This article extends the nature-culture debate to urban anthropology through an analysis of Pakistani immigrants' wedding rites in a British city. Previous arguments on the mastery of 'nature' through ritual are shown to conflate disparate hypotheses. The transformative movement in the wedding rites is accounted for in terms of the wedding ritual's sequential progression and the use made in it of symbolic substances, masquerade and joking. There is a ritual resolution of a fundamental cultural dilemma regarding the nature of human sexuality which is anchored in a unified cosmology of nurture and reproduction. The role of the ritual clown is singled out for special analysis, and the question of the 'naturalisation' of ritual in a new cultural context is raised.

The naturalisation of ritual

The weddings immigrants celebrate in distant and alien places are usually elaborated with cultural images derived from their homeland. This transfer of images from one cultural context to another is an evident feature of the migration process. Yet the theoretical questions it raises have been little explored in the anthropological literature. Moreover, all too rarely has an attempt been made to interpret transferred ritual fully and systematically, analysing how specific symbols are used during particular sequences of rites.

Anthropological analysis has dominantly been about ritual in its 'natural' setting. In the natural setting the beliefs and concerns underlying the ritual, indeed the very substances or paraphernalia or a performance, are all rooted in the context in which the ritual takes place. Nevertheless, this focus on symbolic performance as enacted by people at home in their own society has also produced seminal contributions which are important for the study of transferred ritual. Here perhaps most important are accounts of processes of cultural reconstruction and revitalisation. In such processes a former cultural order has to be renewed or reconstructed in response to the impact of disruptive change (cf. Fernandez 1982). In extending the insights about these processes we need to explore how immigrants reconstitute the taken-for-granted features of rites, and endow symbols with a direct and immediate bearing on their everyday world as immigrants. We need, in other words, to examine the ways in which a ritual becomes 'naturalised' in a new setting.

Certain reductive approaches have to be avoided. Perhaps the least fruitful approach is the one which regards transferred rituals solely as a vehicle for boundary marking. The metaphors and cultural images which constitute the rituals are considered to be anachronistic and therefore inert. It is as if the rituals
have been emptied in being transferred. This approach, in its obsession with boundaries, denies the continued force that symbolic structures have in transferred ritual. Similarly, the ‘replication’ approach is also misleading in that it holds that cultural dislocation is unproblematic, and need not lead to ritual innovation. Here, as in the other approach, what gets obscured is the power of the transferred rituals to reconcile past and present in and through metaphors and images (on this power in religion more generally, cf. Fernandez (1982: 8)).

In order to highlight this reconciling of past and present, I begin my own study of transferred ritual with a comparison between themes in Punjabi Muslim weddings performed in Britain and related themes in their south Asian counterparts. This comparison is particularly illuminating because the local celebration of weddings is a relatively recent phenomenon; during the early phase of migration few weddings were held by immigrants. The article focuses on the apparently enduring elements of the wedding ritual—the images, symbolic acts and ritual substances which, while being most clearly anchored in the immigrants’ homeland, seem less subject to a contextual modification in their meaning. From the people’s own point of view, the wedding rites are overwhelmingly reconstructed in what they consider to be the customary form. Thus Anwar argues that they attempt to ‘minimise’ as far as possible the geographical separation from Pakistan (1979: 75). Westwood remarks about a Hindu wedding celebrated in Britain that ‘amid the shimmering saris and the smell of incense and rose-water mingled with curry. . . . I caught a glimpse of another continent, another time and place’ (1984: 153). Yet at critical points in the rites the link between past and present emerges, anchoring the ritual in its new context. Through performance, the rites thus give renewed symbolic expression and validity to fundamental ideas Pakistanis have about the person, gender relations and the nature of human fertility. And it is through performance, in turn, that the ritual itself regains its validity.

Natural fertility and human procreation

The central interpretive conundrum presented by the Pakistani wedding ritual is perhaps best expressed through two contrasting female images. First is the image of the Pakistani bride, a beautiful glittering subject of extreme adulation. She shines and glows, glamorous and conspicuous. She is served like a goddess or queen (cf. Babb 1975; Marglin 1981: 171, 178). She stands in marked contrast to the outrageous and disorderly figure of a transvestite clown who appears in a key rite preceding the wedding ceremony, and joins in the sexual joking, bawdy pranks and erotic dancing in the women’s quarters.

Such sexual bawdry and ‘physical abandon’, as well as the apparent ‘heating’ of women through the rubbing of turmeric on their bodies, have led to the view that south Asian wedding rituals reveal an underlying definition of women, ‘not only as a source of sexual energy and as having fertility closely identified with the fertility of nature, but also as possessors of qualities that are juxtaposed with other qualities supposedly held by men in such a way as to render them [women] relatively “wild” and “disorderly”’ (Selwyn 1979: 687; also 684–5). According
to this view the ritual serves to place control of this disorderly fertility squarely in the hands of men.

The argument is not novel. Thus La Fontaine, in explaining the ritual elaboration of Gisu weddings, argued that:

the Gisu recognize in women a creative power that is *sui generis* natural. The sign of this power is the flow of blood from the genitals which is a physiological process. The wedding rituals serve to control and harness the reproductive powers of women for the benefit of men, whose powers by contrast are social, not part of the natural order. We can say, in Lévi-Straussian idiom, that men’s powers are part of culture, women’s of nature (La Fontaine 1972: 179; cf. also 1981: 345).

Even earlier Yalman argued that female puberty rites in Sri Lanka and south India are highly elaborated in order to preserve and protect the purity of women, extremely prone to pollution, yet bearers of the purity of the caste and family lineage, for the sake of the men who control these lineages (Yalman 1963).

Implicit here is a view of ritual elaboration as related to the control of ‘nature’ by ‘culture’ and of women by men, with a further implication that in certain societies the two may be coterminous. Significantly, ‘nature’ in the ritual context is conceived of implicitly in terms of a familiar association between disorder, danger and desired power. In Douglas’s terms ‘disorder . . . symbolises both danger and power. Ritual recognises the potency of disorder’ (Douglas 1966: 94). The ritual control of ‘nature’ by ‘culture’, despite the apparent simplicity of the formula, encapsulates, in these terms, at least three alternative hypotheses:

(a) Disorder may be conceived of as innate and *immanent* in the constitution of a person (e.g. female). Hence it must be circumscribed as the person is controlled.

(b) Disorder may be a product of the *intrusion* of nature into culture. It is thus not gender-related *per se*, but in some societies the effect of this intrusion may be seen as more dangerous for one of the sexes, hence their more elaborate or extensive ritual treatment.

(c) Order in nature may be conceived of culturally as a product of an equilibrium or conjunction of opposing forces (hot and cold, fire and water). Disorder is then a product of *disequilibrium* (hot plus hot). The categories of male and female may themselves be conceived of in terms of such a conjunction of opposing forces.

Beck’s insightful analysis of the processual logic of south Asian rituals is relevant here. She argues that, in south India, desired but potentially dangerous conditions (hot, vital, red, etc.) are juxtaposed and thus modified, or, to use an alternative terminology, ‘tempered’ in ritual, by ‘framing’ them in cognitively opposed substances (cooling, white, auspicious, etc.).

While it may be tempting to interpret the elaboration of the Punjabi Muslim wedding rites in terms of the first of these possibilities, an exclusive focus on the dangers of female sexuality misses the ritual concern with the exposure of the bride to the equally dangerous powers of male sexuality. Indeed, it ignores the complex set of beliefs regarding the dangers of the act of sex itself, seen as a conjunction of two opposing principles, male and female (cf. Lévi-Strauss 1969a: 12). Only the delicate balancing, through cultural means, of opposing forces can achieve the intended purpose of the wedding ritual—human fertility.

The key to the interpretation of the rites lies in widely prevalent south Asian beliefs that the powers of human sexuality, while essential for human repro-
duction, lead—uncontrolled—to infertility. In other words, what is natural and reproductive in nature can become unnatural and sterile in human society.

The perceived dangers of sex, the necessity of controlling its malevolent aspects, inform the cultural symbolism of Punjabis in such paradoxical notions as the virgin goddess, a goddess of, alternatively, fertility and smallpox, who is, at the same time, a virgin attired in wedding raiments (cf. Hershman 1977). Indian mythology repeatedly recognises a ‘conflict between the chaste but fertile cow-mother associated with the breast, and the erotic but barren genital mother associated with the mate’ (O’Flaherty 1976: 335, also 347, 349, 350, 356; Das 1981: 197; Selwyn 1981: 399; but for a different view cf. Marglin 1981: 174–5). By the same token, sex in the wedding rite is both publicly proclaimed in its extreme vulgarity, whilst being apparently denied.

The ritual elaboration of Pakistani migrants' weddings

Of all domestic rituals Pakistanis hold in Manchester, the wedding is undoubtedly the most complex and elaborate. This high level of ritual elaboration is not a local invention; south Asian weddings are notoriously elaborate and ostentatious (cf. for example Eglar 1960). The elaboration takes on, however, particular significance in recently formed communities of labour migrants. Not only does the performance perpetuate and revitalise some fundamental cultural images; it also defines newly emergent constellations of social relations. These have been locally generated since Pakistani migrants in Manchester originate from widely separated localities and disparate backgrounds (P. Werbner 1979b; 1981); they have, moreover, been remarkably mobile, particularly as entrepreneurs, within a relatively short time-span (P. Werbner 1984). Thus emergent patterns of stratification and underlying hierarchies are reified and publicly proclaimed through the wedding ritual.

At the same time, weddings are important occasions for reconstructing the ‘kindred of co-operation’ (Mayer 1960). Pakistanis in Manchester are part of a widely scattered diaspora of migrants centred on a home, friends and relatives in Pakistan. Local weddings are focal occasions for the mobilisation of kinship networks and, very often, kinsmen from Pakistan, the Middle East or North America travel to attend weddings in Manchester. So too migrants often plan their trips home to coincide with the weddings of siblings and other close relatives.

The nature of Punjabi Muslim marriages merits some mention at this point. Briefly, for Pakistanis marriage is ideally hypergamous, endogamous and virilocal. The unit of endogamy, the zat, is ranked hierarchically, and the preference is for marriage within the immediate family or localised caste group, the biraderi, so that parallel and cross-cousin marriages, exchange marriages and other marriages with affinal relatives are extremely common.

Although marriages within this localised caste group are the rule, exceptions are most significant in Manchester. Where marriages occur across caste (zat) lines, predominantly between castes of somewhat similar status (e.g. ‘landowners’) they tend to signify publicly the local reordering of the caste hierarchy, and thus to integrate the local caste system (for a detailed discussion cf. P.
Werbner 1979a: chs. 3 and 4). A case of this was a wedding I observed between a boy of the Arain caste and a girl of the Rajput caste which reversed the usual hierarchy between the two castes. This marriage confirmed, in effect, the high status gained by members of the local Arain caste who dominate Pakistani business activity and are highly influential in central communal associations (P. Werbner 1985).

This public definition of a locally emergent caste hierarchy reflects a more pervasive Pakistani concern with honour, reputation and status (izzat), a concern shared with other south Asians. The wedding itself becomes a focal setting for the competitive seeking of status and honour. In its form, the wedding cycle allows for the expression of fine status discriminations, as it moves through a series of discrete named rites and ceremonials convened over a period of weeks and even months. In terms of size and opulence, the progression in the rites is from small, modest and exclusive events to larger, costlier displays of wealth and hospitality (table 1). This complex series which stems, it will be seen, from the symbolic logic of the wedding as a rite de passage, forms the backdrop to the drama of local status manoeuvrings. Thus, for example, the smaller, more exclusive events—and particularly those convened by more prestigious acquaintances—become the target for the subtle solicitation of invitations. Conversely, the large and ostentatious wedding receptions convened by the bride’s or groom’s families reflect the family’s local standing partly through the number of local dignitaries and men of reputation invited—and actually attending these events. Elsewhere (1979a) I discuss these indexical aspects of the wedding cycle in far greater detail.5 Since my central focus here is on the cultural imagery of the wedding rites, I can only outline briefly the spectacular scale and complexity of local weddings.

The social span of a wedding includes close and distant kin, old and new friends, neighbours, business associates and customers, local and non-local people. Entire families are invited, often including several households (ghar). In addition, successive phases and ceremonies of the wedding encompass various categories of friends and kin, and define their relative intimacy and moral attachment to the families of the bride and groom. Young and old, men and women, kin and affines, kin and friends, close friends and distant acquaintances, come together only to separate and re-align with others as the ritual moves from one phase to the next.

Moreover, weddings are the most ostentatious, expensive and economically elaborate events migrants stage locally. Despite the low earnings of most migrants, the cost of their weddings is considerable (in the late 1970’s an expenditure of over £1000 on a wedding was not unusual). At the main reception guests are treated to a full three-course meal, and closer kin and friends are hosted at a number of smaller events as well, again, strictly according to their sex, age and degree of intimacy with the hosts. The women guests wear their most expensive silks and adorn themselves with their finest gold jewellery. The bride herself literally glitters with gold and embroidered sequins from head to foot. A great deal of customary transactional activity takes place during the wedding cycle—between the two sets of affines, and between the guests and their hosts. Marriage payments may be of considerable value and elaboration.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Thel</th>
<th>Mhendi</th>
<th>Khara</th>
<th>Nikah</th>
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<td>Night</td>
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<td>Noon</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Place</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<td>Women</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Men (Fathers of bride &amp; Groom.)</td>
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<td>Alms</td>
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<td><strong>Ritual movement</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Key symbolic acts</strong></td>
<td>Smearing with bana</td>
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<td>'Joke bargaining' with groom by bride's sisters. Customary weeping (of wife givers as bride departs)</td>
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<td>Wedding receptions (Vyah, Valima)</td>
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Increasing size, cost & lexical elaboration of congregation, food, clothing, jewellery.
Moreover, the wedding is the climax of a long period of minor mutual gift prestations and an important occasion for paying accumulated debts and initiating new ones (for details see P. Werbner 1979a). As an index of social standing, the elaboration of these transactions is highly significant; indeed they tend to form the central preoccupation of the conveners and the attendant congregation.

The status marking aspects of the wedding cycle are thus evident and obvious. Its size, prodigious expense, abundance of food and opulence mark it out as a potlatch-like demonstration of power and wealth. More easily missed are the symbolic meanings attached to these displays. Ideas about the person are, among Pakistanis, expressed through the transaction of food, gold and other substances (cf. Marriot 1968; Beck 1969; 1976; Parry 1980), as well as through forms of sacrifice or 'excessive' giving. Both the substances and their transactional form relate to a coherent worldview in which the indexical and figurative are united within a single cosmological framework. Culinary, economic, sociological and physiological domains interrelate symbolically (Sperber 1975: 54). The indexical elaboration of the wedding is fundamentally grounded in its figurative elaboration, in the cultural imagery evoked, and in the underlying theories of reproduction and sexuality which inform this imagery. I turn therefore at this point to a detailed exposition of the symbolic acts and substances used by Pakistanis and to an examination of the wedding as a rite of passage.

The transformative phases of the wedding ritual

The emphasis placed by Pakistanis on sexual chastity and female seclusion makes marriage inherently problematic, since it involves the breaking of a taboo hitherto assiduously safeguarded—the total sexual exposure of a son or daughter to a formerly prohibited person. A great deal of the wedding ritual is thus concerned with the establishment of a setting where customary rules no longer prevail, a state of liminality which allows for the breaking of taboos, as expressed in licensed behaviour and sexual vulgarities, in reversals of customary roles of men and women and in transvestite masquerading. In this setting a state of sexual innocence is ritually transformed into a state of sexuality—initially dangerous but finally legitimate and approved. The ritual powers of the bride and bridegroom are gradually increased as they are treated with key substances and separated, step by step, from all their previous social attachments. This metonymic transfer of substantively located qualities, which I refer to as the 'magical' treatment of the bride and bridegroom, both protects and unites them with one another, to ensure the fertility and legitimacy of the union, before it is legalised and consummated (cf. also Kolenda 1984: 109). The final process is that of their re-incorporation into society, not as individuals but as a conjugal unit.

The wedding ritual cycle moves through a series of transformative phases. The first rite, Thel Bithana (the 'smearing with oil') which opens the cycle of ceremonials marks the separation of the bride-to-be, who is kept thereafter secluded in the house until the wedding contract-signing ceremony (Nikah) and main wife-givers reception (Vyah) (see table 1). During her period of seclusion
the bride is shaved, all her bodily hair is removed, and she is massaged with natural substances. At the end of the seclusion period the clothes she has worn are given away to a lower-caste person, if available (usually the barber), or simply thrown away. She is then attired in a spectacular red wedding gown, embroidered with gold thread and sequins which is a gift from the wife-receivers, and adorned with gold jewellery, much of it also from the groom’s family.

The Thel rite is held at mid-day and attended by a small congregation of women only. The centrepiece of the rite is a mixture of turmeric, grain, oil and scents known as batna (or ubtan in Urdu), a gift to the bride from the wife-receivers, which is shaped in the form of a cake and lit with candles. The bride is fed an assortment of nuts, dates and dry coconut known as bid, which is persistently stuffed into her mouth by the women present, followed by laddu, ball-shaped sweetmeats. Her cheeks are liberally smeared with the batna and, on retiring with her girlfriends to her bedroom at the end of the rite, her entire body is massaged with the mixture. Her hair is smeared with mustard oil. During the rite the bride sits on a low stool with a red square veil (dupatta) held above her head by the congregants. At the end of the rite the women throw one and five pound notes into the veil which is then gathered together, and the money given away as alms (sadqa) to the poor. The Thel is also the rite in which a thread (gaana) of gold is tied to the girl and boy’s wrists in reciprocal exchange (cf. Eglar 1960: 154; Anwar 1979: 74). I did not witness this part of the rite.

The Mhendi rite, the highlight of the pre-wedding cycle, usually follows the Thel seven days later and has essentially the same form. It takes place at night, traditionally continuing into the early hours of the following morning, and the congregation of women and girls attending it is far larger than at the Thel. Both bride and groom are treated at separate Mhendi ceremonies which are held by the wife-givers and wife-receivers in their respective homes. The visiting party of women carry with them the mhendi, a mixture of dried henna leaves, lemon, water and sugar. Once again the mixture is shaped like a dark cake and decorated with candles and tinsel or flower petals (red and white). It is known as dulham, for the word for bride and bridegroom (dulhan and dulha). Both girl and boy are seated, as in the previous rite, under red veils. Bid is poured once again into the girl’s lap and stuffed into her mouth. After the dulham lit with candles is revealed, the bride’s hands and feet are decorated with intricate patterns of henna. The groom is usually decorated only with a round mark on the palm of each hand. The women and girls present decorate their hands with a little mhendi too. The mhendi decoration continues into the early hours of the morning, allowing the dye to darken and redden.

During the early phase of the rite the older women sing their songs of lamentation and the bride sits weeping, but as the decoration progresses the young girls take over, singing their love songs, dancing erotic dances, indulging in sexual joking and gifting. As the early hours of the morning approach, the ritual clown enters. The bride’s hands and feet by this time have been covered with intricate patterns of henna. When the henna is washed off and she takes her ritual bath, her decorated hands are smeared with oil and heated over a stove or fire. After this heating she may no longer wash them. The following day is
usually the day of the Nikah, the contract-signing ceremony, in which the girl discards her old clothes and attires herself in her wedding raiment.

The ritual bath of the groom (khara) is also of some significance. Although I did not witness this rite, I am told that his hair is traditionally washed by the barber in milk and he is given milk to drink, gifts from the bride’s family. In Pakistan where the ceremony appears to be more elaborate (cf. for example, Eglar 1960: 164), he is said to step down from a stool after his bath, wrapped only in a small towel, and to break clay pots filled with milk. Certainly in Manchester there is always a point in the cycle of ceremonials when, after the mhendi treatment, the groom is given milk to drink by the wife-givers.

Nurture and sexuality
Underlying this cycle of four named rites is a dialectic of nurture and sexuality. For the bride, the move in the rites is from a severance of childhood relations of nurture with her mother and maternal home (as expressed in the ‘songs of lamentation’ sung by her senior kinswomen in the Mhendi and Thel rites, and by the customary weeping of the bride and her mother), to potential sexuality (as expressed in the ‘love’ songs of the young girls and the ritual masquerading during the Mhendi rite), to sexual union (after the Nikah). For the groom, the move is from a severance of his maternal attachment (expressed in the ‘oke-bargaining’ with his mother’s brother during the Khara rite) to a separation from potential sexual partners (as expressed in the ‘joke-bargaining’ between the bride’s sisters and the groom during the Nikah), to the actual sexual consummation of the marriage. The continued reluctance of the bride to leave her natal home is signalled by the continued joke-bargaining with the wife’s sisters even after the marriage is consummated. This joke-bargaining occurs during the customary visiting of the couple back and forth following the Nikah. Bride and groom thus follow somewhat different ritual paths, in accord with the patri-lineal and virilocality principles underlying the ritual. The basic dialectic of nurture and sexuality is true, however, for both, and is perhaps best represented in the salted milk offered the groom by the bride’s sisters in one Nikah I attended.

The fundamental complementarity of nurture and sexuality is, moreover, also a key to the interpretation of the magical treatment of bride and groom. For Pakistanis, a thermodynamic theory of reproduction is complemented by a thermally oriented classification of foods and colours (cf. also Beck 1969). Not only are the rhythms of human reproduction formulated thermodynamically, but their proper regulation is achieved through appropriate nurturing. Thus, hot foods, and especially hot dry foods, are given as a cure for infertility because of their stimulating qualities. Yet taken in excess they may harm fertility: I was told of a newly married woman who had brought with her from Pakistan a large quantity of dried dates. My informant said she had eaten too many of these, and this had caused her to be infertile. ‘It was so hot that it burnt her up inside’. In the first months of pregnancy (when the woman is considered ‘hot’) hot foods are avoided as these might harm the foetus. Recommended are milk and butter, also cures for infertility, which are cool, soothing foods, moderating the influence of a ‘heated’ condition. This essentially thermodynamic view of reproduction
applies both to natural fertility (zarkhezi) and to human processes of maturation, sex, conception, pregnancy and gestation. Sexual relations are conceived of as essentially hot, so hot that they create weakness and should be indulged in sparingly. Pregnancy, the outcome of sexual relations, induces heat in women who should avoid eating very hot foods. Immediately after giving birth, the woman is said to be cold and should be given hot, high energy foods such as nuts and eggs, in addition to milk.

Extreme heat appears to be polluting and is countered by bathing. After menstruation and sex, women and men (in the latter case) are expected to immerse themselves fully in water. This view of sex as heating and weakening, as well as polluting, is shared with Hindus (cf. Beck 1969; Yalman 1961).

The act of conception, it is believed, takes place as a result of a combining of male and female substances, both known as mani, in the woman’s womb. The man’s mani, or semen, is, however, considered ‘stronger’ and thus hotter, than the woman’s mani. Indeed, Pakistanis believe (unlike some Hindus) that because of this strength the infant’s blood originates from the father, whereas the mother is the source of nourishment and growth. Metaphorically, conception is likened to seed germinating in the earth (cf. Inden 1976: 94; Inden & Nicholas 1977: 54). In a different metaphor, an Urdu proverb describes the sexual act as ‘the joining of fire and water’ (aag aur panee ka milap). The woman who told me the proverb suggested, somewhat diffidently, that fire signified the male principle, water the female principle. This is also suggested by Punjabi folk songs, such as one of the wedding songs I recorded, which identify women with vessels, jars or pots of water (or milk) which her prospective lover wishes to ‘drink’ from. My informant’s husband asserted, however, that the proverb equated ‘fire’ with women and cited a case of an adulterous wife. Women, he explained, are extremely ‘dangerous’. One may speculate that a promiscuous woman becomes in the eyes of Punjabis a reservoir of ‘heat’ through her excessive sexual activity. Apart from explicit exegesis, the association of hot dry foods and fertility may be inferred by examining the list of foods classified as hot and dry: they include most seeds, beans and lentils, fruit pips and cores, and eggs. The word for seeds, ‘bi’ (bij in Urdu) may also sometimes refer to semen.

The magical treatment of the bride and groom is at the most obvious level iconic, but underlying it are thermal and colour-based transformations drawing in wider notions of purity, pollution and danger. Although the pre-wedding rites often appear to focus on the bride, the treatment of the bride and bridegroom is, in fact, complementary and opposed. Both are smeared with mustard oil and a turmeric mixture (batna) in the Thel rite, and with henna in the Mhendi rite, but only the bride is extensively smeared with these substances. Similarly, the groom only has his hair washed with milk in the subsequent Khara rite. The bride is fed with nuts and sugar, the groom with milk and sugar. Hence at the iconic level a transference of foodstuffs associated with reproduction and the opposite sex is made between the two families. In this respect, the Thel and Mhendi rites may be regarded as structurally equivalent and opposed to the groom’s Khara, and the transference of complementary substances means that before the bride and bridegroom consummate their marriage, they are
magically united through substances associated with fertility and the other sex.

Implicit in the rites is, however, a more complex symbolic structure focused around the transformative qualities of the henna and turmeric, and their conjunction with the bid. The wedding ritual may be said to be ‘synergetic’ in that it effects a multiplicity of transformations simultaneously (cf. R. Werbner 1985). The four rites move the couple towards a state of increasing heat, ‘redness’, vitality and potency. This movement is not, however, a straightforward linear transformation, but a dialectical one, consisting of a series of juxtapositions of opposing qualities. At the centre of this movement are the batna and mhendi mixtures. In both mixtures extreme heat, redness and light —signalled by the lit candles—and initial ‘whiteness’ (the batna) or ‘coldness’ (the mhendi) are juxtaposed. In their contradictory qualities the mixtures have a mysterious potentiality.

The batna and mhendi are brought forth, wrapped in red veils and revealed to the bride and groom under the red Dupatta. They constitute the sacra so common in rites of passage (cf. Turner 1967: 107–8), the ‘ultimate mysteries’ believed ‘to change [the neophytes’] nature, transform them from one kind of human being into another’ (1967: 108). They are the gift of the groom’s family to the bride, and of the bride’s family to the groom. There is here a mystical transference of the qualities of the turmeric-and-grain mixture and of the henna mixture between the couple. By implication, it is only through marriage that they can achieve this state of mystical heat and power.

Condensed symbols and ritual transformers

At the basis of my interpretation of the batna and mhendi are Pakistani taxonomic classifications of food and colour ordered in relation to the series of oppositions between hot and cold, dark and light, pollution and purity, red and white. Thus, I argue, turmeric and henna act as separators and transformers, moving the couple from dark to light, white to red, and from secular heat, to cold, then to hot.

Turmeric (haldi), widely used in weddings throughout India, has been described as ‘auspicious’, sometimes as ‘purifying’ or ‘cooling’ (Beck 1969). In trying to locate the nature of this ‘auspiciousness’ more precisely, however, the multiple associations of this substance must be considered. Like henna, which I discuss below, turmeric bears the contradictory and polysemic qualities of a ‘dominant symbol’ (Turner 1964). In the wedding ritual it operates primarily in terms of its colour. It is an extractor of underlying or internal darkness or dirt, it lightens and softens the skin, removing all bruises and blemishes. It may also mediate in its yellow-orange colour between white and red. It has, in addition, strong associations with blood, fertility, the earth and motherhood (cf. Appendix 1). While its symbolic multivalency is latent, it is thus imbued, like all condensed symbols, with an underlying power (Turner 1964: 47–8). Mustard oil too is associated with contradictory qualities and moves the bride and groom towards light and beneficial heating. The bid assortment of nuts, dates and dry coconut fed to the bride is associated with extreme heat. These are mixed with white sugar sweets (makhana) which are said to be very pure (pak).
The *Thel Bithana* rites which open the ritual cycle can thus be interpreted in its complex dynamic form. The bride is massaged with the *batna* mixture of turmeric, mustard oil, ground grain or chickpeas and scent. Variations of this mixture are used in many parts of India (cf. Babb 1975: 83; Hershman 1977: 297–8). She is fed nuts and dried fruit. Both the turmeric mixture and nut assortment are gifts from the groom’s family. Her treatment with them is said to make her white. An implicit association white–semen may be present here, as well as the explicit reference to the dirt-extractive qualities of the turmeric. The treatment also implies a dialectic of cold and hot. The bride’s internal treatment, the feeding with *bid*, makes her hot and pure. Her external treatment is said to be ‘soothing’, ‘calming’, neither very hot nor too cold, a beneficial medium type of heat.

In the following rite, the *Mhendi* rite, the dialectic of colour, and of hot and cold, is taken to a further extreme. Like turmeric and mustard, henna bears the opposed qualities of cold and hot. While all three are ‘anomalous’ substances, and operate as ritual transformers (cf. Douglas 1966: 166–70), henna, in particular, is uniquely transformative, since it undergoes a visible transformation. It is a green plant, a kind of bush. The dried leaves (‘cold’) are mixed with water, sugar and lemon (‘cold’) to form a dark paste which is said to be extremely cold. It is used not only to cool the feet and hands during the hot summer months, but also as a treatment for rashes and poxes, said to be caused by excessive heating of the blood. The application of too much henna may cause illness, as it is so extremely cold. The paste is usually smeared on a person’s hair or skin and left to stand for several hours before it is washed off, when it produces a dark red or mauve colour which takes several weeks to fade. As it fades, it turns orange, then yellow.

Thus, henna too combines ‘cold’ and ‘hot’ elements and moves from green (cool) to dark green or brown/black to red (hot)—from cold to hot, from the hidden to the exposed and prominent. Small wonder that it is used at weddings from north Africa through the Middle East to north India! Old people in Pakistan dye their white hair with henna—it is a sign of vitality and life.12

In the *Mhendi* rite the girl in particular is, in her external treatment, made extremely cold through the *Mhendi* decoration. At the same time she is fed, internally treated, with the ‘hot’ *bid* mixture. It is when she is at her ‘coldest’, her hands and feet decorated with highly intricate patterns of *mehendi*, that the erotic dancing, sexual joke gifting and transvestite masquerading occur. Dangerous heat is thus juxtaposed with the groom or bride’s ‘cold’, safe condition. I return to this point later.

From a structural stance the rites may thus be interpreted as shown in table 2 and the diagram. Hence, a set of further equations may be surmised:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>male</th>
<th>semen</th>
<th>seeds (grains &amp; pulses)</th>
<th>seeds</th>
<th>fire</th>
<th>hot</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>female</td>
<td>blood/milk</td>
<td>henna, milk</td>
<td>earth</td>
<td>water</td>
<td>cold</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The operation of henna as a transformer is further confirmed by the heating (‘cooking’) of the girl or boy’s henna-covered hands over an oven or fire before the cold substance is washed off. The bride in particular is then smeared with oil
Table 2. The symbolic structure of the bride’s treatment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Thel</th>
<th>Mhendi</th>
<th>Khara</th>
<th>Nikah</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ritual substances</td>
<td>Batna &amp; Bid</td>
<td>Mhendi &amp; Bid</td>
<td>Water &amp; Fire (MILK-GROOM)</td>
<td>Red cloth &amp; gold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iconic connotations</td>
<td>earth &amp; seed</td>
<td>blood &amp; seed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thermal transformation</td>
<td>Cold + hot</td>
<td>Cold + hot</td>
<td>cold + hot</td>
<td>hot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colour transformation</td>
<td>white</td>
<td>dark green/brown on white</td>
<td>red</td>
<td>red</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* of menstruation, virginity, childbirth.
** of a nursing mother. The groom’s treatment appears to be primarily iconic.

![Diagram](image.png)

Figure 1. The symbolic structure of the wedding substances.

... (beneficial heat) and can no longer wash in water. The henna patterns turn red as she is moved from cold to hot. She is heated and ‘cooked’ (Lévi-Strauss 1969b: 336).

The mystical notions embedded in the wedding ritual find expression in the singing of the young girls during the Mhendi rite. Thus the girls sing:

Light the oven in the garden.
Nowadays the girls wear side hair-partings and open [wide] trousers.
The white cock is on the roof’s edge
The girl with the mauve dupatta, the boy is in love with you.

The mango floats in the waterpot [mango—a very hot fruit]
With longing such as this
O that God had not caused me to be born.

The heat of the oven and of the mango are here juxtaposed with the coolness of the garden and the waterpot (on the ‘full vessel’ cf. Marglin 1981: 161); the whiteness of the cock with the redness of the girl’s veil.

Hence the danger of excessive heat (sex) is averted, through its ‘tempering’ or juxtaposition with extreme cold. The cooling is associated with purification and soothing, i.e. with the shedding of secular heat and dirt, and thus with the introduction of the liminal phase. It is still within this phase, however, that the bride and groom are exposed symbolically to the extreme heat associated with sex. Before her marriage, the bride must first encounter the figure of the ritual clown. Moreover, it is this figure, as well as the joking and sexual bawdry of the Mhendi rite, which highlight most dramatically the symbolic conjunction of past and present in the weddings of labour migrants.

The virgin and the clown
At the height of the Mhendi rite, as the bride’s hands and feet are increasingly covered with beautifully intricate designs, the young girls bring their gifts to the bride. These are neither large nor expensive but are extremely important. In one wedding they consisted of a baby doll, a bra and a pair of panties bearing the words ‘Screw Hole’ in English. The gifts are passed around the room amidst gales of laughter and then hung from the ceiling for all to see.

Finally, a girl or young woman enters, dressed as an old man. In one wedding this ‘man’ dressed in old clothes with a long beard danced an exaggeratedly romantic tango with one of the girls dressed as an older woman. In another Mhendi ceremony I witnessed, the ‘old man’, his face wrinkled by wet chapatti flour, wearing an old hat and carrying a cane, attacked the mother of the bride with his walking stick and tried to embrace her. The dialogue was fierce:

Old man: ‘Give me one of your daughters’.
Mother: ‘You can take me’.
Old man: ‘You’re too old’.
Mother: ‘Look at you, you’re old too.’

This type of dialogue is apparently common. In another wedding I was told the ‘man’ was accused of being too old to be virile but retaliated by demanding that the women ‘try him’.

The application of the mhendi by the older women appears to be a crucial turning point in the Mhendi rite, for it is then that the young girls take over the singing in the rite. This singing expresses the bride’s incorporation into the group of her age-mates. The older women stop their songs of lamentation and the songs change from pessimism about the marriage, to songs of love and assertion. Usually sung in the first person singular, the songs stress the identification of the bride and her age mates: ‘He used to call you “mother” then
he was your son; but now he says "darling", and he is my husband", the young girls sing. Although the songs joke about the bride and bridegroom, their ineptitude and silliness, the tone is humorous and optimistic. The final separation of the bride comes when her friends present her with their gifts. For this humorous and obscene gifting is another act of separation, this time of the bride from her age-mates. The bride is now moving away from her former state of sexual innocence to one of sexual knowledge, from being a child to a position of responsibility and motherhood. And she is leaving behind her yet-unmarried friends.

An important element both in the masquerading of the old man and in the girls’ gifts is their innovatory potential which allows the girls to introduce into the ritual locally conceived, British, symbolic objects. It must be remembered that the girls have spent much of their lives in Britain and have attended British, co-educational schools. Thus, the 'old' man and the girl who danced a romantic tango were mimicking British ballroom dancing. And the gifts were clearly local in origin. They signified the extent to which sexual freedom prevails in modern Britain—a freedom expressed in the easy commercial availability of the panties. Thus, the gifts bring out sharply the contrast between the permissiveness of the wider society and the specifically ethnic ideas about purdah and sexual modesty. They demonstrate the girls' awareness of this prevalent permissiveness, while at the same time acting as taboo breakers and separators in the narrower context of ethnic cultural beliefs.14

The transvestite masquerading as an old man occurs when the mhendi decoration is far progressed, and the bride-to-be separated from both older and younger women. The clownish figure of the old man combines opposing elements for it is neither man nor woman, neither young nor old, but a grotesque combination of all these qualities in one. Transvestite masquerading in the wedding resembles, in certain key respects, the 'monster' masquerading which often appears in rites of passage. Ritual monsters are so named because they are constituted through a juxtaposition of incongruent features to combine in a 'totally unique configuration' (Turner 1967: 106). In transvestite masquerading the incongruity lies in the difference between the masked and the mask, the hidden and the overt, rather than between the juxtaposed overt features of the figure.

Turner’s point that ‘. . . facts that had been hitherto for the neophytes bound up in configurations and accepted unthinkingly are, as it were, resolved into constituents’ (1967: 106), would seem to me, however, to apply equally well to transvestite figures. The wedding figure constitutes a double image: first, that of the girl moving from youth to adulthood, and second, a combined image of male and female—the union of the sexes.15

Turner emphasises the expressive features of the monster as an 'object of reflection'. Figures of this type can, however, also be seen to play an active role in the ritual. When the symbolic elements joined together in the grotesque figure include emblems of authority, these can invest the figure with a capacity for authoritative action (cf. R. Werbner 1964; 1971 and, especially, 1972: 247–8). In this case the figure is one of an old man, and therefore it represents authority, albeit ridiculous, 'stupid' or 'mad' (pagal); the women acquire a licence to break
what are the otherwise accepted taboos of the society. The old man can act outside the boundaries of permitted behaviour, whereas the participants in the ritual, even though in a ritual context, remain bound by the conventions of their ascribed roles. Through this figure the young girls express sexual desire and thus break the sexual taboos; they also express the inter-generational conflict inherent in arranged marriages.

While grotesque figures can, however, act beyond the set moral limits, they can do so only within the domain demarcated by the specific elements that compose them. Thus, the wedding clown can break taboos relating to sex and age only, and despite its dishevelled appearance, it is not an arbitrary figure, but a well-defined, well-contained one.

Beidelman suggests that in the Swazi Incwala,

... Supernatural forces which animate the world ... are set loose, and the climax of the supernatural 'charging' of the king is his appearance as a monster, cut off from men and society owing to the very strength and disorder of the various opposing attributes condensed within him (1966: 377).

Can the same be said about the wedding transvestite figure? Unlike the silo (the king-monster), this figure is not awesome but a figure of fun and absurdity. Moreover, it is not the bride herself who masquerades but one of her friends. The masquerading does occur, however, at a similar phase in the ritual—when the girl is cut off from her elders and peers, and when her magical treatment (the mhendi decoration) is nearly completed. She is in a state of betwixt-and-between, moving from youth to maturity, from the status of unmarried daughter to one of wife. She is, moreover, extremely 'cold'. Thus the dangerous heat of sex, embodied in the ritual clown, is juxtaposed with this coldness, which contains it and makes it safe.

An obvious opposition represented in the figure of the clown is that between youth and old age. The married women, in alliance with the young girls, reject the convention which allows men to arrange marriages between young daughters and older men. The clown expresses the disgust felt by the women at such a marriage, in which youthful romantic love is absent, and the bride is treated as a chattel, given for sexual and child-bearing services. In a sense the women, and particularly the young girls, align in a solidary group, opposed to the authority of men and elders, asserting the primacy of their values, i.e., their belief in romantic love. And, indeed, more and more 'love' marriages are negotiated in Manchester after the couple have made their wish to marry known to their respective families.

The second basic opposition is between uncontrolled sex, or extreme, unmitigated 'heat', which is rejected, and controlled sex, i.e. fertility, which is desired and incorporated. The clown represents, in a sense, an ordeal, overcome with the help of the community. Thus 'any doubt that the ritual clown and what he represents might overwhelm the sacred centre or give it a character other than its own is dispelled, with the clown's expulsion' (R. Werbner 1984: 273). Sex is incorporated, but in a transformed, safe form. This is done, moreover, in the cases I observed, by the women present, not by men, the women both enacting sex uncontrolled and providing the means for controlling it (I am told that in
Pakistan a similar form of masquerade, this time by men of women, occurs in
the men’s quarters by male actors known as nakria, fulfilling, I would surmise, a
similar role). While the ritual clown may comment upon and embody the
liminal boundary (cf. Handelman 1981 for a comparative account), it must
ultimately be rejected in its wild, disorderly form. On this most scholars are
agreed.

During the Mhendi rite uncontrolled sex, embodied by the clown, is first
incorporated and made safe by the women surrounding the bride-to-be. She,
however, takes no part in the proceedings, sitting in a corner, decorated with
intricate patterns of ‘cold’ henna, still mournful, almost isolated from the
jollities around her. In a sense, her ‘cold’ detachment complements the women’s
laughter and play. Hieb argues that in controlling the clown through laughter,
what is asserted is that something potentially dangerous, an inversion of
‘alternative patterns which seek control’, lacks validity (Hieb 1972: 193). In a
fortuitously appropriate metaphor, Clark has summed up the role of laughter in
this context:

A clown holds the licentious thing in his hands, psychologically. He goes through a ritual
impersonation as if he were the outrageous thing itself or its personification, yet at the same time
he knows, his audience knows . . . that he is not that thing . . . He is playing with fire; but he is
not the fire. The moment he identifies himself with the fire he is no longer funny; that fine,
delightful sense of balance and mastery is lost. . . . (cited in Crumrine 1969: 14)

It may well be argued that part of the figurative elaboration of the wedding
rites stems from the need to overcome, through laughter, the psychological fear
and shame associated with sex (cf. Crumrine 1969: 12–13). It should be stressed
here, however, that sex is, in reality, often looked forward to with excited
anticipation. Thus, in one of the Thel rites I witnessed, the bride-to-be, having
sobbed uncontrollably throughout the rite, retired with her girlfriends and a
plate of butna to her bedroom where she remarked, jokingly, completely at ease,
that she hoped ‘they buy a strong bed’.

It is possible that the control of sex through laughter and masquerade
facilitates for the bride her cognitive and experiential comprehension or tran-
scendence of this unknown, perhaps terrifying, future experience. It is, in other
words, an attempt to enable an individual to assert, through ‘ritual laughter’
control over ‘nature’ as represented in disorderly sex. A discussion of this point
lies, however, beyond my anthropological competence, and I have limited my
discussion to an analysis of the cultural structuring of the ritual clown.16 For my
purposes the clown remains ‘the ritual prototype of the magical breaker of
prohibitions’ (Makarius 1970: 52).

In this form, as a transvestite man or woman, the clown is a ‘bringer of
prosperity’ (1970: 57), commonly found in weddings and rituals concerned with
natural fertility. Turner reports that in the Nkanga puberty rites preceding
Ndembu weddings, transvestite figures appear (Turner 1968: 214). Selwyn
(1979: 687) and Kolenda (1984: 109–10) mention mock weddings and mas-
quera de in their descriptions of Indian wedding rites. Jeffery describes a similar
figure in the north Indian Muslim Mhendi rite (1979: 101). Babb reports that
during the holi festival men wear feminine dress, while women behave aggress-
ively, like men (Babb 1975: 172), in what he describes as a festival of heat,
sexuality and licence. Westwood describes similar themes in the ‘bride’s ritual’ in the hosiery industry in Britain (1984: 111–28). Zulu women masquerade and behave like men, it will be recalled, at the start of the agricultural season (cf. Gluckman 1963: 112–18), in a ritual intended to promote the fertility of the crops.

Parallel domains

The transformation of bride and groom progresses, therefore, through a dialectic of nurture and sexuality. Nurture (fertility) is transformed into sexuality via nurturing (feeding with bid, etc.). So too wealth—in the form of such valuables as gold, money and luxury foods—functions in the wedding not merely as a marker of status, but is itself integral to the implicit symbolic scheme I have outlined.

Throughout the wedding ceremonial cycle vast sums of money, gold and other costly gifts flow towards the bride and groom or their families. Yet these valuables differ in their significance. Thus the Thel and Mhendi rites, with their underlying protective and purificatory intent, are associated with almsgiving, or the appeal to divine protection and blessing. The women attending these rites circle the heads of the bride or groom-to-be with one-pound and five-pound notes which they throw into the red dupatta held above the bride or groom’s heads. The dupattas are gathered together at the end of each rite, and the money donated to the poor as alms. So too the garland of flowers (Haar) traditionally placed over the groom’s head before the Nikah ceremony is often substituted for a ‘garland’ of five-pound notes, shaped as flowers. Scent and flowers are used throughout south Asia as communicators with the divine, and in accord with this, these ‘flowers’ too are donated to the poor. The poor here act as mediators with God (cf. P. Werbner 1979a: 79–112).

A different notion underlies personal gifts of money (salaami) to the bride and groom which takes place just before and after the Nikah. Here the money is placed on the recipient’s lap, mixed with an assortment of nuts and dates in the case of the groom, and on a red dupatta in the case of the bride. Ideas of growth, multiplication and fertility are implicit in this initial donation of wealth: it is hoped that it will multiply and increase. The feast itself has implicit parallels with the symbolic scheme of the magical rites. Traditional wedding foods such as curried lamb and particularly roast chicken, as well as nuts, dates and chickpeas, are ‘hot’, while the rest of the food is usually ‘sweet’. There is, therefore, a parallel metaphorical meaning in both the economic and culinary domains, and both are related to the magical, symbolic treatment of the bride and groom.

The excessive generosity which pervades the wedding feasts and hospitality has, moreover, sacrificial overtones. Certainly in Pakistan a portion of the wedding food is given away to lower caste groups (Eglar 1966), thus underlining its intent as a means of seeking divine blessing and long-term return. In Manchester, where ‘there are no poor’, this meaning is to some extent excluded, and the competitive, status-seeking nature of wedding feasts is more emphati-
cally stressed. Nevertheless, notions of generosity and redundancy continue to underlie the prodigious feasting.

Finally, we return to the bride. Traditionally, the bride’s face, head, hands and feet—all the exposed extremities of her body—were covered with gold. Even today, in Manchester, she wears rings on all her fingers with a chain or gold ball (gaana) connecting them, bangles on her wrists, a necklace around her neck and golden slippers. In the past she wore gold on her temples, linked behind her head with gold chains. Today, she still wears gold on her forehead, a nose-ring linked with a chain to her ear, and earrings. Much of the gold is part of the weree given to her by the groom’s family. Gold, considered the ‘highest’ metal, is also a ‘hot’ metal (as against silver which is ‘cold’). It shines and glitters like fire. Symbolically, therefore, the bride is endowed with this mystical heat and power only through the marriage union. In her final transformation the bride is an apparition of gold and red silk, turmeric and henna.

Male and female, nature and culture

It remains, however, to examine the fundamental conception of femaleness implicit in the wedding rites. South Asian tantric beliefs identify active energy and power (shakti), both creative and destructive, as essentially female (cf. for example, Dumont 1970: 54; Wadley 1977: 114–18). The sexual masquerading and joking may seem, on the surface, to confirm this belief in female fertile energy, ‘hot’ and dangerous to men. Yet examined in its full symbolic complexity, the conception of femaleness implied by the rites is a different one.

In the wedding rites the bride-to-be, it will be remembered, is treated more extensively than the groom, and she is kept in seclusion. In the eyes of the women who control these rites male sexuality is extremely powerful and ‘hot’, and the rites ensure that the bride is initially in a state of coldness and purity, eliminating thus also (from the male point-of-view) the danger of menstrual heat and pollution. The heat and power associated with male sexuality are contained, both cognitively and magically, by the initially cold purity of the treated bride or groom to be. It is the male, not the female source of fertility which is hotter. It must be stressed, moreover, that the difference in treatment is one of degree: it is not a qualitative difference. Both bride and groom must be protected; both are to be exposed to the ‘heat’ of sex.

The control of the rites by women does not signify, in simple terms, their association with nature. They are, indeed, mediators with nature in the wedding rites because they are the nurturers and feeders, and thus are the controllers of human growth and procreation; they are, in effect, the owners and controllers of the domestic domain. It is this domain into which nature threatens to intrude and to disrupt. Hence they control the pre-marriage ‘magical’ rites.

At the point of transition from the domestic to the public domain men take over the proceedings; it is they who control the legal, religious and public aspects of the wedding ceremony, thus asserting their control over the proceedings as a whole. They also control, in effect, the bride and groom in their state of ritual potency. The final transformation of the bride and groom themselves into
a state of 'safe' heat, of hot red on a background of cool white, is achieved on the morning following the Mhendi, after they take their ritual baths. It is then that the bride puts on her red wedding gown and is adorned with her gold finery. For the bride, in the cases I observed, the appearance of the 'old man', the ritual clown, marks the second part of the liminal phase, rather than her achieved peak of ritual potency. It is the signing of the marriage contract, the Nikah, which sees her transformed into a figure of gold and red, the fleeting image of a goddess or queen. Thus it is that the older women sing:

From which cities has the King come to the parents,
From which cities has the flower plucker come on foot?
The King of Manchester city has come to the parents,
The London plucker of flowers has come to pluck the flower.

Conclusion

Labour migrants carry their cultural knowledge with them on their travels. At times, they perform rituals in their new place of residence, often they do not. The central role played by domestic rituals in communities of labour migrants has received scant attention in the urban anthropological literature. In this article I have attempted to show how distinctive ideas regarding gender and gender relations are given renewed symbolic expression in a new context, far removed from the original 'natural' setting in which the ritual is usually performed. Both the construction of gender, and the ritual itself, are revitalised through its renewed performance in a formerly alien environment. The ritual I have described, the wedding ritual, is a cosmogonic one, attempting to harness the potentially dangerous and disorderly powers of sex and nature for the sake of human fertility.

Ritual transfer hinges in important respects not only on the continuing relevance of the ritual, but on the symbolic coherence of the images, beliefs and values it incorporates. For Pakistanis, key ideas about the person, male and female, old and young, reproductive or sterile, interlock in the wedding ritual into a cosmology of regeneration and social continuity. Thus it is not a set of separate customs which is transferred, but an integrated system of symbols, customs and beliefs. As Parkin (1978) has argued, the reproduction of culturally distinct forms of social organisation rests on the continued interdependence, at the institutional level, of key conceptions. Similarly, the symbolic coherence of a transposed ritual transcends the specific utility or relevance of this or that custom or belief. At the same time the ritual process is not frozen or reified as a set of hallowed 'customs'; it is alive and responsive to novel experiences and predicaments. Symbols are extended and elaborated according to current perceptions and understandings. In important respects, variation is the truth of ritual. Each wedding convened differs in its social composition and figurative elaboration. Yet this variation takes place, necessarily, without doing violence to the coherent semantic structure of the ritual, or undermining its syntactic progression through a series of transformative phases.
Research on Pakistanis during 1975–8 was supported by an ESRC project grant. An earlier version of the article was presented at seminars in Manchester and SOAS in 1977, and at the University of Leuven in 1979, and I am grateful to Abner Cohen, Adrian Mayer and Renat de Visch for their comments. In revising the draft I benefited greatly from comments and suggestions made by Richard Werbner, Penny Logan, Don Handelman and Tim Ingold. I base my orthography on that of a local Urdu teacher, and Anwar (1979).

1 This approach as presented here is, perhaps, a caricature, but may account for the virtual absence of detailed symbolic analyses of the rituals or festivals of immigrants. The few exceptions are tantalising as, for example, Weil (1977) or Cohen’s analysis of the London West Indian Carnival (1980).

2 The ‘replication’ approach is commonly applied to analyses of Asian immigrants’ kinship systems in Britain. I am grateful to Renate Fernandez for suggesting this term.

3 This has been said to hold universally (Ortner 1974). For critiques cf. MacCormack (1980), La Fontaine (1981). Even apart from ritual, the universal argument confutes ‘nature’, i.e. the phenomenological world, with the common usage of the term as a ‘substantive hungry’ or ‘trouser’ word, deriving its contextual meaning from its implicit contrast (Austin 1962: 62–77). Women are thus sometimes ‘natural’ (menstruators, lactaters), sometimes ‘cultural’ (socialisers, cooks). The meaning derives from the contrastive stress on human processing activities in a particular context.

4 The term ‘tempering’ is used by R. Werbner (1985) in a discussion of Kalanga sacrifice. The notion of ‘index’ can be understood in line with its primary definition in the Concise Oxford Dictionary as a ‘pointer showing measurements etc. . . . indicating relative level’. In other words, the emphasis is on indicating relativities in scale, and not merely on a sign qua sign, following the usage put forward by Pierce (cf. Leach 1976: 12). Cf. R. Werbner (1977: xxv). A more profound sense of ‘indexicality’ is highly pertinent to the issues raised here, that is used by some phenomenologists. Garfinkel cites Husserl who ‘spoke of expressions whose sense cannot be decided by an auditor without his necessarily knowing something about the biography and purposes of the user of the expression, the circumstances of the utterance, the previous course of the conversation or the particular relationship of actual or potential interaction’ (1967: 4). Or, as R. Werbner argues elsewhere ‘Ritual is valued for its particularity, for its assertions about people who can see, know, and make demands on one another. To shrivel ritual into some mystical buttress of a whole society, a generality remote from men, is to waste away the specific order it compels men to recognise’ (R. Werbner 1971: 326).

5 The rite is also known as Thel pana, Maiyam or Manyu Bitana in Urdu.

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7 Both ‘hot’ and ‘cold’ foods may be ‘wet’ or ‘dry’ with important medicinal consequences which cannot be discussed here.

8 Thus one informant told me that after sexual relations men and women ‘both feel hot, they must sleep in separate beds, and get very very weak’. ‘In cold weather’, she added ‘it is all right’.

9 In accord with Pakistanis’ lesser concern with food pollution, however, menstruating women may cook for their families.

10 This does not accord with the Bengali view reported by Inden & Nicholas (1977: 52–3), whereby the male is the source of ‘hard’ body structures: bones, nerves and marrow, whereas the woman is the source of ‘soft’ unstructured parts of the body: skin, flesh and blood. According to my informants, bones, which depend for growth on nourishment, originate with the mother. Although I was not told this many reports indicate a widespread south Asian view that semen is highly concentrated blood (cf. Beck 1969). This is consistent with the Punjabi view that the male genital is the source of the baby’s blood.

11 Modesty prevents many women from admitting they even know the word for ‘semen’.

12 On white, black and red, and the ambiguous nature of red, cf. Turner 1967: 78. In south Asia henna is used by Muslims and north Indians, particularly Punjabis, but it is not, apparently, used by Hindus in south India. This suggests that its use was introduced by Muslim invaders from the north-west.

13 The two final equations may well be true only from a female point of view.

14 Mason (1975) discusses the link between licensed behaviour at weddings and the Islamic view of female modesty and male honour, in a perceptive paper on weddings in a Libyan oasis. I do not agree with his analysis in two important respects: (a) he does not appreciate that licensed behaviour is
a ritual act, separating the bride and bridegroom from different categories of people; (b) I do not accept that the wedding ceremony emphasises the inferior status of women in Arab society, but rather the complementarity of the male and female roles. Mason’s analysis is restricted, in my opinion, to the expressive rather than the performative role of ritual acts.  

15 Bateson (1936) argues that transvestite behaviour creates identification or conflation of different statuses. In accord with this line of reasoning, the clown implies that the bride as a married woman will become identified with her husband and his family (cf. in particular Bateson 1936: 35–43).


17 This rite, known as Sehra, the placing of the garland and tinsel veil on the groom, is not discussed here (cf. P. Werbner 1979a).

18 There are two main reception ‘feasts’—Vyah, of the wife-givers and Valeema, of the wife receivers. After the Vyah there are several ceremonials associated with the couple’s movement between the two houses’ (Rukhsati, Mulkawa). For a discussion cf. Eglar 1960; P. Werbner 1979a.

19 At Hindu weddings, as is well-known, the couple circumambulate the wedding fire seven times. The god of fire is said to be the witness in Gujarati Hindu weddings (Westwood 1984: 152).

REFERENCES


## APPENDIX

**Associated meanings of henna and turmeric**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Turmeric (Haldi)</th>
<th>Henna (Mhendi)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>DESCRIPTION:</strong></td>
<td>Bulbous root of the ginger family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NATURAL COLOUR:</strong></td>
<td>Bright yellow/orange (not a 'cool' colour).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ORDINARY USAGE:</strong></td>
<td>Dry: as a condiment in hot curries. Wet root: as a sweet dish.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TEMPERATURE:</strong></td>
<td>Root: cool (by contrast to ginger which is 'hot'). Dry powder: hot. Mixed with water/milk/oil: warm/cooling. Some ambiguity present in literature (Selwyn 1979: 684; Beck 1969: 557, 559).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OTHER ASSOCIATIONS:</strong></td>
<td>With earth: a widespreading shallow root. During weddings in central India, <em>puja</em> is offered to 'mother earth', the special wedding oven is made of earth, and 'small amounts of it may also be mixed with oil and turmeric with which the bride and groom will be anointed' (Babb 1975: 83).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TRANSFORMATIVE QUALITIES:</strong></td>
<td>Lightens, softens, whitens. (Chemically, turmeric mixed with alkaline turns red/brown. Cf. Beck (1969: 557) on red turmeric rice balls).</td>
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