

From 'will you?' to 'I do,' cultural rules vary

■ University students offer a glimpse at their cultures' courtship and wedding rituals

By Dominique Beaumonté
for the Emerald

Don't think about proposing to Ada Hakobyan, Haben Woldu or Rashree Parsad before speaking to their parents.

From the way people propose to the location of the wedding, marriage in other countries means an entirely different set of rituals than the diamonds, white gowns and flowers that often appear in American weddings.

Ada Hakobyan, a junior from Armenia, said it is traditional for parents of the groom-to-be to accompany him to the home of the bride-to-be's parents for the engagement announcement. Upon the approval of the woman's parents, a wedding date will be set.

"Ethiopians do it a little different," said sophomore biology major Haben Woldu. "My future husband will express his love for me to the elders of his family, and they will go to my parents, without him, to tell them why he's a good man."

Woldu said the groom-to-be must wait patiently until her family has come to a decision on whether he is worthy of their daughter's hand in marriage.

In Mexico, it is honorable for the bride to wear her mother's gown for the wedding, Brendalee Sifuentez said. During the ceremony, the groom gives gold coins to the bride, which is the first money a husband gives his wife, she said.

Parsad, a Fijian Hindustani senior, said Indian weddings are solemn occasions.

"Hindustanis are superstitiously romantic," she said.

Women have the major role in

the weddings; the mother and sister of the bride are solely responsible for making preparations, Parsad said. The wedding process lasts anywhere from 3-10 days. During this time, the bride and groom fast and abstain from alcohol, smoking, sex and meats as an act of purity, she said.

"Ethiopians do it a little different."

Haben Woldu
sophomore biology major

Because of certain traditions within the Hindustani religion, finding a place for the ceremony can be a more complicated affair.

"In my culture, the temple is sacred and often too small for weddings," Parsad said. "Besides, there are some traditions that call for a more open space, like a hall."

She said the bride and groom do very little talking during the ceremony except for the exchanging of vows.

"There are seven vows that the bride and groom make while circling a fire, which signifies eternity. The bride and groom are linked by a gold cord, and each take turns leading one another," Parsad said.

Parsad, Woldu, and Hakobyan all agreed that weddings in their individual cultures are more than a union of two souls — they are also parties that may last for weeks. Woldu said that although the wedding is a sacred event, the four-day celebration is also filled with food, fun and games.

But it isn't just culture, ethnic identity or nationality that influence a person's wedding; religion also plays a role.

"It's really important that I marry a man who is Christian," said

ASUO Vice President Joy Nair, who is also of Indian descent.

Nair is a Christian, so her wedding will more closely resemble a typical American wedding.

"I can choose whether I want to wear cultural garments or a white gown," she said, and it is natural for her to have her wedding in a church.

Though Americans may joke about the annual gift of fruitcake during the holiday season, the dessert will play a different role at sociology major Cordella Green's wedding.

"American people may take fruitcake for a granted," Green said, "but in Jamaica it is common and tradition for there to be a tasty fruitcake laced with rum at the reception, and all the cake left over is sent to friends and family that couldn't come to the wedding."

Dominique Beaumonté is a freelance reporter for the Emerald.

Wedding day mishaps blamed on children, animals, music

■ For wedding plans that go off without a hitch, planners advise having a 'Plan B for everything'

By Pat Berman
Knight Ridder Newspapers

COLUMBIA, S.C. (KRT) — When asked whether he would perform the service at an all-nude wedding, Harold L. Swafford of Columbia, S.C., replied, "It won't be a problem for me." He waited a beat before adding: "... Because I won't be there."

Swafford, a lawyer and notary public who has officiated at marriages since 1976, does not do nude weddings. He also avoids weddings that involve swimming or hot air balloons, although he has been asked to perform those types of ceremonies, too. He prefers ceremonies where everyone stays dry, dressed and with both feet on the ground.

Those caveats aside, two things Swafford always makes time for are weddings and adoptions.

"I'll stop whatever I'm doing," he said.

Whether weddings are deliberately offbeat or meticulously planned, things sometimes go awry.

With no pun intended, owner Minnie Young said of weddings performed at The Magnolias of Columbia, "Seventy-five percent go without a hitch."

But those mistakes tend to be memorable.

"When there's a little boo-boo, people relax more and have more fun. You can laugh instead of cry," Young said.

Of course, what constitutes a little boo-boo or a big blunder may be in the eye of the beholder. Or the bride. Or the groom.

"There should be a Plan B for everything," said Linda Ingle of Jo-Lin's Bridal & Formal Wear.

Aside from fainting grooms, some wedding planners most often cited children and animals as culprits for deviations from the script. Music — too much or too dreadful — also earned some mentions.

An outdoor wedding on a hot July day caused one groom to faint,

Swafford said. But such was not the case with a groom who fainted twice during a wedding at Corley Mill House & Garden, a popular wedding spot in Lexington, S.C.

He would have gone down a third

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Minnie Young
wedding chapel owner

time, too, Corley Mill owner Sheila Hall said, but someone brought out chairs to seat the couple for the rest of the ceremony.

Hall also remembered a flower girl who thought she was supposed to throw her petals in people's faces. As the guests caught on, they covered up when the petal-pelting flower girl advanced down the aisle.

Phyllis James of Mitchell House & Gardens in Columbia recalled a

flower girl who had been trained to dutifully pick up after herself. The first trip down the aisle, she tossed her petals. For the trip on the way out, she began picking them up, one by one.

James also had an animal incident at a wedding. As the bride and groom stood in front of the minister, her cat Stormin' Norman strolled in and plopped down on the bride's train for a cat nap. To the amusement of guests, he punctuated the minister's long-winded sermon with occasional yawns. Norman has since been relocated to a new home.

A gobbling turkey might top a snoozing kitty. Chris Harris was a guest at an outdoor cowboy wedding in South Carolina. The guests sat on logs lined up like church pews, and a big turkey casually strutted among the assembled multitude.

When the preacher got to "speak now or forever hold your peace," the turkey loudly gobbled, gobbled, gobbled, Harris said.

Then there was the bride and groom who wanted to ride off on horseback at the end of their wed-

ding at Magnolia's in Columbia. The groom climbed aboard his horse with no trouble, but the bride's gown slowed her down. Her horse got nervous, and the bride's long white train was not white anymore.

Even if party poopers, animals and children were banished from weddings, an element of unpredictability always is afoot.

And remember that what's done is not so easily undone. Swafford joked that he would marry a couple for \$25, but it would cost \$2,500 if they came back for a divorce.

"I had an elderly couple I married on a late Friday afternoon, and I got a call from the groom about 8 or 9 that night asking me to hold on to the paperwork over the weekend because things weren't working out," Swafford said.

"I told him it was too late. They were married."

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