# Vivaha Gujarati

**The Hindu Wedding**

## Introduction to Hinduism

Hindus believe in the existence of a Supreme Being. This Being is described in the Vedas (scripture) as “unmanifest, unthinkable, and unchanging.” The Supreme Being manifests in this world in different forms and at different times as Rama, Krishna, Vishnu, Shiva, etc. Hindus also believe that the soul is divine and eternal. It is neither created nor destroyed, but is reborn through many lifetimes in this world. When a soul has found release from this cycle of rebirth is it said to have achieved liberation (moksha).

Hindus also accepts all religions as true and valid paths to God. In the Bhagavad Gita, Shri Krishna says, “Whenever there is a decline in dharma (righteousness) and an increase in adharma (unrighteousness), at that time I manifest Myself.” In this way, all religions are seen as the manifestation of the Divine into this world.

## The Hindu Wedding

The traditional Hindu wedding is a deeply meaningful and symbolic combination of rituals and traditions. It is a ceremony that has roots going back about 4000 years. Each phase of the ceremony has a symbolic, philosophical, and spiritual meaning. The ceremony not only joins the souls of the bride and groom, but also creates a strong tie between two families. The ceremony is traditionally performed in Sanskrit, which is the language of ancient India and Hinduism. Today the ceremony will be performed both in Sanskrit and English. The following sequence of rituals represents the highlights of the ceremony.

## Mangala Vadyam

The Sanskrit word for marriage is vivaha, which literally means “what supports or carries.” The Vivaha ceremony is therefore a sacred ceremony meant to create a union that supports and carries a man and woman throughout their married life in the pursuit of righteousness (dharma).

The wedding ceremony begins with Mangala Vadyam, or the playing of the auspicious Shenai, a trumpet-like instrument.

## Milni

The bride’s family greets the groom. He receives the red tilaka (red powder) mark on his forehead signifying the Lord’s blessing upon him. He is led to the wedding canopy (mandapa) under which the ceremony will take place.

## Kashi Yatra

For a higher spiritual purpose the groom is given a final opportunity to leave before the bride enters. He is asked if he would like to abandon worldly life and lead the life of an ascetic. The father of the bride requests the groom not to leave, but to stay and marry his daughter.

## Kanya Agamanam/Jaya Mala

While the bride is escorted to the wedding canopy (mandapa). the groom is hidden behind a curtain (antarpat). The groom may be teased about the bride he has not yet seen. The priest will lower the curtain and the bride and groom will shower each other with rice. The rice represents prosperity, but is also said to establish dominance in the marriage. The person who throws the rice first will be the most authoritative in the marriage! The bride and groom exchange flower garlands signifying their acceptance of each other.

## Ganesha Puja

The wedding ceremony begins with the worship of Shri Ganesha, the remover of all obstacles and provider of good luck. All traditional Hindu ceremonies begin with invocation of Ganesha. Other pujas are also performed evoking the presence of other forms of God to preside over the wedding ceremony.

## Hasta Melap/Vara Mala

Hasta Melap literally means the “joining of hands”. The parents of the bride place the hands of their daughter into the hands of the groom. They then place a sacred cord (Vara Mala) around both the bride and groom which joins them together. The bride’s parents ask the groom to accept their daughter as his equal partner throughout life. The groom gratefully accepts.

## Vivaha Homam

The great messenger of the Gods, Agnideva the fire God, is evoked to witness the proceedings. The priest lights a sacred fire in the presence of the bride and groom. Throughout the ceremony, the bride, groom and the priest add ghee, clarified butter, to the fire to keep it burning. Rice and other ingredients are added to the fire at various times.

## Aajya Homam

The groom places offerings of ghee into the sacred fire, asking for the protection of the bride.

## Ashma Kramana/Laaja Homam

The bride places her right foot onto a stone and with the assistance of her brothers makes offerings of puffed rice into the sacred fire, asking for the protection of her husband. The stone symbolizes the earth. The act of placing the bride’s foot upon the stone means that she should become strong and fixed like the earth.

## Druva Darshana

The bride and groom gaze up at the pole star (Druvaloka) and meditate on stability in the marriage union. Each night as the stars rotate in the sky, the pole star always remains fixed. In the same way as life is constantly changing the union of the bride and groom should remain fixed like the pole star, Druvaloka.

## Granthi Bandhanam

One corner of groom’s shawl is tied to the end of the brides sari. This signifies the union of two souls.

## Phera

The bride and groom walk around the holy fire four times, symbolizing the walk of life. Human life is seen to have four great goals called purusharthas: dharma, artha, kama and moksha. The bride leads the groom through the first three rounds while the groom leads the bride through the last round. The first round represents the attainment of dharma, or righteous conduct and the fulfillment of civic and religious responsibilities. The second round is for the attainment of artha, the accumulation of wealth and prosperity. This leads to the third round which is for the attainment of kama, life’s enjoyments. Finally, the bride and groom exchange places and the groom leads the bride around the fire on the fourth round enacting the attainment of moksha, life’s spiritual values.

## Saptapadi

The bride and groom take seven steps together, symbolizing the beginning of their journey through life as partners. These seven steps reflect their guiding principles in life. As they take each step, the bride and groom exchange the following vows:

Together we will...

1. Share in the responsibility of the home
2. Fill our hearts with strength and courage
3. Prosper and share our worldly goods
4. Fill our hearts with love, peace, happiness, and spiritual values
5. Be blessed with loving children
6. Attain self-restraint and longevity
7. Be best friends and eternal partners

The bride and groom now return to their seats, but this time the bride sits on the left side of the groom. As a married woman she is given a place of honor at her husband’s left side.

## Mangalya Dharanam/Ring Exchange

The groom gives the bride a mangala sutra, a necklace made of gold and onyx. This necklace also identifies her as a married woman. The mangala sutra is the equivalent of the wedding ring, which may also be exchanged at this time.

## Sindura Danam

The groom places a special red powder between the parting of the bride’s hair. This red line identifies the bride as a married woman.

## Declaration

The bride and groom make an oath to each other declaring that they love each other and will remain devoted to each other through all times.

## Kansar Bhoj

The newly married couple feed each other sweets representing their first meal together.

## Aashirvaad

The priest gives blessings to the couple. The newly married couple then seeks the blessings of the priest and family and friends. The family and friends bestow their blessings by showering them with flower petals.

## Akhand Sabhagyavati

Senior ladies of the bride’s family come and give blessings to the couple.

## Vidhai

The couple prepare to leave the mandapa. The wife throws rice behind her as she leaves the stage for her husbands home. This symbolizes that she is leaving some wealth behind.