# The Hindu Marriage Ceremony

Marriage in the Hindu tradition is a sacred and ancient ceremony with rituals based on the Vedas, or Hindu Scriptures. It is the thirteenth of sixteen rites of passage that carry Hindus on the lifetime path of Dharma, or righteousness. Priests have performed this ceremony for over 5,000 years, using traditional Sanskrit invocations, chants, and prayers to ensure lifelong blessings and happiness for the couple.

## Arrival of the Groom

Rabinder and his family are welcomed by the bride’s parents. Rabinder enters the Mandap (a sacred canopy under which the holy ceremony takes place) The four-pillared structure represents the four goals of a fulfilled Hindu life: Dharma (righteousness), Artha (wealth), Kama (desire), and Moksha (eternal bliss/salvation). The symbolism of the Mandap goes further with each pillar being understood to represent the four parents of the couple, without whose support, love and blessings, the marriage would not have come to take place. Suchita’s parents offer Rabinder Panchamrutham, a sweetened drink of five nectars (milk, ghee, honey, yoghurt and brown sugar/jaggery).

## Ganapathi Pooja

The Priest offers a prayer to Lord Ganesha, the remover of all obstacles, to ensure that the ceremony takes place smoothly, as Rabinder prays for a long and blissful married life with his bride.

## Punyaahavaachanam

The Priest uses three sacred vessels (Kalasas) filled with turmeric, vermilion and water, and covered with a coconut, to sanctify the site and the articles of the ceremony.

## Rakshaabandhanam

A sanctified thread (Raksha) is tied to Rabinder’s wrist to protect against any malevolence.

## Arrival of the Bride

Suchita enters, carrying a coconut decorated with turmeric and vermilion, symbolizing prosperity. As she enters the Mandap, a cloth screen (Therachekka/Therisella) is held between her and Rabinder. As per tradition, the Bride and Groom are not to see each other until the auspicious moment, or Sumuhurtham.

## Kanyaadaanam

Giving away the bride is considered a parent’s most magnificent offering and precious gift. Suchita’s parents instruct Rabinder to keep Suchita as his equal partner for life.

## Sumuhurtham, Jeelakarra Bellam and Madhuparkam

At this auspicious moment, the Sumuhurtham, Suchita and Rabinder place a special paste on each other’s heads. The inseparable paste is made of slightly bitter cumin seeds (jeelakarra) and sweet brown sugar (jaggery/bellam), symbolizing that Rabinder and Suchita will also remain inseparable through life’s bitter and sweet times. After this, Suchita will receive the Madhuparkam, (white wedding clothes), in the form of a special sari, gifted by her mother-inlaw. The white sari symbolizes purity and the red border represents strength. She will excuse herself to change into this sari.

## Kankana Dhaaranam

Suchita and Rabinder tie sacred yellow threads, fastened to a piece of turmeric (Kankanam) to each other’s wrists as protection from obstacles.

## Maangalya Pooja, Maangalya Dhaarnanam and Maala Dhaaranam

The Mangalasutra is a holy yellow thread with two gold discs symbolizing marriage and the sacred bond between husband and wife. Rabinder ties this thread around Suchita’s neck with three knots, representing the Trimurthi or “Great Trinity” (Brahma-the creator, Vishnu-the preserver and Maheswara (Shiva)-the destroyer). They then exchange garlands (Maalas).

## Thalambraalu

Suchita and Rabinder joyously shower each other with holy rice mixed with turmeric powder, flowers and pearls in an abundant flow that signifies happiness, health, harmony, wealth and a loving and blessed family.

## Paanigrahanam

The couple holds hands and takes their vows in the presence of God and those assembled. They are instructed to be compassionate, loving and sympathetic towards each other and to maintain the strong bonds of family throughout their lives together.

## Homam

Pradhaana Homam
The couple takes their seat beside the sacred fire to conduct the “Pradhaana Homam”. Sixteen Mantras are recited as an accompaniment to the pouring of ghee and puffed rice into the fire. Through this offering, Suchita prays for a long life for Rabinder. The couple then circles the fire three times.

## Silaarohanam

Suchita places each foot on a rock symbolizing her strength in good and bad times. Rabinder places a ring on her toe.

## Brahmamudi

Suchita and Rabinder invoke the blessings of God. The Priest ties the ends of their garments in a matrimonial knot four times before they circle the holy fire. This represents lifelong unity and the four life principles of Dharma (being just and righteous), Artha (earning an honest living), Kama (love for each other) and Moksha (eternal bliss).

## 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:

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

## Arundhati Darsanam

Suchita and Rabinder then participate in the Arundhathi Darshana. In this rite, they are shown the Saptha Rishi Mandala, seven stars in the Great Bear constellation that represent the seven sages who are the originators of Vedic love and their families, and the small star Arundhathi underneath the star of Vashistha. The sight (darshan) of these great sages reminds the couple of the heritage they are a part of and the debt they owe to these sages.

## Kamma Kadiyam

Two rings – one precious and one brass – are placed into a pot of water. Suchita and Rabinder will compete to find them first.

## Aasirvaadam and Mangala Haarati

The couple stands before family and friends to receive blessings. May God grant peace and blessings to all on this wonderful day when Suchita & Rabinder are united before God.