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PULIKONDA SUBBACHARY

SEE ALSO
Jamānī

WATER LORE

Rivers, wells, and lakes are the focus of rich traditions in South Asia. Bathing is emphasized in Brahmanical Hindu traditions, and appears to have been important in the ancient Harappan civilization as well. The most common term for a holy place, *tīrtha,* has as its root meaning "ford" or "crossing place on a river." Most major Hindu pilgrimage places have either a series of broad steps (a *ghāṭ*) leading down to a nearby river, or a temple "tank" (a water reservoir) for bathing. Sanskrit texts praising rivers and pilgrimage places along them assert the power of the water to demolish sin or to bring peace to ancestors whose ashes are immersed in the water.

Equally importantly, water is viewed as a source of fecundity. In accord with this view, the vast majority of rivers in India are seen as feminine, and both rivers and wells are the homes of a variety of female divinities. In Maharashtra, for instance, there are a number of locally or regionally important goddesses whose temples are found on the banks of a river and whose original home is an underwater palace in a deep, still, perennial river pool. Such pools, whether the abode of a particular goddess or not, are frequently understood to hold food, gold, or other forms of wealth and plenty. In particular, they are said to be the home of special fish such as extremely large fish with nose-rings the size of cart wheels or fish of certain species that fishermen are not supposed to catch. Such a pool is frequently said to be unfathomably deep; even if the rope from twelve ropecots is tied end to end, people say, it will not be long enough to plumb the water hole.

Dangerous beings also inhabit some water holes. Besides crocodiles, these beings include water spirits who can cause drownings or interfere with human fertility. In Maharashtra, such spirits, classified as *paryā* (a word that may be etymologically related to the English word "fairy"), are most frequently called *āsarā,* or *māvalayā.* Invisible, but located quite precisely at some particular spot in a river, on a riverbank, or at a well, the āsarās can easily be offended by an unwitting young woman who goes too close to their place when she is menstruating. She may learn of her infraction only later in life, when she has difficulty conceiving children, or when her children are born sickly or die young. The Sanskrit cognate of āsarā is *apsaras,* the term for a kind of water nymph who lives in the heaven of Indra, the king of the gods, and whom Indra sends to tempt male ascetics.

The most religiously important river of South Asia is the Ganges. In the best-known story about this river's descent to earth, the river falls first onto Mount Meru, at the center of the earth, and from there onto the head of the god Śiva. Because it flows through his matted hair, the Ganges is also seen as a second wife to Śiva, and, in oral traditions in regional languages, as a rival of his first wife, Pārvatī. Other rivers are often identified, more or less explicitly, with the Ganges, and, in many cases, the places identified as their origin spots are located on mountaintops near temples of Śiva. Rivers that flow into the ocean are also understood to have the ocean as their husband.

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SEE ALSO
Bhāṭiyālī Song; *Mēla;* Sacred Geography; Sacred Geography, Afghanistan

WEDDING SONGS

The marriage ceremony is the most ritually elaborate of all the life-cycle transitions in South Asia. Since the act of singing is considered auspicious (*maṇgal*), wedding songs are indispensable to Hindu marriage ceremonies, particularly in rural regions. Wedding songs are performed by groups of women—relatives and neighbors who cluster together around ritual action. Songs are part of the action rather than a demarcated performance event.

There are many different indigenous genres which can be lumped together under the rubric "wedding songs." The names and delineations of these genres vary between regions. Most broadly, songs for the bride differ from songs for the groom. There are also songs that describe the experience of marriage in general terms which can be sung at any time, and songs keyed to specific phases of ritual action. Bawdy insults are addressed to the groom from the bride's female relatives and neighbors and at the bride from her new in-laws.

The singing of wedding songs may start several weeks in advance, especially in a bride's home. When

the actual marriage rituals are taking place, women typically sing amid a din of activity—the Brahman priest's sonorous chant, the piping clamor of a brass wedding band, the blaring recorded music of a loudspeaker, the cries and shrieks of children, and the conversations of adults.

Most wedding songs are textually and musically repetitive. Lines of text are usually repeated twice, enabling other women who may not know the song to join in. The text may also be repeated again and again, each time inserting a different keyword into the same slot. For example, in a slot for relatives, a wedding song may be repeated to include father and mother, father's elder brother and his wife, the father's younger brother and his wife, the mother's brother and his wife, paternal grandfather and grandmother, brother and sister-in-law, sister and brother-in-law, and so on. Alternately, in a slot for objects, one may hear about the groom's tinsel crown, his shoes, watch, handkerchief, socks, and so on. Thus, songs can be expanded or contracted, adapting to the performers' interest or the length of a particular ritual procedure.

Sung by women, even when describing events on the groom's side, wedding songs enshrine women's points of view. Apart from ritual insults, whose humor draws on systematic inversions of the expected, wedding songs portray conventional emotions associated with the kinship roles that are brought into focus by the rite of passage. In North India where village exogamy and patrilocality are practiced, songs depict a bride lamenting her departure from all that has been familiar. Her father, mother, and brother may weep, but her brother's wife is usually triumphant. A mother-in-law and husband's sister are presented as tyrannical creatures to whom the new bride must submit. These songs thus underscore kinship arrangements as given and natural. They envelope individual experience in culturally approved symbolism. When performed by unmarried girls, wedding songs serve as a powerful agent of socialization.

Many Hindu wedding songs naturalize their content by recourse to mythology. The groom is frequently compared to Rām, Kṛṣṇa, or occasionally Śiva; the bride to Sīta, Rukmānī or Pārvatī. These gods of Sanskritic mythology become domesticated around regional practises, giving contemporary weddings an aura of mythic timelessness.

Other wedding songs directly invoke present social conditions. They may speak of changing practices (for example a bride being taken off in a bus rather than a red palanquin), objects, or events (such as the election of the current Prime Minister). It is sometimes possible to date a song through such references.

Although wedding songs have been extensively studied among Hindus of North India, studies from South India, from tribal groups, and from religious minorities are scant.

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SEE ALSO

Angay; Balanday; Gender and Folklore; Marriage Ceremonies; Song; Women's Songs

WEDDING VIDEOS

Wedding videos are fast becoming the most common locally produced representation of social life in South Asia. These two-to-three-hour cassettes are produced by professional videographers hired by families to record wedding ceremonies and receptions. Video technology has been available in South Asia since the early 1970s, but wedding videos became popular only in the 1980s, and production exploded in the 1990s. Although at first only the richest families could afford them, increasingly competitive videographers have caused prices to drop sharply, putting wedding videos within the reach of even middle- and lower-middle-class families in many parts of South Asia. Indeed, wedding videos and videographers have become expected at middle-class Hindu, Muslim, and Christian weddings, both urban and rural.

Wedding videos compete with photography, which has been common in South Asia for over a century. Early images of weddings were confined to one or two black-and-white studio photographs, but with the increasing popularity of location photography and color film, representations of weddings expanded to include full-color albums of twenty-five to two hundred photographs. In the early 1980s both clients and photographers began to see video as the next step, and many photographers became videographers.

However, wedding videos differ significantly from photographic representations of weddings. First, videos incorporate movement and allow for continuous coverage of events. The wedding video industry in South Asia is known as "video coverage," and videographers and their clients often cite "full coverage" as the measure of the professional video. Some consumers apparently