

# Change and continuity in wedding ceremonies in rural Punjab

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■ **ABSTRACT :** The study focused to determine the change and continuity in cultural practices related to marriages. The present study was carried out in three cultural zones of Punjab viz., Malwa, Majha and Doaba. The data were collected personally from the two types of respondents viz., Mother-in-laws (G1) and daughter-in-laws (G2) constituting a sample of 360 respondents each. Majority of the G1 and G2 respondents performed 'Roka/Thaka' ceremonies followed by 'Chunni Chadana' ceremony. Majority (69.44 %) of G2 respondents had Ring ceremony and (69.72 %) performed Shagun ceremony whereas only few of first generation (G1) respondents performed both these ceremonies. In G1 respondents, Ladies sangeet was performed only by the ladies from adjoining houses and villages whereas in case of G2 respondents the DJ's replaced the traditional sangeet. The traditional sweets such as Ladoos were replaced by costly sweets, dry fruits and chocolates in second generation. All the respondents of G1 respondents prepared hand knitted items, phulkaris, pakhiyan as dowry items but very few of G2 respondents prepared them. The traditional ceremonies such as Din bandhana, Atte pani pauna, Bambiha bulana, Sithniyan are being lesser followed by G2 respondents. There was a shift regarding believe in astrology as only 28.61 per cent of G2 respondents believed in astrology. So, it was seen that there is a continuity of traditional ceremonies but a major shift in performing ladies sangeet, kind of dowry items, and sweets served was seen nowadays. People maintain ceremonies as traditional while simultaneously appropriating them for changes in broader society. Keeping traditional ceremonies as a way of preserving cultural identity in a society that is becoming more influenced by global trends.

■ **KEY WORDS:** Ceremonies, Change, Continuity, Marriage

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In anthropological literature the term "life-cycle rites" or "rites of passage" refers to a genre of rituals that people perform at major events in life, like birth, puberty, marriage and death. These types of rites characteristically mark a person's transition from one

stage of social life to another and are sometimes tied to biological changes (Geneep, 1960). Throughout history the authoritative traditions of the world religions have displayed a deep concern and interest in defining these rituals to mark religious boundaries and control practices.

In rural Indian life, celebrations tend to mark important transitions: A wedding marks the transition of a woman from daughter to wife and is the central event in her life-cycle (Fruzzetti, 1982), festivals mark important events in the life-cycle of a village - a religious event, or a harvest (Fuller, 1992). Wedding celebrations are often cited as expressive and visible manifestations of retained cultural values (Nevadomsky, 1981). Since marriages are considered an important event of life and a union of two families they remain a cultural focus and are therefore celebrated with much pomp and show. In Sikhism, marriage (viah) is considered the basis of family and social life. Perhaps the most celebrated ceremony in the Sikh social and cultural life is the wedding. In Punjab's tradition the present code of conduct (Sikh Rahit Maryada) prescribes how punjabi's should conduct life-cycle rites in the time of birth, marriage, and death. Surrounding this ceremony, lies a whole labyrinth of customs and rites that do not stipulate a marriage but functions as a cultural and social overlay to the wedding rite (Myrvold, 2004). While some of these ceremonies aim to create and confirm new kinship ties between two families, others are said to bring matrimonial luck and happiness. As the institution of marriage establishes culturally approved relations for reproduction, the rich symbolism of weddings will allude to royalty, fertility and prosperity (Uberoi, 1996). Traditional weddings were (and are) often spread over a period of days, and relatives from far and near arrived three or four days before the wedding and continued to stay for a couple of days after the wedding. A series of ceremonies are conducted during this period, preceding the actual wedding, beginning with the engagement and concluding with the doli, when the bride leaves for her conjugal home (Puri, 1999). In this paper an attempt has been made to overview changes in some common religious and cultural practices related to the weddings in Punjab.

## ■ RESEARCH METHODS

The study was conducted in Punjab State. Multi stage sampling design was used for selection of the respondents. From the three broad cultural zones of Punjab viz., Malwa, Majha and Doaba, two districts Ludhiana and Sangrur from Malwa (being a bigger region), One district Amritsar from Majha and one district Jalandhar from Doaba were selected randomly. Further

two blocks from each district were selected. From each selected block, three villages were selected. Thus 24 villages were selected. A sample of 15 mother-in-law and 15 daughter-in-laws were taken respondents were taken into consideration constituting 360 mother-in-laws (G1) and 360 daughter-in-laws (G2) in all. The data were collected from the respondents by using Interview approach and analyzed with the help of frequency and percentages and other statistical tests.

## ■ RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results obtained from the present investigation as well as relevant discussion have been summarized under following heads :

### Types of ceremonies performed in completion of marriages :

Many ceremonies are performed before and after marriage. Traditionally, marriages in the Punjabi society were formally settled by a betrothal ceremony called *Roka/mangna*, (literally "to ask for"). The family of the bride usually approached the groom's family to stipulate a marriage agreement. The ceremony of *Roka/ Mangna* was an affair of men and the elders in a village. It has not been vanished but transformed into Roka ceremony. The perusal of data in Table 1 showed that a large majority (95.56 %) of G1 respondents had performed *Roka/Mangna* ceremony. The key acts of this ceremony are to decide the wedding day, sometimes with consideration of auspicious dates suggested by an astrologer, the performance of the Ardas and exchange of gifts. When the reservation is settled and the wedding announced, the becoming bride and her family will be offered monetary gifts, gold and the shawl for the wedding called '*Chunni Chadana*', which was performed by 89.17 per cent.

In further dissection of data, it was examined that in Malwa region 97.78 per cent had performed '*Roka/Thaka*' followed by 90.56 per cent had '*Bangal ceremony*' and 89.44 per cent of the respondents held '*Chuni Chadana*'. In Majha region (95.56 %) followed by '*Roka/Thaka*' and in Doaba '*Roka*' (94.44 %) followed by '*Chunni Chadana*' (82.22 %). In case of G2 respondents all the respondents had '*Roka/Thaka*' ceremony followed by '*Chunni Chadana*' (91.39 %) and ring ceremony (61.44 %). Due to the influence of Western traditions, many families have come to perform

Table 1 : Distribution of respondents according types of ceremonies performed								(n=360)
Ceremonies	Malwa (n= 180)	Doaba (n= 90)	Majha (n= 90)	Punjab (n = 360)	Malwa (n= 180)	Doaba (n= 90)	Majha (n= 90)	Punjab
	Mother-in law(G1)				Daughter-in-law(G2)			
<i>Mangna/ Roka</i>	176 (97.78)	85 (94.44)	83 (92.22)	344 (95.56)	180 (100.00)	90 (100.00)	90 (100.00)	360 (100.00)
<i>Ring ceremony</i>	42 (23.33)	32 (35.56)	28 (31.11)	102 (28.33)	109 (60.56)	72 (80.00)	69 (76.67)	250 (69.44)
<i>Bangal ceremony</i>	163 (90.56)	68 (75.56)	51 (56.67)	282 (78.33)	94 (52.22)	39 (43.33)	39 (43.33)	172 (47.78)
<i>Chunni chadana</i>	161 (89.44)	74 (82.22)	86 (95.56)	321 (89.17)	171 (95.00)	81 (90.00)	77 (85.56)	329 (91.39)
<i>Chuharra lagana</i>	102 (56.67)	45 (50.00)	49 (54.44)	196 (54.44)	112 (62.22)	64 (71.11)	51 (56.67)	227 (63.06)
<i>Shagun</i>	42 (23.33)	22 (24.44)	19 (21.11)	83 (23.06)	126 (70.00)	69 (76.67)	56 (62.22)	251 (69.72)

a ring ceremony, in which the couple exchanges golden rings to wear during the wedding. It was performed by 69.44 per cent of second generation respondents whereas only 28.33 per cent first generation had this ceremony. The ritual which resembles the traditional betrothal ceremony and seems to have more or less replaced it today is known as “*Shagan*”.

Three days prior to the wedding the groom’s family set up an unbroken reading of Guru Granth Sahib, either in the gurdwara or at the house. Only 23.06 per cent of G1 respondents had this ceremony whereas 69.72 per cent of G2 respondents performed this ceremony. Overall it was seen that majority of respondents had ‘*Roka/Thaka*’ are followed by ‘*Chunni Chadana*’ ceremony in case of both G1 and G2 respondents. Ring ceremony and Shagun were introduced in second generation people.

### Kind of sweets served:

A few days prior to the wedding the women on both sides gather in the evenings for what is generally called ladies sangeet, the singing of specific folksongs associated with the occasion.

People used to assemble many days before marriage. Ladies sangeet was performed for many days in olden times. The ladies from nearby villages, houses and other relatives used to sing folk songs and perform *Giddha* and other cultural activities. Sikh families would invite women of the community to perform the hymn Sukhmani Sahib for 51 or more times and in the evening sing folk songs and dance to laughter and clapping. In the house of the bride the folk songs are called suhag, which in the context of marriage refers to the marital felicity or a happily married woman. An effort was made to know the change in pre- marriage celebrations. Data

Table 2 : Distribution of respondents according to pre marriage celebrations								(n = 360)
	Malwa (n= 180)	Majha (n= 90)	Doaba (n= 90)	Punjab (n = 360)	Malwa (n= 180)	Majha (n= 90)	Doaba (n= 90)	Punjab
	Mother-in-laws (G1)				Daughter-in-laws (G2)			
Ladies sangeet								
Self	180 (100)	90 (100)	90 (100)	360 (100)	99 (55.00)	59 (65.56)	63 (70)	221 (61.39)
DJ	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	81 (45)	31 (34.44)	27 (30)	139 (38.61)
Sweets served								
Laddoos / Indigenous item	180 (100)	88 (97.78)	84 (93.33)	352 (97.78)	11 (6.11)	5 (2.78)	7 (3.89)	23 (6.39)
Dry fruits	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	49 (27.22)	21 (11.67)	16 (8.89)	86 (23.89)
Costly sweets	0 (0.00)	2 (2.22)	6 (6.67)	8 (2.22)	111 (61.67)	61 (33.89)	63 (35)	235 (65.28)
Chocolates	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	9 (5)	3 (1.67)	4 (2.22)	16 (4.44)

presented in table shows that in the marriages of G1 respondents, ladies sangeet was performed by ladies (100 %) from adjoining houses and villages whereas in case of G2 respondents the DJ's replaced the ladies sangeet. People danced on DJ's and the fashion of singing of folk songs and giddha declined. An effort was also made to know kind of sweets served before marriage. It was observed that traditionally *Laddoos* were served before marriage and that too 4-6 in number. No packings were there. A very few (2.22 %) had served chocolates. Now-a-days most (65.28 % served costly sweets and that too packed in costly boxes and costly cards were printed along which may cost upto Rs. 50-500/box. 23.89 per cent also served dry fruits and few (4.44 %) also served chocolates before marriage. Only 6.39 per cent served laddoos. So, overall it was seen that the trend was changing in terms of pre-marriage celebrations. People are getting more materialistic and show off culture has come in marriages.

#### Traditional items prepared :

In Punjab there is a special custom of giving *Phulkari*, embroidered bed sheets, hand knitted items Girls generally started preparing many items to take along with them at their marriage. Table 3 shows various traditional items like *Pakhiyan*, *Embroided sheets*, hand knitted items etc. were prepared by the respondents. It was observed that in overall sample in case of G1 respondents all the respondents prepared hand knitted items such as sweaters, pullovers, socks, etc. for in-laws family members. *Phulkari* and embroidered sheets were made by each 97.78 per cent of respondents followed by *Pakhiyan* prepared by 58.61 per cent. In case of G2 respondents about one-fourth (26.11 %) prepared *Phulkari*. Only few *i.e.* 8.61 per cent of G2 respondents prepared *Pakhiyan*. Less than half (45.56 %) made hand

knitted items for their dowry. So, it was seen that there is a major shift in kind of dowry items prepared by the respondents. Now-a-days girls prefer to buy readymade things from the market and the traditional dowry items seemed to be disappearing.

#### Traditional ceremonies performed :

The Table 4 shows the traditional ceremonies performed by the respondents. It was observed that in overall data, in case of G1 respondents 64.28 per cent had observed *Din Bandhana/viah hath aana* ceremony whereas in G2 respondents only 39.17 per cent performed this ritual. *Gandh behjni* which was the initial ceremony of sending invitation by 'nai' or 'vichola' for marriage which constitute *Gur*, *Patase* and *Ladoos*. This was done by 63.06 per cent of G1 respondents whereas only 17.78 per cent of G2 respondents performed this ceremony. *Atte Pani pauna* which means to 'start up' of the marriage. It was performed traditionally as a support to bride's family in which things were provided by neighbourers, villagers for marriage. So, 73.89 per cent of G1 respondents had this ceremony whereas a very little 4.44 per cent of G2 respondents performed this ceremony. It seems as this ceremony is disappearing now-a-days. The night before the wedding the groom's or bride's maternal aunt (mami) and other female relatives dress up in beautiful clothes and organize a night procession of light called '*Jago*' which was performed by 65.28 per cent of the G1 respondents. In the house of the bride the folk songs are called *Suhag*, which in the context of marriage refers to the marital felicity or a happily married woman. The songs sung at the house of the bride are called *Sithniyan* and *Bambiha bulana* are usually composed as advice to bride who will go to meet his groom. At this event the women may tie a turban on their head and imitate the groom which amidst great

Table 3 : Distribution of respondents according to items prepared by them								(n = 360)
Item	Malwa (n= 180)	Majha (n= 90)	Doaba (n= 90)	Punjab (n = 360)	Malwa (n= 180)	Majha (n= 90)	Doaba (n= 90)	Punjab
		Mother-in-law(G1)				Daughter-in-law(G2)		
<i>Pakhiyan</i>	112 (62.22)	51 (56.67)	48 (53.3)	211 (58.61)	17 (9.44)	9 (10.00)	5 (5.56)	31 (8.61)
<i>Phulkari</i>	180 (100.00)	89 (98.89)	83 (92.2)	352 (97.8)	41 (22.78)	35 (38.89)	18 (20.00)	94 (26.11)
Embroided sheets	180 (100.00)	89 (98.89)	83 (92.2)	352 (97.8)	138 (76.67)	55 (61.10)	42 (46.67)	235 (65.28)
Hand knitted items	180 (100.00)	90 (100.00)	90 (100.00)	360 (100.00)	103 (57.22)	33 (36.7)	28 (31.11)	164 (45.56)

Table 4 : Distribution of respondents according traditional types of ceremonies performed								(n = 360)
Traditional ceremonies	Malwa (n= 180)	Majha (n= 90)	Doaba (n= 90)	Punjab (n = 360)	Malwa (n= 180)	Majha (n= 90)	Doaba (n= 90)	Punjab
		Mother-in-laws (G1)				Daughter-in-laws(G2)		
<i>Din Bandhna/Vish hath aana</i>	111 (61.67)	66 (73.33)	58 (64.44)	235 (64.28)	66 (36.67)	39 (43.33)	36 (40.00)	141 (39.17)
<i>Ganddh bhejni</i>	108 (60.00)	67 (74.44)	52 (57.78)	227 (63.06)	31 (17.22)	24 (26.67)	9 (10.00)	64 (17.78)
<i>Tel chhona</i>	155 (86.11)	56 (62.22)	66 (73.33)	277 (76.94)	66 (36.67)	24 (26.67)	35 (38.89)	125 (34.72)
<i>Manje pane</i>	111 (88.67)	47 (52.22)	69 (76.67)	227 (63.06)	51 (28.33)	19 (21.11)	16 (17.78)	86 (23.89)
<i>Atte pani pauna</i>	159 (88.33)	61 (67.78)	46 (51.11)	266 (73.89)	13 (7.22)	3 (3.33)	0 (0.00)	16 (4.44)
<i>Akhand Path/Ramayan</i>	168 (93.33)	69 (76.67)	76 (84.44)	313 (86.94)	134 (79.44)	69 (76.67)	69 (76.67)	272 (75.55)
<i>Ladies sangeet</i>	180 (100)	90 (100)	90 (100)	360 (100)	180 (100)	90 (100.00)	90 (100.00)	360 (100.00)
<i>Jaggo</i>	131 (72.78)	55 (61.11)	49 (54.44)	235 (65.28)	42 (23.33)	28 (31.11)	32 (35.56)	102 (28.33)
<i>Bambiha bulana</i>	112 (62.22)	85 (94.44)	75 (83.33)	272 (75.56)	17 (9.44)	11 (12.22)	10 (11.11)	38 (10.56)
<i>Sitahniyan</i>	109 (60.56)	79 (87.78)	67 (74.44)	255 (70.83)	51 (28.33)	19 (21.11)	16 (17.78)	86 (23.89)

laughter. *Bambiha bulana* and *Sitahniyan* were performed by 75.56 per cent and 70.83 per cent, respectively by G1 respondents. But in case of G2 respondent only 10.56 per cent and 23.89 per cent performed these rituals.

So, overall it was concluded that now-a-days, traditional ceremonies are being lesser followed and very few of new generation respondents were performing these ceremonies. Similar results were shown by Menski 1987, Bhachu 1985 in which they

concluded that now-a-days rituals are found to be shorter and less complicated.

#### Believe in astrology :

Traditionally, when a marriage was anticipated, the family might decided to seek the advice of an astrologer most often an astrologer was consulted to match the birth stars of the prospective partners and to tell the families of the compatibility of the partners. In some cases, astrologers were consulted only to fix an auspicious

Table 5 : Distribution of respondents according their believe in astrology								(n = 360)
Believe in astrology	Malwa (n= 180)	Majha (n= 90)	Doaba (n= 90)	Punjab (n = 360)	Malwa (n= 180)	Majha (n= 90)	Doaba (n= 90)	Punjab
		Mother-in-laws (G1)				Daughter-in-laws(G2)		
Yes	93 (51.67)	51 (56.67)	38 (42.22)	182 (50.56)	56 (31.11)	19 (21.11)	28 (31.11)	103 (28.61)
No	87 (48.33)	39 (43.33)	52 (57.78)	178 (49.44)	124 (68.89)	71 (78.89)	62 (68.89)	257 (71.39)
If Yes then								
<i>Gun milana</i>	71 (39.44)	43 (47.78)	52 (57.78)	166 (46.11)	29 (16.11)	11 (12.22)	18 (20.00)	58 (16.11)
<i>Direction of stars</i>	58 (32.22)	33 (36.67)	40 (44.44)	131 (36.39)	27 (15.00)	9 (10.00)	7 (7.78)	43 (11.94)
<i>Manglik-non mangli</i>	41 (22.78)	23 (25.56)	30 (33.33)	94 (26.11)	32 (17.78)	17 (18.89)	18 (20.00)	67 (18.61)
Auspicious time	59 (32.78)	23 (25.56)	20 (22.22)	102 (28.33)	17 (9.44)	6 (6.67)	8 (8.89)	31 (8.61)

day and time for the ceremonies. It was interesting to note that half (50.56 %) of respondents consulted astrologer. 'Gun milana' was the most important belief i.e. 46.11 per cent followed by more than one-third (36.39 %) believed in the direction of stars. Also 28.33 per cent of G1 respondents believed in auspicious time of marriage whereas 26.11 per cent followed 'Manglik /Non manglik' practice whereas in G2 respondents only 8.61 per cent and 18.61 per cent believed in auspicious time and Manglik/Non-manglik resp. Further data revealed that in Malwa region 68.89 per cent believed in astrology, similar was the case of Doaba region of Punjab. So, all it was concluded that the trend was changing and people now don't believe much in astrology. Since weekends are most convenient time for marriages, families insist on having the marriages done on these days. Similar work related to the present investigation was also carried out by Madan (1985); Malhotra (2002); Nevadomsky (1981); Sagade (2004) and Gennep (1960).

### Conclusion :

Marriage in India has apparently always been an important socio-cultural and religious Institution. Although the traditional wedding schedule appears to be shortened over the years, in terms of duration and number of ceremonies. Certain rituals are still considered essential for a marriage to be complete. Punjabi society is going through the process of modernization resulting in radical changes in wedding ceremonies. They are exposed to a variety of changes. Majority of respondents had 'Roka/Thaka' are followed by 'Chunni chadana' ceremony in case of both G1 and G2 respondents. Ring ceremony and Shagun were introduced in second generation people. Many of the traditional ceremonies such as Bambiha bulana, Sithniyan are being lesser performed by the new generation. The trend was changing in terms of pre-marriage celebrations. One of the major change observed in recent weddings was a shortening of the overall ceremonial schedule. Traditional sweets are being replaced by dry fruits, chocolates and costly sweets. People are getting more materialistic and show off culture has come in marriages. A general trend reflected in this process is that people seem to keep the traditional ritual even if many societal values seem to be changing.

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