

Step By Step Explanation of the Pre-Wedding Rituals.

Many have requested a step-by step overview of a Hindu wedding for some time now but please remember that this is just a gist of the most important things in a wedding ceremony... to explain everything in detail this article will run over many pages ...There are so many different types of weddings mentioned in our sastras that its not possible at this point in time to explain them but we shall try in this rendition to do our best...

The Vivah Samskara or a wedding ceremony is the biggest, most elaborate, magnificent, spectacular and impressive of all the life cycle rituals in a Hindu's life. When it comes to Hindu weddings one can write a lengthy encyclopedia of one's family traditions. It seems everybody is an expert. I am not a fan of tradition as it is mainly steeped in fear and confusion. Hence we shall explain the most important parts on the Hindu wedding based on sastras.

Pre-marriage ceremonies

(Performed at their respective place of residence)

Having previously recited the Vedic Mantras in adoration of the Lord, invoking His blessings (Swasti Vachana) and prayed for peace on earth and goodwill to all beings (Shanti Prakarana) and having performed the usual Homa (Sacred fire ceremony), the bride and the groom shall, at the appointed time, enter the altar (Vedi), specially erected for the performance of their marriage ceremony.

Pre-Marriage Ceremonies and Preparations

Tilak:- 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 bride's 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 bride's 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.”

After the tilak ceremony is over and the samdhibhais (sandhi = to join, bhai = brother) have embraced each other, all the guests are taken to the reception area (hall or pavilion) where tea and snacks await them. The two families and parties mingle with each other. This is an opportunity for the two families to socialize. After the reception the girl’s party goes back home and then the other prayers are to be performed.

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

धान 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.

Matkor Song

Outhou outhou matiya ho
Piyari se piyari ho
Tohar bina kaissan biyah
Ehi matiya ke
Vediya bana wele ho
Tohar bina kaissan biyah

“O Earth, arise. Take the yellow colour as (when the turmeric dyed flour paste is applied) as an auspicious sign. How can the marriage take place without your presence? After all it is with this Earth only that the wedding Vedi will be made for the nuptial Fire. How is the wedding possible without you?”

Harish Gadhana: Harish is a compound word meaning God. It is a symbol of Lord Vishnu. The rite of fixing the Harish is known as Harish Gadhana. Hari – a term for Lord Vishnu.

Ish – Where God is.

Hari-Ish means in Sanskrit where God abides. What the Harish is made of?

1. A small branch of mango plant/banana tree
2. A bamboo pole with some leaves
3. Some Kush strands.

The three above named plants, the mango/banana, the bamboo and the Kush, are noted for their auspiciousness, growth, prosperity, abundance and progress in the Hindu tradition.

Mango represents prosperity, progress; always moving forward. The bamboo known as bans (also vans) is symbolical of fertility. As for the Kush, it is a very 'clean', pure and brittle grass. The Harish delimits the sacred space of the nuptial ceremony. It is under the Harish that the gods and goddesses and mainly Lord Vishnu will be invited to take their asanas (seat).

The Harish is fixed in the centre of the chowka/bedi (the area where the prayers are going to take place) by five married men of the kul (family lineage) if possible i.e., the grandfather, father, the brother, paternal uncles etc. The Harish is fixed with the help of Sanskrit mantras chanted by the family priest, just a little before the Hardi ceremony takes place. The Harish Gadhana ceremony takes place after the matkor.



After the Harish is thus fixed on the chowka, five married women of the family, apply the following ingredients to it:

1. **Hardi (Turmeric)** for auspiciousness
2. **Dahi (Curd/Yogurt)** for brightness in life
3. **Ata (Paste of flour)** for firmness
4. **Sindhur (Vermilion)** a symbol of Suhag; sign of being married and for the Saptamatrika (the 7 mothers) as well.

After that the mother and six other ladies pour water into the kalsa...and she lights the lamp thereafter.

Kalash Sthapana:- The Kalash or pitcher is symbolical of the universe and space. It represents 'the body' of God. According to the Karma Kanda and the ancient Rishis, the Sthapana or 'installation' of the kalash in all religious functions means that the Devas prevail here. "Hiranya garbha sama varta tagre" is sung in the Vedas – "Here, the devas prevail."

Panch palav, five leaves are placed on top of the kalash (in the mouth of the kalash) by the priest. These should be leaves of Peepal, Var, Palash, Gular, Aam. If these are not available, then the traditional and common mango leaves are used. The coconut is placed on the pitcher containing the five leaves as specified above. A yellow or red piece of cloth is kept on it. One should install either gold, silver, copper or brass pitcher. As these may not always be available, then an earthen one is a good substitute. The ceremonial pitcher is filled with water by five married men or women from the family. Water as an element of life signifies vitality. It gives life to the kalash. Jal or water signifies there is life. "Praana he". Apa Pranah is mentioned in the Vedas. Apa means water i.e., water of life. Vayu, air is already present. The seed of air is water. After the pitcher is ceremoniously filled, it is placed by five persons in the maroh. These five persons include the priest, the bride/ bridegroom at their respective places, the parents. Then an earthen oil lamp is kept lit on this earthen plate over the pitcher, near the Harish. This lamp is to be kept burning throughout the marriage ceremony, day and night till the bride arrives at her in-laws' house (that is if this possible. If not try your best). It symbolizes Mother Lakshmi, goddess of light and prosperity. The lady of the house or her assistants, have to keep vigil throughout the night to see that oil/ghee is not lacking in the lamp and that there is no danger of the lamp being extinguished.

Other Ritual Materials:- After the kalash sthapana, other utensils of domestic utility are placed near the Harish in the maroh. These are: The Sil and Lodha (grinding stone), the Dal Ghontni (wooden cream churner), the Onkri-Musal (wooden pestle and mortar), The senura (The Vermilion box), and a lota of water.

Homa:- After the various devis and devas have been ceremoniously invited to take their respective seats to grace the site of the nuptial ceremony with all due respect, prayers and offerings, the homa is performed. The fire is lighted in the havan kund or sacrificial basin placed in the Vedi made from the clay, brought symbolically during the matkor ceremony. The homa is the symbolical sacrifice performed during the pre-wedding and also during the main wedding ceremonials.

Hardi (Haridra Lepana):- There is an undeniable sanctity attached to the Hardi ceremony. The Hardi ceremony is the application of turmeric paste on the bride and the groom at their respective homes. The word 'Hardi' in Bhojpuri means turmeric. It is known as haldi in Hindi from the word Halad in Sanskrit. The term is given also to the ceremony of applying the turmeric paste. The custom is mentioned in ancient marriage manuals and is known as 'Haridra Lepana' (applying or smearing with turmeric).



Smearing the bride and groom with an ointment of turmeric root paste and mustard oil is an old Indian tradition popular in all Indian states. By virtue of its yellow colour, turmeric stands as a spiritual plant giving a divine glow. Hurdee paste smeared on the face and body is noted for its lasting and penetrative properties, leaving a bright hue. Yellow is also an auspicious colour.

There are four main reasons for applying the Hardi at the time of marriage.

1. It is the tradition of the kul (family-lineage). The kul devas and devis are worshipped with turmeric.
2. The time of marriage is a very defining period. There is a change in person's life cycle. To ensure a safe passage into the new stage, the Hardi is applied to protect the bride/bridegroom against evil forces and strengthen her/him in the face of challenges in the Grihasthashram (householder's life). The Vedic mantras that are pronounced, help to create the right atmosphere and strengthen the bride and groom.
3. According to the Ayurvedic tradition – by consuming Hardi in the food that you eat keeps away diseases.
4. By virtue of its yellow colour, turmeric when applied on the bride or the groom gives a divine glow. When the next day comes they will look radiant and so handsome/beautiful. The Hardi is a beautifying process that beats even the modern cosmetics system. The Hardi colour gives a special golden glow and luster to the body of the bride/bridegroom that defies description.

The Hardi ceremony is usually held on Saturday nights after the Homa (Havan) is performed. The turmeric paste is first offered to the Harish by the officiating priest so that its protective force is further strengthened with the recitation of sacred formulae.

The Hardi used at the girl's and the boy's place is the same that was mixed and separated during the tilak ceremony. Each party separates the Hurdi roots in the Lagan Kholai (lagan kholna) ceremony in which five married women sort out the Hardi and grass. The boy's and girl's Bua (phoupous) (father's sister) at their respective place make a paste of the Hardi and mustard oil. The mustard oil enables the Hardi to penetrate deeper in the skin pores. The oil gives warmth and strength when rubbed on the skin and also gives a shine.

The ground Hardi is initially kept in a katori (a small shallow steel bowl) at the foot of the Harish in the maroh over the chowka. In the Hindu tradition, even the beautifying process needs the blessing of the Devi's and Deva's. The officiating priest takes a bunch of the grass, applies it to the katori full of turmeric paste, touches the Harish with it before applying it to the eight limbs of the bride's/bridegroom's body, the head and the heart. These eight limbs are the shoulders, the knees, the feet and the hands. The turf is noted for its auspiciousness, growth, prosperity, abundance and progress in the Hindu tradition.

It is the officiating priest who has the honour of applying the Hardi first of all, and then the others follow suit, led by the bride's/groom's father on behalf of the men-folk and the bride's/groom's mother on behalf of the womenfolk.

The Hardi ceremony is an occasion for much teasing. The atmosphere is a relaxed and pleasurable one. Overzealous friends and relatives rub an overdose of the turmeric paste on the face of the bride/bridegroom. The bride and bridegroom sitting quietly and patiently have no say in the matter. They have to bear all the pranks and mischief of their relatives and friends with a smile.

In different areas in India only married men and women are allowed to apply the Hardi on the bride/bridegroom but in other areas even unmarried men/girls that are close relatives apply the Hardi. So this is a grey area and can be performed accordingly to the family wishes.

How is the Hardi applied? After the priest has applied the Hardi on the bride/bridegroom, he is followed one by one by the paternal male relatives, and the maternal male relatives beginning with the grandfather, father, brothers, brothers-in-law, uncles, nephews, cousins and friends. After the last of the male members has applied the Hardi, it is the turn of the female members of the family to do so, led by the bride's/bridegroom's mother. This ceremony is accompanied by the singing of Hardi songs adding the name and relationship of each person applying the Hardi. But this should be done in groups of 5 or 7 men/ladies.

“Pehle hardi more baba
Chadhawe lan...
Pache sajan sab log
Pehle hardiya mere

Chacha chadhawe lan
Bhaiya chadhawe lan...
Moswa chadhawe lan...
Pache sajan sab log..."

"First of all my father will apply the Hardi... first of all my uncle (father's brother), first of all my uncle (mowsa; mother's sister's husband), first of all my brother will apply the Hardi...then all others will do so"

No one is allowed in the maroh with his/her shoes on. The place is sacred and has been duly sanctified. In applying the Hardi, the fervent desire or wish of one and all is to bless the bride/groom with all the happiness that can be conjured, in the future conjugal life. A special feeling is created in the mind with the application of Hardi, strengthened by the sacred mantras chanted a little while earlier.

The dub grass used in applying the Hardi is also of some significance. This grass grows almost anywhere, is lush green and spreads quickly. It is a symbol of prosperity. It is strong and stands for steadfastness. A bunch of dub grass is unbreakable. And the marriage too is expected to be as durable as the dub grass.

Kangan:- This is tied on the wrist during the performance of the "Huldi". Eight kanganas have also been tied on items used in the wedding ceremony. The kanganas tied with the chanting of mantras is for protection and benediction for the smooth and successful progress of the prayers.

Chumawan/Chumawal:- When all the relatives and close friends have applied the Hardi to the bride/groom at their respective places, five or seven married women of the family, perform the chumawan/chumawal rite with grains of rice. How this is performed is like this... after the first round of Hardi is applied then the Chumawal is performed. 5 or 7 ladies are to perform this rite... Place a handful of uncooked rice in the palms of the bride/groom. On top of that place a gold ring and a whole laddu. . Now each other one by one takes the two bunches grass and then take a little rice in the tips of their fingers and then start from the feet, knees, elbows, shoulders and then drop the rest in the archara of the mother of the bride/groom who stands behind the bride/groom. After the 5 or 7 ladies have done this, the mother of the bride/groom turns the lota of water three times and then drops a little on the ground and then the mother carrying the lota of sacred water leads her daughter/son back to the kohbar. All along the way, she sprinkles water from the copper/steel vessel with mango

leaves to purify her daughter's/son's path and remove all obstacles. The daughter/son now drops the rest of the rice onto a clean place....

Now the second set of 5 or 7 ladies applies the Hardi.... Do note that the first set of ladies that applied the Hardi can apply the Hardi again in the 3rd and 5th round... The ladies that applied the Hardi in the 2nd round can apply the Hardi in the 4th and 6th round.... The same applies to the Chumawal... The 7th Hardi and Chumawal is performed the next morning.

In the kohbar, the bride/groom soaked in Hardi from head to toe with golden glow, first does gor lago (bow down) to the kul devta/devi or the Lakshmi (the oil lamp in the corner). This lamp, like the one near the Harish in the maroh, will be kept burning until the wedding is over.

After the puja, the bride/groom stay in the kohbar. They do not move around or out of the kohbar unattended. They are given a steel knife or something sharp to wear on the body all the time. It is a protective device and wards off evil forces. The bride/groom in fact are to lead a life of asceticism observing continence, wearing simple clothes (they do not change their turmeric dyed clothes) and no jewelery etc. They sleep on the floor, on a mat. Formerly this was made of Kush grass. They eat vegetarian meals and in some families only sweet food. They are to make all these observances so as to be able to enter the new life with full vigor and a pure heart, mind and body.

Mehendi - Its significance:- 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 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.

Lawa Bhoonjana:- In the early morning of the main marriage rites this rice is parched. This ceremony is known as the lawa bhoonjana. The daughters of the bride's or bridegroom's family - sister of the bride, bridegroom or father's sister – phouphou are eligible for the ceremony. After the parching of dhan, they get neg or token money or a gift of sari. The parched unhusked rice is known as lawa or laja and is used in the main wedding rites known as Laja Homa. While the dhan is being parched, women sing songs. But these days it's performed right after the Hardi puja...

Hardi on the Wedding Day:- Many years back, Hardi used to be applied for several days. The modern bride or bridegroom may not be prepared to sit for, say a whole week, soaked in Hardi in the kohbar. Therefore, the custom has been adjusted to the needs of a changing society. But the number has been symbolically retained. On the early morning of the actual wedding day, Hardi is applied seven times by five married women to the bride and groom at their respective places before they have

the ritual bath. Much teasing takes place at this time between the family members of both sexes while applying the Hardi and between the bridegroom and his bhabhis for example. This flexibility at the time of weddings in the rigid social rules of former times prevailing in Hindu families, allows for multiple pranks, teasing and intermingling between members of the opposite sex, for example between the devars (husband's younger brother) and the bhabhis (elder brother's wife) and the behnois (sister's husband) and their salis (wife's sister).

Pokhra - The Nuptial Bath:- Bath is an act of purification for the Hindus. The bride and bridegroom at their respective places have their sacred nuptial bath before stepping into the married life. This is no ordinary bath.

Imli Ghontai:- 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.

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.

He is now ready for proceeding to the bride's residence. The elderly ladies of the family and neighborhood sing songs on the occasion. Special references are made to the bond that exists between the mother and her brother.

Now the family goes to their respective prayer place and pray to the Lord and the Devi's and Devas and their Pitrs for their blessings and that the wedding proper be successful. Now the respective parties are ready to leave for the hall...

I really want to thank my late Gurudevji Punditji H. R. Maharaja of Shree Lakshmi Narayana Mandir (of Mobeni Heights, Durban) whose teachings made this article possible.

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Compiled for the upliftment of Sanathan Dharma
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