

THE HINDU SACRAMENT OF MARRIAGE



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Abbreviations used

R.V. — Rig Veda

A.V. — Atharva Veda

S.Y.V. — Sukla Yajur Veda

Tait. Sam. — Taittiriya Samhita

Aśv. gr. — Aśvalāyana Gr̥hya Sūtra

Kau. Br. — Kauśītaki Brahmaṇa

Yaj. — Yājñavālkya Gr̥hya Sūtra

Āp.gr. — Āpastamba Gr̥hya Sūtra

Ap.MB. — Āpastamba Mantra Brahmaṇa

Hir. gr. — Hiranyakeśin Grhya sūtra

Par. Gr — Paraskara Grhya sūtra

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INTRODUCTION

Marriage transforms one's entire life-style and creates a whole new realm of duties, obligations, privileges and joys. Firstly it is important to bear in mind that a Hindu marriage is not merely a particular contractile arrangement between two consenting adults. It is the union of two entire families and many of the rites in the wedding ceremony stress this important fact. This publication is intended to give the reader a complete background to all the major events and considerations in an orthodox Hindu Marriage. Like everything to do with India it's terribly complex! I shall endeavour to make it as simple as possible.

Marriage is not a social contract temporarily entered into under the influence of romance or dissolved at one's pleasure. It is the most important religious sacrament, necessary for every individual to realize fully one's potential and to fulfil the responsibilities which one's owes to one's self, one's family, one's ancestors and to society at large. Marriage, therefore, is to every Hindu, not merely institutionalised pleasure, or primarily a source of gratification of sentimental longings or romantic loves, but an act of duty, a matter of moral and religious obligation, incumbent on everyone in all normal circumstances.

There are many Sanskrit words for marriage all of which have different shades of meaning:—

Pāṇigrahana — holding hands

Kalyāṇa — auspicious occasion.

Udvāha — bearing up, supporting, taking a girl from her father's home.

Vivāha — taking on the special responsibilities and duties associated with the life of a householder (*grihastha*).

pariṇaya or *pariṇayana* — walking around the sacred fire,

upayama (to bring near and make one's own)

Though these words express only one component element of the rite of marriage they are all used in the Śāstras (Scriptures) to indicate the totality of the several acts that go to make up the ceremony of marriage.

The purpose of Marriage

According to the Rig Veda, marriage was to enable a man, by becoming a householder, to perform sacrifices to the gods and to procreate sons.¹ The Satapatha Brahmaṇa. V.2.1.10 says:—

‘The wife is indeed half of one's self; therefore as long as a man does not secure a wife so long he does not beget a son and so he is till then not complete (or whole); but when he secures a wife he gets progeny and then he becomes complete’.

There are four purposes in Hindu marriage ²:

1. Progeny (*prajā*);
2. Sexual pleasure (*rati*);
3. Happiness (*ānandam*);
4. Companionship in the performance of Dharma (*sahatvam or dharmasampatti*).

Importance of children

Hindus have always been very focussed on children which were seen as the greatest givers of happiness. In pre-modern times they were also essential for one's security in old age. One's future depended upon sons; but above all, the future of one's ancestors hinged upon the male descendants who would make the funeral offerings. Sons were a source of labour, strength and power to people in those pre-industrial days.

The final blessing given to a bride is:—

“O bounteous Indra, make this bride blest in her sons and fortunate. Grant to her ten sons and make her husband the eleventh one.” (Rig. 10: 45.)



¹ The verse in Rig Veda X.85.36 shows that the husband took a woman as a wife for '*gārhapatyā*'. Rig Veda V.3.2, V.28.3 speak of the co-operation of husband and wife in the worship of gods. Rig Veda 3.53.4 contains the emphatic assertion 'the wife herself is the home' (*jāyed-astam*). A wife was called '*jāya*', because the husband was born in the wife as a son (Ait. Br. 33.1).

² Manu 9.28, Kau. Br. U. II, 15, Sabha. 5, 116; M. 9: 96; Br. U. I, 4, 17

TYPES OF MARRIAGE

The sources of Hindu Canon Law are the Dharma Śāstras and Grihya Sūtras. There are 8 classical types of Marriages mentioned in the Law Books. The three important ones that are currently practiced are:—

1. Prajāpatya rite

In this form of marriage, the parents of a young, eligible and healthy Vedic student of high ethical standards and educational qualifications approach the parents of a girl with similar characteristics with an offer of marriage. This is the classical arranged marriage which is initiated by the boy's parents.

2. Brahma rite

In this type of marriage arrangement it is the bride's parents who approach the parents of a prospective groom who has studied the Veda and is of good conduct and a suitable match for their daughter. This is the classical arranged marriage initiated by the girl's parents.

3. Gāndharva rite

This is a cohabitation by mutual arrangement between two consenting adults who are in love. This is the *de facto* form of marriage and is not necessarily accompanied by any formal religious nuptial rites. Although for legal purposes this form of marriage is recognised, the canon law recommends that the couple undergo a proper Vedic marriage ceremony at some stage.

The 4th rite is still practiced among some disadvantaged communities

4. Arsha rite

In this case the parents of the bridegroom will offer the bride's parents a 'bride price' (*śulka*) — in ancient times it was a pair of cattle. This usually occurs when the bridegroom has no special qualities or has a few negative ones. This type of marriage while being canonically permissible is discouraged by the injunction never to sell one's offspring, although the 'bride price' is a form of compensation rather than a purchase. Therefore in order to comply with the spirit of the Sacred Law the bride must be completely willing. If she agrees then the 'bride price' can be considered as a 'gift', If she is forced against her will then she is effectively being sold and this is unequivocally condemned by the Scriptures.

ARRANGED MARRIAGES & COMPATIBILITY

The Sacred Texts affirm that it is the duty of the parents to arrange the marriage of their daughter when she reaches puberty. Marriages used to be arranged at a very early age (even before puberty) and child marriages are still done in some parts of India today, the bride going to live with her in-laws after she attains puberty. Manu (IX.90-91) requires a girl to wait for three years after she becomes of marriageable age³ — if her parents have not arranged her marriage she should choose her husband herself.

According to the traditional world-view the fulfilment of life was to marry and procreate. In the pre-industrial age the begetting of children was essential to the development of the village economy by supplying the labour force. Children were also the only social security in old age, sickness and disability. From a religious point of view a son was essential for the performance of the memorial rites (*śrāddha*) after death. Every Hindu was in dread of dying without a son to perform the cremation and post death rites. Thus it was that parents became obsessed with the marriages of their offspring.

There are certainly some advantages to arranged marriages even in this day and age of individual freedom. One of the greatest problems facing modern youth is meeting suitable partners. Partners who would be compatible socially, spiritually, mentally, sexually and economically. People are so busy nowadays with working longer hours, commuting and having so many other distractions that it is increasingly difficult to meet a large variety of potential mates, hence the booming industry of on-line dating sites. Most partnerships in modern society are based on sexual attraction first, with other considerations entering the equation later on. In contemporary society one is conditioned with romantic ideas of a marriage based on love. Love is such a transient factor that anything based on love cannot be guaranteed to succeed, and indeed, the divorce rate is soaring to about 50% — people are talking of the demise of the institute of marriage in the west. But to be objective, many arranged marriages have also not been successful in terms of the general wellbeing and happiness of the couple. But Hinduism, as a complete science of spirituality has provided the objective means whereby the optimum compatibility can be ascertained — and that is through astrology.

In a traditionally arranged Hindu marriage the horoscopes of potential mates are obtained and are matched by a competent astrologer. The couple are then introduced to each other and nature is allowed to take it's course!

³ In Australia the legal marriageable age is 18 but after the age of 16 one can apply for a court order to marry.

Checking Compatibility

A Hindu marriage arrangement is intended to be permanent and although divorce is still a social stigma, there are certain conditions sanctioned by the canon law which make provision for divorce or remarriage (see appendix). So when entering into a marriage arrangement it is with the understanding that you will be together for the rest of your lives — come what may. One should not take it lightly, thinking - "O well, if this doesn't work out we can always get divorced and try again!" Therefore ideally marriages should only be contracted when there is the highest degree of compatibility between the couple. So the first step in getting married is to find out your compatibility rating.

A word of warning — if you have already set your mind on marrying the one you have already chosen, then checking compatibility is a waste of time and may introduce an element of anxiety or apprehension. If you are shown to be incompatible you will not cancel the marriage and it will only plague you for the rest of your married life. So only consider this step if you are prepared to take the results seriously and act on them.

CHOOSING A PARTNER

Qualities of the Groom

The first consideration is: how to choose a bridegroom and what qualifications make a person a very desirable bridegroom?

The legislator Yama offers the following helpful suggestions:—

'One should seek for seven qualities in a bridegroom viz. good family, good character, physical appearance, reputation, learning, wealth and [track record of] support [of relatives and friends]; the other matters need not be considered'.

Qualities of the Bride

Aśv. gr. I.5.3 says:—

'One should marry a girl who is endowed with intelligence, beauty, a good character and auspicious characteristics and who is healthy'.

Āp.gr. (III.21) states a commonsense rule:—

'A girl on whom his mind and eyes are riveted will bring him happiness (or prosperity), he should pay no heed to other things; this is the view of some'.

The Kāma-sūtra quotes the view of Ghotakamukha:—

'He should proceed to marry a girl on taking whom as his wife he would regard himself as blessed and would not be blamed by his friends (or persons in a similar station in life)'.

Manu II.238, however, allows one to marry a girl even from an inferior or dysfunctional family provided she is a 'jewel among women'.

GUARDIANSHIP IN MARRIAGE

The question of guardianship as regards marriage arises only in connection with girls. Men are generally free to contract marriages for themselves; but if they are minors, the consent of parents or guardians is necessary as is a Court Order in Australia.

Even for an adult son it is a matter of duty, though not one of legal obligation, to marry with the permission of his parents or elders.

It is a matter of formality for a man to ask the parents of the woman for her hand. Very often in polite Hindu society it is the parents of the groom that approach the parents of the bride after the couple have agreed to marry each other.

Although the matter of guardianship is no longer applicable to girls who reach the age of 18, yet it plays a part in the *kanya-dāna* (giving away of the bride). To give away a girl in marriage was not only a right and a privilege but is also productive of great merit (*punya*) — so much so, that often if a couple have more than one daughter they may delegate the privilege of giving away of their second daughter to a daughterless couple related to them.

Persons who are authorised to give away a damsel are mentioned in the sacred law.

“The father, parental-grandfather, brother, kinsmen, and mother, being of sound mind, are the persons to give away a damsel, the latter respectively on failure of the preceding.” (Yaj. I. 63.)

The Viṣṇu Dharma Sūtra (24.38-39) specifies the order of persons who are entitled to exercise this right of guardianship in marriage:—

‘The father, the paternal grand-father, a brother, a kinsman, a maternal grand-father and the mother are the persons, by whom the girl may be given away in marriage. In the absence of the preceding one (the right) devolves upon the next in order, in case he is able’.

The mother has been put low in the order of guardians probably because of the dependent status assigned to women and because of the fact that in the ceremony of *kanya-dāna* she cannot engage in it alone but has to get it done through some married couple. The courts in modern India, however, have legislated that after the father the mother is the prime guardian.

The Dharma-sindhu states the important proposition that when the girl performs *svayamvara* (a love marriage of her own choice) or when the mother is to give away the girl in marriage, the girl or mother should perform the *Nāndī-śrāddha* (ememorial ceremony to the ancestors) and the principal *saṅkalpa* (statement of

intent) is to be pronounced by her and the rest of the rite is to be performed through the family priest.

BETROTHAL — ENGAGEMENT

Hindus have a custom of betrothal, according to which the parents meet and publically affirm their agreement to the marriage. A verbal promise is exchanged between the two parties as regards the future wedding. But the betrothal ceremony or engagement called *Vāgdānam* does not create a positive obligation to marry. The legislator Yājñavalkya (I. 65.) thinks that if a better more suitable husband is found before the wedding then the betrothal is void. It is important, therefore, to note that mere verbal or written agreement cannot be the basis of a legal marriage. During the betrothal ceremony the caveat is applied to the groom by the guardian of the damsel.

“As long as your son remains whole in body and mind; does not become impotent; commit a crime, fall into vice or debt; I shall bestow my daughter in marriage, at the auspicious time that has been agreed upon.”

No conditions are applied to the bride.

Devala says that marriage ceremony (*vivāha saṃskāra*) is necessary for every Hindu even when the marriage has been consummated previously by the Gāndharva form.⁴

In some northern communities the engagement ceremony is done in two stages:—

1. The bride’s family visiting the groom’s family to request the hand of the groom commonly called “*tilak*”,
2. The groom’s family visiting the bride’s family to request her hand in marriage commonly called “*sagai*”.

DOWRY

Śulkam, Yautakam, Stridhanam

The issue of Dowry is one of the major vices of Hindu society. A Dowry nowadays is not what the bride voluntarily brings to the marriage but what is demanded or extorted from her and her family by the groom’s family. The demand for Dowry has been so severe in some places that it has contributed directly to female infanticide and the aborting of female foetuses! There are also many reported cases in India of newly wedded brides being abused and even physically injured because of Dowry issues.

⁴ Quoted by Kulluka M. 8:226.) Nārada also takes the same view. (Nārada. 12:2-3.)

The Sacred Law is quite clear on the subject. Demanding money or goods from a prospective daughter-in-law's parents as a precondition of marriage is tantamount to the sale of a child, and the selling of children is strictly prohibited! The scriptures *do* mention the **Śulkam** (tax) which is the giving of a certain amount of cash and kind to a poor bride's parents for the hand of their daughter but there is no mention of a cash amount to be paid to the groom!

This is what Manu has to say on the subject.

A woman's property (strīdhanam) is defined as being of six types: what was given to her at her marriage in front of the fire, during the bridal procession, as a token of affection, what was obtained from her brother, mother or father. In addition any subsequent gift and whatever her affectionate husband gives her should be inherited by her children when she dies, even during the lifetime of her husband. (Manu 9;194-195)

Those deluded relatives who live off a woman's property — her carriages, her clothes, and so on are evil and go to hell. (Manu 3:52)

The government should protect the estate and inherited property of women who are barren or have no sons, who have no families, who are faithful wives, widows or ill. But if, while these women are alive their own relatives should take these away, a just government should punish them with the punishment for theft. (Manu 8:28-29)

The previous Jagatguru Śaṅkarācārya says:—

“According to our scriptures money has nothing to do with these *samskāras*. That today it has come to be so, is a tragedy— and it is a tragedy that is of our own making. In none of the eight forms of marriage does the groom have to be given any money. Even in the asura type it is the groom that pays money, that is in exchange for the bride. If such a transaction is considered demoniac, what would the rishis who authored our Sastras have thought of the prevailing custom of dowry, of the groom's parents telling the bride's people:— "Give us your daughter in marriage and also cash." They could not have even imagined that such a custom would ever crop up. There obtained the custom of "Kanya-sulka" - money offered to the bride or "bride price" - which has some support in the canons. But you cannot find an iota of justification in our scriptures for the present dowry system.” — (Sankaracharya Chandrasekharendra Saraswati Swami quoted in “Hindu Dharma”.)

The whole community should reject this practice of coerced Dowry and Priests and elders should severely discourage it. The quicker it is stamped out the better for everyone.

PROHIBITED RELATIONSHIPS.

Prohibited relations according to English Law are as follows:—

A man cannot marry:—

Mother
 Daughter or adopted daughter
 Father's mother
 Mother's mother
 Son's daughter
 Daughter's daughter
 Sister, half-sister or adopted sister
 Father's sister
 Mother's sister
 Brother's daughter
 Sister's daughter

 Daughter of former wife
 Former wife of father
 Former wife of father's father
 Former wife of mother's father
 Daughter of son of former wife
 Daughter of daughter of former wife

A woman cannot marry:—

Father
 Son or adopted son
 Father's father
 Mother's father
 Son's son
 Daughter's son
 Brother, half brother or adopted brother
 Father's brother
 Mother's brother
 Brother's son
 Sister's son

 Son of former husband
 Former husband of mother
 Former husband of father's mother
 Former husband of mother's mother
 Son of son of former husband
 Son of daughter of former husband

These prohibited relationships are applicable under Australian Law as well, except it is permissible for a person to marry their uncle or aunt and also first cousins.

Under Hindu Sacred Law all the above categories apply as well except that uncles and aunts as well as their wives and husbands are equal to parents and their children equal to siblings and hence marriage with them is forbidden.

THE ARRANGEMENT OF GOTRA

Your priest might ask you what your Gotra is. The general conception about *gotra* or "Clan" is that it denotes all persons who trace descent in an unbroken male line from a common male ancestor thousands of years removed. Traditionally it was forbidden for anyone to marry within their own Gotra. These Gotras or Clans have largely died out and now they are used in the wedding ceremony as a formality only.

A woman takes on her husband's Gotra after marriage. Because a bride changes her gotra, she and her children are of a different gotra to her siblings and therefore according to South Indian tradition one may marry one's maternal cousin (because he or she belongs to a different gotra) but not a paternal cousin who would be of the same gotra. In North India marriage of cousins is strictly prohibited!

CHOOSING A DATE FOR YOUR WEDDING

Time is the universal force of movement and change. According to the seasons produce is obtained, according to Time we rise, work, sleep. All the events in our lives are determined by Time. Everything good and bad happens in Time. So Hindus like to harmonize major events in their lives – like marriage, planning a pregnancy, moving house etc. – with the forces of Time indicated by the planets. Calculations of inauspicious and auspicious dates are very complex and require a lot of time. So there are 3 ways in which to choose a date for your wedding.

1. Make an astrological consultation with a competent astrologer in which both your horoscopes will be drawn up. Your life periods are then analyzed to find out the best window of opportunity in which both of your charts are in perfect harmony with the forces of Time. This involves drawing up charts for each day of the year, and then fine tuning the Time slot to harmonize with both your astrological energies in order to maximize the good effects of the marriage outcomes. This window may be sooner or later and may also be at 2am on a Wednesday morning for example! In other words it will probably be the most unlikely opportunity which would be highly inconvenient to you, your families and guests. The pandit may take about 2 to 3 hours to calculate the exact time and date.
2. Look in the Hindu almanac and choose a "generally" auspicious day – a generically good day which is non-specific and is convenient – usually on a weekend.
3. Take a chance – choose a day, any day and hope for the best! Let your intuition be your guide and hard work your path!

TOKENS OF MARRIAGE

Maṅgal-sūtra & Wedding rings.

Tokens of marriage are as varied as the Hindu communities. Some use a gold ornament called a *maṅgal sūtra* (auspicious thread), some use bangles of ivory, glass (plastic nowadays) and even iron. And nowadays wedding rings have become more common.

In South India much emphasis and intense emotion is attached to the *maṅgal-sūtra* and as far as the majority of South Indians are concerned the marriage ceremony is equated entirely with the tying of this sacred ornament known in Tamil as *tālī*. The Tālī has such a profound social impact that even Christians use a form of it.

In spite of these common perceptions the sacred texts make absolutely no reference to “tokens of marriage” at all! It is entirely left to the community to

decide what symbols they want to use as the accepted indication of a married man or woman.

Once worn at the wedding ceremony the maṅgal sūtra should never be removed but most modern Hindu brides remove it after the wedding and only use it on special occasions, opting for the universally accepted wedding ring for day to day use.

South Indian Maṅgal-sūtra designs



North Indian Maṅgal-sūtra designs.



Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva Maṅgal-sūtras



MARRIAGE CEREMONIES



Wedding Rituals Common to all the Gṛhya Sūtras and their sequence						
Śankhāyana	Āśvalāyana	Pāraskara	Āpastamba	Hiranyakeśin	Jaimini	Khādira
Homam	Homam	Homam	Pāṇi-grahaṇam	Homam	Homam	Homam
Pāṇi-grahaṇam	Pāṇi-grahaṇam	Lājā Homa	Sapta-padi	Aśmā-rohaṇa	Pāṇi-grahaṇam	Aśma-rohanam
Aśma-rohanam	Pradakṣiṇa	Pāṇi-grahaṇam	Homam	Pāṇi-grahaṇam	Aśma-rohanam	Lājā Homa
Pradakṣiṇa	Aśma-rohanam	Aśma-rohanam	Aśma-rohaṇam	Lāja-homa	Pradakṣiṇa	Sapta-padi
Lājā Homa	Lājā Homa	Pradakṣiṇa	Lājā-homam	Pradakṣiṇa	Lājā Homa	Pradakṣiṇa
Sapta-padi	Sapta-padi	Sapta-padi	Pradakṣiṇa	Sapta-padi	Sapta-padi	Pāṇi-grahaṇam

The prescription for the actual wedding ceremony is detailed in the various procedural manuals (*grihya sūtras*) of the different Vedic schools found in the different parts of India. Some of the procedures are similar but there are also many differences accounting for the modern day variations among the Hindu communities.

The ceremonies described here are culled from several manuals. In this description of the wedding sacrament (*vivāha saṃskāra*) there are three parts:—

1. There are certain rites that are preliminary leading up to the wedding day,
2. there are then a few rites that are of the essence of the saṃskāra viz. holding hands (*pāṇi-grahaṇa*), fire-oblations (*homa*), going round the fire (*pradakṣiṇa*) standing on a mill-stone (*aśmarohaṇa*), offering puffed-rice into the fire (*lāja-homa*) and the taking of seven steps (*sapta-padī*).
3. Then there are certain practices like the seeing of the Pole star, entering the home etc., that are subsequent to the central rites.

The *essential* rites are mentioned by all legislators (*sūtrakāras*), but as to the preceding and subsequent rites there is a great divergence in the details. Even as regards the essential rites the sequence in which they take place differs. For example, Aśvalāyana (I.7.7) describes going round the fire before *saptapadī*, while Āpastamba describes *saptapadī* (IV.16) before the act of going round the fire (V.I). Gobhila (II, 2.16), Khadira (1.3.31), and Baudhāyana (I.4.10) describe

holding hands (*pāṇi-grahaṇa*) after the seven steps (*saptapadī*) while many other sūtrakaras describe it before *saptapadī*. Then again there are many acts reference to which is altogether omitted. Aśvalāyana makes no reference to *madhuparka* (which is mentioned by Apastamba III.8, Baudhāyana I.2.1, Manava I.9) nor to *kanyadāna* (which is referred to by Pāraskara I.4 and described in detail in Mānava gr. I.8.6-9).

The following is a fairly exhaustive list of the different matters described in the sacrament of marriage. A few notes are added against those that are deemed important.⁵

1. Vadhuvara-guṇa-parīkṣa: (examining the suitability of a girl or a bride-groom). This has been dealt with already above.

2. Vara-preśana: (sending persons to negotiate for the hand of the girl). The ancient custom seems to have been to send some person or persons (Rig Veda X.85.8-9) to the father of the girl for asking her hand in marriage. The same was the practice in the *sūtras*.⁶ Even in medieval times, particularly among *kṣatriyas*, the bride-groom was the first to seek for the hand of a girl. In modern times some communities send for the bride and some for the groom — this ceremony is known by many names such as *Vara-vṛti karma*, *Ṭika*, *Phaldāna* etc.

3. Vāgdāna or Vañ-nīścaya; — betrothal or engagement ceremony. Most communities no longer perform this as a religious rite but rather have a secular engagement party.

4. Maṇḍapa-karaṇa — Erecting a *paṇḍal/maṇḍapa* (canopy) where the ceremonies are to be performed. Most sacraments are meant to be performed outside the house in a canopy. The wedding is supposed to be performed in the courtyard of the bride's ancestral home. Some communities still perform this canopy erection symbolically — known colloquially as *māṇḍvo* (Gujerati) or *māṇḍapa sthapanam*, *māṇika stambha sthāpanam*.

6. Vadhu-grhāgamana: (bride-groom's going to the bride's house). Still performed by some communities and commonly called 'sagai'.

5. Nāndi-śrāddha and Puṇyāha-vācana: *Nāndi-śrāddha* is a memorial ceremony done to invoke the blessings of the ancestors and the *Puṇyāha-vācana*

⁵ Among the principal ceremonies in marriage described by Kālidāsa in the Raghuvamśa VII are madhuparka, homa, going round the fire, pānigrahana, lāja-homa and ādrākṣata-ropana.

⁶ Vide San, gr. I.6.1-4 (where Rig Veda X.85.23 is the mantra recited when sending them), Baud. gr. I.1.14-15, Ap gr. II.16 and IV.1-2 and 7

is a purification ceremony. Both these ceremonies are referred to by Baudhāyana but most of the other *grhyasūtras* are silent about these.

32. Gauri-Hara-puja: (worship of Siva and his consort Gaurī). Either pictures or images of Gaurī and Śiva are used or they are drawn on a piece of cloth and worshipped by the bride some time before *kanyādāna*. This is still done by many communities, some do it a day or two before the wedding and some on the wedding day in the morning.

34. Taila-haridrā-lepanam: Anointing the couple with turmeric paste. In some communities this applying turmeric powder to the groom's body is done from what is left after the bride's body has been so treated. Most communities still perform this ceremony in some form or the other — colloquially known as “haldi ceremony” or “Mehndi” in the north and “nalangu” in the South. The groom and the bride are separately smeared with turmeric (*haldi*) by their female relatives and bathed.

7. Madhu-parka: (reception of the bride-groom at the bride's house). This is still performed at the canopy after the groom arrives at the hall. On their wedding day the groom is considered as the embodiment of Vishnu the Preserver and the bride is Lakshmi — the Goddess of prosperity. The groom is received by his father in law – his feet are washed, water is given to sip and a honey-yoghurt drink called *madhuparka* is offered. According to the ancient manuals a cow is supposed to be killed to feed the groom's party. Nowadays this is done symbolically by offering a coconut which the groom rolls away saying:— “I say to those who understand — don't kill this cow for me release her, let her drink water and eat grass!”

8. Paridhāpana and Saṃnahana: (making the bride put on new clothes and girding her with a string or rope of darbha.) Pāraskara refers only to the putting on of two garments, Gobhila refers to bathing and putting on a garment, Manava gr. refers to *paridhāpana* and *samnahana*. Strangely enough Gobhila (II.1.10) speaks of the sprinkling of the girl's head with the best of *sura* (wine).

9. Pratisara-bandha: (tying an amulet string on the bride's hand). A protective amulet is tied to the groom's right hand and the bride's left hand before the wedding ceremonies commence. This is kept on till the 3rd or 4th day when it is untied. Nowadays it is usually tied on the day of the wedding or at the maṇḍapa. The purpose is to exempt the couple from any considerations of “impurity” which may arise due to a sudden death in the family. If such a tragedy should occur the ceremonies would proceed as planned regardless.

10. Paraspara-samīkṣana: (looking at each other). The couple don't see each other on the day of the wedding. The first meeting is accompanied by a prayer. Āśvalāyana says that first of all a cloth is held between the bride-groom and bride and that at the proper astrological moment it is removed and then the two see

each other. This practice is observed even now by some communities — Gujerātis, Maharāthis, Telegus and Kaṇaḍigas. When the interposed cloth is held between the bride and bride-groom verses called *mangalaṣṭakas* are repeated by *brāhmaṇas*, the last of which verses is '*tad-eva lagnam sudinam tad-eva*' etc.

11. Kanyā-dāna: (giving away the damsel). Āśvalāyana sets out the procedure of *kanyā-dāna* which is the same even now. A statement of intent is made mentioning the time, date, place and the astrological parameters marking the day and the purpose of marriage is declared to be begetting of offspring, prosperity, and companionship in the performance of religious and social duties. Afterwards the couple vow never to prove false to the each other in *dharma* (religious duties), *artha* (mutual financial arrangements) and *kāma* (intimacy and recreation) with the words:— 'I shall not do so' (*nāticarāmi*). This is done even now.

12. Ārdrākṣataropaṇa: (mutual showering of wet unbroken rice grains by the bride and bride-groom). In a metal vessel a little milk is poured and clarified butter is sprinkled over it and unbroken wet rice grains are poured therein. The bridegroom applies milk and ghee to the joined hands of the bride twice and thrice places rice grains in the joined hands of the bride so that her cupped palms (*añjali*) becomes filled up and twice sprinkles ghee over her joined hands. Some other person does the same to the joined hands of the bride-groom and the bride's father places a golden piece on the joined hands of both. Then the bride-groom places his joined hands on those of the bride whose father then repeats a *mantra* and raises her up; she then pours the rice over the head of the bridegroom who follows her in the same way. This is done thrice by each and then lastly by the bride (i.e. seven times in all). Then the priest sprinkles on their heads water with an udumbara twig together with durva grass after reciting verses '*Apo hi ṣṭha* etc.. (Rig Veda X, 9.1-3)'. Then the couple make a *tilaka* mark on each other's forehead, garland each other and tie a thread with a turmeric piece on each other's hand (which is variously called '*kankana-bandhana*' or '*kautuka-bandhana*').⁷ Nowadays this ceremony is only done by Telegus in an abbreviated form — simply pouring dry rice over each others' heads.

13. Maṅgala-sūtra-dhāraṇam: (tying the token of marriage — a golden ornament and black beads on it – around the neck of the bride). This is now regarded in the South as the most important ornament which no woman will part with as long as her husband is alive. But the *sūtras* are entirely silent about it. Among the earliest references is one from Śaunaka smṛti. The Laghu-Āśvalāyana smṛti 15.33 also prescribes it and the *mantra* to be employed when doing so. Gadādhara on Pāraskara Gr.1.8 says that *mangala-sūtra* should be worn and garlands be placed round their necks by the bride and bride-groom, though the

⁷ Vide Sam. Pr. pp.828-829, S. R. M. p.556. Kalidasa in Raghuvamsa VII describes ārdrākṣataropana as the last of the rites of marriage and in VIII.1 speaks of the *kautuka*.

sūtra of Pāraskara is silent on the point. The Baudhāyana Gr. Śeṣa sūtra V.5 in describing 'arka-vivaha ' speaks of maṅgala sūtra to be tied to the plant. It is not clear whether it means the same as the maṅgala-sūtra now tied by married women, round their necks.

14. Uttariya-prānta-bandhana: (Tying turmeric pieces and betel nut on to the end of the upper garments of both and making a knot of their two garments together). This is still done in most North Indian marriages.

15. Agnīsthāpana & homa: (establishing the fire and offering of ghee oblations into fire). Here there is great divergence by the various authorities about the number of oblations and the *mantras* to be recited.

16. Pāṇi-grahaṇa: (Taking hold of the bride's hand).

17. Lāja-homa: (Offering of puffed grain into fire by the bride). Āśvalāyana says that the bride makes three offerings of puffed rice when *mantras* are repeated by the bridegroom and a fourth is made of the remaining rice by the bride silently. Some others speak of only three offerings by the bride. Some authorities have the bride offering the oblations with her hands supported by the groom. Others have the bride place the grains in the groom's hands and he offers them.

In this act she is usually assisted by a brother or brother substitute (cousin or best friend). The person who assists the bride in offering the grains is her "support" person or one to whom she can turn in the event of bullying or domestic violence in her new home. In some communities the brother twists the groom's ear to warn him of his duty to behave himself with the sister!

18. Agnī-pariṇayana: (walking around the fire). The couple walk around the fire three or four times. Some authorities have the groom going in front for all the rounds while others have the bride walking in front for 3 rounds and the groom in front for the last round.

There is no mention in the Scriptures of the seven rounds (*sapta phera*) which has become so popular in North Indian marriages due to the influence of Bollywood! There seems to have been a confusion between the 7 steps and the 7 rounds.

19. Aśmarohana: (treading on a mill-stone). The grinding-stone represents conflicts and hurdles. The couple are asked to be as firm as the stone in their commitment to their marriage and determination to overcome all conflict and challenges. These three are done thrice viz. *lājahoma*, then *Agnīparinayana* and *aśmārohaṇa*, one after another.

20. Saptapadi: (taking seven steps together). This is done to the north of the fire; there are seven small heaps of rice and the couple step on each of these seven with their right foot beginning from the west.

21. Mūrdhābhiṣeka: (sprinkling holy water on the head of the bride and of the bride-groom according to some and on the head of the bride only according to others).

22. Sūryodīkṣana: (looking towards the sun). Pāraskara speaks of this and employs the mantra:– '*tac-cakṣur*' (Rig Veda VII.65.16 = Vaj. S.36.24). Most of the other legislators are silent about this.

23. Hrdaya-sparśa: (touching each others' hearts with a mantra).

24. Dakṣinādāna: (gifts to the officiating priest). Pāraskara I.8, Sankhāyana.1.14.13-17 both prescribe a cow as the fee in the case of the priestly community, a village in marriages of kings and nobles, a horse in marriages of businessmen etc.). Gobhila II.3.23 and Baudhāyana I.4.38 mention a cow or its price for everyone.

25. Grha-praveśa: (entering the bride-groom's house.) This ceremony is now seldom performed formally but rather some traditional customs and games are observed.

26. Dhruvārundhatī-darśana: (pointing out the Pole star and Arundhatī to the bride at night on the day of marriage). Dhruva is the Pole star which because of its steady nature is used by mariners for navigation and Arundhati was the wife of sage Gautama and is the paragon of chastity. (These stars are not visible from the southern hemisphere.)

Some declare that the groom and bride should remain silent until sunset.

27. Tri-rātra-vrata: (After marriage keeping certain observances⁸ for three nights) Apastamba. gr. 8:8-10, Baudhāyana. gr. I.5.16-17 contain the interesting injunction that the newly married pair should sleep on the ground or on the same bed for three nights, but should interpose between them a staff of bamboo or udumbara wood anointed with perfumes and wrapped round with a garment or a thread. On the fourth night it should be removed with the verses Rig Veda X.85.21-22 and thrown into water, thereafter the marriage may be consummated.

⁸ Vide Aśvalāyana for the observances which are enumerated by almost all *sūtrakaras* — principle among these is the necessity to maintain chastity for 3 nights and to consummate the marriage on the 4th night.

28. Caturthī-karma: (rite on the 4th night after marriage). In the medieval digests certain other ceremonies are mentioned and they are observed in modern times also by some orthodox families. Here again the order is not the same in all works and differs from community to community.

29. Devata-utthāpana & Maṇḍap-udvāsana (taking leave of the deities that had been invoked before the ceremonies began and dismantling of the paṇḍal).

FINALITY OF MARRIAGE

Manu (8.227) says:—

‘The Vedic *mantras* recited in the marriage rite are a sure indication of wife-hood; but their completion should be understood by the wise as occurring on taking the seventh step’.

So it follows that the marriage becomes complete and irrevocable the moment the *saptapadī* rite is performed, but before that rite is gone through there is a *locus paenitentiae* or a right to revoke the commitment. Some ācāryas are of the opinion that the *pāṇigrahana* (taking of the hand) is the moment of no return.⁹

Manu (IX.47) declares—

‘Once is the partition of inheritance made, once is a maiden given in marriage’.

This rule really means that once the ceremony of marriage is completed by *saptapadi*, the marriage is irrevocable and the girl cannot thereafter be given to any one else. Thus in the case of a divorcee remarrying there can be no *kanyā-dāna*.

MENSTRUATION DURING THE WEDDING

Some of the Law Books (*smrtis*) and digests are very much exercised over the question of the bride menstruating while the marriage ceremonies are in progress and homa is about to be performed. Seeing that so much time, effort and expense goes into wedding ceremonies it is not feasible to cancel or postpone the proceedings. Atrī very sensibly prescribes simply offering an oblation of clarified butter with the verse ‘*Yuñjate manah*’ (Rig V.81.1) and proceeding with the ceremonies as planned.

⁹ According to Australian Law a marriage is finalised once the bride takes her vows (“I call upon the persons here present to witness that I take you to be my legally wedded husband.” after the groom. Even though no papers may be signed and authorised immediately, still the marriage is valid and needs a court order to dissolve it.

PECULIAR CEREMONIES RELATING TO MARRIAGE

Certain peculiar ceremonies relating to marriage may now be described very briefly. In order to avert early widowhood (which was judged from her horoscope) for the girl to be married, a ceremony called *kumbha-vivaha* was performed. It is described in Sam. Pr. (p.868), Nirnaya-sindhu p.310, Sam. K. (p, 746), S. R. M. (p.528) and other works. On the day previous to the marriage a jar of water in which a golden image of Viṣṇu is dipped is decked with flowers etc, and the girl is surrounded in a network of threads, Varuna and Viṣṇu are worshipped and prayed to give long life to the intended bride-groom. Then the jar is taken out and broken in a pool of water and then water is sprinkled over the girl with five twigs and to the accompaniment of Rig. VII.49 and then Brāhmaṇas are fed.

The Sam.Pr. (pp.868-869) speaks of *Aśvattha-vivaha* which is like *kumbha-vivaha* and performed for good luck to the bride and averting widowhood. Here the *Aśvattha* tree is substituted for the jar and a golden image of Viṣṇu is worshipped. The image is then given to a Brāhmaṇa.

Arka-vivaha

When a man either has indications in his horoscope of losing a wife or has the misfortune to lose by death two wives one after another, before marrying a third wife he goes through a ceremony of marriage with the arka plant. This is described in Sam. Pr. pp.876-889, Sam. K. p.819, Nirnaya-sindhu, p.328. It is described in Baud. gr. Sesa-sutra V.5 also.

PARIVEDANA

Another question which takes up much space in ancient works but which is now of scant consideration is *parivedana*. When a lad married before his elder brother or where a person married a younger girl before her elder sister was married, this act was called *parivedana* and was severely condemned as a serious encroachment on the rights of seniority and as a sin¹⁰.

Legal nomenclature

1. The younger brother who marries before the elder brother is called *parivetta* or *parivindaka* (Yaj. I.223).
2. The elder brother before whom the younger brother marries is called *parivitta* or *parivinna* or *parivitti* (Manu III.171).
3. The younger sister who marries before the elder sister is called *agredidhisu*

¹⁰ Gaut.15.18 and Ap. Dh, S, (II.5.12.22) Vas. Dh. S.1.18, Viṣṇu Dh, S.37.15-17

(Gaut.15.15, Vas.1.18) or *parivedini*.

4. The elder sister before whom her younger sister marries is called *didhisu*.
5. The husbands of these two last respectively bear the appellations *agredidhisu-pati* and *didhisu-pati*.
6. The father or other guardian who gives away the girl in any of these cases of *parivedana* is called *paridayī* or *paridāta*.
7. The younger brother who kindles the sacred fire before the elder is styled '*panjadhātr*' and the elder brother who is so treated is called '*paryahita*' (Gaut.15.18).

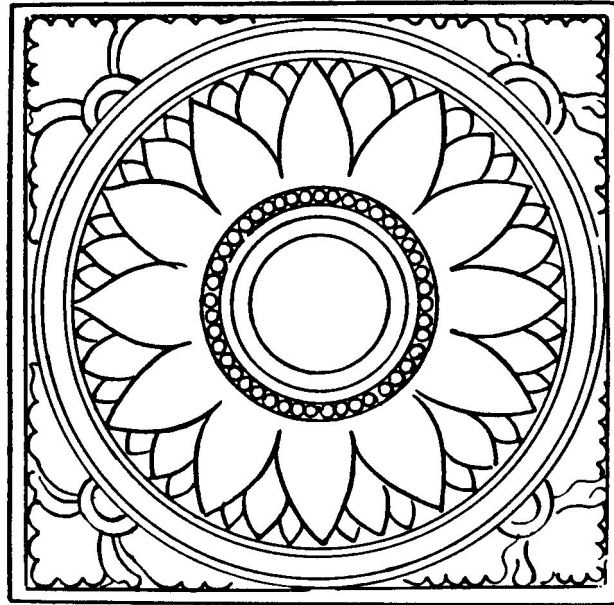
Manu III.172¹¹ says that the *parivetta*, the *parivitta*, the girl whom the younger brother marries before the elder, the man who gives away the girl in marriage and the officiating priest these five all fall into hell.

Gaut. (18.18-19) prescribes that if an elder brother has gone to a foreign country his younger brother must wait twelve years before he takes a wife or kindles sacred fires or six years according to some. Medhatithi on Manu III.171 quotes a verse:—

'One need not wait where the elder brother is a lunatic, or is a sinner, or leprous, impotent, or suffering from tuberculosis'

and remarks that this is only illustrative (i.e. one need not wait where the elder brother has no qualification — *adhikāra* — for marriage or for kindling fires).

Another verse of Atrī (v.106) says that there is no fault in marrying before the elder brother, if the latter is impotent (or gay) or gone abroad, has committed a crime or has become a recluse or is devoted to Yoga.



¹¹ which is almost the same as Baud. Dh. S. II.1.30 and Viṣṇu Dh. S.54.16

THE VEDIC MARRIAGE CEREMONY

INTRODUCTION

The grhya sutras are the Vedic manuals which deal with the performance of the domestic ritual. Each of the four Vedas developed several schools and each of these schools produced its own manual based on the original Vedic texts. In each part of India different schools prevailed, and thus gave rise to the regional variations which are found today.

In the Puranic age the relatively simple ceremony was greatly elaborated upon, and the nuptial ceremony became transformed into the complicated five day celebration which has retained its usage from the middle ages up to the modern times.

The original Vedic ceremony was meant only for the members of the three initiated castes, and commendable tolerance was shown towards family and social customs being associated with the marriage ceremony. Each caste, sect, clan, tribe and family developed peculiarities of their own which were always tolerated, and it is stated in the sacred texts that the women of the family should be consulted in matters of marriage rituals and customs apart from the orthodox Vedic ceremony.

Whatever the differences may be, there are five essential features of the Vedic Marriage that are the irreducible minimum, and must be included if the ceremony is to be considered bona-fide and valid. Whatever customs and rituals the people wish to adhere to must be done in addition to the five essentials. According to the Śāstras folk customs regarding marriage must always be respected by learned brahmins.

The five essential features of a Vedic Marriage are;

*vagdānam ca pradānam ca varaṇam pāṇi-pīḍanam |
sapta-padi iti pañcāṅgo vivāha prakīrtiḥ ||*

1. The engagement ceremony involving the consenting of the parents.
2. Formal bestowal of the bride on the groom.
3. Ceremonial honouring of the groom by the bestower.
4. Taking of the bride's hand by the groom.
5. The rite of the seven steps.

THE SACRAMENT OF MARRIAGE



SOUTH INDIAN VERSION According to Āpastamba Sūtra

1. Vara Preśaṇam

(Invitation of the Bride)

Firstly permission is requested from the elders to being the ceremonies.

“I offer obeisance to the assembly, homage to the Lord of the assembly, salutations to the friends who go before, homage to Heaven and to Earth.” (T. S. 3;2;4)

“May this august assembly afford me its protection, all those who are present here. May they protect my faculties, I offer my lifelong obeisance.” (TB. 1.1.10.3.5)

After offering worship to Ganeśa for the removal of obstacles, betel leaves and areca nuts along with some monetary offering is given to 2 brahmins who are requested to go and ask for the hand of the bride.

“May the pair go quickly to bring the one upon whom I contemplate, benevolent, with gifts exchanged with gifts. May Indra graciously accept the Soma offering, and bestow joy and prosperity upon both of us.” (R.V. 10.32.1)

“Thornless and straight be the paths whereby our fellows travel to the house of the bride. May God (Bhaga) endue us with prosperity, respect for the learned and majesty.” (A.V. 14.1.34)

2. Vara Varaṇam

(Invitation of the Groom)

The bestower formally welcomes the groom and after washing his feet and honouring him, invites him to accept the hand of the bride and to become his son-in-law.

The bride is then brought to the canopy and is seated to the right of the groom.

3. Kanyadānaṃ

(Giving away of the bride)

After reciting the Saṅkalpa or Statement of Intent the hands of the couple are joined. The bride's father places a coconut in their hands and after the clan (*gotra*) and the names of the illustrious ancestors (*pravara*) have been proclaimed, water is poured from a conch-shell over the coconut by the bestower's wife while the priests recite the following verses.

“This maiden is well adorned and bedecked with gold. I, desirous of attaining the realm of Vishnu, give her to you O [embodiment of] Vishnu.”

“The Supreme Being who resides in the hearts of all beings, and all the gods are witnesses. I bestow my daughter upon you so that you may fulfil your mutual obligations to your forefathers [through the begetting of offspring].”

“For the performance of Dharma, for the begetting of offspring, and for companionship in your daily duties are you formally joined in marriage.”

The groom then recites:—

“This woman will be before me, she will be beside me, she will encompass me on every side, may you be Liberated through your gift.”

Acceptance By The Groom.

The groom recites:—

“Impelled by God I receive you, with the two arms of Right Knowledge & Right Action, and with the hands of the Enricher I receive you.” (Tait. Sam. 1.8.7.2)

“May King Varuna lead you, O Goddess to a partner for the sake of progeny. By that may you attain to immortality as well as material enjoyment & well-being.” (Tait. Aran. 3.10.1)

“Who is giving what and to whom? Love is the Giver and Love the Receiver. Love has entered into the Ocean of Being. Through Love I receive you. O Love all this is for you.” (TA. 3.10.1.4 A.V. 3.29.7)

Vows by the couple

The couple now recite the vows. They promise that in the three areas of life that they live together; in the field of *Dharma* – the religious/moral/spiritual field,

Artha – prosperity, mutual financial arrangements and *Kāma* – pleasure, recreation and procreation; they will never do the wrong thing by each other. Traditionally the groom alone recites the vow. But nowadays it is fitting that both should make the vow equally.

Admonition — “In righteousness, in prosperity, in recreation; nurture her at all times, and never offend this tender woman in any way.”

Groom; “I will not offend her in any way.”

4. Varapūjā /Madhuparkam

Madhu-parkam

Madhu-parka: (offering of honey by way of honour to a distinguished guest).

The word literally means — 'a ceremony in which honey is shed or poured' (on the hand of a person).

In all grhya sutras it is described at length. Most of the details are the same, the principal difference being that often different mantras are prescribed, though some (like the verse ‘*mātā rudrānām*’) are the same.

The *madhu-parka* is offered to six persons who happen to visit one’s home:—

1. *ṛtviks* (priests officiating at sacrifices) when they are chosen for a sacrifice,
2. A *snātaka* (a Vedic graduate),
3. The king or a government official,
4. One's *ācārya* (spiritual teacher)
5. A bride-groom
6. One’s father-in-law, paternal and maternal uncles or any other person who is dear to one and whom one wishes to honour.¹²

It is laid down that if these persons come to one's house within a year after *madhu-parka* has been once offered, then it need not be offered again (in the same year), but when a marriage is being celebrated in one's house or a *yajña* is being performed, then *madhu-parka* must be offered to those persons (even if one year has not elapsed since the *madhu-parka* was previously offered).¹³

The procedure of *madhu-parka* is set out from the Aśv. gr. (I.24.5-26):—

"He mixes honey with curds or clarified butter if no honey can be had. A

¹² Vide Gaut. V.25, Ap. gr.13.19-20, Ap. Dh. S. II.3.8.5-6, Baud. Dh. S. II.3.63-64, Manu III.119, Sabha-parva 36.23-24

¹³ Vide Gaut. V.26-27, Ap. Dh. S. II.3.8.6, Yaj. I.110, Khadira gr. IV.4.26, Gobhila gr. IV.10.26.

seat¹⁴, water for washing the feet, *aryhya* water (i.e. water perfumed with flowers etc.)¹⁵, water for *ācamana* (ceremonial sipping 3 times), honey mixture, a cow; every one of these they announce three times (to the person who has arrived). The person (to be honoured) should sit down on the seat made of northward pointed darbha grass with the verse:—

'I am the highest one among my kindred, as the sun among lights. Here I tread on whomsoever bears enmity to me.' Or he should repeat this verse after he has trodden on it.

The host washes his feet; the right foot first. When his feet have been washed, he receives the *arghya* water in his joined hands and then he performs *ācamana* with the water for sipping with the formula:— 'thou art the seat (or first layer) of ambrosia'.

He should look at the *madhu-parka*, when it is offered to him, with the mantra:— 'I look at thee with the eye of Mitra'. He accepts it (the *madhu-parka*) in the joined hands with the formula:— 'by the command (urging) of god Savitr, by the arms of Asvins and the hands of Pusan, I accept thee' (Vaj S. I.24).

He looks at it with the three rk verses 1862 'the winds blow honey to the righteous man' (Rig. I.90.6-8). He (takes it into his left hand), stirs it about thrice from left to right with the thumb and the finger next to the smallest and wipes (his fingers) towards the east with the formula:— 'may the Vasus eat thee with the Gāyatrī metre'; with the formula:— 'may the Rudras eat thee with the Tristubh metre', (he wipes fingers) towards the south; with the formula:— 'may the Adityas eat thee with the Jagatī metre', towards the west; with the formula:— 'may Visve Devas eat thee with the Anustubh metre', towards the north; with the formula:— 'to the bhutas (beings) thee', he three times takes (some of the *madhu-parka* materials) from out of the middle of it (and throws it up).

He should partake of it for the first time with the formula:— 'the milk of Viraj art thou', for the second time with:— 'may I obtain the milk of Viraj', the third time with:— 'in me may the milk of Padyā Viraj dwell'. He should not eat the whole *madhu-parka* and should not eat to satiety.

He should give the remainder (out of the *madhu-parka* materials) to a Brāhmaṇa towards the north; but if no Brāhmaṇa is available he should

¹⁴ A *vištara* is a seat with 25 blades of darbha grass.

¹⁵ *Arghya* is water for washing the hands in which flowers and perfume (like sandal-wood paste) have been mixed up.

throw it into water; or he may eat the whole.

He then takes ācamana with the water intended for it with the formula:— ‘them art the cover of ambrosia,’ He sips water a second time with the formula:— ‘truth ! fame! fortune! may Fortune resort to me.’

When he has sipped water, they announce to him the cow. Having said the words:— ‘destroyed is my sin, my sin is destroyed’ he says: ‘om, do it’ if he desires to have the cow slaughtered; if he is desirous letting her go, he says:— ‘the mother of Rudras and daughter of Vasus’. (Rig. VIII.101, 15) and says ‘let her go’. Let the *madhu-parka* not be without flesh."

A few small matters may be noted. Several grhya-sutras (such as the Manava) describe *madhu-parka* as a part of the marriage rite, while others like Aśvalāyana describe it independently. Others like Hir, gr. (I.12-13) describe it as part of the graduation ceremony (*Samāvartana*).

There is divergence about the substances mixed in offering *madhu-parka*. Aśv. gr, and Ap. gr. (13.10) prescribe a mixture of honey and curds or clarified butter and curds. Others like Par. gr. I.3 prescribe a mixture of three (curds, honey and butter). Ap. gr. (13.11-12) states the view of some that those three may be mixed or five (those three with fried yava grain and barley). Hir. gr. I.12.10-12 gives the option of mixing three or five (curds, honey, ghee, water and ground grain). The Kausika sutra (92) speaks of nine kinds of mixtures viz. *Brahma* (honey and curds), *Aindra* (of *payasā*), *Saumya* (curds and ghee), *Pauṣṇa* (ghee and *mantha*), *Sārasvata* (milk and ghee), *Mausala* (wine and ghee, this being used only in Sautramanī and Rajasuya sacrifices), *Vāruṇa* (water and ghee), *Śrāvana* (sesame oil and ghee), *Pārivrajaka* (sesame oil and oil cake).

The Manava gr. I, 9.22 says that the Veda declares that the *madhu-parka* must not be without flesh and so it recommends that if the cow is let loose, goat's meat or *payasā* (rice cooked in milk) may be offered; the Hir. gr. I.13.14 says that other meat should be offered; Baud. gr. says (I.2.51-54) that when the cow is let off, the flesh of a goat or ram may be offered or some forest flesh (of a deer etc.) may be offered, as there can be no *madhu-parka* without flesh or if one is unable to offer flesh one may cook ground grains. As the cow became sacred, it became unthinkable to kill her and so other flesh was offered. When even flesh-eating came to be abhorred, then only *payasā* and such other things were recommended.

In modern times there is generally no *madhu-parka* except in marriage and then too it is a simple matter and the elaborate procedure prescribed in some of the grhya sutras is hardly ever followed. Meat is never offered.

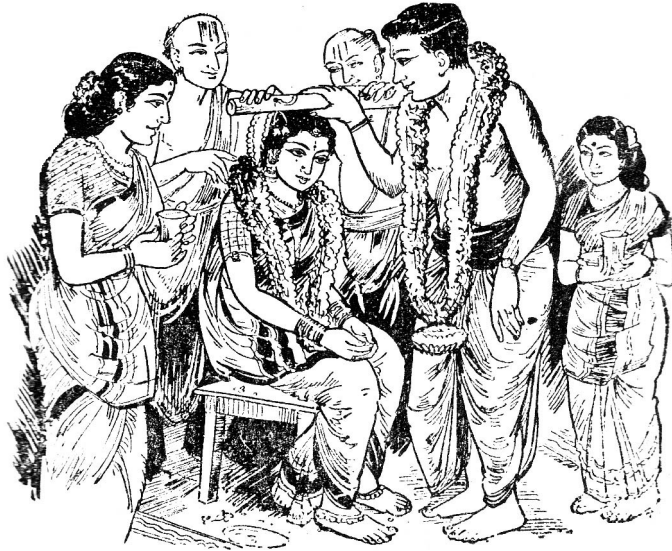
5. Samikṣaṇam

(Setting face to face)

The couple sit and face each other;

“Om. To us, O God Varuna, bring her, kind to her brothers; bring her, O Lord of the Universe Brihaspati, kind to her husband and her children O Indra. O Creator of the Universe Savita bring her with prosperity.” (Atharva Veda 14.1.62)

“Om. Gaze gently upon each other, never be hostile to each other, be tender to animals, of cheerful mind, beautiful in your glory, the parents of heroes, be devoted to the gods, be the bestower of happiness, be good and kind to us, and to all creatures.” (RV.10.85.44)



6. Kanya Saṃskāram

(Sanctification of the Bride)

Previously both women and men undertook the vow of *brahmacārya* (studentship) and studied the Vedas. Gradually women were excluded from the privilege of Vedic study and consigned to home duties. The wedding ceremony therefore became the equivalent of the bride’s initiation ceremony (*upanayana*) that the boys underwent. The groom is the “guru” and through the *vivāha saṃskāram* she is initiated into her domestic duties, and living with the husband is the equivalent of living with the guru and his family (*guru-kula-vāsa*)

The bride sits on a chair facing the east. The groom takes a blade of sacred grass (*darbha*) and wipes the forehead of the bride and then casts it to the west.

“I remove from you all that is negative and inauspicious.”

Two Brahmins bring holy water.

“O Brahmins bring pure water with which to bathe this maiden, removing from her all sin, detriments and faults.” (A.V. 14.1.39)

The groom places a crown of sacred grass on her head.

“May this bride be surrounded by the blessings of all your mutual relatives.” (A.V.14.1.39)

He holds a miniature yoke above her head.

“O talented groom, sanctify your highly competent wife through these three devices; through the yoke which symbolises her union with you, through the gold which represents the Ultimate Truth, and through the water which represents the Cosmic Principles. May she be radiant like the sun and attain the goal of life.” (A.V. 14.1.41)

Some gold or the maṅgala sūtra is placed over the hole of the yoke.

“Blest be your gold ornaments, and blest be your progeny, blest be the mutual exchange of ideas, blest be your dwelling, blest be the waters, the purifiers of hundreds, and blest be your devotion and loyalty to your husband.”

The priests perform the holy bath (*maṅgala snānam*) by sprinkling holy water on the bride.

“May the Golden-hued, the Bright, the splendid Cosmic Principles that produced the Sun and Fire. Those that contain the Supreme Wisdom, the golden Ones bring joy to you and bless you.” (A.V. 1.33.1 Tait. Sam. 5.6.1.1.)

“May the subtle ether in the midst of which the Resplendent Lord pervades, watching men's pious and impious deeds, which acts as a medium for lightning, beautiful in appearance, bring joy to you and bless you.” (A.V. 1.33.2 Tait. Sam. 5.6.1.1)

“May the subtle ether which supports the manifold beautiful objects in the sky, which acts as a medium for lightning, beautiful in appearance, bring joy to you and bless you.” (A.V. 1.33.3 Tait. Sam. 5.6.1.1)

“May the Cosmic Principles behold you with auspicious eye, touch you with their auspicious hands. May they bright and pure, shedding loveliness and brilliance, bring joy to you and bless you.” (A.V. 1.33.4 Tait. Sam. 5.6.1.2)

7. Vastra Dānam

(Presentation of clothing)

The groom presents the bride with a new set of clothes as a token of his intention to take care of all her material needs for the rest of her life.

“O lover of song, may these our chants encompass you on every side; strengthening you with long life, may they bring delight to you.”
(S.Y.V. 5.29)

The bride retires to don the new sari. This may take another half hour so this should be taken into account when planning the schedule for the wedding day.



8. Māngalya-Dhāraṇam

(Bestowing the Tokens of Marriage)

The brahmins bless the maṅgala-sūtra and the tray is carried around for all the congregation to bless

The bride returns to the maṅḍapa and sits on her father's lap, according to some traditions she sits on a bag of rice symbolising abundance and fecundity.

The groom holds the cord of the maṅgala sūtra around her neck and ties the first knot while his sister ties the other two knots.

The following verse is chanted by the groom and the brahmins;

“Om I tie this sacred thread [I place this sacred ornament] around your neck, so that we may live long together, and remain together enjoying prosperity for an hundred autumns.”

A present is given to the sister of the groom by the bride's party.

The couple exchange garlands three times to confirm their intimate bond with each other. According to Hindu culture, food, garlands and clothing can only be shared with those who are most intimate.

9. Yoktra Bandhanam

(Binding of the girdle)

The groom ties the *yoktram* or girdle made of sacred grass around the waist of the bride.

“We pray with a pure mind that we may obtain the blessing of good children, fortunate and of sound health. O Agni be propitious to us in this matter. I bind this girdle for happiness and the performance of righteous deed.” (A.V. 14.1.42 Tait. Sam. 1.1.10.1)

The groom takes the bride by the hand and leads her to the fire while the priests chant the following verse:—

“Let the Lord who Nourishes take your hand and hence conduct you; may Right Action & Right Knowledge transport you. Go to the house of your husband to be the mistress of his household and speak as a Lady to the gathered people.” (R.V. 10.85.26)

10. Agnithāpanam

(Kindling the Sacred fire)

A new grass mat is spread to the west of the fire. The couple take their seats with the bride to the right of the groom. The groom performs the preliminary rites & then recites the following two verses:—

“O Woman, equanimity is your first guardian, observance of the Vedic law is your second, knowledge and strength of character are your third guardians. One born of woman is your fourth guardian.” (A.V.14.2.3.)

“Tranquillity develops in the girl the sentiment of following the Vedic law; which in turn brings her knowledge and strength of character; which bestows upon me prosperity and progeny.” (A.V. 14.2.4)



11. Pāṇigrahaṇam

(*Holding hands*)

The groom takes the bride's right hand and recites the following mantras.

“I take your hand for wellbeing so that together we may attain to old age in happiness. The Sovereign Cosmic Principles; Enjoyment [*Bhaga*], Aspiration [*Aryaman*], Creativity [*Savitar*] and Completeness [*Purandhri*] have united us for the performance of our duties as householders.” (RV 10.85.36)

“This institute of Householders was previously established by these Cosmic Principles, may we attain their benediction.” (Ap.MB.1.3.4)

O” Sarasvati! Personification of learning and eloquence, the source of well-being, O Gracious One, You whom I praise are the source of all creation.” (Ap.MB 1.3.5)

“May the out-stretched golden hands of the purifying life force which pervades all directions unite our minds as one.”



12. Saptapadi

(Taking of seven steps)

The couple now take the first seven steps in their journey of life together. These steps represent the seven areas of life that they need to work on together in order to have a perfect marriage. There are a number of ways of doing this. Either the groom can take hold of the bride's big toe of the right foot and moves it onto seven piles of rice, or the couple can take steps together — placing their right toe on seven blades of sacred grass or seven piles of rice. The verses recited are as follows:—

1. May Lord Vishnu guide you to nourishment.

(Good eating habits and nutrition is the basis of a healthy relationship)

2. May Lord Vishnu guide you to health.

(Not only should we eat healthy food and timely meals but we should also live a healthy life-style which includes exercise and avoidance of bad habits like smoking, binging and gambling)

3. May Lord Vishnu guide you to prosperity & security.

(When we are healthy and fit we can work hard and achieve success, prosperity and security.)

4. May Lord Vishnu guide you to consummate bliss

(The central element and one of utmost importance is a health sex life.)

5. May Lord Vishnu guide you to the welfare of the domestic animals.

(Domestic animals — cows, goats, sheep were the original form of investment! So nowadays one should aspire to nurture a good investment portfolio!)

6. May Lord Vishnu guide you to enjoyments according to the seasons.

(Playing together, taking vacations together and generally enjoying the good things of life together is also an essential element in a happy marriage.¹⁶)

7. May Lord Vishnu guide you in the actualisation of your seven-fold Spiritual Energies.

(Realising that the ultimate purpose of life is spiritual evolution and unfoldment of the potentialities of body, life-force, mind, intellect, will, essential being and transcendental bliss.)

“You are my friend in life through these seven steps; may I attain your friendship, may our friendship bind us together; may we never cease being friends, may our intentions be of one accord, may our radiance be one, and our minds united. We are united in harmony and affection, radiant with kind thoughts, enveloped in enjoyment and strength, united are our minds, our vows and our hearts.”

“You are Primal Nature — I am all-pervading Spirit¹⁷ — You are Nature. I am the Sky — You are the Earth.

I am the seed — You are the bearer.

I am mind — You are Speech.

I am the melody — You are the words.

Come O Bounteous One. Let us dwell together in happiness and may our progeny attain glory.” (Ap.MB. 1.3.14 Brhad. Up.)

13. Vaivāhika Homam

(The wedding sacrifice)

The priests now make oblations of ghee into the sacred with the following vedic verses. If the groom has been initiated and wears the sacred thread he may be encouraged to make the oblations himself. If not, the priests do it on his behalf.

¹⁶ According to Indian poetics the simple seasonal enjoyments are as follows: In the cool season — a warm body to sleep with. In mid-winter — heating. In spring — hiking in the forests and fields; In summer — water sports, swimming etc. In the rainy season — a well appointed place of shelter; In autumn — various preparations made with cow’s milk.

¹⁷ This refers to the Philosophical concept of the natural duality of the world which comprises of both the male (purusha) and female (prakriti) principals.

To Soma, the One who possessed the maiden, I make this offering. Hail!

To the Gandharva, the one who possessed the maiden, I make this offering. Hail!

To Agni, the one who possessed the maiden, I make this offering. Hail!

This maiden going from her parents' home to that of her husband's has without formal initiation performed all her duties. Hail! (ApMB. 1.4.4)

I release you from your father's protection and give you over to your husband. I bind you gently there. O bounteous Indra, may she live blessed in her fortune and her children. Hail! (A.V. 14.1.58)

O Bounteous Indra, make this bride blessed in her fortune and her children, Confer upon her ten children, and may her husband be like unto the eleventh. Hail! (R.V. 10.85.45)

May Agni come hither, the First among the gods. May he protect this woman's children from untimely death. May this King Varuna grant; that this woman may never weep in distress through her children's deeds. Hail! (Ap.MB. 1.4.7)

May Agni Garhapatya protect this woman. May he lead her offspring to old-age. May her womb be fertile and let her be the mother of living children in whom she will always delight. Hail! (Ap.MB. 1.4.8)

May no cry of distress ever arise in your home. May no evil ever trouble you, and may your husband live long. May you shine in your husband's life, beholding your congenial offspring. Hail! (Ap.MB. 1.4.9)

May Heaven protect your back, the Wind your thighs, and the Principles of Right Knowledge and Right Action your breasts. May the Lord who is the impeller protect your children until they are weaned and may the Lord of Wisdom then guard them, and afterwards may all the Cosmic Principles guide them. Hail! (Ap.MB. 1.4.10)

Infertility, infant mortality, evil and distress I remove from you, like a wreath from your head and place it upon the heads of them that hate you. Hail! (Ap.MB. 1.4.11)



14. Aśmarohanam

(Treading upon the mill-stone)

The couple retire to the north of the fire where a millstone has been placed. The bride stands upon it facing the east. The stone represents difficulties and hurdles in married life. Conflict is inevitable and the success of a marriage depends on how effectively the couple learn to apply their conflict-resolution skills.

“Tread upon this stone, be you firm and steadfast as this stone, in all your tribulations, pressing underfoot all negativity and grief.” (Ap.MB. 1.5.1)

15. Lāja Homam

(Offering of puffed-grains)

The bride’s cupped palms are filled with puffed-rice by her brother, then supported by her husband she offers the grains into the fire with the following mantras.

“This woman thus prays to God as she offers oblations of grains; long live my husband! Yea, a hundred autumns let him live!” (A.V. 14.2.63)

“May this maiden sacrificing here in the fire be completely united to her husband, O Aryaman grant you this, that they may never be parted.” (Ap.MB. 1.5.7)

“Aryaman, you are the personification of Spiritual Aspiration, mysterious are you. O Self-sustainer, as a kind friend, with streams of milk they anoint you, when you makes wife and husband one-minded.” (R.V. 5.3.2)

The person who helps the bride in this ritual is the nominated protector or sponsor of the bride. If she encountered any domestic difficulties in her new home she could then summon her sponsor to come to her aid and to mediate on her behalf.



16. Pradakṣiṇam

(Circumambulation)

The couple then circumambulate the fire altar three times with the groom leading.

“O Agni, in obedience to your command, we have brought the bride along with the marriage procession, unite her now with the husband along with future progeny.” (R.V. 10.85.38)

“O Agni, give long life and energy to this couple, May they both live for a hundred autumns.” (A.V. 14.2.1 R.V. 10.85.39)

“Guide them through all tribulations as easily as one passes through rivulets of water.” (R.V. 2.7.3)

17. Yoktra Vimocanam

(Releasing of the Girdle)

The groom releases the grass-girdle (*yoktram*) that was tied around the bride's waist. This act is symbolic of transferring the duty of protection from the father to the husband.

“O Bride! I free you from the restrictions of your parents, wherewith your blessed father has bound you. Into the Seat of the Sacred Law, to the world of virtuous actions, I give you up uninjured with your consort.” (R.V. 10.85.24)

“Thus I release you from the noose of Varuna, wherewith the Impeller, the Giver of Success hath bound you. I establish you in the realm of

spirituality, in the world of virtuous actions, together with your husband.” (Tait. Sam. 1.1.10.2)

Final Oblation

“O Mystic Fire, giver of refuge are you, irreproachable, in truth the refuge of the devotees. We meditate upon you in our minds, O Bearer-of-oblations, grant unto us healing remedies.” (Ap.MB. 1.5.18)

18. Blessing

“It is of a hundred measures, man has a hundred years of life, a hundred powers; verily on life and power he rests.” (T.S.3;2;6)

“Highly auspicious is this bride, come congratulate her; wish her a married life filled with her husband's love, and then repair to your respective dwellings.” (R.V.10.85.33)

19. Departure

“O Bride, radiant as the Sun, mount this all-hued, golden-tinted, strong-wheeled, highly brilliant car, gently rolling, bound for the world of life immortal. Make for your husband a happy bridal procession.” (R.V. 10.85.20)

“Rise over conflicts and calamities, exceed your husband, and your children in dignity and pride and be you famous.” (Ap.MB. 1.6.5)

“Be an empress over your father-in-law, an empress over your mother-in-law, be an empress over your husband's sisters, and an empress over his brothers too.” (R.V. 10.85.46)

“May you radiate over the daughters-in-law in your new home, over all the children and the property, over your husband and his brothers and over all the community.” (Ap.MB. 1.6.7)

“Those who are at cross purposes and opposed to the wedded couple may they not succeed. May the hard path of life be crossed by pleasant journey. May all the forces of evil shrink away.” (R.V. 10.85.32)



THE SACRAMENT OF MARRIAGE



NORTH INDIAN VERSION

According to Pāraskara Sūtra

1. Dvāra Pūjā

(Reception of the Groom's party).

The wedding venue is technically the “Home” of the bride, so the groom's party is welcomed at the gate with customary ceremonies done by the women of the family. What is done varies from community to community but the intention is to create auspiciousness and to avert negative influences.

Milini

Milini is the “meeting” of the relatives of the two sides. Usually done by Punjabis. The respective male members of the two families meet, greet, garland and hug each other. Fathers, brothers, uncles etc.

The mantras chanted by the priests are from the final hymn of the Rig Veda:—

“Meet together, talk together, let your minds comprehend in harmony; In like manner as the ancient gods concurring, accepted their portion of the sacrifices.”

“May you pray together in harmony, may you strive for common goals with a common purpose, may you have associated desires. I repeat for you a common prayer, I offer for you a common oblation.”

“United be your intention, united be your hearts, united your thoughts, so that there may be a thorough harmony among you.”

The father of the bride then welcomes the groom. He anoints his forehead with sandalwood paste and rice grains and places a garland around his neck.

“O noble son, with this tilak may you have longevity, health, excellence, radiance, and blazing intellect!”

The women perform *ārati* which is the waving of a tray with auspicious objects and a light in front of the groom. The exact method of doing this varies from family to family. There are traditional songs which are sung by the women at this time.

The groom's party is led to the pandal and the groom takes his seat.

The priest assists the groom to perform a Ganesha puja for the removal of all hindrances.

Kankana Dhāraṇam

A sacred protective thread is tied to the groom's right wrist.

2. Vara Pūjā

(Reception of the Groom)

On the day of their wedding the couple are regarded as the embodiments of Vishnu and Lakshmi. Vishnu being the Preserver of the trinity the couple as householders will be participating in His work of maintaining the society and the world. As the embodiment of Vishnu the groom is invited and worshipped by the bestower of the bride.

Madhu parkam — [\(See page 27 for a full description of this ceremony\)](#)

3. Kanyā Āgamana

(Arrival of the Bride)

The bride now makes her entrance accompanied by her bridal party. How the bride approaches the canopy is an individual matter nowadays. Sometimes she is accompanied by her uncles, and sometimes by her friends or bride's maids. Sometimes she is carried in a palanquin.

She approaches the pandal and meets the groom outside and the couple stand facing each other and then when the priest recites the following mantra they garland each other :—

“May all the Directive Energies of the Cosmos unite our hearts, may the Universal Principles, the Life Force and the heavens keep us two together.” (RV.10.85.47)

4. Vastra Dānam

(Presentation of Clothing)

The groom now presents the bride with a set of clothing. According to some Grihya Sutras the clothes are given by the groom's side and some say that 4 items of clothing are given by the bride's father — one for the groom and one for the bride.

The groom takes 2 for himself and presents the bride with her set. The following mantras are recited:—

“Wear this garment and may you have fame and longevity, and may we live together until old age. With your grace may we live together for an hundred autumns, enjoying well-being, prosperity and ever increasing our knowledge.”

“O lover of song, may these our chants encompass you on every side; strengthening you with long life, may they bring delight to you.” (V.S. 5.29)

5. Kanya-dāna

(*Bestowal of the Bride*)

In most cultures the bride is traditionally “given away” by her father. In Hindu society marriages were usually contracted at a young age when the bride was still under the guardianship of her parents, hence “giving away” was appropriate. Nowadays most woman are independent and already on a career path when they get married. And most marriages are “love marriages” and so it is not unusual for a modern woman to have some reservation about being ‘given away.’ This needs to be discussed with all the participants and stake-holders to ensure that no one is offended.

If there is an objection to “Giving the bride away” then perhaps an acceptable option would be to call this part of the ceremony “Uniting in Matrimony” — one can then either have both sets of parents involved or the priest can simply do it on their behalf.

The father of the bride or the authorised person is called upon by the priest to recite the following statement of intent or recites it on the bestower’s behalf.

The ‘statement of intent’ or *Saṅkalpa* is recited before every ritual act and comprises the recitation of the astrological parameters governing the day, the place and the reason for the act.

Harih om tatsat. Govinda, Govinda, Govinda, with the permission of the Supreme Being Lord Vishnu, in this period during the second half of the life-span of the demiurge Brahma, during the aeon of the White Boar, during the universal rule of Vaivasvata Manu in the 28th period, during the first quarter of the age of Kali, on the planet Earth in land south of mount Meru, in the Golden Land, in the country of in the metropolis of, in the year of the 60 year Jovian cycle, in the solstice, during the season, in the month of in the fortnight, on the

lunar day, on a day under the constellation of with auspicious conjunctions, and all the planets being benevolently disposed;

The bride is of the clan, of the great grand daughter of the grand daughter of the daughter of by the name of ; she is the embodiment of Lakshmi the preserving Energy of the Lord; she is free of faults, healthy & long-lived and desirous of a husband, She is well adorned and honoured and has with her Prajapati the lord of creation and progeny. This woman is bestowed upon you for the performance of your mutual social and religious duties as householders, for raising offspring and for companionship. May the devas, Sacred Fire, Teachers and Brahmins bear witness to this union.

A coconut etc is placed in the bride's hand by the father. The bride's hand and coconut is then placed in the groom's right hand. The bride's mother pours water over the coconut while the following verses are recited ;—

“This daughter is well adorned and bedecked with gold. I, desirous of attaining the realm of Vishnu, give her to you O [embodiment of] Vishnu.”

“The Supreme Being who resides in the hearts of all beings, and all the gods are witnesses. My daughter is entrusted to you so that you may fulfil your mutual obligations to your forefathers [by begetting offspring].”

“This daughter well-dressed, righteous, well-mannered and intelligent is united with you in matrimony so that you may fulfil your social and religious duties, for prosperity and fulfilment of desires.”

The couple then recite the kāma-stuti or hymn in praise of Love together:—

Kāma Stuti

“Who is giving what and to whom? Love is the Giver and Love the Receiver. Love has entered into the Ocean of Being. Through Love I receive you. O Love all this is for you.” (TA. 3.10.1.4 A.V. 3.29.7)

5. Agni-sthāpanam

(Establishing the sacred fire)

The sacred fire which is to be the witness to the vows is now kindled. Nowadays in Australia it is becoming increasingly difficult to find function venues that are agreeable to having an open fire. Insurance company pressures and fear of litigation are the dominant reasons. A substitute would be an ornate lamp of some description.

7. Pratijña

(Vows by the couple)

Groom — *dharme ca arthe ca, kāme ca, imāṃ nāticarāmi ||*

Bride — *dharme ca arthe ca, kāme ca, imā nāticarāmi ||*

“In our mutual pursuit of spiritual development, in our mutual financial arrangements and in our mutual pursuit of pleasure and intimacy I shall never do the wrong thing by you.”

8. Śubha dr̥ṣṭi

(Auspicious gazing)

The couple are requested to look at each other without breaking their gaze as the following verse is recited;—

“Om. Gaze gently upon each other, never be hostile to each other, be tender to birds and animals, of cheerful mind, beautiful in your glory, the parents of heroes, be devoted to the gods, be the bestowers of happiness, be good and kind to us, and to all creatures.” (RV.10.85.44)

“Om. To us, O God, bring her, kind to her brothers; bring her, O Lord of the Universe, kind to her husband and her children. O Creator of the Universe bring her along with prosperity.” (AV.14.1.62)

“O Woman, Soma knew you first, and then the Gandharva, thirdly Agni knew you, your fourth husband is one born of woman.” (AV. 14.2.3.)

“Soma gave you to the Gandharva, the Gandharva gave you to Agni, O Agni transfer her now to me along with prosperity and progeny.” (AV. 14.2.4)

Swami Dayananda Sarasvati translates these verses as follows:—

O Woman, equanimity (Soma) is your first guardian, observance of the Vedic law (gandharva) is your second, knowledge and strength of character (Agni) are your third guardians. One born of woman is your fourth guardian.

Tranquillity develops in the girl the sentiment of following the Vedic law; which in turn brings her knowledge and strength of character; which bestows upon me prosperity and progeny.

Soma being the moon has control over the growth of the young girl, thereafter as her body begins to mature the Gandharva who governs beauty, music, art takes control of her and directs her maturation, finally when she reaches puberty Agni — fire, takes over and creates an impulse towards sexuality and the desire for procreation. So these 3 are said to be a woman's first companions, the husband then is her fourth.

9. Pradhāna Homam

A fire sacrifice is then done. The mantras vary among the various procedure manuals. These are the most common mantras that are recited.

O Lord Varuna listen now to my invocation. Be gracious even now. I approach you seeking your protection.

O Varuna! Praised by Vedic hymns, may I reach your refuge for which I long, through these oblations. I offer you abundant praise, withhold your anger now and enlighten us. Hail! (RV. 4.1.5 TS. 2.5.12.3)

O Agni! Mollify the anger of the gods and Lord Varuna. The Most Worshipful, the Best-Conveyer, the Most-Resplendent as you are, With these oblations we express our gratitude; turn away from us all them that hate us. Hail! (RV. 4.1.4 TS. 2.5.12.3)

O Agni! Foremost amongst the gods, protect us at dawn and during the day and night. May we never be hindered, grant us ever expanding happiness, O you who are easily invoked. Hail! This is an offering to Agni and Varuna.

O Agni! You are our refuge and mental solace. O Bearer-of-oblations, vouchsafe to us healing remedies. Hail! This is an offering to Agni. (TB.2.4.1.9)

10. Pāṇi grahaṇam

(Holding Hands)

The groom takes the bride's right hand and recites the following mantras:—

“I take your hand for wellbeing so that together we may attain to old age in happiness. The Sovereign Cosmic Principles; Enjoyment [Bhaga], Aspiration [Aryaman], Creativity [Savitar] and Completeness [Purandhri] have united us for the performance of our duties as householders.” (RV 10.85.36)

“You are Primal Nature — I am all-pervading Spirit — You are Nature. I am the Sky — You are the Earth. I am the seed — You are the bearer. I am mind — You are Speech. I am the melody — You are the words.”

“May we remain together until old age, loving each other, delighting in each other, with our minds in harmony with each other, appreciating each other's ideas, views and feelings. May we discover life together for an hundred autumns, may we live together for an hundred autumns, and may we listen to each other attentively for an hundred autumns.”

11. Granthi Bandhanam

(tying the knot)

An appointed member of the family then ties the hems of the couples' garments together.

With the bonds of the food that you eat together, with the many-colored thread of life; with the knot of truth I bind together your minds and your hearts.

12. Lāja Homa # 1

(Offering of Puffed-rice)

The bride's brother or a substitute places puffed rice in the bride's cupped palms — the groom places his palms below hers.

“This woman thus prays to God as she offers oblations of grains; long live my husband! Yea, a hundred autumns let him live!” (AV 14.2.63)

The couple circumambulate the fire with the bride in front while the priests chant the following mantra:—

“Primordial God, in obedience to your command, we have brought the bride along with the marriage procession, Give her now to her husband along with future progeny.” (RV. 10.85.38)

13. Aśmarohanam

(Treading upon the mill-stone)

The couple stop to the north of the fire where a millstone has been placed. They stand opposite each other touching the stone with their right feet. They can either hold hands of the bride places her hands upon the groom’s shoulders.

“Tread upon this stone, be you firm and steadfast as this stone, in all your tribulations, pressing underfoot all negativity and sorrow.”

14. Lāja Homa # 2

The bride’s brother places puffed rice in the bride’s cupped palms for a second time — the groom places his palms below hers.

“May this maiden sacrificing here in the fire be completely united to her husband, O Aryaman grant you this, that they may never be parted.”

The couple circumambulate the fire for a second time with the bride in front while the priests chant the following mantra:—

O Agni, give long life and energy to this couple, May they both live for an hundred autumns. (AV. 14.2.1 RV.10.85.39)

15. Lāja Homa # 3

The bride’s brother places puffed rice in the bride’s cupped palms for a third time — the groom places his palms below hers.

“Aryaman, you are the personification of Spiritual Aspiration, mysterious are you. O Self-sustainer, as a kind friend, with streams of milk they anoint you, when you makes wife and husband one-minded.” (RV.5.3.2.)

The couple circumambulate the fire for a third time with the bride in front:—

Guide them through tribulations As easily as one passes through rivulets of water. (RV 2.7.3)

The couple sit down and the groom recites the following sloka in praise of Sarasvati. Sarasvati is the consort of the creator Brahma and is the

personification of creative energy or *śakti*. Creation or rather *emanation* according to Hindu philosophy proceeds by means of vibration or sound. The process of emanation and transformation is cyclical — evolution and involution is the form of a pulsating universe. Thus Sarasvati is also the goddess of speech and information (learning). The bride is the means of procreation and is identified with Sarasvati and praised as such.

16. Gāthā Gānam

O Sarasvati Goddess of learning and eloquence, the source of well-being, O Gracious One, You whom I praise are the source of all creation. (ApMB 1.3.5)

It is in you the whole creation arose and in whom it is sustained and into whom it is ultimately dissolved. Today I shall sing that song which is the highest glory of women.

17. Final offering

Together holding the winnowing basket the couple offer all the rest of the puffed rice.

To the Lord of Bliss all Hail!

They then circumambulate the fire for the fourth time this time the groom leads. The significance of this rite is the affirmation of roles within the family. The first three rounds represents the three goals of human aspiration — *Dharma* = religious, spiritual, moral and ethical duties and obligations; *Artha* = domestic financial management and mutual prosperity; *Kāma* = pleasure, recreation, sex and procreation, all these three aspirations are controlled by the wife, hence she leads for the first three rounds. The fourth round indicates *Mokṣa* = “emancipation” on a material level — freedom from poverty, danger — the husband’s duty is to provide for the material needs of the family, to protect from dangers and to afford status in society. On a spiritual level it is the duty of the husband to pursue the higher spiritual knowledge and enlightenment in order to teach, guide and benefit the family.

18. Venī mocanam

(Releasing a lock of hair)

The groom releases a few locks of the bride's hair to symbolically liberate the bride from her parental control.

O Bride! I now free you from the restrictions of your parents, wherewith your blessed father had bound you. I now establish you with your consort in the practice of Dharma, in the realm of virtuous actions. (Rik Veda 10.85.24)

19. Saptapadi

(The rite of the Seven Steps)

The couple take seven steps together either towards the east or the west. These are the first seven steps in the journey of life together and each one represents an area of life that needs to be worked upon in order to achieve a perfect marriage. According to Hindu canon law the marriage is finalised after the seventh step.

1. Take the first step with me for nourishment. May Lord Vishnu guide us.

(Good eating habits and nutrition is the basis of a healthy relationship)

2. Take the first step with me for health. May Lord Vishnu guide us.

(Not only should we eat healthy food and timely meals but we should also live a healthy life-style which includes exercise and avoidance of bad habits like smoking, binging and gambling)

3. Take the third step with me for prosperity & security.

(When we are healthy and fit we can work hard and achieve success, prosperity and security.)

4. Take the fourth step with me for consummate bliss

(The central element and one of utmost importance is a health sex life.)

5. Take the fifth step with me for worthy offspring.

(The hope is for children that will be wanted, desired, cherished and raised with great affection and skill in order to produce worthy citizens and Dharma practitioners!)

6. Take the sixth step with me for enjoyments according to the seasons.¹⁸

(Playing together, taking vacations together and generally enjoying the good things of life together is also an essential element in a happy marriage.)

7. Take the seventh step with me for friendship.

(The culmination of the journey of marriage is a perfection of friendship.)

Romantic love is not mentioned in the context of marriage because it is fickle short-lived and unsustainable. What does sustain a married couple through all the tribulations and turmoil of marriage is an abiding friendship.

Bride now sits to the groom's left — close to his heart and the couple recite together:—

You are my friend in life through these seven steps; may I attain your friendship, may our friendship bind us together; may we never cease being friends, may our intentions be of one accord, may our radiance be one, and our minds united. We are united in harmony and affection, radiant with kind thoughts, enveloped in enjoyment and strength, united are our minds, our vows and our hearts.

The Indications of Friendship

Friendship is said to possess six indications; firstly friends delight in the prosperity of friends, and secondly, are distressed at their adversity. If any one asks for anything which is dear to his heart, but which should not be asked for, a true friend surely gives away even that. Fourthly, a true friend who is of a righteous disposition, when asked, can give away his very prosperity, his beloved sons, and even his own spouse. Fifthly, a friend does not dwell in the house of a friend, on whom he may have bestowed everything, but should enjoy what he earns himself (in other words friends should always maintain an independence). Sixth a friend does not hesitate to sacrifice his own good for his friend. (*Mahābhārata Udyoga Parva chapter 45 verse 12*)

¹⁸ According to Indian poetics the simple seasonal enjoyments are as follows: In the cool season — a warm body to sleep with. In mid-winter — heating. In spring — hiking in the forests and fields; In summer — water sports, swimming etc. In the rainy season — a well appointed place of shelter; In autumn — various preparations made with cow's milk.

20. Abhyukṣaṇam

(Sprinkling with Holy Water)

The priests now sprinkle the couple with holy water while chanting the following:—

O Waters! you are beneficent, so grant to us nourishment that we may behold great delight. Grant us a share in that great bliss that you possess, like Mothers in their tender solicitous love. To you we come gladly for Him, to whose abode you lead us on. Make us pure through wisdom and grant us to be reborn with splendour.

21. Sūrya Darśanam

(The Prayer to the Sun)

The couple then either go outside to look at the Sun or stay where they are and pretend to see the sun:—

May we continue to see for an hundred autumns, may we discover life together, may we live together, may we listen to beneficial advice, may we communicate well, may we never be defeated for an hundred autumns, thus may we forever continue to pursue the path to enlightenment.

22. Hṛdaya Sparśam

(Touching the hearts)

The couple touch each other's hearts:—

May our hearts be united in love, may our thoughts be in harmony, may we respond to each other's requests, may we walk together and be helpful to each other.

23. Māṅgalya Dhāraṇam

(Donning the tokens of marriage.)

The sacred necklace is then placed around the bride's neck

Om I tie this sacred thread [I place this sacred ornament] around your neck, so that we may live long together, and remain together enjoying prosperity for an hundred autumns.

OR Rings are exchanged

I place this ring which is a symbol of my love upon your finger — may we live together for a hundred autumns.

24. Sindūr Dānam

A red dot is placed on the forehead of the bride by the groom and a little vermilion paste is also placed in the parting of her hair.

Highly auspicious is this bride, come congratulate her; wish her a married life filled with her Husband's love, and then repair to your respective dwellings. (RV.10.85.33)

Fair wealth O Savitar, today, tomorrow, fair wealth produce for us each day that passes. May we through this our song, O God, be happy gainers of a fair and spacious habitation. (Y.V. 8:6)

25. Āśīrvādam

(Blessing)

Be an empress over your father-in-law, an empress over your mother-in-law, be an empress over your husband's sisters, and an empress over his brothers too. (RV.10.85.46)

Those who are at cross purposes and opposed to the wedded couple may they not succeed. May the hard path of life be crossed by pleasant journey. May all the forces of evil shrink away. (RV.10.85.32)

O Bounteous Indra, make this bride blessed in her fortune and her children, confer upon her ten children, and may her husband be like unto the eleventh. (R.V.10.85.45)

26. ācārya sambhāvanam

(Giving Honorarium to the priests)

A formal presentation of honorarium is given to the officiating priests. A tray is prepared with some fruit, flowers, betel leaves and nuts along with a coconut which is a substitute for the cow which should be give as the wedding fee. Usually the price of the cow is substituted.

27. Maṇḍap Udvēsanam & Prasthānam

(*Dismantling of the canopy and departure*)

The priest then calls 4 women and performs *the maṇḍapa udvēsanam*. After some valedictory prayers the women being dismantling the maṇḍap.

The couple make their way to the car and as the bride gets in the priests chant the following mantra:—

Bride, radiant as the Sun, mount this all-hued, golden-tinted, strong-wheeled, highly brilliant car, gently rolling, bound for the world of Rita. Make for your husband a happy bridal procession.
(RV.10.85.20)

The mother of the bride or another *sumangali* (married woman) goes to the vehicle and anoints the driver with *tilak*.

She pours holy water over the right wheel of the car and anoints it with sandal-wood paste, red-powder and some rice grains.

A coconut is then placed under the wheel and the car is slowly driven over the coconut to break it.



EXAMPLES OF VARIANT WEDDING CEREMONIES



The South Indian Non-Brahmin Wedding.

In addition to the principle Vedic rites described previously, a typical South Indian non-brahmin wedding will consist of a series of auxiliary rites in the following general sequence. (Many of these rites are also common to North Indian marriages with variations.)

1. The best man (*mapillai tozhan*) usually the bride's brother leads the bridegroom to the wedding dais. After circumambulating the dais once, in a clockwise direction, the groom takes a seat.
2. The best man garlands the bridegroom with a rather simple garland.
3. The liturgy begins with the worship of Gaṇeśa for the removal of all obstacles to the nuptial rites and to the marriage in general. The Sanctification Rite known as the "*Puṇyāha-vācanam*" is performed for physical, mental, and spiritual purification and absolution of all previously committed sins. Sometimes a *Navagraha Pūjā* and a *Navagraha Homa* are conducted as a preliminary in order to propitiate the nine planets, who are the Lords of Karma, and to obtain their blessings. (This ceremony is sometimes done one day before, at the home of the groom).
4. The "*Nalungu*" (haridra-lepanam) ritual that was performed the day before the marriage is repeated with the anointing of sandal paste, rather than turmeric, to the cheeks, hands and feet of the groom by three or five married women. The dish of red water is again waved in a clockwise manner around his head to remove the 'evil-eye' and any bad luck. He usually gives a present of some betel leaves and nuts with some money to each woman.
5. The same women perform the "*ankur-arpanam*" ceremony in which nine different types of cereals are sown in five clay vessels filled with earth. This is to invoke the blessings of the *Aṣṭa Dik Pālaka's* – the celestial guardians of the eight directions of the universe for a successful married life and for health, prosperity and fertility. The same women will now plant the *Ara-sani* (Aśvattha) branch in a pot. This branch symbolizes the residence of the gods. A bamboo pole is washed and decorated and stood in the canopy.

6. The officiating priest ties a yellow protective thread (*kankanam* in Tamil, *Rakṣa-Sūtra* in Sanskrit) around the wrist of the bridegroom. While the thread is being tied, the bridegroom holds a coconut (representing fullness of being) in the palms of both his hands.
7. the bride now arrives, led by the bridesmaid, usually the bridegroom's sister. After circumambulating the wedding dais once, the bride takes a seat on the dais.
8. The officiating priest anoints the foreheads of both the bride and bridesmaid with sandal-paste and the bridesmaid garlands the bride with the simple garland.
9. Another *Gaṇeśa Pūjā* is conducted on behalf of the bride, followed by the *Maṅgala Gaurī Pūjā* to invoke the blessings of the Divine Mother Parvatī for a long and happy married life.
10. Three or five married women are invited to perform the “*Nalungu*” for the bride. Thereafter the yellow protective thread is tied around the left wrist of the bride.
11. The parents of the bridegroom and bride formally greet each other and seal the alliance by the exchange of “*Tambūlam*” (ie. 2 bananas placed upon 2 betel leaves with some betel nuts).
12. The best-man places the right foot of the bridegroom on a grinding stone, washes it with milk, and decorates it with sandal-paste and kumkum. He then places a toe-ring known as “*metti*” around the second toe. The same is done on the left foot.
13. The Vivāha (wedding proper) commences with the ceremony of “*madhu-parkam*” in which a mixture of honey, yoghurt and ghee is offered to the groom as a welcoming rite.
14. The “*Kanyā-Dānam*” (bestowal of the bride) is now done. The bride's parents or guardians make the *Saṅkalpam* (Resolve) to give their daughter in marriage to the groom who is named along with his clan and the names of his father, grandfather and great-grand-father. The father of the bride then place the hand of the bride in that of the groom along with a coconut and the mother of the bride pours water over their joined hands.
15. The bride is presented with her wedding sari and ornaments and she then retires to change.
16. The “*Māṅgalya*” Pūjā or the consecration of the tokens of marriage (*Tali* in Tamil) is done. The bride returns to the dais and sits on the groom's right.
17. The consecrated *Maṅgala Sūtra* (*Tāli*) which is wound around the coconut, is now taken by a male relative (preferably an uncle) around the wedding

hall to be blessed by the guests. This is done by each person touching the Tāli with both hands.

18. The officiating priest hands the Tāli to the bridegroom. The groom ties the first knot and his sister ties the other two. This is done to the sounds of the “*ketti melam*” (a traditional tune) played by the Nadhaswaram musicians. During this ritual the bridegroom’s sister should stand behind the bride holding a lighted oil lamp. The bridegroom applies sandal-paste and kumkum on the three knots in the Tāli.
19. The bridegroom puts his right arm around the bride’s neck and applies a red dot (pottu/tilak) on her forehead.
20. The bride and groom exchange garlands three times to the accompaniment of blessings.
21. The “*Pāṇi-grahaṇam*” (hand holding) ritual is now performed in which the groom takes hold of the bride’s hand and recites the prescribed verses.
22. The “*Sapta Padi*” ceremony is now performed by taking seven steps together – each accompanied by a benediction.
23. The couple return to their seats and perform a fire sacrifice (Homa) together – or it is done by the officiating priests on their behalf.
24. The couple rise and circumambulate the sacred fire. To the north of the fire the bride stands upon the millstone (*Āśma-rohaṇam*) and the bridegroom places a toe-ring (*metti*) around the second toe of both feet of the bride. Thereafter the best-man places some puffed rice (*Lāja*) into the cupped hands of the bride who, joining hands with her husband offers it into the fire.
25. The bridegroom offers a gift (*Dakṣinā*) to his best-man.
26. The bridal couple return to the wedding dais. Now the bride sits on the bridegroom’s left.
27. The officiating priest valedicts all the Devas who were invoked at the commencement of nuptial rites, and blesses the couple.
28. Designated relatives or sisters of the groom tie the “*pattam*” a golden ornament around the forehead of the bride to ward off negative influences on their journey to their new home.
29. Relatives and elders bless the couple and three married women perform the Ārati ceremony (waving of a camphor flame around the heads of the couple to ward off any evil-eye).

THE VĪRA ŚAIVA WEDDING

The Vīra-Śaivas are a community living in Karnataka State in South India. Their wedding ceremony differs from both northern and Southern format. The major peculiarity is the absence of fire. The sequence of rites that are performed over three days is as follows: -

1. *Varapūjā* – the ceremonial reception of the groom.
2. *Vāg-dānam* – engagement ceremony in which the parents pledge their agreement to the alliance.
3. *Maṅgala-snānam* – The anointing of turmeric ceremony, accompanied by the ceremonial bathing of the couple.
4. *Gaṇeśa Pūjā* – Invocation and offerings are made to Gaṇeśa for the removal of all obstacles.
5. *Nandi Pūjā* – The bull Nandi who is the vehicle of Lord Śiva and 23 others of the retinue of Lord Śiva are invoked and worshipped and presents are given to 24 worthy relatives and friends.
6. *Maṅḍapa Pratiṣṭha* – The consecration of the canopy erected for the ceremony is now done.
7. *Aṅkur-arpanam* – The sowing of the grains in five pots by five married women – for fertility and health.
8. *Kaṅkana-bandhanam* – Tying of the protective thread to the wrists of both bride and groom.
9. *Gaṅga Pūjā* – Seven pots of water are filled by the women and placed in front of the canopy. These represent the seven sacred rivers.
10. *Kalaśa Sthāpanam* – Five pots of water are established with their mouths covered by 5 mango leaves and a coconut. These pots symbolise the five aspects of Lord Śiva. The creative, preservative, transformative, obscurative and gracious aspects. These five kalaśa's are the substitute for the sacred fire used in other forms of Hindu weddings.
11. *Kāśī Yātrā* – The groom pretends to go on a pilgrimage to benares and is brought back by the bride's father with a pledge to give his daughter to him in marriage.
12. *Madhu-parkam* – The parents of the bride honour the groom by washing his feet and offering him a drink of yoghurt, ghee and honey.

13. *Gaurī Pūjā* – The bride offers her worship to the Goddess Parvatī for a long and happy married life.
14. *Nirīkṣaṇam* – The bride and groom sit on opposite sides of a curtain held between them. Each holds a handful of a paste made of cumin seed and jaggery. At the auspicious moment the curtain is removed and each one tries to put the paste on the head of the other first. It is said that the one who succeeds gains the upper hand in the marriage! The cumin seed represents fame and the jaggery sweetness of disposition.
15. *Kanyādānam* – The bride is formally given away by her guardians.
16. *Akṣataropanam* – The couple sit facing each other and take handfuls of rice and pour it over each other's head three times.
17. *Mālā-dhāraṇam* – The couple now garland each other.
18. *Maṅgalya-dhāraṇam* – The golden token of marriage is tied around the bride's neck accompanied by the recitation of the appropriate mantras.
19. *Brahma-granthi-bandhanam* – A knot is tied in the clothing of the couple.
20. *Umā-Maheśvara Pūjā* – Worship is now offered by the couple to Lord Śiva and His consort Parvati. This takes the place of the fire worship with oblations that is conducted in the Vedic marriage.
21. *Pāṇi-grahanam* – The groom takes the bride's hand and recites the appropriate mantras.
22. *Sapta-padi* - The couple rise and take the seven steps together. Each time the groom moves the bride's foot from one pile of rice to the next by holding her big toe of the right foot with his right hand.
23. *Nagole* – On the wedding dias, an 8 petalled lotus is drawn using rice flour. This is surrounded by a square. An elephant is drawn on each side – one in rice flour and the other with salt. A consecrated pot is placed in the center. The couple stand facing each other – one on the salt elephant and the other on the rice elephant. They are then asked to exchange places. This rite is symbolic of cultivating the two ingredients required for a happy marriage – substance represented by the rice and flavour represented by the salt.

POST NUPTIAL RITES

Dhruva-Arundhati Darśanam

Viewing of the Polar Star

In the evening the husband takes his wife out into the night and points out the polar star known as Dhruva which is supposed to be the fixed nexus around which our galaxy revolves. He recites the following verse:—

“Firm dwelling, firm origin. The Firm One are you, standing on the side of firmness. You are the nexus of the stars; thus protect us from adversity.”
(Ap.MB.1:9:6)

The husband then points out the star called Alcor belonging to the constellation of the Great Bear. This star is personified as Arundhati which literally means “fidelity”. She was the wife of the Rishi Vasiṣṭha and became renowned for her unshakeable fidelity to her husband.

“The seven Rishis (ursa major) have achieved security for Arundhati, she who stands first among the six Pleiads: may she, the first among the stars shone upon us.” (Ap.MB.1:9:7)

Griha Praveśa

Entrance into the New Home

According to Vedic custom, the fire that was lit at the wedding is taken to the new home to be established in the domestic hearth so that the daily sacrificial duties of offering morning and evening oblations into the fire could start. Nowadays this is only done by the ultra-orthodox.

The formal ceremonies for entering the home also differ widely between communities, but all of them include some sort of reception by the women of the household, the kicking over of a pot full of rice representing the wish for abundance in the new home and a ceremony of worship at the household altar.

As they arrive at the home the following mantras are recited.

1. We pay our obeisance to Asvins — the physicians of the gods [who represent Right Thoughts and Right Actions], may good thoughts come to us from them. And may they protect us and fulfil the desires which we cherish in our hearts. O twin Lords of auspiciousness, be favourable to us as we enter this home. (R.V.10:40:12)

2. May the Impeller, The Universal Preceptor, the Mystic Fire, the Cosmic Mind, the Principle of Friendship and the Cosmic Witness, the Divine Shaper and the All-pervading Supreme Lord grant us wellbeing! May we rejoice with our children; we have so many desires — to you we surrender them all.

A sacred fire is kindled and the following prayers are recited while ghee is being offered.

1. My wife comes to this home along with investments (cattle and horses), may she live long with her children, and attain heavenly worlds. May she bear many children and may her prosperity increase. May we worship this fire for a hundred years. Hail!
2. O Agni lord of the hearth, amiable one, together with Bhaga grant ever increasing happiness to this couple. Grant them wealth, health and progeny. Hail!
3. To these two, with their children, grant happiness, O Lord of Beings, O Indra and Agni. Let their children not die before them. Hail!
4. Be pleased again with this oblation offered by them from their very being. May this wife increase with the ambrosia of immortality. Hail!
5. With milk may she increase, may her territory grow and expand, may her prosperity increase a thousandth fold, without expectation. Hail!
6. May they both dwell here in happiness, enjoying the full span of human life. May Indra be propitious to them. Hail!
7. O wife grow and unfold with your husband, be steady. The great Lord of Wisdom has ordained you to be a wife. Be fruitful and live together for a hundred autumns. Hail!
8. The Divine Craftsman has created wives, for this maiden has He created you as the husband, may He grant you both long life. Hail!

The couple sit upon a red bull-hide with the neck turned towards the east.

Here may the cows sit down, here the horses, here the men. With a thousand gifts, with prosperity and health be seated here.

A child is placed in the bride's lap and is fed a fruit;

May this woman bring forth progeny into this world.

The bride is then blessed with the following mantra:—

“May you be happy here and prosper with your children; be vigilant and rule this household. Closely unite your body with this man, your Lord; so shall you full of years address the assembly.”

A decorated bamboo pole is placed in the bed between the couple so that they don't consummate the marriage for 3 days. On the fourth day the pole is removed and after a fire-ceremony the couple are free to do as they please after offerings are made with the following:—

“O Agni! you are the agent of expiation, among the gods you are the agent of expiation. I the Brahmana entreat you, desirous of protection. Whatever misfortune is upon this woman that would affect her husband, her offspring, her domestic animals, her prosperity, and her lover drive that away from her! Hail “

Samaveshana (Garbha-danam)

Rite of Consummation.

This ceremony is the sanctification of the consummation. It is a sacred act in which it is hoped worthy, intelligent and spiritual children will be conceived. In ancient agrarian society it was important for economic reasons for the majority of the children to be boys, and this sentiment is reflected in the ancient hymns that are recited prior to coitus.

May this maiden attain a son like Vishnu; of beauty radiant like the sun and accomplished in prosperity.

May you bring forth in the tenth month; a son who will be a god amongst gods.

May Vishnu (The Preserver) make your womb ready; may the celestial craftsman design the shape (of the embryo). May the Lord of Beings activate (the sperm) and may the Creator grant conception. (A.V.5;25;5)

May you conceive, O Moon-faced one, may you conceive, O Energy of Creation. May the two Ashvins wreathed with lotuses, grant conception to you. (A.V.5;25;3)

That spark which the Ashvins produce with their golden kindling sticks; that spark of life we invoke into your womb, that you may give birth after 10 months.

O Lord Vishnu! grant to this woman a child of superlative beauty, that may be born safely in the tenth month.

Together we participate in the act of procreation, may you conceive, may a child be born without deficiency, with all its limbs, not blind, not lame, not afflicted by demons. (R.V.10;184,1-3)

SOME SIGNIFICANT SYMBOLS



The Planting of the Peepul Branch (*Ara-sani*)

Among some communities it is customary to plant a green branch of the Asvattha or *Ficus religiosa* tree (*Ara-sani* in Tamil) in the middle of the Canopy. The Peepul tree is considered sacred since it is a particular manifestation of Lord Vishnu (vide Gita chapter 10:26). Lord Vishnu is the Preserver of the Hindu Trinity and the married couple are said to be embodiments of Vishnu and Lakshmi since they, as householders, assist the Supreme Lord in the work of preserving the society and environment. The tree is considered to be the most appropriate symbol of the ideal householder. The tree offers shade, fuel and food to all beings regardless of who or what they are, totally beneficent and non-judgemental — this is the ideal to be striven for by the newly wed couple. Planting of a tree is also considered to be an act of great merit.

The Sacred Fire

Lord Agni the god of fire is invited to all Hindu weddings to witness the taking of vows by the bridal couple. Agni is the lord of the domestic hearth and is worshipped every day by the orthodox. Agni is also worshipped at every major sacrament and ceremony and when we die the ultimate offering to Agni is our own bodies.

Banana Trees

Tradition requires us to decorate our homes, halls and others places where auspicious events such as religious festivals, weddings etc. are held. The decoration is not complete without two banana trees with fruit on either side of the entrance. There are three main reasons for using the banana tree:—

1. The first is based on the name of the tree itself. Its Tamil name is "*Vazhai Maram*". The word "*vazhai*" in Tamil apart from banana also means to "look-after" or 'to take care of" and thus signifies the virtue of protection and nurturing.
2. The second reason is that once a banana tree takes root, it will continue to multiply from the root, and soon there will be a "family" of banana trees, thus these plants are the symbol of the continuity of the family.
3. The third reason is that every part of the banana tree is useful and the fruits are produced only for the benefit of others as they don't play a part in reproduction. The leaves are used for plates and for thatching roofs, the fruit, trunk and flower can be eaten. The outer stem is used for making ropes. Thus complete utility

expresses the highest moral practice of Hinduism which is the pursuit of the welfare of all beings. We should live for the sake of others in everything that we do.

Prostrating to the Parents

Touching the feet of a person is the sign of our respect towards them. Hindus prostrate at the feet of their Gurus, Saints, Sages and any other person who is worthy of such respect. Our parents are of course are eminently worthy of such honour. Therefore, when we get married we show our respect and gratitude towards them by prostrating before them. At the same time we obtain the blessings of the two most important persons in our lives.

The significance of Number Seven

Seven is a sacred number which has many esoteric associations — primarily as a division of time (seven days of the week). The number seven is comprised of 3 + 4. Three being the triad of cosmic forces — Creation, Sustentation and Transformation. Three is also the number which signifies: Time — present, past and future. And four is the number symbolic of space or the earth — with its four cardinal directions, four social orders, four stages of life, four states of consciousness, four Vedas, four aims of human life — *Dharma* (duty), *Artha* (material prosperity) *Kāma* (love, recreation and sex) and *Moksha* (liberation).

Some communities place 7 brass pots full of water in front of the wedding canopy symbolising the seven sacred rivers, or the seven Mother Goddesses. During the wedding ceremony the couple take seven steps together holding hands — this is symbolic of their first seven steps in life together as a couple and the seven areas of life upon which they need to focus in order to perfect their marriage.

Some communities in north India also walk seven times around the sacred fire. On attaining puberty, a girl undergoes a seven day purification period after which she joins the family as a fully fledged adult.

The foetus in the womb is fully formed in the seventh month and the stump of the umbilical cord of a baby falls off within seven days after the birth. The teeth will first begin to appear in the seventh month of a child's life.

CANON LAWS OF MARRIAGE FROM THE DHARMA ŚĀSTRAS

Giving away of the Bride

He who gives a damsel in marriage having first openly declared her blemishes, whether she be insane, or afflicted with leprosy, or have lost her virginity, is not liable to punishment. (Manu 8;205)

A wife is not freed from her husband by sale or rejection; we recognize this as the law formulated by the Lord of Creatures Prajapati long ago. (Manu 9;46)

Once is the division (of the inheritance made), once is a maiden given in marriage, A man says "I will give" once, each of these three acts is done once only by the good people. (Manu 9;47)

Let no intelligent man, after having given his daughter to one man, give her again to another; for he who gives and then gives is guilty of deceit. (Manu 9;71)

Annulment & Divorce

In the present social conditions in Hindu Society divorce is considered an anathema and most Hindu pandits and indeed most orthodox Hindus do not realize that provision has been made in the sacred law for annulment, divorce and remarriage. Although in medieval and up to recent times the laws were seldom implemented and subsequently untold suffering resulted from couples being forced by social pressure to stay together.

1. A marriage contracted under false pretences can be annulled.

Though a man may have accepted a damsel in due form, he may abandon her if she be blemished, diseased, or deflowered, and if she have been given with fraud. (Manu 9;72)

If anybody gives away a maiden possessing blemishes without declaring them, the bridegroom may annul that contract with the evil-minded giver. (Manu 9;73.)

When a faultless maiden has been married to a man who has a blemish unknown before the marriage, and does not take to another man after discovering it, shall be enjoined to do so by her relatives. If she has no relations living she may go to live with another man of her own accord. (Narada 12;96)

2. The bound of marriage can be dissolved if subsequent to the marriage either party is found to be blemished. The blemishes are;

In both parties;

1. Affliction with a chronic or disgusting disease
2. deformity
3. madness
4. inability to have sexual relations

and in a girl;

5. loss of virginity [that was not previously declared]

and in a man;

6. committing of a crime for which loss of caste is the penalty.
7. if the groom has forsaken his family.

Manu 9;72.

3. Disappearance or prolonged absence of the husband is justification for remarriage.

If the husband went abroad for some sacred duty, the wife should wait for him eight years, if he went for acquiring learning or fame six years and if he went for pleasure three years. [Thereafter she may remarry with incurring any sin or guilt.] (Manu 9;76)

4. Inability to dwell harmoniously is justification for remarriage.

For one year let a husband bear with a wife who hates him; but after that let him deprive her of her [share] of the property and cease to live with her. [But he should still make arrangements for her clothing and food.] (Manu 9;77.)

5. Alcoholism in either party is a grounds for divorce.

She who drinks spiritous liquor, is of bad conduct, rebellious, diseased (with leprosy), violent, or wasteful of money, may at any time be superseded by another wife. (Manu 9;80)

6. Inability to have sexual relations is a ground for divorce.

If a man is unable to have sexual relations with his wife, then she may divorce him and take another husband. (Nārada 12;18.)

Legitimate Reasons for Divorce (Nārada 12;93,97,98)

The five cases of legal remarriage for women are;

- a. death of the husband [while the wife is still young, with very small children]

- b. the husband disappears.
- c. husband becomes a monk.
- d. the husband becomes impotent [while the wife is still young].
- e. the husband commits a crime deserving of loss of caste.

If the husband is untraceable, dead, renounced the world, impotent or degraded - in these cases of emergency a woman can remarry. (Parashara 28)

The five legal reasons for divorce by men;

- a. If the wife squanders his property.
- b. If she procures an abortion.
- c. If the wife makes an attempt on the husband's life.
- d. If the wife continually shows him malice.
- e. If the wife slanders her husband.

Rape

A man who rapes an unwilling maiden should be executed, but a man who spoils a willing maiden who is his [social] equal, should not undergo capital punishment. (Manu 8.364)

Where a damsel is taken by force, but is not solemnly married according to religious rites, she may be given in marriage to another, for she is considered as a virgin. (Vasishtha 17;73)

Adultery

Men who commit adultery with the wives of others, should be severely punished by the courts of law and afterwards banished. (Manu 8;352)

Acts of Adultery: [*samgrahana* Manu 8;352-361]

The following acts are all considered accessory to adultery and should be avoided;

1. Addressing [in a personal manner] a married woman at [a lonely spot such as] a *tirtha*, outside the village, in a forest, at a confluence of rivers.
2. Offering presents to a [married] woman.
3. Romping with her and touching her ornaments or dress.
4. Sitting upon the same seat as a married woman.

Exemption from the rule;

The following persons are permitted to converse freely with married women;

1. Artisans [and merchants]
2. Monks
3. Entertainers
4. Ordained priests

Abandoning A Wife

If a man forsakes an undefiled, honourable wife in the prime of her youth he shall be born as a woman in seven successive births and suffer widowhood each time. (Parashara 24.)

If a man leaves a wife who is obedient, well-spoken, skilful, virtuous and the mother of sons, he should be reminded of his duty and [if unrelenting] should be severely punished by the king. (Narada 12;95.)

Polygamy & Polyandry

Polygamy

Although monogamy seems to have been the ancient ideal and has been the rule down to modern times, the Vedic literature is full of references to polygamy,¹⁹ Rig. X.145 (same as Atharva Veda III.18) is a hymn meant as a charm for weaning the husband's affections from a co-wife.

Hariscandra is said to have had a hundred wives (Ait. Br.33.1). It is not to be supposed that polygamy was confined only to kings and nobles. The great philosopher Yajñavalkya had two wives, Kātyāyanī who was worldly-minded and Maitreyī who thirsted for the knowledge of Brahman and immortality (Br. Up. IV.5.1-2 and II.4.1).

In the times of the sūtras, some sages wanted to hold up a high ideal.²⁰ Āpastamba (Dh.S.II.5.11.12-13) declares that when a man has a wife who is endowed with dharma and progeny, he shall not marry another wife; but if any one of the two (dharma and progeny) is wanting (in the case of the wife), he may marry another. Though Āpastamba and others held up the ideal of monogamy and Nārada and others prescribed a fine for marrying a second wife without sufficient cause, it is extremely doubtful whether a man was ever punished by the king for so doing.

¹⁹ The word *dampati* (which occurs very frequently in the Rig.) conveys in several places the idea of a monogamous marriage. Vide Rig. V.3.2, VIII.31.5, X.68.2, 1272.

²⁰ "A man should unite with a single wife. If he unites with a second, he is infatuated with lust. If he takes a third or a fourth wife he is the meanest wretch. This is the convention ordained by Me for the guidance of all the people." (Varaha Purana 142.35.)

The legislator Devala says that a sūdra may have only one wife, a vaiśya two, a kṣatriya three and a brāhmaṇa four, but a king may have as many as he desires. This only reflected the prevailing practice of kings of that age.

We find in the Imperial Gazetteer of India, vol. I (ed. of 1907) p.482:—

‘Although in theory polygamy is allowed, in practice a second wife is rarely taken while the first is alive and in India as a whole there are only 1011 wives to every 1000 husbands so that even if no husbands have more than two wives all but 11 per thousand must be monogamous’.

Polyandry

Not a single Vedic passage can be cited which clearly refers to the practice of polyandry. The most glaring example of polyandry in Sanskrit literature is that of Draupadī as the wife of the five Pāṇḍavas. Probably the tradition was too firmly rooted to allow the author to ignore it. The Mahābhārata also reports that all were shocked by the resolve of Yudhiṣṭhira to make Draupadī the wife of the five brothers.

There are two types of polyandry, one matriarchal (where a woman forms simultaneous alliances with two or more men who are not necessarily relations of each other and therefore succession is traced through the female) and the other fraternal, where a woman becomes the wife of several brothers. The former practice prevailed among the Nairs of Kerala, but is now becoming increasingly rare. The latter form of polyandry is still to some extent found in Kumaon, Garhwal, Nepal and among peoples in the Himalayan area up to Assam.

Same-sex marriage

The question regarding ‘Same Sex Marriage’ from an expatriate Hindu point of view involves 2 separate issues —

1. Legal definition of marriage and application of secular laws.
2. A religious Sacrament known as *Vivāha Saṁskāra*

In most western countries and in Australia there is a separation of Church and State. Marriage as defined under secular law, is about property rights, privileges and protection under the law which is afforded automatically to heterosexual couples — the question is:— should these same rights be extended to same sex couples. It is a matter of EQUALITY and CIVIL RIGHTS. I think every one of us would appreciate these social values and therefore the answer should be an emphatic YES to all citizens in the state enjoying complete equality under the law regardless of gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, colour, creed, ability or disability.

The problem is that we confuse the 2 definitions of marriage and tend to judge the matter from a specific HINDU position. Our religious values and Dharma are matters for ourselves, we cannot and should not impose our value system upon the majority of our host country. We should do what is good for the larger society in which we live. Any law which gives stability to social relationships and grants happiness and security to others must surely be a good and a positive thing. The essence of dharma is summed up as:—

*Adroho samasta bhūteṣu karmaṇā manasā girā |
Anugrahaśca dānam ca tām dharmā sanātanaḥ ||*

Sanātana dharma is:— non-prejudice to any living being, by word, deed or thought, compassion for all and a charitable disposition.

The second issue is — can the sacrament of marriage known as **Vivāha Saṃskāra** be performed for same-sex couples? The answer is — there is absolutely no provision in Hindu Sacred law for such an event to take place, as all the sacraments are domestic, heterosexual based processes involving progeny.

One may then question whether a heterosexual couple who have absolutely no intention or ability to have children are also authorised to have a Vivāha Saṃskāra the major purpose of which is to have children. This is indeed a vexed point as there are many older couples getting married who are past child-bearing age or who are infertile. This is a question for individual couples to discuss with their priest or guru.

It must be remembered that Hindu Sacred Law is extremely elastic and there are many communities in India who have “Marriage” ceremonies which incorporate only a few or even none of the Vedic usages and practices. In Kerala for example the only element of the “Vivāha” ceremony (which lasts for 15 minutes!) which has any connection with the orthodox ceremony is the exchanging of garlands!

So for a gay couple there is no question of them having a Canonical Hindu Wedding ceremony but there is the option of a commitment ceremony based on some of the common usages. Regarding Commitment Ceremonies or Civil Unions — in which two people make formal vows of friendship and support sanctioned by a priest — we already have a precedent in the Ramayana in which Rāma and Sugrīva have a commitment ceremony in front of the sacred fire presided over by Hanumān.

It is clearly stated that they hold hands (*pāṇigrahaṇa*) and make vows and then walk around the sacred fire (*mangala pheras*) into which Hanuman has already offered oblations. (these are the *limbs* of a traditional marriage ceremony!)

This ceremony is described in Vālmiki Kishkindha Kāṇḍa 4:5: 11 – 18. Mentioned in Adhyātma Rāmāyana 1:31 And in the Tulasi Rāmāyana:—

*Taba hanumanta ubhaya disi kī saba kathā sunāi
Pāvaka sakhī dei kari jorī prīti dṛḍhāi.*

Then Hanumān related all the circumstances of both the sides, and having installed the sacred fire as a witness he concluded a firm alliance of friendship (between Rāma and Sugrīva).

The Family Altar

Every Hindu home is expected to have a shrine room or at least an altar. At the time of marriage the mother of the bride usually presents the couple with a lamp similar to the one depicted here. The lamp symbolises knowledge and wisdom which lead to enlightenment at sunset by the lady of the house. Usually there is a small lamp – this symbolises life. The altar forms the focal point of the family devotions. It is accompanied by an icon of the favourite family deity. The daily ritual consists of lighting some incense, making an offering of fresh fruit, or dried fruit such as raisins and nuts, and reciting some prayers. The greatest of all prayers is the Gāyatri mantra which is as follows:—



and is kindled every evening in the house (Grha-Lakshmi). A vessel of water kept near the altar forms the focal point. It is sometimes the favourite family deity. The daily ritual consists of lighting some incense, fruit, or dried fruit such as raisins and nuts, and reciting some prayers. The Gāyatri mantra which is as follows:—

*om bhur bhuvah-suvah. Tat savitur varenyam bhargo devasya
dhimahi, dhiyo yo nah prachodayat.*

Meaning

We meditate upon the Adorable Light (i.e. the Sun) of the Supreme Being who has projected this entire universe into being. May That One impel our minds towards enlightenment.

Variant readings:

May That One enlighten our intellects.

May That One guide our mind, speech and actions.

DUTIES OF HUSBAND AND WIFE



Here we present some selections from the Canon Law Books (Dharma Shastras) illustrating your general obligations as a married couple.

A man alone is nothing — he is incomplete. The perfect man is one who is completely united in harmony with his wife and children. These three are ONE. (Manu 9;45.)

The husband receives his wife from the gods, he does not wed her according to his own will; in order to please the gods he must always support her as long as she is faithful to him. (Manu 9;95.)

Commentary:— 'Support' means that he must keep her well supplied with *anna* (food) *vastra* (clothing) and *abhushana* (ornaments).

The married couple should try as hard as possible until death to maintain their marriage fidelity to each other. They should not do any act of *dharma* (religious and social duty), *artha* (mutual financial arrangements and business), or *Kāma* (love and recreation) apart from each other. (Manu 9;101 & 102.)

Commentary:— According to the sacred Law there are four legitimate goals in life: *Dharma* — social and religious duties, *Artha* — everything that is done for material prosperity and social advancement, *Kāma* — love and recreation and all those activities which bring pleasure. The fourth and ultimate goal is *Moksha* or Liberation from suffering and ultimately the cycle of births and deaths. All these goals should be pursued in harmony and none of them should be neglected by the householder.

The wife must be given the responsibility by the husband of collecting and spending his wealth, of supervising hygiene and purity, of maintaining the household, of fulfilling the religious obligations and of preparing the food. (Manu 9;11.)

Commentary:— according to Vedic law the woman is responsible for the bank account and for running the household economy.

Women and men were created for being parents; therefore the Veda has ordained that religious rites & rituals be performed by the husband and wife together. (Manu 9;96.)

Commentary:— The purpose of marriage is procreation. And as a married couple all religious rites have to be performed together – after marriage neither of the couple is permitted to perform a ritual act or ceremony alone.

Since members of the other three stages (students, retirees and monks) are supported every day by the knowledge and food of the householder, therefore the householder stage of life is the best. (Manu 3;78.)

Commentary:— The whole of society is an inter-dependant organism and the welfare of one group affects the welfare of the entire organism. It is the duty of the householders to use their surplus wealth to support the other three orders by:—

- ❖ contributing to the support and encouragement of students and educational institutes and projects.
- ❖ contributing to the maintenance of retirement centres and facilities for the frail and the aged
- ❖ contributing to the support of the monks and the monastic institutes where the Dharma is being practiced and taught.

These three orders are dependant upon the householders and therefore can only continue to survive and develop with the financial and moral support of the householders.

PAÑCA MAHĀ YAJÑAS

The Five Great Sacrifices

The principle framework for the duties and obligations of householders are the “Pañca-mahā-yajña” literally ‘The Five Great Sacrifices’.

The term ‘yajña’ which is loosely translated as ‘sacrifice’ is associate with 3 roots;—

Yaj — to offer, to give

Yāc — to request, to receive, to obtain

Yuj — to balance, harmonize, equalize.

In a yajña an offering is given, a blessing is received or a request is made, or a previously obtained gift or favour is acknowledged, and then through mutual reciprocation balance and harmony are achieved.

The two dynamic factors of Yajña are:—

1. A sincere feeling of gratitude and
2. The demonstration of that heartfelt gratitude in the making of offerings and performing of service.

Yajña in its narrow primary sense refers to the ancient Vedic Sacrifices that are now redundant.

In its secondary and applied sense it refers to the *Five Great Sacrifices* which requite the Five Great Debts with which each one of us is born.

The fact of our birth in human embodiment incurs 5 debts (*ṛṇas*) it is our duty therefore to discharge these debts for the rest of our lives. These are:—

Pitru ruṇa — debt to the parents and the ancestors.

PitruYajña — The fact of our birth, and the loving care, protection and nurturing of our parents obligates us to them and to our grandparents and all the other members of our family. This debt is discharged by procreation to continue the line, by honoring our parents, seeking their guidance, supporting them, caring for them in their old age and by venerating them and our ancestors after they have died. Thereafter the performance of the *śrāddha* ceremonies to honour their memory.

Rishi Runa — debt to the sages

Brahma Yajña — Our sages (Rishis) have dedicated themselves to the path of enlightenment for the welfare of all beings. These magnanimous sages have performed intense austerities to realize the truth and have passed down their wisdom through their disciples in order that we too may spiritually develop, unfold and progress towards enlightenment. The debt that we owe them is called “*brahma*’ which means ‘immense’. It is discharged by taking the trouble to study their teachings daily, and to teach them to others. Pursuit of a religious education or at the very least making the attempt at being culturally informed frees one from this intellectual debt.

Deva Runa — debt to the gods

Deva Yajña — The Devas are the cosmic forces which administer and govern the universe under the direction of the Supreme Lord. All these forces of nature and cosmic principles are rewarded by making daily offerings to them to show our gratitude and to help us cultivate an awareness of the underlying cosmic consciousness behind all phenomenal appearances. In the Gīta Kṛṣṇa says that the one who enjoys the bounty of the gods without offering them anything in return is verily a thief!

Manuṣya Runa — debt to society

Manuṣya yajña — We are by nature social animals and cannot live in isolation. Everything that we enjoy comes to us through the agency of other people. We are therefore indebted to our fellow humans and have the duty to ensure that they are at least clothed, fed and sheltered. By welcoming and offering hospitality to strangers and by caring for the poor and the needy whenever the occasion arises, we discharge this social debt. An orthodox Hindu should try to feed a stranger

every day. There are three minimal requirements which must be offered to a guest; a seat, water to drink, and kind words. (See next section on Hospitality)

Bhūta Runa — debts to the elements

Bhūta yajña — And lastly we are part of an environment which is made up of the five elements and consists of plant and animal life (*bhūtas* = elementals). This ecosystem is vital to our survival and thus it is our duty to continually protect it. This is done through tree planting programs, correct farming methods and protection of wildlife, decreasing our consumption of valuable resources. In our homes we can take the effort to limit the amount of water, gas and electricity consumed, by recycling and avoiding the use of plastic bags etc.

These five sacrifices form the basis of Hindu practice. It's the discharging of these debts that form the core of our ritual and social duties. These yajñas unite all Hindus in common practice whereas theological and philosophical beliefs and convictions may differ widely and serve to divide one group from another.

Hospitality

The primary social duty of the householder is hospitality. In Hindu society great emphasis is placed upon the obligation of being hospitable. The three aspects of hospitality are:—

1. Feeding guests and strangers and whoever happens to visit. No visitor should ever remain without food and drink.
2. Accommodation or at least offering a place for a guest to rest.
3. Pleasant and comforting words.

The following are some teachings from the Vishnu Purana on the subject:—

The householder is then (after performing one's daily religious duties) to remain in his courtyard to await a stranger (*atithi*), for as long as it takes to milk a cow (about 12 minutes) or longer if he chooses. If a stranger comes he must be worshiped and welcomed with all due hospitality. He must be offered a seat, and his feet are to be washed. Food should be respectfully served and he should be engaged in pleasant conversation. When he departs, he should be lovingly farewelled — the host accompanying him (for a short distance). The householder should always welcome and venerate with great care as a guest that stranger who comes from another country and whose name

and family are not known. A fellow villager is never considered a guest (*atithi*). He who eats, neglecting an unknown stranger, who is poor and friendless, and who is desirous of eating, goes to hell. VP 3:11:56 - 60

The stranger, who being disappointed, leaves a house and goes elsewhere, transfers his own demerit to the owner of the house and takes away the house-holder's merit.

Brahma, Prajapati, Indra, Agni, the Vasus and Aryama are ever present in the person of a stranger/guest share the food that is offered to him. Therefore O best of men! One should assiduously discharge the duties of hospitality; for one, who eats without giving any to a stranger/guest, feeds upon sin. Thereupon the householder must satisfy with well-prepared meals the young married woman (*suvasini*), the unwell (*duhkhi*), the pregnant woman (*garbhini*), the aged (*vrddha*) and the children (*balaka*) of the house and then only he himself should eat. The householder, who eats without first feeding these, feeds upon his own iniquity and after his death is condemned to hell to feed upon phlegm. He, who eats, without performing ablutions, feeds upon filth; he, who eats without doing japa, feeds upon pus and blood; one who eats unblessed food, drinks urine; and he, who eats before the infants and the others (mentioned previously) is doomed in hell to live on excrement. (V.P. 3:11:67 – 71)

In the evening, the householder, should again, according to his means show hospitality to any stranger/guest who may come, receiving him with the salutation of evening and offering him water to wash his feet, a seat, supper and a bed. The sin, consequent upon not receiving hospitably the stranger who comes after sunset, is eight times greater than that of neglecting one who comes during the day, A person should therefore show particular respect to one who seeks refuge after sunset, for by venerating him all the gods are venerated. The householder should therefore according to his means, give a stranger/guest rice, vegetables, water, a bed, a mat, or if he cannot give any thing more, a space on the ground upon which to lie. (V.P. 3:11:103 - 107)

MARRIAGE AND SEX

Hindus are usually thought of as being rather puritanical about sex and indeed most of our policy makers, elders, and religious leaders are. But this puritanism is more a product of Victorian values imposed upon Indian society than a reflection of the Dharma itself. In fact there are some astounding liberal affirmations made in the Dharma Shastra regarding sexual relations. And it must be remembered that all religious teachings are conditioned by the disposition, the level of spiritual development and the capacity of each individual to practice the teachings.

Celibacy is indeed considered to be the ideal state during studentship, in retirement and off course in renunciation. The ideal spiritual householder should also restrain his/her sexual appetites, but if this ideal cannot be met, then one should indulge oneself within the constraints of Dharma so as not to cause the accumulation of more karma. Many Hindus do not realise that sex is permitted by the Dharma as enjoyment in itself and does not have to be only for procreation. The following verses are given as examples of some other views that the Scriptures have about sexuality to give a more balanced social perspective.

Rules for Sexual Activity Vishnu Purāṇa. 3:11:

111. In proper time, under the influence of an auspicious planet and in an auspicious moment or on even nights (*tithis*) one should have sex with his own wife.

112 – 113. One should not approach a woman who is unbathed, sick, menstruating, unwilling, angry, un-recommended, pregnant, unskilled (*adaksinam*), in love with another (*anya-kamam*), lacking in libido (*akamam*) nor committed to another (*anya-yoshitam*), nor if she is hungry or over-fed. He too should also be free from all these imperfections.

114. When engaging in sexual intercourse (*vyavayam*) one should have taken a bath, be adorned with a garland and perfumes, and be in an aroused and affectionate mood, not disturbed by anxiety.

115. The special days on which the use of body-oils, meat and sex is prohibited is the eighth and fourteenth lunar days, new moon and full-moon and the entrance of the sun into a new zodiac sign (*sankranti*).

116 - 117. On these occasions according to the Scriptures the wise should control their appetites and engage in the worship of the gods, in sacrifice, meditation and japa (recitation of mantras). And he, who acts

otherwise, will be doomed to a hell where he will be constrained to live upon faeces and urine.

118 – 119. Intercourse should not take place in any orifice other than a vagina (*anya-yonau*), nor with other species (*avayonau*), nor should one use accessories (*upayukta*) or aphrodisiacs (*aushadhi*). Intercourse should not be done in a temple, at cross-roads, in cow sheds, in a cremation ground, in a garden or in water.

120. On the occasions (*parvas*) mentioned previously, as well as at the times of sun-set and sun-rise (*sandhya*) the wise should not engage in sexual activities.

122. A man should not have sex with the wife of another, and not even think adulterous thoughts, nor should even discuss it with her.



After having fully enjoyed the union, my (Krishna's) devotee should bathe himself and put on fresh garments. (Varaha Purana 142.33)

A woman is not defiled by a lover nor a brahmin by Vedic rites, nor water by urine and excrement, nor fire by consuming impure substances. (Vasistha 28;1)

Though tainted by sin, whether she be quarrelsome, or have left the house, or have been raped, or kidnapped, a wife should never be abandoned; to forsake her is not prescribed by the sacred law. Let him wait for the time of her courses, by her temporary uncleanness she becomes pure. (Vasistha 28 2-3)

A man who avoids women on the (six) disapproved nights²¹ and on the other nights is regarded as chaste, no matter which of the four stages of life he is in. (Manu 3:50)

²¹ New Moon, Full Moon, 8th and the 14th day of each fortnight. The first 4 nights of the menstrual cycle, the 11th, and the 13th nights. (Vishnu Smṛti 69:1)

CONJUGAL RIGHTS

According to Hindu Law only women have conjugal rights known as the *Ritu*. The *Ritu* which means “season” are the 12 nights after the commencement of the menstrual cycle, excluding the first 3 or 4. It is laid down in many sacred texts that it is the duty of the husband to have sex with his wife during this period. This is known as *Ritu-gamana*. After the menstrual blood has ceased to flow, the woman is advised to purify herself by bathing and wearing clean clothes she should approach her husband and say:— *ṛtum dehi* — give me my conjugal rights — the husband has no right to refuse such a request. (Mbh 13:162.41). In fact a refusal to oblige is considered a heinous sin leading to hell! (Parasara 4:12). In fact it is taught that having sex in the *Ritu* is one of the virtues that lead to heaven. (Mbh. 8:144.13-14) The Sacred Law goes even further and declares that the married couple who only have sex during the *Ritu* are to be considered as celibate. (Mbh. 12:221.11)

This is an interesting law for those who insist on sex only for procreation. Immediately after menstruation it is almost impossible to fall pregnant, the all knowing sages and law-givers must have known this before they formulated such a law and this would support the argument that the Dharma Shastra does sanction having sex for pleasure alone.

