

Sri LakshmiNarayanaya Namaha

Lakshmi Narayanaou Vande Jagatam Adi Dampateem Sarvakalyana Siddhyartham Hridayaikyam Sadashritou

I Prostrate to Sri Lakshmi and Sriman Narayana, the world's First Divine Couple, who are eternally inseparable with united heart for blessing auspiciousness to all.

VIVAHA SAMSKARA (Wedding Ceremony)

Introduction :

Samskaras are specific rituals and sacraments that awaken, strengthen, nourish and refine the mind. The samskaras done with sincerity and knowledge will provide both materialistic and spiritual prosperities. The various samskaras to be performed at various stages of human life are given by Rishis (Sages) in Shastras (Vedic scriptures). There are about forty samskaras. However, in these times, sixteen samskaras are popularly known. These samskaras include various stages of human life, such as starting from the stage of Embryo, development in Womb, Birth, Naming, Feeding of solid food, Hair cutting, initiation into Vedic studies, Graduation and Wedding etc. Among these samaksaras, **Vivaha** is a very important from all perspectives namely physical, psychological, social, cultural and spiritual.

Main Steps in the Wedding Ceremony

1. **Vighneswara/Vishvaksena Pooja** : This pooja is carried out to seek the blessings of the Lord Vighneswara (Ganesha), remover of obstacles or Lord Vishvaksena, the Chief Commander of Lord Vishnu. The prayers include seeking protection of the Lord from any type of obstacles to the ceremonies.
2. **Vara Pooja** : In this step, the Bridegroom and his party is invited with respect and offered gifts from the Bride's parents.
3. **Madhu Parka** : In this step, the bride's parents offer the Madhu Parka (mixture of honey and yogurt) for the bridegroom to eat.
4. **Pratisara Bandha (Raksha Bandhan)** : In this step, a sacred turmeric color thread is tied to Bridegroom's right hand by his father and then the Bridegroom ties to the left hand of the Bride. This signifies the blessed determination to begin the ceremonies.

5. **Kashiyatra** : In this step, the Bridegroom expresses interest in visiting the holy place of Kashi (Benares), the seat of higher learning. At this time, the Bride's father offers his daughter and asks the Bridegroom to take her with him so that they can advance in knowledge together.
6. **Sambandha Malike** : The Bridegroom agreeing to the offer of Bride's father comes back to the marriage hall. At this coming back, the Bride and Bridegroom exchanges garlands three times. The exchange begins with Bride's first garlanding the Bridegroom. A veil is placed between the bride and bridegroom before the garland exchange begins.
7. **Kanya daana** : In this step, the Bride's father gives his daughter to the Bridegroom. Here the family background details (gotra pravara) of both Bride and Bridegroom are narrated. In this step, the bridegroom promises the Bride's father that he will not transgress the guidelines of dharma (duty), artha (wealth) and kama (desire).
8. **Mangalya Dharana** : In this step, a sacred turmeric colored thread with a religious pendent is tied by the Bridegroom around the neck of Bride. This tying of thread signifies the long term bonding of married life.
9. **Panigrahana** : In this step, the Bridegroom holds the right hand of the Bride and with sacred fire as witness thanks the Gods for blessing the Bride with various energies. The cloths of the bride and bridegroom are also tied.
10. **Saptapadi** : Here, the Bridegroom brings the Bride and asks her to keep her right foot on seven heaps (one at a time) of rice. At each step, a mantra is recited. The seven mantras mean -
 - May Lord Vishnu guide and help provide food.
 - May Lord Vishnu guide and help provide strength.
 - May Lord Vishnu guide and help provide energy to do noble actions.
 - May Lord Vishnu guide and help provide happiness in life.
 - May Lord Vishnu guide and help provide wealth.
 - May Lord Vishnu guide and help provide favorable environment.
 - May Lord Vishnu guide and help provide sacred services (yajnas).

After these seven steps, the Bridegroom makes assertions to the Bride, such as

"you are my friend. We will always be friends to each other. May we be united together in thoughts, speech and actions. I represent heaven, you represent earth. I represent meaning, you represent speech. We will understand each other and be happy together"

11. **Pradhana Homa** : In this homa, through the sacred fire, the Bridegroom and Bride offer various sacred materials to divinities seeking their blessings.
12. **Ashmarohana** : In this step, the Bridegroom asks the Bride to keep her right foot on a stone and recites a mantra that means "*we need to be strong like this stone to face challenges and difficulties that we encounter in our life* "
13. **Lajahoma** : In this homa, the Bride's brother offers puffed rice to the sacred fire. This is to wish good health and life for the Bridegroom. Then the Bridegroom and Bride go clockwise around the sacred fire.
14. **Conclusion** : The Bridegroom and Bride perform some concluding rituals and they offer prostration to the sacred fire, the Gods and all elders and seek their blessings.

**Santushto Bharyaya Bharta Bhartra Bharyaa Tathavaicha
Yashminneva Kule Nityam Kalyanam Tatra Vai Dhruvam**

It is certain that a family will be always joyful and prosperous wherein the husband is happy due to his wife and equally the wife is happy with her husband.

(These brief notes are prepared by M.G. Prasad, Maplewood, New Jersey)