Hindu Wedding Rituals

13 Steps of a Vedic Marriage Ceremony

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Hindu wedding rituals may vary in detail depending on which part of India the bride and the groom come from. Notwithstanding regional variations and diversity of languages, culture, and customs, the basic tenets of a Hindu marriage are common throughout the Indian subcontinent.

Basic Steps of a Hindu Wedding

While various regional steps are followed by different sects of Hindus across India, the following 13 steps form the core of any type of Vedic wedding ceremony:

1. *Vara Satkaarah*: Reception of the bridegroom and his kinsmen at the entrance gate of the wedding hall where the officiating priest chants a few mantras and the bride's mother blesses the groom with rice and trefoil and applies *tilak* of vermillion and turmeric powder.

2. *Madhuparka Ceremony*: Reception of the bridegroom at the altar and bestowing of presents by the bride's father.

3. *Kanya Dan*: The bride's father gives away his daughter to the groom amidst the chanting of sacred mantras.
4. **Vivah-Homa**: The sacred fire ceremony ascertaining that all auspicious undertakings are begun in an atmosphere of purity and spirituality.

5. **Pani-Graham**: The groom takes the right hand of the bride in his left hand and accepts her as his lawfully wedded wife.

6. **Pratigna-Karan**: The couple walks around the fire, the bride leading, and take solemn vows of loyalty, steadfast love, and life-long fidelity to each other.

7. **Shila Arohan**: The mother of the bride helps the bride to step onto a stone slab and counsels her to prepare herself for a new life.

1. **Laja-Homah**: Puffed rice are offered as oblations into the sacred fire by the bride while she keeps the palms of her hands over those of the groom.

2. **Parikrama or Pradakshina or Mangal Fera**: The couple circles the sacred fire seven times. This aspect of the ceremony legalizes the marriage according to the Hindu Marriage Act as well as custom.

3. **Saptapadi**: The marriage knot is symbolized by tying one end of the groom's scarf with the bride's dress. Then they take seven steps representing nourishment, strength, prosperity, happiness, progeny, long life, and harmony and understanding, respectively.

4. **Abhishek**: Sprinkling of water, meditating on the sun and the pole star.

5. **Anna Praashan**: The couple makes food offerings into the fire then feed a morsel of food to each other, expressing mutual love and affection.

6. **Aashirvadah**: Benediction by the elders.

**Pre- and Post-Wedding Rituals**

Besides the above mandatory rituals, most Hindu weddings also include a few other fringe customs that are observed before and soon after the marriage ceremony.

Typical of an **arranged marriage**, when the two families agree on the marriage proposal, a betrothal ceremony known as *roka* and *sagai* are held, during which the boy and the girl may exchange rings to mark their vows and sanctify the agreement.

It may be noted that on the day of the wedding, an auspicious bath or **Mangal Snan** is arranged, and it is customary to apply turmeric and sandalwood paste on the body and face of the bride and the groom. Most girls also like to wear Mehendi or **Henna** tattoos on their hands and feet.

In a light and informal setting, a custom of singing or **Sangeet**, mainly by the women of the household, is also organized. In certain communities, the maternal uncle or maternal grandfather presents the girl with a set of bangles as a symbol of their blessings. It is also customary that the husband gifts the wife a necklace called **mangalsutra** after the marriage ceremony to complete the rituals.

The wedding ceremony effectively concludes with the ritual of **Doli**, symbolic of the happiness of the bride’s family in sending off their girl with her life partner to start a new family and live a happy married life. **Doli** comes from the word **palanquin**, which alludes to the carriage that was used in olden times as a mode of transport for the gentry.