

# VIVAAH SANSKAAR

## HINDU MARRIAGE CEREMONY

Vivah Sanskaar or marriage is the 13<sup>th</sup> of the 16<sup>th</sup> Sanskaars. It is at this time that the individuals now enter the second stage of life, that of a householder (Grihast). Marriage is sacred according to Hindu Dharma. IN this stage, householders have responsibilities and duties towards the training and upbringing of their children, who will be the men and women of tomorrow. The householder is said to be the most important of the four stages of life.

In Vivah Sanskaar, husbands and wives live with the bond of mutual understanding and trust. In that home, where the husband is pleased with the wife, and wife with her husband, happiness will assuredly be forever. Mutual faithfulness will continue until death. This is considered as the summary of the highest law for husband and wife, "according to the Hindu scriptures".

The Vedas and other scriptures teach us that girl children are entitled to the highest education, sanskaars, and studies of the scriptures, and as a woman she is entitled an equal part in all domestic, religious, and social life in the family. As a girl, she is under the guidance and protection of both her mother and father. That guidance and protection has been handed over by the parents of the bride to the groom, which is called **Kanya-Daan**. The Hindu scripture teaches us that by giving away your daughter in this way of marriage is the highest gift that one could give. It has become now the responsibility of the bridegroom, to give protection and comfort to the bride, from today until death.

Marriage is not a social contract, but a religious institutional sacrament. Apart from the two parties, there is also a divine aspect in marriage. It is on this divine aspect that the permanent relationship between husband and wife depends. Every Hindu marriage is a union of Lakshmi and Vishnu.

## MILAAP

Upon the arrival of the wedding party (Baraat) both the fathers of the bride and groom face each other while the Pandit (Hindu Priest) recites the swasti vachan and other appropriate mantras. The father of the bride then greets his samdhee (groom's father) by embracing him. It is customary for the bride's father to give his samdhee a monetary gift.

## DWAAR PUJA

The bride's father, now formally welcomes the Dulha (groom). The Dulha faces the east and the bride's father faces the west, while the pundit leads them to prayers. The bride's father applies chandan (sandalwood) on the Dulha's forehead, places a flower on his head, showers him with rice and then does aarati. He also gives him a monetary gift.

## PARCHAN

The dulha then proceeds towards the entrance where the bride's mother, along with her female relatives welcomes him with the Parchan ceremony. She puts a tika (dye and milk cream) on his forehead, throws four flour-loys in the four directions, does aarati, circles a lota with water over his head three times and then pours a little on the ground. She then embraces him and gives him a monetary gift. The other women do likewise.

## JANWAAS

The dulhan's father escorts his samdhee, the dulha and other relatives to the Janwaas. The Janwaas is a place of rest provided by the bride's father for the wedding party who may be in need of refreshments after a long journey. The pandit of the bride's father welcomes them and recites appropriate shlokas. After which the dulha is given puri and mohan-bhog to eat by the dulhan's father and some water to drink. He also gives him a monetary gift. The rest of the baratees then partake in whatever is available for them to eat and drink.

(Note: Items needed for janwaas include, two pillows, one bedsheet, puri, mohan-bhog, water, soft drinks, sweets, cups, plates etc.)

## IMLEE/NEHCHOOR

While the rites of Janwaas are being done, the bride is brought into the Mandap (Maaro) and sits in front of the kalasha. Her mother sits behind her, wearing the patmouri. Seven mango leaves are used during this ceremony. The mamoo (bride's mother's brother) takes each leaf and circles it over the mother and daughter's heads and gives the bride the tip to bite. She keeps the pieces in her mouth. She is then given a little water in her mouth and she deposits the tips and the water into her mother's right hand. The mother then swallows them all. The brother then gives a gift to his sister; other relatives also give her gifts. The feet and palms of the bride as well as those of her mother are then decorated.

The pandit now enters the mandap to conduct puja (prayers) the bride. Gauree, Ganesh, Lakshmi, and Naugraha pujas are performed. If clothing and other gifts are brought for the bride by the dulha's elder brother (barkaa), they are now presented to the bride. After this ceremony the bride returns inside the house.

## **VARA POOJA**

The bride's father leads the dulha into the mandap (maaro). The dulha's father and close relatives are also invited into the mandap (maaro). The pandit puts five mounds of rice and flowers on the peerhaa. Both the dulha and the bride's father hold each end of the peerhaa and touch the kalasa five times, while the pandit recites the appropriate mantras. The rice and flowers are then shaken off from the peerha onto the bedi, and the peerhaa is placed for the groom to sit on. Kusha grass is placed on the peerhaa. With the dulha facing the east and data (bride's father) facing the west, the data holds the groom's hand and asks him to sit. He then washes the dulha's feet, puts chandan on his forehead, a flower on his head, and performs aarti on him.

## **MADHUPARKA**

The dulhan's father offers sugar, ghee, honey and milk-cream (madhuparka) to the dulha which the groom accepts while the pandit recites the appropriate mantras. The dulha stirs it and then tastes it three times. The groom is then given two paan leaves with rice, flowers and coins, one in each hand. He crosses his hands in front of him and touches the following parts of his body: lips, nostrils, eyes, ears, arms, thighs, and all over the body while appropriate mantras are recited. The bride now returns and sits on the right side of the groom.

## **KANYA DAANA**

The most precious gift the parents of the bride could offer to the groom is their daughter. With the bride's hands in her parents', whose hands are on top of the groom's hand (note right hand should be on top) if flour-loy with jewelry or money is placed in the hands of the bride. The bride's brother pours water from the lota upon the loy, into a thali, while the priest recites the appropriate sankalp.

The bride's parents seek a pledge from the groom of his enduring love, fidelity and security and in caring for the bride and in doing so the groom replies; "Prati Grahaami" – I accept her. The bride's parents bestow their blessings on the bride and groom with rice and flowers.

## **HOMA (AGNI THE SACRED FIRE)**

A sacred fire is lit in the kund to invoke the fire god (Agni). This sacred fire symbolizes not only the illumination of the mind, knowledge and happiness, but is also a clean pure witness to the ceremony as it progresses. The priest chants the appropriate mantras, and offerings of ghee are made into the fire by the groom.

## **JAYAMAALA (EXCHANGE OF GARLANDS)**

Two maalas are made with fresh flowers. With the bride and groom standing and facing each other with a maala, each in their hands, they garland each other. The bride garlands the groom first then the groom garlands the bride.

## **PAANI GRAHAN (TAKING THE HANDS OF THE BRIDE)**

This ceremony marks the beginning of the formal section of the marriage rites. The groom takes the hands of the bride for the prosperity of household life, promising to love, honor and always protect her.

## **LAAJAA HOMA**

The Laajaa Homa is the offering of laawaa (parched paddy) into the fire. Three offerings are made into the sacred fire by the bride and groom.

The bride places her open-palms into the groom's palms. Her brother then fills her hands with the laawaa. Both of them make the three offerings, one-third with each mantra given by the pundit. Here, the bride is saying to the groom: "I offer this oblation into the fire which is witnessing my separation from my parental home, and joining that of my husband. May god bless my husband with long life, and may his family flourish in happiness and prosperity. Oh my husband, I make this offering praying for your progress and prosperity. May there be great affection between us. May god help us along the path."

## **GRANTHI BANDHAN, AGNI PRADAKSHINAA SAATH-BHAVAR (SEVEN CIRCUMAMBULATIONS)**

The bride and groom are joined together by a knot. The knot contains rice, flower, coins and a supari. While this is being done by the Bhabhi (Bhouji) of the bride, the priest invokes the appropriate mantras meaning: "With reverence to Ganesh Ji and Lord Shiva, I make the knot, May It be strong, binding them together for life".

Having been tied together in a knot they walk around the sacrificial fire seven times making oblations. The bride leads the first four times, while the groom leads the next three. The Laawaa is mixed from both sides, and given by the bride's brother. Appropriate mantras recited during these rites include: "We intentionally and voluntarily accept each other. This sacred fire, the Lord and other Devtas are our witnesses. Let both of us have pleasant and loving feelings for each other. May God bless this marriage with children. May both of us, love and keep each other in our hearts and live for one hundred years in peace and happiness.

## **SAPTAPADEE (SEVEN STEPS)**

The bride and groom now make seven steps from south to north with the right foot. These seven steps represent the marriage vows which express:

### **The First Step**

Groom: May God lead you to happiness and an abundance of food grains.

Bride: You have made me responsible for wealth and foodstuffs in the home, in order that I may be able to discharge my duties and serve the household.

#### **The Second Step**

Groom: My God bless you with strength.

Bride: I shall nurture the family and foster harmony by sweet and firm speech. In adversity, I will be firm. In happiness, I shall be happy.

#### **The Third Step**

Groom: My God lead you to greater prosperity.

Bride: I shall always be faithful to you and shall have pleasure being with you. The thought of another person shall never enter my mind.

#### **The Fourth Step**

Groom: May God lead you to bliss.

Bride: I shall adorn myself with jewels and clothing only for you and no one else.

#### **The Five Step**

Groom: May God lead you to the sharing and partnership of our resources.

Bride: I shall always worship God for our welfare but I will only serve you.

#### **The Sixth Step**

Groom: May God lead you to the joy of the seasons.

Bride: I shall always be with you when making sacrifices, offerings, giving charity and when performing other acts for attaining wealth, desires and piety.

#### **The Seventh Step**

Groom: Finally, you have walked seven steps with me, our love and friendship became eternal. We have experienced spiritual union in God. I promise our marriage will forever. You are my dearest friend. May we be faithful to each other. May God lead you towards fulfilling these vows.

Bride: The Gods, the Devtas have all gathered here to witness this marriage, whereby you have become my husband in accordance with the sacred laws.

## **SHILAA-AAROHAN (STEPPING ON THE STONE)**

According to the Vivaaha-Sopaang-Vidhi (a book that deals with marriage), a sil and a lorhaa should be used here. If these are not available, then a stone is used. The bride is asked to put her right foot on the sil or stone. The groom is saying as the sil and lorhaa are used to crush whatever obstacles that come in their path, so you, my bride should have the strength to overcome all obstacles in life. The groom now moves away the bride's foot with his right foot. (please note that the lorhaa should not be touched by the foot, because the kangan is tied to it)

## **SURYA DARSHAN**

Both the bride and groom look to the direction of the sun and pray for brightness and guidance in their lives while the priest recites the following mantra. God is all-vision, pure and benevolent. He desires good for all. By his grace, may we see, hear, speak, live, and enjoy unfettered liberty for as long as he permits us to remain on earth.

## **SAATH-VACHAN (SEVEN REQUESTS MADE BY THE BRIDE)**

Here the bride is saying to the groom that "I am now leaving a happy home, the love and protection of my parents to become your life companion in your home and under your care and protection. I pledge that I will share this householder's life with you, both in pleasure and pain, happiness and sorrows, wealth and poverty, health and illness, fame and infamy. I hereby pledge that I will dwell in all religious observances, and maintain traditions and sanctity of the laws of matrimony under all conditions. But before taking my rightful place on your left side, I must insist that you obey these seven requests. "The bride through her pandit asks the groom to answer her seven conditions.

After the groom has answered these seven requests of the bride, he replies by saying "The promise of my consent, obedience, and upholding of the seven conditions I give to you with pleasure, I call upon the Trinity, the planets, this assembly, and the sacred fire to bear witness of my promise to you. I vow to carry out your seven requests, and I now ask that you vow to keep this one condition of mine, which is outlined in five parts. "The groom's pandit will speak on his behalf and if he does not have a priest, then the pandit performing the ceremony continues.

The bride replies to the groom, "Oh my beloved, I shall always be devoted to you alone in thought, word and deed carrying out my wifely duties in accordance with the laws of Dharma." The bride now moves across and sits on the left side of the bridegroom.

## **SINDOOR DAAN**

The bride and groom are covered with a white sheet, and the groom applies the sindoor (vermillion) to the middle part of the bride's head where the hair is parted upwards. This is done seven times. Sindoor on the forehead indicates that she is a married woman. The groom takes off the cover from his head when he is finished and leaves the bride covered. The sister-in-law of the bride then goes under the sheet, and adjusts the sindoor on the bride's head if it is not done properly. The sheet is then taken off the head of the bride. A monetary gift is given to the sister-in-law, by the groom's father.

At the time of the sindoor daan, the grandparents, parents, and other close relatives should not be looking at the proceedings. It is for this reason that they are covered. This part of the ceremony is very sacred. The wife should always wear sindoor while her husband is alive.

## **EXCHANGE OF RINGS**

The bride gives a ring to the groom first, and then the groom gives a ring to the bride.

## **TAAJ PAAT**

During this part of the ceremony the elder brother of the groom make a pledge to the bride that he would be an impartial arbiter during time s in difficulties. With her acceptance the barkha (groom's elder brother) place the tag paat (pink woolen garland) on the bride's neck.

This act indicates to her, that should his father die, he would ensure that all goes well with her. He is also assuming the responsibilities of feeding, clothing, and protecting the bride, if the bridegroom is unable to do so at any time. The bride should treat him with great respect. There should be no physical contact between the two, only if her life is in danger. In some cases, this ceremony is performed at the beginning of the marriage where prior consent by the bride was not given. It is for this reason that this part is performed towards the end of the marriage after consent has obtained from the bride.

## **HOMA (HAVAN)**

The bride and groom perform (havan) offerings into the sacred fire for the first time as a married couple.

## **BREAKING THE FLOWER**

The bride and groom are asked to break a flower each into tiny pieces. The breaking for the flowers symbolize the irreversible commitment the bride and groom are making to each other on this day. A

flower broken in several pieces can never be put back together, reminding us that love and human relations are fragile and must be protected and treated with tenderness and care.

### **AASHIRVAAD (BLESSINGS)**

The grandparents, parents, relatives and guests should come close to the mandap. They should stand at this time with rice and flowers in their hands. Together they join with the priest to shower their blessings on the bride and groom.

### **END OF CEREMONY**

### **KHITCHAREE**

According to family customs, and in an effort to give the newly married couple a financial start, the bridegroom and his party in the mandap are invited to eat at his father-in-law's home for the first time. He is given gifts and money by the family and friends of the bride. Then he and his relatives partake in the meal provided.