

Bridal Ornamentation and Gender Performances in India: A Literature Review

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Abstract

Material artefacts could be markers of identity, markers of life cycle changes and also of the connectedness between sexuality and gender. This paper focuses on the material aspects of bridal beautification and ornamentation in India. Particularities of clothing, ornaments, use of certain metals etc., are explored through a review of literature based on bridal ornamentation in the Eastern and Western regions of present-day India. The paper seeks to explore those narratives on the representation of the bride, the performance of bridehood, underlying structural factors and aesthetic prescriptions for the bride.

Keywords: Material Culture, Bridal Dress, Jewelry, India, Gender

Introduction

This discussion, based on a review of literature on marriage and gender performances locates two caveats of feminist discourse I have derived from the work titled 'Gender and Jewelry' by Rebecca Ross Russel (2010). The first question is concerned with ornaments as symbols of oppression as well as resistance. In her theoretical formulation of jewellery prescriptions, Russel broadly identifies the possibility of jewellery to be functional as well as symbolic of 'physical incapacitation, ownership, representation of honour and a means of physical and conceptual emancipation'. This paper places this postulation in the context of gender and bridal ornamentation in India. Secondly, considering the explanatory possibility an intersectional approach offers in understanding bridal ornamentation, the paper looks at how the interaction of diverse forms of discriminatory or differentiating structures are explored in writings on bridal ornamentation. Forging the aforementioned concerns, an attempt is made to understand the cultural prescriptions, production and circulation of ornamented bridal imageries along with the dominant and changing ideals of marriage in India, through writings on marriage and ornamentation in India.

Method

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