

In the 1500s England most people got married in June because they took their yearly bath in May, and still smelled pretty good by June. However, they were starting to smell, so brides carried a bouquet of flowers to hide the body odour. Hence, the custom today of carrying a bouquet when getting married. That's what a Western historian is trying to tell us.

Some ignorant *phoren* guy tried to suggest that the bridegroom in Bangladesh has a handkerchief permanently glued on his nose perhaps in keeping with a tradition to avoid similar pungency, and that the bride, deprived of any nasal cover, often fainted at a marriage ceremony. These hypotheses have no scientific bases because we always had lots of waterways. Those who were too lazy to take a dip in the river were taken care of by the monsoon rains.

While a bath theory is rubbish, this is not: In the olden days the Bangladeshi bridegroom and his party had to pay for the food they had at the bride's house. Once Akkel Ali had the food, took the bride and ran away. Since that day the bride's family insisted on advance payment, and this had to be paid at the entrance. But the amount the groom paid gradually got so small, that later children were asked to hold the gate.

The Westerner goes on: In England baths of the olden days consisted of a big tub filled with hot water. The man of the house had the privilege of the nice clean water, then all the other sons and men, then the women and finally the children. Last of all the babies got their turn. By then the water was so dirty you could actually lose someone in it. Hence, the saying, 'Don't throw the baby out with the bathwater.'

The former lovers of the Bangladeshi would-be bride claimed that only a goat would get into this marriage. To symbolise this sometimes they tied a *raam chaagol* in the courtyard of the bride's house. The groom found this out, was very upset and wanted the competition removed. The bride's family informed him that they had done so, but the suspecting groom was so adamant that he would only believe if there was proof. Since then a slaughtered goat, dressed and cooked is thumped on the groom's table.

This Westerner was insistent about their historical facts: English houses had thatched roofs, he said, thick straw piled high, with no wood underneath. It was the only place for animals to get warm, so all the cats and other small animals (mice, bugs) lived in the roof. When it rained it became slippery and sometimes the animals would slip and fall off the roof. Hence the saying, 'It's raining cats and dogs'.

The Mughal soldier could not turn his head because of his metal battle dress that extended from head to toe. Abiding sepoys had a straight neck, others were known as *ghaar tera*. So when he sat at his wedding, the sepoy could not turn his head without turning his whole body, which also made a lot of noise and disturbed the band party. So they placed a mirror in front of the new couple so that the guy could see who it was that he was getting in with. She already knew what she was getting into. On one occasion the shock at first sight on the face of either the groom or the bride (there are two versions) was so obvious that hence they decided to cover the couple with a chador. And since that day tradition demands a similar ritual at *rasumat*, even if they fell in love and had been seeing each other for the past three years.

Rewriting History, it's Possible

CHINTITO

In the old England days, they cooked in the kitchen with a big kettle that always hung over the fire. Every day they lit the fire and added things to the pot. They ate mostly vegetables and did not get much meat. They would eat the stew for dinner, leaving leftovers in the pot to get cold overnight and then start over the next day. Sometimes stew had food in it that had been there for quite a while; hence the rhyme 'peas porridge hot, peas porridge cold, peas porridge in the pot nine days old'

In the olden days our houses did not have a door lock. So on wedding night the couple felt insecure for obvious reasons and required that the door to the *baashor ghar* be sealed. There was no furniture in the room that could be put up against the door. Their only option was a human doorstop, which would also convey that nothing was going on. No one at the groom's house could be trusted with the task from inside because he knew everyone and might co-operate with those seeking unauthorised entry. Since that day a little brother or sister or cousin (*kissu bhuje na type*) of the bride has been accompanying the couple on first night.

England is old and small, the western history buff tells us, and the folks started running out of places to bury people. So they would dig up old coffins and reuse the old grave. When reopening these coffins, one out of 25 was found to have scratch marks on the inside. Horrified, they realised they had been burying people alive. So, they would tie a string on the wrist of the corpse, lead it through the coffin and up through the ground and tie it to a bell. Someone would have to sit out in the graveyard all night (hence 'the graveyard shift') to listen for the bell. Thus, someone could be 'saved by the bell'.

Any family worth its gold in Ye Old Bengal desired to adorn their bride-to-be in gold from head to toe or vice versa. Some historians believe the word *futani* emerged from this practice. As would seem obvious, they soon ran out of gold. More historians believe the word *futa* has its origin in this downfall. But purists wanted to maintain the tradition and symbolically daubed golden turmeric on the maiden. This angered the girl's family and as a form of revenge the very next day they too went to smear the would-be *jamai* in more turmeric. Someone confused gold's representation in spice as the dye yellow and decided to splash some red, then blue, then mayhem to add more colour. That's the beginning of the merriment at *gaye halud*. The gold has stuck on over the years and today, as irony would have it, you have to spend in gold.

And you thought only Westerners could write history.