, moong and money.
5. The groom moves the thalis apart with his katar, the first to the right, the second to the left. The bride (the binani, as the manual calls the new bride of the house) lifts all seven in both hands without a sound and gives them to her mother-in-law, who sits ahead on a bajot. The bride bows.
6. The couple bow to the Maya. The mother-in-law puts the bride's hand into jaggery and ghee while its song is sung.

Why we do it

Stacking plates without a sound can look like a parlour test of a new bride, and a young reader may bristle at that. Look at what the rite actually asks. The bride's very first act in the house is to take up its vessels with care and hand

them to the woman who has run it until now. She is not tested by strangers; she is showing respect to the mistress of the house, in front of the family she is joining.

The silence has its own song. The Thaledi song recorded in the family manual opens "Na khadkai, na bhadkai", no clatter, no flare-up, and turns into a mock quarrel among the women of the house. It is almost the only teasing in that family's songs, and the teasing is the point: the rule is kept with a smile.

The katar ties the day together. The groom carried it at Nikasi and struck the toran with it at the bride's door (chapter 19). Now the same blade clears the way at his own threshold. The jaggery and ghee need little explaining: they are the house's wish that sweetness and richness stay in her hands. Gud has been the sign of welcome all week.

The sisters at the door belong with the other games, from the jamais at the mare's reins to the hidden shoes. It costs the groom something to bring his wife home, and that is the joke.

What the guests see

Guests see a young woman gathering plates while everyone watches. What is happening is the handing over of the house's vessels, one woman to another, with a song that turns the moment into laughter. The Agarwal bride tips a kalash of rice with her foot; the Maheshwari bride lifts seven thalis with her hands.

ROOTS **Vedic rite and Community custom**

The bride's entry into her husband's home with mantras (vadhu pravesh) is in the Grihya Sutras. The thalis, the katar, the door bargaining and the jaggery and ghee are Maheshwari family custom.

In some families

The Maheshwari Samaj Ludhiana's ritual list also has seven thalis on the bride's way, each with supari, khaja and kharek; there the bride first steps on

kumkum and walks in on a long white cloth, leaving red footprints. It calls the door custom "dwar rokna".

The family manual describes the welcome before the couple arrive. A sankali, a chain pattern, is drawn before the door with a gap left open; it is closed after the bride enters, and the manual says the open chain means the family welcomes the couple. Seven packets of mehendi and sweets go to seven senior women. In older days footprints were drawn in the courtyard, and a jamai came ahead as badhaidar, bringer of the good news, to be seated for tilak and money.

Later comes the Rang Bhat, the feast for the bride's arrival, at which the jamais are fed and given sikh; hence its other name, jamai jiman.

Your part in it

- **Bride:** Practise lifting seven plates without a clink. Slide each onto the next rather than dropping it.
- **Groom:** Keep the katar within reach for the drive home, and cash for your sisters at the door.
- **Groom's sisters:** Agree among yourselves what you will ask, and keep the singing going.
- **Cousins:** Draw the seven circles and set the thalis before the car arrives.

Ask your elders

1. *When you entered this house as a bride, how many thalis were there, and did they make a sound?*

2. *Who drew the sankali at the door, and do you remember the Thaledi song?*

CHAPTER 29

Suhag Thal, Kothli and Munh Dikhai: the house meets its bride

सुहाग थाल, कोथली, पग पकड़ाई और मुंह दिखाई

BRIDE SIBLINGS



IN ONE MINUTE

In the first days after the bride arrives, the groom's house takes her in one rite at a time. The couple bow first at the family's temple. At the Suhag Thal the senior women feed her from one silver thali and count her as one of them. At the Kothli she draws coins from a red bag in which one gold coin hides. At the Munh Dikhai she holds each elder's feet and receives a blessing and a gift.

WHEN	The morning after the bride's arrival, and the first days after
WHO LEADS	The bua or eldest woman; the sasu's generation; the eldest of the house
WHERE	The groom's home and the family's temple
THEME	Bonds between families; Moving home

What happens

1. On the morning after the bride's entry, the bua or eldest woman takes the couple, still in wedding dress, to the temple of the family's kul devata and then to the city's main temple (the family manual names the Venkatesh temple in Mumbai). They do dhok with the gathjoda tied and come home under a chandwa, an odhna held up by four women.
2. Sir-gunthi: the bua or sister plaits the bride's hair, covers her head, puts on her nath and sweetens her mouth.
3. Suhag Thal: a silver thali of lapsi, rice, badi ka saag, batashe, ghee and black til is set on a bajot, with the women of the sasu's generation on three sides. The groom pours ghee on the rice and the bride takes hold of his hand to stop him pouring too much. They feed each other; then each senior woman feeds her, and the jethani and nanads eat with her.
4. Kothli: the eldest of the house holds out a red cloth bag of coins, Rs 200 in all, with one ginni (a gold coin) among them, and the bride draws out as many as she can in both hands. If the ginni comes out she is praised as lucky; if not, the elder takes it out and gives it to her anyway.
5. Pag pakdai and Munh Dikhai: each senior couple in turn sits on a chauki, the bride holds both their feet, and they give her a gift, while a nanad writes down who gave what. At the kan pakdai she holds both the devar's ears and gives him an envelope. In the ghumai the elders turn the couple round, with envelopes.
6. At night the women sing a Rati-juga: a lamp before the deities, four deity songs, then badhava.

Why we do it

Everyone has already seen the bride; these rites place her: before the family's gods, at the women's table, in the household's purse and in the order of its elders.

The temple comes first: before the house introduces the bride to its people, it takes her to the deity it counts as its own. The full Jaat comes later (chapter

33).

The Ludhiana list gives the Suhag Thal's meaning plainly: the married women feed the new bride "saying that now the bride is included in their family". Eating from one thali is the oldest sign of belonging. The groom's ghee and the bride's hand on his wrist are the house's first joke about thrift: she is already minding the stores.

The same list says the Kothli is done "to show how to look after the money". The family manual adds the kindest rule in the chapter: if the gold coin does not come out, the elder puts it in her hand. The bride cannot fail.

Pag pakdai and Munh Dikhai do the introducing. A wedding is too crowded for a bride to learn who anyone is; here each couple comes to her with a name, a relationship and a gift, and the devar's ears keep it from turning solemn.

ROOTS **Community custom**

Household customs of Rajasthani and Marwari families, carried by the women and recorded in both Maheshwari sources. None is in the Grihya Sutras.

A note on the ghunghat

The ghunghat, the bride covering her face with the end of her odhna, is a custom and not part of any Vedic or Shastric rite. Some Maheshwari families still keep it at the Munh Dikhai and, for a while, before the elders, as a sign of respect, and many women who kept it see it that way.

In 1934 the Mahasabha named the ghunghat an obstacle to women's progress and urged that it be given up. Many families dropped it long ago or keep only a light veil lifted once. Brides and mothers-in-law usually settle it before the wedding; the blessings and gifts are the same either way.

In some families

The Ludhiana list places the Kothli after the next-morning temple visit and has the father-in-law hold the bag. Some families fold these rites into one

afternoon, alongside the Lakhesari (chapter 33); others spread them over days.

The Agarwal edition spells it Mooh Dikhai; the Suhag Thal and the Kothli as a full rite are not in that edition. Many Rajasthani families keep an all-night vigil before the wedding (chapter 13); the family manual adds an evening of songs at the groom's home. Ask what yours does.

Your part in it

- **Bride:** At the Suhag Thal, catch the groom's wrist before the ghee runs over; the table is waiting for it. At the Munh Dikhai, ask the nanad beside you to whisper each name.
- **Nanad:** Keep the list neat and give the bride a copy.
- **Devar:** Come for your kan pakdai cheerfully; the envelope is yours.

Ask your elders

1. *Which temple did our family take the last bride to on the morning after she came home?*

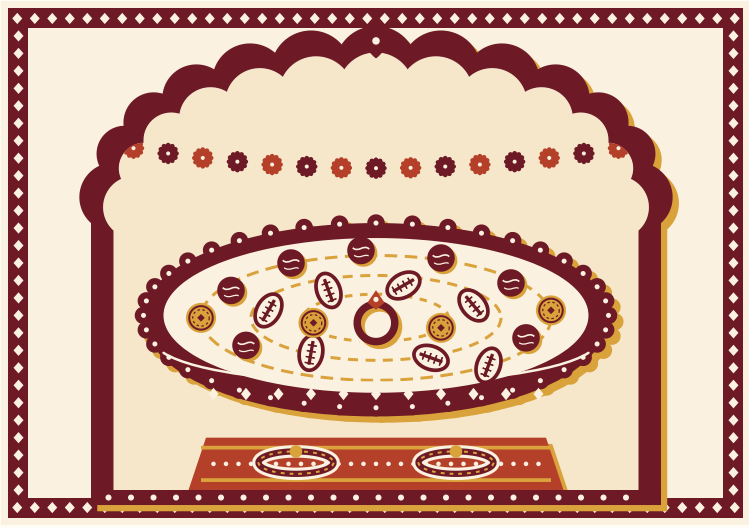
2. *Did the brides in our family keep a ghunghat at the Munh Dikhai, and when did that change?*

CHAPTER 30

Juva-jui and the Kankan Dora untied: the games

जूवा-जूई, कांकण डोरा खोलना

GROOM · BRIDE · SIBLINGS



IN ONE MINUTE

After the wedding the couple play two old games. In Juva-jui a parat of milky water hides supari, cowries, coins and a silver ring, and the two fish for them, the groom with one hand and the bride with both. Then they untie each other's kankan dora, the protective thread tied before the wedding. The family manual plays both at the bride's home on the day after the wedding, and again at the groom's.

WHEN	The day after the wedding, at the Kanwar Kaleva; again at the groom's home
WHO LEADS	The bride's bhabhi or sister; at the groom's home, his sisters and bhabhis
WHERE	The bride's home, then the groom's
THEME	Bonds between families; Protection

What happens

1. A parat is filled with water and milk, with a little turmeric so that nothing can be seen below the surface.
2. Seven supari, seven cowries, seven one-rupee coins and a silver ring go into the water. The bhabhi or sister drops them in, seven times or four.
3. The couple reach in together. The groom may use only his right hand; the bride uses both. Every win and every loss is greeted with laughter and comment from the women around them.
4. At the end the groom takes off his own ring and puts it on the bride.
5. For the Kankan Dora kholna a towel is spread. The bride unties the dora on the groom's right hand using both her hands; the groom unties hers using his right hand alone. In the family manual each then ties his or her own dora on the other. The doras on the feet are untied the same way.
6. Both games are played again at the groom's house, with his side's women running them.

Why we do it

A ring in a dish of milk is a child's game, and it is meant to be. After a long night of rites, two people who may still be shy of each other are set side by side in a ring of teasing women, competing as equals. The ice usually breaks within minutes.

The one-hand rule is the Maheshwari detail. The groom fishes with his right hand only while the bride uses both, and at the dora he again works one-handed while she uses two. No source gives a reason for the handicap; families

simply enjoy it. The saying that whoever wins will rule the house is a joke, and everyone at the parat knows it.

The untying carries the serious part. The kankan dora went on at the Maya dhok (chapter 15): seven knots of moli holding lunrai, gold, silver, iron, lac and a cowrie, against nazar through the most exposed days of the wedding. The Ludhiana list says of the iron that "they should lead their married life as strong as iron". Now the wedding is done, the protection is no longer needed, and each is released from it by the one person who now stands beside them.

The ring at the end turns the game into a gift. Whatever the score, the groom's own ring goes on the bride's hand.

ROOTS **Community custom**

Jua-jui is the Rajasthani name for these games, shared across the region's communities. The untying closes the protective thread tied in chapter 15. Neither game is in the Grihya Sutras.

In some families

The Agarwal edition places the same games at the groom's home; the family manual plays them first at the bride's home on the morning of the Kanwar Kaleva (chapter 31) and repeats them at the groom's house.

The Ludhiana list ties the dora on the wrist of both bride and groom, and the family manual on the groom's right hand and foot and the bride's left. Which hand and foot, and so which knot comes off first, is for your family to say. The manual's number of drops, seven or four, varies too.

Where the couple are tired, many families play one short round of Juva-jui. The untying is the part most families keep, since the thread has to come off somehow.

Your part in it

- **Groom:** Keep your left hand behind your back and lose gracefully. Have your ring ready to come off at the end.
- **Bride:** Use both hands without apology; the rule is in your favour.
- **Bhabhis and sisters:** You run this. Drop the items fairly, keep score loudly, and keep a small pair of scissors by the towel for a stubborn knot.

Ask your elders

1. *In our family, are the games played at the bride's home, the groom's, or both?*

2. *Who untied your kankan dora, and what was tied inside it?*

CHAPTER 31

Kanwar Kaleva and Manda Jhankna: the bride's home calls

कंवर कलेवा, मांडा झांकना

GROOM BRIDE SIBLINGS



IN ONE MINUTE

In the first days after the wedding the bride's home calls twice. On the day after, the groom comes with his younger brothers and friends for Kanwar Kaleva, the prince's breakfast, served by the women of the bride's side, and the games are played. A day or two later her brother fetches the couple for Manda Jhankna, "peeping at the manda", carrying a pot of sweets and a sari for the bride's mother-in-law.

WHEN	Kanwar Kaleva on the day after the wedding; Manda Jhankna one or two days after
WHO LEADS	The bride's mother and the women of her side; her brother
WHERE	The bride's home
THEME	Bonds between families; Moving home

What happens

1. On the day after the wedding the bride's side sends for the groom for Kanwar Kaleva. He comes with his younger brothers and friends.
2. The women of the bride's side serve him a meal. In many Marwari families the bride's sisters and cousins tease him and ask for neg before he is left to eat in peace.
3. The Juva-jui and the untying of the kankan dora are played here (chapter 30).
4. One or two days after the wedding the bride's side calls their daughter and son-in-law home for Manda Jhankna. Her brother goes to fetch them.
5. He carries the lowest of the seven beh pots, filled with sweets, and a sari for the bride's sasu.
6. At the bride's home the couple are fed, and when they leave they are given sikh, the farewell gifts.

Why we do it

The name explains the first visit. Kanwar (or kunwar) is a young unmarried man, or a prince; kaleva is the morning meal. In a Rajasthani household the son-in-law is the most honoured guest it will ever receive, and this is the first time he eats in his wife's home as one of the family rather than as the head of a baraat.

The teasing does the rest. It breaks the formality of the wedding and starts the joking friendship that, in many Marwari families, is the warmest relationship a man has with his in-laws. There is a plain side as well: after a night of rites the

groom and his friends have often eaten little, and the bride's family sees them properly fed.

Manda Jhankna answers a different worry. Vidai can feel like an ending. Coming so soon after it, this visit shows that the bride's first home is still open to her, and her brother is the one who comes to fetch her, so the bond is shown in action rather than words. The name carries a smile: the couple come back to peep at the manda, the mandap where they were married, as if to check it is still there.

The pot the brother carries belongs to a longer thread. The seven beh pots were brought home at the Chak Puja and stacked at the post of the mandap (chapters 10 and 16), and in the family manual they end up at the groom's house. The lowest of them travels this way, full of sweets, in the hands of the bride's brother, with a sari for the woman who now has charge of his sister. Food and cloth go from the bride's house to her new one, and the couple are fed and sent off with gifts in return.

ROOTS **Community custom**

Both visits are Rajasthani household custom, arranged by the two families and not by the pandit. Neither has a mantra or a place in the Grihya Sutras.

In some families

Agarwal families know Kanwar Kaleva by the same name, and Manda Jhankna as the visit their book calls Pagphera. For Maheshwaris the bride's first formal stay at her pihar comes later, at the Sikh (chapter 32).

Timing depends on where and when the wedding was held. When the wedding and the Vidai happen in a hall within one night, families fit the Kanwar Kaleva in where they can. Ask both mothers and agree it in advance.

What the bride's side serves and gives the groom is for each family to judge; in some homes it is an envelope, in others an ornament kept for the purpose.

The word kaleva reaches beyond weddings. The Ludhiana list uses Kalewa for the meal that comes from the in-laws' side on the eleventh day after a death; in Rajasthani it is a general word for a meal sent or served between two houses.

Your part in it

- **Groom:** Take friends who can hold their own in the banter, and keep cash in hand for the salis. Ask your mother-in-law what she cooked; it is her first meal for you.
- **Bride:** Tell your mother which day suits your new household for the Manda Jhankna, so that the invitation comes without awkwardness.
- **Bride's sisters:** The Kanwar Kaleva is yours to run. Keep the demands friendly and let him eat before the food goes cold.
- **Bride's brother:** You carry the pot and the sari. Check with your mother which pot and which sari before you leave the house.

Ask your elders

1. *Is the Kanwar Kaleva held in our family on the day after the wedding, and what is served?*

2. *Who fetched the bride for Manda Jhankna at the last wedding, and what did he carry?*

CHAPTER 32

Maya Uthana, Ganesh's churma and the Sikh: closing the house

मायां उठाना, गणेशजी को प्रसाद, सीख

BRIDE GROOM SIBLINGS



IN ONE MINUTE

A Maheshwari wedding is closed as formally as it was opened. On a good day the family sits before the Maya, the panel that has watched over every rite, offers lapsi and a coconut, and lifts it. The couple and the groom's parents take five kilos of churma to the Ganesh temple to thank him for a wedding without obstacles. Then, on another good day, the bride is sent to her pihar for her first visit home.

WHEN	Good days chosen by the family after the wedding
WHO LEADS	The groom's parents and the couple; the bua for the aarta; the bride's brothers for the Sikh
WHERE	The groom's home; a Ganesh temple; the bride's pihar
THEME	Blessing; Moving home
THE SONG FOR THIS MOMENT	"Utho utho mayan, ghi gud mayan"

What happens

1. On a good day the groom's mother and the bride wash their hair. Lapsi, rice and badi are cooked.
2. The groom's parents and the couple sit before the Maya, offer lapsi and a coconut and bow. The bua does the aarta while the women sing badhava and the Maya song, and the Maya is lifted.
3. Five kilos of churma are made, and the couple go with the groom's parents to offer it at the Ganesh temple.
4. On another good day the bride is sent to her pihar for the Sikh, with two saris, an envelope and sweets.
5. Her brothers come to fetch her. At the groom's house they are fed and given envelopes before they take their sister home.

Why we do it

In many homes today the wedding simply fades once the reception is over and the guests have gone. The family manual does not let it drift. It closes the wedding in three steps, and each one answers something done at the beginning.

The Maya was set up before the wedding as the household's own wedding shrine (chapter 15). The dressed groom bowed to it before Nikasi, the couple bowed to it after the Mama Phere and again after the pheras, and the new bride bowed to it on entering the house. Lifting it says that the house is no longer in wedding. The song calls on the Maya to rise and names ghee and jaggery, the

two sweet things that have marked every step since the Vivah Hath. The washed hair and the lapsi mark the day as clean and sweet.

The churma closes what the Sava Pujan opened. Ganesh was invoked first so that the wedding would go without obstacle, and a small boy of the family sat beside the bride or groom as his presence until the Gangaur puja (chapters 8 and 15). The manual's reason for the churma is plain gratitude: all the wedding's work "was completed without obstacle by Ganeshji's grace". A request made at the start is acknowledged at the end.

The Sikh is the bride's first formal visit home, as distinct from the short call of the Manda Jhankna. Sikh means the farewell gifts given to one who leaves, and here they travel from the groom's house: saris, an envelope and sweets with her, food and envelopes for the brothers who come to take her. Her new family sends her home honoured, and her own family sees how she is held.

ROOTS **Shastric or Puranic rite and Community custom**

The thanksgiving to Ganesh belongs to the pandit's tradition of beginning and ending with him. The Maya and the Sikh are Rajasthani household custom, kept by the women of the family.

In some families

These closing rites rest on one detailed source, the family manual, and practice varies. Some families lift the Maya within days of the wedding; others wait for a day the pandit names. Where the Maya went to a hall for the wedding, someone has first to bring it home.

The Agarwal edition has no counterpart to the lifting of the Maya or the churma for Ganesh; its thapa painted on the wall is the nearest thing to the Maya.

One family manual records, as that family's own rule, that before the bride's first visit home her hands are wrapped in mehendi and she is asked to close her fists, with the stated meaning that the matters of her sasural are to be kept shut

like a closed fist. The manual marks it as one family's practice, and the book prints it as that.

Your part in it

- **Bride:** Wash your hair with your mother-in-law on the morning of the Maya Uthana. It is one of the few rites the two of you do side by side.
- **Groom:** Go to the Ganesh temple with your parents and your wife. It is a short visit, and it closes the wedding your Sava Pujan began.
- **Siblings:** If no one has been named to bring the Maya board home from the hall, take it yourself and keep it upright. The bride's brothers fetch her for the Sikh: eat what you are given.

Ask your elders

1. *Who lifted the Maya at the last wedding in our family, and on which day?*

2. *When a bride from our family first went home on her Sikh, what was sent with her?*

CHAPTER 33

The Chuda and the Gathjode ki Jaat

ब्यावला चूड़ा बदलना, लखेसरी, गठजोड़े की जात

BRIDE GROOM



IN ONE MINUTE

Two customs carry the wedding into the weeks after it. The ivory chuda that came from the bride's mama in the Mayra stays on her wrists; at the Lakhesari lac bangles are added before and behind it, and some days or weeks later it is formally changed for lac. And the couple, with the gathjoda tied, go on Jaat to the family's own shrines, as a child is taken there for its first tonsure.

WHEN	Lakhesari in the first days; the chuda changed after 7 or 11 days, sava mahina or about forty days; the Jaat in a permitted season
WHO LEADS	The sasu, a lakharan or the jethani; the pandit for the day; the badi ma, ma or kaki for the Jaat
WHERE	The groom's home; the family's shrines
THEME	Blessing; Moving home

What happens

1. Lakhesari: the bride's senasut and jewellery are taken off, and she gives the senasut to her sasu or the eldest woman, touching her feet.
2. A lakharan (bangle-woman), or the kaki-sasu or jethani, warms lac bangles on a tava over coals and slips one before and one behind the ivory chuda on each hand. The ivory, once worn, is not taken off for this. The bride holds her hands over the fire with grains of bajra, water is poured over the bangles, and the nanad ties moli on one bangle of each hand.
3. Byavla chuda badlana: 7 or 11 days or sava mahina after the wedding, at a time the pandit fixes by the moon in the groom's name, the chuda is changed. One lac bangle is first given to a Brahmani. The right ivory chuda comes off and five red lac bangles go on; on the left, six. A thread of black wool is tied on one bangle of each hand, and after seven days an ordinary chuda replaces the lac.
4. Gathjode ki Jaat: outside chaturmas, shraddh paksh, malmas and adhik mas, the couple go on Jaat with the gathjoda tied, taken by the badi ma, ma or kaki.
5. At each shrine they offer a coconut, a garland and prasad, do dhok and go round in parikrama.
6. If the bride is visiting the ancestral village for the first time, footprints are drawn in the courtyard, the couple sit for tilak and take darshan in the house's thakurwadi, and lapsi and badi are cooked.

Why we do it

With the Maya lifted, two more customs can seem one rite too many. They finish the wedding from the inside: the bride's wrists return to everyday wear in measured steps, and she is taken to the gods of her new family.

The ivory chuda is the visible mark of a Maheshwari bride. An insider's account in Hindi Vivek calls ivory bangles required for a Maheshwari bride and says they are worn for at least forty days. Hers came from her mama in the Mayra (chapter 11) and was put on at the Lakh (chapter 14). The Lakhesari adds lac before and behind it without disturbing it; the changing, weeks later and at a chosen hour, moves her from bridal wear to the everyday bangles of a married woman. Until then the chuda carries her new state.

Ivory itself can no longer be bought or sold in India; the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, as amended in 1986 and 1991, closed the trade. Families use heirloom sets or bone or plastic substitutes.

The family manual explains the Jaat in one line: as a son's first tonsure is taken to the shrine, so the couple go on Jaat after the wedding. For the bride it matters most, since by custom she now takes her husband's kuldevi as her own. The vow to make the Jaat was sung during the wedding, in the Balaji and Mataji songs; this visit keeps it.

ROOTS **Community custom**

Family custom with a strong devotional element, kept by the women of the house; the pandit chooses only the hour for the chuda.

In some families

The Agarwal Jaat goes to Mahalakshmi; Maheshwaris have no single kuldevi. Each khap has its own, usually a goddess of a Rajasthani shrine (Part 0); online tables differ, and the family's own knowledge prevails.

In practice the kul devata may also be the family's ishta or village deity. One family manual's circuit runs to Salasar Balaji (with a savamani), Dungar

Hanumanji, Dabri Mataji, Pabolav Hanumanji and the Lakshmiji temple, though that family names Ashapura Mata as its khap's kuldevi. Ask which shrines yours visits.

For changing the chuda the manual avoids tara (Venus combust), malmas, Shravan, rikta tithis and amavasya; ask your pandit which days he avoids.

The couple's first Mahesh Navami

The year holds one more day for a new couple. Mahesh Navami, Jyeshtha Shukla Navami, is when the community remembers its beginning: the seventy-two restored, their arms laid down, the name Maheshwari given (Part 0). Some community accounts say newly married couples pray to Shiva and Parvati on that day. A couple whose wedding carried that story through the Mama Phere may like to keep their first one together.

Your part in it

- **Bride:** Ask your sasu before the Lakhesari who will put on the bangles, and keep your hands steady over the coals.
- **Groom:** The day for the chuda is read from the moon in your name; make sure the pandit has it.
- **Both:** Ask the elders which shrines the Jaat goes to before planning travel, and note the date.

Ask your elders

1. *Which shrines does our family visit for the Gathjode ki Jaat, and in what order? Is our khap's kuldevi among them?*

2. *Was the chuda of the brides in our family ivory, bone or something else, and after how many days was it changed?*

Common questions

Must the thalis at the Thaledi really make no sound?

That is the game. The bride lifts seven thalis in both hands without letting them ring and hands them to her mother-in-law, who sits ahead of her as mistress of the house. It is her first act in her new home, done with care. If a thali clatters, the women laugh and the Thaledi song, itself a mock quarrel, carries on. In most families nobody holds it against a bride.

What if there is no ginni in the house for the Kothli?

The family manual puts one gold coin among Rs 200 in coins, but the heart of the rite is its rule that the bride always ends up with the special coin, because the elder hands it to her if her fistful misses it. A family without a ginni can choose any coin it treats as special. The meaning stated in the Ludhiana list, showing the bride how the house looks after its money, stays the same.

Ivory is illegal, so what do we wear?

The trade in ivory was closed under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, as amended in 1986 and 1991. Families use an heirloom set already in the family, or bone or plastic. The customs are the same whatever the chuda is made of: it comes in the Mayra, lac is added at the Lakhesari, and it is changed on a day the pandit fixes.

Where do we go for the Jaat if we do not know our kuldevi?

Start with the eldest members of the family on the father's side, since the kuldevi passes down that line. Online tables link each khap to a goddess, but they differ in detail, and a family's own memory prevails. In practice the Jaat may go to the family's ishta or village deity as well; one family manual's circuit is mostly Hanuman shrines. Some families make a first Jaat at a shrine they do know and travel to the family shrine later, once they have found it.

When is the wedding "over"?

In the family manual, when the Maya is lifted and five kilos of churma have been offered to Ganesh in thanks: what the Sava Pujan opened is closed. The changing of the chuda and the Gathjode ki Jaat carry it some weeks further. A couple may also like to keep their first Mahesh Navami together (chapter 33).

Do we play the games at both homes?

The family manual does: Juva-jui and the untying of the kankan dora at the bride's home at the Kanwar Kaleva, and again at the groom's house. Some families play them once, wherever the couple are on the day after the wedding. Ask both sides which they expect.

The whole wedding as one story

Taken one chapter at a time, a Maheshwari wedding can look like a long list of customs. Taken from the Nandimukh to the Jaat, it tells a single story: two families ask for blessing, guard the couple through the exposed days, bind themselves to each other, make the promise before witnesses, and move the bride from one home to another. The five themes of Part 0 are the chapters of that story, and they come roughly in that order.

Blessing

The wedding opens by asking. The Nandimukh calls on the ancestors ten days out, so that nothing in the family can stop what follows. At the Sava Pujan Ganesh is invoked and then made present in a small boy of the family, the Vinayak, who sits on the right chauki and receives every rite first. Every singing session begins with the five songs to Vinayak, Balaji, Shyamji, Mataji and the Pitar. The Maya goes up against the wall and watches the rest. At the end the story returns to where it began: the Maya is lifted, Ganesh is thanked with churma, and the couple go on Jaat to the family's own gods.

Protection

Once the house is in wedding, the bride and groom are treated as exposed, and the Maheshwari wedding guards them closely. The Baan keeps them at home, with salt, coal and a silver ring laid before them and a silver chitiya to carry. Lunrai is waved over them at the door. The kankan dora goes on at the Maya, with iron, lac and a cowrie in its knots. A small girl rides behind the groom with salt and mustard, and at the toran he meets kajal, a mirror, neem and a rattle. For these days the two are the most precious people in the house.

Bonds between families

This edition leans hardest here, because so much of the Maheshwari wedding is carried by the mother's side. The mother goes home to her brothers with thirty-two of everything, and they come back with the Mayra: the wedding clothes and the ivory chuda. The mama lifts the child off the pata, brings the bride into the mandap and leads the Mama Phere. Between the two houses gifts travel in set directions, the jamais hold the mare's reins, the sisters bar the door, and the bride sits at last on her sagaji's lap.

Consent and witness

At the centre is the promise. At the Varana both pandits speak the two gotras and three generations aloud. Then comes the shape that is the Maheshwari wedding's own: three circuits at the door, the bride led round the groom by her mama in memory of the wives whose marriages Mahesh and Parvati remade, and four at the fire, three led by her with her brother's laja in her hands and one led by him. The stone, the seven steps and the fixed star follow, and when she moves from his right side to his left, she is his wife.

Moving home

The last part is the move. The groom's katar, which struck the toran at her door, parts the seven thalis at his, and she lifts them without a sound for her mother-in-law. The women feed her at the Suhag Thal, the house puts its gold coin in her hand, and her brother comes to fetch her home. The ivory chuda carries her new state on her wrists through the first weeks, until it is changed for lac and the couple stand together before the family's gods.

Read this way, even the smallest custom has a place in the plot. A family can shorten the story, change the order of some scenes or leave a few out, and many do. What this book has tried to show is what each scene is for, so that whatever a family keeps, it keeps knowing why.

Keeping it meaningful: a guide for families

A family does not need to add anything to a wedding to make its rituals mean more. Most of what helps is small. When people know what a rite is for, they take part in it instead of waiting for it to end.

Read one paragraph before each ritual

Before a rite begins, ask one person to read aloud the "In one minute" box from its chapter. It takes less than a minute and changes how the room watches. A cousin who knows why the mama stands behind the bride at the Mama Phere, or why the bride's brother fills her hands at the fire, will watch those moments differently. Agree the timing with the pandit so that the reading does not cut across his mantras.

Make an English guest card

Some guests will not follow Hindi or Marwari: friends, partners from other communities, relatives who grew up abroad. One card at each seat can list the wedding evening in order with two lines on each: the Varana, the Dhukav and Toran, the Suvali and Varmala, the Mama Phere, the Kanyadaan, Gathjoda and Hathleva, the four fire rounds, the Saptapadi and the sindoor. Add one sentence on the count, since guests who expect seven rounds at the fire will otherwise be puzzled: three at the door and four at the fire make seven.

Brief the pandit

Meet the pandit a week or so before the wedding, with both sides if possible. Points worth settling in advance:

- The number of rounds: whether your family takes three Mama Phere at the door, and four rounds at the fire (three led by the bride, one by the groom)

or seven.

- The order of the daan: whether the kanyadaan comes before the fire rounds or, as in some families' telling, after them.
- The names for the Varana and the sankalp: the khap, the gotra, and three generations on each side, written clearly. If your family knows its pravar, Veda and shakha, give him those too.
- Whether he will explain the main mantras in Hindi or English as he goes. Many pandits do this willingly when asked.
- Any adaptation the couple would like. The pandit's own tradition prevails on the day, but most pandits prefer to know early.

An evening for the elders

Set aside one evening before the wedding, perhaps after the Sava Pujan, when the grandparents, parents and older aunts tell the family's own version: which telling of the utpatti katha the family follows, how many circuits were taken at the door, what came in the Mayra, which shrines the Jaat went to. Ask whoever holds the family's song copy to bring it out, and record the songs on a phone; the five deity songs and the kuldevi and pitar songs carry your own family's names. Use the "Ask your elders" questions as a starting point and write the answers in the spaces provided. No book holds these versions.

Decide early who will be Vinayak

The Vinayak boy sits beside the bride or groom from the Sava Pujan until the Gangaur puja, receiving every rite first. One family manual records that a real brother is never chosen; a cousin on the kaka, bua, sister or mama side is. Settle it with the elders before the Sava Pujan, and name an older cousin as his minder, since a small boy in wedding clothes needs one.

Give the young cousins named jobs

Young cousins who feel useful pay attention. Give each a named job, with the chapter that explains it:

- Minding the Vinayak through the long days (chapter 8).
- Making the moong badis at the Baan, after the bride or groom has made the first seven; the family manual gives this to the unmarried girls (chapter 9).
- Holding the four flower baskets at the corners for the Mama Phere (chapter 21).
- Setting out the seven thalis for the Thaledi, and the parat for the Juva-jui (chapters 28 and 30).
- Reading the "In one minute" box before each rite, and recording the elders' answers.

Bring the wedding home from the hall

Ritual objects are easily left behind at a hall. The family manual asks families to send someone responsible to carry the toran, the Tani, the thamb kalash and the beh pots back to the house, and in that family the Tani is tied at the home shrine. Add the Maya board to the list. Name the person in advance, because the Maya Uthana (chapter 32) cannot happen without it.

Allow the family its own choices

Nothing here asks a family to do more rites or longer ones. Some will shorten the week; some will bring back a custom their grandparents remember. Whatever is kept is easier to do with attention when everyone present knows what it is for.

Glossary

Terms used in this book, with the spelling used throughout and the word in Devanagari. Families pronounce and spell many of these differently, and some use other words for the same thing; the chapter numbers show where each term is explained.

Aarta आरता

Waving a lamp or thali before a person being honoured, usually by the bua or sister; the Rajasthani form of aarti (chapter 2 and after).

Antarpat अन्तरपट

A cloth screen held between bride and groom at two points in the mandap rites; better known from Marathi and Gujarati weddings (chapter 22).

Atan अटाण

The small clay pot of warmed curd for the Jhol; atan ghalna is another name for that rite (chapters 10 and 14).

Baad-rukai बाड़-रुकाई

The groom's sisters barring the door of his home until they are paid (chapter 28).

Baan बान

The days when the bride or groom is given ubtan and kept at home, now done with the Sava Pujan; baan bharna is giving tilak and money at it (chapter 9).

Bada Bhat बड़ा भात

The main feast after the pheras, which begins with thalis drawn for the deities and ancestors (chapter 25).

Badhaidar बधाईदार

Bringer of the good news: in older practice the jamai who came ahead to announce the baraat's return (chapter 28).

Badhava बधावा

Songs of rejoicing sung when an auspicious task is done, as on the return from Vidai and at the lifting of the Maya (chapters 27, 28 and 32).

Badi बड़ी

Small dried balls of ground moong; the bride or groom makes seven at the Baan, and badi ki sabzi is cooked at the Battisi (chapters 6 and 9).

Bajot बाजोट

A low wooden seat or stool (chapters 28 and 29).

Banda, bandi बनड़ा, बनड़ी

The groom and the bride in Rajasthani household speech (chapter 7 and after).

Banna, banni बन्ना, बन्नी

The groom and the bride in the wedding songs; banna and banni geet are the songs of each side (chapter 5).

Banori बनोरी

The evening procession of the bride or groom in the Baan days; the Brahman Banori is the first, blessed by a Brahmin (chapter 13).

Bari बरी

The bride's clothes, jewellery and shringar sent by the groom's side on the wedding morning (chapter 16).

Battisi बत्तीसी

The thirty-two: the mother's visit to her brothers with thirty-two of each item to invite them to fill the Mayra, called Battisi Nyotna (chapter 6).

Beend Raja बीन राजा

The groom once he is dressed for the wedding; beend is the groom (chapter 17).

Beh ki handi बेह की हांडी

The seven stacked clay pots from the potter that stand at the mandap post and end up at the groom's house (chapters 10, 16, 26 and 31).

Bes बेस

A set of clothes; the Bari carries several (chapter 16).

Bhairun भैरूं

Bhairava, the guardian deity who attends the kuldevi; a family that honours one adds a Bhairunji song (chapters 5 and 13).

Bhatti भट्टी

The hearth of the wedding kitchen, whose neg the groom performs after the pheras (chapter 26).

Bihana बिहाणा

The dawn rite and songs that open the wedding day (chapter 13).

Binani बिनणी

The family manual's word for the bride, especially as the new bride of the house (chapter 28 and after).

Bir बीर

Brother, above all the mother's brother in the Battisi and Mayra songs (chapters 6 and 11).

Bir Bhojan बीर भोजन

The meal at which a sister serves her brothers with her own hands after the Mayra (chapter 11).

Chak Puja चाक पूजन

Worship of the potter's wheel, from which the wedding's pots once came (chapter 10).

Chandwa चंदवा

A canopy, often an odhna held up by four women, under which the bride or groom is brought in (chapters 13 and 29).

Chauki चौकी

A low wooden platform or seat used at most rites (chapter 7 and after).

Chhat छात

The cloth the barber spreads behind the couple after the pheras, for which he receives neg (chapter 25).

Chikni Kothli चीकणी कोथली

The visit of the groom's women to the bride with gifts, returning the Mudda Tika (chapter 2).

Chitiya चिटिया

A small silver piece the bride or groom carries for protection from the Baan onwards (chapter 9).

Chuda चूड़ा

A set of bangles; here the bride's ivory chuda, brought in the Mayra and later changed for lac (chapters 11 and 33).

Chunri चुनड़ी

A tie-dyed odhni; the brothers drape one on their sister at the Mayra (chapter 11).

Churma चूरमा

A sweet of crushed wheat, ghee and sugar; five kilos are offered to Ganesh when the wedding closes (chapter 32).

Dastoor दस्तूर

A customary observance; the Sagai has two dastoors, one at each home (chapter 1).

Dhan Rolna धान रोळना

The women passing grain between winnowing trays seven times under an odhna, opening the wedding kitchen (chapter 10).

Dhok धोक

Bowing in reverence, especially before the Maya and the family's deities (chapter 15 and after).

Dhruva darshan ध्रुव दर्शन

Showing the bride the pole star at a night wedding, or the sun at a day wedding (chapter 24).

Dhukav ढुकाव

The arrival of the baraat at the bride's door or the venue gate (chapter 19).

Family manual, the

The book's short name for the written manual of a Mumbai Maheshwari family, reetrivaz.in (How to read this book; Sources).

Gangaur गणगौर

Gauri with Isar, that is Parvati with Shiva; Rajasthan's festival of the married pair, and the puja the bride and groom each do with seven suhagins before the wedding (chapters 3 and 15).

Gathjoda गठजोड़ा

The knot tying the groom's cloth to the bride's odhni, with moong, rice, turmeric, supari and a rupee in it (chapter 22); the Gathjode ki Jaat is made with it tied (chapter 33).

Ghat Vivah घट विवाह

In some families, a private marriage of the bride to a clay pot on the night before the wedding, as a jyotish remedy (chapter 13).

Ghodi घोड़ी

The mare the groom rides at Nikasi; also the songs sung for the groom (chapters 5 and 17).

Ghumai घुमाई

The elders turning the groom and the bride round and giving them envelopes (chapter 29).

Ghunghat घूंघट

The bride covering her face with the end of her odhna; a custom, not a rite (chapter 29).

Ginni गिन्नी

A gold coin, such as the one hidden in the Kothli bag (chapter 29).

Godaan गोदान

The gift of a cow, today a gift made in the cow's name, at the kanyadaan (chapter 22).

Gotra गोत्र

The rishi name attached to a khap and recited at the Varana and the kanyadaan; several khaps may share one (Part 0, chapters 18 and 22).

Gotrochar गोत्रोच्चार

The recitation aloud of the gotras and three generations of both sides (chapter 18).

Gud गुड़

Jaggery; the mouth is sweetened with it at almost every rite (throughout).

Hathleva हथलेवा

The joining of the couple's right hands with a ball of mehendi between the palms (chapters 12 and 22).

Hridaya sparsha हृदय स्पर्श

The touching of the heart after the seven steps (chapter 24).

Jaat जात

A visit to the family's shrines; the Gathjode ki Jaat is the couple's visit after the wedding (chapter 33).

Jala, Jalo जळो

The bride's side's women going to view the baraat's camp, and the song they sing (chapters 5 and 18).

Jamai जंवाई

A son-in-law of the house (chapter 17 and after).

Jhol झोळ

Curd poured over the bride or groom by the father with a rolling pin, before the bath (chapter 14).

Juva-jui जूवा-जूई

The games after the wedding: fishing for a ring and coins in milky water, and untying the kankan dora (chapter 30).

Kalash कलश

A water pot of clay or metal, set up with mango leaves and a coconut as a sign of fullness (chapter 8 and after).

Kaman कामण

The songs that close a singing session in the bride's house (chapter 5).

Kan pakdai कान पकड़ाई

The bride holding her devar's ears and giving him an envelope (chapter 29).

Kankan Dora कांकण डोरा

The protective thread of seven knots tied on the bride and groom at the Maya, and untied after the wedding (chapters 15 and 30).

Kanwar Kaleva कंवर कलेवा

The prince's breakfast: the groom's meal at the bride's home on the day after the wedding. Kaleva, also kalewa, is a meal sent or served between the two houses (chapter 31).

Kanyadaan कन्यादान

The bride's parents entrusting their daughter to the groom (chapter 22).

Kanyaval कन्यावल

The fast kept by the bride's elders until they see her married face (chapters 16 and 25).

Kas कस

The pin on the groom's coat, which the bride's mother takes at the door (chapters 17 and 19).

Katar कटार

The dagger the groom carries, used at the toran and at the Thaledi (chapters 17, 19 and 28).

Khap खाप

The clan at the level of the surname, traced in tradition to one of the seventy-two umravs; also spelt khanp or khamp (Part 0).

Khil खील

Puffed rice: the laja the bride's brother pours into her hands at the fire (chapter 23).

Khol खोळ

The lap, held out as a fold of cloth; khol bharna is filling it with gifts (chapter 1 and after).

Khunkhuniya खुनखुनिया

A rattle shaken by the groom's ear at the door (chapter 19).

Kilangi किंलगी

The plume on the groom's safa, in the family manual's spelling; in standard Hindi kalangi, कलंगी (chapter 17).

Kora bhata कोरा भाता

Plain white cloth from the Mayra, worn by the bride under her wedding dress and later dyed (chapters 11 and 14).

Kothli कोथली

A cloth bag; at the groom's home, the red bag of coins from which the bride draws (chapter 29).

Kukdi कुकड़ी

The last song of an all-night vigil (chapter 13).

Kuldevi कुलदेवी

The family goddess, who for Maheshwaris differs by khap (Part 0, chapter 33).

Kumkum patrika कुमकुम पत्रिका

The formal wedding card, sent about a month ahead (chapter 3).

Lagan लग्न

The auspicious hour for the wedding, written on pink paper at the Sava Pujan (chapters 3 and 8).

Lagan patrika लग्न पत्रिका

The old formal letter from the bride's side fixing the wedding hour, carried to the groom at the Varana (chapters 3 and 18).

Lajahoma लाजाहोम

The offering of khil into the fire at the rounds (chapter 23).

Lakh लख

The rite at which seven suhagins pass the lakhdhan over the bride or groom with the wish that they prosper by lakhs (chapter 14).

Lakharan लखारण

A woman who makes and fits lac bangles (chapter 33).

Lakhdhan लखधन

The ball of jaggery, spices, lac and metals used at the Lakh (chapter 14).

Lakhesari लखेसरी

Adding lac bangles before and behind the bride's ivory chuda at the groom's home (chapter 33).

Lapsi लापसी

A sweet of broken wheat, cooked at the Battisi, the Suhag Thal and the Maya Uthana (chapters 6, 29 and 32).

Lunrai लूणराई

Salt and mustard waved round a person against nazar (chapters 13, 15 and 17).

Mahesh Navami महेश नवमी

Jyeshtha Shukla Navami, the day the community remembers its origin (Part 0, chapter 33).

Mama Phere मामा फेरे

The three circuits the bride makes round the groom, led by her mama, before the fire rites; also bahar ke phere (chapter 21).

Manda Jhankna मांडा झांकना

Peeping at the manda: the couple's first visit back to the bride's home, fetched by her brother (chapter 31).

Mangalashtak मंगलाष्टक

Verses of blessing recited before the garlands in some families (chapter 20).

Manuhar patrika मनुहार पत्रिका

The early invitation, sent about three months ahead; the kumkum patrika follows about a month before (chapter 3).

Maya मायां

The household's wedding shrine: a printed auspicious panel, formerly painted on the wall, honoured at every turn and lifted after the wedding (chapters 15 and 32).

Mayardar मायरदार

The mother's natal family, who fill the Mayra (chapters 8 and 11).

Mayra मायरा

The gifts the mother's brothers bring for their sister's child's wedding; also called bhat (chapter 11).

Mehendi मेहंदी

Henna; the bride's comes from her in-laws' side, and a circle is left bare on the right palm for the Hathleva (chapter 12).

Moli मोली

Red and yellow sacred thread (throughout).

Moong Bikherna मूंग बिखेरना

Giving out green moong for the women of the house to pick over as the wedding begins (chapter 7).

Moongdhana मूंगधणा

Worship of the bundle of firewood, with a neem sprig, for the wedding kitchen (chapter 10).

Mudda Tika मुद्दा टीका

The tilak of the groom at his home by the bride's brother (chapter 2).

Munh Dikhai मुंह दिखाई

The elders seeing the bride's face and giving her gifts; at the bride's home, her own family's ending of the Kanyaval fast (chapters 25 and 29).

Nakh नख

A sub-branch of a khap, often named after a village or a trade; also called up-khap (Part 0).

Nandimukh नान्दीमुख

The rite for the ancestors before the wedding, after which a birth or death in the family does not stop it (chapter 4).

Neemjhari नीमझरी

Passing a green neem branch over the groom at the door, from shoulder to chest (chapter 19).

Neg नेग

A gift due by custom to a particular relative at a particular moment (throughout).

Netra नेतरा

A cord of churning rope, silver chain, pearls and moli with which a woman measures her brother or son four times crosswise (chapters 11, 17, 19 and 28).

Nikasi निकासी

The groom's departure from home on the mare (chapter 17).

Olyun ओळूं

Songs of remembrance sung at the Vidai (chapter 27).

Pag pakdai पग पकड़ाई

The bride holding the feet of each senior couple at the groom's home (chapter 29).

Panigrahan पाणिग्रहण

The Vedic taking of the bride's hand, the core of the Hathleva (chapter 22).

Parat परात

A wide, shallow metal dish, used for the Juva-jui (chapter 30).

Pata पाटा

A low wooden board on which the bride or groom stands or sits (chapter 14).

Patasa पतासा

A sugar drop, also called batasha (chapters 6 and 9).

Pecha पेचा

A long turban of starched cotton, worn instead of a safa (chapter 17).

Peele chawal पीले चावल

Rice rubbed with ghee and turmeric, made at the Sava Pujan in a groom's wedding as the invitation to the baraat (chapter 8).

Pehravani पेहरावनी

The bride's side honouring the groom's side with clothes and gifts after the wedding (chapter 26).

Pher-pata फेर-पाटा

The puja with the couple seated on two cushions at the place of the pheras (chapter 26).

Pihar पीहर

A married woman's parents' home (chapters 6 and 32).

Pitarji पितरजी

The ancestors, to whom the fifth deity song is sung (chapters 4 and 5).

Pithi पीठी

The turmeric paste applied to the bride or groom (chapter 14).

Rang Bhat रंग भात

The feast at the groom's home for the bride's arrival (chapter 28).

Rati-juga राती-जुगा

A night of women's songs to the deities; the family manual records one at the groom's home after the bride arrives (chapters 13 and 29).

Sagai, Rokna सगाई, रोकना

The engagement, and the public fixing of the match (chapter 1).

Sagaji सगाजी

The groom's mother in her role as the bride's mother-in-law, the samdhan (chapter 26).

Sanjha सांझा

The evening songs of the Baan days (chapter 13).

Sankadi सांकड़ी

The night before the wedding, kept with festivities and staying awake (chapter 13).

Sankali सांकळी

The chain pattern drawn at the groom's door, left open for the couple and closed behind the bride (chapter 28).

Saptapadi सप्तपदी

The seven steps (chapter 24).

Sava Pujan सावा पूजन

The Ganesh puja that opens the wedding, at which the Vinayak boy is made and the lagan written (chapter 8).

Savamani सवामणी

An offering of prasad by the sava man, a large measure, made at a shrine (chapter 33).

Senasut सेणसूत

A silver-wire wristband from the in-laws, worn by the bride and later given to her sasu (chapters 14, 16 and 33).

Sevra सेवरा

The groom's headdress, two of which are tied on his safa; also the song that closes a session in the groom's house (chapters 5 and 17).

Shagun शगुन

An auspicious token or sign (throughout).

Shilarohan शिलारोहण

The bride stepping on the stone at each round of the fire (chapter 23).

Sikh सीख

Farewell gifts given to one who leaves; also the bride's first formal visit to her pihar after the wedding (chapters 31 and 32).

Sikora सिकोरा

A clay saucer, broken by the bride or groom with the right foot (chapter 14).

Sindoor सिन्दूर

Vermilion in the parting, put in by the groom (chapters 24 and 26).

Sinjara सिंजारा

The gifts the groom's side sends the engaged girl for Teej and Gangaur (chapter 3).

Sir-gunthi सिर-गूंथी

Oiling and plaiting the bride's hair and filling the parting, at the bride's home and again at the groom's (chapters 26 and 29).

Siropav सिरोपाव

A set of clothes given in honour, here to the groom at the Pehravani (chapter 26).

Sithne सीठणे

Teasing songs sung by women at Rajasthani weddings (chapter 5).

Soop सूप

A winnowing fan (chapters 10 and 23).

Stambh Ropan स्तम्भ रोपण

The worship of the mandap's post by the groom's elder or jamai at the bride's home (chapter 16).

Suhag Thal सुहाग थाल

The silver thali from which the women of the groom's house feed the new bride (chapter 29).

Suhag-bidi सुहागबीड़ी

The sari given to the bride by her sisters, buas, mausis, mamis and bhabhis after the pheras (chapter 25).

Suhagin सुहागिन

A married woman whose husband is living; five or seven lead many rites (chapter 14 and after).

Sutak सूतक

The ritual impurity after a birth or a death in the family (chapter 4).

Suvali सुवाली

A fried wheat disc; a garland of seven is brought before the Varmala (chapter 20).

Tani तणी

The auspicious cord tied across the mandap, untied by the groom after the pheras (chapters 9 and 26).

Thakur bari ठाकुर बाड़ी

The household shrine room; the family manual has the Tani tied there after the wedding, and calls the shrine of the ancestral house the thakurwadi (chapters 9 and 33).

Thaledi थालेड़ी

The seven thalis inside the groom's door, parted by his katar and lifted by the bride without a sound (chapter 28).

Thali Puja थली पूजन

Worship of the kitchen threshold or the hall gate before Vidai (chapter 26).

Toontiya टूटिया

The mock wedding the women once staged at home after the baraat had left (chapter 17).

Toran तोरण

The decorated frame over the bride's door, struck by the groom (chapter 19).

Umrav उमराव

A noble; the seventy-two companions of the origin story; also a name for the groom in the songs (Part 0, chapter 5).

Up-khap उपखाप

See nakh (Part 0).

Utpatti katha उत्पत्ति कथा

The community's origin story, told as sacred tradition (Part 0).

Uvari ऊंवारी

Money waved over a person's head and then given to a servant or the barber (chapters 2, 11 and 17).

Vadhu Pravesh वधू प्रवेश

The bride's entry into her husband's home (chapter 28).

Varana वरणा

The rite at which the bride's father washes the groom's feet and both pandits recite the two gotras (chapter 18).

Varmala वरमाला

The exchange of garlands, the bride garlanding first (chapter 20).

Vidai बिदाई

The bride's leaving of her parents' home (chapter 27).

Vinayak विनायक

Ganesh; also the small boy of the family who stands for him beside the bride or groom from the Sava Pujan to the Gangaur puja (chapters 8 and 15).

Virad Vinayak विरद विनायक

The family manual's name for the days of pithi before the wedding, once five or seven days long (chapters 13 and 14).

Vivah Hath विवाह हाथ

The rite at which the house enters the wedding, with tilak, moli and the giving out of moong (chapter 7).

Sources and further reading

There is no published Maheshwari Mahasabha wedding manual. The chapters rest on the community sources below, a 1916 ethnographic record, the Mahasabha's own history, and the Paraskara Grihya Sutra for the rites marked "Vedic rite". Where a custom rests on one source alone, the chapter says so. Web addresses are given as they stood when the book was written.

Community sources

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- Maheshwari Samaj Ludhiana, "Customs and Traditions of Maheshwari Samaj", a list of 38 items in English translation from a Hindi original. http://maheshwari-samaj-ludhiana.com/maheshwarirituals.html
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- Hindi Vivek, "Maheshwari samaj ki sanskriti" (2015), a community insider's account of customs, food and festivals. https://hindivivek.org/253
- Sri Maheshwari Times, on the marks of the community, the marriage rule and the place of Gangaur. https://srimaheshwaritimes.com/maheshwari-community/
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- Premsukhanand Maheshwari, "Maheshwari Utpatti evam Sankshipt Itihas", part 1 (Mahesh Navami, 2014). A devotional history, cited as one author's telling.

The earliest printed telling of the origin story that scholars cite is Sivkaran Ramratan Darak's history of 1923; no copy was located for this book.

The 1916 record

- R. V. Russell and Hira Lal, *The Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces of India* (London: Macmillan, 1916), vol. II, article "Bania: Maheshri". Reproduced on Indpaedia, http://indpaedia.com/ind/index.php/Bania:_Maheshri/_Maheswari . The Indpaedia page opens with a modern, unattributed section on the community's origin; the book cites that section separately as a community telling and does not credit it to Russell and Hira Lal.

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- Hermann Oldenberg (translator), *The Grihya-Sutras: Rules of Vedic Domestic Ceremonies, Part I*, Sacred Books of the East, vol. 29 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1886). The Paraskara Grihya Sutra, kanda I, kandikas 4 to 8, covers the

taking of the hand, the laja offerings, the stone, the seven steps, the pole star and the touching of the heart.

- Rigveda, book 10, hymn 85, the wedding hymn of Surya. A widely available English version is Ralph T. H. Griffith, *The Hymns of the Rigveda* (Benares: E. J. Lazarus, 1889 to 1892).
- Rajbali Pandey, *Hindu Samskaras: Socio-Religious Study of the Hindu Sacraments* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2nd edition 1969, and reprints).
- P. V. Kane, *History of Dharmasastra*, vol. II, part 1 (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1941), on vivaha.
- The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, section 7: a Hindu marriage may be solemnised according to the customary rites of either party, and where those rites include the saptapadi, the marriage is complete when the seventh step is taken.
- The Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, as amended in 1986 and 1991, under which the ivory trade in India is closed.

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- Lindsey Harlan, *Religion and Rajput Women: The Ethic of Protection in Contemporary Narratives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992),

on the ratijaga, the kuldevi and the bride.

- Ann Grodzins Gold, "Outspoken Women: Representations of Female Voices in a Rajasthani Folklore Community", *Oral Tradition* 12(1), 1997, pp. 103 to 133.
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- Vishes Kothari, articles on ritual singing and translations of women's songs in Rajasthan, Sahapedia. http://www.sahapedia.org/ritual-singing-tradition-rajasthan-navigating-gendered-space-religion

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- Thomas A. Timberg, *The Marwaris: From Jagat Seth to the Birlas* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2014).

Recordings

- Rupayan Sansthan, Jodhpur (the Komal Kothari collection), field recordings of Rajasthani wedding songs, digitised on the Internet Archive, for example https://archive.org/details/dni.ncaa.RS-1119-AC . These cover many communities and are not Maheshwari recordings.
- The indexed audio of wedding songs on reetrivaz.in, listed above.

Songs and family memory

Much of what is in this book is written in none of these places. The Battisi, the Mayra, the Maya, the Mama Phere, the Thaledi and the Jaat live in the women's songs and in family memory, passed from mother-in-law to daughter-in-law and from grandmother to grandchild, with each family's own names sung into the verses. Every family's version is a little different. The answers your elders give to the questions at the end of each chapter are a primary source

in their own right, and once written down, they are a source the next generation will have.

About the author

Arun Agrawal has been in the IT industry since 1986. He is the founder and CEO of EbizIndia Consulting Pvt. Ltd. and holds an M.E. (Gold Medal) from Jadavpur University. He is the author of *The Marwari Wedding Rituals*, the Agarwal companion to this book, and of *Invisible to Prominent*, on being found online.

A note on accuracy

Maheshwari wedding customs vary from family to family, from khap to khap and from region to region: between the Rajasthan homeland, Maharashtra, Malwa, Hyderabad, Bengal and every other place Maheshwari families have settled. This book describes the practice recorded in its sources and notes the variations it found. It cannot describe every family's version, and where your family does something differently, your family's way is the right one for you.

The sources are listed so that readers can check what is printed. Where a custom rests on one source, the chapter says so; where no source records a meaning, the chapter says that too. On the day itself, the family pandit's own tradition prevails.

Even so, mistakes may remain, and we would like to hear about them.

Sending corrections

If you find an error, know a variation we have missed, or have an answer to one of the "Ask your elders" questions that you would like to share, please send a message on WhatsApp to **+91 98310 27107**. Please mention the chapter number and tell us which family, khap or region your version comes from. Corrections and family variants will be considered for future printings.