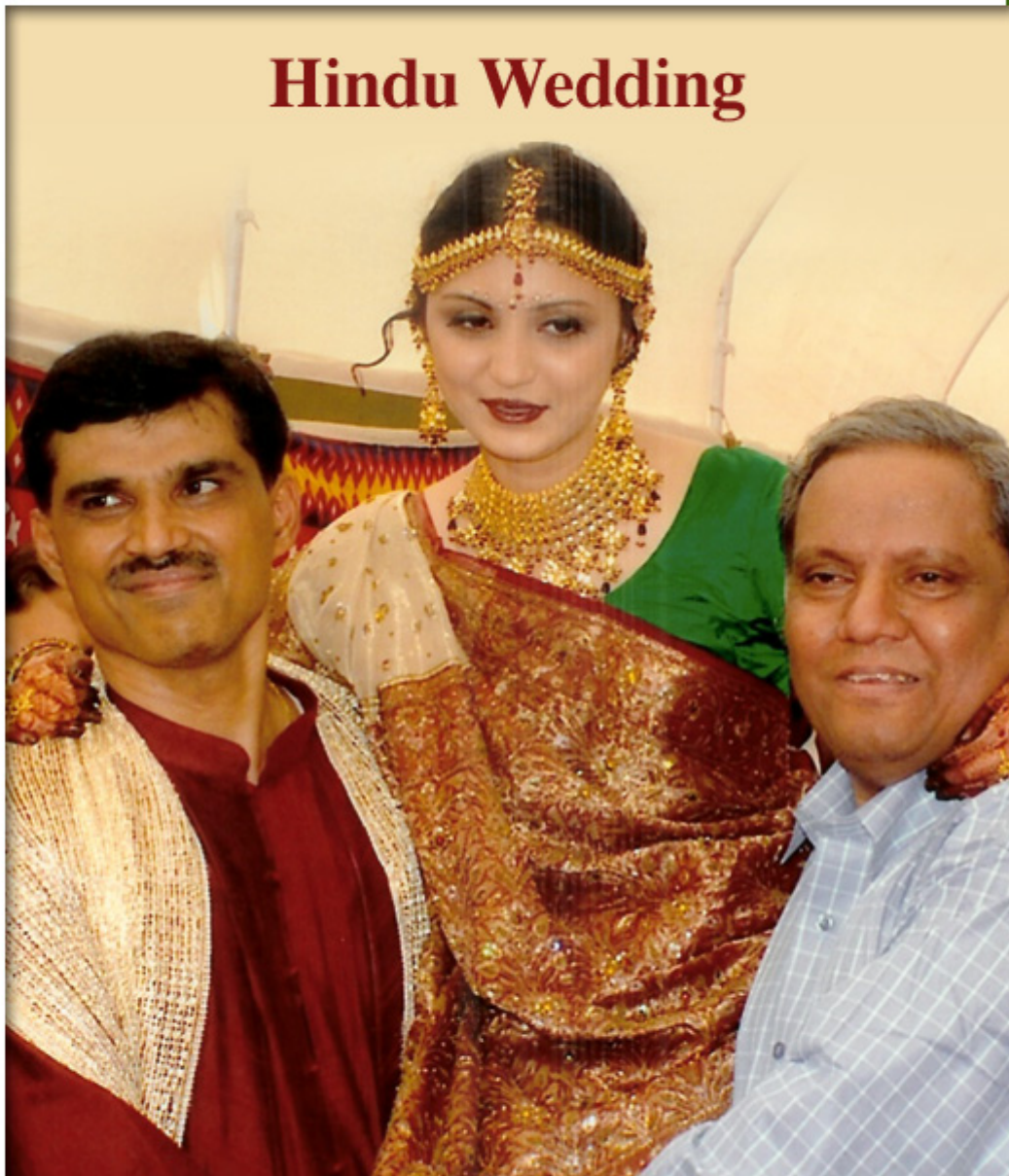




*The Henna Page*TM

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF HENNA

Hindu Wedding



Dipti Desai

HINDU WEDDING

By Dipti Desai

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Stow, Ohio 44224 USA

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Library of Congress Cataloging in-Publication Data

Dipti Desai
Hindu Wedding

Henna Traditions
Weddings
Hindu Traditions

Hindu Wedding

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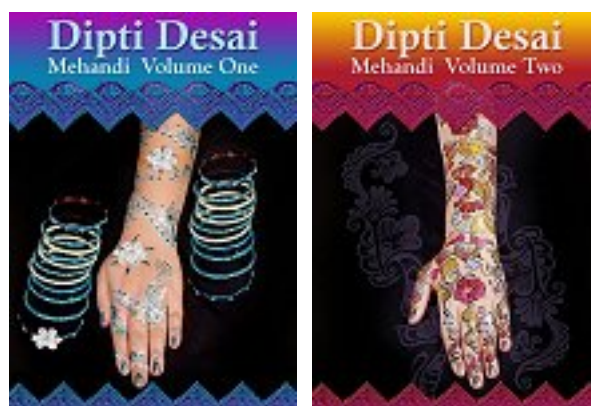


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HINDU WEDDING

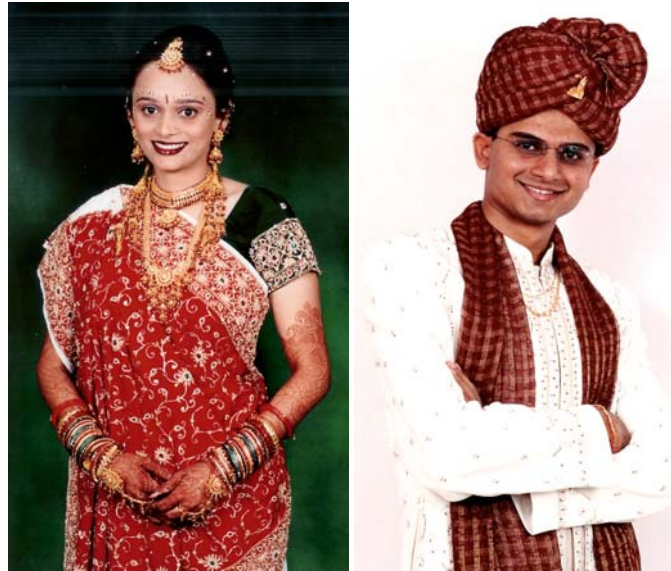


Figure 1: Bride and Groom

The Concept of the Hindu Wedding

The ancient Vedic society had a number of rituals for keeping life running smoothly (these reached all aspects of daily life, including aesthetics), most of which were rooted in Indian traditions.

Man's most vital need is to discover his own inner reality through the cultivation of a symbolic life. As the body was the chief symbol of worship in Vedic society, the preparations for worship tended to be on the outside of it. It would be in this way that the Shakti, a female energy and the creative power of Shiva in man, was awakened. In the second stage that immediately followed the initial Brahmcharya (the period of training one's body and mind, to bring the concept of companionship), the two ritual markings on the body were regarded as a crossroads of sorts. This was the marriage of two souls.

Hindu marriage is a sacrament based on the concept of a holy bond - a union for spiritual development and mutual love and companionship in the eyes of God. The need for companionship is seen not as a sign of weakness but a basis for intellectual and moral development and the creation of families. The traditional Hindu marriage serves a higher spiritual ideal both partners, and this common ideal binds even the most dissimilar of individuals. Thus, both partners allegedly can create a perfect relationship through sacrifices, dedication, and surrender.

In Hindu dharma, marriage is viewed as a sacrament, as opposed to the western view of marriage being a contract. It is also the strongest social bond that takes place between a man and a woman. When a man and a woman are soul mates through the institution of marriage, they can direct their respective life energies toward the progress and evolution of their of their souls.

During the marriage ceremony, Veda's mantras are uttered, the duties demarcated, and freedom given to both as husband and wife vow to be loyal to each other. A harmonious family is an institution that provides the energy and inspiration to bring forth one's divinity. A child of harmonious family may be a divine personality. It is said in various Hindu scriptures that "Ram Avtaar" is at Ayodhya's king Dashratha and Kaushalyaji and "Krishna Avtaar" is with Vasudeva and Devkiji, after thousands of years of Tapashcharya, they got the God as their child etc.

Because India is a large country with diverse religious and cultural bases, its wedding customs vary widely. However, the idea of marriage creating a family unit prevails.

Arrangement of Marriage

Marriage is a strong bond between the shakti (woman) and the power (man). According to the Hindu scriptures, marriage represents the pilgrimage of eternal life (salvation), and is an institutional arrangement within society at large.

In the Hindu religion, marriage is the thirteenth of the sixteen ceremonies in a person's life and a sacrament to be solemnized as ascribed by the Vedas, the holy Hindu scriptures which date back several thousand years. It starts from Manu and Shatrupa – Brahma's manas generation on this Universe. Brahma is the lord of creativity of this world. He thought that "AKO AHAM BAHUSHYAMI....." brings the present wonderful world.

Marriage is not simply a ceremony. It consists of a number of events, actually starting in a person's childhood. At one time, marriages were completely arranged by one's parents, giving the child no say in the matter whatsoever. However, as society has evolved and overall levels of education have increased, this has changed some. Nowadays, parents still arrange the marriage, but do so with their child's consent. Friends of the parents often suggest someone who they feel is a suitable match to their son or daughter. Most important is that the perspective match be of the same caste as the young man or woman for whom a match is sought. Other bases for suitability include health, wealth, education, personality, and family background, and even astrology. Once this initial phase of matchmaking is completed, the two families settle on a date to meet.

The boy, accompanied by his parents and/or close relatives, visits the girl and talks to her and her family. If both of them are satisfied with each other's personality, the parents establish the engagement. In engagement process, the boy's mother gives the bride some

money as a sign of welcome. The girl bows down to the boy's parent to thank them for inviting her into the family member and seek ashirwad (blessings).

A ring ceremony or chandla vidhi, or chandlo matli, is held at the home of the groom in which the couple welcomes each other and exchange golden rings. At this time, a pooja of lord Ganpati is also performed and bride's father makes a Tilak on the forehead of the groom and accepts him as his son-in-law, uniting the two families, who then exchange sweets. Additionally, the bride's family also offers a matli (large vessel), which contains sweets and savories. Next, the two families settle on a date for the wedding consulting a priest or an astrologer, and the marital process begins. Normally, the bride's family is the busier of the two because they will be the ones to host the wedding.

Sometimes the older generation of a family may insist on finding a match without the child's consent or input, especially regarding the education of a prospective partner, and this causes some friction. In some regions marriages of minors do still occur in this day and age, but India's government is doing what it can to put a stop to them. Another practice that has caused some societal discord is the dowry, in that it causes the wealthy to become conspicuous consumers and make life and marriage more difficult for those with less money. The dowry was designed as a form of financial security for the bride, in the case of her marriage failing. It is usually made up of clothing, jewelry, and items for the home, even some cash. However, this has changed into more of a "market value" pricing system with the status of the bride's family. To safeguard the bride, the Indian government has banned the official practice of the dowry. Although the legislation exists, however, the dowry system is still in effect in many marriages.



Figure 2: The Ring Ceremony

Marriage Ceremonies

In addition to being a holy ceremony, a wedding is an important social function and people of all ages can and do enjoy themselves. The wedding has three phases: premarriage activities, ceremonies before the wedding day, and at last the actual wedding.

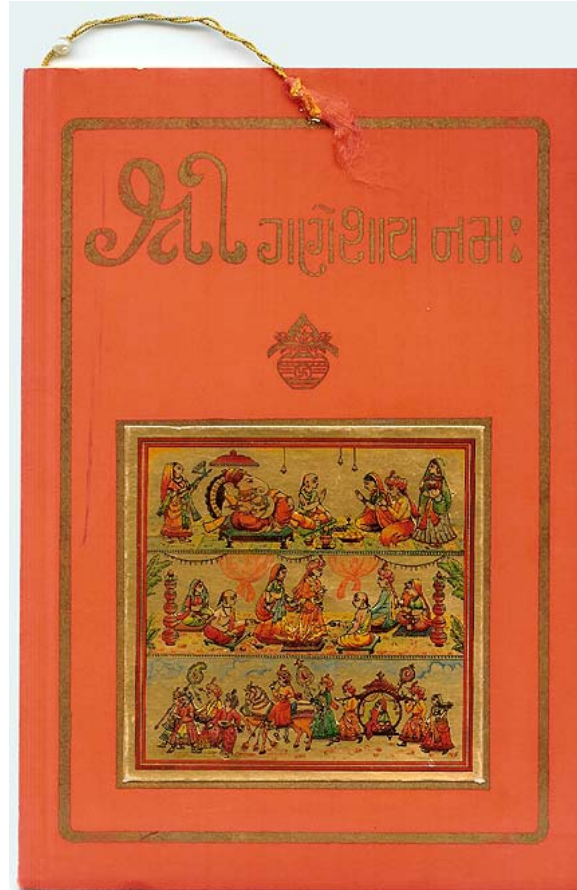


Figure 3: Kankotry: the wedding invitation card

The family arranges invitations (kumkum patrika), mehndi, mandap muhurat, Pithi, and Grah Shanti.

First, the families prepare guest lists for the various functions and. The procedure inviting a guest is called "kumkum patrika," and may be done either in person or by other means. First, though, an invitation is offered to the God, requesting Him to remain present and grace the function. Each family has its own Kul Devta along with Lord Ganpati and others.

Some of the bride's family members may arrive as far as fifteen days in advance in order to help with the festivities.

Mehndi Party

For the bride, the mehndi (henna) day is a very important day. The house is decorated with flowers and filled with friends and family members and there is music and dancing.



Figure 4: The bride's henna



Figure 5: The Bride's Henna

The bride's feet and palms are decorated with beautiful, intricate henna designs. As the henna artwork signifies the strength of love in a marriage, the bride makes an effort to keep it on as long as possible. The function ends with friends and family sitting down to an extravagant dinner.



Figure 6: The Bride's Henna

Words from well-known Gujarati song about mehndi:

“Mehendi te vavi mandve / rang gayo Gujarat re . . .”



Figure 7: The Bride's Henna

Words from a well-known Bollywood song about mehndi

“Mehndi laga ke rakhna / doli saja ke rakhna . . .”

*Put on the henna; decorate the palanquin (carriage,)
Your beloved is coming to take you home!*

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Raas Garba: Sangeet Party



Figure 8: The family at the sangeet

The Sangeet is another joint event between the families, normally including an orchestra and singers, and is held three or four days before the wedding. The music will include popular songs as well as dance music and dandiya raas.

In Gujarat on the evening of the 'raas/garba' family and friends gather together dressed in traditional finery and sing and dance to the beat of the 'dhol' (drum). The women form a circle to dance the graceful 'garba' and the men join in later in an energetic 'dandia raas' (dandias are sticks).



Figure 9: Dancing at the Sangeet



Figure 10: Performance at the party



Figure 11: Dancer and musicians

Now days, orchestras are popular for the garba night. Each region of India has its own songs and dances. Garba, nrutya, dandiya, dandiya raas are favorites in Gujarat. This party runs late into the night and ends with a dinner.

A well known song for Sangeet is:

*“Dhrabang.....Dhrabang
Dholina dhol dhabuke
Pag ni pani ma vijali zabuke.....
Dhartini Dhul abh ne ambe....”*

Clothing



Figure 12: A Hindu groom dressed for his wedding

The Groom's Clothing

Normally, the groom wears a traditional sherwani (long tunic with gold embroidery) in white, ivory, or beige, though the Kurta, a simple Dhoti and tunic. Men also wear westernized clothing, often favoring a suit and tie. Men may wear a Rajwadi safa (a style of turban) on head. The safas are different colours and shapes.



Figure 13: A Hindu Bride dressed for her wedding

The Bride's Dresses

The bride's wedding dress is glamorous with a superb glow and shine and an almost magical touch to it. In some parts of India, the bride has to change sarees four or five times during a wedding ceremony. A woman may wear a Banaras silk saree or one from South India with golden brocade and tinsel work, and either red or green in color.

During the Vedic period, the bride's female relatives and friends would make the dress by hand. The brides had different spiritual tie-dyed sarees called chunris. In fact, it is a tradition in Bhojpuri culture for women to wear these tie-dyed sarees at weddings. A georgette or chiffon fabric would be embroidered with silk thread, jari work, badla (tinsel) and synthetic pears. The ensemble had a matching choli and intricate lace undergarments.



Figure 14: A bride in an ikat sari



Figure 15: A Hindu Bride dressed for her wedding

The bridal outfit may consist of a red and white saree heavily embroidered with gold thread or jari. The white signifies purity and the red, fertility. The bride's maternal uncle (her mother's brother) also presents her with a sari and head covering, and her husband's family would also give her a silk sari.

Solah Shringars



Figure 16: A Hindu Bride dressed for her wedding

Throughout history, women have tried to make themselves more attractive. Whether beautiful or plain, a woman may spend hours each day engaging in beauty rituals and treatments guaranteed to enhance her inherent charms. No other day is more appropriate for this ritual than one's wedding day.

The solah shringars symbolize the pinnacle of the basic feminine urge for beautification. The shringar, the decorating of one's body for enhancement, has long been an art of the Hindu society. It was not a mere cosmetic process but had an undercurrent of deeper significance. The solah shringar rituals evolved for the sake of health and hygiene. Today, beautifying one's body, today is a more mechanical and physical process, aesthetic rather than divine.



Figure 17: A Hindu bride dressed for her wedding

Jewelry plays an important role in Indian wedding. Nowhere have jewels had a greater place society and its traditions than in India. During the vivah sanskar (marriage ceremonies), both the bride and bridegroom wear magnificent jewelry on many parts of their bodies that captivate the gaze of one and all.



Figure 18: A Hindu bride dressed for her wedding

No single piece of Indian jewelry fulfills the role that the wedding ring does in western society. Usually a bride wears as much jewelry as her family can afford, in the form of necklaces, bangles, bajubandh, tikka on the head, earrings, toe rings, and more.

The Sangeet party (Song party)



Figure 19: Dancing at the sangeet party

At night, the women have a songs-sangeet party for all four days, with each side of the wedding party holding their own. They sing songs pertaining to social aspects, songs about the bride, groom, and their respective families, and antakshari, a game in which the partygoers divide into two groups, one group starts a song, and the other group must sing a song starting from the last word of that one. They also sing fantanas- songs sung in local dialects about daily life. The songs may lightly poke fun at other people present, in the same style as the western tradition of a "roast." At the end of the night, small gifts are handed out to the partygoers. One of the songs is . . .

*"Kanku chhanti kankotri mokli...mokli mokli mama derbare..
mama te vehla awjo re...."*

Ceremonies before wedding day: The Holy rituals

During each process, the priest (Brahmin) chants mantras (slokas) from Vedas.

Mandap Muhurat:

Mandap is the four-poled canopy at center stage. The sacred fire in the mandap not only symbolizes the illumination of mind, body, and soul, but also brings a clean and pure witness to the ceremony. Mandap ropan (the placing of the wooden poles in the ground done three days before the ceremony) signifies the official start of the occasion. Doing

this invites lord Ganesha, the son of lord Shiva and Parvati. He is an especially auspicious god and his presence ensures that everything will run smoothly.

Matruka Sthapan (Maydev)

In the Hindu religion, goddesses called Matrukas are invited into a specific place in the home and there their presence is established in the form of two pots made of soil. In the bottom of these pots is jwara (soil mixed with selected grains). These are kept until the bride comes into the groom's home, with a similar ceremony in the bride's home. Nourished by the soil and water, the jwara grows, and if it grows very tall, it is said to be a good omen.

Pithi



Figure 20: Pithi for the Groom

The Pithi ceremony follows the preceding rituals. The pithi ceremony takes place at both the bride and the grooms house. A shrine is arranged with a picture of Lord Ganesh set in it.

The bride/groom sits on a 'bajat' or low stool, palms upturned. It is the prerogative of the 'kaaki' (paternal uncle's wife) to mix the 'pithi' (a paste of sandalwood powder, turmeric, herbs, rosewater and 'German mogro' (a type of 'attar' or perfume). This is supposed to have beautifying and skin lightening properties.

She then arranges the 'pithi' on a decorated platter and has it blessed by the priest. The women of the household apply the 'pithi' on the bride/grooms skin on all the exposed areas.



Figure 21: Pithi for the groom

A small ceremony called the 'ookarhi nautarvi' is conducted after the 'pithi' wherein the 'kaaki' places an iron nail, a whole 'supari' (betel nut) and a one-rupee coin in a shallow hole dug by the 'pujari'. This is done to ensure that no evil spirits enter the venue of the wedding.



Figure 22: Pithi and henna for the bride



Figure 23: The family applies pithi to the bride

Grah Shanti:



Figure 24: Grah shanti

On the next day, the Grashanti ceremony takes place at the houses of both the bride and groom. This is an entirely religious ritual, when all the saints and prophets and even the family's dead ancestors are invited to bless the occasion.



Figure 25: The family at the sacred ceremony



Figure 26: The sacred fire and offerings

A fire is lit in a central vedi (made of small kutchha bricks with an open area in the center) and aahuti of various materials offered to the fire of God, Agni Devta, along with pooja of other Gods and Goddesses and nine planets.

This is a prayer to the nine planets of the solar system. Ancient Indian beliefs were that celestial bodies have an influence on everyone's destiny, with the effect of the nine planets being the strongest. During this pooja, the gods associated with this planets are asked to give the soon-to-be-married couple courage, peace of mind, and inner strength to help them endure life's sufferings.



Figure 27: Grah shanti

Wedding day

There will be different activities at both the bride and grooms homes. At the bride's home, people will be busy with many preparations whereas at the groom's home, they will be only busy making arrangements for the var yatra-barat (groom's procession).



Figure 28: The Hindu Groom

Groom's Procession (var yatra-barat):

The groom wears silky shervani or other selected clothing and the procession starts from his place. He may sit on a white horse's cart, on the white horse itself with shringar or in a car decorated mostly with flowers.

The priest gives the groom's sister a small bowl wrapped in cloth and containing coins on which the Hindu Swastika has been etched. She rattles this over her brother's head to ward off the evil eye and also to warn him that even though he is getting married, he must not forget his sister.



Figure 29: The groom's procession: the car

An orchestra will be first in the procession, next a group of dancing people, then groom's part of the wedding party followed by the groom's vehicle and a group of the bride's friends and family at the end.



Figure 30: All the family and friends join the procession



Figure 31: Musicians play for the groom's procession



Figure 32: The groom's procession: the family dances

This is a happy occasion, with the friends and family singing and dancing along with the orchestra. At the bridal mandap, they set off fireworks. In earlier times, a decorated bullocks cart would set off for a distant place, and people were lifted on litters or palanquins.



**Figure 33: The groom's procession: the happy family
Welcoming the Groom (Receiving the Barat)**



Figure 34: Receiving the Barat

As soon as the procession reaches the mandap, the family member of the bride receives the groom's party. The bride's mother welcomes the groom with a garland and she escorts him to the gate of the mandap at the wedding hall's entrance.



Figure 35: Receiving the barat

All other barat people will be escorted to the mandap and given a proper seat and drinks or ice cream are served as the orchestra plays songs appropriate for the occasion. To add to the atmosphere, the mandap is decorated with flowers and other beautiful things. At the center, another small lagna mandap to seat the bride and groom stands, decorated with flowers and flanked with pots.



Figure 36: A lagna mandap



Figure 37: A lagna mandap

At the entrance, the groom passes through a customary pooja called “pokavu.” The mother-in-law welcomes the groom and then tries to pinch his nose. This playful practice reminds the groom that he has come to their door to ask for their daughter. The bride also welcomes the groom by offering him a garland at the entrance hall, which symbolized the couple’s formal acceptance of each other.



Figure 38: The bride and groom are lifted higher and higher

There is also a game here: the groom is elevated at a level higher than the reach of the bride, so it is difficult for her to welcome him and offer the garland. This demonstrates the groom's superiority. Of course, today things are different and this is only done in fun. Then, the bride and groom are seated opposite each other (amne-samne).



Figure 39: The groom's feet are washed

Upon the groom's arrival in the lagna mandap, another ceremony, madhuparka, is held. The groom's feet are washed and he is fed honey and milk after he sits down.



Figure 40: The groom is fed honey and milk, while bride's sister plots mischief

During this time, the bride's sister tries to steal the groom's shoes, adding some mischief and humor to the ceremony. Afterward, the groom retrieves his shoes by offering his sister-in-law some money or something else of value.

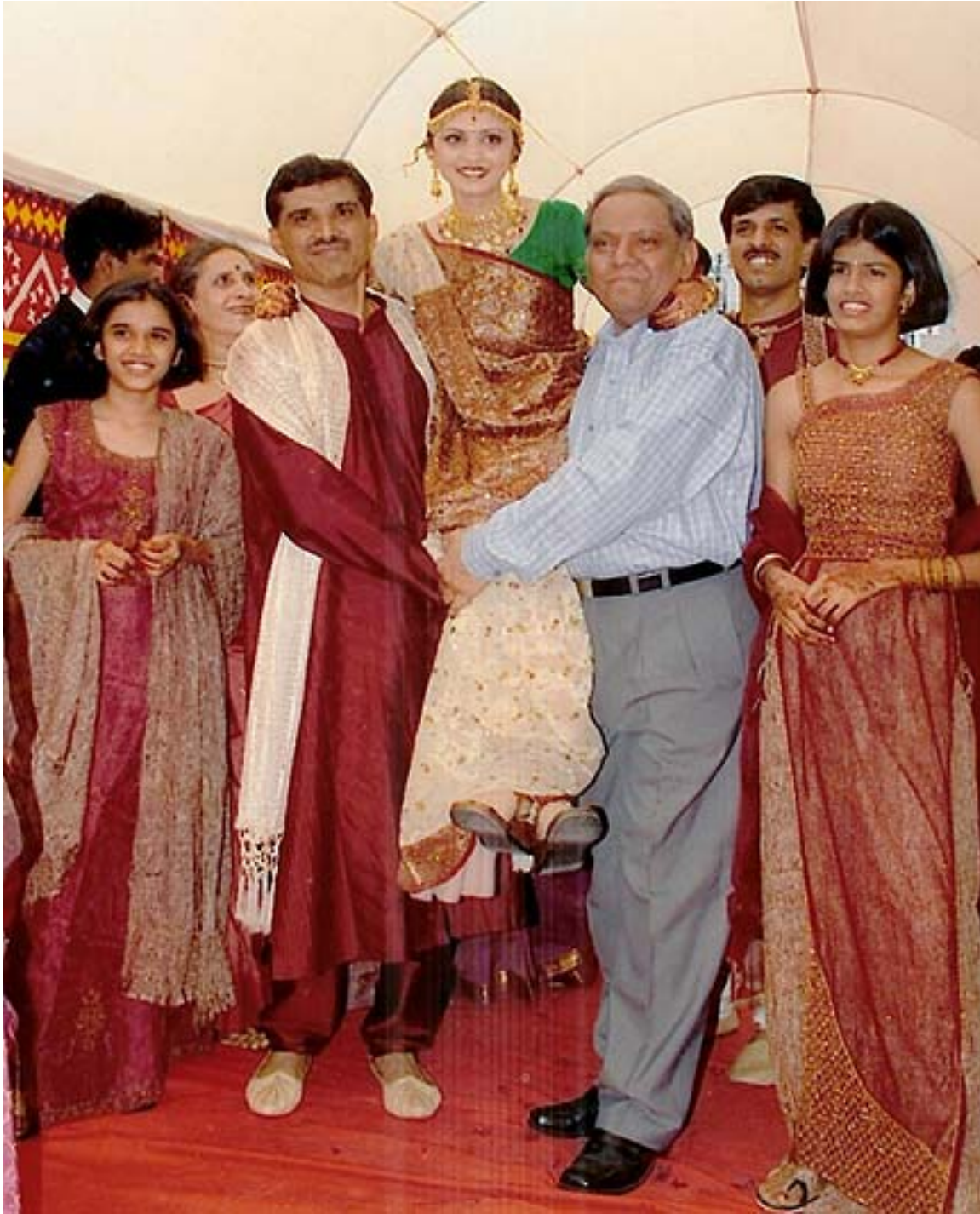


Figure 41: The bride's maternal uncle carries her to the mandap

The bride is then walked/carried to the Mandap by her maternal uncles in a ceremony that is known as Kanya Agamana, a tradition that has survived from the early days of child marriages.



Figure 42: The bride's maternal uncle carries her to the mandap



Figure 43: The curtain is pulled back

The priest holds the Anterpat, a curtain separating the bride and groom who are now standing opposite each other. They chant the Vedic sutras and angalashtak, giving blessing.



Figure 44: The couple's hands are joined and the family brings flowers.

Then it is time for the bride to be given away in a ritual known as Kanya Daan and hasta melap. Hasta melap means joining of hands. This is done by the bride's father joining the right hands of the bride and groom as a symbol of their union (hasta melap). At this point a loop of white raw cotton, wound round 24 times symbolizing different characteristics and virtues of human life, is put round the shoulders of the bride and groom. Garlands and rings are exchanged.

On the last line of the sloka, a thali is struck to inform everybody in the mandap that hasta melap is over.

At this time, close relatives sprinkle flowers on the couple. In Gujarat, at this stage, the couple exchanges a varmala (a beautiful garland of flowers). An auspicious cord is also placed around the necks of the couple to protect them from evil influences. Some holy pooja is also done after this.



Figure 45: The couple with auspicious cord and garlands

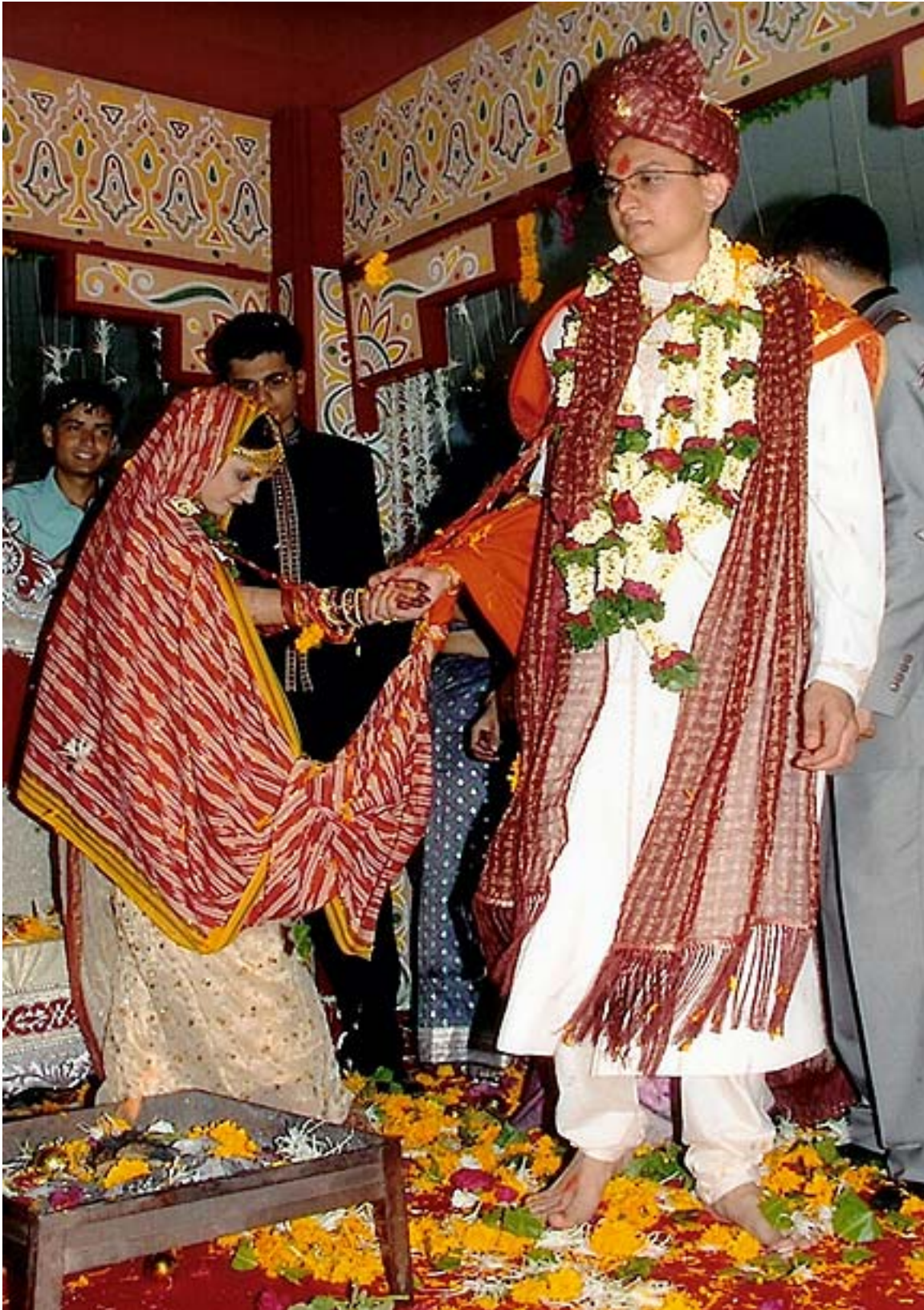


Figure 46: The couple circles the holy fire

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Now it is time for the mangal feras. During this process, the couple circles the holy fire four times. In many parts of India, the four circles symbolize the four basic human goals. According to Hindu way of life, a man should strive to achieve these four chief objectives (Purusharthas) during his life. They are: dharma (righteousness), artha (material wealth), kama (desire) and moksha (salvation).



Figure 47: The bride reveals her resourcefulness and intelligence

After completing the fourth circle, the bride and groom compete to be the first to sit down. In the past, this tradition was thought to predict who would dominate the marriage since family elders noticed that simple traits and gestures could reveal the bride's resourcefulness and intelligence. Today this game carries much less significance since the bride and groom are both aware of the tradition, making it more fun than anything else.

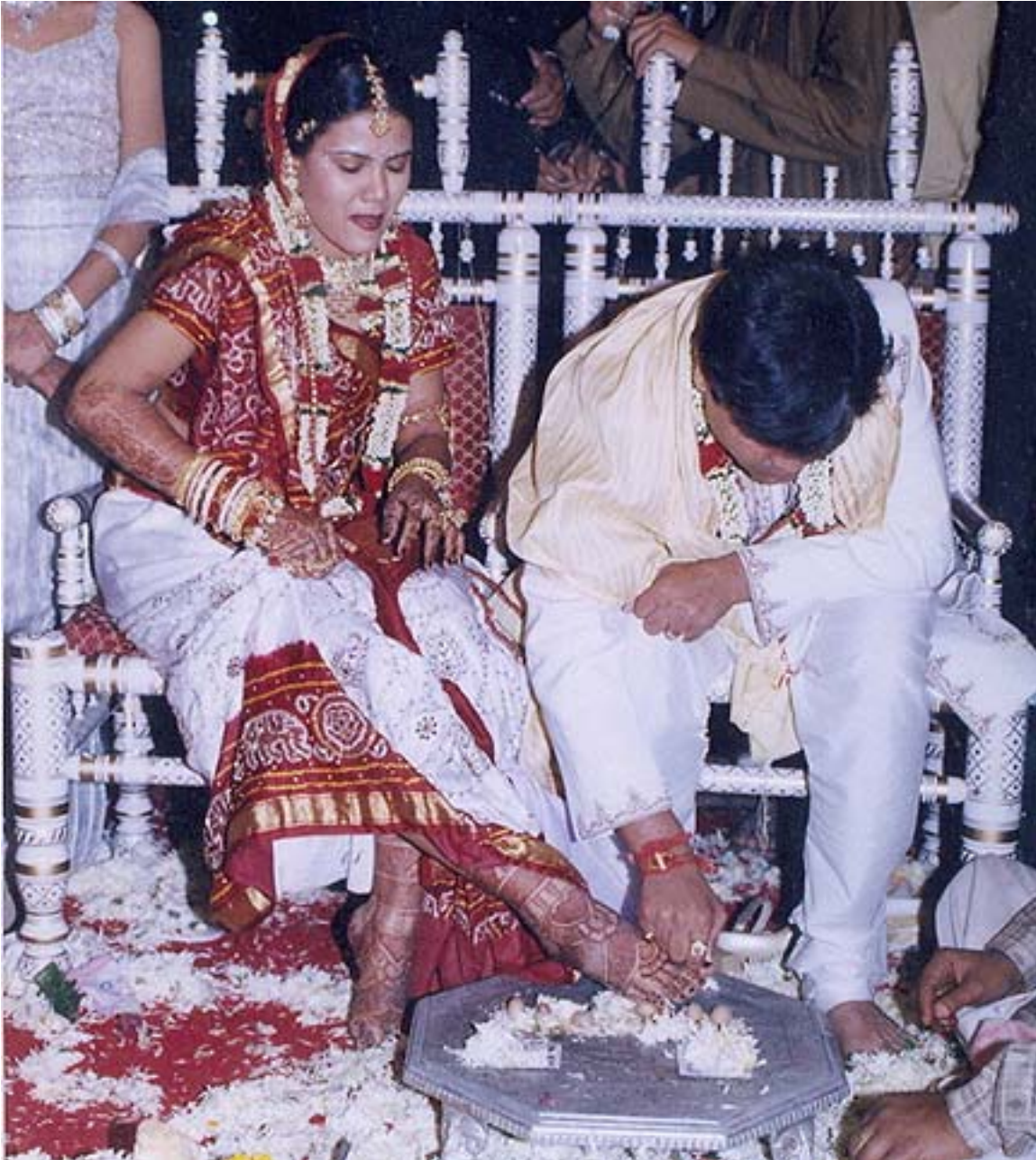


Figure 48: The groom helps the bride touch seven betel nuts with her right toe

According to Gujarati wedding tradition, the saat fera or sapta padi has a unique function. The groom helps the bride touch seven betel nuts with her right toe while the priest recites the seven vows, and the brother of the bride stand nearby and wish the couple good will by sprinkling rice grains.



Figure 49: The bride helps the groom touch seven betel nuts with his right toe

Saubhagyavati

Another quite interesting aspect of the wedding is the Saubhagyavati, in which several married women from the bride's family get onto the altar to whisper secret blessings into the right ear of the bride. The groom's side offers presents to these women for blessing their daughter-in-law.

The groom reaches out and grabs the pallu of the bride's mother's sari, a tradition called “Chero pakarvo” which began as an excuse for the groom to ask for the ring and gifts from the bride's family to which he is entitled. Relatives and friends from both sides then offer their gifts to the couple.



Figure 50: The family offers gifts to the couple

Mungalsutra & Sindoor

The groom's family now presents the bride a gold and black-beaded necklace, known as Mungalsutra. Next, the groom applies a red powder, known as Sindoor, in the middle parting of the bride's forehead. The Mungalsutra and Sindoor are symbols of the eternal bond of marriage, and a long and protected life for the groom and bride.



**Figure 51: Gifts from the family
Saat Pedhi Sambandh**



Figure 52: The saat pedhi sambandh unites the families

A relation ritual known as saat pedhi sambandh is performed between two families to unite them with each other and each other's ancestors. The bride and groom's fathers perform this ceremony in the presence of the couple.



Figure 53: The families unite



Figure 54: The couple touches the priest's feet

After completing all these rituals, the couple touches the feet of their priest and their parents, asking for their ashirwad (blessings). This is followed by the grand dinner with the couple, their parents, and a few relatives. The couple welcomes this meal as they must fast the entire wedding day.



Figure 55: The couple enjoy their wedding dinner

VIDAI



Figure 56: The bride is sad to leave her home

After performing some other ceremonies, the last stage is to give departure to the Var-Kanya (the couple). This is a sad ceremony for the bridal family and particularly for the

bride, because she is leaving the house where she has lived since birth. Now she must leave these familiar surroundings and also leave the chhtrachhaya (protection) of her parents and begin a new life among the unfamiliar. God has given women extraordinary strength in this respect. She weeps heavily at the time of departure but in a few days when she will visit her parents, she will be very happy with new situation.



Figure 57: The bride weeps heavily

After the departure of the bride and groom, which is known as the vidai, the couple returns to the groom's house. On their arrival, the groom's mother welcomes the couple and asks them to stand near the main door. There a kankoo (red powder) with water is in a dish where the bride is asked to dip her foot and make footprints on the floor of the room. This is said to be kankuvarna pagla, i.e. Goddess Laxmi's footprints, and this means that Laxmi has come to the house. This procedure continues until they (the couple) reach the matruka sthapan place.



Figure 58: Eki Beki

Here, they play a game of “Eki-Beki.” This game is played by placing a ring and several coins in a tray of water colored by sindoor and milk. It is said that the member of the couple who finds the ring first four out of seven times will rule the household. They pray to the matrukas and take blessings from them. The next day, the couple will visit the temple for blessings and after that chhed chhed separated.

This completes the wedding ceremony. After that, the couple will move to some outside place to enjoy the first night of marriage, the honeymoon.

Aum Shanti Shanti Shanti.....

A Hindu Wedding in Henna



Figure 59: The bride's hennaed hands



Figure 60: Lord Ganesha (left) and Mandap Maharat with musical instruments (right)



Figure 61: The groom arrives on horseback

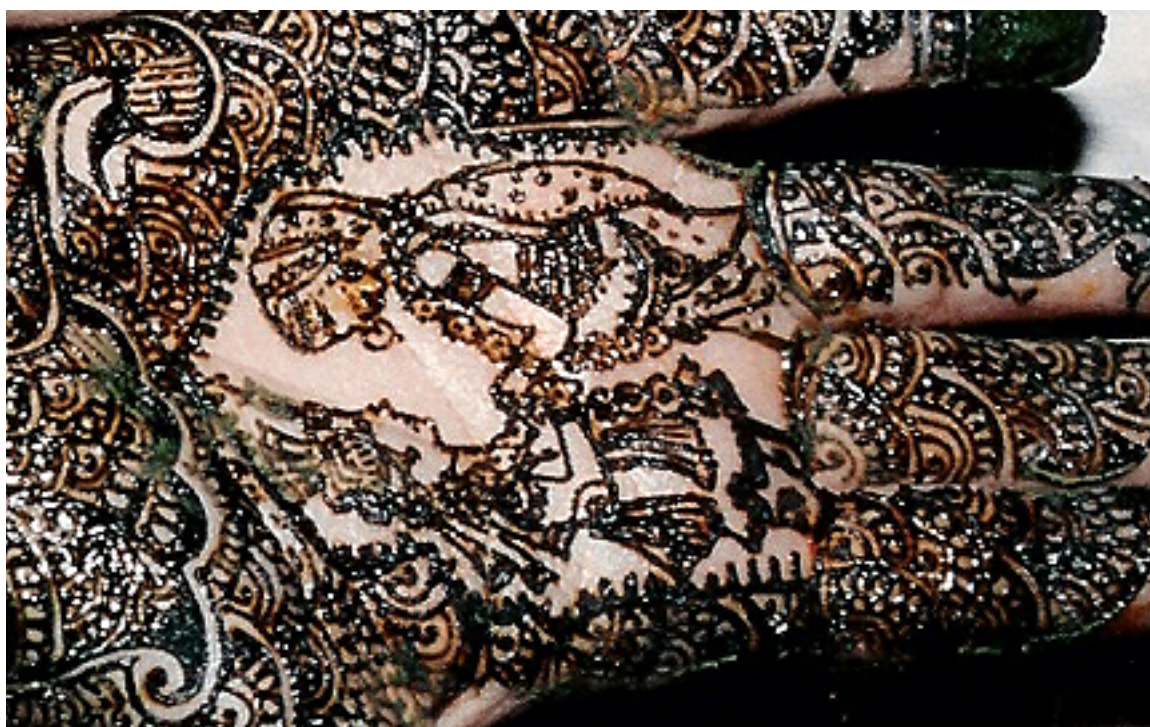


Figure 62: The bride welcomes the groom



Figure 63: The bride in her palanquin (left) and the portrait of the bride (right)



Figure 64: Hasta Melap, the bride's hand on the groom's hand (left) and Mangal Pherat the couple circles the holy fire (right)



Figure 65: The groom takes the bride home with him

Henna artistry by Dipti Desai

The Henna Page would like to extend its gratitude to Dipti Desai, her family and brides for this wonderful book, and to the editors at HennaPage.com for assisting in its publication.

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