

Decoding Gujarati Weddings: Everything You Need To Know About The Sacred Pre And Post Wedding Rituals

A wedding is one of the most sacred rituals in India and every community or religion has its own traditions, ancient as well as modern, i.e., the sheer diversity that makes it even more special. Gujarat is the land of colours, riches, culture and food. Gujarati people are warm and hospitable, and this hospitality is evident in their wedding functions also. The festive nature of the Gujarati people reflects in their wedding rituals and practices as their weddings are filled with fun and joy.

Hey Shubhaarambh, Ho Shubhaarambh, Mangal Bela Aayi, Sapnon Ki Dehri Pe, Dil Ki Baaji Re Shehnai...

a wedding in India is more than just two people tying the knot on an auspicious day in a traditional ceremony. It is more about the rituals and customs that add the oomph factor to one's wedding. Gujarati weddings are no different as from pre-wedding rituals to post-wedding customs, they are vibrant, intricately planned, culture-rich festivities full of celebration and traditions. Here are the pre- and post-wedding rituals of a Gujarati wedding.

Pre-wedding traditions and rituals

Chandlo matli

This is the foremost Gujarati marriage function, which is all about the acceptance of the marriage. Chandlo is basically a red-coloured circle made in the centre of the groom's forehead. The bride's father along with four other male members from the bride's side visit the to-be groom's home to apply it. Along with this, shagun is also given as a token of love, and the marriage date is also fixed on the same day.

Gol dhana

The engagement ceremony in a Gujarati wedding is known as gol dhana, which means coriander seeds and jaggery. So basically, at the engagement ceremony, both these things are distributed amongst the guests. The bride-to-be and her family pay a visit to the groom-to-be's house with sweets and a few gifts. The rings are exchanged in the presence of their respective families, and the couple seeks blessings from five married women from each side of the family.

Mehendi ceremony

Two days prior to the wedding, the mehendi function is hosted by the bride's family. Just like any other Indian wedding, beautiful mehendi designs are applied to the bride's hands with henna. Other female members of the family also apply mehendi on their hands.

Sanji/sangeet sandhya in a Gujarati wedding

A song and dance ceremony in Gujaratis is known as sangeet sandhya or sanji. It takes place after the mehendi ceremony and before the wedding day. This is one such function, where both the families get a chance to know each other even more. Traditional Gujarati wedding songs are sung, and guests enjoy tapping their feet on garba and dandiya.

Mangal mahurat

The mangal mahurat ceremony is held at both the bride and the groom's houses. The bride and the groom along with their respective families offer their prayers to Lord Ganesha to seek his blessings and pray to him to remove all the obstacles coming in their way.

Griha Shanti puja

The griha shanti puja is also performed at both houses. As the name itself suggests, it is done for acquiring peace and calm in the houses.

Pithi

Pithi is the Gujarati name for the haldi ceremony. In this ceremony, the bride sits on a stool, and the ladies of her family apply a paste of sandalwood, turmeric, rosewater and perfume on her body.

Mameru/Mosaalu

This ceremony takes place a day before the wedding day. The bride's mama (her mother's brother) visits her house and gifts her sarees, bangles, and jewellery along with many other things.

Jaan ritual

The jaan, held on the wedding day, is a very entertaining, sweet and funny ritual. After arriving at the marriage venue, the groom touches his soon-to-be mother-in-law's feet for her blessings, and she tries to grab his nose while he tries to avoid her clutch. This playful ritual is to remind the groom that she is giving her precious daughter to him, so he should be humble and grateful.

Wedding traditions and rituals

Baaraat/varghoda

In a Gujarati wedding, the groom's sister waves coins wrapped in a cloth over his head before he sets out of his house. This is a way to ward off the "evil eye" around her brother. The groom usually leaves for his baaraat on a horse.

Jaimala

This is the first ritual in the actual wedding ceremony. Here the wedding couple exchanges garlands made of fresh flowers.

Antarpaat

This is one such ceremony where there is a curtain between the bride and groom. In this Gujarati wedding ritual, the bride is escorted to the mandap by her maternal uncle. There is a cloth curtain between the bride and the groom. During the course of this ritual, the curtain is lowered.

Kanyadaan, hasta milap and varmala

Kanyadaan is the moment when the bride's father gives his daughter's hand in the hands of the groom. After this, the bride's saree is tied to the groom's shawl in a ritual known as the hasta milap. After that, a cord is tied around the couple's necks by the elders in the family to ward off evil, which is known as varmala.

Madhuparka/panchamrut

In this ritual, a member of the bride's family washes the groom's feet, while he is offered a drink of milk and honey.

Joota Churai

This is the most exciting and very entertaining ritual of most Indian weddings. In Gujarati weddings, when the madhuparka is going on, the sisters of the bride try to hide the groom's footwear and agree to return them only in exchange for money.

Mangalphas and Saptapadi

Unlike most Hindu weddings, Gujarati weddings have 4 pheras rather than 7. The priest chants the mantras, while the couple takes rounds around the sacred fire. They take seven steps together that are known as the saptapadi. The married couple then seeks the blessings of all their elders.

Chero Pakaryo

This is another one of the funny rituals of a Gujarati wedding. Here the groom catches hold of his mother-in-law's saree and asks for more gifts. Her saree is then filled with gifts and cash, and later, is given to the groom and his family.

Post-wedding traditions and rituals

Vidaai

In the vidaai ceremony, the bride says her goodbyes to her family. She takes rice in her hands and throws it back without looking and her mother is supposed to catch the rice in her pallu.

Gharni Laxmi

In this ceremony, the bride enters the groom's house by gently kicking a small handi of rice with her right foot.

Aeki Beki

This ceremony is the most fun ceremony after the hectic wedding schedule. A bowl is filled with milk and a ring is dropped in it. Both the bride and the groom then have to find the ring, and whoever wins, gets a reward.

Reception

After all the wedding rituals are over, the groom's family may or may not plan a wedding reception. The guests at the reception party include mostly the near and dear ones of the groom's family.

***Pheras* – Four Goals of Life**

Unlike other Indian cultures, in a Gujarati wedding, the couple takes four *phas*, instead of seven, around the sacred fire. The four *phas* have immense significance in the marriage. Each of them symbolizes one goal of human life – Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha.

Saat Pheras - Seven Vows

The typical Hindu wedding ritual consists of the bride and the groom taking seven vows in presence of their loved ones, with the holy fire as their witness. This is a way for the couple to confirm their commitment and sincerity to the new relationship they are about to begin.

With each phera, the bride and the groom take a vow in front of their loved ones for their happy married life. Though most couples, in their eagerness to get over with the ceremony, may tend to overlook these vows, each of these seven vows around the holy fire in the presence of their loved ones as their witness behind it. Let us take you through these seven wedding vows, and tell you what each of them means.

first phera

The first step of this journey of togetherness is a prayer to the Lord for nourishment. This phera has the bride and the groom seek divine blessings by asking the Lord to ensure that they are never short of food or money. As the groom vows to provide welfare and happiness to his better half; the bride promises to shoulder the responsibilities with him. Together they pray that they may work towards this goal together, and with respect for one another.

second phera

In the second phera, the couple seeks union on all levels– mental, emotional and spiritual. They vow to love each other forever, faithfully! They pray to the Lord to help them live as one complete being rather than two halves. Since they will be partners for life, they seek strength to be able to support and protect each other through all phases of life.

third phera

Stepping into the realm of worldly life; in the third phera, the bride and the groom beseech the Lord for wealth and prosperity. They seek wealth not only for their physical existence and desires but also to be able to fulfil their spiritual obligations. They also seek blessing for the ability and means to take care of

their children, educate them and look after all their needs. They also pledge physical and spiritual loyalty towards each other throughout their life.

fourth phera

The family is an important entity in Indian society. Respecting elders and taking care of all the family members is a part of the social values. The couple pledges to strengthen their family together by ensuring that they uphold the family values, and maintain relationships within the family. The groom expresses gratitude towards his wife for completing his life and bringing auspiciousness and happiness. And, the bride takes the vow to love her husband in every way.

fifth phera

With the beginning of a new life together, the couple seeks blessings for their future progeny as well. They pray to the Lord to be blessed with strong and noble children, who will carry their family name forward. They also vow to be responsible parents to the children and provide them with education and a correct upbringing. The groom also tells his wife that he would always see her as his best friend. The bride promises to love and cherish their relationship forever.

sixth phera

To live a life that is honest and noble, the couple prays to the almighty to give them a healthy and disease-free life. They pray for strength so that they can fulfil their responsibilities towards their family, each other and their children. The bride and the groom wish for a balanced and joyful life for each other and with each other.

seventh phera

The final phera that seals this holy union is one, where the couple pledges to each other their love, trust, and companionship. They vow to be friends for life and stand by each other through everything. This phera also brings home the truth that they are now united through everything in life and must be true to each other and their relationship always. They pray for sweetness and love to fill their lives.

Saptapadi – Seven Steps of Togetherness

This ritual involves the couple taking seven steps together, as the priest cites mantras. Then they recite the seven sacred vows

Every different religion and culture has its own set of vows for newlyweds. But, behind all of them, the significance is the same- commitment, devotion and

respect towards one another. All these vows mean that the couple love, respect, stand and understand each other... 'till death do us apart'.