

Wedding Customs in *Monsoon Wedding*

Judson Michael Edwards

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Instructor: Ms. Andree Cosby

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Monsoon Wedding is a movie by Mira Nair “set in modern-day Delhi,” and falls under the interesting category of “Punjabi comedy” (Howe WE37). Nair herself is from Delhi, which has been a Punjabi stronghold since 1947, when Muslims left the city for the newly formed country of Pakistan (WE37). The storyline is based on an arranged marriage between the characters of Aditi and Hemant: two upper middle class Punjabis. Punjabi weddings include a great deal of ancient traditions, many of which are apparent in *Monsoon Wedding*. This analysis will cover the Punjabi marriage traditions that are most apparent in *Monsoon Wedding*.

Their families prearrange Aditi and Hemant’s marriage. Although they have never met, they are not being forced into marrying each other. At the chunni chandana ceremony, Aditi’s aunt even says, “Give them some privacy. I met C.L. only once, we got married right away!” It is their choice, and they seem to be completely comfortable with it. They trust their families to make a good match for them because “family [is] an important factor in the selection of a spouse” (Kapadia 136).

Throughout the movie, it is apparent that there is a conflict between traditional Punjabi customs and more modern western ones. In one scene, Aditi’s father, Lalit, and the wedding planner P.K. Dubey, get into a bit of an argument over the color of the wedding tent. Lalit wanted a traditional colorful Punjabi tent, but Dubey has already put up a western-style white tent. Lalit says to Dubey, “What’s with the white tent?” “This is the fashion these days. Millennium style. Y2K dot,” Dubey responds. Lalit then says, “Put up a colorful tent. Red,

yellow, green, blue.” Dubey then tells his helpers, “Get this down. It’s not wanted! He wants the old look.”

One of the first Punjabi marriage traditions that takes place in *Monsoon Wedding* is the chunni chandana ceremony (“Punjabi”). The chunni chandana ceremony takes place at the house of the bride, as is the Punjabi tradition. Whiskey and fried pakoras play a role in this ceremony. When the groom and his family pull into their driveway, Aditi’s mother Pimmi tells their servant Alice, “Fry the pakoras.” One of the first things Lalit asks the groom’s father is, “Did you bring the whiskey?” Also in accordance with tradition, Aditi wears clothes bought by Hemant’s family. Before the ceremony begins, Aditi pays respect to her grandmother, who gives her a gift of traditional jewelry. “Pay respects to grandmother,” Aditi father Lalit tells her. Beginning the ceremony, Aditi’s soon to be mother-in-law gives her gifts and jewelry. At this point, Aditi and Hemant exchange rings and feed each other some sort of cake and the two families then have a party.

Next is the kwardhoti ceremony (“Punjabi”). In this ceremony, women from both Aditi’s and Hemant’s families’ decorate Aditi with mehendi or henna. Singing and dancing accompany the applying of the mehendi. The songs the women sing are traditional Punjabi wedding songs. This ceremony is strikingly similar to a bachelorette party. The men are not allowed to take part in this ceremony and only rejoin the women after the mehendi is applied. When the men show up too early the women are all screaming, and one of Aditi aunts jokingly yells, “Go! No men allowed!”

After the kwardhati comes the main sangeet (“Punjabi”). The main sangeet is basically a party where Aditi and Hemant’s friends and families have a chance to meet each other. In the movie, Lalit tells Aditi’s uncle C.L. to “leave the jokes for the sangeet.” Aditi’s cousin, Ayesha,

is the dancer at the main sangeet. Her traditional Punjabi dance is done to the tune of modern Bollywood music, which mixes very well.

Before the marriage ceremony, the bride's family takes pictures together with her in her traditional Punjabi wedding dress. Once they finish taking pictures, they go to ask their elders to bless the marriage. Aditi's mother, Pimmi, tells Aditi, "Come, darling. Be blessed by your elders." In Punjabi, and speaking broadly, Hindu culture, ancestors are believed to play a pivotal role in everyday life.

Lastly comes the marriage ceremony itself. Aditi wears a dress made up of many "bright auspicious colors like red, orange and magenta," which is traditionally given by the bride's maternal family members (Punjabi). On the other hand, Hemant wears a white "achkan safari" suit. In following with tradition, Hemant arrives on the back of a mare. Aditi and Hemant are then brought together to exchange garlands. In keeping with tradition, Aditi garlands Hemant first.

Monsoon Wedding immerses the viewer in the traditions that are a Punjabi wedding. It debunks the stereotype that not all arranged marriages are cold and without love. Nair's love for her native Delhi shines through in this heartfelt tribute to Punjabi life; "she's inviting us into the inner recesses of her culture" (Howe WE37). When you watch *Monsoon Wedding*, you really feel like you are part of the family. The movie is "deeply sensual, too: the colors, from the women's traditional costumes to the abundance of marigolds, are exquisite" (WE37).

Works Cited

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Judson Michael Edwards' major is Undeclared.

Ms. Cosby's Comments: *Mike wrote this paper for my World Literature class. As we watched the movie Monsoon Wedding together, many students wanted to know more about the Punjabi customs; therefore, Mike took it upon himself to do his research paper on that topic. He was able to enlighten both his classmates and myself with the information he discovered.*