



After the wedding, 'Bidai' sees the bride and groom leaving for their new abode. The bride here bids farewell to her family, and generally leave before the evening. Sometimes the bride takes a handful of puffed rice over her head, which is then caught in the sari 'anchal' of her mother.

When the couple arrives at the groom's place, the bride is made to step into a mixture of milk and red hues, and then walks into the home creating coloured foot-steps, a memory of her blessed arrival. She also receives gifts and blessings from the family. Other smaller and region based rituals then end the wedding ceremony.

THE CHRISTIAN WEDDING

The Bengali Christian wedding has more elements of traditional Bengali wedding than the religious elements. The bride and groom enjoy a traditional holud, and often there are also fun bridal showers as well as more recently, bachelor and bachelorette parties.

The main wedding takes place at the church, where the priest officiates as the couple say their vows, and often, exchange their wedding rings. The day is then spent in general merriment, and often, the bride is welcomed into the groom's home with song and gifts.

THE BUDDHIST WEDDING

A traditional Buddhist wedding starts off with the matching of the bride and groom's horoscopes, and then finding the auspicious hour for the wedding, according to the priest's suggestion.

The actual wedding takes place at the temple, officiated or blessed by the head priest. First, the couple bows down before the image of the Buddha, chant prayers, and light incense sticks.

The parents of the bride and groom then tie a loop of thread around their heads. The couple then makes offerings to the monks, of food, sweets, flowers and even medicines.

Then the couple are blessed by chanting of prayers in Pali. The string around the couple is not connected to container, which is later sacrificed, and red paste is applied to the couple's foreheads. This signifies the end of the official ceremony. Although monks traditionally did not attend weddings, now they often do.

SOME INDIGENOUS TRADITIONS

Apart from the Bengali ethnicity, the tribal people of the country have many interesting and colourful rituals too. The Chakmas of the Chittagong Hills, the largest indigenous group, are predominantly Buddhist, but their cere-

monies also have a distinct indigenous flavour.

The Chakma do not hold any weddings in the Bangla month of Poush, and weddings only take place at the auspicious hour. Before the wedding, the groom's family visits the bride's home at least thrice in the 'tin purani' custom, and only fix the date and other details during the third time.

On the day of the wedding, one person from the groom's family is appointed as the 'shabala,' and he/she takes all the bride's trousseau and gifts in a basket (kula) and takes the blessings of all the elders in the family. The same person then takes the gifts to the bride's home, and collects blessings from all her elders, before giving it to the bride.

Another lady from the groom's family is assigned as 'bou doroni,' and she collects the bride from her home and brings her to the wedding venue, after she seeks blessings from all her elders by touching their feet, and receiving a sprinkling of cotton and rice! At the venue, usually the groom's house, the priests chant prayers and conduct the ceremony. Interestingly, the bride's mother in this community has a right to ask for a special gift from the groom and family, 'doduli tengya.'

The Garo community of the Mymensingh and surrounding regions also had many different rituals. They are a matrilineal society, and children take the surname of the mother. Also, people with the same last name cannot intermarry.

There are two main events in the Garo wedding, the 'panchini' and 'biye.' Interestingly, the 'panchini' is organised in the house opposite to that of the bride. The wedding gifts are also exchanged on the day. Later, if the wedding takes place at the bride's, then the groom comes to her place to live, and if it takes place the groom's, then she comes to live with him.

Many of the Garos have now become Christian, and often marry at the church, and start their lives together at an entirely new house, away from the parents.

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Bata

