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**Vedic Vivaah Sanskaar (Sacrament)**

**(Hindu Wedding Ceremony)**

**Introduction**

The Vedic wedding ceremony is over 4000 years old. The ceremony is performed in Sanskrit under a Mandap, a 4 pillared structure which represent the 4 Vedas (sacred Hindu scriptures).

The ceremony is conducted in front of ***Agni*** (fire), which personifies the power and light of God. The holy fire acts as a divine witness to the union and brings warmth throughout married life.

Each part in the ceremony has a symbolic, philosophical and spiritual meaning.

The wedding not only represents the union of two souls but also the joining of families.

**Bharat**

Dipak arrives in a grand procession with his family and friends as they make their entrance to the wedding.

**Milni**

The groom alongside his family and friends are welcomed and greeted by the bridal party with garlands and embrace.

**Arrival of the Groom**

Dipak is escorted to the wedding mandap by his family.

**Arrival of the Bride**

Anika is escorted to the mandap by her parents and sister.

The ***sanskaras*** (sacraments) followed are:

***1. Jai Maalaa*** *(Wedding garland)*

 Dipak and Anika greet each other and exchange flower garlands signifying their mutual respect and acceptance of each other.

 **2. *Praarthanaa Mantra*** *(Prayers)*

 Veda Mantras are chanted to invoke the blessings of the supreme Lord.

***3. Madhu Parka*** *(Ceremony to ensure friendship)*

 Anika offers Dipak a mixture of honey and yoghurt. Honey symbolises the sweetness of eternal love and yogurt is for good health.

**4. *Aachamana****(Purification)*

 Water is sipped three times for purification of the heart and body.

***5. Mauli Bandhan*** *(Tying the religious thread)*

 Coloured threads are tied on Anika and Dipak’s wrists and family in the *mandap* participating in the marriage ceremony, for them to receive blessings from God.

***6. Kanyaadaan (****Giving parental consent and blessings to the daughter)*

 The parents of Anika place her right hand on the right hand of Dipak giving their consent to the marriage. The act of giving one's daughter's hand in marriage is considered the ultimate offering a parent can give.

***7.******Agni Pranidhaan*** *(Kindling the sacred fire)*

 The wedding is solemnised before fire, the symbol of knowledge power and purity.

***8. Yajna or Havan*** *(Fire ritual)*

 Hindus believe that fire is the sustainer of life and symbolises the illumination of the mind, knowledge and happiness. Anika and Dipak perform the *havan* to commence the religious ceremony. *Ghee* (clarified butter) and *saamagree* (mixture of herbs, spices and grains) are put into the sacred fire amidst the reciting of *mantras* (hymns from The Vedas) to invoke the blessings of God.

***9. Paani Grahan and Pratijnyaa*** *(Taking of the sacred vows)*

 Dipak takes Anika’s hand and they both make a solemn pledge before God that they have become one and will forever love each other. The following sacred vows are taken:

* *I accept you as my wife/husband. May you live long with me in love, harmony and understanding.*
* *From today let us surrender ourselves to each other and never be unkind or unloving to each other.*
* *Through the grace of God I have, this day, accepted you as my soul mate and nothing shall be dearer than you.*
* *Together with you I shall fulfil my duties of the Grihastha Aashram (building of a happy home) and may you enjoy a joyful life with me.*
* *I entreat the blessings of Almighty God on this union.*
* *May the elements of nature help us to create righteous children and a virtuous family.*
* *I shall always remain true and faithful to you and I promise to support you emotionally, mentally and physically as required by our Dharma (righteous duty).*

***10. Gatha Bandhan*** *(Tying of the knot)*

 The *chunnis* (scarves) worn by Anika and Dipak are tied together symbolising their unity forever.

***11. Shilaa Rohan*** *(Rock ceremony)*

 Anika’s right foot is placed on a piece of rock by her brothers signifying that the bride and groom promise to remain true to each other, as firm as a rock, regardless of any obstacles in life.

***12. Laajaa Homa*** *(Parched rice ceremony)*

 Parched rice is placed in Anika and Dipak’s hands. They together offer it to the sacred fire. This symbolises a wish for the prosperity and wellbeing of the couple and the couple's desire to share their good fortune with the world. The Vedic hymns recited at this time are prayers for prosperity and fertility.

***13. Mangal Parikramaa*** *(Going round the fire)*

 Anika and Dipak encircle the fire four times. During the first three rounds the groom leads the bride and during the last round the bride leads the groom. These represent the marriage vows and symbolise the following:

***Dharma*:** Righteousness - moral sense to lead a good life

***Artha*** : Prosperity

***Kaama*** : Enjoying together as a strong and happy family sharing the responsibilities of the home to fulfil mutual desires

***Moksha*** : To attain the ultimate goal of happiness with the help of physical, mental and spiritual development .

***14. Saptapadi*** *(Seven steps)*

Anika and Dipak take seven steps forward symbolising the beginning of their journey through life together. It represents sharing and equality within marriage.

As they take each step they invoke the --------blessings of the Creator (God).

*First step: To provide food, clothing, the home and needful things*

*Second step: To develop physical, mental and spiritual powers*

*Third step: To acquire and increase wealth by righteous means*

*Fourth step: To acquire knowledge, happiness and harmony by mutual love and trust*

*Fifth step: To be blessed with virtuous children and a strong family*

*Sixth step: To maintain self-restraint and longevity*

*Seventh step: To be true and faithful companions, share each other's ideals and remain lifelong partners*

 ***15. Sindoor*** *(Vermilion powder)*

 Dipak puts *Sindoor* in Anika’s hair parting and welcomes her into his life as his eternal partner (soul mate).

 ***16. Aashirvaad*** *(Blessings)*

 Relatives and guests recite a hymn and shower fresh flowers upon the couple to wish them good luck, prosperity and a long and happy married life.

 ***17. Shaanti Paath*** *(Prayer for Peace)*

 This prayer is recited at the end of all Vedic ceremonies and functions. It is a prayer for "perfect peace and tranquillity to reign through the Universe".