AN AGARWAL FAMILY GUIDE

The Marwari 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 is common among Agarwal families and notes the variations it knows of. On the day, the tradition of your family and of your family pandit prevails.

Corrections and additions are welcome. Please send them on WhatsApp to +91 98310 27107, with the chapter number and, if you can, the name of the family or region whose practice you are describing.

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 twenty-nine rituals, in the order they usually happen, each with a line on what it means. Tap a ritual to go to its chapter. For when each one takes place, where and who leads it, see The wedding week at a glance on page 20.

Part One: The Promise

1 **Roka and Tilak** 23
The match is settled, and the bride's family goes to the groom's home to mark his forehead. Her side is saying, in public: we have chosen you.

2 **Sagai, Godh Bharai and the ring** 27
The groom's family comes to the bride, puts the ring on her finger and fills her lap with gifts. The promise now runs both ways.

3 **Lagan Lekhan and the Lagan Patrika** 31
The pandit fixes the muhurat and writes it in a formal letter that is carried to the groom's home. The wedding's official notice.

Part Two: Opening the Home

4 **Ganesh Sthapana and Vinayak** 38
Ganesh is installed in both homes, and from that hour the house is “in wedding”. The songs begin.

5 **Chaak Puja, the potter's wheel** 42
The women worship the potter's wheel and bring home the clay pots and lamps for the wedding, with a blessing.

6 **Mayra, or Bhaat** 46
The mother's brothers arrive with gifts and the yellow peela. Her parents' home still stands behind her.

Part Two: Opening the Home *(continued)*

7 **Ratijaga, the night vigil** 50
The women stay awake through the night singing, asking every protector of the family to watch over the wedding.

Part Three: The Celebrations

8 **Pithi Dastoor, Tel and the Kangan Dora** 57
Turmeric, oil and a thread on the wrist set the bride and groom apart. From now on they are blessed and guarded.

9 **Mehendi** 61
Henna, often sent by the groom's side, is the first thing his family puts on her: adornment, blessing and a first visible tie.

10 **Mahila Sangeet and the Banna-Banni Geet** 65
The women sing about the bride and groom, praising, teasing and advising, and grieving the coming departure, all in verse.

11 **Bindori and Banola** 69
A procession through the neighbourhood and a meal at a relative's home, so the wider family can claim its share of the wedding.

12 **Palla Dastoor** 73
The groom's family brings the bride her wedding outfit and jewellery. She goes to the pheras dressed by the family she is joining.

Part Four: The Wedding Day

13 **Korath** 80
On the day, the bride's men go to the groom and invite him and the baraat in person. He comes because he has been asked.

14 **Sehrabandi, Nikasi and Ghudchadi** 84
The sehra is tied, his mother feeds him and he rides out on the mare. The family's boy sets out as a bridegroom.

15 **Toran and Dhukav** 88
The groom touches the toran at the bride's door and her mother welcomes him with aarti. He is received at the threshold.

16 **Samela, Milni and Var Puja** 92
The two families embrace, pair by pair, and the bride's father washes the groom's feet: one of the oldest welcomes in the rites.

17 **Varmala** 96
Bride and groom exchange garlands, the first moment in the wedding when the two of them alone act. A sign of choice.

18 **Kanyadaan, Hathleva and Gotrochar** 100
The ancestry of both sides is announced and her parents place her hand in his. He promises, before witnesses, to stand by her.

19 **Gathjoda, or Granthi Bandhan** 104
The bride's chunari is knotted to the groom's dupatta. From here to the end of the rites, they move as one.

20 **Pheras, Lajahoma and the stone** 108
The couple circle the sacred fire and offer puffed rice, and she pushes a stone forward for a marriage that stands firm. The fire is the witness.

Part Four: The Wedding Day *(continued)*

21 **Saptapadi and the seven vows** 112
Seven steps, each asking for something a home needs, the last for friendship. In the old texts this completes the marriage.

22 **Suhaag chinh: sindoor, chooda, bichhiya, mangalsutra** 116
Sindoor in her parting, the chooda, toe rings and the mangalsutra: the signs that mark her as a married woman.

23 **Aashirvad, Pehravani and Joota Chupai** 120
Blessings from the elders, honours for the groom's family and the bargaining over his hidden shoes. Reverent, formal and pure fun.

24 **Kanwar Kaleva** 124
The groom's first meal at the bride's home, served with plenty of teasing. A welcome into her family through food and laughter.

Part Five: The New Beginning

25 **Vidai** 131
The bride throws rice back over her head and leaves her parents' home. The most emotional hour of the wedding, and the tears are part of it.

26 **Griha Pravesh and the games** 135
She tips the pot of rice and walks into her new home leaving red footprints. Then the games, to make two near-strangers laugh together.

27 **Mooh Dikhai** 139
The women of her new family come to see her face, one by one, each with a gift. Every one of them meets her properly.

28 **Pagphera** 143
The bride's first visit back to her parents. Her old home is still hers, and the groom is welcomed as a son-in-law.

29 **Dhok and Jaat at the Kuldevi** 147
The couple bow before the family goddess and ask for her blessing. The wedding ends where the family's devotion lives.

Why I wrote this book

A Marwari wedding is a long sequence of rituals. Some take an hour, some take a few minutes, and a few stretch across a whole night. Families go through every one of them with great care. Yet in many families, if you ask why a particular thing is done, the answer is "because it has always been done this way".

That answer was enough for earlier generations. It is not enough for many young people today. They grow up asking why about everything else in their lives, and they bring the same question to the mandap. When nobody can tell them, they come to a reasonable conclusion: these are standard old practices that make no sense, to be sat through for the sake of the elders.

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 consent given in front of witnesses, about a daughter leaving one home and entering another. The meaning has simply not been passed on along with the actions.

So this book does two things for every ritual. It describes what happens, step by step, so that nobody is lost on the day. And it explains the significance of each activity, so that the people doing it know what they are doing and why. My hope is simple. A young bride, groom, brother or cousin who understands a ritual will take part in it with far more engagement than one who is only following instructions.

Why the Agarwal wedding

The Marwari community is not one community. Agarwals, Maheshwaris, Oswals and others share a great deal, but each has its own customs and its own words for things. Trying to cover all of them equally in one book would have made it vague. I chose to start with the Agarwal wedding and to mention the

practices of other Marwari communities as variations where they differ. If this book proves useful, I may write a Maheshwari edition later.

Even within Agarwal families, practice differs between those from Haryana, from Rajasthan, from Uttar Pradesh and from eastern India. The book says so wherever it can. It does not claim that any one family's way is the correct one.

Checking it with the elders

I know that a book about family ritual must earn the trust of the people who actually keep those rituals. That is why this book went to family elders before it went anywhere else. They read it with care, and I am grateful to them for their time.

If you are reading this and something does not match what you know, I would like to hear from you. Tell me what your family does, and where it comes from. The details are on the copyright page. Every correction makes the next edition better for the families who will use it.

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

Arun Agrawal

Acknowledgements

My first thanks go to the elders of my family, who read this book before anyone else and checked it against what they have seen and done at weddings over a lifetime. Where this book is right about how things are done, much of the credit will be theirs.

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.

I am also grateful to the generations of women whose wedding songs carried these customs long before anyone wrote them down, and to the family pandits who keep the rites going.

Arun Agrawal

How to read this book

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

It begins with Part 0, a short introduction to the Agarwal community, the reasons for ritual and a table of the whole wedding week. Then come twenty-nine 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.

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. If you read nothing else, read this.
- **At a glance:** when it happens, who leads it, where it takes place and which theme it belongs to.
- **What happens:** the sequence, in plain numbered steps.
- **Why we do it:** the meaning. This section starts with the sceptic's question, "what is the point of this?", and answers it as straight as it can. Where the origin of a custom is not known, the book says so rather than inventing one.
- **Roots:** where the ritual comes from, with a label explained below.
- **In some families:** how practice differs between Agarwal families from different regions, and among other Marwari communities.
- **Your part in it:** small, concrete things the bride, groom, siblings and cousins can do.

- **Ask your elders:** two questions to put to your parents or grandparents, with space to write their answers. Filled in, these pages become a record of your own family's way.

The Roots labels

Each chapter carries one Roots label, or two where one would not be accurate.

- **Vedic rite:** found in the Grihya Sutras, the old household manuals (Paraskara, Ashvalayana, Gobhila and others), or in the wedding hymn of the Rigveda. The pandit's mantras for these are Vedic. The fire rounds and saptapadi are examples.
- **Shastric or Puranic rite:** not in the Grihya Sutras, but laid down in later Dharmashastra texts, the Puranas or the pandit's standard wedding manual. Ganesh puja before the rites and the varmala are examples.
- **Community custom:** Agarwal, Marwari or wider Rajasthani practice, carried by families and by the women's songs rather than by priests. Mayra, Toran and Pithi are examples.
- **Protective or folk belief:** done to keep away nazar, misfortune or ill will. The kajal applied by the bhabhi and the kangan dora are examples.

One rule matters more than the labels themselves. A label says where a ritual comes from, not whether it matters. Mayra is a community custom, and for many families it is the most moving hour of the whole wedding. Please do not read "community custom" as "optional".

Reader markers and reading paths

Below each chapter title you will see one or more markers: Bride, Groom, Siblings. They show who has a part to play in that ritual. If you want only the chapters that concern you, follow these paths.

- **Bride:** read the chapters marked Bride.
- **Groom:** read the chapters marked Groom.
- **A sibling or cousin with a job to do:** read the chapters marked Siblings.

- **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 in a Marwari wedding serves one or two of five purposes. Each chapter names its theme in the At a glance box, and Part 0 explains them more fully.

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

Variations, and who decides

No two Agarwal families do every ritual the same way. Families from Haryana, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and eastern India differ in names, order and detail, and Maheshwari and Oswal families differ again. The book describes what is common and marks the variations in the body of the text: "in most Agarwal families", "some families". 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 Tilak, at Mayra, at Palla, at Milni, at Pehravani and elsewhere. They are tokens of goodwill exchanged between families, and the chapters explain who gives what and what it means.

Every gift described in this book is voluntary. Indian law, under the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, forbids giving, taking or demanding dowry. A demand, whether open or hinted, turns a ritual of goodwill into something else entirely. The chapters that follow do not return to this point, because it applies to all of them.

PART ZERO

Before the Rituals



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

Who are the Agarwals?

Agarwals are a trading community of north India. Over the last few centuries many Agarwal families moved out from Haryana and Rajasthan to Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Bengal, Assam and beyond, and later to cities across the world. A large share of them are counted among the Marwaris, the business families whose roots lie in Marwar and the wider Rajasthan and Haryana region. That is why an Agarwal wedding in Kolkata or Mumbai still carries Rajasthani words, songs and customs.

The name is usually traced to Agroha, the town from which the community is said to have come.

Maharaja Agrasen and Agroha

Agarwal families trace their descent to Maharaja Agrasen, a king of Agroha. Agroha is a real place, in present-day Hisar district of Haryana. The ancient mound there has been excavated several times, first in the 1880s and most thoroughly between 1978 and 1981, and the finds show a town inhabited from a few centuries before the Common Era to medieval times. The excavations do not mention Agrasen; he belongs to tradition, which places him in antiquity. Historians do not agree on a date, and this book does not try to settle it.

The stories told about him matter more at a wedding than the dates. He is remembered as a just ruler who welcomed newcomers to his city, and the community honours him as its founder. Many families keep his picture, and Agrasen Jayanti is celebrated each year.

The gotras: eighteen, or seventeen and a half

Every Agarwal family belongs to a gotra, a lineage traced through the father's line. The traditional story says that Agrasen performed eighteen great yagnas, and that each gave rise to one gotra. The story continues that at the eighteenth

yagna Agrasen was moved by the sacrifice of the animal and stopped it midway, so its gotra is counted as half. This is the usual explanation for the phrase "seventeen and a half gotras", and the same story is told as the reason the community gave up animal sacrifice. Both counts are in use. Some families say eighteen, some say seventeen and a half, and families differ on which gotra is the half one.

Among the well-known Agarwal gotras are Garg, Goyal, Bansal, Mittal, Singhal, Jindal, Kansal and Tayal. Spellings vary a little from family to family. The full list, and its exact form, is best checked with your own elders, since printed lists do not always agree.

Why gotra matters at a wedding

Agarwals do not marry within the same gotra. In most families this is the first thing checked when a match is suggested. Many families also avoid a match with the mother's gotra. This is common practice, not law, and families differ on how far they take it. Ask your elders what rule your family follows.

The reason given is lineage. A gotra is treated as a single extended family descended from one ancestor, so a marriage inside it is thought of as a marriage between relatives. This book makes no claim about any biological basis for the rule. It records how families understand it.

Gotra also has a public moment during the wedding itself. Before the kanyadaan, the pandit recites the gotra and the names of three generations on each side: the bride's father, grandfather and great-grandfather, and the same for the groom. This recital is called gotrochar. It announces, in front of everyone present, which two families are being joined. Chapter 18 describes it in full. If you are the bride or groom, write down your three generations of names before the day and give them to the pandit, so that nobody is left searching for a great-grandfather's name at the mandap.

Mahalakshmi, the Kuldevi

A Kuldevi is a family's own goddess, the one the family turns to at every important moment. For the Agarwal community as a whole, the Kuldevi is Mahalakshmi. Tradition links her to Agrasen, who is said to have won her blessing for his city and his line. At Agroha today stands Agroha Dham, a large temple complex built by the community between 1976 and 1984, with Mahalakshmi in its central shrine and Agrasen honoured beside her.

Many families also honour a village deity or a deity linked to their gotra, alongside Mahalakshmi. Ask the family which deities are worshipped at home. The Kuldevi appears several times in the wedding: in the songs of the Ratijaga, in the household worship before the rituals begin, and at the end, when the new couple go for Dhok and Jaat (chapter 29).

When one partner is not Agarwal

More and more weddings join an Agarwal family with a family from another community. The rituals in this book can be done, and often are, when one partner is not Agarwal. The pandit adapts the gotrochar and other details to the other family's tradition, and the two families agree between them which customs to keep. If you are marrying into an Agarwal family, Part 0 and The Wedding Day are the best place to start.

Why rituals at all?

A registrar can marry two people in ten minutes with a signature and two witnesses. A Marwari wedding takes a week and involves hundreds of people. What is all the rest for?

The short answer is that a Marwari wedding was never only about two people. It is about two families becoming one: two households, two sets of grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins, agreeing to treat each other as their own from now on. A signature records a marriage. The rituals build the relationships around it. Seen this way, many of the customs that look odd on their own start to make sense as parts of a single process.

Read through all twenty-nine rituals and five purposes come up again and again. Each chapter in this book names one or two of them.

Blessing

Before anything new begins, the family asks for goodwill: from God, from the Kuldevi, from the ancestors and from the living elders. Ganesh Sthapana opens both homes this way, because Ganesh is invoked before every undertaking. The Ratijaga keeps the family awake through a night of songs to the Kuldevi and the ancestors. Aashirvad, after the pheras, has the couple bow to each elder in turn. Whatever one believes about the divine, the elders' blessing is something everyone can see and feel.

Protection

The days before a wedding were always thought of as delicate, a time when the bride and groom were exposed to nazar, misfortune or ill will. Several customs guard them. The kangan dora is tied on the wrist at Pithi and stays until after the wedding. The bride and groom are not left alone, and a small knife or piece of iron is kept with them. At Sehrabandi the bhabhi puts kajal on the groom

before he rides out. You may or may not believe in nazar. The care these customs express, a family watching over its own, is real either way.

Bonds between families

A large share of the wedding is about relatives taking up their roles. At Mayra the mother's brothers come with gifts for their sister and her household, and the bond between a woman and her natal family is honoured in public. At Milni the two sides meet, and each relative embraces his counterpart: father with father, mama with mama. At the pheras the bride's brother pours puffed rice into her hands for the lajahoma, a place given to him in the oldest texts. These rituals tell every relative where they stand.

Consent and witness

A marriage has to be agreed and it has to be seen. The fire is the first witness, and the guests are the rest. At the gotrochar the pandit announces both families' lineages aloud before the kanyadaan. Saptapadi, the seven steps, is the point at which the old texts treat the marriage as complete, and it is done in front of everyone. Even Roka and Tilak, at the very start, are public announcements that two families have given their word.

Moving home

For the bride, the wedding means leaving the house she grew up in and making a new one. Several rituals mark the stages of that move. At Vidai she throws rice back over her head towards her parents' home. At Griha Pravesh she tips over a kalash of rice with her foot and walks in on kumkum, leaving her footprints on a white cloth. At Pagphera she returns to her parents' home for the first time as a married woman, a reminder to both families that she has not been lost to either.

Doing them with understanding

None of this means every ritual must be kept exactly as it was. Families have always adapted, and they will go on adapting. What this book hopes for is that

the adapting is done with knowledge. A family that knows Mayra is about a sister's tie to her brothers, or that the kangan dora is a protective thread, can decide what to keep and what to shorten for good reasons rather than 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

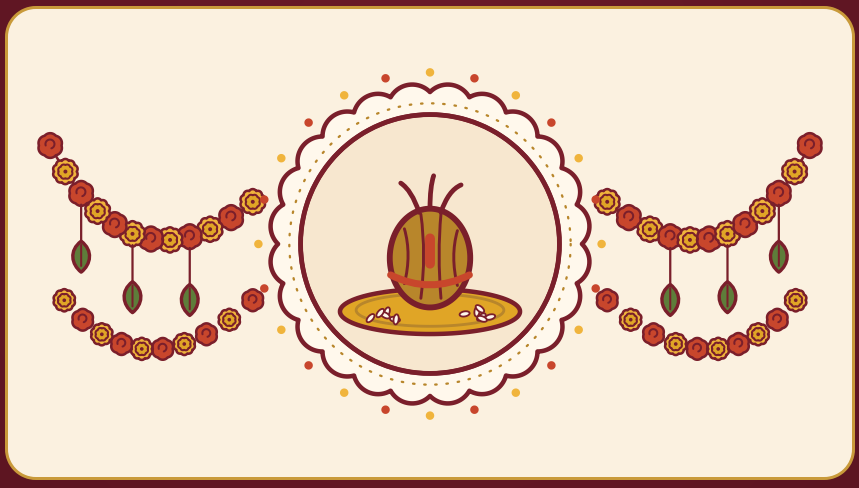
This table lists every ritual in the book in the order it usually happens. Timings are typical, not fixed: many families combine some rituals, move others or leave some out. Your family and your pandit will set the actual order.

Ritual	When	Where	Who leads
Part 1: The Promise			
1. Roka and Tilak	Weeks or months before	Groom's home	Bride's father, brother or male elders
2. Sagai, Godh Bharai and the ring	Weeks or months before	Bride's home	Groom's sister or bua
3. Lagan Lekhan and the Lagan Patrika	Weeks before	Both (written at bride's, read at groom's)	Bride's family pandit and male relatives
Part 2: Opening the Home			
4. Ganesh Sthapana and Vinayak	Two to five days before	Both	Pandit and parents
5. Chaak Puja, the potter's wheel	Days before	Both (at the potter's)	Women of the house
6. Mayra, or Bhaat	Days before	Both (separately)	Mother's brothers (mama)
7. Ratijaga, the night vigil	Night before Pithi or the wedding	Both	Women of the family
Part 3: The Celebrations			
8. Pithi Dastoor, Tel and the Kangan Dora	One or two days before	Both	Married women, mama's family
9. Mehendi	One or two days before	Bride's home (a token at the groom's)	Women of the family
10. Mahila Sangeet and the Banna-Banni Geet	Days before	Both	Women of the family
11. Bindori and Banola	Days before	Both (in families that do it)	Relatives who host
12. Palla Dastoor	Day before or wedding morning	Bride's home	Groom's family
Part 4: The Wedding Day			

Ritual	When	Where	Who leads
13. Korath	Wedding day	Groom's home or hotel	Bride's male relatives and pandit
14. Sehrabandi, Nikasi and Ghudchadi	Wedding day, before the baraat	Groom's home	Jija, sisters, bhabhi, mother
15. Toran and Dhukav	Baraat arrives	Venue	Groom; bride's mother
16. Samela, Milni and Var Puja	Baraat arrives	Venue	Both fathers; bride's father and pandit
17. Varmala	Wedding evening	Venue	Bride and groom
18. Kanyadaan, Hathleva and Gotrochar	At the mandap	Venue	Pandit; bride's parents
19. Gathjoda, or Granthi Bandhan	Before the pheras	Venue	Groom's sister or pandit
20. Pheras, Lajahoma and the stone	At the mandap	Venue	Pandit; bride's brother
21. Saptapadi and the seven vows	At the mandap	Venue	Pandit and couple
22. Suhaag chinh: sindoor, chooda, bichhiya, mangalsutra	After saptapadi	Venue	Groom; his mother or sister
23. Aashirvad, Pehravani and Joota Chupai	After the pheras	Venue	Elders of both sides; bride's sisters
24. Kanwar Kaleva	After the pheras, often next morning	Bride's home	Bride's sisters and cousins (salis)
Part 5: The New Beginning			
25. Vidai	After the wedding	Bride's home or venue	Bride and her family
26. Griha Pravesh and the games	On arrival at the new home	Groom's home	Groom's sisters or bua
27. Mooh Dikhai	Soon after arrival	Groom's home	Women of the groom's family
28. Pagphera	Next day, or after the Dhok	Bride's home	Bride's brother
29. Dhok and Jaat at the Kuldevi	Days after the wedding	Groom's family shrine or temple	Groom's mother

PART ONE

The Promise



The two families say yes, the date is fixed, and the word goes out.

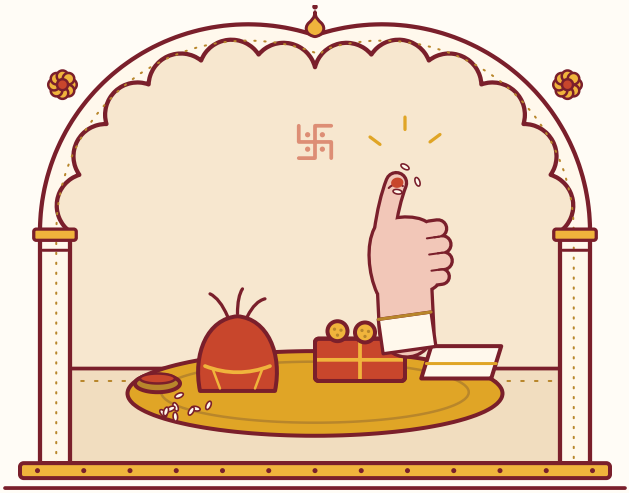
Roka and Tilak · Sagai, Godh Bharai and the ring · Lagan Lekhan and the Lagan Patrika

CHAPTER 1

Roka and Tilak

रोका, तिलक

GROOM SIBLINGS



IN ONE MINUTE

Roka is the moment both families agree to stop looking: the match is settled. Tilak is the bride's family going to the groom's home and marking his forehead, with gifts of sweets, a coconut, cloth or cash. It is the first public act of the wedding, and it runs one way, from her side to him. In plain terms, her family is saying: we have chosen you, and we are telling everyone.

WHEN	Weeks or months before the wedding; often both on one day
WHO LEADS	The bride's father, brother or male elders
WHERE	The groom's home
THEME	Bonds between families; Consent and witness

What happens

1. Roka: once the families have agreed, they meet, usually with a few close relatives, and exchange sweets and small gifts. The word comes from rokna, to stop. Each side stops considering other proposals.
2. Tilak: on the chosen day the bride's father, brother or other male elders go to the groom's home with a thali of roli, rice, sweets, a coconut and gifts.
3. The groom sits facing them, often on a low seat, with his family around him. A pandit may say a short puja first.
4. The bride's father or brother applies the tilak to the groom's forehead with roli and presses on a few grains of rice.
5. They place the coconut, sweets, cloth or cash in his hands. Some families also give a sword.
6. The groom touches the feet of the bride's elders. Sweets go round, and the two families eat together.

Why we do it

If the couple have already said yes, often on a video call months ago, what does a red mark on his forehead add? Roka and Tilak were never about the couple's private yes. They are the families' public yes. Before this point either side could walk away quietly. After it, everyone in both circles knows.

That is why Tilak travels. The bride's family does not summon the groom; they go to him, in his own house, in front of his relatives. Going to someone's home and honouring him there is a strong statement in any Indian family. It says the choice has been made with care, and it puts the bride's family's word on record.

The tilak itself is the ordinary Hindu mark of honour and blessing, the same one put on a guest or a returning son. The rice used with it is akshat, grains kept whole, which stand for something unbroken. Read together, the mark says: we honour you, and we wish this to last.

The gifts follow the same direction. The coconut is the standard auspicious offering at the start of any good work. Sweets mean good news. Cloth and cash

are tokens of goodwill from one family to another. The sword, where it is given, is usually explained as marking the groom as the one who will protect the bride and the home the two of them make. That is the reason families give; how the custom began is not recorded.

ROOTS **Community custom**

Neither Roka nor Tilak appears in the Grihya Sutras. Both are carried by Agarwal and wider North Indian families, and the forms vary from house to house.

In some families

In most Agarwal families today Roka and Tilak happen on the same day, sometimes in the same hour, simply because relatives are travelling and one gathering is easier than two. Some families still keep them apart, with a quiet Roka at home and a larger Tilak later.

Some families treat Tilak as the formal engagement and do not hold a separate ring ceremony at all. Others do Tilak and then a Sagai with rings a few weeks later (chapter 2). In some families Tilak is done when the lagan patrika is carried to the groom's house (chapter 3), so the two visits become one.

The name also varies. Many families say Teeka rather than Tilak, and the gifts range from a single coconut and a sweet box to a full thali of clothes. The meaning is the same at either size.

Your part in it

- **Groom:** Sit still and let the elders take their time. Touch the feet of each of the bride's elders, not only her father, and learn their names before the day so you can greet them properly.
- **Groom:** Keep the coconut. Many families place it in the home shrine until the wedding.

- **Bride's brother:** If you are applying the tilak, practise the movement: thumb in roli, one firm upward stroke, rice pressed on gently. It is your first formal act for your sister.
- **Siblings and cousins on both sides:** Be the person who introduces the two families to each other by name and relation. Half the room will not know who is who.

Ask your elders

1. *In our family, were Roka and Tilak done on separate days or together, and who went from the bride's side?*

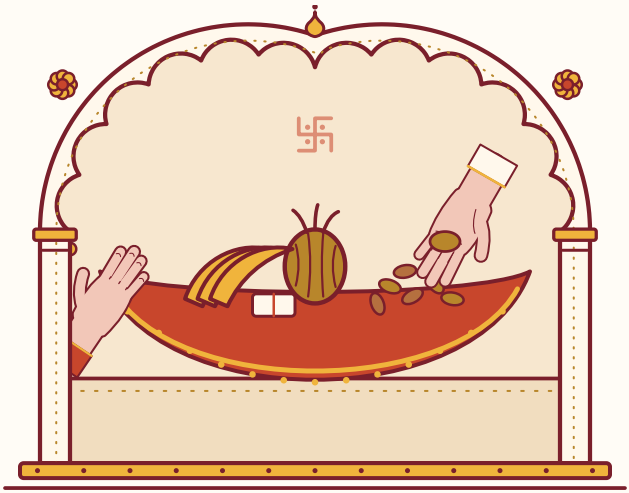
2. *What was put in the Tilak thali at your own wedding, and was a sword ever given?*

CHAPTER 2

Sagai, Godh Bharai and the ring

सगाई, गोद भराई

BRIDE SIBLINGS



IN ONE MINUTE

Sagai is the groom's family coming to the bride, in her home, and welcoming her as one of their own: his sister or bua puts the ring on her finger, and gifts and sweets are given. Godh Bharai fills the bride's lap with fruit, dry fruit, a coconut and cloth. Tilak in chapter 1 went from her side to him; this goes from his side to her. Together they make the promise two-way.

WHEN	After Tilak, often weeks before the wedding; Godh Bharai may wait until the day before the wedding
WHO LEADS	The groom's sister or bua, with the groom's parents
WHERE	The bride's home, or a hall hired by her family
THEME	Bonds between families; Blessing

What happens

1. The groom's family arrives at the bride's home with sweets, fruit, clothes and jewellery for her.
2. A short Ganesh puja is done in many families before anything else.
3. The groom's sister or bua puts the ring on the bride's finger. In many families the bride then puts a ring on the groom's finger.
4. For Godh Bharai, the bride sits with the end of her odhni or saree held open in her lap (her jholi). Women of the groom's family fill it with a coconut, fruit, dry fruit, cloth and sometimes a small doll.
5. The bride touches the feet of the groom's elders, who bless her and give her shagun.
6. Sweets are exchanged and the families eat together.

Why we do it

Why two engagement ceremonies? Surely one ring is enough. The difference is direction. At Tilak the bride's family went to the groom and honoured him. Sagai is the reply: the groom's family comes to her and says, in front of her relatives, that she is welcome in their house. A promise that only one side makes is not much of a promise.

It matters who puts the ring on. It is usually not the groom but his sister or bua, the women who will be closest to the bride in her new home. Their hands doing it say: we accept you, and we will look out for you. The bride touching the feet of the groom's elders is the answer from her side.

Godh Bharai means filling the lap. A lap filled with fruit, nuts and a coconut is one of the oldest pictures of plenty and fertility in Indian custom. The groom's family is wishing that the bride's life with them will be full. The doll, where it is used, is a plain wish for children.

Not the baby shower

Godh Bharai at a wedding is not the Godh Bharai held for a pregnant woman, though the name and the filled lap are the same. If an aunt looks puzzled at the word on a wedding card, this is why.

The ring is the newest part. The older Marwari form of Sagai had no ring at all: the tilak, the gifts and the filled lap did the work. Rings came in with the wider Indian adoption of the engagement ring in the last few generations. Nobody needs to feel that a ring-free Sagai is incomplete; that was the older way.

ROOTS **Community custom**

Sagai and Godh Bharai belong to Marwari family practice, not to the priestly texts. The ring is a modern addition to an older custom.

In some families

In Rajasthani usage the ceremony is often called Mudda Tikka, and older relatives may use that name rather than Sagai.

Godh Bharai does not always happen at Sagai. Many families hold it on the day before the wedding, when the groom's family brings the bride's wedding outfit and jewellery in the Palla Dastoor (chapter 12). Some do it at both. Some families have merged Sagai into Roka and Tilak so that everything happens at one large engagement party, with the ring as its centre.

What goes into the lap also varies: some families fix the number of fruits, some always include a particular sweet, some leave the doll out. Ask before you buy.

Your part in it

- **Bride:** Hold the jholi firmly and keep it open until the women have finished; dropping the coconut is the one thing everyone will remember. Afterwards, ask your mother what to do with the coconut and fruit; many families keep the coconut in the home shrine.

- **Bride:** Learn the names and relations of the groom's elders before the day. Touching someone's feet and calling them by the right name (Bua ji, Tauji) is noticed, and talked about afterwards.
- **Groom's sister:** If you are putting the ring on, check the size in advance. You are also the bride's first ally in the family; a quiet word to her during the ceremony is worth more than any gift.
- **Cousins on the bride's side:** Keep a list of who gave what. Families like to return shagun in kind at later occasions, and nobody remembers on the day.

Ask your elders

1. *Was there a ring at your own Sagai, and if not, what marked the engagement?*

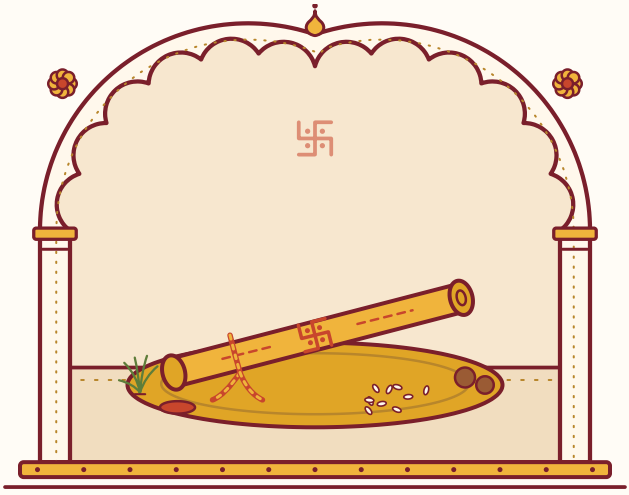
2. *In our family, is Godh Bharai done at Sagai or with Palla, and what must always go into the lap?*

CHAPTER 3

Lagan Lekhan and the Lagan Patrika

लगन लेखन, लगन पत्रिका

SIBLINGS



IN ONE MINUTE

The bride's family pandit works out the auspicious date and time (the muhurat) for the wedding and writes it, with the main ritual timings, in a formal letter called the lagan patrika, often on yellow paper. Her male relatives carry it to the groom's home, where it is read aloud and worshipped, and the groom is honoured with tilak and gifts. It is the wedding's official notice from one family to the other.

WHEN	Usually a few weeks before the wedding, once the muhurat is fixed
WHO LEADS	The bride's family pandit writes it; her father, brother or other male relatives carry it
WHERE	Written at the bride's home; read at the groom's home
THEME	Consent and witness; Bonds between families

What happens

1. The bride's family pandit studies the horoscopes and the calendar and fixes the muhurat for the wedding and for the main rituals before it.
2. Lagan lekhan: at the bride's home, after a Ganesh puja, the pandit writes the lagan patrika. It names the couple, their families and gotras, the date and the times. Turmeric, rice and roli are often applied to it, and it is folded and tied with mauli.
3. A few of the bride's male relatives carry the patrika to the groom's home, usually with sweets, a coconut and gifts.
4. Lagan vaachan, or lagan padhna: at the groom's home the patrika is placed before Ganesh, worshipped, and read aloud by a pandit to the assembled family.
5. The groom is given tilak and gifts by the bride's relatives, and the visitors are fed and sent back with gifts of their own.

Why we do it

The date is already on everyone's phone, the venue is booked, the caterer has an advance. Why carry a hand-written letter across town to be read out? Because a message tells people the date, while the lagan patrika commits two families to it. It is closer to a signed agreement than an invitation.

Look at who does what. The bride's family fixes the time, through their pandit, and the groom's family receives it. Being the side that sets the hour is a quiet mark of respect to the bride's family; being the side that worships the letter is the groom's family's acceptance. Once the patrika has been read aloud in front of relatives, the date is no longer a plan. It is the family's word.

The reading aloud matters too. In a time when few people could read, a letter that was read out to the whole household was a letter everyone had heard. Today it means every uncle and aunt hears the same times from the same source, which saves a lot of confused phone calls in the wedding week.

Why yellow? Haldi yellow is the colour of auspicious beginnings across North India, and the same yellow returns at Pithi and in the Mayra peela. Hence the other name for the patrika, peeli chitthi, the yellow letter.

The muhurat itself comes from jyotish, the system of auspicious times. You may or may not believe in it. The letter does its job either way: it makes a private agreement public.

ROOTS **Community custom**

Writing and carrying the lagan patrika is a family custom across North India. The muhurat it records rests on jyotish rather than on the Grihya Sutras.

In some families

In some families the formal Tilak (chapter 1) is done at this very visit, so the men who carry the patrika also mark the groom's forehead, and there is no separate Tilak day.

Some families have the patrika written in Hindi on printed yellow stationery; some still have it hand-written by the pandit with a swastik at the top. Some keep the patrika afterwards with the wedding papers; others place it in the home shrine. In families where both sides use the same pandit, the letter may be written and read on the same day.

Your part in it

- **Bride's brother or cousin:** If you are carrying the patrika, carry it in a clean thali or a cloth, not in a laptop bag. Hand it over with both hands. You are the bride's family's messenger for the day.
- **Bride's siblings:** Photograph the patrika before it leaves the house. It is the first written record of the wedding and the family will want it later.
- **Groom's siblings:** Ask the pandit to read the times slowly and write them down. They become the family's schedule for the wedding week.

- **Both sides:** If the letter names the gotras, check them with the elders now. The same names are spoken aloud at the gotrochar on the wedding day (chapter 18).

Ask your elders

1. *Who wrote the lagan patrika at your own wedding, and is it still kept somewhere in the house?*

2. *Who carried it to the other family, and what was given to them on arrival?*

Common questions

Do we have to do Roka, Tilak and Sagai separately?

No. In most Agarwal families today they are combined into one or two gatherings, often in a single day. What matters is that both directions are covered: her family honouring him (Tilak) and his family welcoming her (Sagai). How many days that takes is up to the two families.

Is a ring ceremony part of the tradition?

Not the old one. The older Marwari Sagai had no ring; the tilak, the gifts and the filled lap did the work. Rings came in over the last few generations and are now usual. Families who skip the ring are following the older form, not cutting a corner.

Why does the bride's side go to the groom first?

Because the first public act in this tradition is the bride's family choosing and honouring the groom in his own home. The groom's family replies at Sagai by coming to her. Read in order, the two visits are a conversation between equals, each family making its commitment in the other's house.

We had a love marriage and the families met only recently. Do these rituals still make sense?

Arguably more so. The couple may have decided long ago, but the families are new to each other. Tilak, Sagai and the lagan patrika are how two sets of parents and relatives make the commitment their own, in front of each other. If one partner is not Agarwal, the pandit can adapt the details; the shape still works.

What if the two families' pandits disagree on the muhurat?

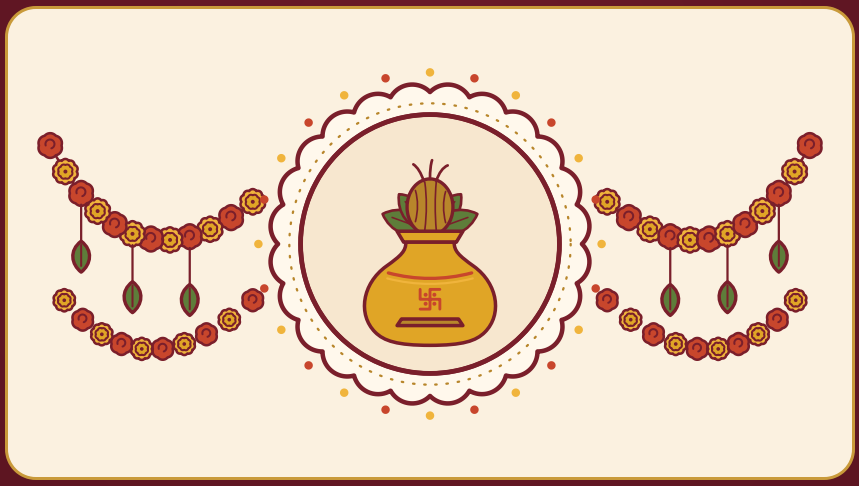
By custom, the bride's family pandit fixes the muhurat and writes the lagan patrika, and the groom's family receives it. In practice the two families usually talk it through before the letter is written, so that both pandits are content. Your pandit's own tradition prevails on the day.

Does anything have to be given at these ceremonies?

Every gift in these chapters is a voluntary token: a coconut, sweets, cloth, a ring. The size is for each family to decide, and a single coconut carries the same meaning as a full thali. Nothing is owed by either side.

PART TWO

Opening the Home



Ganesh is seated, the potter's wheel is honoured, the mama's family is called and the house stays awake to sing.

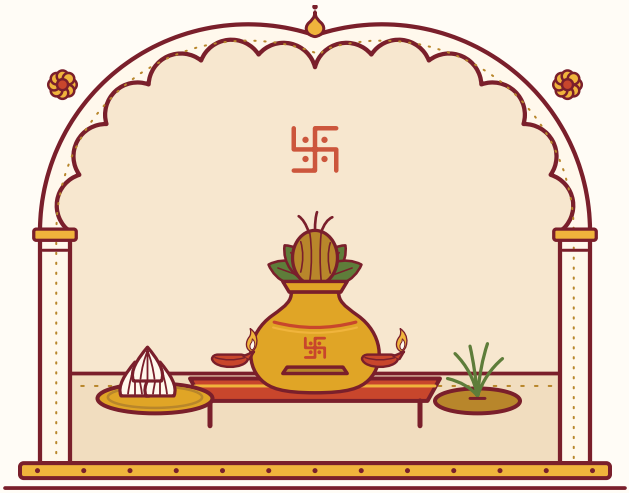
Ganesh Sthapana and Vinayak · Chaak Puja, the potter's wheel · Mayra, or Bhaat · Ratijaga, the night vigil

CHAPTER 4

Ganesh Sthapana and Vinayak

गणेश स्थापना, विनायक

BRIDE GROOM



IN ONE MINUTE

A few days before the wedding, both homes install Ganesh at an auspicious time. This is Ganesh sthapana, or Vinayak baithana. From that moment the house is "in wedding": the women begin the wedding songs, the mandap space is marked, and the household stops going to other families' weddings or funerals. It is the switch that turns an ordinary house into a wedding house.

WHEN	Usually two to five days before the wedding, at a time set by the pandit
WHO LEADS	The family pandit, with the parents of the bride or groom
WHERE	Both homes, separately
THEME	Blessing; Protection

What happens

1. A clean corner of the house is chosen, often near the home shrine, and a low wooden seat is covered with cloth.
2. At the set time the pandit installs a Ganesh figure or a symbolic form, with a kalash of water topped with mango leaves and a coconut.
3. The parents, and in many families the bride or groom, do the puja: roli, rice, flowers, sweets and a lamp.
4. The women of the house sing the first wedding songs, starting with songs to Ganesh.
5. The space for the mandap or manda is marked or worshipped.
6. From now until the wedding is over, the house is in byah haath. Ganesh is worshipped daily and stays in place until the wedding rituals are over; when he is moved varies by family.

Why we do it

We are not especially religious, and the wedding is still days away. Why start with a puja? Partly because Ganesh is invoked at the start of almost any undertaking, from opening a shop to sitting an exam, as the remover of obstacles. A wedding is the biggest undertaking most families attempt, with hundreds of moving parts and many chances to go wrong. Asking for a smooth path before any of it begins is the natural first step.

The second reason is less obvious and more practical. Ganesh sthapana marks a boundary in time. Before it, the family is planning a wedding. After it, the family is in one. The phrase families use is byah haath, or haath lagna: the wedding has been taken in hand. Life inside the house changes. Songs start. Relatives begin to arrive.

The rule about not travelling for other weddings or deaths follows from this. A household in byah haath is fully given over to its own wedding. Many families explain the rule about funerals in terms of protecting the auspicious state of the house. A plainer reading is that the family's attention, money and people

are committed, and nobody should be pulled away. Both explanations are heard.

Why at an auspicious time? Because this is the formal opening of the wedding, and families like to begin well. Whether or not you follow muhurat, a fixed moment brings everyone together, and that is how a beginning becomes visible.

ROOTS **Shastric or Puranic rite**

Ganesh is invoked before every major rite in the Smarta tradition followed by most pandits, but the Grihya Sutras do not name him. The byah haath customs that follow are family practice.

In some families

In most Agarwal families the Ganesh figure is a small idol or a picture. Some families use a symbolic form drawn with turmeric or a betel nut wrapped in mauli. Some tie the kangan dora on the wrist of the bride or groom at this point rather than at Pithi (chapter 8).

In some Rajasthani Marwari families, Bindayak (a local form of Vinayak) is a small boy from the family who stands in for Ganesh. He accompanies the bride or groom through the pre-wedding rituals as a living good omen. This is a regional variation, not the norm in most Agarwal homes.

The number of days varies a great deal. Families with relatives flying in may install Ganesh only two days before; others keep the older, longer span. Some families also do a Thamb puja, worshipping the post of the manda, around this time.

Your part in it

- **Bride and groom:** Be at home for the sthapana, not at a fitting or a salon. It is the opening of your wedding, and the family notices who is there.
- **Bride and groom:** Ask the pandit what the mantra asks of Ganesh, in one sentence. It is short, and knowing it changes how the next days feel.

- **Siblings:** Keep the daily lamp going in front of Ganesh. It is a small task that is easy to forget once the house fills up.
- **Everyone:** Check the family's rules for byah haath before you accept other invitations for the same week.

Ask your elders

1. *How many days before the wedding was Ganesh installed at your own wedding, and what form did he take?*

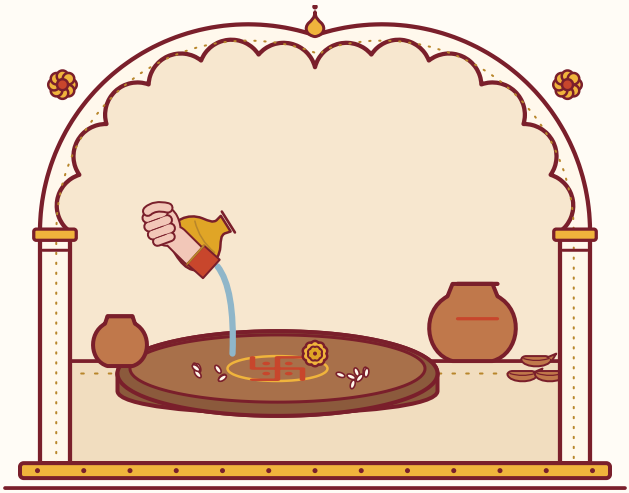
2. *Which rules did our household keep once it was in byah haath?*

CHAPTER 5

Chaak Puja, the potter's wheel

चाक पूजा, कुम्हार का चाक

SIBLINGS



IN ONE MINUTE

Women of the family walk, singing, to the local potter's house. They worship his wheel, the chaak, and bring home the clay pots and lamps that will be used in the wedding: the kalash, the matki and the small diyas. The potter is paid and given gifts. It brings the first objects of the wedding into the house with a blessing, and gives a working family in the neighbourhood a place in the celebration.

WHEN	In the days before the wedding, usually after Ganesh sthapana
WHO LEADS	The mother of the bride or groom, with the married women of the family
WHERE	The potter's home or workshop
THEME	Blessing; Bonds between families

What happens

1. The women of the house set out together for the potter's home, singing wedding songs as they go.
2. At the potter's, the mother of the bride or groom worships the wheel with water, roli, rice, flowers and a lamp. Many families draw a swastik on it.
3. The pots are chosen: the kalash for the mandap, matkis for water, and small diyas.
4. The potter is given his fee and gifts, often grain, cloth, sweets and cash.
5. The women carry the pots home on their heads or in their hands, still singing, and place them near Ganesh.

Why we do it

We can buy clay pots at any market, or have the decorator bring them. Why go to the potter's house and worship his wheel? Because this ritual was never really about the pots.

Think of what a wedding needed before there were shops for everything. Water had to be stored for hundreds of guests. Lamps had to be lit. A kalash had to stand at the mandap. All of it came from the potter. The wedding could not happen without his wheel, so the family went to him, honoured the tool that made it possible, and paid him well. Worshipping the instrument of a person's craft is a familiar instinct in India; it is the same one behind Vishwakarma puja, when workers honour their machines.

The clay itself carries meaning. A kalash made from earth and filled with water is one of the oldest signs of fullness and new life in Hindu practice. Some people add that the wheel, shaping something new out of formless clay, is a fitting picture for a wedding. The ritual does not depend on that reading.

Then there is the walk. The women going through the lane in song announce to the neighbourhood that this house is now in wedding. In a village or an old city mohalla, that was how news travelled. The potter's family, who would not usually be on the guest list, became part of the celebration in their own home.

ROOTS **Community custom**

Chaak puja is a North Indian folk custom carried by families and their songs. It is not part of the priestly wedding texts.

In some families

This is a ritual where family background matters a great deal. Chaak puja is practised mainly by Agarwal families from Haryana, Delhi and western Uttar Pradesh, and by many Punjabi families. Among Marwaris whose families came from Rajasthan, including many in Kolkata and eastern India, it is less common; the pots are often bought without any puja at the potter's. If your family has never done it, nothing is missing from your wedding.

In cities, families who keep the custom now often do a short version: the potter brings the wheel or a few pots to the house, or the women visit a pottery market and do the puja there. Some families simply do a small puja of the new pots at home before they are used.

Your part in it

- **Siblings and cousins:** If your family does chaak puja, go. Carry a pot home. It is one of the few rituals where the younger generation simply walks with the elders and learns the songs.
- **Siblings and cousins:** Record the songs on your phone, with the singer's permission. These are the ones most likely to be lost.
- **Siblings and cousins:** Find out in advance which potter the family uses and confirm the day with him. In a city this takes some phone calls.
- **Everyone:** Treat the potter as a host, not a vendor, for the hour you are in his home.

Ask your elders

1. *Did our family go to the potter's at your wedding, or were the pots bought? Who went?*

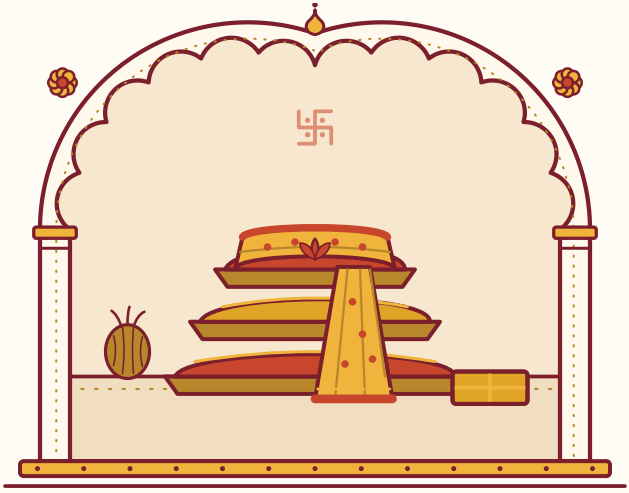
2. *Which songs were sung on the way, and can you sing one now?*

CHAPTER 6

Mayra, or Bhaat

मायरा, भात

SIBLINGS



IN ONE MINUTE

When a child is about to marry, the mother formally invites her brothers. They arrive with clothes, jewellery, cash and gifts for their sister, her child and the household. The most important gift is the peela, a yellow odhni with a red border, which the brother places over his sister's head. Mayra says that a married woman still has her parents' home behind her, and that her brothers show up when it counts.

WHEN	Invitation (bhaat nyotna) a few days before; the Mayra itself usually a day or two before the wedding
WHO LEADS	The mother of the bride or groom, and her brothers (the mamas) with their families
WHERE	At each home separately: the bride's home and the groom's home
THEME	Bonds between families

What happens

1. Bhaat nyotna: the mother of the bride or groom goes to her brother's home, or her parents' home, with sweets and rice and formally invites him to fill the bhaat. The women sing as she goes.
2. On the day, the mama and his family arrive, often with music and singing, bringing the gifts in trays.
3. The mother welcomes her brother at the door, with aarti and tilak in many families.
4. Bhaat bharna: the mama places the peela over his sister's head and gives her clothes and jewellery. He gives gifts to the bride or groom, and often to the sister's husband and the household.
5. The women sing Mayra songs throughout, many of them telling the story of Narsi Bhagat.
6. The mother wears the peela at the main rituals that follow.

Why we do it

Seen from outside, Mayra can look like an expensive display that puts pressure on the mama's family. It can become that. Its meaning is about something else: what happens to a woman's place in her parents' home after she marries.

In the traditional family, a married daughter left her parents' house and became part of her husband's. She could visit, but she was no longer counted in the same way. Mayra is the moment, at her own child's wedding, when her natal family appears in full view of her in-laws and says: she is still ours. A woman whose brothers fill her Mayra with care is a woman who is visibly not alone.

One explanation sometimes offered is that the brother's gifts stood in for the sister's share of the parental estate, which in the old system usually passed to sons. That is a reconstruction, not a record, but it would explain why the gifts come at life's big moments and why families take them so seriously.

The peela is the centre of it. It is the sister's special gift from her parents' home, and she wears it at her child's wedding as a sign of that home's blessing. Some families call it pomcha. Strictly, pomcha is the yellow odhni given to a woman at childbirth, and peela the one given at a wedding, but many families use the words loosely. Use whichever word your family uses.

The story behind the songs

The Mayra songs often tell of Narsi Bhagat (Narsi Mehta, the Gujarati saint-poet), so poor that he had nothing to bring to his daughter Nanibai's Mayra, and mocked by her in-laws for it. Krishna himself came and filled it. "Nanibai ro Mayro" is sung in many Marwari homes. It is a story families tell as devotion, not as history, and its point is plain: no sister's Mayra should go unfilled.

ROOTS **Community custom**

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

In some families

Many Haryana Agarwal families say Bhaat; many Rajasthan-origin families say Mayra. Both mean the same ceremony.

The scale varies enormously. Some families keep it to the peela, a set of clothes and a token sum. Others make it a large event with music. If the mother has no brother, a cousin, an uncle or her father may fill the bhaat; families find a way, because the point is that someone from her side comes.

The peela itself differs. Many are yellow with a red border; some carry a lotus or chundri pattern.

Your part in it

- **Mama's children:** Go with your father. Carry a tray. You are being shown what a brother does for a sister, and one day it may be you.

- **Bride or groom:** Greet your mama and mami at the door with your mother, and touch their feet. Thank them by name at some point during the wedding.
- **Siblings:** Learn one Mayra song, or at least the Narsi Bhagat story, so you can tell it to the guests who ask what is going on.
- **Everyone:** Notice your mother when she wears the peela. It is her moment, not the couple's.

Ask your elders

1. *Do we call the yellow odhni peela or pomcha, and what did yours look like?*

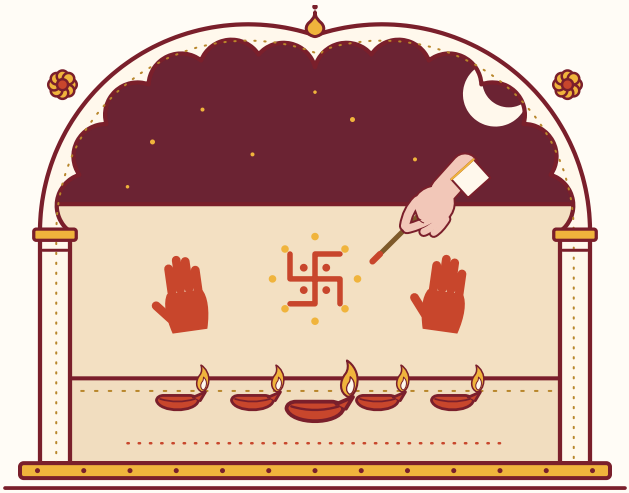
2. *Who filled your Mayra, and what do you remember of that day?*

CHAPTER 7

Ratijaga, the night vigil

रातीजगा, रतजगा

BRIDE GROOM SIBLINGS



IN ONE MINUTE

Ratijaga is a night when the women of the house stay awake singing. They sing to Ganesh, to the family's Kuldevi, to Bhairon, to the ancestors (Pitar) and to the household's protective deities, and they paint and worship auspicious marks called a thapa. It invites every protector the family has, living memory and beyond, to watch over the wedding. It is held at both homes.

WHEN	Usually the night before Pithi, or the night before the wedding
WHO LEADS	The married women of the family, led by the senior women
WHERE	Both homes, separately
THEME	Protection; Blessing

What happens

1. In the evening a thapa is made: auspicious marks such as the swastik, dots and lines are painted with roli, turmeric or kumkum on a wall or a wooden board.
2. The thapa is worshipped with a lamp, rice, roli and sweets, often with the bride or groom present.
3. The women sit together and sing through the night: first to Ganesh, then to the Kuldevi, Bhairon, the Pitar and the other deities the household honours.
4. Tea and snacks keep the singers going. Younger women and girls drift in and out; the senior women carry the songs.
5. At dawn the vigil ends, often with a final song and prasad.

Why we do it

To a tired cousin, Ratijaga is an all-night party for the aunts before a long day, and everyone yawns through Pithi as a result. There is some truth in the tiredness. But staying awake through a night has a long history in Indian devotion as a way of keeping watch, and the Ratijaga is a watch.

The list of who is sung to tells you what it is for. Ganesh opens the way. The Kuldevi is the family's own goddess, for Agarwals as a community Mahalakshmi, though many families also honour a village or gotra deity. Bhairon is a guardian figure, invoked for protection. The Pitar are the family's ancestors. Ratijaga calls all of them to the house the night before the wedding rituals intensify, so that no protector is left out and no ancestor feels forgotten.

The ancestors matter more than the young may expect. A wedding continues a family line. Inviting those who came before to see it, through songs that name them, is one way the family says the marriage belongs to a longer story than this generation.

The thapa is the visible part. Painted marks on the wall have been part of auspicious occasions in Rajasthani and North Indian homes for a long time.

What each mark meant when the practice began is lost; families today read them as signs of good fortune and of the deities being present.

There is a plainer benefit as well. Many of the women singing see each other only at weddings. A night together, before the rituals that depend on them, turns a scattered family into a working one.

ROOTS **Community custom**

Ratijaga belongs to Rajasthani and North Indian family practice, carried entirely by women and their songs, with a strong element of ancestor worship. It is not in the priestly wedding texts.

In some families

The spelling varies: you will also see Ratjaga and Ratri Jaga. In this book we write Ratijaga.

Families differ on which night it falls. Many hold it the night before Pithi; others the night before the wedding. Some families also hold a Ratijaga at other big occasions, such as the birth of a son or a child's first visit to the family deity.

The list of deities differs too, according to where the family came from and whom its elders worshipped. Many families today do not stay awake until dawn; they sing until midnight and close with a short puja. The thapa may be painted fresh, or a printed or stencilled design used.

Your part in it

- **Bride and groom:** Sit with the women for at least the first hour, especially during the thapa puja. Many of the songs are about you.
- **Sisters and female cousins:** Ask a senior aunt to teach you one Ratijaga song. If nobody under fifty in your family knows them, the songs stop with this generation.
- **Brothers and male cousins:** Keep the tea coming and handle the practical jobs so that the women can sing.

- **Anyone with a phone:** Photograph the thapa and write down the names of the deities sung to, in order. It is a record of your family's protectors.

Ask your elders

1. *On which night did our family hold Ratijaga, and which deities did you sing to?*

2. *Who was the singer everyone waited for at your Ratijaga, and which song was hers?*

Common questions

Our wedding is at a hotel in another city. Can we still do these at home?

Yes, and many families do. Ganesh sthapana, Mayra and Ratijaga can all be done at home before the family travels; some families carry the Ganesh figure with them to the venue. The point of this Part is that the home is opened first, wherever the wedding itself happens.

My family has never done Chaak puja. Are we missing something?

Probably not. Chaak puja is mainly a Haryana, Delhi and western UP Agarwal custom, and many Rajasthan-origin Marwari families have never done it. A ritual your family has no memory of is not something you have lost. If you are curious, a short puja of the new pots at home keeps the idea, and so does asking an elder from a Haryana or Delhi family to describe how it was done.

My mother has no brother. Who fills the Mayra?

Families find someone from her side: a cousin, an uncle or her father. The point of Mayra is that her parents' home comes forward for her. Who exactly does it matters less than that someone does.

Do we really have to stay awake all night for Ratijaga?

Many families no longer do. They sing until around midnight and close with a short puja. What carries the meaning is the thapa, the songs and the names of the deities and ancestors being called, not the hour you go to bed.

What does byah haath mean for the rest of the family?

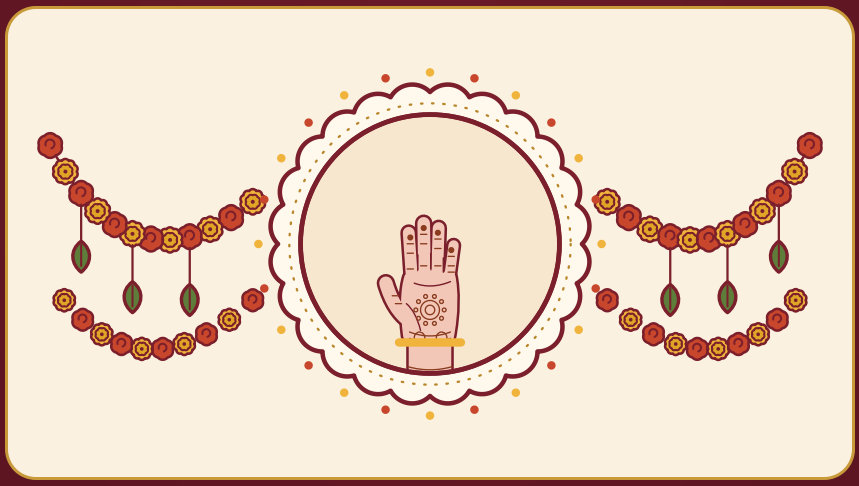
Once Ganesh is installed, many families stop attending other weddings and funerals until their own wedding is over. Some families read the rule as protecting the auspicious state of the house; others see it simply as keeping the family's people and attention on its own wedding. The rules differ between households, so ask your elders before accepting any invitation that week.

Our pandit does things differently from this book. Who is right?

Your pandit and your elders. Practice varies from family to family and region to region, and this book describes the common pattern. Where yours differs, write your family's version in the Ask your elders space.

PART THREE

The Celebrations



Turmeric, henna, songs, processions and the bride's outfit from her new home.

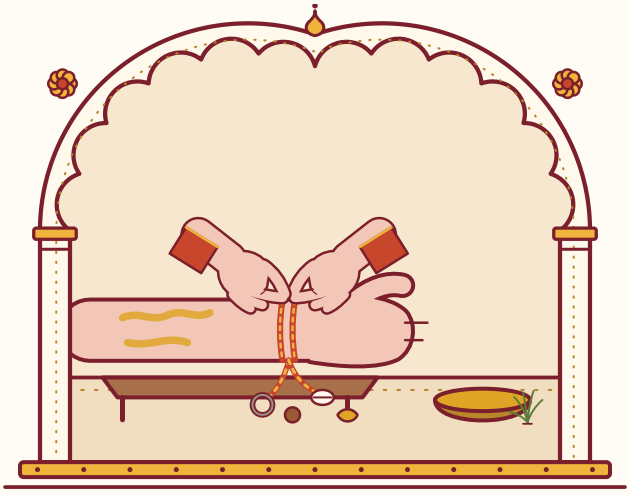
Pithi Dastoor, Tel and the Kangan Dora · Mehendi · Mahila Sangeet and the Banna-Banni Geet · Bindori and Banola · Palla Dastoor

CHAPTER 8

Pithi Dastoor, Tel and the Kangan Dora

पीठी दस्तूर, तेल, कंगन डोरा

BRIDE GROOM SIBLINGS



IN ONE MINUTE

Pithi is the turmeric paste the women rub on the bride, and separately on the groom, a day or two before the wedding. Tel is a quieter anointing with oil and curd. The kangan dora is a thread tied on the wrist that stays on until after the wedding. Together they mark the point where the bride or groom stops being an ordinary member of the household and becomes the person the wedding is about: blessed and guarded.

WHEN	One or two days before the wedding, usually in the morning. Tel is often done the same morning.
WHO LEADS	Married women of the family, then the mama's family, then everyone. The mama gives shagun at Tel.
WHERE	At each home separately, bride's and groom's
THEME	Protection; Blessing

What happens

1. A low wooden seat is set out. The bride or groom sits on it in clothes nobody minds staining, often yellow.
2. The paste is mixed: haldi, gram flour and oil. Some families add curd, sandalwood or a little mehendi.
3. The married women of the house apply it first, to the face, arms, hands and feet, while the others sing. Then the mama's family takes a turn, then cousins and friends.
4. Tel, or Telbaan, follows. Oil and curd are touched on in sets of seven strokes with a few blades of durva grass or a leaf. The mama gives shagun.
5. The kangan dora is tied on the right wrist: a mauli thread, usually carrying an iron ring or a small knife, a cowrie, a supari and a piece of dried turmeric.
6. The paste is washed off. From now until the wedding the bride or groom stays at home, is not left alone, and keeps the knife or iron close.

Why we do it

Why cover someone in turmeric the day before the photographs? Start with the colour. In a Hindu home, haldi and yellow mark things set apart for an auspicious purpose. The lagan patrika goes out on yellow paper. The mama brings his sister a yellow peela. Pithi does the same to a person: it marks the bride or groom as someone the wedding has claimed.

The second reason is protection. The older belief is that a person about to marry is at their most exposed. They are leaving one state of life and have not

yet entered the next, and they draw every eye, some of it envious. Hence the rules that follow Pithi: stay indoors, do not go about alone, keep iron on you. Iron as a guard against harmful forces is an old folk belief found across India. When the knife first went into the kangan dora is not recorded, and families do not agree on what each object in the thread stands for.

The third reason is plain. A paste of gram flour and turmeric is ubtan, a beauty preparation women in India have used for centuries. Rubbing it in the day before the wedding leaves skin soft and bright. That much any bride can test.

A reason often given today is that turmeric is antiseptic. Whatever its chemistry, nobody holds a singing ceremony, with the mama giving shagun, as first aid.

Why the mama at Tel? As with Mayra, his presence shows the mother's family standing behind her child at the moment the child leaves childhood. And it matters that the groom gets a kangan dora too. It is the one wedding sign both of them wear, and in the groom's home after the wedding they untie each other's threads (chapter 26).

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

Pithi and Tel are carried by family practice and the women's songs rather than by the Grihya Sutras. The kangan dora, with its iron and its rule of never being left alone, is a protective belief.

In some families

In most Agarwal families the kangan dora is tied at Pithi. Some tie it earlier, at Ganesh sthapana (chapter 4), so the protection begins the day the house goes "in wedding". What goes into the thread varies: some families use a small iron ring, others a tiny knife or a key, and the count of other items changes from house to house.

Many families no longer separate Pithi from Tel and simply call the morning "haldi". In cities it has become an event of its own, with a yellow dress code,

flowers and a photographer. The paste and the songs usually survive the makeover. Some families still keep the stricter rule that the bride or groom does not step out of the house at all after Pithi.

Your part in it

- **Bride:** Wear something old and sit still. Before the thread is tied, ask what is in it and why; the answer is your family's own version, and it will not be the same as your friend's.
- **Groom:** Keep the kangan dora on, even under a shirt cuff at the office if you go in. It is your one visible wedding mark, and you only lose it in a game with your wife.
- **Siblings:** You are the escort from now on. Take turns so the bride or groom is never alone, carry the knife if it is handed to you, and hold the bowl of paste while the elders apply it.

Ask your elders

1. *When is the kangan dora tied in our family, at Ganesh sthapana or at Pithi, and what goes into it?*

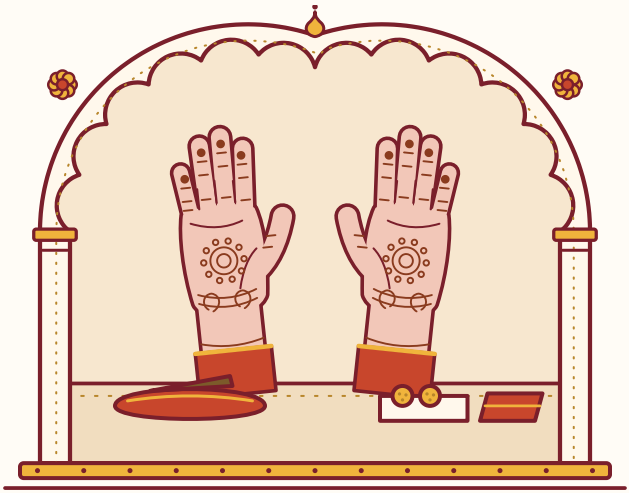
2. *Do we do Tel separately from Pithi? Who makes the seven strokes, and what does the mama give?*

CHAPTER 9

Mehendi

मेहंदी

BRIDE



IN ONE MINUTE

Mehendi is the henna applied to the bride's hands and feet before the wedding. In many Marwari families the henna itself is sent by the groom's side, so the colour on her hands is the first thing his family has put on her. It is one of the solah shringar, the sixteen adornments of a married woman. The groom has a token of it too. The point is adornment, blessing and the first visible tie between the two homes.

WHEN	One or two days before the wedding; often the evening of Pithi or the day after
WHO LEADS	The women of the bride's family; the henna artist or a skilled aunt applies it
WHERE	The bride's home; the groom has a token application at his own home
THEME	Bonds between families; Blessing

What happens

1. In many families the groom's side sends the mehendi, often with sweets, bangles or a small gift for the bride. The women of her house receive it.
2. The bride sits with her hands and feet bare. A first dot or small mark is usually put on by a married woman of the family before the full design begins.
3. The design is drawn, palms and backs of the hands, often up to the elbow, and the feet. It takes hours. The women sing mehendi songs, and cousins and friends have their own hands done.
4. The paste is left to dry and darken. Lemon and sugar are dabbed on to keep it on longer, and the bride is fed by others because she cannot use her hands.
5. At his own home, the groom has a small amount applied, usually a dot or a simple mark on the palm.

Why we do it

Is this decoration with a ceremony attached? Partly, and nothing wrong with that. A bride is meant to be adorned. Mehendi is counted among the solah shringar, the sixteen adornments of a married woman, alongside sindoor, bangles and the rest. It is one of the first she puts on for her wedding.

What turns decoration into ritual in a Marwari home is who sends it. When the groom's family provides the henna, the colour that appears on her hands has come from them. Before the pheras, before the sindoor, she is already wearing something from the house she is going to. That is why some families treat the arrival of the groom's mehendi as a small occasion of its own.

Then there is the saying every bride hears: the darker the colour, the more her husband (or her mother-in-law) will love her. Nobody believes it as a forecast. It is a teasing line, a way for the women around her to talk about the marriage she is about to enter.

The long sitting matters too. A bride who cannot use her hands for an evening has to be fed, helped and kept company. For many women in the family, those hours of singing and gossip around her are the part of the wedding they remember.

You may hear that henna is applied because it cools the body before a stressful day. That is a modern explanation, not the reason families do it. When mehendi became part of the Marwari wedding is not recorded.

ROOTS **Community custom**

Mehendi has no place in the Grihya Sutras or the pandit's wedding rites. It belongs to the women's side of the wedding, carried by family practice and songs.

In some families

In most Agarwal families the mehendi evening has merged with the Sangeet or become a party with music, a dress code and a professional artist. Some families keep it small and at home, with an aunt who has always done it. Rajasthan is proud of its henna: Sojat, in Pali district, is the best-known henna town in the country, and Sojat mehendi was given a Geographical Indication tag in 2021. Some families still send for it by name.

Many brides now have the groom's name or initials hidden in the design and make him look for it on the wedding night. It is a recent game, and a popular one. In some families the groom's mehendi is no longer done at all; in others his sisters make a point of it. Mehendi also returns at the mandap: in Hathleva (chapter 18), the joined hands of the couple are bound with a little mehendi between them.

Your part in it

- **Bride:** Find out who sent the mehendi and thank them. If you are hiding the groom's initials, tell the artist early, before the design fills up.
- **Groom:** Let your sisters put the dot on your palm. It takes thirty seconds and it is the counterpart to hours your bride is spending.

- **Siblings and cousins:** Feed the bride, hold her phone, fix her hair. Learn one mehendi song from the elders before they stop singing it.

Ask your elders

1. *In our family, does the groom's side send the mehendi for the bride? What comes with it?*

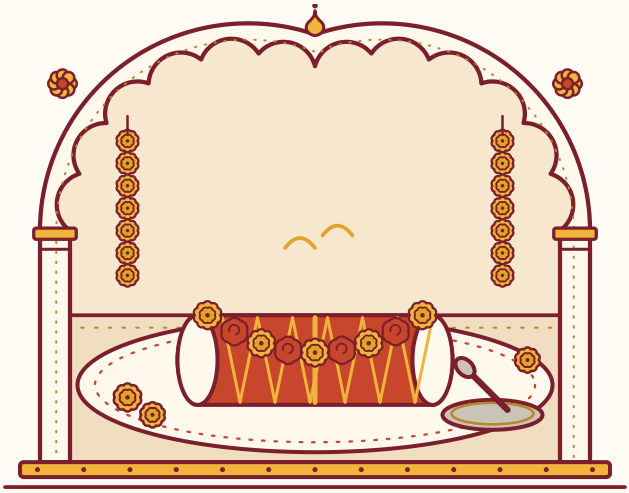
2. *Which mehendi songs did the women sing at your wedding, and can you teach us one line?*

CHAPTER 10

Mahila Sangeet and the Banna-Banni Geet

महिला संगीत, बन्ना-बन्नी गीत

BRIDE GROOM SIBLINGS



IN ONE MINUTE

Before the stage, the choreographer and the DJ, the Sangeet was the women of the family sitting round the bride or groom and singing. The banna songs are about the groom, the banni songs about the bride, and many of them tease the other family without mercy. The songs were the family's way of talking openly about the marriage: praising, mocking, advising and grieving the coming departure, all in verse, with nobody taking offence.

WHEN	Traditionally on several evenings in the days before the wedding; today usually one big evening
WHO LEADS	The women of the family; the older women know the songs
WHERE	At each home separately; today often a hall or a lawn
THEME	Bonds between families

What happens

1. The women gather after the day's work, sit on a floor-sheet and put the bride (or, at his home, the groom) in the middle.
2. A dholak comes out. Someone keeps time on a thali with a spoon or a ring.
3. The singing begins with songs to Ganesh and the deities, then moves to the banna and banni geet: songs that describe the groom riding in on his mare, the bride's beauty, her mother's worry, and a good deal of teasing of the other side.
4. Women get up to dance one by one or in pairs. In Rajasthani homes this may be ghoomar.
5. In the modern form, the families put on rehearsed dances on a stage, cousins perform skits about the couple, and the old songs get a slot, often at the start.

Why we do it

Ask why there is a Sangeet and most people will say "for fun". That is true, but it misses what the songs were doing. In an older household, the bride could not say much about her own marriage, and her mother could not easily say what she felt about losing her. The songs said it for them.

Listen to the words. A banni geet praises the bride and warns her about her mother-in-law in the same breath. A banna geet describes the groom as a prince and then asks why he has come begging at this door. Some songs are openly sad, about a daughter who will soon be a guest in her own home. Others are rude about the samdhis in ways nobody would dare say in prose. Because it is a song, and because everyone sings it, nobody can be blamed for it.

So the Sangeet was the family's emotional preparation for the wedding. It let the women of the house welcome the change, joke about it and mourn it before the day itself, when there would be no time.

It also carried knowledge. The songs name the rituals and the relatives: the mama bringing the bhaat, the sister holding the mare's reins, the bhabhi

applying kajal. A girl who grew up singing them knew the shape of a wedding before she had ever attended one as an adult.

How old any particular song is, no one can say. They passed from mother to daughter, changed from village to village, and very few were ever written down.

ROOTS **Community custom**

The Sangeet has no part in the pandit's rites. It belongs to the women of the family, and the songs travel by memory from one generation to the next.

In some families

Ghoomar and its songs are Rajasthani. Agarwal families from Haryana have their own wedding songs in their own dialect, and families settled in Kolkata or Mumbai often sing a mix. Some families hold a separate small evening, sometimes on the night of Mehendi, for the old songs alone, and keep the stage show for another night.

In most city weddings the Sangeet is now a joint event for both families, with rehearsed dances and a professional sound system. Some families have kept the teasing alive by writing new lyrics to film tunes about the couple. The intent is the same as the old banni geet, even if the dadi does not recognise the tune.

Your part in it

- **Bride and groom:** Ask for one old song to be sung while you sit in the middle, the way it used to be done. It takes five minutes and the elders will remember that you asked.
- **Siblings and cousins:** Record the older women singing, with the words written down. In many families this is the last generation that knows them by heart.
- **Anyone performing:** Tease, by all means; that is the tradition. Keep it the kind of teasing both families can laugh at.

Ask your elders

1. *Which banna or banni song was sung at your wedding? Can you sing it, and tell us what the words mean?*

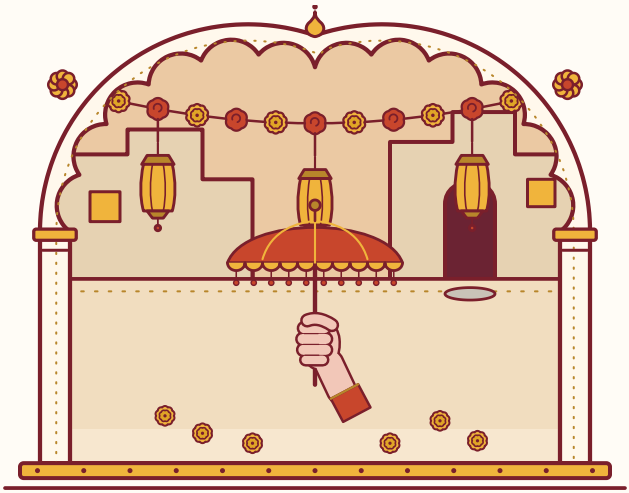
2. *Were there songs our family sang that teased the other side? What did they say?*

CHAPTER 11

Bindori and Banola

बिंदोरी, बनोला

BRIDE GROOM SIBLINGS



IN ONE MINUTE

These are two different customs that often get mixed up. Bindori is a procession: the bride or groom, dressed up, is taken through the neighbourhood or to a temple with the family dancing alongside. Banola is a meal: a relative invites the bride or groom and the family home to eat in the days before the wedding. Both are ways for the wider family and neighbours to claim a share of the wedding. Many Agarwal families do neither.

WHEN	In the days between Ganesh sthapana and the wedding, usually evenings
WHO LEADS	Bindori: the family and friends. Banola: the relative who hosts.
WHERE	Bindori: the lanes of the locality, or to a temple. Banola: the host's home.
THEME	Bonds between families; Blessing

What happens

1. **Bindori:** the bride or groom is dressed in festive clothes, often the groom in a safa and the bride in a bright lehenga or odhni.
2. The family sets out on foot (in some places on a mare or in a decorated vehicle) behind a band or dhol, through the lanes of the locality or to a nearby temple.
3. Relatives and neighbours dance, women sing, and people along the way come to their doors to see and bless the bride or groom. At the temple, there is a short darshan before returning.
4. **Banola:** an aunt, uncle, cousin or close family friend invites the bride or groom, with the immediate family, for a meal at their home.
5. The host feeds the bride or groom with special care, often sweets first, and gives a small gift or shagun before they leave. In a large family this can happen at several homes on successive days.

Why we do it

Who needs a parade, or yet another dinner, in the busiest week of the year? The question underneath is who the wedding belongs to. In a joint family, living in one locality, a wedding was not a private event of two households. Every aunt, every neighbour and every family the household had attended weddings for had a claim on it.

Bindori answers that claim in public. Walking the bride or groom through the lanes says to the neighbourhood: this child of ours is about to marry, come and see, come and bless. Before invitation cards travelled by courier, it was also an announcement. And it gave the bride or groom a last walk through the streets they grew up in, in a status they would soon leave.

Banola answers it in private. A relative who hosts a Banola is saying: this wedding is ours too, and we want to do something for you before you go. For a bride, these meals are the last times she will sit in her relatives' homes as an unmarried daughter of the family. For the host, feeding her is a way of giving a blessing that is not limited to the one formal gift at the wedding.

How old either custom is, and where the names come from, is not recorded. Banola is often linked to banna and banni, the Rajasthani words for groom and bride; that is a reasonable guess, and no more.

ROOTS **Community custom**

Neither custom has any place in the pandit's rites. They are Rajasthani and Marwari family and neighbourhood practice.

In some families

Bindori is strongest among Oswal Jain and Maheshwari families, and is also done by Agarwal families of Rajasthani origin. Many Agarwal families from Haryana, and many settled in eastern India, do not hold a Bindori at all. Some have never heard the word. It was never theirs, and nothing is lost by that.

Banola is wider spread but also patchy. In some families it is called Bana-Banni ka bhoj. In cities it has often shrunk to one dinner at a restaurant, or been folded into the welcome dinner for the baraat. Some families now hold a Bindori as a pre-wedding event in a hotel driveway, with a band and lights, which is a long way from the lanes but keeps the dancing.

Your part in it

- **Bride and groom:** If a relative offers a Banola, accept if you can. It is their way of giving you something, and a refusal can sting more than you expect.
- **Siblings and cousins:** At a Bindori, you are the dancers and the guard. Keep the bride or groom company, and keep an eye on the umbrella, the safa and the shoes.
- **Hosts:** If you host a Banola, ask the bride or groom what they would like to eat. That is the whole point.

Ask your elders

1. *Does our family do Bindori, Banola, both or neither? Did it change when the family moved cities?*

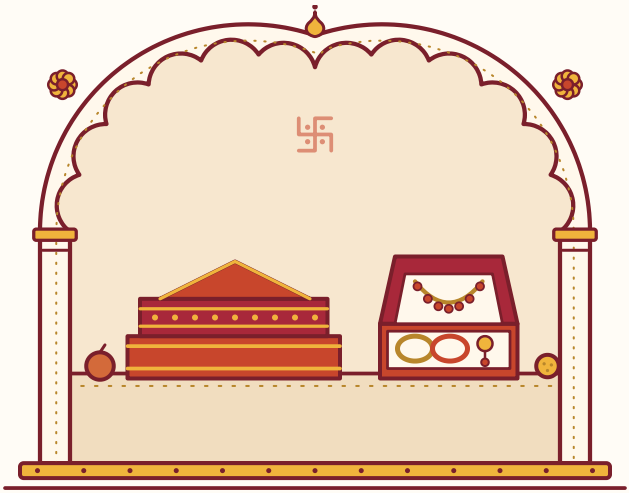
2. *Who hosted a Banola for you before your wedding, and what did they cook?*

CHAPTER 12

Palla Dastoor

पल्ला दस्तूर

BRIDE SIBLINGS



IN ONE MINUTE

Palla is the visit when the groom's family brings the bride her wedding outfit, jewellery, cosmetics, sweets and fruit, usually on the wedding morning or the day before. The bride then wears what came in the palla for the pheras. That is the meaning in one line: she goes into the most important rite of her wedding dressed by the family she is joining. It is their public welcome, given before she has even left home.

WHEN	The day before the wedding or the wedding morning
WHO LEADS	Women of the groom's family, often with a few men; the bride's family receives them
WHERE	The bride's home or the wedding venue
THEME	Bonds between families; Moving home

What happens

1. A group from the groom's side, led by the women of his family, arrives at the bride's home with trays of gifts. The groom himself usually does not come.
2. The bride's family welcomes them with tilak, sweets and refreshments.
3. The trays are presented: the wedding lehenga or poshak and odhni for the pheras, jewellery, cosmetics and suhaag items, sweets, dry fruit and fruit.
4. The bride sits with the groom's women, who show her the things they have brought. In many families Godh Bharai is done at this visit: they fill her lap with fruit, dry fruit, a coconut and cloth (chapter 2).
5. The groom's family is given shagun and a return gift before leaving. Later the bride dresses for the pheras in the outfit from the palla.

Why we do it

The bride has usually chosen her wedding outfit herself, months ago, and may have paid for it. So why must it arrive on a tray? Because what matters here is not who chose the clothes but who presents them.

Look at the direction of giving through the week. Tilak, the lagan and the welcome at the door all run from the bride's side to the groom's. Palla, like Sagai before it, runs the other way, and it comes at the last moment. On the eve of the wedding the groom's family comes to her house and says, in effect, we have dressed you for our son's wedding. When she walks into the mandap, she is already wearing her new family's welcome.

The word is worth knowing. Palla is the end of a sari or odhni, the part a woman draws over her head. To bring the palla is to bring the covering she will wear as a married woman of their house. Families differ on how far to press that reading, and the age of the custom is not recorded, but most Marwari elders would recognise it.

There is also a quieter purpose. Palla is often the first time the women of the groom's family spend unhurried time with the bride on her own ground,

before the crowds and cameras. A good palla visit sets the tone for how the two families' women will get on.

ROOTS **Community custom**

Palla is Marwari family practice, not one of the pandit's rites. What the pandit's rites do need is a bride dressed for the pheras, and the custom decides who provides the clothes.

In some families

In most Agarwal families Palla comes on the wedding day itself, a few hours before the baraat sets out. Others do it the evening before, together with Godh Bharai, so the morning is free. Some families send the palla with a smaller group and keep the larger gathering for the wedding.

What is in the trays varies widely. Some families send a full set of suhaag items, others send only the outfit and sweets and let the jewellery come later. Today many brides choose the lehenga with the groom's mother and the outfit is "brought" in the palla as a formality. That still counts. The custom was always more about the presentation than the shopping.

Your part in it

- **Bride:** Sit with the groom's women and look at each tray properly, even if you know what is in it. Wear what came in the palla for the pheras; that is what the custom is for.
- **Bride's siblings:** Receive the guests at the door, serve them yourselves rather than leaving it to caterers, and have the return shagun ready before they arrive.
- **Groom's sisters and cousins:** You are often the ones carrying the trays. Know what is in each one so you can tell the bride.

Ask your elders

1. *When does our family do Palla, on the wedding morning or the day before? Is Godh Bharai done at the same visit?*

2. *What came in your palla, and who brought it?*

Common questions

Is the haldi party the same as Pithi?

Mostly, yes. Pithi is the older Marwari name for the turmeric paste and the ceremony around it, and Tel is a separate anointing with oil and curd that many families now fold into the same morning. The yellow outfits, flowers and photographer are new. If the married women apply the paste first, the mama gives shagun and the kangan dora is tied, the ritual is still there under the decoration.

Can I take the kangan dora off before the wedding? It does not go with my outfit.

The custom is that it stays on until the bride and groom untie each other's threads at the groom's home after the wedding (chapter 26). That untying is a game you cannot play if the thread is gone. Many brides and grooms wear it under a bangle or a cuff. If you feel it really has to come off, ask the elders who tied it before you do anything.

Our family has never done a Bindori. Are we missing something?

No. Bindori is strongest among Oswal Jain and Maheshwari families and Rajasthan-origin Agarwals. Many Agarwal families from Haryana and eastern India have never done it, and the same is true of Banola in many homes. Your wedding is complete without a custom your family never had.

Does the Sangeet have to be a stage show?

No. The stage show is a recent form. The traditional Sangeet is the women of the family sitting round the bride or groom and singing banna and banni songs, and it can be done in a living room in an hour. Many families now do both: a short evening of the old songs and a separate night for the dances.

I bought my own wedding lehenga. Does Palla still make sense?

It does, because Palla was always about who presents the outfit, not who shops for it. Many brides now choose the lehenga with the groom's mother, and it is then brought in the palla trays as a formality. Wearing it for the pheras keeps the meaning: you walk into the mandap dressed by the family you are joining.

Do I have to stay at home after Pithi?

That is the older rule, tied to the belief that the bride or groom is especially exposed to nazar in these days and should not go about alone. Some families still keep it strictly; many have relaxed it to "do not go out alone". This book does not tell you what to do. Ask your elders what they expect, and why, before you decide.

PART FOUR

The Wedding Day



From the groom's ride to the toran, the joined hands, the fire and the seven steps.

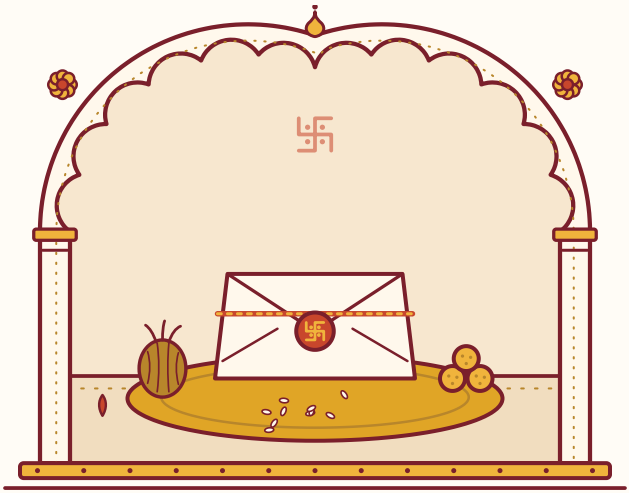
Korath · Sehrabandi, Nikasi and Ghudchadi · Toran and Dhukav · Samela, Milni and Var Puja · Varmala · Kanyadaan, Hathleva and Gotrochar · Gathjoda, or Granthi Bandhan · Pheras, Lajahoma and the stone · Saptapadi and the seven vows · Suhaag chinh: sindoor, chooda, bichhiya, mangalsutra · Aashirvad, Pehravani and Joota Chupai · Kanwar Kaleva

CHAPTER 13

Korath

कोरथ

SIBLINGS



IN ONE MINUTE

On the wedding day, the bride's male relatives go with their pandit to wherever the groom is staying and formally invite him and his baraat to the mandap. The groom worships the invitation, sweets are exchanged, and a token gift is given. Everyone already knows the time and the venue. The point of Korath is that the groom does not simply turn up: he comes because the bride's family has asked him, in person, on the day.

WHEN	The wedding day, some hours before the baraat sets out
WHO LEADS	The bride's brothers, uncles or cousins, with the bride's family pandit
WHERE	The groom's house, janwasa or hotel
THEME	Bonds between families; Consent and witness

What happens

1. A small party from the bride's side, usually her brothers, cousins or uncles, sets out with their pandit, carrying the invitation, sweets and a token gift.
2. They are welcomed at the groom's place by his family.
3. The groom sits for a short puja. The invitation is placed before him, and he worships it with the pandit, with rice, roli and a lamp.
4. The invitation is spoken: the bride's family asks the groom and his baraat to come to the mandap at the appointed time.
5. Sweets are exchanged, the token gift is given to the groom, and the bride's party returns to report that the invitation has been accepted.

Why we do it

The cards went out weeks ago and the family group knows the timings to the minute. Why send people across town to say it again? Because an invitation sent to the world is not the same thing as an invitation offered to the groom himself.

In the Marwari way of thinking, the groom's arrival at the bride's door has to be at her family's request. He is the honoured guest of the day, and an honoured guest is fetched, not left to find his own way. Korath is the bride's family coming to him on the morning itself, with their own pandit, so that when the baraat sets out it is answering a call. It closes the circle that the lagan patrika opened (chapter 3): the bride's side proposed the date, and now they come to say the date has arrived.

There is a practical side too. In the days before telephones, Korath confirmed that both sides were ready: the groom well, the baraat assembled, nothing gone wrong overnight. The bride's party went home with news, and the bride's house could finish its preparations knowing exactly when to expect the baraat. In a large joint family with a hundred guests waiting, that mattered.

The groom's puja of the invitation shows how seriously the invitation is taken. He does not receive it like a letter. He worships it, because it carries the request to begin a sacred rite.

Where the word Korath comes from, and how old the custom is, is not recorded. It is well known in Marwari families, but it does not appear in the pandit's wedding texts.

ROOTS **Community custom**

Korath belongs to Marwari family practice. The pandit performs the small puja, but the custom itself is carried by the families, not by the Sutras.

In some families

Korath is common in Marwari families, and many Agarwal families keep it. Some Agarwal families now do it by phone, with the groom's side doing a small puja at their end, and some have let it lapse entirely, especially when both families are staying at the same hotel. A few families combine it with the morning's other visits, so one party carries both the Palla trays and the invitation.

Some families also hold a Thamb Puja around the wedding day, worshipping the post (thamb) of the manda or mandap. Which home does it, and when, varies from family to family, so this is one to ask about.

Your part in it

- **Bride's brothers and cousins:** This is your errand. Go yourselves rather than sending a driver with a box of sweets, take the pandit, and say the invitation out loud. You are speaking for your sister's family.
- **Groom's siblings:** Receive the party properly, with tea and a seat, and make sure your brother is ready and dressed for the puja when they arrive.
- **Groom:** Sit for the five minutes and do the puja with attention. Then thank them by name.

Ask your elders

1. *Does our family do Korath in person, by phone, or not at all? When did it change?*

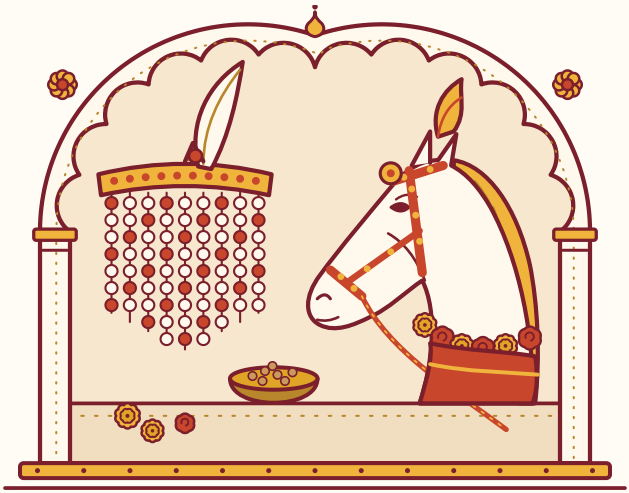
2. *At your wedding, who went for Korath, and what did they carry?*

CHAPTER 14

Sehrabandi, Nikasi and Ghudchadi

सेहराबंदी, निकासी, घुड़चढ़ी

GROOM SIBLINGS



IN ONE MINUTE

This is how the groom leaves home for his wedding. Sehrabandi: the jija or sister ties the sehra on his head and the bhabhi applies kajal against nazar. Nikasi: his mother feeds him and he steps out of the house. Ghudchadi: he mounts a mare, with a sword in hand, while his sisters hold the reins and demand payment. It marks the moment he stops being the family's boy and sets out as a bridegroom.

WHEN	The wedding day, just before the baraat sets out
WHO LEADS	The groom's family: jija or sister for the sehra, bhabhi for the kajal, mother for the feeding, sisters at the mare
WHERE	The groom's home, janwasa or hotel, and the road outside
THEME	Protection; Moving home

What happens

1. **Sehrabandi.** The groom, dressed in his sherwani or achkan and safa, sits on a low seat. His jija (sister's husband) or sister ties the sehra, a veil of flowers or strings of pearls, or a kalgi (a jewelled crest) on the safa. They are given a gift for it.
2. His bhabhi applies kajal to his eyes, against nazar, and is given a gift too.
3. **Nikasi.** His mother feeds him before he leaves. In some families this is moong, rice and sugar; in others, sweets. Women of the family sing as he walks out of the house.
4. **Ghudchadi.** The mare is worshipped with tilak, and she is fed. The groom mounts, holding a sword (katar or talwar).
5. His sisters hold the reins and feed the mare soaked gram, and do not let go until he pays them. Then the baraat, with band, dhol and dancing, sets out for the bride's door.

Why we do it

The usual question is about the horse. Why does a man who takes the metro to work need to arrive on a mare with a sword? Because for one day the groom is dressed and mounted as a prince. The safa, the sword and the mare echo the royal style of Rajasthan, which Marwari weddings have long borrowed. A man going to fetch his bride rides like a raja; that is the image, and nobody pretends it is more than an image.

Under the costume sits the protective layer, which is older and more serious. A bridegroom on his wedding day draws every eye, and the belief is that admiration can carry nazar, the evil eye. The sehra veils his face. The bhabhi's kajal is a classic guard against nazar, the same as the black dot on a baby's cheek. The sword, like the knife in his kangan dora, is iron he carries for protection. Each of these is a protective belief rather than a scriptural rule.

Nikasi is the emotional centre, though it gets less attention. Nikasi means "going out". His mother feeding him is the last meal of his unmarried life

served by her hand. When he comes back through that door, he will bring a wife, and the household will be different.

As for the sisters at the reins: they are making their brother pay for the right to leave them. It is a game, and a pointed one. The gram they feed the mare, and the neg they extract, give the sisters their own recognised place in his leaving.

When the mare became the standard mount, and why a mare rather than a stallion, is not documented. Families give different reasons.

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

Sehra, mare and sword are wedding customs shared across north and west India. The kajal, the veil and the iron are protective beliefs against nazar.

In some families

In most Agarwal families the jija ties the sehra; in some it is the sister, and in others the bhabhi ties it and applies the kajal both. Some families tie a kalgi on the safa and skip the floral veil, which many grooms now prefer for the photographs.

In city weddings the mare is often replaced by a vintage car or a decorated buggy, or the groom mounts the mare only for the last stretch to the venue. The sisters still find a way to block the car door and demand neg. Some families hold Nikasi at home and then drive to the venue, where the Ghudchadi happens outside the gate.

Your part in it

- **Groom:** Eat what your mother gives you before you leave, slowly. Then pay your sisters properly; the amount will be quoted back to you for years.
- **Jija and bhabhi:** You each have a named job. Know which one is yours, and have the sehra and the kajal ready before the photographer calls everyone outside.

- **Sisters:** Hold the reins, feed the mare the gram, and bargain. Settle the figure among yourselves first.
- **Cousins:** Carry the sword until the groom mounts, and keep the gram and the mare's tilak thali at hand.

Ask your elders

1. *Who ties the sehra in our family, the jija, the sister or the bhabhi? Does the bhabhi apply kajal?*

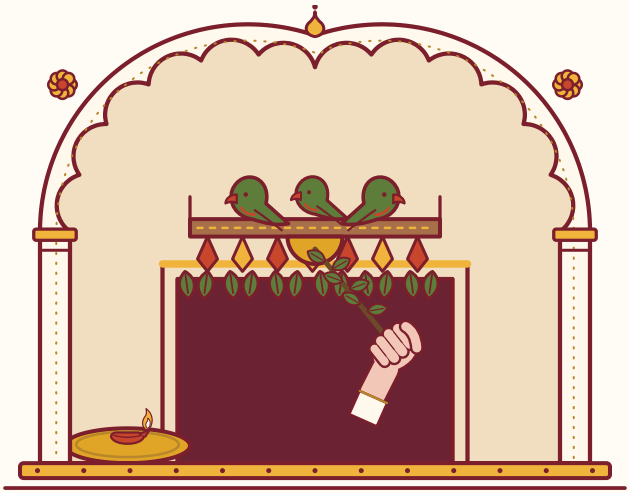
2. *What does the mother feed the groom at Nikasi in our family, and what is sung as he leaves the house?*

CHAPTER 15

Toran and Dhukav

तोरण, ढुकाव

GROOM SIBLINGS



IN ONE MINUTE

When the baraat reaches the bride's door, the groom touches a carved toran above the entrance with a neem twig or his sword. This is "toran marna". Then the bride's mother welcomes him with aarti and tilak and feeds him a sweet. It marks the moment the groom stops being a visitor on the road and is received at the threshold of his bride's home.

WHEN	Wedding evening, as the baraat arrives at the venue
WHO LEADS	The groom at the toran; the bride's mother for the welcome
WHERE	The main entrance of the bride's home or the wedding venue
THEME	Protection; Bonds between families

What happens

1. A toran is hung over the entrance before the baraat arrives. The traditional Marwari toran is wooden, often painted, with parrot figures along it; some families use flowers or a ready-made decorative one.
2. The baraat dances up to the door and stops. The groom, still on the mare or just dismounted, reaches up and touches or taps the toran with a neem twig or with the sword he has carried since Nikasi.
3. The bride's mother comes to the threshold with a thali. She does the groom's aarti, puts tilak on his forehead and feeds him a sweet.
4. In many families she also gives his nose a gentle tug, a teasing reminder that he is now among his in-laws. The women of the bride's side usually sing at this point.
5. Dhukav, the formal arrival, is complete. The groom is led in, and the welcome rites of the next chapter begin.

Why we do it

Why hit a piece of wood? Where toran marna began, nobody can say. No scripture prescribes it and the pandit has no mantra for it. It is a custom of Rajasthan and the Marwari communities, and it has been explained in several ways.

One explanation says the groom is showing that he can protect the house he is marrying into, which is why the sword is used. Another says the neem twig keeps off ill will and nazar at a moment when the whole baraat is gathered at an open door. A third, told with a smile, says the parrots stand for rival suitors the groom has beaten to the bride. Families tell all three, and none of them is scriptural.

What is clear is the meaning of the doorway itself. Across India a toran over a door says "this house is celebrating". The groom has travelled from his own home with his people. At the toran he is no longer on the road: he is at the threshold, and the first person to receive him is the bride's mother. Her aarti and tilak are the same welcome given to an honoured guest or a returning son.

The nose tug, a joke, says the other thing out loud: from today he belongs here too, and can be teased like one of the family.

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

Toran marna is Marwari and Rajasthani custom, carried by families and the women's songs rather than by the pandit's texts. The neem twig belongs to the wider folk belief that neem wards off harm.

In some families

In most Agarwal families the groom touches the toran rather than striking it, and many now prefer the neem twig to the sword. Some families from Rajasthan keep the older form, with the groom still mounted and the sword raised. In Kolkata and other cities, where the baraat arrives at a hotel or hall, the toran may be fixed to a temporary gate, and the mare may not reach the door at all.

Whether the nose is pulled at all varies a great deal. In some homes it would be thought improper; in others it is the moment everyone waits for. The details of the mother's thali, and the songs sung at the door, also differ from family to family, which is why this is a good chapter to check with the elders before the day.

Your part in it

- **Groom:** Ask beforehand whether your family uses the sword or the neem twig, and keep it within reach as the baraat slows down. Touch the toran with care. Then stand still for your mother-in-law's aarti. It is the first time she welcomes you as family, and she will notice whether you were looking at her or at your phone.
- **Siblings:** The groom's siblings and cousins can make sure the baraat actually stops at the door, which is harder than it sounds. The bride's sisters and cousins can hold the thali for her mother and lead the welcome songs.

- **Anyone:** If the family owns an old wooden toran, find out where it came from and whose wedding it was first hung for. Photograph it before it goes back into storage.

Ask your elders

1. *In our family, does the groom touch the toran with a neem twig or with a sword, and from the mare or on foot?*

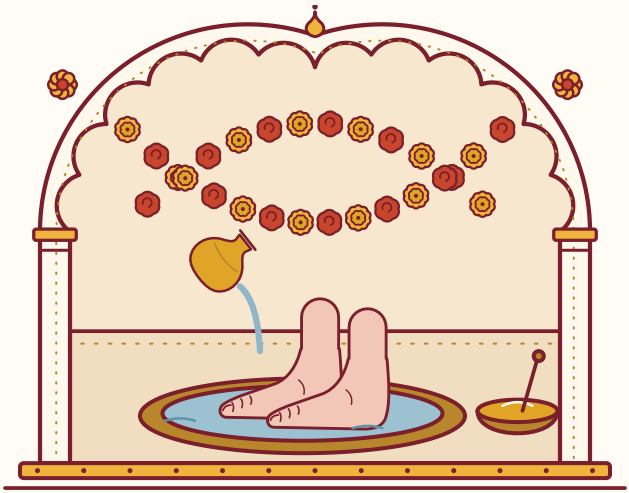
2. *Did the bride's mother pull the groom's nose at your wedding, and what was sung at the door?*

CHAPTER 16

Samela, Milni and Var Puja

समेला, मिलनी, वर पूजा / मधुपर्क

GROOM SIBLINGS



IN ONE MINUTE

Once the groom is through the door, the two families meet properly. In Milni the fathers embrace and exchange garlands, then the mamas, uncles and brothers pair up the same way. In Var Puja the bride's father washes the groom's feet and offers him madhuparka, honey mixed with curd. Milni is family custom. Var Puja is one of the oldest rites of the whole wedding, written in the Grihya Sutras: the welcome for the most honoured guest.

WHEN	Wedding evening, right after the toran and before Varmala
WHO LEADS	The two fathers for Milni; the bride's father and the pandit for Var Puja
WHERE	At the entrance or a welcome area near the mandap
THEME	Bonds between families; Blessing

What happens

1. Milni: the pandit or an elder calls out the pairs. The two fathers come forward first, embrace and garland each other. Then the mamas, the chachas, the brothers and the jijas, each with his counterpart. A token gift, often an envelope or a shawl, goes from the bride's side to each relative of the groom's side.
2. Neem jhadai: in many Agarwal families the bride's sister lightly sprinkles water on the groom with a neem twig, and he gives her a gift for it.
3. Var Puja: the groom is seated. The bride's father, guided by the pandit, washes his feet with water, gives him water to sip and offers madhuparka, a mixture of honey and curd (some add ghee). The groom tastes it.
4. The bride's father puts tilak on the groom and gives him a token gift. The groom is now ready to be taken to the stage for Varmala.

Why we do it

Why are a grown man's feet washed by his future father-in-law, in public? It can look upside down. It makes sense once you know how old Indian households treated guests. The Grihya Sutras, the household manuals behind the Vedic wedding, name a short list of people who must be received with the full welcome: the teacher, the officiating priest, the king, a dear friend, a learned graduate, and the father-in-law or a relative by marriage. The lists differ a little from one Sutra to another. Each of these guests is offered water for the feet, water to sip, and madhuparka. The pandit's Var Puja applies that same welcome to the groom.

So Var Puja is not about rank between the two families. It is the highest welcome a household can give, and the groom receives it because, for this evening, he is the most important guest that house will ever have. The honey and curd are sweetness and nourishment; the Sutra mantras the pandit recites over them ask that everything around the guest be sweet. The bowl in the bride's father's hands is offered with words that households were using well over two thousand years ago.

Milni answers a different question: how do two families who barely know each other become one? Not by speeches. Each person is given a counterpart and a moment of physical welcome. The groom's mama now knows the bride's mama by face, and at every later function those two will look for each other. Milni is custom rather than scripture, and it does exactly what it looks like it does.

Neem jhadai is a protective gesture. Neem is widely believed to keep off harm and ill will, and the bride's sister brushing the groom with it is the bride's side looking after him as he enters. People will tell you neem is antiseptic, which is true and beside the point.

ROOTS **Vedic rite and Community custom**

Var Puja with madhuparka is a Grihya Sutra rite, the honouring of the guest, and its mantras are Vedic. Milni and the Samela are Marwari and North Indian custom; neem jhadai is a protective folk belief that many Agarwal families keep.

In some families

In Marwari usage "Samela" names this meeting of the two sides. Some families also use the word for a welcome dinner hosted for the baraat on the night before the wedding. Some Agarwal families call the welcome puja Bateri Puja. Ask which names your family uses, because the pandit and the elders may use different ones for the same thing.

The order varies. In some weddings Var Puja is done at the mandap just before the Kanyadaan rather than at the entrance, and the madhuparka is given there. Milni gifts range from a single envelope to shawls for every relative; many families now keep them small. Where the baraat is large, Milni may be limited to the closest pairs, with the rest greeting informally.

Your part in it

- **Groom:** Var Puja is the one moment of the evening when someone is serving you. Sit still, let your father-in-law finish, and taste the madhuparka

when offered. If you would like to understand it, ask the pandit beforehand to say one line in Hindi about what the mantra means.

- **Groom's siblings and cousins:** Make a list of Milni pairs for both sides and give it to the person calling the names. It saves the awkward hunt for "the other mama".
- **Bride's sister:** If your family does neem jhadai, keep the twig and a small bowl of water ready. Expect to bargain a little for your gift.

Ask your elders

1. *In our family, does the bride's father wash the groom's feet and give madhuparka, and do we call it Var Puja, Bateri Puja or something else?*

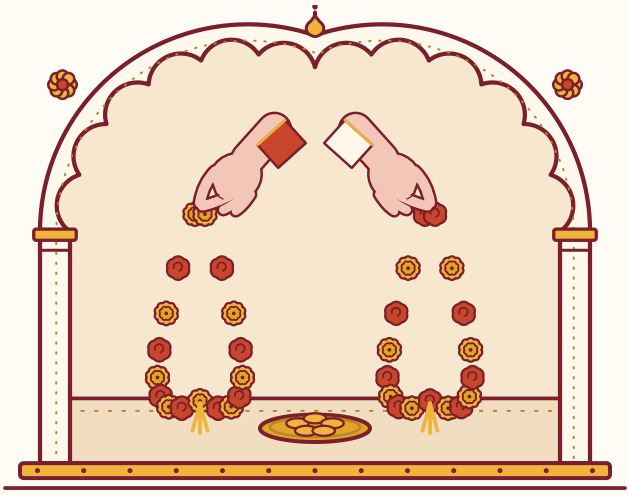
2. *Who was paired in Milni at your wedding, and what was given?*

CHAPTER 17

Varmala

वरमाला, जयमाला

BRIDE GROOM



IN ONE MINUTE

The bride and groom face each other and exchange garlands, usually the bride first. It is the first public moment of the wedding when the two of them, and nobody else, act. The garland is a sign of choice: in the old epic stories, a princess chose her husband by placing a garland on him. Varmala is not in the Vedic texts. It is later tradition, and it is now the photograph every family keeps.

WHEN	Wedding evening, after the welcome and before the pheras
WHO LEADS	The bride and groom; the bride's family brings her to the stage
WHERE	A stage or raised platform in front of the guests
THEME	Consent and witness

What happens

1. The groom waits on the stage. The bride is brought in by her brothers, cousins or friends, often under a phoolon ki chaadar, a canopy of flowers held at the four corners.
2. In some Marwari families the bride first places seven suhalis, small fried discs of flour, on the groom's head, one after another.
3. The bride places her garland on the groom. In most families she goes first.
4. The groom places his garland on the bride. Rose petals are thrown, and the guests cheer.
5. The couple sit together on the stage for a short while and receive greetings before moving to the mandap.

Why we do it

Varmala today is often a photo opportunity, and there is no harm in that. But the garland carries an older meaning. In the epics and Puranas, a princess at a swayamvara walked among the assembled 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 the Ramayana most North Indian families know, Tulsidas's Ramcharitmanas, Sita places the jaymala on Rama after he breaks Shiva's bow. (Valmiki's older telling has the bow contest but no garland; Janaka simply gives his daughter to the winner.) Whatever else the wedding contains, the garland stands for the bride's choice, made in front of everyone.

This is why, in most families, the bride garlands first. The order is not about rank. It recalls that the old garland was hers to give. When the groom answers with his own, both have now said, without a word, "I accept you", with both families watching.

It is worth being clear about what Varmala is not. It is not one of the Vedic rites. The Grihya Sutras, which give the fire, the hand-taking and the seven steps, do not mention an exchange of garlands. Varmala comes from the epic and Puranic tradition and has become part of the standard wedding over time.

That does not make it less dear to anyone. It means the marriage is not made here; it is made at the fire, later in the evening.

The suhalis are harder to explain, and no source settles why seven are placed on the groom's head. Families who do it describe it as a blessing of plenty, seven being the wedding's number, and the groom being "crowned" by the bride's side before he is garlanded.

ROOTS **Shastric or Puranic rite**

The garland of choice comes from the swayamvara of the epics and Puranas. It is not in the Grihya Sutras; the suhali custom is Marwari practice.

In some families

Many families call it Jaymala rather than Varmala; the meaning is the same. The suhali custom is followed by some Marwari families and is unknown in others, especially among Agarwals from Haryana and Delhi.

Then there is the lifting. As the bride approaches, the groom's friends lift him on their shoulders so she cannot reach, and her brothers lift her in reply. Everyone enjoys it, and some families find it undignified. It is a joke, not a rite, and nothing in the wedding depends on it. If either family is uncomfortable, it is easy to agree beforehand that nobody gets lifted.

Some couples exchange garlands at the mandap instead of on a separate stage, so that the choice and the rites that follow it happen in one place.

Your part in it

- **Bride:** If your family follows the custom, ask who will give you the suhalis and practise placing seven quickly; the stage gets crowded. Then take your time with the garland. This is your choice being shown, and you can let it last a second longer.
- **Groom:** Decide in advance, with your friends, whether there will be any lifting. Then bend your head a little for the garland. It is a small thing that

guests notice.

- **Both:** The garlands are heavy and get crushed. Ask someone to take them off you after the photographs and put them somewhere safe; some families keep them.

Ask your elders

1. *At your wedding, was there a separate Varmala, or were garlands exchanged at the mandap?*

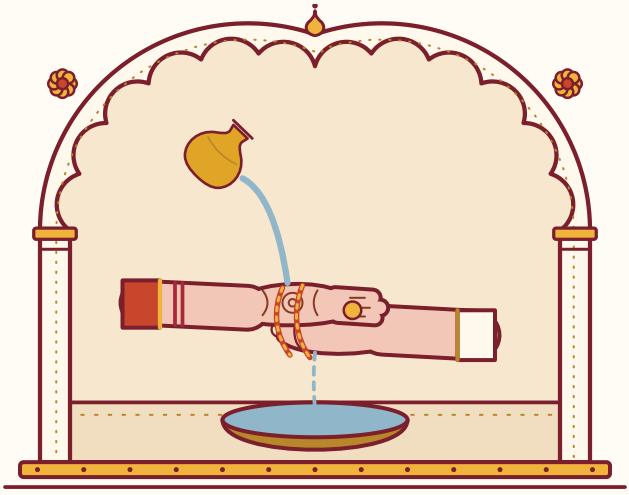
2. *Does our family place suhalis on the groom's head, and how many?*

CHAPTER 18

Kanyadaan, Hathleva and Gotrochar

कन्यादान, हथलेवा, गोत्रोच्चार

BRIDE GROOM



IN ONE MINUTE

At the mandap the pandit first announces the gotra and three generations of ancestors on both sides: this is gotrochar. Then the bride's parents place her right hand in the groom's, with water and a vow: kanyadaan. The joined hands, bound with mauli, are called hathleva in Marwari homes. When the groom takes her hand, he is doing the Vedic act of panigrahan, and he promises before witnesses to stand by her for life.

WHEN	At the mandap, after Varmala and before the Gathjoda and pheras
WHO LEADS	The pandit; the bride's parents; the groom
WHERE	The mandap, seated before the sacred fire
THEME	Consent and witness; Bonds between families

What happens

1. Gotrochar: the pandit recites the gotra of the bride's family and the names of her father, grandfather and great-grandfather, then does the same for the groom. Each side often has its own pandit reciting.
2. Sankalp: the bride's father, with her mother beside him, holds water, rice and a coin and states the intention of the rite, naming the time, the place and both families.
3. Kanyadaan: the parents place the bride's right hand in the groom's right hand and pour water over them. The pandit recites the vow that the groom will not fail her in dharma, artha and kama, and the groom answers that he will not.
4. Hathleva: in Marwari practice the joined hands are held with mehendi between the palms, and a mauli thread is wound round them.
5. Panigrahan: the groom holds the bride's hand while the pandit recites the Vedic verse of hand-taking.

Why we do it

Begin with gotrochar, since someone will ask why a wedding needs a list of dead men's names. A marriage in this tradition joins two lineages, not two individuals alone. Announcing three generations aloud tells everyone present exactly which lines are being joined. For Agarwals it is also the one public moment when the gotra matters. Agarwals do not marry within their own gotra, and many families also avoid the mother's. Gotrochar declares, before witnesses, that the rule has been kept.

The joined hands are the oldest part. In the Rigvedic wedding hymn, and in the Grihya Sutras, the groom takes the bride's hand with a verse that runs, roughly, "I take your hand for good fortune, that you may grow old with me, your husband." Panigrahan is so central that panigrahana, "taking the hand", is itself an old Sanskrit word for marriage.

Kanyadaan frames that moment from the parents' side. In the Sutra and Dharmashastra tradition, the father entrusts his daughter to the groom, and

the groom accepts responsibility for her in front of witnesses. The vow is specific: in dharma (right conduct), artha (livelihood) and kama (love and desire), he will not fail her. It is the groom, not the bride, who is placed under obligation here.

Hathleva, the Marwari name, is the practical side of it. Mehendi between two palms, a thread round two wrists: two hands that will stay together until the next rite begins.

About the word "daan"

Many young readers stop at the word itself. "Daan" means a gift, and to modern ears giving away a daughter sounds like handing over property. That discomfort is real and worth saying aloud.

It is equally fair to say what the rite's own words contain. The mantras speak of trust and of the groom's responsibility; they are a vow he makes, not a sale. Families who hold kanyadaan dear often describe it as the greatest act of trust a parent can make, and for many fathers it is the moment of the wedding they feel most deeply.

Families today handle this in different ways. In many weddings both parents perform the rite together. Some pandits ask the bride to state her consent aloud before her hand is placed. Some couples ask for the rite to be worded as kanya-samarpan, an entrusting, and a few choose to leave it out. This book offers no verdict. It sets out what the rite means so that each family can decide with full knowledge.

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

Panigrahan, the taking of the hand, is a Vedic rite found in RV 10.85 and the Paraskara Grihya Sutra. Kanyadaan rests on both the Grihya Sutra and the later Dharmashastra tradition; hathleva is the Marwari name and form.

In some families

In most Agarwal families the bride's father performs kanyadaan with her mother at his side. Where the father has died, a brother, uncle or grandfather usually takes his place; in some families the mother performs it alone.

The mehendi in hathleva is not universal: some families bind the hands with mauli alone. The gotrochar can be brief or long depending on the pandit's tradition, and some pandits include the gotra on the mother's side too.

Your part in it

- **Bride:** Write down your father's, grandfather's and great-grandfather's names, and your gotra, and give them to your pandit in advance. If you would like to state your consent aloud, tell the pandit before the day; most are glad to include it.
- **Groom:** Do the same for your side. Then, when the pandit recites the vow of dharma, artha and kama, listen to it; this promise is yours alone. Ask him to repeat the meaning in Hindi if you need to.
- **Both:** Keep your hands still once the mauli is tied. The mehendi between your palms will tell everyone if you did not.

Ask your elders

1. *What are the names of the last three generations on our side, and what is our gotra? Do we also avoid the mother's gotra?*

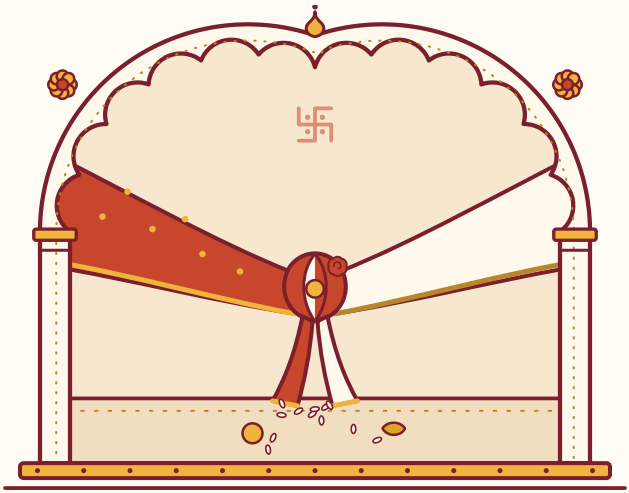
2. *At your wedding, who performed kanyadaan, and was mehendi placed between the hands for hathleva?*

CHAPTER 19

Gathjoda, or Granthi Bandhan

गठजोड़ा, ग्रंथि बंधन

BRIDE GROOM SIBLINGS



IN ONE MINUTE

Before the pheras, the groom's sister or the pandit ties the end of the bride's chunari to the groom's dupatta or patka. A coin, rice, turmeric and a flower go into the knot. From here until the end of the rites the couple move as one, joined by cloth. The knot gives the wedding its everyday Hindi phrase: when two people marry, we say "gathbandhan ho gaya".

WHEN	At the mandap, after Kanyadaan and just before the pheras
WHO LEADS	The groom's sister in most families; otherwise the pandit
WHERE	The mandap
THEME	Bonds between families

What happens

1. The pandit asks for the knot to be tied. In most families the groom's sister comes forward; in some, a married woman of either family or the pandit himself does it.
2. She takes the end of the bride's chunari or odhni and the end of the groom's dupatta or patka.
3. A coin, a pinch of rice, a piece of turmeric and a flower are placed in the cloth, and the two ends are tied together in a firm knot.
4. The sister usually asks the groom for a gift, her neg, before or after tying. He pays.
5. The couple rise for the pheras, joined. The knot stays tied through the pheras and the saptapadi, and in many families until the couple reach the groom's home.

Why we do it

They are already holding hands, so why tie their clothes together as well? Because the gathjoda is a sign anyone in the hall can read, from the back row. Up to this point the bride and groom have each been led through their own rituals by their own families. From the gathjoda onwards, nothing is done by one without the other. They walk the fire together, sit together and rise together, and the cloth shows it.

What goes into the knot has a plain meaning in family terms. The coin and the rice stand for prosperity and food in the new home; the turmeric for auspiciousness and health; the flower for happiness. Families do not claim more than that, and need not.

The person who ties it matters too. In most Agarwal families it is the groom's sister. She is the one who ties her brother to his wife, which gives the groom's family a hand in the joining. Her neg is the custom's way of saying that this is a real job and deserves thanks.

On the roots, a precise word. The Grihya Sutras describe the bride's clothes and the joined hands, but they do not describe tying the garments together. The knot comes from the pandit's later wedding manual and from custom, and it has become so central in North India that it has given the language its word for marriage.

ROOTS **Community custom**

The gathjoda is included in the pandit's wedding manual, but it is not in the Grihya Sutras. It is carried mainly by custom, and by the groom's sister's claim to her neg.

In some families

In some families the knot is untied only at the groom's home, after Griha Pravesh, or at the Dhok at the Kuldevi; in others it is untied as soon as the rites at the mandap are over. A knot is often tied again later in married life for joint pujas, such as a Satyanarayan katha or a havan, where husband and wife sit together.

What goes into the knot varies: some families add a supari, durva grass or a little sugar; others use only a coin. Where the groom has no sister, a cousin or bhabhi usually ties it, or the pandit does.

Your part in it

- **Groom's sister:** This is your rite. Keep the coin, rice, turmeric and flower ready in a small pouch, ask the pandit when he will call you, and tie the knot firmly; a knot that slips halfway round the fire upsets everyone. Agree your neg with your brother in advance or enjoy bargaining for it on the spot.
- **Bride and groom:** Once tied, you are walking as a pair. Move at the slower person's pace. If the bride's lehenga is heavy, it helps if the groom shortens his stride.

- **Anyone:** After the wedding, ask whether the family keeps the knotted chunari or dupatta. Some families put it away and bring it out for the couple's first puja together.

Ask your elders

1. *In our family, who ties the gathjoda, and what is placed in the knot?*

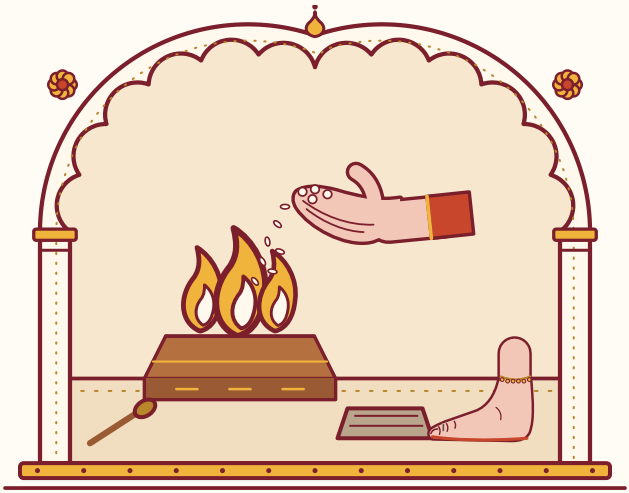
2. *When was the knot untied at your wedding: at the mandap, at the groom's home, or at the Kuldevi?*

CHAPTER 20

Pheras, Lajahoma and the stone

फेरे, लाजाहोम, अश्मारोहण

BRIDE GROOM SIBLINGS



IN ONE MINUTE

Tied together, the couple walk round the sacred fire. At each round the bride pushes a small stone forward with her toe, a prayer that the marriage stands firm. Her brother fills her cupped hands with puffed rice, which she and the groom offer into the fire: this is lajahoma. These are among the oldest acts of the wedding, written in the Grihya Sutras. The fire is the witness. Most Agarwal families take seven rounds.

WHEN	At the mandap, after the Gathjoda; the heart of the wedding night
WHO LEADS	The pandit; the bride and groom; the bride's brother for lajahoma
WHERE	Round the havan kund in the mandap
THEME	Consent and witness; Bonds between families

What happens

1. The pandit lights the sacred fire and makes the first offerings of ghee. The couple sit before it.
2. Lajahoma: the bride's brother pours laja, puffed rice, into the bride's cupped hands. The groom joins her, and together they offer the rice into the fire while the pandit recites. In many weddings this is repeated at several rounds.
3. The pheras: the couple rise and walk round the fire, clockwise, joined by the gathjoda. In most Agarwal weddings the bride leads the first rounds and the groom the last; your pandit decides the exact count.
4. Ashmarohan: before or during each round, the bride touches a small grinding stone (sil) with her right toe and pushes it forward, or in some families steps onto a stone, while the pandit recites the verse of steadiness.
5. After the last round, the couple sit again before the fire, and the pandit moves on to the saptapadi.

Why we do it

This is the big one: why does walking round a fire make two people married? The tradition's answer is that the fire is a witness. In Vedic thought Agni carries offerings to the gods and sees what is promised before him. A promise made "Agni ko saakshi maan kar", with the fire as witness, cannot later be denied. This is why the pheras, not the reception or the registry signature, are what most families mean when they say the wedding happened.

Lajahoma gives the bride's brother a formal place, and the Sutras describe it clearly: her brother pours the parched grain into her joined hands, and she offers it. The mantra she offers it with asks for long life for her husband and prosperity for her own relations. It is a quiet moment, easy to miss, and it says something real. Even as she leaves one family for another, her brother stands at the fire beside her. The ties of her birth are part of the rite, not left at the gate.

The stone is the most direct of all. The Paraskara Grihya Sutra has the groom make the bride tread on a stone with the words "Tread on this stone; like a

stone be firm." Marwari families make it a small grinding stone, the sil from the kitchen, pushed forward with her toe. Whatever comes, she is asked to stand steady. You may hear that pressing the toe strengthens the bride in some way; that is a modern gloss, not where the rite comes from.

Now the number. Families say proudly, "we take seven pheras." The Paraskara Grihya Sutra prescribes three rounds of the fire, each after an offering of laja, with a fourth offering at the end; other Sutras give similar counts. The seven steps of saptapadi, the next chapter, are a separate rite. Over the centuries North Indian practice joined the two ideas, and the rounds became seven. This is not a mistake to correct. It is how a living tradition grows, and seven rounds is now the custom of almost every Marwari family.

ROOTS **Vedic rite**

The rounds of the fire, lajahoma and ashmarohan are all Grihya Sutra rites with Vedic mantras. The count of seven rounds and the use of the household sil are North Indian and Marwari practice built on them.

In some families

The division of rounds varies. In most Agarwal weddings the bride leads the first rounds and the groom the last; some pandits give her three, some four, and a few reverse the order altogether. The count rests with the pandit's tradition.

Some families use a flat stone instead of the sil, and some have the bride step onto it once rather than push it at every round. In some weddings lajahoma is done once before the pheras; in others the brother refills her hands at each round. Where the bride has no brother, a cousin or another male relative of her family takes his place.

Your part in it

- **Bride's brother:** Lajahoma is yours. Sit close to the fire, keep the bowl of laja in your lap, and fill your sister's hands generously each time the pandit signals. Ask him beforehand how many times you will be needed.

- **Bride:** Ask the pandit how many rounds you lead, and find the stone with your toe before you rise. Lift the front of your lehenga with one hand; the other is busy with the knot.
- **Groom:** Walk at her pace, and when you lead, check that the knot has not caught on anything. Ask the pandit to say in one line what each round's mantra asks for.
- **Siblings and cousins:** Keep the area round the fire clear of trailing dupattas and phones held out for photographs.

Ask your elders

1. *At your wedding, how many rounds did the bride lead, and did she push a sil or step on a stone?*

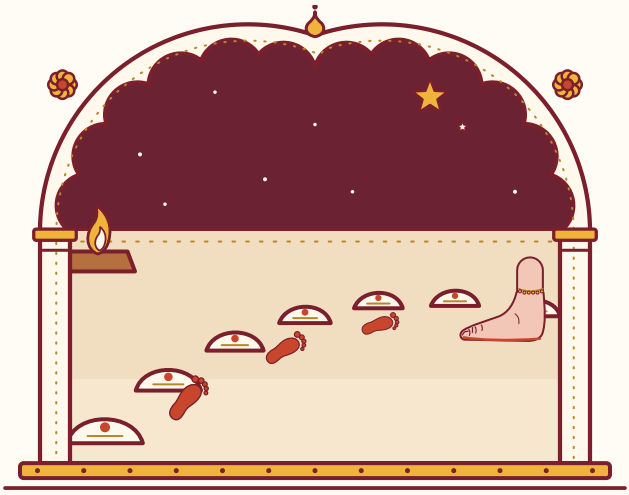
2. *Who did lajahoma for the bride in your wedding, and is there a story the family tells about it?*

CHAPTER 21

Saptapadi and the seven vows

सप्तपदी

BRIDE GROOM



IN ONE MINUTE

Saptapadi means "seven steps". The bride and groom take seven steps together, and with each one the pandit says a short Sanskrit line asking for one thing a household needs: nourishment, strength, wealth, comfort, cattle (children, in the list most pandits explain today), the turn of the seasons and, last, friendship. In the old texts this is the moment the marriage is complete, and Indian law still recognises it. The Hindi vows read out today are a later, simpler version of the same idea.

WHEN	At the mandap, after the pheras and before sindoor daan
WHO LEADS	The pandit, with the groom guiding the bride's steps
WHERE	Beside the sacred fire, at the bride's venue
THEME	Consent and witness

What happens

1. After the rounds of the fire, the couple stand; the Gathjoda knot stays tied.
2. The bride takes seven steps, usually towards the north or north-east, starting with her right foot. In many weddings seven small heaps of rice, or seven betel nuts, are laid in a line and she touches each with her toe.
3. With each step the pandit recites a line, and the groom repeats it or says it with him. Each line names one blessing for the home they are starting.
4. At the seventh step comes the line "sakha saptapadi bhava": "with seven steps, be my friend".
5. Many pandits then read out seven vows in Hindi, sometimes as the bride's conditions and the groom's acceptance, sometimes as promises both make.
6. In some weddings the groom then shows the bride the Pole Star (Dhruva) and the star Arundhati, as a vow of steadiness. Indoors at night, the pandit simply names them.

Why we do it

After seven rounds of the fire, why walk seven more steps? Because the steps, not the rounds, are what the old texts count. In the Grihya Sutras the rounds of the fire are three or four; the seven steps are the act that seals the marriage. North Indian practice later merged the two, which is why the pheras became seven and why some pandits now fold the step mantras into the rounds.

The seven lines are short. In the Paraskara Grihya Sutra, as Oldenberg translates it, 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, and at the seventh, "friend, be with seven steps united to me." Sap and juice are nourishment; cattle were the livelihood of that age. The list most pandits explain today, food, strength, wealth, happiness, children, seasons and friendship, is a loose modern rendering, with children standing where the text has cattle. Either way it is what a young couple needs to run a house and stay together, said aloud before the fire and the families.

The last step carries the weight. A husband asking his wife to be his friend, in a text well over two thousand years old, surprises many young readers. Walking seven steps with someone, in the old idea, made you companions for life. The marriage is completed by friendship, spoken before witnesses.

The law agrees on the moment. Section 7 of the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 says a Hindu marriage may be solemnised in accordance with the customary rites and ceremonies of either party, and that where those rites include the saptapadi, "the taking of seven steps by the bridegroom and the bride jointly before the fire", the marriage becomes complete and binding when the seventh step is taken.

The seven vows you will hear in Hindi

These vows are a modern composition, not a translation of the Sutra lines, and the wording varies from pandit to pandit. One common version has the bride ask, and the groom agree:

1. Include me in your prayers, fasts, pilgrimages and every religious act.
2. Respect my parents as you respect your own.
3. Stand by me in every stage of life.
4. Take on your share of the household's needs.
5. Consult me before decisions about the home and its money.
6. Do not belittle me in front of others, and keep away from gambling and bad habits.
7. Be faithful to me alone.

Some pandits add a set of promises from the bride in return. Ask yours in advance which version he reads.

ROOTS **Vedic rite**

Saptapadi, its seven mantras and the showing of Dhruva and Arundhati are in the Grihya Sutras, including the Paraskara Grihya Sutra used by most North Indian pandits. The Hindi vows are a later addition.

In some families

In most Agarwal weddings the seven steps are taken after the rounds as a separate rite. Some pandits combine them with the pheras, reading one step mantra at each round, so the couple may never take seven distinct steps. Both are accepted practice; your pandit's tradition decides.

The Hindi vows vary the most: all as the bride's conditions, or split between the two, or left out in favour of the Sanskrit and a short explanation. Dhruva and Arundhati darshan is kept by some pandits and dropped by others, especially at late-night weddings where no star can be seen.

Your part in it

- **Bride:** Ask the pandit before the wedding to say the meaning of each step in Hindi or English as you take it. Seven short sentences cost him a minute and give you the whole rite. Ask him too whether his fifth step is for cattle or for children; pandits differ.
- **Groom:** Learn the last line, "sakha saptapadi bhava", and say it yourself rather than mumbling after the pandit. It is the one line in the ceremony that is entirely yours to say to her.
- **Both:** Read the Hindi vows together a few days before. If a line sits badly, talk to the pandit; many will adjust the wording.

Ask your elders

1. *In our family's weddings, were the seven steps taken separately after the pheras, or were they part of the rounds?*

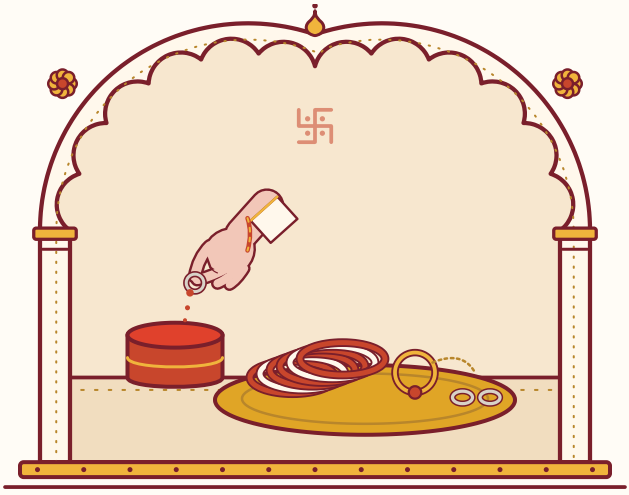
2. *Which Hindi vows did our pandit read at your wedding, and do you remember any of the words?*

CHAPTER 22

Suhaag chinh: sindoor, chooda, bichhiya, mangalsutra

सिंदूर दान, चूड़ा, बिछिया, मंगलसूत्र

BRIDE



IN ONE MINUTE

Once the seven steps are taken, the groom fills the parting of the bride's hair with sindoor, and the signs of a married woman (suhaag chinh) are given to her: the chooda bangles, the nath, toe rings and, in many families now, a mangalsutra. Each marks her as a married woman. Sindoor is the oldest of these in our practice. The mangalsutra came into Marwari weddings only in the last two generations.

WHEN	At the mandap, right after saptapadi
WHO LEADS	The groom applies sindoor; his mother or sister gives the other signs
WHERE	At the mandap
THEME	Consent and witness; Moving home

What happens

1. The pandit calls for sindoor daan. The groom takes a pinch of sindoor, usually on a silver coin, a ring or a small stick, and draws it along the bride's parting, often more than once.
2. In many families the bride's head is then covered with a chunari brought by the groom's side.
3. The groom's mother or sister puts the nath (nose ring) on the bride, and gives or puts on the chooda, the set of lac bangles.
4. Toe rings (bichhiya) are slipped on, by the groom in some families and by his sister in others.
5. Where the family uses one, the groom ties the mangalsutra round the bride's neck.
6. The women of the groom's side often bless her at this point, and the pandit moves on to the closing rites.

Why we do it

A young bride may ask why only she carries the marks of being married. These signs grew up in a world where a married woman's status was announced by what she wore. Sindoor, bangles and toe rings told the village, at a glance, that this woman was married and her husband was alive. That is what suhaag means: the married state, and good fortune within it.

Sindoor daan is the most solemn of them. It is the groom's own act, done with his hand after the marriage is complete, and for many families it is the moment the bride visibly becomes a married woman in front of everyone. Sindoor is not in the Grihya Sutras. It rests on Puranic and regional custom, and when it entered the wedding rite is not settled.

The chooda and nath come from the groom's family, which gives them a second meaning. They are the first ornaments she receives from her new home, put on by the women she is joining. The toe rings carry a similar sense. You

may be told that toe rings press on a nerve that helps fertility; that is a modern story, not the traditional meaning.

The groom is not without a mark. He wears the kangan dora, the protective thread tied on his wrist at Pithi, through the wedding. Unlike the bride's signs, it comes off after the wedding, in the game at the groom's home (chapter 26).

Is the mangalsutra Marwari?

Not traditionally. The black-and-gold mangalsutra is a western and southern Indian custom. Older Marwari brides wore sindoor, chooda, nath and bichhiya, and many grandmothers married without a mangalsutra at all. It came into Agarwal weddings over the last two generations or so and is now common. Wearing one is a choice; leaving it out is equally in keeping with our older practice.

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

Sindoor daan rests on Puranic and regional custom rather than the Sutras. The chooda, nath, bichhiya and mangalsutra are community custom, the last of them recently adopted.

In some families

The chooda varies the most. Many Marwari families give a set of lac bangles, usually red. Some give a full set to be worn up the forearm; others give a few to be worn with gold ones. A few families, especially those with Punjabi relatives or neighbours, have taken up the red-and-white Punjabi chooda.

Who puts on each item changes from family to family. In some the groom's mother does everything except the sindoor; in others his sister puts on the toe rings and gets a small gift for it. Some families give the nath only later, at Griha Pravesh or Mooh Dikhai.

How much sindoor, and how long it is worn each day afterwards, is a matter for the bride and her family. Many brides today wear a fine line or none at all

outside festivals.

Your part in it

- **Bride:** Ask your mother-in-law beforehand which signs her family gives and who puts them on. It turns a moment of being dressed by strangers into a first conversation with her.
- **Bride:** If you want a mangalsutra, or do not, say so before the wedding rather than at the mandap. Both are in keeping with family practice somewhere.
- **Groom:** Practise with the coin or ring. A steady, unhurried line of sindoor reads as care; a smudge across her forehead is remembered in the photographs.

Ask your elders

1. *Which suhaag signs were given to you at your wedding, and who put each one on?*

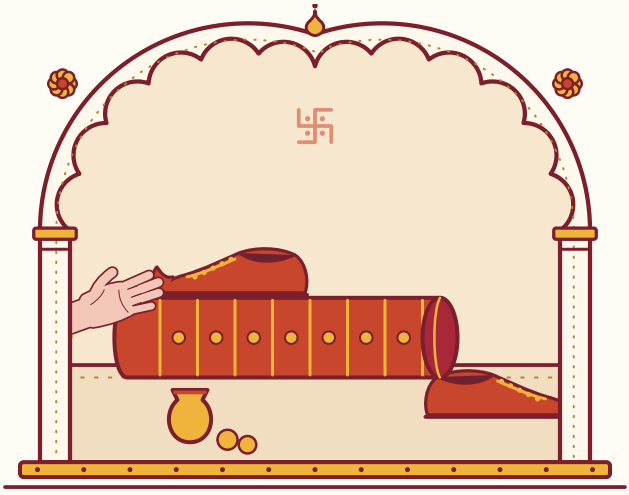
2. *Did anyone in our family wear a mangalsutra when you married, and when did you first see one at a family wedding?*

CHAPTER 23

Aashirvad, Pehravani and Joota Chupai

आशीर्वाद, पहरावणी, जूता छुपाई

BRIDE GROOM SIBLINGS



IN ONE MINUTE

Once the rites at the fire are over, three things happen, often at the same time. The couple touch the feet of the elders on both sides and receive their blessings (Aashirvad). The bride's family honours the groom, his father and close relatives with clothes, a coconut and a token of cash (Pehravani). And the bride's sisters, who hid the groom's shoes at the mandap, bargain to return them (Joota Chupai). One is reverent, one formal, one pure fun.

WHEN	After the rites at the mandap, before the meal or Vidai
WHO LEADS	The elders of both families; the bride's sisters for the shoes
WHERE	At the mandap or a sitting area beside it
THEME	Blessing; Bonds between families

What happens

1. As the couple step into the mandap, the groom takes off his shoes. One of the bride's sisters or cousins quietly takes them and hides them.
2. When the pandit finishes, the couple, still tied by the Gathjoda, go round the elders of both families and touch their feet. Each elder blesses them and usually gives a small token, often cash in an envelope.
3. For Pehravani, the bride's family gives the groom clothes, a shawl, a coconut and cash, and does the same for his father and close male relatives. The pandits of both sides receive their dakshina.
4. In some families the bride is taken to the kitchen of her home for a thali puja with a lamp at this point.
5. When the groom gets up to leave, his shoes are missing. The bride's sisters name a price. His brothers and friends argue it down, sometimes try to find or snatch the shoes, and in the end a sum is agreed and paid.

Why we do it

To a modern guest this can look like a queue of envelopes followed by a silly game. Each part has a job.

Aashirvad is the first public act of the couple as a married pair. They bow together, tied together, and every elder of both families puts a hand on their heads. The older generation accepts this marriage and backs it, and everyone sees them do so. For the elders, it is also their first chance to bless the groom as a son-in-law or the bride as a daughter-in-law.

Pehravani means "the giving of clothes to wear". It is the bride's family honouring the people who have just become their relatives. Dressing someone in clothes you have given is an old Indian way of showing respect, and the groom's father being honoured by the bride's father settles the new relationship between the two homes. Dakshina to the pandits closes the religious part of the day with thanks.

Joota Chupai is a game, and nothing more needs to be read into it. It gives the bride's sisters a place in the wedding, lets the two sides tease each other after hours of formality, and starts the easy, joking bond between a man and his salis that many Marwari families value. How old it is, no one has recorded.

ROOTS **Community custom**

None of these is in the Sutras or the pandit's manual. They are carried by families: touching feet and honouring guests with clothes are wide Indian practice, and Joota Chupai is a wedding game.

In some families

The order varies. In some weddings Pehravani is done the next morning, just before Vidai, rather than at the mandap. Some families also leave the full Aashirvad round for the reception.

What is given in Pehravani depends on the family: some give a full set of clothes to the groom and his father, others a shawl, a coconut and an envelope. The kitchen thali puja by the bride is kept in some homes and unknown in others.

The shoe price is the most changeable of all. In some families the sisters set a figure in advance with the groom's brothers so that nobody is embarrassed; in others the haggling is the whole point.

Your part in it

- **Bride and groom:** Before the wedding, ask a parent to stand beside you during Aashirvad and tell you quietly who each elder is. A grandfather's cousin greeted by name goes home pleased.
- **Groom:** Keep cash ready with a brother or friend for the shoes, and lose the bargaining gracefully. Who won is forgotten by dinner; a sour groom is not.
- **Siblings:** If you hide the shoes, keep the game light and the price fair. Agree with the groom's side beforehand if you are unsure how hard to push.

Ask your elders

1. *In our family, what is given in Pehravani to the groom and to his father, and is it done at the mandap or before Vidai?*

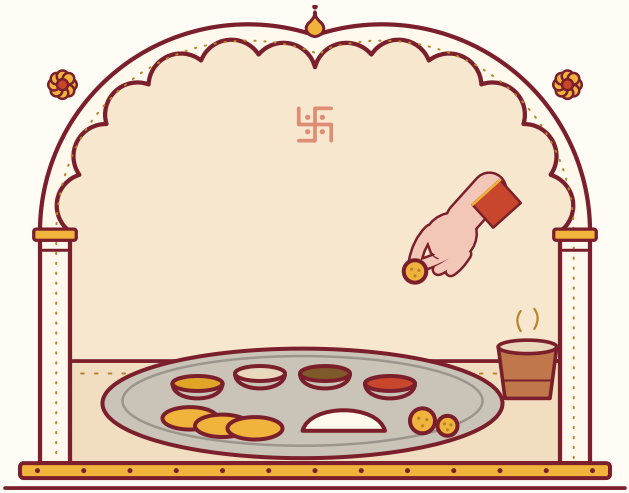
2. *Does the bride do a thali puja in the kitchen before she leaves, and what is said or sung then?*

CHAPTER 24

Kanwar Kaleva

कंवर कलेवा

GROOM SIBLINGS



IN ONE MINUTE

Kanwar Kaleva is the groom's first meal at the bride's home after the wedding. He sits with his close friends and is served by the bride's family, while her sisters and cousins tease him and ask for neg, a gift of money, before he will be persuaded to eat. It is a welcome into the family, done through food and laughter. Many Marwari families keep it; many others skip it.

WHEN	After the pheras; often the morning after a night wedding
WHO LEADS	The bride's mother and the women of her home; the salis run the teasing
WHERE	The bride's home or the wedding venue
THEME	Bonds between families

What happens

1. After the rites, or the next morning, the groom is invited to eat at the bride's home. He comes with a few close friends or young male relatives.
2. He is seated at a low chowki or a table, and the women of the bride's family serve him a full meal, usually with sweets.
3. The groom, by custom, does not start eating straight away. He waits to be coaxed, and in many families asks for a gift before he will eat.
4. Meanwhile the bride's sisters and cousins tease him, sing, ask him questions and demand neg from him in turn.
5. The bride's mother or an elder gives the groom a gift, often cash or an ornament, and he eats. The salis are paid their neg, and the meal ends in laughter.

Why we do it

One more meal, padded out with demands for money? There is something in that, and it misses what the meal does.

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

The coaxing and the gift are the old way of showing that honour. The groom holds back, the family persuades him, and his eating is accepted as a sign that he is now at ease in his wife's home. The teasing from the salis 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.

The meal also has a plain, practical side. After a long night of rites the groom and his friends have often eaten little, and the bride's family, as hosts, sees them properly fed before the day of Vidai. Hospitality to the son-in-law's party was a point of family pride, and in many homes it still is.

The custom is Rajasthani, of an age no one has recorded, and it travelled with Marwari families wherever they settled.

ROOTS **Community custom**

Kanwar Kaleva is Rajasthani in origin and carried by families, not priests. It has no mantra and no place in the pandit's manual.

In some families

Practice varies a great deal. Many Marwari and Agarwal families keep Kanwar Kaleva, and many others skip it or know it by name only. Whether your family does it is a question for your elders.

The timing changes too. After a night wedding it is often the next morning, before Vidai. After a day wedding it may follow the pheras directly.

The neg asked by the salis and the gift from the bride's mother are tokens, and their size is for each family to judge. In some homes the gift to the groom is an ornament kept for the occasion; in others it is an envelope.

Where the wedding is held at a hotel or hall, some families keep a smaller version: a table set apart, the bride's sisters and a plate of sweets.

Your part in it

- **Groom:** Take a few friends who can hold their own in the banter, and keep cash in hand for the salis. Ask your new mother-in-law, at least once, what she cooked; it is her first meal for you.
- **Siblings:** The salis run this one. Plan a few questions or a song in advance, keep the demands friendly, and let him eat before the food goes cold.
- **Groom's friends:** Your job is to defend him with good humour, not to win.

Ask your elders

1. *Is Kanwar Kaleva done in our family, and on which day: after the pheras or the next morning?*

2. *What does the bride's family traditionally serve and give the groom at this meal?*

Common questions

The wedding day is long. Which parts actually make the marriage?

In the Vedic rite, the core is the taking of the hand (panigrahan), the rounds of the fire with lajahoma, and above all saptapadi, the seven steps. Indian law also names saptapadi: under the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, where the couple's custom includes it, the marriage is complete at the seventh step. Korath, Toran, Milni and the games are community custom. They carry real meaning for the families, but they are not what makes the marriage valid.

Do we have to do every ritual in these chapters?

No. This book explains what each ritual means so that the choice is yours and your family's. Many families already drop Korath, do Kanwar Kaleva only in name, or fold several steps into one. If you shorten something, knowing its meaning lets you keep the part that matters, such as the bride's brother at lajahoma or the elders' blessing after the pheras.

Our pandit does things in a different order. Is he wrong?

Almost certainly not. Pandits follow their own family's manual, and the order of kanyadaan, gathjoda, the pheras and saptapadi varies between traditions, as does the number of rounds the bride leads. On the day, the pandit's tradition prevails. If you want something explained, or a step kept, speak to him a week before, not at the mandap.

Can the pandit explain the mantras as he goes?

Most will, if asked in advance. A one-line meaning in Hindi or English before each rite, especially kanyadaan, the pheras and saptapadi, changes how the couple and the guests follow the ceremony. Some families print a small card for guests with a sentence on each step.

One of us is not Agarwal, or not Marwari. What changes?

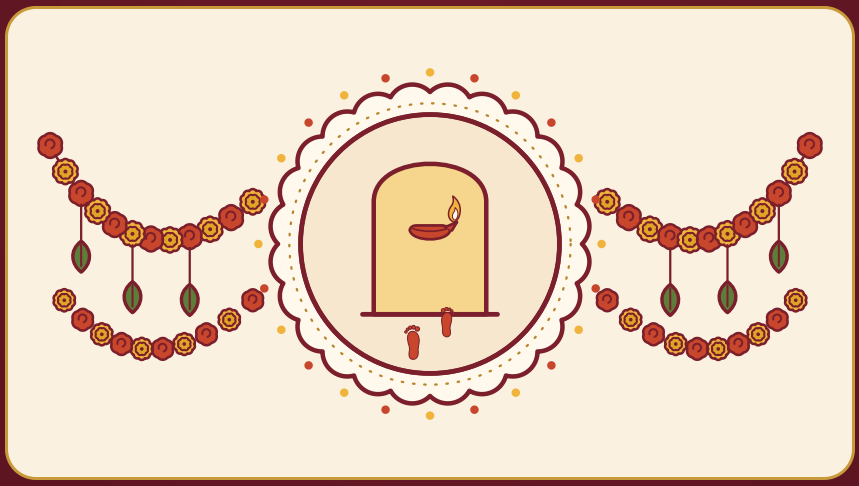
Very little. The rituals in these chapters are often done when one partner comes from another community. The pandit adapts the gotrochar to the other family's gotra or lineage, and the other side may add a custom of its own. Talk to both families early about who will do each part, such as who ties the gathjoda or who puts laja in the bride's hands.

The bride wears sindoor and chooda. What does the groom wear?

The bride's suhaag signs are hers alone, and the book does not pretend otherwise. The groom's visible mark through the wedding is the kangan dora, the protective thread tied on his wrist at Pithi. It comes off after the wedding, in the untying game at his home. The mangalsutra, incidentally, is not a traditional Marwari sign; it came in over the last two generations.

PART FIVE

The New Beginning



The bride leaves one home, enters another, and the couple go to the family goddess together.

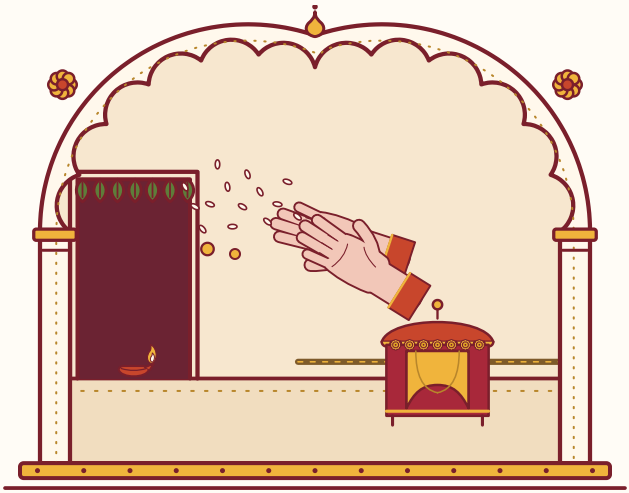
Vidai · Griha Pravesh and the games · Mooh Dikhai · Pagphera · Dhok and Jaat at the Kuldevi

CHAPTER 25

Vidai

विदाई

BRIDE SIBLINGS



IN ONE MINUTE

Vidai is the farewell, when the bride leaves her parents' home for her husband's. She throws rice back over her head towards the house, a wish that its prosperity stays with the family she leaves. Her brothers push the car to start her on her way. It is the most emotional moment of the wedding, and the tears are part of it. Nobody is expected to hold them back.

WHEN	After the pheras and Kanwar Kaleva, usually the morning after a night wedding
WHO LEADS	The bride, her parents and brothers; the women of the family
WHERE	The door of the bride's home or the wedding venue
THEME	Moving home; Blessing

What happens

1. When the groom's family is ready to leave, the bride says goodbye to her parents, grandparents and the rest of the family. She touches the elders' feet and they bless her.
2. At the door, someone hands her a thali or a bowl of rice. Without turning round, she throws handfuls of it backwards over her head, towards the house. In some families coins are mixed with the rice.
3. In some families she is given a dried coconut with sugar or a coin inside, to be handed to her mother-in-law when she arrives at her new home.
4. She is led to the car with the groom. Her brothers, often joined by cousins, push the car for the first few metres before the engine takes over.
5. The family stands at the gate until the car is out of sight. Then the house, full for a week, begins to empty.

Why we do it

If the bride will be back in a day or two for Pagphera, and is a phone call away for the rest of her life, why stage such a heavy farewell? The parting is not what it was when a girl might be married into a village many days away and see her parents only a few times a year.

But Vidai marks a change of belonging, not of distance. Until this morning the bride 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 have always felt that change, whatever the distance, and Vidai gives the feeling a set place and time. Crying at a ritual is easier than crying alone a week later.

The rice carries the other half of the meaning. Rice is the old sign of plenty in the house. By throwing it behind her without looking back, the bride leaves the home's fortune where it belongs, with her parents and brothers, and takes only their blessing with her. Some families say she is also repaying, in a small way, everything the house gave her. Both readings are in circulation, and they sit together without trouble.

The brothers pushing the car is the simplest gesture of all. They cannot keep her, so they send her off with their own hands. In the days of the doli, the brothers lifted or walked beside the palanquin; pushing the car is the same gesture in a new age.

ROOTS **Community custom**

The Grihya Sutras have mantras for the bride's departure from her father's house (vadhu prasthan), but the rice thrown backwards, the coconut and the pushing of the car are family and regional custom.

In some families

The number of handfuls varies. Some families keep to five or seven; others simply throw until the thali is empty. In some families the bride's mother, or another woman of the house, stands behind her and catches some of the rice in the end of her saree, to be kept in the house; in others the rice is simply left where it falls, and the elders may say the mother should not be the one to catch it. Ask which way your family does it.

In many Rajasthan-origin families the women sing vidai songs as the bride leaves. Where nobody sings them any more, an aunt or grandmother may still remember a verse or two.

The coconut for the mother-in-law is common in some Marwari families and unknown in others. Where it is done, the bride often holds it through the drive.

Your part in it

- **Bride:** Ask beforehand who will hold the rice and how many handfuls your family throws, so that on the morning you only have to throw and not ask. If there is a coconut for your mother-in-law, keep it with you rather than in a bag in the boot.
- **Brothers and cousins:** Agree in advance who pushes the car, and make sure the driver knows the plan. It looks easy until the car starts moving.

- **Sisters and cousins:** Stay close to the bride's mother through the morning. The parents are often busiest exactly when they most need someone beside them.
- **Anyone:** If an elder knows a vidai song, ask her to sing it, and record it. These songs are rarely written down.

Ask your elders

1. *How many handfuls of rice does our family throw at Vidai, and who holds the thali behind the bride?*

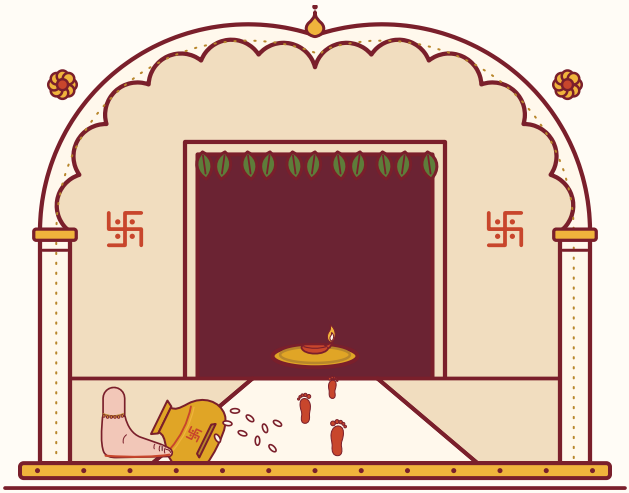
2. *Is there a vidai song our family sang, and can you sing a verse of it?*

CHAPTER 26

Griha Pravesh and the games

गृह प्रवेश, कंगन डोरा खोलना

BRIDE GROOM SIBLINGS



IN ONE MINUTE

Griha Pravesh is the bride's first entry into her husband's home. The groom's sisters block the door until they are paid, the bride is welcomed with aarti, tips over a pot of rice with her foot and walks in leaving red footprints. Then come the games: untying the wrist threads and fishing for a ring in milky water. The entry is a blessing on the new home; the games are there to make two near-strangers laugh together.

WHEN	On arrival at the groom's home after Vidai
WHO LEADS	The groom's mother, sisters and bua; the women of the groom's family for the games
WHERE	The front door of the groom's home, then inside
THEME	Moving home; Bonds between families

What happens

1. The couple arrive at the groom's door. His sisters stand in the doorway and refuse to let them in until the groom pays neg. The bargaining is loud and is meant to be.
2. The groom's mother, sister or bua does aarti for the couple and puts tilak on them. Where the bride has brought a coconut from her mother's home, she hands it over now.
3. A small kalash filled with rice is placed on the threshold. The bride tips it over gently with her right foot so the rice spills into the house.
4. She steps into a plate of kumkum water or alta and walks in over a white cloth, leaving a line of red footprints. Many families keep the cloth.
5. In some families she also touches a stack of thalis, or ghee and jaggery, or a small bag of money, before going further in.
6. Once the couple have bowed at the household shrine and sat down, the games begin. First, kangan dora kholna: the bride and groom each untie the thread on the other's wrist, using one hand only.
7. Then a thali of milk and water, sometimes with rose petals, is set between them and a ring is dropped in. Both reach in at once, usually several rounds. Whoever comes up with the ring more often is declared the one who will "rule the house".

Why we do it

A rice pot and a ring in milk may seem childish ways to welcome an adult into a family. The games are childish, and they are meant to be. A bride arriving in a new house after a sleepless night, among people she has met a handful of times, is tense. The games put her and her husband at the centre of a circle of laughing women, competing as equals, and the ice usually breaks within minutes.

The entry carries the serious meaning. The kalash of rice stands for plenty, and the bride spilling it into the house shows her bringing good fortune with her. This is why many families speak of her as Lakshmi entering the home. The red

footprints are the visible record of that first step, and the cloth that holds them is often kept for years.

The kangan dora has its own logic. It was tied at Pithi as protection through the most exposed days of the wedding. Now the couple are home and married, so the protection is no longer needed, and they release each other from it. That it must be done with one hand turns a small duty into a small contest.

The bargaining at the door belongs with the other games the sisters play, from the reins at Ghudchadi to Joota Chupai. It gives the groom's sisters a claim on the moment their brother brings his wife home, and it costs him something, which is the joke.

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 rice kalash, the footprints, the door bargaining and the games are family and regional custom.

In some families

In Rajasthani usage these games often go by the name jua khilai. Which games are played differs a great deal. Some families add a contest of finding a coin or a cowrie in a pot; some play the ring game in a pot rather than a thali. A few families play none at all.

The thali stacking, the ghee and jaggery, and the money bag are each found in some families and not others. Footprints are made with alta in some homes and kumkum water in others. Where the kangan dora was tied at Ganesh sthapana rather than Pithi, it is still untied here.

The family priest may recite the entry mantras at the door, but in most Agarwal homes today the welcome is led by the women of the house without a pandit.

Your part in it

- **Bride:** Ask your sister-in-law beforehand which of the entry customs her family does, so nothing at the door surprises you. Push the kalash gently; the aim is to spill the rice inwards, not to send the pot rolling.
- **Groom:** Keep cash ready for your sisters at the door. During the ring game, your wife is the newcomer and you are not; many grooms quietly let her win at least once.
- **Groom's sisters:** Agree among yourselves what neg you will ask for, and keep the white cloth with the footprints safe afterwards.
- **Cousins:** Have the thali, milk, ring and towel ready before the couple arrive, so the games do not stall while someone searches the kitchen.

Ask your elders

1. *Which customs does our family follow at the door when a bride first enters: the rice kalash, the footprints, the thalis, the ghee and jaggery?*

2. *Who won the ring game at your own wedding, and what was said afterwards?*

CHAPTER 27

Mooh Dikhai

मुँह दिखाई

BRIDE



IN ONE MINUTE

Mooh Dikhai means "showing the face". In the day or two after the bride arrives, the women of the groom's family and neighbourhood come to see her, one by one. Each sees her face and gives her a gift, usually jewellery, cash or a saree. It is a formal introduction: every woman who will be part of her new life meets her, and each marks the meeting with something given.

WHEN	Usually the day after Griha Pravesh, often one afternoon
WHO LEADS	The groom's mother; the female relatives of the groom's side
WHERE	The groom's home
THEME	Bonds between families; Moving home

What happens

1. The bride sits dressed in her wedding finery, often with her head covered, in the main room of the house. Her mother-in-law or a sister-in-law sits beside her.
2. The women of the groom's family come forward one at a time, roughly in order of seniority. Each lifts the bride's ghunghat or veil a little, looks at her face and blesses her.
3. Each gives a gift: a piece of jewellery, a saree, cash in an envelope. The bride touches the feet of each elder.
4. A bhabhi or sister-in-law writes down who gave what, so the family knows later how to return the courtesy.
5. Tea, sweets and conversation follow. By the end of the afternoon the bride has met, by name and face, most of the women in her husband's family.

Why we do it

Everyone has already seen the bride at the wedding, in photographs and probably on video calls months before. What is left to show? In its old form Mooh Dikhai was a real first sight. Many women of the groom's household would not have been at the bride's home for the pheras, and the bride came veiled. Today it is no longer a first sight for most families.

What remains is the introduction itself. A wedding is too crowded for the bride to learn who anyone is. Mooh Dikhai sits her down in her new home and brings the women to her one by one, each with a name, a relationship and a gift. The record kept by the bhabhi is less about counting gifts than about knowing, a year later, which aunt gave her first necklace.

The gift matters too. In many families it is the first thing the bride owns that comes from her new home rather than her old one: a welcome made solid, and in older practice part of what she kept as her own.

A note on the ghunghat

The ghunghat, the bride covering her face with the end of her saree or chunari, is a custom and not part of any Vedic or Shastric rite. In some Agarwal families it is still kept at Mooh Dikhai and, for a while, in front of the elders of the house, especially in families from Rajasthan and Haryana. For those families it is a sign of respect towards the elders of the house, and many women who kept it see it that way.

In many other families it has been dropped, or survives only as a light veil lifted once at Mooh Dikhai and not worn again. Brides and their mothers-in-law usually settle it between them before the wedding. Both ways are common, and the ritual of the gift and the blessing works the same either way.

ROOTS **Community custom**

Mooh Dikhai is a North Indian household custom carried by the women of the family. It has no place in the Grihya Sutras or the pandit's manual, and no pandit is needed.

In some families

In most families today Mooh Dikhai is a single afternoon, sometimes folded into a small reception at home. In some it is spread over several days as relatives and neighbours drop in.

The groom's grandmother or mother usually gives the most significant piece, often family jewellery. Some families also have the groom give his bride a gift privately, which some call his own mooh dikhai; this varies widely.

Where the bride does not keep a ghunghat, the women simply bless her and give the gift; the name of the custom stays the same.

Your part in it

- **Bride:** Ask your sister-in-law to whisper each woman's name and relationship as she comes forward. Try to hold on to three or four names;

using them a week later goes a long way.

- **Bride:** If you are unsure about the ghunghat, ask your mother-in-law before the wedding, not on the day. The conversation is usually easier than brides expect.
- **Groom's sister or bhabhi:** Keep the list neat and give it to the bride afterwards. It is her record as much as the family's.

Ask your elders

1. *What did you receive at your own Mooh Dikhai, and from whom?*

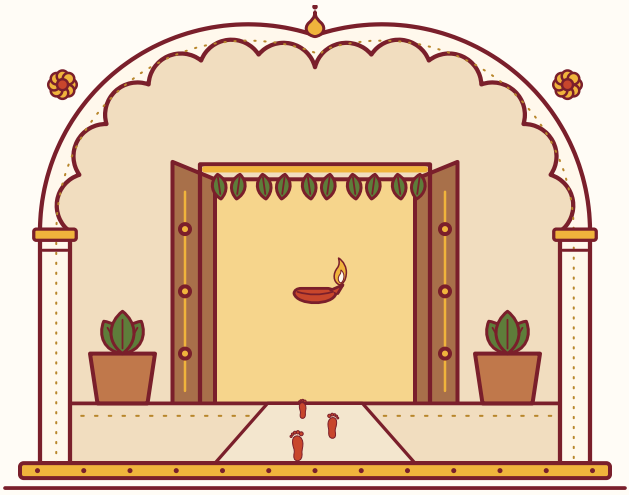
2. *Did the brides in our family keep a ghunghat, and when did that change?*

CHAPTER 28

Pagphera

पगफेरा

BRIDE GROOM



IN ONE MINUTE

Pagphera is the bride's first return to her parents' home after the wedding. Her brother comes to fetch her, she spends a day or a night with her own family, and then the groom comes to take her back, and is fed and given gifts. The word means the "turning of the feet". It shows the bride that her old home is still hers to come back to, and welcomes the groom as a son-in-law.

WHEN	Usually the day after the bride arrives, or after the Dhok
WHO LEADS	The bride's brother and parents; the groom for the return
WHERE	The bride's parents' home
THEME	Bonds between families; Moving home

What happens

1. The bride's brother, or a cousin standing in for him, goes to the groom's house to bring his sister home. He is welcomed there and offered something to eat.
2. The bride returns to her parents' home, often with sweets or a token from her in-laws. Her mother and the women of the house receive her at the door.
3. She spends the day, and in some families the night, with her own family. This is the first time she has been there since Vidai.
4. The groom comes later, sometimes with a sibling or friend, to take her back. He is given a full meal, often his favourite dishes, and gifts by her parents.
5. The couple return together to the groom's home, usually with sweets and gifts sent by the bride's family.

Why we do it

The bride left a day ago, cried at the gate, and now she is back for lunch. Why build a ritual around something that would happen anyway? Because of what Pagphera says to her, and to both families, at the point when the change is newest.

Vidai can feel like an ending. Pagphera, coming so soon after, corrects that feeling. The bride's parents' door is open to her as before; her brother is the one who comes to fetch her, so the bond with her natal family is shown in action as well as words. In an older world, where a new bride might not otherwise see her parents for months, this first visit mattered even more.

The groom's part matters as much. He comes to his in-laws' home not as the head of a baraat but alone or nearly so, to collect his wife. They feed and honour him in their own house, and his relationship with her family begins on ordinary ground. He becomes the jamai of the house here as much as at the mandap.

ROOTS **Community custom**

Pagphera is a North Indian family custom with no place in the Grihya Sutras or the pandit's manual. It is arranged by the two families, not by a priest.

In some families

The timing varies. In most Agarwal families Pagphera happens the day after the bride arrives; in some it waits until after the Dhok and Jaat at the Kuldevi, so that the new couple have first paid their respects in the groom's home. Some families fix the day by the calendar, avoiding days considered inauspicious for travel.

In some families the bride stays one night, in others only a few hours. Some families send the bride back with the groom on the same day; others keep her for a short stay before the groom comes.

When the wedding is held in a hotel or another city, Pagphera is often a short visit to wherever the bride's parents are staying, or is postponed until the couple next visit. Many families feel it should still be marked, even in a small way.

The gifts given to the groom differ too. In some families it is clothes and a coconut, in others cash in an envelope or a piece of silver. The bride usually goes back with sweets for her in-laws, so that she does not return empty-handed.

Your part in it

- **Bride:** Agree the day and time with both mothers before the wedding, so that nobody is waiting by the phone the morning after.
- **Groom:** Go yourself to bring her back, even if it would be easier to send a car. It is your first visit to your in-laws as their son-in-law, and they will have cooked for you.
- **Bride's brother:** This is your job. Go in person, greet her in-laws properly and bring your sister home.

- **Bride's parents:** Ask your daughter quietly what the groom likes to eat. The meal is the centre of his visit, and a dish chosen for him is noticed.

Ask your elders

1. *When does our family do Pagphera: the next day, or after the Dhok?*

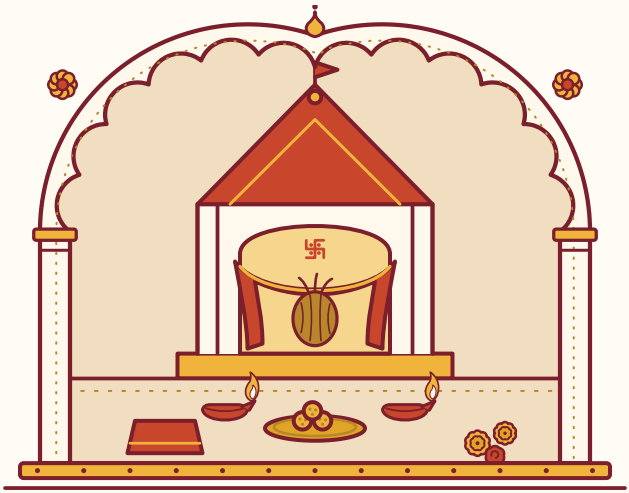
2. *Who fetched you for your own Pagphera, and what did your parents cook for the groom?*

CHAPTER 29

Dhok and Jaat at the Kuldevi

धोक, जात

BRIDE GROOM



IN ONE MINUTE

Dhok means bowing in reverence; Jaat is the formal visit of the newly married couple to the family's Kuldevi. For Agarwals the Kuldevi is Mahalakshmi, honoured at the family's own temple or the home shrine. The couple offer a coconut, a chunari and prasad, and ask for her blessing on their married life. It closes the wedding where the family's devotion lives, and introduces the bride to the deity of her new home.

WHEN	A day or a few days after the wedding; in some families later, at a fixed time of year
WHO LEADS	The groom's mother and the women of the family; the couple
WHERE	The home shrine or the family's Kuldevi temple
THEME	Blessing; Moving home

What happens

1. The couple dress in wedding or festive clothes, often with the bride's chunari from the wedding. The groom's mother usually goes with them, and other family members may join.
2. At the home shrine or temple, they do Dhok: bowing low, often touching the head to the ground before the Kuldevi.
3. They offer a coconut, a red chunari, sweets or prasad, and sometimes a lamp, according to the family's practice.
4. The bride, guided by her mother-in-law, is introduced to the family deity and to any gotra or village deities the family also honours.
5. The prasad is brought home and shared with the family. In some families a small meal follows.

Why we do it

After so many days of puja, why one more? The difference is in who is being thanked. Most of the wedding rites address deities common to all Hindu weddings, Ganesh and Agni above all. Jaat goes to the deity that belongs to this family in particular.

Every ritual in the week has been a request: for a smooth wedding, for protection, for blessing. Jaat is the return visit, made once the wedding has gone well. It is also the bride's introduction to the devotion of her new home. By custom a married woman is reckoned with her husband's family and its gotra from now on, and his family's Kuldevi becomes hers; this is why the Jaat matters more for her than for him.

That is why the same word, Jaat, is used again when the couple's first child is brought to the Kuldevi. The family takes each new member to the same place.

How old the Jaat is in its present form is not recorded. Its sense is clear enough: the wedding began with Ganesh installed in the home, and it ends with the couple bowing before the family's own goddess. Between the two lie all the other rites.

ROOTS **Community custom**

Dhok and Jaat are family custom with a strong devotional element. They are not in the Grihya Sutras; their form is kept by each family rather than by the pandit's manual.

In some families

For the Agarwal community as a whole the Kuldevi is Mahalakshmi. Some families also honour a village deity or a deity linked to their gotra, and visit that shrine too. Ask the family which applies.

Where the Jaat is done varies. Many families do it at the home shrine. Some travel to a family temple, sometimes in the ancestral village; a few make the visit to the Mahalakshmi temple at Agroha Dham. Some families do a Devi-devata puja with a few bricks set up as the deity's seat, together with a coconut, the day after the wedding; others visit a Hanuman temple.

The timing also differs. Some families do Jaat within a day or two; others wait for a particular festival or a convenient trip, which can be months later.

Your part in it

- **Bride:** Ask your mother-in-law the name and story of the family's Kuldevi or village deity before you go. Few new brides ask, and most mothers-in-law are glad to tell.
- **Groom:** Find out where the family's Jaat has traditionally been done. If it is in a distant village, ask whether a home Jaat now and a visit later is acceptable.
- **Groom's mother:** Tell the bride the family's own story of the Kuldevi while you are at the shrine. It is the best moment she will have to hear it.
- **Both:** Keep a note of the date. When your first child is taken for Jaat, someone will ask when yours was.

Ask your elders

1. *Where does our family do the Jaat after a wedding, and has the place changed over the generations?*

2. *Besides Mahalakshmi, is there a village or gotra deity our family honours, and what is its story?*

Common questions

The bride is not leaving her city, or the couple are moving into their own flat. Is there still a Vidai?

In most Agarwal families, yes. Vidai marks a change of belonging, not a change of address, so families keep it even when the new home is ten minutes away. Where the couple go straight to a flat of their own, many families still do the Griha Pravesh at the groom's parents' home first, and a small puja at the flat later.

Do we have to play the ring game?

No. The games are there to make the couple laugh and to bring the groom's family round them. If the couple are tired or shy, many families play one short round, or skip them. Untying the kangan dora is the one part most families keep, since the thread has to come off somehow, and the protection it gave is now no longer needed.

I do not want to wear a ghunghat. How do I raise it?

Raise it before the wedding, with your mother-in-law, and not on the day. Many families have already dropped it or keep only a light veil for Mooh Dikhai; others hold to it out of respect for their elders. A calm conversation in advance usually settles it, and the gifts and blessings of Mooh Dikhai are the same either way.

The wedding was in a hotel in another city. When do we do Pagphera?

Families handle this in different ways. Some do a short visit to wherever the bride's parents are staying before everyone flies home. Others wait until the couple's first visit to her parents' city and treat that as the Pagphera, with the brother fetching her and the groom fed and gifted when he comes. Ask both mothers and agree it in advance.

Our family's Kuldevi temple is in a village we have never visited. Is a home Jaat enough?

Many families do the Jaat at the home shrine soon after the wedding and make the trip to the family temple later, sometimes years later, sometimes combined with the first child's Jaat. The elders will know what your family has done before. Asking them is also how you learn where the temple is.

The bride is from another community. Do these rituals still apply?

They usually do. Griha Pravesh, Mooh Dikhai and the Jaat are how a bride from any background is welcomed into an Agarwal household and introduced to its people and its Kuldevi. Her own family may have different customs for Vidai and Pagphera, and many couples combine the two.

The whole wedding as one story

Seen one ritual at a time, an Agarwal wedding can look like a long list of separate customs, some solemn, some silly, each with its own thali. Seen from end to end, it tells a single story: two families agree to become one, ask for blessing, guard the couple through the dangerous days, bind themselves to each other, make the promise in front of witnesses, and move the bride from one home to another. The five themes in Part 0 are the chapters of that story, and they come roughly in that order.

Blessing

The wedding opens by asking. Ganesh is installed in both homes so that nothing goes wrong, and from that moment the house is "in wedding". The pots from the potter's wheel, the Ratijaga songs to the Kuldevi, the Pitar and the household deities, and the lagan patrika worshipped at the groom's home all ask the same thing: let this go well. The whole week ends where it began, with the couple's Dhok and Jaat at the Kuldevi, a blessing asked for at the start and acknowledged at the end.

Protection

Once the house is in wedding, the bride and groom are treated as exposed. The kangan dora goes on at Pithi, with its iron and cowrie. The bride and groom stay at home and are not left alone. The bhabhi puts kajal on the groom against nazar, he carries a sword to the Toran, and the neem twig is waved at the door. Families today may not believe in nazar as their grandparents did, but the care behind these acts is easy to read: for a few days, these two are the most precious people in the house.

Bonds between families

A large share of the week is about relatives finding their place. Tilak and Sagai open the exchange between the two sides. The mama arrives with the Mayra and the peela. The groom's family brings the Palla. At Milni, father meets father and mama meets mama. The brother fills the bride's hands with laja at the fire, the sisters hide shoes and block doors, and the salis tease the groom at Kanwar Kaleva. Every gift travels in a set direction and every relative has a job, and by the end each family knows exactly who it is now related to.

Consent and witness

At the centre of the week is the promise itself. The gotrochar names three generations on each side in front of everyone. The bride's parents entrust her at Kanyadaan, the groom takes her hand, and the Gathjoda ties them together. Then the pheras around Agni, the stone underfoot, and the seven steps of Saptapadi, which in the Grihya Sutras complete the marriage. Fire, family and the whole gathering are witnesses. The suhaag signs and the elders' blessings that follow make the change visible.

Moving home

The last part of the story is the move. The bride throws rice back towards her parents' house at Vidai and leaves its fortune there. At her new door she spills a pot of rice inwards and walks in on red footprints. The games break the ice, the women of the house come to see her at Mooh Dikhai, her brother fetches her for Pagphera so that her first home stays hers, and the couple bow together before the family's Kuldevi.

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 out a few, 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 the rituals mean more. Most of what helps is small: a few minutes of explanation, a printed card, a conversation with the pandit, one evening set aside for the elders. These suggestions come from the same idea that runs through this book. When people know what a ritual is for, they take part in it instead of waiting for it to end.

Read one paragraph before each ritual

Before a ritual starts, ask one person to read out a short explanation of what is about to happen and why. The "In one minute" box at the top of each chapter is written for exactly this. It takes less than a minute and changes how the room watches. A cousin who knows that the brother's laja at the pheras gives him a formal place in his sister's wedding will watch that moment differently.

Choose a reader who is comfortable speaking, and agree the timing with the pandit so the reading does not cut across his mantras.

Make an English guest card

At most weddings now some guests do not follow Hindi or Marwari: friends from college and work, partners from other communities, relatives who grew up abroad. A single card at each seat, or a page in the wedding booklet, can list the main rituals of the day in order with two lines on each. For the wedding night that usually means Toran, Milni, Varmala, Kanyadaan, Gathjoda, the pheras, Saptapadi and sindoor.

Keep it short and plain. Guests do not need the Sanskrit; they need to know when to stand, what the bride's brother is doing at the fire, and that the seven steps are the moment the marriage is complete.

Brief the pandit

Meet the pandit a week or so before the wedding, with both the bride's and the groom's side if possible. A few points are worth settling in advance:

- The three generations of names and the gotra on each side, for the gotrochar. Write them down clearly; this is the moment the family's lineage is said aloud.
- Your family's custom on the pheras: how many rounds the bride leads, whether a stone or sil is used, who gives the laja.
- Whether the couple would like him to explain the main mantras in Hindi or English as he goes. Many pandits do this willingly when asked, and it is often the single biggest change a couple can make.
- How long the ceremony will run, so that the family can plan the meal and the guests can plan their evening.
- Any adaptations the couple want, for example in the wording of Kanyadaan. 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 Ganesh sthapana or during the Ratijaga, when the grandparents, parents and older aunts tell the family's own versions of the rituals. How was the Mayra filled at their weddings? Which songs were sung? Who tied the Gathjoda? What did the toran look like?

Bring this book and use the "Ask your elders" questions at the end of each chapter as a starting point. Ask someone to write the answers in the spaces provided, and record the songs on a phone. These are the versions no book holds. It also gives the elders a real role in a wedding now often run by planners.

Give the young cousins named jobs

Young cousins who feel useful pay attention. Instead of "help out", give each of them a named job, with the chapter that explains it:

- Carrying the knife or iron for the bride or groom after the kangan dora is tied.
- Keeping the thali and the rice ready for Vidai.
- Reading the "In one minute" paragraph before each ritual.
- Holding the guest cards and showing friends from outside the community where to sit.
- Recording the elders' answers and songs.
- Setting up the milk, thali and ring for the games at Griha Pravesh.

Write the jobs on a sheet and pin it up in the house. A fourteen-year-old who has been told that the Vidai rice is her responsibility will be standing at the door with it on time.

Allow the family its own choices

Nothing here asks a family to do more rituals or longer ones. Some will shorten the week; some will drop a custom that no longer suits them; some will bring back one their grandparents remember. Whatever is kept, it is easier to do with attention when everyone present knows what it is for.

Glossary

Terms used in this book, with the spelling we have used and the word in Devanagari. Families pronounce and spell many of these differently; the spellings here are the ones used throughout the book.

Aarti आरती

Waving a lit lamp in circles before a deity or a person being honoured, such as the groom at the door.

Aashirvad आशीर्वाद

Blessing; the moment after the wedding when the couple touch the elders' feet and receive tokens (chapter 23).

Agni अग्नि

Fire, and the deity of fire, witness to the pheras.

Agrasen अग्रसेन

Maharaja Agrasen of Agroha, from whom tradition traces the Agarwal community.

Agroha अग्रोहा

The town in present-day Hisar district, Haryana, that tradition names as Agrasen's capital.

Akshat अक्षत

Unbroken rice grains, pressed onto a tilak as a sign of wholeness.

Alta आलता

Red dye for the feet, used for the bride's footprints at Griha Pravesh.

Ashmarohan अश्मारोहण

The bride stepping on, or pushing forward, a stone during the pheras, as a prayer for steadiness.

Banna, banni बन्ना, बन्नी

The groom and the bride in folk songs; banna-banni geet are the wedding songs that tease each side.

Banola बनोला

A meal hosted by a relative for the bride or groom in the days before the wedding.

Baraat बारात

The groom's wedding procession to the bride's venue.

Bateri Puja बटेरी पूजा

The name some Agarwal families give to the welcome puja of the groom (Var puja).

Bhaat भात

Another name for Mayra, the mama's gifts; bhaat nyotna is inviting the brothers, bhaat bharna is filling it.

Bhabhi भाभी

Brother's wife.

Bhairon भैरों

A protective deity sung to at Ratijaga.

Bichhiya बिछिया

Toe rings worn by a married woman.

Bindayak बिंदायक

A Rajasthani form of Vinayak; in some families a small boy who stands in for Ganesh through the pre-wedding rituals.

Bindori बिंदोरी

A procession of the dressed bride or groom through the locality before the wedding.

Bua बुआ

Father's sister.

Byah haath ब्याह हाथ

The state of a household once Ganesh is installed and the wedding has been taken in hand; also haath lagna.

Chaak चाक

The potter's wheel, worshipped at Chaak Puja.

Chooda चूड़ा

The set of bangles (lac in many Marwari families) given to the bride as a suhaag sign.

Chunari चुनरी

A red or patterned head cloth; offered to the Kuldevi and worn by the bride.

Dakshina दक्षिणा

The fee or offering given to the pandit.

Dhok धोक

Bowing low in reverence, especially before the Kuldevi after the wedding.

Dhruva ध्रुव

The Pole Star, shown to the bride with the star Arundhati as a sign of constancy.

Dhukav ढुकाव

The groom's arrival at the bride's door, with the Toran.

Durva दूर्वा

A sacred grass, used in sets of blades at Tel and in puja.

Gathjoda गठजोड़ा

The knot tying the bride's chunari to the groom's dupatta or patka before the pheras.

Ghoomar घूमर

The Rajasthani circle dance of women, danced at the Sangeet.

Ghudchadi घुड़चढ़ी

The groom mounting the mare to set out with the baraat.

Ghunghat घूँघट

The end of the saree or chunari drawn over a married woman's face; a custom, not a rite.

Godh Bharai गोद भराई

Filling the bride's lap with fruit, dry fruit, a coconut and cloth; not the baby shower of the same name.

Gotra गोत्र

Lineage traced through the father; Agarwals have eighteen (or seventeen and a half).

Gotrochar गोत्रोच्चार

The pandit's announcement of the gotra and three generations of ancestors on each side.

Granthi Bandhan ग्रंथि बंधन

The Sanskrit name for Gathjoda.

Griha Pravesh गृह प्रवेश

The bride's first entry into her husband's home.

Grihya Sutras गृह्यसूत्र

Ancient Sanskrit manuals of household rites, including marriage.

Haldi हल्दी

Turmeric; also the common modern name for Pithi.

Hathleva हथलेवा

The Marwari name for the joining of the couple's hands, with mehendi and a mauli thread.

Jaat जात

The formal visit of the new couple, or later a new child, to the Kuldevi.

Jamai जमाई

Son-in-law.

Janwasa जनवासा

The place where the baraat lodges before the wedding.

Jaymala जयमाला

Another name for Varmala.

Jholi झोली

The lap, or the end of an odhni held open as a bag, filled at Godh Bharai.

Jija जीजा

Sister's husband.

Joota Chupai जूता छुपाई

The game of the bride's sisters hiding the groom's shoes and bargaining for their return.

Jua khilai जुआ खिलाई

In Rajasthani usage, the games played by the couple at the groom's home.

Kajal काजल

Kohl, applied to the groom by his bhabhi against nazar.

Kalash कलश

A pot of water or rice, a sign of plenty, used at many rites.

Kalgi कलगी

A jewelled crest or plume fixed to the groom's safa.

Kangan dora कंगन डोरा

The protective wrist thread (kankan) tied on the bride and groom at Pithi and untied after the wedding.

Kanwar Kaleva कंवर कलेवा

The groom's meal at the bride's home after the pheras, with teasing by the salis.

Kanyadaan कन्यादान

The bride's parents placing her hand in the groom's, entrusting her to him.

Korath कोरथ

The formal invitation of the groom and the baraat by the bride's male relatives on the wedding day.

Kuldevi कुलदेवी
The family or clan goddess; for Agarwals, Mahalakshmi.

Kumkum कुमकुम
Red powder used for tilak and the bride's footprints.

Lagan lekhan लगन लेखन
The writing of the lagan patrika by the bride's family pandit; lagan vaachan is its reading at the groom's home.

Lagan patrika लगन पत्रिका
The letter fixing the wedding muhurat, written by the bride's family pandit (Lagan Lekhan) and sent to the groom's home; also called peeli chitthi.

Laja लाजा
Puffed rice, offered into the fire at Lajahoma.

Lajahoma लाजाहोम
The offering of puffed rice into the fire, poured into the bride's hands by her brother.

Madhuparka मधुपर्क
Honey mixed with curd, offered to the groom at Var puja.

Mahalakshmi महालक्ष्मी
The Kuldevi of the Agarwal community.

Mama मामा
Mother's brother.

Mandap मंडप
The canopy under which the wedding rites are performed.

Mangalsutra मंगलसूत्र
A necklace marking a married woman; adopted by Marwari families in recent generations.

Mauli मौली
Red and yellow sacred thread.

Mayra मायरा
The gifts brought by the mother's brothers for their sister's child's wedding.

Mehendi मेहंदी
Henna, applied to the bride's hands and feet.

Milni मिलनी
The ceremonial meeting and embrace of counterpart relatives from the two sides.

Mooh Dikhai मुँह दिखाई

"Showing the face": the groom's female relatives seeing the bride and giving gifts.

Mudda Tikka मुड्डा टीका

The Rajasthani name for Sagai, the groom's side visiting the bride.

Muhurat मुहूर्त

The auspicious time fixed for a rite.

Nath नथ

Nose ring given to the bride.

Nazar नज़र

The evil eye; harm believed to come from envious looks.

Neem jhadai नीम झड़ाई

The bride's sister sprinkling water on the groom with a neem twig.

Neg नेग

A customary gift of cash or kind claimed by a relative for a ritual role.

Nikasi निकासी

The groom's departure from home with the baraat.

Odhni ओढ़नी

A woman's head and shoulder cloth; the Rajasthani word for a dupatta or chunari.

Pagphera पगफेरा

The bride's first return to her parents' home after the wedding.

Palla Dastoor पल्ला दस्तूर

The groom's family bringing the bride's wedding outfit, jewellery and gifts.

Panigrahan पाणिग्रहण

The groom taking the bride's hand; the Vedic act of marriage.

Patka पटका

The groom's sash or scarf.

Peela पीला

The yellow odhni with a red border given to the mother by her natal family at Mayra.

Peeli chitthi पीली चिट्ठी

"The yellow letter": the lagan patrika.

Pehravani पहरावणी

Clothes and gifts given by the bride's family to the groom and his relatives.

Pheras फेरे

The rounds of the sacred fire made by the couple.

Pitar पितर

The family's ancestors.

Pithi पीठी

The paste of turmeric, gram flour and oil applied to the bride and groom.

Pomcha पोमचा

A yellow odhni, strictly the one given at childbirth; some families use the word for the peela.

Prasad प्रसाद

Food offered to a deity and then shared.

Ratijaga रातीजगा

The night vigil of women's songs before the wedding; also spelt Ratjaga.

Roka रोका

The informal agreement that ends the search for a match.

Roli रोली

Red powder of turmeric and lime, mixed with water for tilak.

Safa साफ़ा

The groom's turban.

Sagai सगाई

The engagement visit of the groom's side to the bride.

Sali साली

Wife's sister.

Samdhi समधी

The father of one's son-in-law or daughter-in-law.

Samela समेला

The meeting of the two sides; in some families, the welcome dinner.

Sankalp संकल्प

The spoken statement of intention that opens a rite, naming the time, the place and the people.

Saptapadi सप्तपदी

The seven steps taken together, completing the marriage.

Sehra सेहरा
The veil of flowers or strings hung from the groom's turban.

Shagun शगुन
An auspicious token gift, usually cash.

Sil सिल
A flat grinding stone, used for Ashmarohan in Marwari practice.

Sindoor सिंदूर
Vermilion applied in the bride's hair parting by the groom.

Solah shringar सोलह शृंगार
The sixteen adornments of a married woman, among them mehendi and sindoor.

Suhaag सुहाग
The married state of a woman; suhaag chinh are its signs.

Suhali सुहाली
A small fried disc of dough; in some families placed on the groom's head at Varmala.

Supari सुपारी
Betel nut, tied into the kangan dora and placed in the gathjoda knot.

Tel तेल
Oil; the anointing of the bride or groom with oil and curd (Telbaan).

Telbaan तेलबान
Another name for Tel, the anointing with oil.

Thali थाली
A metal plate.

Thamb Puja थंब पूजा
Worship of the post of the manda or mandap, done by some families around the wedding day.

Thapa थापा
Hand-painted auspicious marks on a wall or board, worshipped at Ratijaga.

Tilak तिलक
A mark on the forehead; also the ceremony of the bride's side honouring the groom.

Toran तोरण
The decorated hanging at the bride's door that the groom touches with a neem twig or sword.

Ubtan उबटन

A paste of gram flour and turmeric used to cleanse and brighten the skin; the substance of Pithi.

Vadhu prasthan वधू प्रस्थान

The bride's departure from her father's house, with mantras in the Grihya Sutras.

Vadhu pravesh वधू प्रवेश

The bride's entry into her new home, with mantras in the Grihya Sutras.

Var puja वर पूजा

The bride's father honouring the groom by washing his feet and offering madhuparka.

Varmala वरमाला

The exchange of garlands between bride and groom.

Vidai विदाई

The bride's farewell to her parents' home.

Vinayak विनायक

A name of Ganesh; Vinayak baithana is his installation in the home.

Sources and further reading

The chapters marked "Vedic rite" can be checked against the texts below. All are old enough to be freely available online in scanned editions, and Indian reprints are easy to find.

The Grihya Sutras

The Grihya Sutras are the ancient manuals of household rites, including marriage. They describe the madhuparka, the taking of the hand, the offering of laja, the stone, the rounds of the fire, the seven steps, the Pole Star and the bride's entry into her new home.

- Hermann Oldenberg (translator), *The Grihya-Sutras: Rules of Vedic Domestic Ceremonies, Part I*. Sacred Books of the East, volume 29, edited by F. Max Müller. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1886. Contains the Sankhayana, Ashvalayana, Paraskara and Khadira Grihya Sutras.
- Hermann Oldenberg (translator), *The Grihya-Sutras: Rules of Vedic Domestic Ceremonies, Part II*. Sacred Books of the East, volume 30, edited by F. Max Müller. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1892. Contains the Gobhila, Hiranyakeshin and Apastamba Grihya Sutras.

For the wedding rites, the most useful sections are the marriage chapters of the Paraskara Grihya Sutra (followed by many North Indian pandits), kanda I, kandikas 4 to 8, and the corresponding chapters of the Ashvalayana and Gobhila Grihya Sutras. The seven steps, the stone and the brother's offering of parched grain are in Paraskara I.7 and I.8. Oldenberg's wording of the seven steps is "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".

The Rigveda

- Rigveda, book 10, hymn 85: the wedding hymn of Surya, the oldest Indian text on marriage. Several verses are still recited at the taking of the hand. A widely available English version is Ralph T. H. Griffith (translator), *The Hymns of the Rigveda*, first published in Benares by E. J. Lazarus, 1889 to 1892, in four volumes.

Griffith's translation is over a century old and its English is dated, but it is complete and easy to find. Readers with Hindi or Sanskrit will find many modern editions with commentary.

The law

- The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955. Section 7 provides that a Hindu marriage may be solemnised according to the customary rites of either party, and that where those rites include saptapadi, the marriage is complete when the seventh step is taken.
- The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961.

Family memory

Most of the customs in this book are not written in any of these texts. The Mayra, the Ratijaga, the Toran, the Pithi, the games at the groom's door and the Jaat at the Kuldevi live in the women's songs and in family memory, passed from mother-in-law to daughter-in-law and from grandmother to grandchild. There is no book that holds them all, and each family's version is a little different.

That is why the "Ask your elders" questions matter. The answers your grandparents give are a primary source in their own right, and once they are 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.

A note on accuracy

Marwari wedding customs vary from family to family, between Agarwal families from Rajasthan, Haryana, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and eastern India, and between Agarwal and other Marwari communities. This book describes the most common Agarwal practice and notes variations where we know of them. It cannot describe every family's version, and where your family does something differently, your family's way is the right one for you.

Where the origin of a custom is not known, we have said so. Where a rite comes from the Grihya Sutras or the Rigveda, we have said that too, and the sources are listed so that readers can check. On the day itself, the pandit's own tradition prevails.

Family elders read this book before its release. Mistakes may still 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 or region your version comes from. Corrections will be considered for the next edition.