

Questions and Answers on Weddings and Marriage



What is the significance of the Tilak Ritual?

There are many important stages in a wedding and before the wedding proper certain pre-marriage ceremonies are performed and the wedding ceremony starts off with the Tilak Rites. The Tilak is an auspicious occasion and it is a mark of auspiciousness. It is also known as Vagdan that is vacchan ka dan, meaning a promise. Another name for Tilak is Phal-dan, gifting of fruits. The Tilak ceremony symbolizes and made official, giving the word of honour that the marriage is concretized by both the groom and bride's parties. The Tilak symbolizes that the boy is ready for marriage. It is applied on the forehead on all religious and ceremonial occasions to denote welcome. It is made of sandal-paste, sacred ash or kumkum. Tilak is applied at the Ajna Chakra – the space between the two eyebrows, at the spot of the Third Eye. It has a cooling effect and creates good vibrations.

The term Tilak is used to denote the rite performed a little before the marriage ceremony to finalize and to make official the betrothal. This ceremony is performed before the wedding one day - many weeks in advance, as the families find convenient due to time place and circumstances. The father or brother of the bride, accompanied by close relatives and friends, visits the home of the bridegroom. After the pujas and havan are performed, the Tilak Rite is performed by the bride's brother. The bride's brother is requested to wash the bridegroom's feet symbolically on a thali (tray). It is symbolical welcome of a guest of honour who is akin to God (Atithi devo bhava – Taittiriya Upanishad). This is the highest form of welcome. The bridegroom and the bride's brother are both sanctified.

Then the brides' brother imprints on the forehead of the bridegroom, with his thumb a roundish, yellow impression (called Tilak) as a mark of respect, honour and benediction; and presents to the Groom in a thalee (brass plate) 1 flower, 1 betel

leaf, 1 betel nut, few fruits, a few sticks of hurdi, a small bottle of mustard oil, 1 coconut, some sweets and money. All these items are symbols of auspiciousness, sent from the bride and her family with love and good wishes. Other gifts may also be given according to the families wishes. Also the Grooms family also sends on a thari to the brides family the following... 1 new yellow sari, 1 flower, 1 betel leaf, 1 betel nut, few fruits, a few sticks of hurdi, a small bottle of mustard oil, and some sweets. When the tilak is applied to his forehead by the girl's brother, it makes a formal acceptance suggesting that the boy is a fit match for the girl. From now on the boy is given a new status. He is known as Var, meaning the son has reached adulthood and is ready to assume new responsibilities and enter marriage hood. From now on he is known as the bridegroom.

From the Kriya Chintamani this verse is stated "Upavitam phalam Pushpam, Vasanti vividhani cha, Deyam variya varane, Kanya brata dwijen cha" "The brother of the bride and Brahmins should go to the house of the bridegroom and offer him Upavita, fruits, flowers, clothes, and so forth, on the occasion of Var Varna."

What is significance of Matkor?

Matkor is the rite of digging clay. This clay is symbolically used to make the Vedi (Bedi) or puja (prayer) place in which the kund or ritual basin is placed and in which nuptial fire is lit and around which the marriage vow is made. In Sanskrit, it is known as mridaharana and in Bhojpuri (the local language of the people of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh in India) as matkor. The word matkor is a compound of two words: (i) matti meaning earth or clay and (ii) kor meaning digging. Matkor is mentioned in the Paddhatis and the Sat Kriya Sara Dipika (used by Gaudiya Vaishnavas.)

So Matkor is prayers to Mother Earth and Mother Earth is none other than Bhumi devi. Her husband is Varaha deva who is one of the das (10) main avatars (incarnations) of Shree Krsna. And who is Shree Krishna's consort... She is none other than Srimati Radharani... So when you are performing Matkor puja you are performing worship to Srimati Radharani. At the beginning of every auspicious occasion, sprouts are used for mangal (auspicious) decoration. Be it for Katha or a Yajna (havan) etc., sprouts are germinated as a decorative feature. In the Paddhatis, it is mentioned: "On the ninth, seventh, fifth or third day before marriage in an auspicious moment, with music and dancing, earth (clay) should be fetched from a place to the north or east of the house, for growing sprouts, in a pot of clay or a basket of bamboo." This is a quotation from Gadadhar in the Paddhatis. Sprouts signify fertility, a new life. A bit of clay is dug to the accompaniment of music and singing (and/ or dancing) and is placed in a basket of bamboo known as dalya (a.k.a Soop). This dalya is placed on the head of brides/ bridegroom's sister or phouphou. It is performed at both homes. The ceremony of growing sprouts is not done nowadays in weddings, but the custom is retained in all kathas, such as Bhagavat Purana, Gita or Durga Pujas. Rice sprouts are cultivated in special clay all round the Vedi. Formerly the earth was dug near a sacred water source, a river, a well or a lake. This earth (soil) is kept under the kalash on which dhan is kept for parching. This is known as Lawa and will later on be used in the Laja Homa ceremony (during the wedding ceremony).

But Matkor is performed now-a-days just outside ones home in a clean place. A hoe is carried to dig the clay. This hoe is ritually purified. It is anointed with a paste of flour by five/seven married women of the family. The lady of the house performs the first action. The paste is applied on the hoe by each of the five/seven women at seven different places. This symbolizes the Sapta matrika, the seven mothers. The vermilion (sindhur) is smeared on the seven areas where the flour paste has been applied. Now the hoe has been sanctified and is ritually fit to dig the earth.

Five or seven women (including the Mother) should place wheat in the dalya (Soop), seven laddu should be placed in the dalya, and seven tikas (anointments) are made in the dalya with Sindoor. Then the bride's or bridegroom's paternal aunt, phouphou or younger sister carries the dalya on her head covered with a piece of red or yellow cloth. A group of women follows her to the clean place just outside the home. Once there an oil lamp is lighted on the lump of dug earth. A hole is dug in the ground and filled with water, simulating a holy river as a place of pilgrimage; worship is offered as in a temple. In South Africa this is normally done... Just in front of the hole where the water has been filled, place 7 betel leaves next to each other. On top of that place, 1 betel nut, a little sweet rice or some sweet, and a few boiled Channa (chick-pea) dhal. Dot each leaf with Sindhoor. In front of the betel leaves place 7 camphor and on top of that place some cloves. Light this and pray to the Sapta matrikas and Mother Earth for the long and successful marriage of the couple. The clay/soil from the now holy place of pilgrimage is then placed in the dalya, carried by the phouphou or sister on her head. As for the bride's or bridegroom's mother, she takes her share in the loose end of her sari, the anchara (a.k.a archara), and deposited in the kalash which is on the Vedi/bedi. The mother and the phouphou/sister are both followed back by a string of women who performed the ceremony while women sing appropriate folk songs.

What is significance of Mehendi?

When the bride has had her Hardi ritual and already taken her 'dinner', always keeping a steel penknife on her person, she is then joined by her friends. One of them, who is adept in applying the mehendi, starts the intricate and beautiful joy-giving art of applying the magical herb paste on the bride's hands, palms and feet. The paste is made of green leaves of the plant known by the same name and finely crushed on the stone grinder. Nowadays, ready-made mehendi powder is obtained from the market or imported from India. The mehendi is the traditional Hindu color of auspiciousness, joy and celebration. But more than that it is the bridal herb par excellence. It evokes a world of beauty, leisure and sensuous womanhood. It exudes tenderness, softness and a mystery as mysterious as the heart of a woman.

Mehendi is the Indian word for henna, a common garden shrub, dull to look. But this simple shrub provides one of the finishing touches to the bride's body on her wedding day and for maidens and married women alike on festive occasions. This ordinary looking plant produces a redness of the reddish-orange hue that is obtained when its leaves are crushed. Mehendi is associated with marriage. The custom of applying herbal paste comes down from the Vedic period. Red is a colour of auspiciousness, of good omen.

In ancient India, the beautifying of a person was raised to an art. The senses were explored in all their subtleties to suit the responses of paint, perfume and jewels. Vatsyayana in his work Kama Sutra has referred to the art of decorating the body with designs of different motifs. "In Sanskrit literature there is a reference of about fifteen different designs of mehendi such as the pushpakam (flower garland), makarkam (crocodile), vall (creeper), chakra (wheel), chitra (picture)" etc. It is a tradition in India, on marriage occasions for the young maidens as well as married women of the family to decorate their palms, finger-tips including the nails, the toes, the soles and sides of feet along with the bride, with intricate designs of mehendi dye. Beautiful, intricate designs are made with the mehendi on the palms as well as on the feet. The paste takes quite a few hours to dye. One has to keep applying oil or lemon juice on the dyed parts. The Rajasthani designs are the most intricate. The most auspicious design is the single circle on the palm denoting the Bindu (Circle). The peacock, mango leaf motifs are also traditional Hindu designs. It is said that the deeper and faster the colour of the mehendi, the greater will be the husband's love for the young bride! As red and saffron are the colours of celebration in the Hindu tradition, mehendi has come to occupy its rightful place in the sixteen processes of beauty techniques known as solah shringars.

Moreover, mehendi has a cooling effect. It has a distinct, delicate but subtle fragrance that is exuded for days after the dye has been applied. Applied in the hair, it gives it a resplendent glow and gloss after a hair bath, the best shampoo in fact! It is also believed that its aroma cancels the powerful pungent smells of onions and other condiments such as turmeric, garlic and ginger. And hence, when the bride prepares herself to assume her domestic responsibilities, she is not only beautifully bedecked and bejewelled, but also armed for the new chores awaiting her in her new life! Mehendi is also applied in India on the occasion of Holi, Diwali and exclusively by married women on the occasion of Karva Chauth when they perform a special rite for the longevity of their husbands, dressed in their bridal elegance. Mehendi, in the Hindu community, unlike the Muslim community, is applied to the hands and feet of the bride only and not to the groom.

What is the significance of the Imli Ghontai ritual.?

The Imli Ghontai ceremony is held on the wedding day before the barat (wedding party) leaves for the bride's residence. What is Imli Ghontai? From the number of books consulted, no authority seems to know exactly the origin of the term, which has nothing to do with the actual ritual. Imli means tamarind. Ghontai means to swallow. Tamarind is a well-known and common tree in the northeastern provinces of India, but what has this to do with the actual ritual is a matter of great puzzle. The bride at her residence and the bridegroom at his place sit in front of their mother in the maroh. The mother wears the beautifully decorated, crown, on her head that the son will soon wear. What takes place in the Imli Ghontai ceremony? The mother sitting on a pidha (a low stool), behind her son/daughter covers his/her eyes with her hands. This is symbolical of the mother seating her son/daughter in her lap. She covers his head/her head with her anchal (end portion of sari). The boy/girl too sits on a pidha or low stool between his/her mother's legs. The

groom's/brides maternal uncle (the Mama) offers a mango leaf to his nephew/niece. The bridegroom/bride bites a little piece of the stem of the mango leaf, which he/she then spits in his/her mother's cupped right hand stretched in front of him/her. The uncle pours a little water on this, in her cupped outstretched right hand. The mother makes a symbolical gesture of sipping this water. This water poured in the mother's right hand is symbolical and full of meaning. It is to remind her that it was this water that he had given to her at the time of her own wedding, many years ago. The maternal uncle gives a present (generally a sari but this is optional) to his sister on this occasion to congratulate her. The bridegroom's/bride's mother is shown a lot of affection. Not one, but all her brothers bring presents for her and if the brothers are no more or are absent, their wives replace them. After the Imli Ghontai ceremony, the pat mawri is removed from the mother's forehead and tied to the groom's.

What is the significance of SAMDHIMILAN ritual?

This is the welcome of the bridegroom and his party by the bride's father accomplishing his welcome by placing a lota water with mango leaves in the palm of the groom's father, applying a chandan dot and thereafter embracing each other chest to chest. Thereafter the groom's party moves forward to a point where the ladies perform the Parchan (arati).

What is significance of the Kanya-Danam / Sampradanam puja?

'Kanya' means virgin daughter or girl. 'Daan' means giving away. This is one of the most important parts of the marriage ceremony in which the bride's parents give their daughter away to the groom by entrusting their daughter to the groom. The guests in the wedding are now notified that the parents have willingly expressed their wish and consented by requesting the groom to accept their daughter as his bride. The dough or shank with a blade of kusha grass is placed in the bride's palm, the mother places her right palm under her daughter's palm the father places his right palm under his wife's palm and then the groom places his palm under the father's palm. Using his left hand, the groom holds an empty thari under his right palm. The bride's brother then slowly pours a lota which has in it water, turf, rice and chandan onto the dough on the bride's palm. The Punditji chants auspicious mantras and as soon as the groom indicates his acceptance the bride's parents place their daughter's right hand into the bridegroom's right hand. A mantra is chanted to solidify this. The bride's parents now bestow their blessings on both the bride and the groom and pray to the Lord to shower His choicest blessings on them. – From the Shukla Yajur Vedthee Vivaah Paddhati.

What is significance Granthee Bandhan?

This ritual emphasizes the permanence of the husband-wife relationship. The nuptial knot containing money, Durva (Kush grass), 1 hurdi stick, 1 small flower and 1 betel nut and 1 betel leaf is tied and reinforced by the chanting of Vedic mantras. The father's sister or mother's sister or in some gotras (family lineage) the father ties the knot joining them for life. Symbolically this Granthee is never opened.

What is significance of Paaneegrahana?

After the three offerings the Vara (Groom) holds the hands of his Vadhu (Bride) and a mantra is chanted which very briefly translated means “I take your hands my Kanya Vadhu (virgin bride) and may our relationship be eternal, may our love be on the increase. We are jointly entering, married life; let our hearts be united, let our aims be common; let us live for mutual benefit life long”

What is significance of the Shilarohanam?

‘Shila’ means stone. ‘Arohan’ means ascending or stepping upon. This is the stone-stepping ceremony. The bride places her right foot onto a grinding stone (Lorha). A married couple is likely to encounter many ups and downs, joys and sorrows, prosperity and adversity, sickness and health. In spite of difficulties facing them they are enjoined to remain steadfast and true to each other (just as a stone can weather any storm...the stone is rock steady so just like that the couple must remember to be just like the stone in any adversities). The bride shall place her right foot on the slab (stone). The priest recites a Mantra from the Atharva Veda (AV II.13.4). This is also quoted in the Sat Kriya Sara Dipika. The mantra in English means “May you be as steadfast as this stone. May you be the bringer of peace and look down upon those who look at you with base desires”.

What is significance of Agni Pradakshina?

This aspect of the ceremony and the one that follows, viz. Saptapadi (seven steps) - constitute the most important parts of the wedding, in as much as it legalizes the marriage according to Hindu custom and tradition. These two aspects of the marriage ceremony establish an indissoluble matrimonial bond between the couple. The bridegroom taking the palm of the bride into his hand circumambulates the havan kund with the bride leading. Going around the sacred fire holding hands represents the journey through life; which the couple vows to take each other’s company. The above is repeated twice more. In these three times the bride leads first. The Agni Parikrama mantra in English means “O Agnideva, let this relationship which has been formed, abide for all time. May we obey the divine laws and may we become energetic, spiritual and radiant by your grace”. During the first three rounds, God’s blessings and help are sought; loyalty to each other is emphasized and; a promise to keep in mind the well-being and care of the future children is made. In the fourth time the remainder of the Laajaa is offered into the fire by the Bride only. In the fourth (last) round (led by the groom) the groom promises that he will lead his life according to the tenets of the Hindu religion, namely Satya and Dharma or Truth and devotion to duty, and that he will always ensure that the bride can rely on him to carry out his family and religious duties.

In many Hindu weddings the couple circumambulates around the havan kund and Bedi 7 times and some 4 times only. Both are correct but why four times well this is explained in the Rig Veda. In the Rig Veda 10th Mandala Sookta 86 verses 40-42. “Soma first obtained the bride, the Gandharva obtained her next, Agni was your third husband; your fourth (husband) is born of man.” This is mentioned in the Sat Kriya Sara Dipika as well. When a female child is born she has three husbands

(protectors) in her life until she gets marriage to a mortal man. From birth to about 8 years she is “married” – protected by the Moon-god (Chandradeva / Somadeva). At around 8 years she is handed to Gandharva Deva and he protects her until she is around 16 years. At 16 years she is handed to Agni Deva and Agni deva protects her until she is married. So when she circumambulates the havan kund and Bedi the first time this is for her first “husband” Chandradeva, the 2nd round for Gandharva Deva and the 3rd round for Agni Deva. So this is why she leads first in these three rounds. On the fourth round Agni deva hands her over to her soon-to-be-husband for protection and progeny. And the groom now leads her on the fourth time. In some families the Groom leads for 4 rounds making it 7 circumambulation in total.

What is Significance of the Saptapadi ritual.?

Then both shall stand facing the northerly direction. Seven kusha grasses are placed in equal distance to each other. In taking these seven steps, the right foot of the bride ONLY (which is placed on the kusha grass) shall always lead and the left foot be brought forward in line with it.

The groom should chant: -

Step 1: - As Vishnu, I am leading you into the first part of life; may we be adequately provided with food. The bride vows: to serve the whole household with food.

Step 2: - I lead you into the second sphere. May we be endowed with both physical and spiritual strength. The bride vows: I will always be kind; will bear adversity with courage and patience and reap all pleasure with you.

Step 3: - I lead you into the third sphere: may we be equipped with material means. The bride vows: I shall regard only you as my husband and shall enjoy married life together.

Step 4: - I lead you into the fourth sphere: may we experience peace and happiness, with freedom from sickness and disease. The bride vows to use attire and adornment to please her husband.

Step 5: - I lead you into the fifth sphere: may we show kindness to all creatures, including animals.

Step 6: - I lead you into the sixth sphere: may we enjoy the pleasure that God blesses us with in all season. The Bride vows: I shall always accompany you when you proceed to any prayer, havan or charitable acts.

Step 7: - Taking the seven steps together, we have become eternal companions in our life's journey. May our love be eternal. As husband and wife let us serve not only our family but also our nation and our Dharma. Let us abide in the eternal bond of love.

After the Seven steps the couple chants this mantra together “Be my companion for life, fixed in seven vows. May I attain companionship with you. Do not break this bond.”

What is the significance of the Rings and Mangal Sutra?

Rings are not Vedic based rather is an infiltration from the west. I don't give much importance to the rings but because many insist I allow it. But if one wears a ring it should be in the right ring finger and NOT in the left ring finger. No ornaments should be worn in our left fingers. The left hand has just one purpose and that's to clean ourselves after evacuating. Wearing esp. gold which is dear to the devas is

tantamount to sin... The mangal sutra is an auspicious necklace. And is worn by women from the Maharashtrian area of India i.e. west India but these days it has become custom to wear this. Women from North, Central, and East Indian use Sindoor to signify that they are married. Women from West Indian use the mangal sutra to signify they are married and women from South India use the Thali to signify they are married so you see whichever you use it signifies that you are married.

The Sindhoor represents Shree Shree Lakshmi -Narayana.

The Mangal Sutra represents Shree Shree Rukmini-Krsna.

The Thali represents Shree Shree Parvati-Shiva.

What is the significance Sindhoor Daan?

This part of the wedding is the most eagerly anticipated part of the wedding. Here the groom first offers the sindhur three times to Lord Ganesh and then seven times to Mother Earth and once that is completed then he fills her maang (center part of a ladies head) with Sindoor. He places six dots on the bride's middle part from the front to the back, then he connects the dots making a continuous line and then places the 7th dot on her forehead. The Sindhoor mantra in English means "O Deva, presiding over this marriage ceremony kindly look upon this bride, with kindness. Let them forever live with each other. May they be blessed with good offspring". The Sindhoor ritual in the marriage ceremony has been watered down quite a bit with the advent of Bollywood. I am rather old fashioned when it comes to certain things and one of them is the Sindhoor ritual. I don't allow the audience or anyone to view when the groom applies the Sindhoor to the bride. This is a very very very private moment shared only between the bride and groom. Ask yourself this question would you like people to see what you and your spouse are doing intimately. Well this is the same thing. That's why I request it be blocked by two ladies from everyone to view. In the older days the couple was covered with a huge sheet of cloth nowadays its one of the biggest attraction scenes. And it has in many ways become a joke.

What is the significance of the Pao/Pau Puja?

Where the both sides give their gifts is done now. In many weddings its done right after the Kanya daan puja but personally I don't allow it then as this part generally takes too long and the wedding thereafter is on the back foot trying to catch up with time... Presentations are made to the bridal couple by the bride's parents and other female members of the bride's family. These presentations are in the form of the tray's laden with fruit. This indicates the fusion of two hearts and the union of the two families.

What is the significance of the turf, banana tree and mango leaves?

The turf, banana tree and mango leaves are considered items of auspiciousness, sacred plants used in worship, being green and fresh they symbolize life and prosperity, they are durable plants characterized by profile growth. All these qualities accord with various mantra, which entreat for growth, prosperity, abundance, progress and so forth in married life.

What is the significance of the stone in the wedding ceremony?

'Shila' means stone. 'Arohan' means ascending or stepping upon. This is the stone-stepping ceremony. The bride places her right foot onto a grinding stone (Lorha). A married couple is likely to encounter many ups and downs, joys and sorrows, prosperity and adversity, sickness and health. In spite of difficulties facing them they are enjoined to remain steadfast and true to each other (just as a stone can weather any storm...the stone is rock steady so just like that the couple must remember to be just like the stone in any adversities). The bride shall place her right foot on the slab (stone). The priest recites a Mantra from the Atharva Veda (AV II.13.4). This is also quoted in the Sat Kriya Sara Dipika. The mantra in English means "May you be as steadfast as this stone. May you be the bringer of peace and look down upon those who look at you with base desires".

What is the significance of the kangan tied on the wrists after the Hardi ceremony?

This is tied on the wrist of the bride and groom after the performance of the Hardi ceremony. Nine kanganas are prepared earlier on. The kanganas are tied with chanting of the appropriate mantras which is for subtle protection and benediction not only for the smooth, successful progress of the entire ceremony but also for the continuation of their wedded life without interruption. The nine are tied as follows 1) On the groom's right hand wrist and the bride's left hand wrist 2) The Stool 3/4) The Sil and Lodha 5/6) The Dal Ghontni (wooden cream churner) 7/8) The Onkri-Musal - wooden pestle and mortar 9) The Harish...

Why does the groom's mother wear his Maura (crown/turban)?

In the actual ritual, which takes place just before the departure of the groom to the hall, the groom's mother seated immediately behind, wears the crown; then she transfers it to the head of her son who is leaving home to get married. This act is reminiscent of the familiar proverb, "uneasy lies the head that bears the crown:.. For all these years, since childhood, the mother has played an important role in the life of her son. But now, by this simple gesture, she emphatically transfers to him the responsibilities, on the entry of her son to the life of a householder.

Question:- Can a woman's 2nd husband apply Sindhoor in her maang (centre part).

Answer:- Well this should not occur because the maang is only filled once in her lifetime. There of course are no shastric proof of applying the Sindhoor again neither does it say you cant, due to the fact one in an ideal situation is supposed to be married just once... of course most don't live in an ideal situation these days. But personally this do not seem correct to me applying the Sindhoor again... what should be done is the 2nd husband just dots her third eye region with Sindhoor.

Question:- Can Hardi/Nelengu Prayers be performed again for the second time in the 2nd marriage?

Answer:- Yes this should be performed as the application of Hardi is for the protection and beautification of the bride or groom.

Question:- Can Kanya Dhan be performed again at the wedding ceremony?

Answer:- No this is a once off for a woman as she is only given once away and that was in the first marriage. And Kanya means giving away a virgin bride... if she is marrying the second time then its highly unlikely she is a virgin...

References:- Some Q n A 's are from the booklet called Vivaha Sankar – Wedding (by SLNT – Mobeni Heights)

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