

# HINDUISM Part 2: Notes on Hindu Wedding Ceremony



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**A Hindu wedding** ceremony is the second of the four **Ashrams**. Each Ashram has specific **duties or dharma** that a person must follow. **The Grihastha** Ashram is known as household life and for taking an active role in the care and protection of one's family and responsibility to society. Wedding ceremonies in the UK are traditionally conducted in the ancient language, Sanskrit and brief translations can be given by the priest.

The pre-wedding ceremonies include **an engagement**, (involving **Vagdhana**, **an oral agreement**. **A Lagna Patra**, **a written declaration**, and arrival of the marriage party at the bride's residence, often in the form of a marriage procession. The post-marriage ceremonies involve welcoming the bride to her new home.

An important thing to note is that despite the fact that modern Hinduism is based on the **Puja**, the worship of *devas* as enshrined in the **Puranas**. A Hindu marriage ceremony is essentially a Vedic yajña (a fire-sacrifice). The primary witness of a Hindu marriage is the fire-deity (or the Sacred Fire) **Agni dev**, and by law and by tradition, no Hindu marriage is deemed complete unless in the presence of the Sacred Fire, seven encirclements have been made around it by the bride and the groom together.

**Important Marriage ceremonies: The Hindu marriage ceremonies vary in different regions and according to family traditions. The major ceremonies are the following.**

- **Ganesh Puja** - Invoking Lord Ganesh to remove obstacles.
- **Agni Puja** - Evoking the holy fire as a witness and seeking his blessings.
- **Kanyādāna** - Giving away the bride to the groom. Of many auspicious charities. Giving your daughter in marriage is considered one of the most auspicious. As a condition for offering his daughter for marriage, the father of the bride requests a promise from the groom for assisting the bride in realizing their spiritual and material duties. The groom makes the promises by repeating them three times.
- **Mangalsutra** - Tying of holy necklace on bride.
- **Saptapadi/ Saat Phere** - The Seven Holy Steps circling the fire
- **Śilārōhana** - Bride steps on the stone.



The ceremonies involve the Pandit (priest) chanting various prayers and mantras.

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**Saat phere** is an important part of the wedding ceremony, undertaken by the bride and the groom around a sacred fire. Saat means seven and *Phere* means circumambulation. The vows taken in front of Agnidev, the fire God, who acts both, as a witness and one who offers his blessings. The vows or promises are considered sacred and unbreakable. *The bride and groom* circumambulate the fire seven times reciting the following prayers:

1. With the first step, the couple ask God for plenty of pure and nourishing food. They promise to share this with the less fortunate.
2. With the second step, the couples pray to give them the mental, physical and spiritual strength to lead a healthy life. They promise to share their joys and sorrows.
3. The third step is for preserving wealth, prosperity and virtuous, noble and heroic children. They promise to live with honour and respect.
4. With the fourth step, they pray for attainment of happiness and harmony by mutual love and trust between themselves and within the family including, respect for elders.
5. With the fifth step, they pray for the welfare of all living beings in the Universe. They promise to protect and give in charity to the vulnerable in society, including children and the elderly.
6. With the sixth step, to give them a long, joyous life and togetherness forever.
7. With the seventh, and last, step, for understanding, companionship. They promise each other loyalty and unity with love and sacrifice.

Additional information: Google search, images: Hindu Weddings.



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Cover of a typical Hindu wedding Invitation

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## Key Roles

- Bride
- Groom
- Priest
- Bride's parents
- Groom's parents
- Bride's maternal uncle/s (*maamaa*)
- Bride's brothers (can also be a cousin)
- Best man, usually the Groom's brother in law.
- Chorus: a few women who know how to sing traditional Indian slokas

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## Glossary

- **Ashrams: Four stages of life and development:**
  1. **Bramachari Ashram or Student Life** – Learning, values and qualities.
  2. **Grihasta Ashram: Married Life/Householder** – Married Life. Responsibility to family and Society. To give charity and help the poor and vulnerable.
  3. **Vanaprastha Ashram: Retired Life** – Devotee more time to spiritual matters.
  4. **Sannyasa Ashram: Renounced Life-** Devotee more time to spiritual matters.
- **Dharma:** Religious and social responsibilities and duties.
- **Grihasta:** Married life and responsibility to family and society.
- **Vagdhana:** an oral agreement of marriage.
- **Lagna Patra:** a written declaration of marriage.
- **Puranas:** Hindu holy scriptures
- **Puja:** Ceremony
- **Agni Dev:** Fire God
- **Ganesh Puja** - Ceremony Invoking Lord Ganesh to remove obstacles.
- **Agni Puja** – Ceremony evoking the holy fire as a witness and seek his blessings
- **Kanyadana** – (Kanya - unmarried woman, dana,-charity). Considered one of the highest acts of charity. A father gives his daughter hand in marriage to the groom.
- **Mangalsutra** - Tying of holy necklace on bride.
- **Saptapadi** – Taking seven steps or vows
- **Saat Phere** ( Saat- seven, Phere- circumbulating). The Seven Holy Steps circling the fire.
- A small, stylized illustration in pink and purple showing a bride in a sari performing the Saat Phere ritual, circling a fire.
- **Śilārōhana** - Bride steps on the stone.

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