

And pivotal to this entire scene is the Indian bride... radiant and demure, yet shy and apprehensive, her *kohl*-marked eyes mirror her conflicting emotions. For her, it represents a break from her childhood home and the parental yoke, to complete adaptation to a new life with her husband and his family...

Richly clad in warm colours, bedecked with magnificent jewellery, adorned with sweet-smelling flowers and anointed with perfume, a bride is always radiant on her wedding day but Indian tradition and culture make the Indian bride even more enchanting.

Another striking difference between the North Indian and South Indian bride is the veiling of the face. Brides in the North must drape the end of the saree over the head, so as to allow it to drop over the face like a veil. This is called *ghungat* (Hindu) or *pardah* (Muslim). The origin of this practice can be traced to the era of population movements into India, when the women sought this protection from covetous eyes. Today it is observed as a sign of respect to elders. Brides from the South and Maharashtra are not required to cover their head. Therefore considerable emphasis is attached to floral decoration for the hair.

The bride's forehead is covered by the centre of the *tikka* or a similar ornament supported by jewelled chains which hook into the hair. The nature of the variety of styles and the way worn in the North on the right side of the nose, in the South on the left side, both sides, or in the centre. Elaborate ornaments are worn in the ears, and a number of necklaces of different lengths are worn around the neck. The upper arms may be adorned with a *bazuband* or a *vanki*, whilst the wrists are adorned with special ornaments. The hands are covered with a *hathphool*, a hand ornament of several rings connected to a wristlet by jewelled chains. Sometimes, a bride may wear an ornament to emphasise her waist or hips, and around her shoulders. The bride also wears a *chunari* and a *dupatta*. These ornaments are primarily worn by brides and may have different regional names.

and gold beads, worn in Western and Central India or the single gold chain *thiruvangaiyam* from the South. This identifies a woman as being married, and she may not remove it while her spouse is alive. Similarly almost all over India, the red powder or *sindoor* crinkled in the parting of the hair of a woman or applied to her forehead indicates her married status.

This bride toilet commences at dawn with the ritualistic *haldi* or turmeric bath. The symbolism of this may be lost today but it is a ceremonial occasion. Purifying and anointing the body with oils and perfumes and beautifying the skin with a turmeric bath are a must for all brides. *Kohl* or *kajal* made of sulphide of antimony is applied to the eyes to make them sparkle and glitter. The *bindi* or *tikka* of intricate or simple auspicious designs is placed on the forehead and sometimes around the eyebrows. There is also the exotic custom of decorating the hands and feet with beautiful patterns created out of applying *mehandi* or henna paste. This ceremony is an elaborate affair. Whilst the experts of this traditional art weave intricate patterns and songs, sometimes naughty and even bordering on the lewd, but a philosophical with advice on the duties of the bride and her spouse.

Another musical session is the *sangeet* (song) where the ladies sing to the accompaniment of a percussion instrument called the *dhoolak*. In Gujarat young and old join in a *garba* and dance with gay abandon, and in the South young girls participate in *kummi* or *kolattam* a folk dance abounding with rhythmic patterns.

Although the festive spirit is very much in evidence, underlying the gaiety of the occasion, the solemnity of the event is never lost. The whole wedding ceremony is a religious affair, conducted in the traditional ways of the *balaharan* or *balawaran*. The traditional giving away of the bride by the parents, the *bayadayan*, accompanied by the *bayad* or *bayarin*, is a solemn and final break from the ancestral home and is one of the poignant aspects of the ceremony. In the North, the bride's departure in a *doll* or palanquin for her future home is also accompanied by appropriate songs. Traditionally, she was carried in the *doll* on her brothers' shoulders to her new home. Now a flower bedecked car replaces the brothers and the *doll*.

Different religious groups and other communities conduct their weddings, according to their own religious and social norms, many akin to those described above, while adhering to regional customs in several aspects. Their religious affinity characterises the holy rituals and ceremonies.

Tradition and culture play a great part in these various rituals and ceremonies. It could be that in the contemporary context with life's attendant tensions and the pressures of soaring prices, people are prone to depart from tradition and perhaps sometimes compromise, yet it is difficult to break away completely and thus no matter what community or religion one may belong to, Indian tradition and culture will always beckon.

Nestling in remote pockets of the country, untouched by the onslaught of modern civilisation are a section of our population - the tribes of India. Each of these tribes have maintained their unique identity - manifest in their physical racial traits, language, costume and customs. Some of the tribal groups conform to their own social norms and ideas of life and death. Their bizarre attire. Very often, they are bold and laughing brides as opposed to the demure brides of other regions.

Forging a link with our traditions, this year Air-India presents portraits of *vividha vadhu*, or Brides of India, resplendent in their traditional jewellery and bridal attire. Due to limitations of space, only 12 brides could be featured in our calendar, but they represent only a segment of the variety of bridal costumes in the vast sub-continent of India.

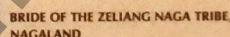


The leaf shaped nath (nose ring) of pearls and diamonds is typical of Maharashtra as are the earrings or kap of pearls. Also typical is the *tanmani* of pearls worn around the neck together with a pearl collar which bears a pendant with the auspicious sign of Om. Framing the face is a slender garland of flowers called the *mundavalya* worn by brides and grooms alike. The *mundavalya* can be made of flowers or pearls.

BRIDE FROM LUCKNOW,  
UTTAR PRADESH

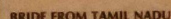
The costume comprises a full length divided skirt or *gharara*, a *kurta* (shirt) and a *dupatta* (scarf), the colour of which is generally red. The *dupatta* is intricately embroidered in gold thread, and has an elaborate gold border all around.

During the wedding ceremony, the bride's face is covered with a *sehra* (veil) of flowers, and this is lifted immediately after the *nikah* ceremony so that her face can be seen in the mirror ring which she wears, first by her husband before other relatives meet her.



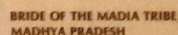
Her costume contains a handwoven skirt of a traditional and striking pattern typical of the Zeliang tribe for the marriage occasion. The bridal skirt cannot be worn before marriage.

Her jewellery includes chunky silver ornaments in primitive styles, armlets of silver and brass, numerous strings of beads of precious and semi-precious stones and ear-rings of red wool.



The *thalai saman* is popular with Bharat Natyam dancers who have adapted it as part of their ensemble.

The Tamil Nadu bride's clever arrangement of flowers on her plait is distinctive. The flowers are coaxed round the ruby-encrusted hair jewel called *rakkodi* and start at the top of the plait to weave through its knots.



The tribes of Central India are said to be the oldest inhabitants of the Indian sub-continent. Though their ancient glory has now vanished, and the tribals now live in dire poverty, they have maintained a sense of spontaneous joy in living which has been perhaps forgotten by people living in large cities.

From the jungles of Madhya Pradesh in Central India comes this Madia (Mandi) bride. The Madia bride's dress comprises a *mekhala* and *chunni*, in a striking combination of red and yellow. The profusion of beads round her neck contrast with the delicate nose-ring, *gulooband* (necklace) and ear-rings, all of heavy silver. The striking features of her ensemble is the headgear, a head-band of metal with a plume of feathers quivering out of it.

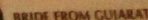
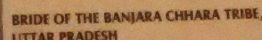
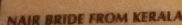
Bold and bewitching, the Madia bride's bashful smile expresses best the joy such an occasion brings.



Punjabi brides wear a profusion of jewellery, generally made of precious stones, emeralds, rubies or uncut diamonds set in gold. This style of jewellery workmanship is called *kundan* work.

The elaborate *nath* (nose ring) is supported by a fine pearl/gold chain which hooks into the hair for support. Heavy necklace, earrings and *tikka* (forehead ornament) are all of matching *kundan* work.

The typical signs of a Punjabi bride are red and ivory bangles. Attached to the bangles (not seen in the picture) are little gilded or silver bells tied by the bride's friends at the *mehendi* ceremony and signify the change that will occur in her life. The bride is supposed to gently bang these bells on the heads of her unwed friends to ensure their early marriage.



The Gujarati bride wears a traditional home-spun silk sari called *panetar* which





# Brides

All over the world, weddings usher in moments of gaiety and colour, solemnity and poignancy, but Indian weddings have a unique charm of their own which are at once baffling, intriguing and captivating to the outsider. Characterised by the full-scale participation of family, friends and community, they are occasions for extended periods of festivity and fun — whether in the large metropolis or the smallest village. From the arrival of the bridegroom in his processional *baaraat* to the departure of the bride in the *doli* each ceremony is symbolic, conducted according to tradition, and carries its own significance.

And pivotal to this entire scene is the Indian bride... radiant and demure, yet shy and apprehensive, her *kohl*-marked eyes mirror her conflicting emotions. For her, it represents a break from her childhood home and the parental yoke, to complete adaptation to a new life with her husband and his family...

Through the ages, Indian bridal costumes have been spectacular, graceful, and colourful and Indian brides of all castes and creeds have worn these costumes with matchless elegance. Though variations have crept into the traditional dress, the basic features are still maintained and a strong and distinctive regional identity exists, which emphasises the ethnic or tribal background culture.

Richly clad in warm colours, bedecked with magnificent jewellery, adorned with sweet-smelling flowers and anointed with perfume, a bride is always radiant on her wedding day but Indian tradition and culture make the Indian bride even more enchanting.

Vermilion, scarlet and red are the most favoured colours for bridal dress as they are considered very auspicious. There are, however, certain exceptions... the Kerala brides who are usually in stark white; the Tamil Nadu brides who have a wide choice of colours; the Maharashtrian brides whose choice is also not limited, and who often favour green or yellow. Generally, however, the traditional colour worn by brides is red, especially in the North.

Another striking difference between the North Indian and South Indian bride is the veiling of the face. Brides in the North must drape the end of the saree over the head, so as to allow it to drop over the face like a veil. This is called *ghungat* (Hindu) or *pardah* (Muslim). The origin of this practice can be traced to the era of population movements into India, when the women sought this protection from covetous eyes. Today it is observed as a sign of respect to elders. Brides from the South and Maharashtra are not required to cover their head. Therefore considerable emphasis is attached to floral decoration for the hair.

The ritual of *solah sringar* was the traditional series of sixteen beauty aids adopted by the bride in preparation of the great event. According to this ritual, it was customary to cover, by exquisite ornaments or painted designs, whatever was not covered by elaborate costume. Regional interpretations and styles vary, but the basic concept is common.

The bride's forehead is covered in the centre with a *tikka* or a similar ornament supported by jewelled chains which hook into the hair. The *nath* or nose ring can be in a variety of styles and worn in the North on the right side of the nose, in the South on the left side, both sides, or in the centre. Elaborate ornaments are worn in the ears, and a number of necklaces of different lengths are worn around the neck. The upper arms may be adorned with a *bazuband* or a *vanki*, whilst the wrists are covered with special red *lac* or glass bangles and the hands may be covered with a *hathphool*, a hand ornament of several rings connected to a wristlet by jewel chains. Sometimes, a bride may wear an ornament to emphasise her waist or hips, and around her ankles she may wear *payal* (anklets) and rings on her toes. These ornaments are primarily worn as bridal ornaments and may have various regional names.

Some ornaments however, have a special importance like the *mangalsutra*, necklace of black



BRIDE FROM MAHARASHTRA



BRIDE OF THE  
NAGALAND



# of India

and gold beads, worn in Western and Central India or the single gold chain *thirumangalyam* from the South. This identifies a woman as being married, and she may not remove it while her spouse is alive. Similarly almost all over India, the red powder or *sindhur* sprinkled in the parting of the hair of a woman or applied to her forehead indicates her married status.

The bridal toilet commences at dawn with the ritualistic *haldi* or turmeric bath. The symbolism of this may be lost today but it is a ceremonial occasion. Purifying and anointing the body with oils and perfumes and beautifying the skin with a turmeric bath are a must for all brides. *Kohl* or *kajal* made of sulphide of antimony is applied to the eyes to make them sparkle and glitter. The *bindi* or *tikka* of intricate or simple auspicious designs are painted on the bride's forehead and sometimes around the eyebrows. There is also the exotic custom of decorating the hands and feet with beautiful patterns created out of applying *mehendi* or henna paste. This ceremony is an elaborate affair. Whilst the experts of this traditional art weave intricate patterns and designs on the hands and feet of the bride and her friends, the older women sing wedding songs, sometimes naughty and even bordering on the lewd, but also philosophical with advice on the duties of the bride and her spouse.

Another musical session is the *sangeet* (song) where the ladies sing to the accompaniment of a percussion instrument called the *dholak*. In Gujarat young and old join in a *garba* and dance with gay abandon, and in the South young girls participate in *kummi* or *kolattam* a folk dance abounding with rhythmic patterns.

Although the festive spirit is very much in evidence, underlying the gaiety of the occasion, the solemnity of the event is never lost. The whole wedding ceremony is a religious affair, conducted to the melodic strains of the *shehnai* or the *nadaswaram*. The traditional giving away of the bride by the parents — the *kanyadaan* — accompanied by the incantation of *mantras* is the final break from the parental home and is one of the poignant aspects of the ceremony. In the North, the bride's departure in a *doli* or palanquin for her future home is also accompanied by appropriate songs. Traditionally, she was carried in the *doli* on her brothers' shoulders to her new home. Now a flower bedecked car replaces the brothers and the *doli*.

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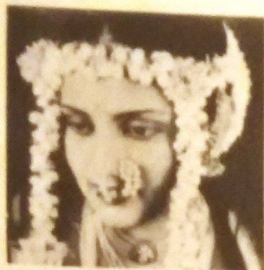




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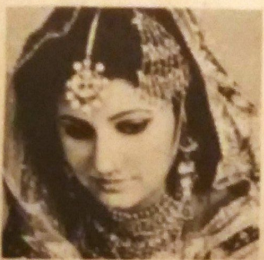


BRIDE FROM MAHARASHTRA

Wearing the traditional 9 yards sari in the Maharashtrian style, this bride is decked with jewellery and flowers.

The leaf shaped *nath* (nose ring) of pearls and diamonds is typical of Maharashtra as are the earrings or *kap* of pearls. Also typical is the *tanmani* of pearls worn around the neck together with a pearl collar which bears a pendant with the auspicious sign of Om. Framing the face is a slender garland of flowers called the *munda* worn by brides and grooms alike. The *munda* can be made of flowers or pearls.

On the forehead is the traditional powdered *tilak* in the shape of a crescent moon.



BRIDE FROM LUCKNOW,  
UTTAR PRADESH

Stepping as it were from the pages of history, the Lucknowi bride in her graceful costume mirrors an image from the Nawabi courts of Avadh. This magnificent costume has slipped out of common usage but is still worn at weddings.

The costume comprises a full length divided skirt or *gharara*, a *kurta* (shirt) and a *dupatta* (scarf), the colour of which is generally red. The *dupatta* is intricately embroidered in gold thread, and has an elaborate *gota* border all around.

The heavy necklace of precious gems and uncut diamonds, the *karanphool jhumka* in her ears, the crescent shaped diamond *tikka* on her forehead, the large circular *nath* (nose ring) the traditional *jhoomar* — on the left side of her head and the gold glitter on her cheeks — express an opulence, grandeur and graciousness of an era gone by.

During the wedding ceremony, the bride's face is covered with a *sehra* (veil) of flowers, and this is lifted immediately after the *nikah* ceremony so that her face can be seen in the mirror ring which she wears, first by her husband before other relatives meet her.

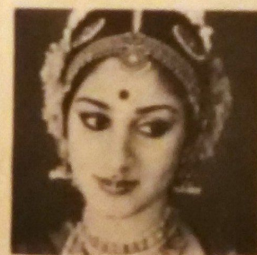


BRIDE OF THE ZELIANG NAGA  
NAGALAND

Perched on the hill-peaks of the North Eastern region of India, the Nagas, by ramparts of stone, are the villages of the Nagas of Nagaland. The Nagas are divided into sixteen main tribes, each distinguishable by their dances, and the distinct colours and patterns of the shawls. With Mongoloid features common to all the tribes of Nagaland, the Zeliang Naga bride wears her hair short, as do all the Nagas. Only married women have long hair.

Her costume contains a handwoven skirt of a traditional pattern, typical of the Zeliang tribe for the marriage occasion. She wears a traditional headpiece before marriage.

Her jewellery includes chunky silver ornaments in the form of a silver and brass, numerous strings of beads of precious stones and ear-rings of red wool.



BRIDE FROM TAMIL NADU

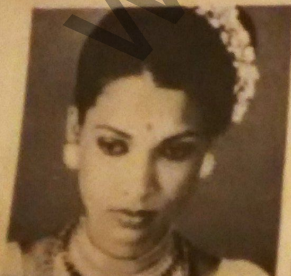
From the sunny south comes the Tamil Nadu bride, wearing a silk sari offset by magnificent jewellery. The ornately decorated *thalai saman* has the sun and moon fashioned on one or either side of her head. The diamond nose ring and the intricately fashioned *bulakku* rests in the centre of her neck she wears the traditional *addigai* and many of her ears are adorned with ruby and pearl *jhumka* and *matta*.

The *thalai saman* is popular with Bharat Natyam dance as part of their ensemble.

The Tamil Nadu bride's clever arrangement of flowers on her head. The flowers are coaxed round the ruby-encrusted hair plait start at the top of the plait to weave through its knots.



BRIDE OF THE BANJARAS  
UTTAR PRADESH



NAIR BRIDE FROM KERALA



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#### BRIDE OF THE ZELIANG NAGA TRIBE, NAGALAND

The North Eastern region of India, and surrounded villages of the Nagas of Nagaland. The Nagas are distinct, each distinguishable by its separate dialect, customs and patterns of the shawls its people wear. Common to all the tribes of the North Eastern region, is her hair short, as do all unmarried Naga girls. Her hair.

Woven skirt of a traditional and striking pattern, for the marriage occasion. The bridal skirt cannot

be adorned with silver ornaments in primitive styles, armlets of strings of beads of precious and semi-precious stones.



BRIDE OF THE MADIA TRIBE,  
MADHYA PRADESH

The tribes of Central India are said to be the oldest inhabitants of the Indian sub-continent. Though their ancient glory has now vanished, and the tribals now live in dire poverty, they have maintained a sense of spontaneous joy in living which has been perhaps forgotten by people living in large cities.

From the jungles of Madhya Pradesh in Central India comes this Madia (Maria) bride. The Madia bride's dress comprises a *mekhala* and *chunni*, in a striking combination of red and yellow. The profusion of beads round her neck contrast with the delicate nose-ring, *gulooband* (necklace) and ear-rings, all of heavy silver. The striking features of her ensemble is the headgear, a head-band of metal with a plume of feathers quivering out of it.

Bold and bewitching, the Madia bride's bashful smile expresses best the joy such an occasion brings.



BRIDE FROM THE PUNJAB

#### BRIDE FROM TAMIL NADU

The Tamil Nadu bride, wearing a rich *kanjeevaram* sari with heavy jewellery. The ornately designed hair ornament is shaped like the sun and moon fashioned in rubies and pearls. The diamond nose ring is called the *mookuthi*. The *polakku* rests in the centre of her nose. Around her neck are several *addigai* and many other necklaces, and her hair is adorned with a pearl *ghumka* and *mattal*.

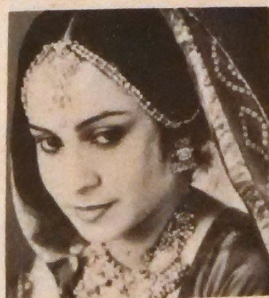
Like the Bharat Natyam dancers who have adapted it, the arrangement of flowers on her plait is distinctive. The ruby-encrusted hair jewel called *rakkodi* and the veil pass through its knots.

The Punjabi bride wears a *salwaar-kameez* outfit with a *dupatta* (veil) all intricately embroidered in gold thread.

Punjabi brides wear a profusion of jewellery, generally made of precious stones, emeralds, rubies or uncut diamonds set in gold. This style of jewellery workmanship is called *kundan* work.

The elaborate *nath* (nose ring) is supported by a fine pearl gold chain which hooks into the hair for support. Heavy necklace, earrings and *tikka* (forehead ornament) are all of matching *kundan* work.

The typical signs of a Punjabi bride are red and ivory bangles. Attached to the bangles (not seen in the picture) are little gilded or silver bells tied by the bride's friends at the *mehendi* ceremony and signify the change that will occur in her life. The bride is supposed to gently bang these bells on the heads of her unwed friends to ensure their early marriage.



BRIDE FROM GUJARAT

#### BRIDE OF THE BANJARA CHHARA TRIBE, MADHYA PRADESH

The Gujarati bride wears a traditional home-spun silk sari called *panetar* which is adorned with a *bandhani* (tie-dyed) vermillion border laced