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Wedding Customs in Nepal

Nepal is a multi-religious, multi-lingual and a multi-cultural country, located on the lap of the mighty Himalayas in south Asia. Such diversity translates into diverse rituals in wedding customs among different cultural groups in Nepal. This variety adds to the rich culture practiced by the Nepali people for centuries. In this article, I have tried my best to describe the typical wedding customs in Nepal, which hopefully does no injustice to the culture of any particular Nepali cast, creed or religion.

The system of arranged marriage is dominant in the Nepali society. Barring a few-metropolitan-instances of “love marriages” when the couple concerned choose their own life-partners, most of the marriages are arranged by the parents of the marrying couple with the help of their respective relatives and a match-maker priest. Even in such setting, for the most part, each of the prospective couple is given a final say to accept or decline their match.

In the good old days, like in the case of my parents 25 years ago, the bride and the groom got to see each other on the day of their engagement, and literally speak to each other for the first time on their wedding day! A popular practice these days especially in the cities, like in the case of my cousins, is that the parents make their matches and give the potential couple some time to date and know each other before letting them decide on the marriage.

The matches are generally made on the basis of similarity of background in caste and financial conditions of the two families. In some cases, a pretty girl might get married off to a more salubrious family, but it is almost impossible for a poor lad to get arranged with a pretty or wealthier girl. The arrangement always takes place inside the same caste but never inside the family.

The wedding starts off with the engagement ceremony. It is generally a low-profile event as compared to the main wedding ceremony. The groom-to-be, along with his family and close friends, visits the bride’s place to take a vow and fix a wedding day, in accordance with the astrologically favorable days pointed out by the priest. The engagement is called *Tika-tala*, which roughly means the exchange of good wishes and promise through *Tika*, a traditional red mark on the forehead.

The wedding ceremony is a huge social event. This is a showcase of extraordinary communal values of the Nepali people. The entire village is the part of the ceremony. All the relatives of both the families, immediate or distant, and the whole neighborhood are invited! A wedding ceremony is the event of a lifetime for the two families involved. It easily incurs the greatest one-event-expenditure for the families, for which they start saving since the day of the birth of their child.

The wedding ceremony extends for around three days, and preparation for which is usually a few weeks. The kin and clan of the groom assemble at the groom's place to get ready to go to the bride's place for the main event. In most of the cultures, mainly the men travel with the groom for the main event, while the women stay back and celebrate the evening with *Ratyauli*, an event where no men are welcome as women act, dance and play with much inference to sexuality.

The groom's procession is called *Janti*, which is a decent size parade of either a traditional band (*Panche Baja*, a band of five-famous instruments) or a full Brass-Band, followed by the feasting and dancing party of the groom. The bride's family welcomes the *Janti* with a great feast, after which a series of religious and social rituals take place, which usually lasts the whole day. Both the bride and the groom are clad

with traditional outfits. Usually, the bride has ostentatious make up with traditional temporary tattoos (*Mehendi*) and gold jewelry.



The main rituals of the main wedding day are: (1) the *Swayambhar*, when the couple exchange floral garlands after the bride's parents officially "give away" their daughter (*Kanyadan*) to the groom; (2) the

Mandap ceremonies, where the couple pledge to keep their union for seven lives to come by tying a symbolic knot and walking together around a sacred conflagration of fire for seven times after the groom puts a mark of red-vermillion powder (*Sindur*) on top of the bride's forehead, which from that time onwards differentiates the bride as a married women from an unmarried girl; (3) the *Anmaune* or the *Bidai* ceremony, when the wedding party from the bride's side bid farewell to the bride, which is generally an emotional affair with the bride weeping incessantly (This may be a show of true emotion of getting away from the family and friends, or just a traditional obligation).

The groom's party then returns home with the bride and in most cases, with furniture and other requisites to set up a new home for the newly-weds, which the groom receives as dowry. The returning party and the other invitees take on a great feast, usually called *Jante-Bakhro*, roughly symbolizing the feast of goat-meat, an important delicacy served. All of the events and rituals of the wedding are complemented by singing, dancing and fun related activities, even by the marrying couples. In many cultures, the newly-weds, along with the groom's immediate family members, return to the bride's family for a day after a couple of weeks (*Dulhan Farkauney*) to express gratitude for the new established relationship.

I would like to reiterate again that wedding customs may vary with different cultural groups, but the customs I have mentioned above, I believe are the typical ones.

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