# Hindu Wedding Ceremony

Chanted by the priest in Sanskrit verse, the prayers that compose the Hindu wedding ceremony are derived from Vedic scriptures that are over four thousand years old.

## Barat (Groom's parade)

The groom arrives on a decorated horse accompanied by his family and friends in the form of a parade.

## Milni (Greeting the Party)

The bride's family receives the groom and his family. It is very typical for each relative to embrace his counterpart - grooms and bride's fathers, maternal uncles (mamas) and paternal uncles (chachas) - in the other family at least 3 times each.

## Var Puja (The Welcoming of the Groom)

Accompanied by his family and his attendants, the groom arrives at the site of the ceremony, and is greeted by the bride’s parents. The mother of the bride welcomes the groom with an aarti, or prayer, and welcomes him to the ceremony. After receiving the blessings of his elders, the groom is escorted by the parents of the bride to the Mandap accompanied by his parents and groomsmen.

## Ganesh Puja (Worship of Lord Ganesh)

To commence the Hindu wedding ceremony, a prayer is offered to Lord Ganesha, the elephant God, whose blessings will remove any major obstacles from the ceremony and from the couple's new life together. Ganesha is the Lord of all circumstances; therefore no Hindu ritual or auspicious occasion is ever undertaken without Him. Jasmine garlands and the Mangalsutra (sacred wedding necklace) are placed at Ganesha's feet to invoke his blessings. His grace will overcome all obstacles, destroy all evils, and enable the ceremony to proceed with tranquility.

## The Entrance of the Bride

The bride arrives and is escorted by her sisters, bridesmaids, and flower girl to the site of the ceremony.

## Jaimala (Exchange of Garlands)

The bride and groom exchange garlands symbolizing their willingness to accept each other

## Kanya Daan (Giving Away Their Daughter)

The bride’s father joins the hands of his daughter and the groom, declaring to all gathered that he hands her to the care of the man of her heart. The bride’s father seeks a pledge from the groom of his enduring love, fidelity, and security in caring for the bride. Once the groom has agreed, the bride and groom both pledge to support each other in fulfilling the four goals of human life: Dharma, the duty to lead a moral life; Artha, the duty to lead a joyous and fruitful life; Karma, the duty to lead a pleasant and productive life; Moksha, the duty to attain enlightenment.

## Gath Bandhan & Phere (Circling the Fire)

The bride and the groom are joined together by tying a corner of their outer garments, symbolizing the bond of marriage. After this a small open fire is lit in the center and the fire God is invited to witness the marriage. Fire, a purifying agent, is also a source of energy. Only fire can separate this bond of unity between bride and groom. The couple walks around the sacred fire seven times, making it a witness of their union as husband and wife.

## Saptapadi (Taking Seven Steps)

Saptapadi is translated in Sanskrit to mean “seven steps”. These steps are representative of the marriage vows. The priest then guides the bride and groom to take seven steps hand in hand around the sacred fire. The number seven refers to the earth, sun, moon, and the four planets visible to the naked eye all locked together in harmonious interrelationships governed by a single law. The Saptapadi is the most important ritual of the wedding ceremony.

The Priest recites the following hymns detailing their vows:

With God as a guide, let us take,

1. The first step to provide nourishment and pure food for our houehold,
2. The second step to develop our physical, mental and spiritual powers,
3. The third step to increase our wealth by righteous means and diligence
4. The fourth step to acquire knowledge, happiness and harmony by mutual love and trust,
5. The fifth step to be blessed with strong, virtuous and heroic children,
6. The sixth step to have self restraint and longetivity,
7. The seventh step to become true companions and remain lifelong partners by this wedlock.

Having taken these steps together, I assure you that I will not swerve from the path of my love and friendship with you. Let our thoughts, decisions, and actions be one and in unison. Let us be kind, loving, considerate, good and open-hearted to each other. Let us share our food, possessions, strengths, and advantages together. Let us be complementary to each other as thought and speech are to each other.

The saptapadi ceremony concludes with a hymn signifying that the union is eternal. The bride and groom are pronounced husband and wife.

## Mungalsutra & Sindoor Daan (Placing Red Powder on Bride's Head and Necklace Around Her Neck)

The groom now places sindhur, or red powder, on the crown of the bride’s forehead and welcomes her into his life. The sindhur is indicative of a blood union, and it is the unmistakable mark of a married woman. He then places a Mangalsutra (necklace) around her neck, symbolizing his enduring commitment to their marriage.

## Ashirvad (Prayer and Blessings)

Once the wedding rituals have been completed, the couple touches the feet of their parents and the priest, asking for their Aashirwaad, or blessings.

## Vidai (Departure of Bride and Groom)

Vidaai marks the departure of the bride from her parental house. She throws phulian or puffed rice over her head. She conveys her good wishes for her parents through this gesture. A beautifully decorated palanquin or car takes her to her new home. The bride and groom leave as a married couple and receive blessings and shower of flower petals from all of their guests.