

MARWARI (AGARWAL) WEDDING

The Marwaris come from 'Marwar', the desert region of Rajasthan.

The Marwari Agrawals of Rajasthan excel the rest in business acumen. They have done particularly well in Assam and West Bengal where some have built huge industrial empires. Agrawals can be found in almost every state, particularly in Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Assam and Bengal.

They belong to the large Vaish community, and are also known as 'banias' (traders) from their occupation. They number about a crore.

The name Agrawal or Aggarwal is derived from the Agragan state said to be founded by Maharaja Agrasen some five thousand years ago. Agra (not Aggar) was the name of the state and 'wal' or 'wala', a suffix denoting possession.

The Agrawals are orthodox and tradition bound. The Agrawal appears to combine in himself the materialism of the West with the religiousness of the east.

Social customs and practices among them are basically the same as those of other Hindus but the details vary from state to state. For instance, the rites and rituals of the Marwari Agrawals of Rajasthan are slightly different from those prevailing elsewhere.

For the Agrawal, marriage is an occasion for great extravagance. Many families ruin themselves in the matter of dowry, an evil the community is particularly plagued with.

If the community has produced numerous renowned businessmen and industrialists like the Dalmias, Modis, Singhanias, Srirams and Bajaj's, it has also produced a number of eminent jurists, educationists, scientists, engineers, politicians, doctors, philosophers, poets and scholars." Text borrowed from the book "Religions and Communities of India" edited by P.N.Chopra.

Some surnames: Birla, Goenka, Khemka, Poddar, Ruia

1. MUDHA-TIKKA : Engagement ceremony

A auspicious day is found by consulting an astrologer for this ceremony. On this day, the grooms family - brothers, sisters, sister-in-laws etc.) go to the brides home taking with them on a silver platter puja items for the tikka, :: rice, jaggery, dry fruits, mithai (sweets) a diamond ring and sometimes a garland. They also take outfits /sarees and other gifts for the bride.

The bride is dressed grandly in a traditional lehnga and her jewelry. The grooms sister gives the bride the ring puts tikka on her forehead (vermillion powder) and feeds her some

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Shaadionline Pvt. Ltd.

16, Sant Nagar, Frist Floor, East of Kailash, New Delhi-110065

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jaggery. The brides family in turn also gives gifts of cash, silver or jewelry to the grooms sisters.

Requirements:

Jewelry, silver, puja items, toys, brides outfit sari, womens designer, mithai, dry fruits

2. GODH BARAI: Gifts for the bride

The brides lap is filled with gifts and jewelry, toys, clothes, sweets beautifully decorated and laden on elaborate trays which are brought in by the grooms sisters.

These represent the blessings of the family that she may always live in wealth and prosperity and that she may have many children.

3. SANGEET: Singing traditional songs

After the mudha-tikka ceremony, the bride wearing all the jewelry gifted to her by the grooms family sits on a silver chowki surrounded by all the ladies who had come to perform the tikka and members of her own family. They all sing traditional wedding songs to the bride. Nowadays the groom also is present at the sangeet as are the other menfolk of the two families.

Requirements:

Singers/band, tapes of traditional songs

4. NAANDI: Pre-wedding puja

About 10 days before the wedding ceremony, a Ganesh puja is performed by the groom in his home and the bride in hers, by a pujari. This puja is performed to negate the effects of any deaths in the family so that the marriage can go on, regardless.

The families also pray to Lord Ganesh to bless this endeavor (the wedding) and to remove any obstacles from their path. They beg that he may bestow success, happiness, strength and wealth and invite him to be the presiding deity at the wedding ceremony.

Requirements:

Pujari, puja items

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5. BHAAT : The maternal uncle - 'Mamas'- role in the wedding ceremonies

Amongst Marwari Agarwal families, the brides maternal uncle - Mama - plays a very crucial role in the wedding festivities and ceremonies. There is a very valid reason for this.. Marwari Agarwal women are given lavish and generous gifts at their weddings. By and large traditionally, they do not make any further claims on their fathers wealth. It automatically goes to her brothers. Therefore at the weddings of his niece/nephew, it is expected that the 'Mama' shows a great deal of generosity and plays a supportive role and can be depended upon to do the family proud. This ceremony, Bhaat is confirmation of this support . It is conducted by the grooms family and the brides family, in their respective homes.

The 'Mama' is called home so that he can be personally invited to attend the wedding. He and his sister partake of cooked rice and moong (a lentil). She then feeds her brother some sugar.. He gives his sister a traditional tie-dye 'chunri' (dupatta) which she keeps with her for always (literally for the rest of her life). The 'Mama' gifts the bride/groom with their wedding outfits, jewelry., silver and cash. 'How much' again depends on each family and their means.

He also gives gifts to the sisters, brothers, sisters/brothers-in-law , mother-in-law etc. It can be envelopes of cash or again clothes, sarees, or silver, gold/diamond jewelry etc. He then hosts a very lavish , typically Marwari vegetarian lunch/dinner for his sisters entire family and their guests.

Requirements:

Jewelry, saree, silver, 'chunri ', caterer, Suit lengths, womens designer, mens designer

Gifts: watches, electronics

6. TEL BAAN - A ritual bath

This is a ritual performed by the groom and bride in their respective homes either a day before or on the morning of the wedding ceremony depending on the auspicious time given by the pujari.

The bride/groom are 'prepared' for the wedding by all their close relatives - generally only the women of the families participate in this ceremony. Pure vegetable oils, fresh milk curds, henna and turmeric is made into a paste and applied on the face and arms and feet of the bride/ groom by their close family members. This symbolizes the cleansing and preparation of ones mind, body and soul before embarking upon the path of marriage. The groom/bride are then taken for a bath.

Requirements:

Turmeric and oil paste

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7. MEHNDI - Intricate henna design applied on the hands

This ceremony is usually held the afternoon or evening before the wedding ceremony. The bride invites her close female cousins and friends and amidst music and often dancing, a 'mehndiwali' is called to paint intricate designs on the hands and feet of the bride with henna paste. They all wear simple clothes. Of course these days, the friends and cousins also get mehndi designs painted on to their hands and feet. After these functions, dinner is served to all the guests.

Requirements:

Mehndiwali, caterer

8. KORATH- Groom is personally invited to come to the wedding venue

When the bride is ready and the auspicious time for the wedding is at hand, the men of the bride's family (her brothers, cousins, uncles etc.) go to the groom's home with a silver thali with rice, moong, jaggery, coconut the invitation card on it. Traditionally, the pujari also accompanied the family members. The groom accepts the invitation and prepares to leave for the wedding venue with his 'baraat' - family and friends.

Requirements:

Pujari, silver puja items

9. BARAAT : Groom leaves for the wedding venue

This is a very colorful and very grand procession. The groom is majestic in a heavy off-white gold brocade sherwani - long formal jacket with Nehru collar - and long slim pants or churidars (traditional fitted pyjamas). He wears a bright red or saffron color turban called 'safa' and a necklace with seven rows of pearls strung on gold (satladi) or two rows of emeralds (panna).

On his turban is a 'sirpench' a kind of brooch. The groom sits on a white mare also richly decorated and armed with a sword- a Rajput tradition- and he sets off to bring his bride home. He is accompanied by all his relatives also wearing red turbans and a band which plays traditional music (although nowadays it is more popular film music that is played!!). The younger members of the baraat dance around and the groom arrives in this fashion at the wedding venue.

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At the entrance of the venue, on the top, hung or tied is a sort of small shrine with 7 birds carved on the top and a small murthi (idol) of Ganesh inside it. The groom hits this with a stick and only then enters the wedding hall.

Requirements:

Grooms outfit & safa, grooms jewelry, white mare decorated, Sword, band/singers, wedding venue, Small shrine with Ganesh

10. BARAAT SWAGAT - Receiving the groom

The groom is received by the bride's father with special honor. A welcome prayer is conducted with the groom and each gives his word to perform the sacred rites of marriage according to his prescribed religious duty and the bride's mother does aarti to the groom. The baraatis are then served sumptuous snacks personally by the bride's family. The groom is then led to the mantap which is beautifully and richly decorated and hung with flowers - jasmine, marigold and roses.

Requirements:

Mantap, florist, caterer

10. VARAMALA - Exchange of garlands

The bride comes into the mantap wearing a richly embroidered silk and gold worked lehnga (long gathered skirt), a kurti and a beautifully worked dupatta with which she covers her head. The bridal outfit is traditionally in tones of red, maroon, crimson and saffron. She wears heavy 'jadau' jewelry (uncut diamonds set in gold) emeralds, rubies set with diamonds and pearls.

The bride and groom stand opposite each other and amidst chanting by the priest, the bride garlands the groom signifying that he is her choice of husband and he reciprocates in like manner.

Requirements:

Bridal outfit, garlands, traditional Marwari jewelry

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11. PHERAS: The seven steps and vows

After the Varamala, the pujari lights the sacred fire - homa or havan.

Offerings are made into the sacred fire as a form of thanksgiving and purification. The grooms waist band and brides dupatta are tied in a knot and they circle the sacred fire seven times (pheras) and make the seven vows to each other:

- 1. Faith in God forever.**
- 2. Promise of love, fidelity and compassion.**
- 3. Help each other in all good deeds.**
- 4. Be strong and righteous.**
- 5. Show love and goodwill to all the family members.**
- 6. Raise their children with values and high morals.**
- 7. Be welcoming and respectful to all guests and visitors.**

12. KANYADAAN : Giving away the bride

This is the ceremonial giving away of the bride by her parents.

The bride is on the right of the groom.

A gold or silver coin is placed in the palms of the bride and the same is held by her father and placed on the grooms hands saying "we offer you our daughter hand in marriage. May she be a blessing and a lifelong companion to you". Accompanied by appropriate prayers by the pujari water is poured over their joined hands as they promise to live always in love. The bride then moves to the left of the groom and he puts vermilion on her head in the parting of her hair.

Requirements:

Gold or silver coin

14. SEER-GUTHI: Putting vermilion on the bride

On a silver platter the bride is given rice, moong, jaggery, mithai (sweets) and cash. Her hair is opened out and braided by her 'nanand' - husbands sister, weaving into the end mouli (red thread) which was blessed at the Naandi Ganesh Puja. The nanand then fills the brides parting with vermilion (maang baran).. The 'nath' a piece of jewelry worn on the nose - traditionally it is 2 pearls and a ruby -is brought by the mother-in-law and placed on the brides lap. A brief puja is done to it and then worn by the bride.

Requirements:

Nath (nose jewelry)

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15. CHUDA: Bangle ceremony

Colorful glass bangles or laq bangles are brought by the mother-in-law and put on the brides hands.

Requirements:

Glass and laq bangles.

16. MOOK-DEKAI: Gifts for bride

The bride sits alone and receives gifts from all her family members. Clothes, silver or cash.

Requirements:

Silver, outfits/sarees, gifts like watch

17. JUA & MUTI BUND : Light hearted traditional ceremonies

These are two of a number of 'fun' ceremonies which follow the solemnizing of the wedding. Here, a ring is put into a silver dish full of milk. The bride and groom look for the ring by dipping their hands into the milk. Whoever finds the ring will be the 'dominant' partner!!!!

MUTI-BAND: The groom holds his hand in a tight fist. The bride tries to pry open his fist..... the same is repeated with the bride holding her hand in a tight fist.

These small ceremonies were important in days when the groom and bride did not know each other at all and in fact met for the first time at their own wedding. This sort of helped to 'break the ice'. Naturally the rest of the family members watch gleefully teasing all the while.

Dinner is served with traditional vegetarian Marwari fare. Now however western style pasta, salads mousses etc. is served but all vegetarian. Cooks are often flown in from other cities to cater to the more discerning. Often if the invitees are many, dinner is served earlier. Alcohol however, is strictly prohibited.

18. VIDAAI : Bride leaves her parental home

This is a very emotional ceremony. The bride prepares to leave her parental home and go with her husband to his home. Invariably tears are shed by all. The bride gets envelopes of

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cash from all the elder member of her family.. All the men of the brides family apply tilaak to the groom and give him envelopes of cash.
The couple leave in a car decorated with flowers.

Requirements:

Decorated car (florist)

19. VADHU PRAVESH: Bride enters her husbands home

When the bahu-rani (daughter-in-law) arrives at her new home, she is helped out of the car by her mother-in-law and welcomed with an aarti. She puts her right foot over the threshold of the house into a tray of vermilion powder symbolizing the arrival of good fortune. With both feet covered in red she now takes five steps and kicks over a vessel filled with rice and coins to symbolize fertility and wealth in her home.

Of course there is some humor added to this solemn ceremony too... the bahu ranis' sisters-in-law sit on the threshold of the house refuse to allow their brother to bring his new bride in unless he gives them some gifts or cash. He succumbs and is duly allowed to bring his young bride into the home!!!

Requirements:

Silver aarti, vessel with rice, gifts for sisters

RECEPTION

Like most other communities, reception has become the norm of the day. It depends entirely on individual families of how they would like to conduct the reception (if they have one at all). Normally it is held in a hotel.

Requirements:

Venue for reception, band/singers, caterers

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