

CEREMONIES BEFORE THE WEDDING

| Ceremonies – Bride’s Side | Joint Ceremonies | Ceremonies – Groom’s Side |
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| | | <i>Janya or "Thread Ceremony" is a rite of passage considered to be the official induction into the Hindu religion. During this ceremony, a sacred thread is tied to the groom-to-be, and health, wealth and prosperity are wished upon his future.</i> |
| | Kacchi Misri – Kacchi means ‘raw’ so this is ceremony is a pre-engagement of sorts. It takes place once the boy and girl and their respective families agree to move forward with the marriage. It is formalized with a small pooja and the exchange of offerings (mithai, coconuts, fruits, sometimes money or jewelry). A wedding date is set based on an auspicious day in the near future. Misri is also the name for rock sugar and it is customary for the couples to feed each other a piece of rock sugar, symbolizing their agreement to the marriage. This is often considered the engagement, but traditionally, rings are not exchanged until the Pakki Misri. In most cases, families will only announce a son or daughter’s engagement after this ceremony has taken place. It is also believed that feeding Misri to the other single young men and women in the families will speed up their search for a spouse. | |
| | <i>Some families, particularly Bhaiband Sindhis, begin the marriage festivities with a Jhulelal Behrano – Jhulelal is the patron saint of Hindu Sindhis and the Behrano is a prayer specific to Jhulelal.</i> | |
| | Pakki Misri – Taking place a few days prior to the actual marriage, this is a formal ring exchange ceremony, consecrated with a pooja, that usually signals the start of the marriage festivities. Because the fourth finger is thought to have a vein leading directly to the heart, the rings are placed on the fourth finger of the right hand of the groom and the fourth finger of the left hand of the bride. After exchanging rings, the groom’s family offers a basket of fruit, clothing and other items to the girl as a symbol of acceptance into their family. The groom’s family then gives the bride’s family a promise of marriage and feeds them misri to finalize the engagement. Traditionally, the bride’s family sends the groom his outfit for the wedding day, sometimes accompanied by cash, fruit (fresh & dry), misri, sweets and coconuts. It is also believed that feeding misri to the other single young men and women in the families will speed up their search for a spouse. | |
| | Mehndi - the bride has her hands and feet intricately patterned with a paste that is made of henna, oil, lemon juice and some water tinted with tea. Ideally, the bride-to-be should not wash her hands until the paste has completely dried. Some brides leave it on overnight to darken the stain of the paste on their hands and feet. Mehndi signifies the strength of love in a marriage. An old wives tale says that the darker the mehndi, the stronger the love. The Groom’s initials or name is hidden in the mehendi pattern and the Bride makes the Groom find his name on her hands on the wedding night. This event is typically for the women only. | |
| | Sagri - the groom’s sisters come to the bride’s house (usually after her Mehendi) to welcome her into their family. They adorn her with bangles, chains, earrings, perfume and crowns of flowers that have been strung together. The groom’s sister then presents the bride with cosmetics, five types of fruits, and 'misri', along with a 'thali' of dried coconut, sweets, 'batashe' (sugar candy) and 'attar' (perfume). The bride’s family then offers gifts to each person who has decorated her to show gratitude and respect to the guests in their home. This ceremony is meant to familiarize the bride with her family-to-be and create a bonding relationship between the women in the groom’s life. | |
| | <i>A lot of modern weddings combine the above three ceremonies into the same day, and some add on a Sangeet, which is a musically themed celebration that has evolved into another type of reception. Traditionally, Ladas (Sindhi wedding songs) were sung all evening, sometimes poking fun at or singing the praises of members of the wedding party.</i> | |

The following ceremonies are performed by both sides, but on their own, not jointly like the ceremonies listed above. Typically, the following ceremonies are all held on the day prior to the wedding, and Bride and Groom do not see each other at all.

Navgrai Pooja is the prayer to the nine planets of our Solar System. Ancient Indian studies indicate that various celestial bodies have tremendous influence on the destiny of every individual, and among them the effect of the nine planets is the most profound. During this pooja, the Gods associated with these planets are asked to bless the couple and their families. As per Sindhi tradition, all 'pujas' are performed in the groom's home first and only then in the bride's house. The 'pujas' performed on this day include the 'Ganesh Puja', 'Omkar Puja', 'Lakshmi Puja', 'Kalash Puja', followed by the 'puja' of the nine planets or the 'Navgrahi Puja'. Because of various rites that need to be performed and blessings to be given, it is imperative for the bride's 'mama' (maternal uncle), 'chacha' (paternal uncle) and brother to be present. While this pooja is going on, seven married women, called 'suhaginis', do the "**bochini**" – a white silk dupatta has to be embroidered with seven different motifs in seven different colors. Towards the end of the pooja, these ladies (sata suhaginis) gather around a mortar and pestle with the bride or groom, and they all jointly pound pieces of tumeric root, which signifies blending.

Vanwas: In this ceremony, both the groom and bride are dressed in old clothes. At the start of this pooja, the priest ties a red thread (garo dhago) on the wrist of the groom and bride and their immediate family members. This thread confirms their abstinence from alcohol and meat until after the conclusion of the wedding ceremonies. People from their respective families pour oil on top of their head and body. Both bride and groom are made to put on the shoes they will wear during the wedding and break a clay pot -- it is auspicious to do so swiftly and in one motion. Their clothes are then torn by family members, equating 'out with the old, and in with the new'. It is critical that every shred of the torn clothes must be immersed in the ocean along with the pooja items immediately after the wedding.

Ghari, or Ghari-Bukhi is the final and most important religious custom that is performed on the eve of the wedding day and is a special pooja for the parents of the bride and groom. The priest performs the prayers with rice, coconut, wheat grains, oil, betel nuts, turmeric and a number of other spices. The groom offers a handful of grains to the priest indicating he will always give to charity and look after those less fortunate than himself. Married ladies grind wheat on a small old-fashioned grinder symbolising that the home will always be prosperous. The son in law of each family now steps into the very important role of **ainer** – the protector and bodyguard of the groom and his family (or bride and her family) and is given a ceremonial sword or knife. The mother and father of both the bride and groom dress up in their bridal finery. Carrying an earthen pot (mutka) of water and milk on the mother's head, and they walk to the threshold of their homes. The mutka is put on the ground, just outside the threshold of the house, and the ainer stirs the water and milk mixture with his sword. The symbolism here is that once water and milk are mixed, they cannot be separated, no matter how sharp the knife or how strong the effort. And this is exactly how strong and joint this family is. The parents are now joyously greeted and garlanded by their relatives and are presented with '**tol**'. In return, this is also when the parents present their friends and relatives with gifts and a **dupatta** or a shawl. All of this is often done with great fanfare and noise, such as banging of pots and pans, to ward off any evil that wishes to come between the marriage.

WEDDING DAY CEREMONIES

Swagatam - After the bride has dressed in her wedding ensemble, her sisters or female relatives go to the groom's house to escort the groom to the bride's house. They leave the bride's trousseau in the groom's house and the bride's sister performs a small ceremony whereby she has to apply some cosmetics on the faces of the groom and his mother. The priest puts a red 'dupatta' on the groom and the groom then proceeds to the bride's home. In addition to the red dupatta, a pink dupatta is also draped around the groom's neck - it has one end sewn closed in which a coconut is inserted, which the groom holds during a major portion of the ceremony. The opposite side of the pink dupatta is knotted to the corner of the bride's pallu; oftentimes with a gold coin inserted in this knot, which later on, is opened by the groom's who gets to keep the gold coin. Also draped around the groom's neck is the bochini.

The arrival of the bridegroom's party at the venue is heralded by special musical tunes played on the shehnai (flute). Before he can enter the house, the groom places his right foot on the top of the bride's foot, signifying that he should be the dominating strength in their life together. When the bride and groom first meet each other on the wedding day, they exchange flower garlands. This is to greet each other and to acknowledge mutual acceptance of the wedding to take place. The bride's parents then rinse the groom's feet with milk and water because it is believed that due to all the prayers that have preceded this moment, the groom is an embodiment of Lord Vishnu on this wedding day.

Hathialo - In this ceremony, the corner of the bride's sari is tied to a scarf the groom is wearing. The right hands of the couple are tied with a thread that has been blessed with religious incantations. The tying of the hands signifies an eternal bond that will join them forever and that although they are separate individuals, from now on, they are one in mind and spirit. The couple then prays to the Gods to give them strength and bless their union.

The bride and groom are given water and something to eat because after this their hands are tied together with the sacred thread or 'mouli'. Some money and a dried date are placed between their palms before their hands are tied. After the chanting of 'mantras' the couple and relatives leave for the wedding venue.

*The Hindu Wedding Ceremony is a spiritual union of two individuals performed in the presence of God. The couple and their parents sit around **Agni**, the God of Fire, who serves as the divine witness of a ceremony conducted in Sanskrit, the sacred language of the Hindu religion. The ceremony takes place in an altar called a **Mandap**, built to represent the Universe - its four pillars represent the four parents and their roles in raising the Bride and Groom.*

Ganesh Puja: Hindu ceremonies begin with a prayer to the elephant God Ganesh -- remover of all obstacles -- seeking blessings and asking for the successful completion of the ceremony.

Nav Graha & Kalash Pujas: Prayers are then offered to the nine planets as they greatly influence our lives, asking for peace, happiness and prosperity; followed by prayers to Varundev, the God of Water, represented by a pot of water topped with a coconut. Next, the priest leads prayers to all the Gods and Goddesses, parents, grandparents and the couple's ancestors.

Vedi: The priest then recites mantras and the couple is showered with rice, representing fulfillment in all aspects of life.

Pheras: The couple walks around the holy fire four times, signifying the four phases of life -- Dharma (Duty, Purpose & Righteousness) Artha (Prosperity), Kama (Love), and Moksha (Salvation). Before the pheras, the bride is seated to the right of the groom, but after the pheras she is seated to his left, to signify that she is now closer to his heart. In a Sindhi wedding ceremony, the groom leads the first three rounds while the bride leads the fourth.

Dharma: *This signifies the spirit of righteousness and one's duty to follow the religion devoutly.*

Artha: *This signifies the path one and right means that one should take for earning one's wealth and livelihood, striving for material gain and success, and endeavouring to help the poor and unprivileged whenever possible.*

Kama: *According to Hindu mythology, Kama is the God of Love. This 'phera' thus symbolizes the love and dedication that a married couple should have towards each other. They should support and stand for each other, 'for better or worse', for the rest of their lives.*

Moksha: *The last phera signifies liberation of suffering. Once a person gets married and encounters the bliss of marital fulfillment, he will find liberation from the sufferings and pains of unmarried life.*

Kanya Daan: The Bride's parents entrust her wellbeing to the Groom by placing her hands in his.

Jaya Mala: Bride & Groom exchange garlands to signify their acceptance of marriage.

Sapta Padi: The couple take seven steps, representing seven vows, to sanctify the marriage. The couple faces north, and along with each vow, they take a step.

The Seven Vows:

1. Groom: *You will offer me food and be helpful in every way. I will cherish you and provide for the welfare and happiness of you and our children.* Bride: *I am responsible for the home, and take charge of all household responsibilities.*
2. Groom: *Together we will protect our house and children.* Bride: *I will be by your side, and be your courage and strength. I will rejoice in your happiness. In return, you will love me alone.*
3. Groom: *May we grow wealthy and prosperous, strive for the education of our children. May our children live long.* Bride: *I will love only you for the rest of my life, as you are my husband. Every other man in my life will come second to you. I vow to remain chaste.*
4. Groom: *You have brought sacredness into my life, and have completed me. May we be blessed with noble, obedient children. May our children live long.* Bride: *I will shower you with happiness, from head to toe. I will strive to please you in every way that I can.*
5. Groom: *You are my best friend, and staunchest well-wisher. You have come into my life, and have enriched it. God bless you.* Bride: *I promise to love and cherish you for as long as I love. Your happiness is my happiness, and your sorrow is my sorrow. I will trust and honour you, and will strive to fulfill all your wishes.*
6. Groom: *May you be filled with joy and peace.* Bride: *I will always be by your side.*
7. Groom: *We are now husband and wife, and are one. You are mine and I am yours for all time.* Bride: *As God is witness, I am now your wife. We will love, honour and cherish each other forever.*

Sindoor & Mangal Sutra: The Groom places Sindoor on the Bride's forehead and hair symbolizing a long life, and a sacred necklace as a symbol of their marriage.

Aashirwad: The priest blesses the couple on behalf of the Gods and Goddesses and closes the ceremony with a prayer; and asks everyone to shower them with blessings and good wishes. The newlyweds will seek the blessings of their parents, elderly relatives and other family members for a happy marriage and a long life by bowing and touching their feet.

POST WEDDING CEREMONIES

| <i>Ceremonies – Bride's Side</i> | | <i>Ceremonies – Groom's Side</i> |
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| | <p>Vidayi: Once the marriage ceremony is over and the bride is taken to her groom's house. The bride is covered from head in generally a sari. This is called "Dhakh ji Chaadar" (Dhakh means to cover). This symbolizes that the father is given his asset & his pride that lived with him from day one is handed over to some other family.</p> | |
| | <p>Datar – Before entering her new home, the bride first steps into a thali of water with her right foot symbolizing her purity before stepping into the house. When entering the house, a lid is put over her head while she sprinkles water and milk around the house. The lid symbolizes that bride will respect her new family and keep its affairs and shortcomings within the confines of her home and not share them with the outside world. The bride then picks up salt from a tray by cupping both hands and places it in the hands of her husband who places place some money and a gift in the salt for his wife as a blessing for a healthy lineage and a happy married life. He passes the salt back into her hands without spilling any, and this is repeated three times. The next person to perform this ritual with the bride will be her father-in-law, followed by her mother-in-law and then one by one each person from the groom's family. Exchanging salt symbolises that just as salt blends in and gives taste to food, so must the bride blend in and become a part of her new family.</p> <p>Some rituals take place to welcome the bride into the groom's family. One of these is a game in which coins, gold and other items (sometimes bottle caps!) are placed into a large mutka that is filled with water. The bride has to put her hand into the mutka and in one grip (one attempt), remove everything of value from it. If indeed the bride successfully does this, she is considered an 'akul wari chokri' and is welcomed with a great round of applause and made to feel 'at home' in her new house.</p> | |
| | <p>Satavaro: The bride and the groom go to the bride's house for a family gathering, usually hosted by the bride's mother's family.</p> | |