

Hindu Marriage Rituals in Kashmir

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Wedding Ceremony in India is different in different parts of the country. Kashmiri wedding is one amongst the many Indian wedding rituals and customs that is followed by the people of Kashmir. Traditionally rules of marriage govern the social life. Brahmins, Rājputs, Mahajans (Business community), Jats, Kyomil (Peasants) and Scheduled Castes all traditionally follow caste endogamy. Owing the process of the selection of bride and groom, the background, status, reputation and moral character of the family, etc. play significant role. One of the most important Kashmiri wedding rituals and customs is the horoscope matching of the would be bride and groom. This follows *Kasamdary*. The literal meaning of it is a formal commitment on the part of both the girl's and boy's families to the marriage. Elderly persons from both the girl's and boy's families meet and exchange flowers to celebrate the new relationship. Once all these are settled, the marriage date is proposed by the bride's parents. After agreement from both sides, the family Purohit (goor) fixes the date of wedding. On this day, the maidservant or sister of the boy's family presents gifts to would be bride. After exchanging the rings the maidservant or sister of the groom feed cream and dry fruits to the bride with a silver spoon. Both families hold a music session (vanwun etc) in the evening, wherein Kashmiri marriage and folk songs are sung. The marriage takes place usually either in the morning or night.

Pre- Wedding Rituals

In the pre-wedding rituals, *Vana* or a formal commitment of the marriage ceremony takes place in front of a deity. According to the

tradition, the elderly persons of both sides meet in temple and exchange flowers which are followed by a sumptuous food arranged and served by the bride's family. The eldest aunt of both girl and boy prepare *var* (a special rice pudding) which is distributed among the neighbours and relatives. The girl's family sends cash, dry fruits and a pot containing *nabad* (misri) to the boy's house.

After *Vans*, *Livun* takes place. It is the traditional cleansing of the house before marriage. This is the day when *waza* (family chef) arrives to make necessary arrangements for the preparation of the feast throughout the marriage ceremony. *Wasa* includes the whole paraphernalia to be necessary for cooking the meals. The ingredients spices, rice, ghee etc are supplied by the host.

Few days before the marriage ceremony, music sessions (*Wanwun*) are held every evening by the family/members and friends at the house of both, bride and the groom. The relatives and neighbours participate in these sessions and make them lively with such items as dance, mimicry, mime and solo singing. Then comes *manziraat*. On the day of *manziraat* ceremony, the decoration of the doors of the houses of the girl and boy takes place. Later, in the evening, the bride follows a bathing ritual. After bath, the bride's hands and feet are decorated with *Mainz* or *henna* by her eldest aunt. *Bariyani* are cooked to flag off the wedding preparations in both houses.

So far as sending of *thals* is concerned, it takes place two or three days before the wedding. Bride's family sends out 51 *thals* to the groom's house. The *thals* are large plates of sweets, fruits and dry fruits, Khajur (dates), ghee, sugar and gota (special mixture made during wedding).

Then after this, *Poshi* – gund (flowers) banquet comes. Two days before the wedding, groom's family sends the bride flowers, jewellery and tinsel, which girl adorns as a symbol of her first *shingar*. *Mehendi* is also one of the pre-wedding rituals which take place

one or two days before marriage ceremony. First there is a *Puja* and after that the girl's hands and feet are decorated by henna. *Mehendi* is also applied on the groom's hands as a *shagun*. On the day of the manzirat the doors of the two concerned households are decorated with flowers and other sacred geometric forms.

Ditigun is also pre-marriage ritual in Kashmir. It takes place on the morning of the day of the marriage ceremony. The elders of the both families apply a paste of curd, *besan* and saffron to the bride and groom's heads and after that bride and groom take bath. This is followed by *pooja*. After this *pooja*, the bride, groom and their parents observe a fast till the marriage is over. The parents of the bride give her jewellery, cloths, household items, etc. An essential item of the jewellery is the *Dedijhur*, which is the sign of a married Kashmiri woman.

The next ritual is *Sanimaira*, The *Samsaru* is sent by the family of the boy to girl. It consists of cosmetics, a small mirror, *sindoor*, a shawl and special gift for the bride.

The *Devgon* is a *Havan* ceremony. It marks the transition of both the girl and boy from brahmacharya ashram to grihastha ashram. The ritual is observed by both families. The girl and boy worship Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati.

For the girl, this day begins with a holy bath named *Kanishran*. In this ritual, young girls hold a veil over the bride's head and a mixture of water, rice, milk and curd is showered along with flowers by the relatives present. The maternal uncle of the bride gifts her a new set of clothes. The boy also starts his day with bath and comes formally dressed for the ceremony.

Wedding Ceremony

All the relatives and friends assemble at the groom's residence. The groom normally wears the *Pheran* and waistband along

with a sword and *juti*. The eldest paternal uncle ties the turban. A plate of rice containing some money is touched to the left shoulder of the groom while the turban is being tied. The groom traditionally rides a horse in the marriage procession to the bride's house. However, now the tradition has been given up in favour of a car. The barat is greeted with the blowing of *Shankhs*.

The marriage ceremony begins with traditional verses, shlokas recited by the Pandit. The bride and groom both are told about their duties towards one another. The couple crosses their hands one over the other and hold hands under the cover of cloth. This ritual is called *Aathewas*. According to tradition, the first one who manages to pull out the other's engagement ring plays a dominating role in the married life of the couple.

A golden thread is tied to their respective foreheads. After this, the left feet of both the bride and groom are placed on grinding stone which is commonly used in Kashmiri kitchens. Stepping on seven one rupee silver coins placed in circle makes the first round around the sacred fire. The next six rounds are done to the chanting of mantras. The bride and groom finally feed each other some rice, signifying the end of the ceremony. This is followed by the *vidai* ceremony. The newlyweds are made to stand on the *rangoli*. The eldest lady of the bride's family offers them *misri* (nabad). Then bride sits in doli or a (as the case maybe) car and her relatives and friends bid her tearful send off as she heads her in-laws house.

Post-Wedding Rituals

At last the bride arrives at the groom's house where her entry is refused by the groom's sister until she is given some cash or jewellery. After getting cash or jewellery she kisses them on the forehead. A pair of pigeons is set to free to celebrate the arrival of the newly-weds. The golden threads tied on the forehead of the

couple are exchanged. The sister leads them to kitchen where *Waza* (the cook) serves them food. After the meal, the bride changes into the new set of clothes and jewellery, presented to her by in-laws. The ritual like *Satraa* takes place in the same evening of the marriage when the bride returns to her parental home with her husband and two children from the groom's family. As a part of *Samat* ceremony, the couple is presented new clothes by the bride's parents, which they have to wear before returning home.

Then *Phirlath* is held when the couple is invited again for lunch or dinner by the girl's parents. Finally it ends with a *Roth Khabar* where bride's family sends cakes to the groom's family. *Roth* is a long and wide cake decorated with nuts, and sent to the groom's family on Tuesday or Saturday following the wedding. The bride accompanies the carrier of the *Roth Khabar* back to her parent's house. The bride's in-laws send some one to bring her back. She is given some salt and cash as *shagoon* on her return to her in-laws place.

At the end we can say that Kashmir has some of the most unique wedding customs and rituals. After all the ceremonies are over, the girl is free to visit her parents house whenever she wants to go, without having to wait for the right *mahurat*. Finally, the married couple is ready to drive down a new road of exploration in their newly formed relationship.