

Iyer Marriages **(Rites and Rituals)** **BY** ***P.R.Ramachander,***

Iyer Marriages
(Rituals and Functions)

Introduction

Marriage ceremonies and rituals, though based on the common religious percepts are different for different castes in India. It is also different for the same caste living in different parts of the country not only based on the Veda or Sutra they belong but also due to customs that the community has adopted.

An attempt has been made to list out and describe the various rituals and functions of the marriage of Iyers. It does not mean that these are same for all Iyers. According the Veda and the Sutra that they follow as well as the custom adopted by the families these can be different. The marriage rituals, except for a few have not been stable over years. It has kept on changing according to the needs and conveniences of the iyer society. Even about 100 years back, most of the marriages were celebrated for four days. Little earlier to that Vara Dakshina or dowry was not in practice but Kanya Shulka or brides money was given to the father of the bride. What are being described are the functions and rituals, as it should be based on the Vedas and different family customs, which are in vogue. Some effort has also been made to give the significance of these functions as well as the meanings of the important mantras recited at different times.

Marriage for a Hindu is not a contract but a sacrament or in other words. a function dictated by religion aimed at elevating two individuals in to a unified whole called the family. But going through the following , it could be seen that all the prayers are chanted by the groom .All prayers are aimed at purifying the bride and no where a need for purification of the groom is mentioned.(One of the learned referees of this article has pointed out that , performance of Vritha cleans the bridegroom). It could also be seen that majority of the rituals are dictated by custom rather than by religion. Marriage is one of the 40 samskaras (16 according to some), which every individual has to undergo from the time of conception in the womb of the mother till the individuals death. Samskara in Sanskrit means refining Marriage is one of the important samskaras in an individual's life.

Every individual iyer knows that the iyer marriage is a very complicated function. They would however be surprised to know that the part dictated by Vedas in the marriage ceremony is extremely less. Most of the manthras are very significant but some of them are extremely out dated. Some of the out dated ceremonies are slowly being changed or left out by our forefathers. We have to be really proud of that group of people who were tied in orthodoxy of those times but willing to change

once they realized that it is not relevant. Apart from the Vedic rituals there are also puranic rituals, which must have crept in with passage of time. This was possibly the reason why the Indian Constitution tells that the stipulated marriage rites of a Hindu community are those rites, which have been prevalent for the past 25 years. There are also umpteen rituals in the iyer marriage, which has nothing to do with Veda or puranas or even the religion. These are the loukika rituals. Sumnagalis or married women whose husbands are alive take a leadership in determining and carrying out these rituals.

Broadly in the iyer marriage the Vedic rituals are 1. Groom asks for the girl from her father through intermediaries 2. Father of the bride agrees 3. The father of the groom gives permission for the groom to marry 4. The bride's father gives his daughter as a gift to the groom and then 5 .The Groom marries the bride who is now his. But the rituals and steps are much more than five The rituals and functions as was the practiced are: -

- 1.Vang Nischayam
- 2.Sumangali Prarthana
- 3.Pongi Podal at the aunt's house.
- 4.Yatra danam at the Grooms house.
- 5,Receiving of the Grooms party
- 6.Vara Praekshanam
- 7,Janu Vasam
- 8.Nischaathartham
- 9.Vritham for the groom and Kappu Kettal (Raksha) for the bride
- 10.Sprinkling of Paligai
- 11.Para desi kolam and Kasi Yatrai
- 12.Malai mattal or Exchange of garlands
- 13.Unchal and Pachai podi
- 14, Vara Poojai
- 15.Telling of Pravaram
- 16.Dharai Varthal or Kanya danam
- 17.Agni prathishtapanam
- 18.Madu Parkam and Vara pooja
- 19.Looking at the bride
- 20.Vivaha sankalpam, Kanya samskaram and Mangala snanam
- 21.Mangalya dharanam
- 22.Wearing of toe ring by the bride
23. Prayer while tying the string made of Dhurbha
- 24.Groom leading the bride in front of the fire.
- 25.Agni muhurtham
- 26.Panigrihanam
- 27.Saptha padhi
- 28.Parinayam and Pradhana homam
- 29.Asmarohanam, Laja Homam and Agni Pradakshinam
- 30.Removal of Dhurba tied around the bride
- 31.Jayadhi homam

- 32. Aseervadham and Phala Dhanam
- 33. Palum Pazhamum
- 34. Marriage feast (Lunch)
- 35. Nalangu
- 36. Journey towards husband's home
- 37. Griha pravesam
- 38. Pravesya Homam
- 39. Gandharva pooja
- 40. Prayer for getting good children,
- 41. Seeing of Arundhathi and Dhruva
- 42. Post marriage rituals
 - a. Sthali bhagam
 - b. Oupasanam
 - c. Sesha homam
 - d. Nandi sraddham
 - e. Kooshmanda Homam
 - f. Phala dhanam
 - g. Thamboola charvanam
 - h. Aseervadam.

1. Vaaang Nischayam (Loukika)

The families after examining the compatibility of the couples both physical and mental and the longevity of their wedded life from the horoscopes initiate the marriage negotiations. This consists of enquiring about the background of the bride's and groom's families and a visit of the groom and family to the bride's house. Once the groom and bride like each other both families decide to perform the marriage. A simple ceremony which was preceded by a Vigneswara pooja and exchange of Nalikera and Thamboola (Coconut, betel leaf and arecanut) before elderly people of both families, by the brides and grooms parents is called Vaang Nischaya, Later the reading of Lagna Patrika (or a contract by both parents about the performance of the marriage) was added to this simple function.

But this has now become a mini marriage ceremony, which is celebrated in the groom's house. Apart from what is described in the last paragraph, mutual garlanding of the groom by the bride and a big feast for large number of invited guests etc form a part of this function.

2. Sumangali Prarthanai (Loukika)

This is a prayer by the groom's and bride's families to those ladies of their family who have died as sumangalis. i.e. died before their husbands. The blessings of these sumangalis are sought by inviting 5-8 Sumangalis for a special pooja and a traditional feast. Normally the married daughters and sisters of the family are included in the list of invitees. All Sumangalis come to the feast in a traditional attire of a nine-yard sari. Here the Sumangalis invited represent the dead Sumangalis of the house and they are first worshipped and fed. It is interesting to note that this is the only iyer function in which women eat before men. Apart from Sumangalis a kanya is also invited. There is lot of variation of this pooja, which almost differs

from family to family. No priest is called and no Sanskrit sloka is recited. It is a custom in certain families to hold it after the marriage so that the daughter or daughter-in-law participates as a Sumangali in this Pooja.

3.Pongi Podal (Loukika)

Female elders were extremely important in an iyer family especially the father's sisters (aunt) and mother's brothers' wife (Mami). Before the marriage these relations used to invite their nephew (or niece) for a traditional feast in which Pongal Chadam (rice cooked with Dhal and turmeric), which is the sign of prosperity, is prepared. Also all the dishes that their nephew (or niece) likes are prepared. This is a sort of farewell feast by these elders to the bride or groom who are going to form a family themselves.

4.Yatra Danam (Puranic)

Iyer marriages always take place in the bride's place of residence and so there is a need for the groom and his parents to travel to the bride's place. So before starting a Vigneswara Pooja is performed and dana is given to Brahmins to ward of evils. It is also customary to break a coconut before the party departs to ward of evil eye.

5.Receiving of the grooms party (Loukika)

This is a very important function of yester years and used to be done at the boundary of the village. The bride's parents receive the groom and his family with coconuts and Nadaswaram and lead them to the place where stay has been arranged. With the concept of village undergoing change, nowadays the groom's party is taken to their place of stay and is received in front of the mantap by the bride's parents and relatives. They are received besides the usual coconut, flowers and Thamboola with two conical structures called " Paruppu Thengai Kutti" made of dhal , jaggery and coconut. This sort of reception with Kutti happens five times during the marriage ritual. Though still called Paruppu (dhal) , Thengai (coconut) Kutti, these are nowadays made of cashew nut or Laddu or Lozenges of various other sweets.

This Nadaswaram troupe continues to play till the marriage ceremonies over in the mantap. Off and on, when important rituals take place, the priest's signal for Getti melam, which means faster and louder playing of the drum. This is supposed to prevent bad words or words of ill omen from being heard at the marriage hall.

6.Vara Prekshanam or Kanya Varanam (Vedic)

This is a ceremony in which the groom sends learned Brahmins as his emissaries to the groom's father and requests him to give his daughter in marriage to him. The mantras recited are from Rig Veda. This consists of several parts: -

1.Requests to the Brahmins to Go on his behalf

Hey Elders, You have decided to help me based on my request. Please go with a contented heart to request a bride for me. You would be all blessed by the devas who will get their share in the yagas to be performed by my wife and me after marriage.

2. Prays for a safe passage to the elders

Let the path of these elders who are my friends be devoid of stones and thorns. Let Aryama the deva unite the bride and me. Let the family that we are going to build be holy and well joined. Let the path these elders take be the shortest and straight one. Let the Deva Aryama help these elders in their endeavor.

7. Janu Vasam (Loukika)

This is a very important function of the iyer marriage. In the present day it consists of getting dressed in western clothes by the groom at the nearby temple and from there coming to the mantap in a grand procession to accept the bride. The bride's brother presents the dresses for the occasion to the groom before the januvasam and arrangements are made to take them to a predetermined temple. A special Pooja of the deity is also arranged. It also is an indirect exposure of the groom to the general public. If some body knows some thing negative about him (like he is already married or he is a bad character), they get a chance of telling it to the bride's father. The procession nowadays is in a car preceded by a grand nadaswaram and some times bursting of crackers. In the olden days the procession used to be even on elephants.

. This procession also has some very interesting implication. According to the Vedas, once upanayanam is over for a Brahmin boy, he becomes a Brahma charin or one who walks in the way of Brhama. It was a time for him to learn Vedas and other necessary knowledge. It was customary during those times that he used to wear one white short cloth up to the knee, never shave or have a hair cut, never wear a garland or scents, never wear sandal paste and in fact lead a saintly life. Janu means knee and vasam is cloth. Janu Vasam is really a procession in which the groom is brought to the bride's house as a brahmachari. He was expected to wear only a cloth up to the knee. Ofcourse now it is not like that.

8. Nischayartham (Loukika)

This is an important item of the marriage ritual and is normally held in the previous evening to the marriage and after the Janu Vasam. This consists of a preliminary Ganapathi Pooja followed by honouring the parents of the groom by the parents of the bride and vice versa and announcing the final agreement by the bride's parents that they are willing to give their daughter in marriage to this groom. The groom and his parents accept the proposal . The groom's parents give her a silk sari during this time. She receives this and changes whatever sari she wears with the new one. The groom's sister ties in some families Thamboola in the end of this sari. Please note that the proposal was initiated by the groom through the intermediary of the elders and not by the bride's parents as is common now. This system must have changed from Vedic times in the recent past. In this function elders from both families meet each other and bless the groom and the bride for a happy future. There is also a custom of giving articles for washing and make up as well as two dolls by the groom's party to the bride during this occasion. It is called for Vilayadal or playing. This is supposed to be given by the groom's sister. Sometimes along with this she also presents a silk sari.

There is a tendency nowadays of holding the marriage reception after this Nischayathatham. Under normal circumstances there seems to be nothing wrong but many of the rituals reserved for the marriage like Garlanding of each other and pani Grahanam take place then. Though some elders frown at this tendency most of them accept it. But if the marriage does not take place after this pani grahanam and Mala Dharanam, for some reason or other, it will be really tragic as these are part of the Hindu marriage ceremonies.

9. Vritham and Kappu Kettal. (Vedic)

As mentioned under Januvasam, the groom is still a brhamacharin in the ascetic garb. He is unshaved, uncut and supposed to lead a strict life as prescribed. His Guru when he was initiated in this life of penance is his father. So it is essential that before he gets married he has to take permission from his father (Guru) to end his Brhama Charya Vritha and marry and lead a life of a Grihastha. This function is Vritham. This function could also be performed in the groom's house before he departs to the bride's house for marriage.

The bride's family lead by the maternal aunt of the bride normally invites the groom with a pair of Paruppu Thengai Kutti.



During this time the groom's father makes him perform all the samskaras like namakaranam, Choulam, Annaprasanam etc which for some reason have not been performed and also make the groom do the duties as a brahmacharin which he has not performed like Khanda rishi tharpanam, Prajapatyam, Saumyam, Agneyam, Vaiswadevam etc and complete the samavarthana (life of a brhma charin). It is necessary according to religious beliefs that he has gained expertise in Vedas by this time.

Simultaneously a Raksha (Protection) in the form of a sacred string is tied in the wrist of the bride after reciting Vedic manthras to protect her from all evil spirits and also those Gandharvas, who were holding charge of her till then,

There is a custom of giving oil for bath, green gram for oil bath, sweets to eat after he takes a bath, to the groom before the Vritha by the aunt (Athai) of the bride. Nowadays this has been enlarged to include a shaving set, toilet articles like soap scent etc. Earlier days all these were supposed to be given during the early morning of the marriage at the groom's quarters with accompaniment of Nadaswaram etc. But nowadays, it is mostly handed over to the groom's party the previous night.. This is a purely Loukika custom.

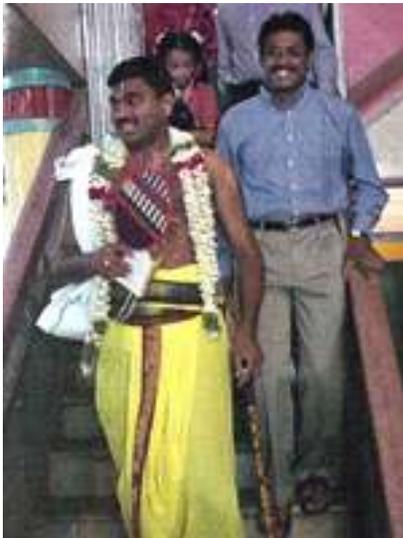
10. Sprinkling of Paligai (Puranic)

Pali means row of trees and this ritual would have been planting of trees by the groom's and bride's families for the upkeep and happiness of the groom and the bride. In modern days, this consists of sowing germinated seeds of nine kinds of pre-soaked cereals in 5 mud pots (layered with green grass and bilva leaves) by married women (Sumangalis) relatives of the groom and the bride. They first sow the germinated seeds and pour milk with water over it. It is a custom nowadays to have five such pots for each side. Five sumangalis (three from the groom's relatives and two from the bride's relatives in case of the groom's side and three from the bride's relatives and two from the bride's side in case of bride's side) sow the germinated grain and pray for long happy married life for the couple as well as several children to brighten their homes.

In Kerala ,these germinated plants in the mud pots are supposed to be left in the river nearby after 4 days. There is an opinion from a learned referee that , rather that the germinated seeds should be eaten as is the custom in Karnataka . But during modern times, this is rarely done and nobody bothers about the germinated seeds.

11.Para Desi Kolam and Kasi Yathrai (Loukika)

After the Vritham in the olden days the groom used to have a haircut and a bath. This is in memory of those times when he used to grow hair during the time when he was a brhmachari. Slowly this custom vanished. Nowadays after the Vritham the groom wears for the first time in his life the 8 yards Dhoti called Soman in the Pancha Kacham (which incidentally means big Veshti one part of which goes in between the legs) fashion. He also wears an Uttariyam.It is normal for him to carry a fan, an umbrella, a bamboo fan, a grantham (any book nowadays), wear



new slippers and also a small bundle .He wears (collyrium) Kan Mai, garland and sees himself for the first time in the mirror after the poonal. He also wears double poonal (sacred string) indicating the fact that he is ready to become a grihastha.

He usually walks away from the marriage Pandal and is stopped by the father of the bride .The groom informs the bride's father that he is going to Kasi. (Which indicates that he is still learning and is going further to learn). The bride's father first tells them that he is already an accomplished Vedic Scholar and requests him to stop his travel for learning and offers him a coconut and offers his daughter in marriage to him and requests him to come back and become a grihastha. The groom accepts this request.

This is not a Vedic ritual as no manthras are uttered. Another important indication is that the negotiation is between the groom and the bride's father again

indicating that the arranged marriage of those days was arranged by the groom with the bride's parents.

12. Malai Mattal (Loukika)

In the olden days the groom used to go inside the mantap and come out later for the malai mattal. But nowadays he is received by the bride at the entrance of the mantap. Normally the maternal uncles of the groom carry him in a cradle to the mantap. Though in marriages this still takes place, in many cases, the maternal uncle simply accompanies the groom. The bedecked bride waits at the entrance of the mantap to receive the groom. Both the groom and bride apart from the normal garland wear 3 sets of garland (called Mattu Malai), which is not in the usual form but in the form of "U" put around the neck. At the entrance the bride is lifted up by her maternal uncles and the groom by his maternal uncles and one after another the garlands are exchanged. Lot of mirth and fun takes place during this ritual. When the bride tries to garland the groom either he is moved away or lifted too much high so that she will find it difficult to garland him. The bride's party also tries to move the bride in critical time so that the groom has to virtually chase the bride to garland her. The women relatives sing various songs in the background.



13. Unchal and Pachai podi (Loukika)

This is another very interesting ritual, which is not Vedic and entirely managed by women relatives. This is also called Kannujal. The silk Sari to be worn by the bride during this occasion was supposed to be purchased by her maternal uncle. The bride keeps her fingers folded in to the palm in a conical form and the groom holds her hand (It is interesting to note that the Pani Grihanam which means holding of hand, which is a Vedic ritual takes place much later after the oonchal. Hence some elders feel that Oonchal ceremony should not be held at this time). The groom leads the bride in front of the Oonchal (A swing) and they stand together facing east, Then the mother of the bride, mother of the groom, paternal aunts of



the bride and the groom and one of the uncles wife's or maternal aunts (altogether five people in some families seven people) one by one sprinkle milk on the feet of the groom and bride (symbolizing washing their feet with milk) and wipe their feet with the edges of their silk sari. After this function the groom and bride are asked to sit in the swing, (It is told that the bride's feet should not touch the ground and only the groom's feet should touch the ground while sitting in the swing, symbolizing that He is the controller of the family) the same relatives then wave colored rice balls (normally coloured red but in some cases coloured yellow and red) all round them in a circular motion and throw them in different

directions. This is a ceremony meant to ward off evil from the groom and bride. After this the same relatives give a mixture of sugar, milk and banana to the bride and groom. Once this is over the bride's paternal aunt walks round the swing with a lamp kept on a plate and lit on cooked rice, fed by ghee and with five wicks kept on a brass plate called Thambala .She is followed by the bride's mother, grooms mother, grooms paternal aunt, brides or grooms uncle's wife alternatively carrying a pot of water and a lit lamp normally kept in a vessel. (So that wind does not put it off). While all these is going on the women invitees sing mellifluous tunes composed by several poets for the occasion. Most of them remind of the puranic marriages of either Vishnu or Shiva. Once the function is over a pot of water is handed over to the groom and bride so that they can wash their feet. The priest waves a coconut round the bride and groom and breaks the coconut.

14. Vara Poojai and initiation of the ceremony.(Vedic)

The Vedic ceremony of marriage only starts at this juncture.

After the Oonchal the bride and the groom are taken to the Mantap and the Vedic rituals start. First the bride's father welcomes the groom and washes his feet with water. The groom then starts the vivaha rituals with the permission of the learned Brahmins. He first prays the Brahmins to permit him to start the Vedic rituals. The Brahmins permit him to do so. He then performs the Vigneswara pooja and prays God to help him complete the rituals without any problem.

15.Telling of Pravaram (Vedic)

This is really an announcement about whom the bride is going to wed and whom the groom is to the people who have gathered there. The gothra to which the bride belongs, name of her paternal great grand father, her paternal grand father and her father are repeated in a sonorous loud tones by one priest. They ask the bride's father whether he agrees to protect the dharma of his family. He agrees. Then another priest similarly introduces the bridegroom by telling his Gothra, names of his paternal great grand father, paternal grand father and father. The groom Okays the information given and agrees for the marriage ceremonies. This is repeated thrice. Possibly this is a ritual to give a chance to the audience to tell any thing negative about the information repeated. This was necessary as the groom is a traveler in search of knowledge approaching the bride's father in a different village.

16.Kanya Dhanam or giving away the bride (Vedic)

The Hindus consider gifting of their daughter to a suitable groom as a very holy deed. In fact it is supposed to be superior to many other holy deeds like giving alms, giving food etc. In the beginning of this ritual the bride would be sitting facing east on a bundle made of paddy stalks and holds in her hand a coconut. She also holds a small gold coin called Pudu panam. (But nowadays, she sits on the lap of her father.).Her father should stand facing north with the brides mother on his right side. The groom stands facing the west.. The father of the bride holds the Thamboola (Betel leaf and areca nut) in his palms and the bride should place her

palms holding coconut on her father's palms. The groom should join his palms and get prepared to receive the bride's palm holding coconut from her father. While her palms are being transferred, the bride's mother should keep on pouring water over her daughter's hand, which should made to fall on the ground (This is called Dhara in Sanskrit. In Tamil this ceremony is called Dharai Varthu Kodukkal). Gently the bride's palms are transferred to the groom's hand. This ritual symbolizes the transfer of ownership of the bride to the groom (Note: They are still not married and the ritual of the marriage would be performed by the groom. It is obvious that the Hindus thought that the daughter is owned by her father till than and will be owned by the groom later.)

While transferring the bride her father should tell the following prayer: -

- a. I am giving to you as a gift, my ever playful gold like daughter who came to my house to give redemption to my ancestors and who would make me reach the heavens in future, bedecked in gold to you, who is the personification of Vishnu.
- b. I am giving her to you so that you can get children through her and do all your prescribed religious duties.

The groom replies: -

I accept her by the grace of Sun who made this world with my hands protected by the Aswini Devas with he permission of the Sun God.

It is considered normal for the bride's parents to cry after this ceremony. This is because the transfer of ownership of the bride is complete.

17.Agni prathisthapam (Vedic)

This means raising of fire. Fire has been the basis of modern life. For centuries the only method of raising the fire was by churning wood.(since there was no match box).Due to it being extremely essential in day to day life, a married man was supposed to maintain fire perennially in his house with the help of his wife. This is a Oupasana .He daily remove the ashes surrounding the fire worships the fire and maintains it. During this holy ritual a new fire is supposed to be raised by the groom with the help of the priest .He is supposed to take a part of this fire and maintain it in his home for life.

18.Madhu Parkam and Vara Pooja (Vedic)

Once the bride's father gives away his daughter to the groom and he accepts her, the bride's father becomes happy and again does honours to the groom by washing his feet and then offering him a mixture of honey and curd called Madhu Parkam.He also is supposed to give him a cow (the basis of a happy home in earlier times. In fact wealth was counted by the number of cows one has). Nowadays cow is substituted by token presents.

While the bride's father washes his feet, the groom prays, " Let this water poured over my feet destroy my enemies and take care of my family.

The bride's father then tells the groom" You who are the personification of Maha Vishnu, please take your seat and accept all these good things that I give you"

After this the mixture of curds, honey and ghee is given to the groom. In some families they also add popped rice and fried rice flour. The groom tells the following prayers: -

Hey, God of Knowledge, who is responsible for the gleam in people in general and the lustrous strength of Brahmins, Hey Vedas who add luster to the God of Knowledge, Hey Vedas who are themselves the strength of all, I pray you to make all people love me like this, please make me own several herds of cattle.

Hey Madhu Parka, which has come to me, please give me luster, fame and milk like qualities. Let all people love me. Please give me cattle wealth.

.19.Looking at the bride (Vedic)

This is a ritual, which symbolizes, announcing to everybody his intention of marrying the maid who has been given to him. He looks at her part by part and talks to her and requests her to become a part of his family.

First he prays to the Gods thus:-

Hey, Varuna, Let not anything bad befall on the sibs of my bride. Hey, Brahaspathi, please remove all bad physical and mental qualities in her that would bring bad luck to her husband. Hey, Indra please remove all the physical barriers in her that would prevent birth of children and also equip her with good qualities so that she can bring up the children properly. Oh, All Gods, please shower her with all good qualities.

.20..Vivaha sankalpam, Kanya samskaram and Mangala snanam (Vedic)

a. Kanya Samskaranam

This means refining of the bride or civilizing the bride. The marriage rituals really start from this point only. The groom realizes that his marrying the bride and taking her away would make her parents sad. He feels that they should not become sad and tells them: -

Though the bride has been brought up with love and care, it is not proper for you to shed tears at this time. She is full of life and is going to lead a happy life. Instead of this you all should be happy because me and this girl are going to lead a life full of love Also this act of giving the bride is going to repay your debts to your ancestors. Shedding tears now will displease them.

Then he addresses the maid he has chosen to marry and tells her what he expects of her and also refines her and removes all that is bad in her by a prayer: -

“ Hey maid, Please be the one who is not giving a harsh stares at the husband. Please be kind to my brothers. Please always go in the most proper way and please always keep your body clean.

I will be praying for long life for all the children, which you will beget for me. Since this requires the worship of the devas, you should also have a desire to worship them. I also beseech you to be always good to all my family members and the animals like the cows and horses owned by the family.”

After this the groom takes a dharbha grass and gently moves it over the eyelids of the bride and throws the dharbha behind her reciting a mantra praying the devas once again to make her behavior kind towards him.

b. Mangala Snanam and Vivaha sankalpam

This means holy bath and marriage preparations. This is done in a few steps. They are: -

1. Prayer to the Brahmins to bring water that is holy for giving bath to the bride.

Normally this holy water is brought by even number of learned Brahmins (normally 2 or 4). The groom prays to them: -

“There are lots of sins that are transferred to the water. Hey, Brahmins bring that holy water which has not been spoiled by death and that water which will not destroy her children in her womb and that water which is devoid of any bad effects.”

2. Prayer when keeping the dharbha ring on the head of the girl.

The groom then keeps a thick ring (normally meant for keeping the mud pots stable) on the head of the girl and recites the following prayer. He also prays his relatives to surround him and the bride.



“Hey, Deva called Aryama, like the stand made of dharbha kept on the head of this maid is round, with your blessings let er and my brothers and mother surround this fire and witness these ceremonies. Her relatives and mine also should surround this fire and will witness the marriage between us and pray for our welfare. Let their prayer be granted by your grace.”

3. Prayer when keeping the yoke on the ring.

Then the groom keeps a model of a yoke (meant to tie two bullocks) on the Dharbha ring and recites the following prayer. He reminds Indra of the way he cured a girl called Abala (Abala literally means “strength less”. In fact in Sanskrit all girls are called Abalas)

“Hey Indra, In he same way as all the bodily defects of Abala disappeared and she became similar to the sun, please remove all the bodily defects of this girl and make her shine like Surya.”

(Abala was a girl who had leucoderma and was cured by pulling her through the hole in the yoke used to tie the horses in Indra’s chariot, three times)

4.Prayer when keeping gold in the hole in the yoke

(Normally the hole in the stick is covered with the mangalya made of gold and kept on the head of the bride.)

The groom prays ”Hey maid, let this stick covered with gold and the holy waters brought by the Brahmins wash of all the defects in you which would bring bad effects on me and which are not visible .Let it thus bring good to you. Let these unite your body with mine later when we love each other.”

5.Prayer for performing holy bath to the bride.

This consists of 5 prayers by the groom. They are: -

- a. These waters shine like gold, and have an unblemished luster. This water itself is pure and is capable of purifying others .Let these waters remove all the blemishes in this maid. Was it not in these waters in which several hundreds of holy theerthas (Holy river waters) are present? Let the God of all, use this water and make you pure.**
- b. This water in which was born Lord Surya, this water in which was born the fire, this water which is as blemish less as gold and this water which purifies all others, let it , Oh maid, remove all your sorrows, and let it also give you eternal pleasure.**
- c. These waters in which God Varuna remains in the middle and watches all the good and bad one does, these waters that wear fire in the middle and these waters of purest colour, let it give all the pleasures of this world to you, Oh, Maid.**
- d. These waters which gods drink from the sky, these waters which exist in the sky in various shapes, these waters which have raging fire in the middle should give you pleasure both of this world and the world thereafter., oh, maid**
- e. Oh maid, who is going to marry me now, let these waters see you with its welfare giving eyes, let it with its holy body touch your skin and let these waters which give rise to the innate principle of the ghee, give you all the pleasures of this world.**

6.Prayer while giving new clothes to be worn by the bride.

The bride till this point wears the cloths normally worn by unmarried women, (Sari), Now the groom gives her a new cloth which should be worn by her in future.

The groom prays while giving new clothes to the bride:-

“Similar to the fact that this maid is surrounded by the new clothes on all her sides, Let You , Indra , who worship elders who do service to God, be attracted by my prayer and be kind enough to give all that is good to this maid.”

With this prayer the groom hands over to the bride a nine yards sari, which is called Koorai Pudavai.(Till recently it was a custom for the groom’s parents to pay

for the Koorai Pudavai. It was invariably in the colour of Lac. But nowadays the bride's family purchases Koorai Pudavai). The sister and lady relatives of the groom dress the bride in this new cloth. Possibly this is the last chance for them to examine the bride in secret and find out whether she has any defects.. Koorai in Tamil means roof and this name must have been taken from this sloka, where the cloth is supposed to cover her all over. One author feels that it must have come from the word "Kroora" which means "cruel" Possibly it hides her from the cruel looks of other males by bringing her under the protection of marriage.

21. Mangalya Dharanam (Puranic)

Mangalya means that which gives good things and Dharanam means "wearing". The bride has to wear two mangalyas one given by her father and another by the groom's father. The shape and content of Mangalya varies from family to family. Normally before marriage the gold for making mangalya is melted on an auspicious day by the gold smith. Lot of importance is given in the present day to the



Mangalya. Before being tied it is circulated among the audience for their blessing and good wishes. This mangalya is a piece of gold in which is inscribed Shiva Linga or Shiva Linga as embossed on a Thulasi madam or Goddess Meenakshi depending on the custom of the bridegroom's family. The groom ties the mangalya arranged on a yellow string round the neck of the girl only the first knot is put by him and two more knots are put by his sister. (The

groom's sister is normally given a suitable present for tying the two knots). The bride is normally sits facing east and sits on a bundle of grain-laden hay. The groom recites the following prayer while tying the Mangalya: -

:"This string is holy and giver of good things in life. It also is going to elevate my life. Hey, beautiful maiden, I am tying this around your neck and pray that you would live for hundred years."

It is important to note that this prayer is in modern Sanskrit and is not taken from Veda, It also is important to note that this ritual is not prescribed by the Vedas. Possibly this custom originated in later years. But as of today, according to general people, it is one of the very important functions of marriage. After the mangalya Dharanam is over, the elders shower flowers and yellow coloured rice on the groom and bride. It is also common nowadays to congratulate the bride's parents and groom's parents after this ritual. A sweet sherbhat (sweet scented water) is served to all the people in the mantap once this ritual is over. But really the marriage ritual is has just begun and is far from being over.

22. Wearing of toe ring by the bride (Puranic)

This is yet another ritual which has no Vedic mantras. The toe ring (3 in number for each leg) is worn to the bride by the sister of the groom. .In Ramayana when Rama asks Lakshmana to identify the ornaments of Seetha , he identifies only the Noopura which is worn in the ankles. He tells Rama that the only part of Seetha he has seen is her feet. Though Noopura denotes anklets, some authorities identify it as toe ring and claim that this was an ancient ritual.

Possibly this was worn to identify a married woman in ancient times.

23. Prayer while tying the string made of Dharbha (Vedic)

The next ritual is tying a rope made of Dharbha grass around the hip of the bride by the groom. He does this by reciting the following prayer: -

Oh fire God; please give a stable and composed mind to this maid, who is going to join me in worshipping you. Let her not get perturbed by anything from now onwards; let her beget lot of children, wealth, grains and house. Let her also get a lustrous pretty body. For getting all these I am tying her with this rope made of dharbha.

24.Groom leading the bride in front of the fire.(Vedic)

The groom then leads the bride by catching her right hand to the mat spread in front of the fire facing east. The bride should sit on southern side and the groom on the northern side of the mat,

“Let God Poosha hold your hand and take you near the fire. After performing the sacrifices in the fire let the Aswini Devas (Doctors of Gods) permit you to come to my house in a cart. If you come after taking permission from them, my family and me will lead a healthy life. After coming to my house. you would become the queen (boss) of my house. And then you should encourage me to do several religious fire sacrifices.”

According to Vedic rites this is the first time when the groom holds the hand of the bride. Nowadays this is the second time, the first being while he leads her to Oonchal (swing). According to some people, this sloka also indicates that the groom and bride are supposed to live in their own house and not with the family of groom’s parents. It is not clear when the joint family concept came in to India.

25.Agni Muhoortham or holy fire ritual. (Vedic)

After doing Namaskaras to the fire The groom recites the following prayers:-

You (the bride) was had by Soma (the moon) in the beginning .The Gandharva had you after wards from him. Then the Gandharva gave you to fire. That fire is now giving you to me along with wealth.

The God Soma liked this maid first. Then she was with Gandharva and later the God of fire liked her. After being had by all these gods, I am the first human being to have her. So because Soma, Gandharva and Agni (god of fire) have already given

her wealth and capacity to have children, me and this maid will have all the good fortunes in this world. .

Naturally this is prayer is not well understood. Possibly it indicates that she was innocent like a baby (moon) attractive as a maiden (gandharva) and enticing and sensual as fire (agni). Some authorities are of the opinion that these slokas indicate that the Vedas did not approve pre puberty marriages. Though the Sanskrit words indicate that she was married by moon, gandharva and Agni in turn, some people interpret the word as “looked after” not “married”

26.Pani Grihanam (Vedic)

Literally this means “holding of hands. Because this is the first most important Vedic ritual, scholars believe that this should be done during the auspicious time. Normally the bride folds fingers her right hand fingers into a conical form upwards and the groom holds it in his hand folded downwards by surrounding all her fingers.(One authority says that “ If he holds her hand leaving her thumb then they both will have only female children and if he holds only her thumb leaving out the fingers , then they will have only male children).The following prayers are recited by the groom:-

Hey maid, I am holding your hand so that you will have several good children and live happily with me till ripe old age. The God Aryama has given you to me to lead the life of a householder.

The gods Bhaga and Agni were leading this life before me with you and have now given you to me for the purpose of raising my family.

Hey Goddess Saraswathi, you are blessed with all the luck, riches and food and so we who have held our hands today, hope to get riches and pleasures by your blessing. I announce this loudly in front of all so that you will definitely bless me.

Hey Maid, Let Vayu (god of wind) who has the capacity to travel in all directions, who keeps a gold coin in his hand to give to those who pray him and who is the friend of fire God (Agni) who has the capacity to purify everything as well as the capacity to make raw food eatable, enter your mind and make you love me for every minute of our future lives.

27 Saptha Padhi (Vedic)

Literally this means the “seven steps”. Courts in India have ruled that this is the most important ritual of a Hindu Marriage. They consider that unless this ritual is completed the marriage itself is not over. According to Vedas, once this is over the bride and groom become wife and husband. This ritual consists of the groom taking the right foot of the bride in his left hand and making her take seven steps either in the direction of east or north. The following prayers are recited: -

First Step:

Let God MahaVishnu who is spread through out the world, Give you food in plenty

Second step:

Let Him come with you for a second step and give you sufficient strength

Third step:

Let Him come with you for a third step to make you observe all religious rituals.

Fourth step:

Let Him come along with you for the fourth step to give you pleasures

Fifth step:

Let Him be with you when you take the fifth step to give you lot of wealth (cow)

Sixth step:

Let Him lead you the six stages of life with happiness and welfare

Seventh step:

Let him help you in performing Soma Yaga and other prayers when you take the seventh step

The following requests are to be recited by the groom to the bride after she takes the seven steps:-

“You who has taken the seven steps with me should become my friend.

We who have taken the seven steps together would live as friends.

I should get your friendship, Oh maid.

Oh maid, I should never get parted from your friendship.

We who have attained each other, should get lustrous health, serenity, peaceful mind, and should enjoy together the food and all other tastes.

We would plan all things that are to be done in future together.

Let us both make our two minds in to one.

Let us enjoy together all the physical and mental pleasures together from now onwards.

Let us do all religious observations together.”

Then again the groom tells the bride:-

“You are the Rig Veda and I am the Sama Veda

I am the Sama Veda and you are the Rig Veda (recited twice for emphasis)

Like these two Vedas we should never separate from each other. We also will not get separated.

I am the world Dyu and you are the earth (dyu is the world above. This indicates that she is below him and should obey his wishes).

I am the material called Shukla (semen) and you are the wearer of this in your womb.

I am the mind and you are the word

I am Sama Veda and you are the Rig Veda

I am telling this because I have lot of care for you.

Please bear me male children in future,

Hey Maid come with me.”

Once the prayer and the grooms request is recited the bride becomes groom’s wife and joins his family (Gothra)

28. Parinayam and Pradhana Homam (Vedic)

The wife and husband now circle the fire and are seated in front of the fire. The wife sits on the south side and the husband sits on the north side. The wife keeps

touching the husband while he does the following 16 Ahuthis (pouring of Ghee in to the fire) with the following Manthras: -

1,2,3 This offering is poured for soma who had this maid. This offering is poured for the Gandhrava who had this maid. This offering is poured for the Agni (fire God) who had this maid.

4.This maid has come out from her father's family where she was a maid and joined my family. I am pouring this offering so that she is excused for the sins she has committed as a maid.

5.Hey Indra, who grants all desires. Please free this maid from her father's family? Please tie her strongly to my family .She is future should develop attachments to my family only. Please make her a part of my family and make her bear male children to me, through her.

Hey Indra , who grants all desires .Please remove the attachment this girl has to her father's family. Please make her affectionate to my family. Let riches, grains, cows and good luck increase in my family.

6.Hey Indra, who grants all desires, Please make this maid have good sons and make her fortunate. I should beget ten sons out of her and I should become her eleventh son.

7.Agni, who is an important deva, should come here. He should prevent infant death to all her children. To ensure that she will not shed tears because of the early death of her children, God Varuna should agree with Agni to prevent the children's death. For this purpose I make this offering in the fire.

8.Let Agni save this maid from all future troubles. He should give long life to all her children. If her organs are not strong enough to bear a child , he should cure this and help her get children. He should give her the happiness of cuddling her children in her lap in the early morning.

9.Hey bride, there should not be any more crying in your house in future. Let all those demons that cause unhappiness desert you. Let those demons that enter the homes and terrorize women should not come to her house. The Gods should prevent you from beating your chest with disheveled hair. I am pouring this offering to help you do all these.

10.Let your behind be protected by the God of Sky; Let your thighs be protected by Vayu; Let your breasts be protected by Aswini devas; Let your sons be protected by Savitha and till you wear clothes; Let you be protected by Brihaspathi.

11.I am giving this offering in the fire so that all the causes which stand against the birth of a son and those which cause the death of a sin in you are removed from you. Like the wilted flowers that you wore on your head was removed and thrown,, Let God remove all such defects in you and transfer them to your enemies.

12.Oh Varuna, please hear this prayer and give me all pleasures just now. As soon as I ask you should give me pleasures. I want to be saved by you only and hence I am praying you,

13.I am reciting this Vedic prayers and surrender to you so that I can save myself. People who do this worship are doing so to save themselves. Hey Varuna, you should help me complete this task, which I have taken up. So please do not rob allotted years from my life.

14. Hey Agni, Help me by reducing the anger of Varuna towards both of us. You who is the greatest among those who are worshipped, you who takes the offering given by us to devas gently and who shines with luster should remove from us all those hateful qualities.



15. Hey Agni, You who are the greatest among all those devas who are worshipped and is the cause of existence of the devas, should save us when it is the dawn and also during daytime. You should be very near us always. You please prevent Varuna from coming to us and troubling us. You who give us all pleasures should consume the offerings given by us. Please come when we call you. And also help us to become happy when we call you.

16. Hey Agni, you are suitable of devotees attaining you and also you attain the devotees directly. And because of that you are suitable for attaining by mind. Hey Agni, because you can be easily attained by devotees, I am meditating on you using my mind and beg to get your blessings.

Hey Agni, you who can be easily attained by devotees should receive from us the offering to different devas and give it to the concerned devas. Also please give us the capacity to demit our sins.

29. Asmarohanam, Lajahomam and Agni Pradakshinam (Vedic)

This is a combined ritual First the husband and wife circle the fire and reach near a stone kept at the north side. The husband holds the thumb of the right leg of the wife by his left hand and places it on a stone. Both of them go near the fire and take their seat. The husband then helps his wife to offer the handful (both palms of the wife are held together). Her brother also takes two hand full of popped rice) of popped rice along with small quantity of ghee given to his wife by her brother to the Agni (fire). Then they circle the fire and repeat this ritual thrice. Though not mentioned in the Vedas, it is a common practice for the husband to give a suitable present to his wife's brother for helping them in this ritual. Normally this should be equal in value to the present given by the bride's family to the groom's sister during Mangalya dharanam for tying the two knots.

The prayer to be recited by the husband while placing the leg of his wife on the stone: -

“Hey bride, please climb on this stone. You should become as stable as the stone in your mind. When some body wages a war at you, you should be boldly oppose them and insult the enemies.”

The prayer while putting popped rice in to the fire for the first time: -

“This lady is praying a long life of hundred years for her husband. Please fulfill her desires.”

The prayers while circling the fire for the first time: -

1-3. Hey Agni, When the world began, you were given the daughter of Surya (sun god) along with wealth for marriage. Now please give this wife to me so that we can beget children.

,Hey Agni, since you have married the daughter of Surya, all the girls in this world are in your custody. So for begetting children, I pray you to bless me by giving a blemish less wife.

4. Hey Agni, please give me a wife who is very attractive and with long life.

5. Hey Agni, bless us to cross like water all problems in our life .

Then he should keep the leg of his wife on the stone second time with the same prayer as of the first time.

The prayer while putting popped rice in to the fire for the second time:-

Maids worship the God Agni, because he is easily pleased and gives them their desires. Oh Agni, she prays you to remove her bonds with her parent's house and also at no time remove her bonds from my house. Hey Agni, performing this offering of popped rice has benefited several maidens. Please accept her offering and fulfill her prayer.

Then they circle the fire and step on the stone once more and make the offering of popped rice for the third time.

The prayer while putting popped rice in to the fire for the third time is: -

“Hey Agni, you have been always in charge of food and the maidens, who are the path of heaven. And because of that you give maidens to us. Please make us both of the same mind and opinion. For this I am pouring ghee into you similar to the water being given to the tree.

Hey, Agni, the portals of heavens through fire sacrifices are not open to those who do not have a wife. You are the giver of the maidens to us. Please make us both of the same mind and opinion. For this I am pouring ghee into you similar to the water being given to the tree.”

30. Removal of the Dharbha string from the wife.(Vedic)

The husband recites the following prayers and then unties the dharbha string he has tied earlier,

- 1. I free from the rope tied by Lord Parameshwara who ties this rope of Varuna for all the good-minded beings, I give you the position of pleasure with me to you in the world of Brahma.**
- 2. I free you from the string of Varuna tied by the Lord Parameshwara who gives blessings to his devotees. You can live with me in Brahma loka where the blessed go and be with me without the fear of the rope of Varuna.**

31. Jayadhi Homam (Vedic)

This homa is performed at the end of the main Homa for successful completion of the function and for a prosperous living. It is not a specific marriage ritual but is performed as a prayer on similar occasions.

These prayers and fire sacrifice was done by Indra when he went to war with Asuras as taught by his teacher Brihaspathi. It consists of 13 prayers. This is

followed by 18 prayers with offering in the fire to the devas and ancestors which are meant to increase knowledge and Brahminical sathvic qualities. This is followed by 12 prayers, which are for the benefit of the country we live. Another three prayers called Vyahrithi homa, Swishtakrith homa and Prajapathi homa follow these.

After a total of 48 offerings to the fire, the fire from the Homa is preserved in a new mud pot and is taken by the wife to the Pravesya homa which takes place in the husbands home. She is also supposed to keep and guard this fire carefully all her life.

32.Aseervadam and Phala Dhanam(Puranic)

This means literally blessing. The groom spreads his Uttariya over his shoulders and his wife stands by his side. Then the elders and learned people in the gathering throw Akshathai (meaning that which never ends but in reality rice coloured by turmeric) at the couple with Vedic prayers to the almighty to give him all that is good in life. They pray for his and his wife's betterment. A pair of paruppu Thengai Kutti is used at this occasion also. Once this is over, , then the husband and wife do namaskarams to their grand parents, parents, uncles , aunts and also to each of the elders present and get their blessing. Each of them put the Akshathai thrown at them and collected from the groom's Uttariya on their heads. Nowadays, possibly due to lack of time all the elders stand together and the couple are only asked to do one namaskaram.

Once this ritual is over the husband and wife are ready to accept gifts from all their relatives and friends. The first to give presents are always the bride's parents. This always includes a silk sari from the bride's parents and a Veshti for the groom. The bride's and groom's paternal aunts and maternal uncles follow them. Then the other relations and friends give their presents. Each present in the olden days used to be given with a mantra in the form of blessing and used to be always termed as "Ayiram Kodi Gatti Varahan". This means billions of solid gold coins. Once the presentation ceremony is over the husband and wife return the presents to their paternal aunts. Normally it is slightly more in value than the presents given by the aunts. Only Thamboola is given back to the maternal uncles.

Phala Dhanam or giving of cash presents to all the guests used to take place after the Aseervadam. Normally this used to be a quarter of a rupee and used to be given by the brides family. But as on today this has been discontinued and cash gifts are now given in some marriages only to the near and dear of the groom.

After this an Arathi is taken. This consists of water in which turmeric and lime is mixed, waved in a circular fashion by one female representative of the groom's side and the other from the brides side, along with a suitable song. The groom puts two coins as gift to these relatives. This in reality should bring to an end the pre-lunch rituals of the marriage. But nowadays the rest of the Vedic rituals, which are supposed to be carried out in the groom's house, also are compressed and carried out before lunch.

33.Palum Pazhamum (Loukika)

Then the wife and husband visit first the husband's house and then the wife's house .In these houses the female relatives gather and give the husband and wife a spoon each of banana pieces put in milk. Since the husband's house is normally in some other town, the husband and wife are nowadays taken to the place allotted to the groom's party and the husband's relatives give Palum pazhamum there.

34.Lunch (Loukika)

The lunch normally prepared on the marriage day is a very grand one with umpteen courses. The wife along with her relatives invites the groom and his family for the lunch with a pair of Paruppu Thengai Kutti.Normally a special area is reserved for the lunch of the groom's relatives. In the olden days before each banana leaf of the groom's family guests , they used to keep a lit lamp. The husband and wife sit together for their lunch side by side. Lot of mirth and fun is derived by all concerned when the newly married couples are asked to exchange their half eaten food or when they try to feed each other. This is possibly to make them loose their inhibitions and make them realize that they have some very special rights.

35.Nalangu (Loukika)

This is another ritual of teasing the husband and wife and makes them to get much nearer. The wife along with her friends goes to the husband and invites him for Nalangu.She has to sing a Pathiyam for inviting him (The word must have derived from Padyam which means poem) He agrees and come with all his relatives mainly female and the reply from him is again given in the form of a pathiyam sung by one of his female relatives on his behalf. The groom and his relatives sit on one side and the wife and her relatives sit on the opposite side. The wife stands and then applies Nalangu (a mixture of Oil and Kumkum) on the feet of her husband .She then puts a sandalwood and Kumkum on his forehead. Then she combs him and breaks a chutta appalam (disc like eatable) and puts it over his head. Then she holds a mirror for him to see himself. After this all these rites are performed by the husband to the wife but he would be sitting down.

Once this is over the husband takes a coconut and gently rolls it towards his wife. In olden days the couple used to get a brass coconut from the bride's father as a present. She catches it and rolls it towards him in return. While all these are going on the relatives gathered round sing melodious songs. In the olden days there were two types of songs called Pathiyam (in praise of the groom or bride or description of mythical marriages) and Yesal (gentle reminder of the deficiencies of the husband and wife). There were instances when this has lead to a quarrel. They composed most of these compositions. But in recent yesteryears only film songs and classical music are sung.

At the end of the Nalangu, the husband is asked to hold the coconut with one hand and the wife is asked to pry it out using both her hands. Once she succeeds or accepts defeat, the wife holds the coconut with both hands and the husband is asked to pry it using one hand. The relatives tease them a lot.

36.Thozhi Pongal, Maravanai and Kattil (Loukika –special to Kerala Iyers)

This ritual was in practice only among Kerala Iyers. On the day of marriage in the evening the bride goes along with her maternal uncle to the houses of friends of the wife and bid farewell to them. Depending on how rich the family is the journey of Thozhi pongal was performed even on an elephant. The family members of the friends receive the couple and bid them farewell with Thamboola. The bride's uncle normally presents the sari that the bride wears. Nowadays, a grand reception is arranged instead of the Thozhi pongal.

Another grand function, which has disappeared, is the Maravanai. This was a grand procession in which the bride and groom are taken round the village. Some male relatives used to wear the make up of women and some female relatives that of men and dance in front of the procession. Since marriage of those days was conducted for 4 days, this was held on the third day. With shrinking of the marriage ceremonies to a single day, this ritual disappeared.

People of the olden days also tell of a function called Kattil.The bride and the groom go to each and every house of the village. They would be received with fanfare and made to sit on a cot. The lady of the house used to give the bride and groom coconuts and Thamboola.

36. Journey towards the husband's house

According to Vedic rituals the husband and wife are supposed to return to the husband's house the same day.(but nowadays they only go to the quarters reserved for them)It was a custom for the bride's family to give packed food for the groom's party during this occasion. (this packed lunch is given nowadays in the next day morning)They used to go in back in a bullock cart during the olden days. There are several prayers to be recited by the groom during this occasion.

a. To lift the bullock cart

The mind, word and body hold the earth. The sun Gods hold the sky. The Sun Gods live in fire sacrifice (yaga). The soma latha holds the heaven. Like this I should be able to hold this cart safely.

b. To tie the bull to the cart

i. Men tie big horses or bulls in these carts, so that it will have strength to run and cross things which are permanent. This would continue till the time when the stars and sun shine in the sky.

ii. We will call Indra on every occasion when we are forced to tie the horse or the bull, so that we complete our journey safely.

c. Prayer for the wife to occupy the cart

Hey lady, climb in to the cart which is made of soft wood and in which leaves with out thorns are spread. This has also shine like gold because of the decorations done for this occasion. It also has stable and good wheels. Please carry with you all the wealth and articles (for making my life pleasant) from your parent's house in this cart.

Hey Lady, you who climb in this glorious cart should drive away all quarrelsome people and climb on my head.(i.e. you will become my ruler).Like Virat , you should beget for me ten sons. You should become the queen of your father in law, mother in law , sister in laws and brother in laws.

d. Prayer before starting the cart

I spread a blue and red string before this cart so that I can escape all the bad things wished by others on me. I pray that if the enemies of my paternal family hatch a conspiracy so that my new wife should not get along well, that this should be defeated.

I pray that the thieves who are planning to steal the material, which this girl brings from her house, should not succeed.

I have reached that path that does not have danger from thieves and in this path I have my servants to help me.

e. Prayers while traveling in the cart

Let Aswini devas make the water available on my way healthy and of good quality. Let them give me ten sons and wealth.

Let this boat made of wood take both of us safely to the other shore. Let it also give luster to us and long life (if there is necessity to cross a river)

There are similar prayers to cross a burial ground, forests and rivers.

f. Prayer while showing his home to his wife

The husband should first take all the wealth and materials brought by his wife inside his house and then tell her:-

Hey. Lady, this is my home and please see it well. Please see all the material brought by you and which has been kept in this house without hatred and with peace.

Then he prays God Savitha that all the wealth that he has brought should increase steadily.

37.Griha pravesam

The husband should enter the house first and spread the hide of a bull in the central hall with the neck side pointing towards east. While spreading he should pray:-

Let the pleasure-giving hide be properly spread. Hey God who is the god of the new moon day, let this girl become fertile, let her live with the blessings of God Bagha.

Then the wife steps with her right leg in to the house with the following prayer:-

I who am capable of becoming mother to sons, am entering my husband's house where his relatives, brothers and their children live and which is protected by capable watch and ward, happily. I am reaching this house, which has lot of cooked rice over which the ghee flows. After this the couple perform the Pravesa Homa.

38.Pravesya Homa

Literally this means homa performed while entering the groom's house. This is performed before lunch on the day of marriage itself nowadays in the kalyana mantap.

This consists of 13 prayers after reciting each prayer ghee is poured in to the homa fire .The fire is normally lit in the north eastern corner of the house .The wife

keeps touching the husband with a dhurbha grass during the entire homa. The prayers are:-

1. My wife has reached my home from her home along with the cows and horses received by her from her house. She should have a husband who will live long, and she should become eligible to reach heaven by giving birth to many sons, She should also become wealthy and daily pray this Oupasana Agni.(fire maintained in every house hold throughout) .Hey Agni, please fulfill all these and for that I am giving you this ghee.

2.I believe that in whichever house Oupasana agni is maintained, there will be never any dearth. Bagha who looks after the house and gives wealth and food to us should increase our wealth and give us children.

3.Hey Indra, Hey Agni, Hey Prajapathi, please see to it that the children born to us do not die before us.

4.By the offering that I make you, oh, Agni, I should steadily improve in life. Hey Indra, Hey Agni, please accept my offering and make the life given by you to me, improve further.

5.This wife should get more and more happiness out of the ghee, which has been taken out of the milk. Let the house and wealth of ours improve further. Let us both not depend on anybody else for sustenance.

6.Oh couple (addressing themselves) you should always live in this house. You should always be together. You should live for 116 years. Indra should always be interested in looking after you both.

7.Oh wife , you who is going to be looked after me, should be not worried and be attached to me .Brihaspathi has given you to me. So you should beget children for me and live up to 100 years.

8.This wife was made by God Twashta.The same God made me her husband., Hey wife, the reason of my becoming your husband was because of God Twashta Let him give us both different types of wealth and give us long life.

9-13 These are same as the last four prayers of the pradhana homam.

Then a prayer for increase of cattle wealth , begetting valorous children and wealth which never diminishes is made and the homa comes to an end.

39.Gandhrava Pooja

The wife was believed to be under the protection of a Gandharva called Viswa Vasu .He is made to enter a decorated stick and Pooja is performed to this stick.

40.Prayer for getting children

Then the couple are supposed to sit on the hide of the bull and recite the following prayer: -

Hey, Cows, Increase in this house. Hey horses, increase in this house. Hey Servants , increase in this house. Let this house get lot of wealth so that we can perform charity.

Then a boy child of a lady who has only male children and none of whose children had died is selected and asked to sit on the lap of the wife with this prayer:-

By moon, the crops have grown and because of that the gods have benefited. Because of moon the earth has become hard and the plants and trees are able to stand on the earth because of this. Similar to this moon god being among the bevy of stars, this child has been kept on your lap.

Then fruits should be given to the child with the following prayer:-

Hey fruits, you were the cause of increase of children. Like you are fertile, this maid also should become fertile.

Hey wife, in this house, let you be happy because of children. Let God grant you several children. You are the queen of this house. Hold this post in a just manner. Please join your body with mine when we both wish. Then when we become old , help me perform all religious sacrifices.

Hey elders bless this lady to have large number of children, unlimited wealth and bless her to live with her husband till ripe old age..

41. Showing of Dhruva and Arundhathi.

After the above rituals the husband and wife are supposed to observe penance of silence till night when the stars come at night.

Then the pole star is pointed out to the wife and the following prayer:-

Hey Dhruva, you are in an unchangeable place and are the origin of all stars. You give stability to all other stars. Like the cattle tied to a tree cannot roam round, the stars are tied to you. Kindly protect me from my enemies.

(Normally no prayers are recited but the wife asks the husband “Sir, Have you seen the Star Dhruva “ in tamil.)

After this the husband points out the star Arundhathi that is a part of the constellation of great bear. She was the wife of the sage Vasishta. She has been cited as an epitome of wifely devotion. He then recites the following prayer:-

When the great seven rishis made Arundhathi as the greatest among the wives of the great sages, the other six sage wives acknowledged her position. By seeing her , let my wife become the eighth one.

42. Post marriage rituals

These have long gone out of practice and many of them are never carried out and hence only the rituals are described:-

Before retiring for the night together for the first time, they have to pray the Oupasana Agni again. This is called Stalibhaga Then they also perform a rite called Nandi Sraddha, which is the worship of their ancestors Then the wife offers her husband Betel leaf and Areca nut to chew. This is called Thamboola Charvanam,.

The husband and wife should sleep on the bare floor for the next three days with the stick in which the gandhrava Viswvasu is put . Then on the second, third and fourth days the Gandhrva Viswvasu is woken up with a prayer asking him to leave them and give the wife permanently to the husband is made by the husband .He is requested to go to another girl who is in her fathers house and not married. Then the husband again worships the fire (this ritual is called Sesha Homa). He prays the fire God (agni) to remove from his wife all those bad aspects in her, which lead to

the destruction of her husband, wealth and cattle. He also prays that she should not be attracted by any other males. There are other general prayers to the Agni.

After the homa, with the remaining ghee he should rub the chest of his wife and his own chest and pray Gods that they should be always together. He prays “Let Viswa Devas makes our hearts closer. Let The God of water make us close together. Let Vayu and Brahma make our hearts closer. Let Goddess Saraswathi make both of us to speak with each other.” He then prays God Twashta and Lord Indira to occupy his body and make them parents of many sons. He also prays God Prajapathi and Aryama to make them both live with love till they are old. He finally prays Lord Surya to make his wife accept the seed that he has to sow. (Vedic authorities steeped in Vedic ritual also say that the groom has to another Homa Called Rithu Mathi Prayaschitta Kooshmanda Homam. This is performed to get away from the sin of marrying a girl who has attained puberty. But in the recent past this homa is not performed). Phala Dhanam at the groom’s house , similar to the one at the brides house , used to take place in earlier days.

The sumangalis in the house again apply the nalangu on both of them and lead them to their nuptial chamber.. The room is decorated with flowers and lot of fruits is also kept there. A lamp and a matchbox and a God’s picture are also kept in the room. The Sumangalis spread a mat on the bed in the nuptial chamber.

The bride once she enters the room is supposed to light the lamp and pray for a happy life. The elderly married female relatives used to gather outside the nuptial room and sing bawdy uninhibited songs for some time. This was again to make the bride understand the facts of life.

There are also prayers to be chanted in the nuptial room, when the husband and wife are alone. He tells her that she should embrace him and derive happiness because of it. Then he prays for virility for himself for a long time and capacity for himself to produce several children. He tells her that similar to the fashion of making fire on a stick by rotating a stick on it he would be making lots of sons in her. He prays that all their children should be long lived. He also compares her to earth which has fire in the middle and receives the rain from the sky to produce the plants. (she should receive the seeds from him similarly) .He also tells her that they should worship gods daily and get good children.

Thus comes to an end the iyer marriage ritual.

Appendix 1. Some special songs sung during marriage ceremony.

As mentioned in various places the ladies attending the marriage used to sing several songs on different occasions , while the marriage rituals are performed . Unfortunately many of these songs are no more available or known to our elders. (Film songs or classical music has nowadays replaced these). A few of the songs are given below: -

A. Song sung during exchange of garlands:

Malai Chatthinal, Kothai , Malai Matthinal,

**Maladainthu Mashila Rangan
Malayavar than marbile, maiyal aai,
Thaiyalal Malarkarathinal Poo (Malai**)

**Rangarajanai, Anbar – thangal nesanai,
Asi koori, bhoosurargal -pesi miga vazhthida,
Anbudan- Inbamai,
Andal karathinal Poo (Malai**)

(Translated in to free English verse)

**Flower garland put on his neck, Kothai
Flower garland exchanged from him, Kothai**

**On him who is lord Vishnu,
On him who is the spotless Ranga,
The winsome lady,
With her flower like hands,
With love filling her heart, (Flower.....)**

**When the friends and priests,
Praised and blessed him who is God,
With love and with joy,
With her holy hands (Flower...)**

B. Songs sung during Unchal and Pacha Podi

1.Kannunjal Adinal

**Kannunjal Adinal Kanchana Malai
Mana magizhndal.**

**Ponnunjal mel poorithu,
Bhooshangal Darithu,
Iswaranaridathil, Adi Asayum ,
Romba Vaithal (Kannunjal...)**

**Uttami Pettha Kumari,
Nithya sarvalangari.
Bhakthargal papa samhari,
Padma mugha oyyari (Kannunjal...)**

**Asaindhu Sangiliyada,
Usandu Urvashi pada,
Isaindhu Thalangal poda,**

Meenakshi Priyal Kondada (Kannunja..)

(Translated in to free English verse)

**Swung she, our Garland of Gold,
For the first time,
In the golden swing,
And happy she became.**

**Ecstatic In the golden Swing,
And in love with the Lord of all (Swung she...)**

**Daughter of great ma,
Gaily made up to the toe,
Remover of sins of devotees,
The lotus girl who is haughty (Swung she...)**

**With her movements pretty,
Swung the chains hither and thither,
From the sky sang the great Urvashi,
And all people around kept the beats,
With Our darling Meenakshi 's praise (Swung she ...)**

2.Laali

**Palale Kalalambi,Pattale Thudaithu,
Muthana pengal ellam, Muvarumai Chutta Lali**

**Ganga Jalangal Kondu, Mangayargal Devi,
Mani vilakkai kayyil endi – Valaya Vandu Chuttha Lali**

**Deva Thanthi than Muzhanga- Devargal Pugazha,
Pathinettu Vadhiyamum – Pugazh Divya Muzhanga Lali**

(Translated in to free English verse)

**Washing his feet with milk divine,
Drying his feet with the softest silk,
Three pearl like women go round and round Laali**

**One lady great,
Carrying the holy waters of Ganges,
The goddess of women carrying,
A lustrous lamp divine,
They go round and round Laali**

**Music pretty from strings of God,
With Gods blessing from the sky,
Eighteen accompaniments,
Singing their praise, Laali**

C: Songs sung During Nalangu

1.Invitation to Nalangu by bride

**a. Vaarum, Vaarum Nalangida, Sri Vamana Avaatharare,
Theerum, Theerum, En Kavalai ,Theertha Ramachandrare,**

**Azhi Pettha Kayyile- Kanayazhi Modiram Minnave,
Thozhimarudan Koodi- thottathil Vilayadave (Varum...)**

**Atchudanada Moorthiye- Pachai Kavacham Podave.
Atchutarum Lakshmiyum, Ichai udane Koodiye (Varum.)**

**Please come, please come for putting Nalangu,
He who was born as Vamana,
Put an end, put an end,
To all my worries, Hey Ramachandra.**

**In the hand that was born to the sea,
The Lustrous ring sparkling bright,
Please come to make merry,
In the garden beautiful,
With my lovely friends all around (Please come....)**

**Hey God who is Atchutha,
For wearing the shirt of green,
Come with Lakshmi and Achutha,
With lovelorn face, (Please come. ...)**

**b. Varum Nalangida Varum,
Tharum Pathaathai,
Vandennai Aat Kollum,
Vasudeva maindare.**

**Thandai Chilambu Kalal- Tavazhndu Vilayadi
Thappamal Jala Kreedai –Adiya Paadam (Varum Nalangida..)**

**Gokulam Thannil Gopa Streeguladane,
Koodi Vilayadi – Kondadiya Padam (Varum Nalangida...)**

(Translated in to free English verse)

Welcome to you sir, welcome,
Extend your feet
For putting the Nalangu,
Come and conquer me,
Oh, Son of Vasudeva.

With the feet wearing jingling anklets,
Playing lying down in the floor,
The feet that played with love,
Inside the water,
The feet which danced with love (Welcome..)

In the hoary Gokula,
With winsome Gopis,
Played this feet with love,
And became ecstatic (Welcome..)

2.songs sung during nalangu ceremony

- a. Nalangidugiral Meena Lochani,
Nadarudan Vandu Kooda,
Naradarum Nalla Ganangalai Pada,
Nana Vida Taalam Poda,
Nalangidugiral Meena Lochani.

Neela Varna Divya Manjalai Edutthu,
Nithyanandarai Kurithu,
Poorithu, Bhoopathi Padathile Ittal,
Pushpa Haram Marbil Pottal. (Nalangidugiral

Swarna Panneer Chombai-Jothi eduthal,
Sundareswarar Mel Thelithal,
Vasanai Kalanda Parimalam Poosinal,
Vanangi Chamaram Veesinal (Nalangidugiral

Vistharamai Neenda Netiyai Thottal,
Kasthuri Thilagangal Ittal,
Malligaiyai Chelli Kai Ale Thelithal,
Maha devar Veniyile Mudithal (Nalangidugiral

Thanga Thambalam Thaga Thaga endru Eduthal,
Thamboolangaludan Koduthal,

**Munnale Nandraga Pathiyam Padithal,
Meenakshi Priyal Manasai Sada Pidithal (Nalangidugiral)**

(Translated in to free English verse)

**Our girl Meenalochani,
Is Putting Nalangu.**

**When she came with her husband,
Narada sang beautiful songs,
And all kept different beats.**

**Taking the blue coloured divine turmeric,
Thinking of him who is happy for ever,
With happiness filling her mind,
She put Nalangu on the feet of her king. (Our girl Meenalochani)**

**Golden pitcher with scented water she took,
And sprinkled on the God of beauty
And applied she scented balms,
And also fanned him with peacock feathers (Our Girl Meenalochani...)**

**She caressed his wide long forehead,
And applied round dot with musk divine,
And took jasmine flowers in a lot,
And put it in his made up hair. (Our girl Meenalochani)**

**She took a glittering gold plate ,
And gave him with Thamboola,
And also sang nice Pathiyams,
And thus our darling Meenakshi caught hold of his mind.
(Our girl Meenalochani)**

b. Groom singing to the bride

**Varai, Rukmani Devi, Nerai En Mugathai Parai,
Nalangida Pathathai Tharai. Magizhvaga (Varai)**

**Vanchanai Cheydha, Pey Uyir Thuncha Vendra Mayan,
Kanchala nethran Kaiyal –Manjal Poosigiren. (Varai...)**

**Mandra giriyai Sumandirarukku amritham,
Vindai ayi eenda kaiyale, Chandanam Poosigiren (Varai...)**

**Vala Karathil Azhi dharithirukkum Vasudevan,
Thilaga pottidugiren Thiru nettiyil nerai (Varai)**

**Theembu cheyda Kaliya paambil meedil nadithon,
Aambal malar vayan kaiyal Thamboolam tharugiren (Varai...)**

(Translated in to free English verse)

**Come my Rugmani, See my face straight,
Extend your feet for putting Nalangu,
With all the happiness in the world.**

**He who has not deceived any one,
He who has killed all the bad devils galore,
He who has beautiful black eyes,
Am applying turmeric paste on you, oh dear (Come my ...)**

**He who took the Mandara Mountain,
With his hand , in times of yore,
Applies with his magical hands Sandal on you , oh dear (Come my)**

**Me the great Vasudeva,
Who wears the ocean in his right hand,
Am putting thilaka ,
On your forehead straight, Oh dear (Come my ...)**

**He who danced on the head,
Of the evil Serpent Kaliya,
Am giving you with my lotus hand,
Thamboola to you, Oh dear. (Come my ...)**

c. Pathiyam (sung by the bride)

**En Prana Rajare, Eerezhu Loka Vasare,
Manayvi Nan Chollu Mozhiyai Magizhndu Kelum**

**Pathiye Deiyvam Endru enni Bhakthiyai Poojai Panni,
Nithiyamum Nan Ummai sevikka Venum**

**Kodi Manmada Roopa , Koodi Ennalana Mattum,
Nadiye Panividai Nan Nadathugiren**

**Adile Apacharam Ayiram Nan Cheydalum,
Upacharamagave Grahithu**

**Kuttangal Ethanai Nan Cheyda Podum,
Chittathil Vaikamal Kshamithu Parum,
Prana Saga Pol Ennai Anaithu alum.**

(Translated in to free English verse)

The King of my soul, my darling,
He who lives in all the seven worlds,
Hear with attention and be happy forever,
These words told by me, your wife, darling.

I should always darling,
Think of you as my only God,
And be of service to you, darling,
Always and always.

Darling mine who is like thousand cupids,
I will try always in the best possible way, darling,
To do all your work , my darling.

In that even if I, my darling,
Make one thousand mistakes,
You should take them as proper love, my darling.

Oh my darling, treat me as thine,
Dear bosom friend,
And embrace and pardon all the mistakes, I do.

d. Pathiyam (sung by the bride)

Soma Suryavanni nayanasu sareeramellam,
Chornthirukka Vendiya Karanangal enna.

Surukkai inda sangadiyai, surukkai en karanam ketka,
Kapadamillamale, Urayum Nanna

Mohiniyai Kandu Bhogikka Asai kondu.
Hariyidathil Apamana patta manna-

Mosam Cheythu munivar pathinigalai thodarnthu,
Padivritha bhangam Cheytha Prabhu Neeranna

Vervayal Annai Thantha Salvai Nananchu Poche,
Visala lalada basmam azhiyalache,
Nalu Nariyargal Arindal enakku eche,
Nan enna thavam cheytheno, enakku Vache.

(Translated in to free English verse)

**Oh Darling mine,
Why should you look so worn.**

**Please darling mine,
Tell all the reasons for this first.**

**Did you follow Mohini ,
And got insulted by Hari, Oh darling mine.**

**Did you deceive the sages fine,
And followed their wives dear,
And insulted them, oh darling mine**

**Oh darling mine,
Why is the shirt,
Given by your mummy, so wet,
And oh why, your forehead broad,
Is full of water darling mine.**

**When four ladies know,
About thee , darling mine,
They will abuse me, darling mine.**

**What penance did I , darling mine,
To get an husband like you , darling mine.**

e. Pathiyam (sung by the groom or groom's party)

**Kan mani, Rukhmani, Ennudaya Bhooshani,
Kanaka Oyyari , nee Kamalavadani-**

**Minnal Oli Pondra Nee, Vinnor Paniyum nee,
Vilangave Ulagathil Vandavalum nee,**

**Swarna Prathamai nee, Jyothi Maya Roopini,
Prasanna Vadivum nee, Por Kodiyum nee,**

**Kannal Karubum nee, Karkandu Rasamum nee,
Unnadamana Thoru Utta then nee,**

**Chennal Vilaynthidum, Suka vasi niye,
Singamanador, Vachani neeye,
Karunai Kadal Pondra Gunamum Neeye,
Kalyana Guna Seela Vadani Varai.**

(Translated in to free English verse)

**Darling, Oh Darling,
Rukhmani, oh my darling,
Ornament mine, Golden girl mine,
You are lotus faced, Oh my darling.**

**You are like the streak of lightning, Darling,
You were the darling in heaven too,
Ere you came to light , this world, oh darling.**

**You are a doll of gold, oh darling,
You are made of light, oh darling,
You are a pleasant faced one, oh darling,
You are a golden tendril, oh darling.**

**You are the sweetest cane, oh darling,
You are the juice of sugar , oh darling,
You are the sweetest of honey, oh darling.**

**You are the pleasure house, oh darling,
You are lion like brave, oh darling,
You are the ocean of mercy, oh darling
You are a pleasant faced one, oh darling.**

f. Pathiyam (sung by the groom or groom's party)

**Sandegam, kollade, endan mel-
Sathiyamai Cholgiren , idai kelai.**

**Chandira Bimba Mandahasi undan-
Chengaram chindai magizhndu piditha nalai-**

**Soppanathil Analum e prapancha madargalai-
Sugithu Nan Anaithahthillai, en tholal**

**Surasenan sudani Petta en sugumariye,
Suthu endru Ariyadennai Sugithu Alai**

**Para Paksha Kashtangalai Chumanthu Nane-
Bana Bhadran Sathruvai Jeyikka ponen-
Komalakara Kuyile, endan kudumba mane,
Kopam Kollamal ennai Koodadi En there.**

(Translated in to free English verse)

**My heart of hearts,
Don't doubt me for a minute please,
I will tell you, all the truth,
Please hear this, oh darling mine.**

**My heart of hearts,
From the day , I held your hands,
Oh darling with a moon faced smile,**

**Even in dream , oh darling mine,
I have never held in my pleasing hands,
No lady of earth except thee. Oh darling mine**

**The daughter of son of Surasena,
I am innocent and plain, darling mine,
Hold me with you darling mine.**

**Carrying all thine doubts, darling mine,
I went to fight enemies of Bana Bhadra,
Hey, beautiful nightingale mine,
Hey, gazelle of family mine,
Leave this anger and become one with me, darling mine**

g. Song teasing groom's mother

**Engal Sambandi,
Sappidave Mattal.**

**Vegu Sangojakkari
Idliyile 200,
Thayir Vadayile 500,
Puliyodarayum,
Venpongalum,
Kai Murukkum Boondhi Laddum,
Then kuzhalum,
Vida Vidamaga ,
Oru Kai Parapal... (Engal Sambandhi)**

**Amerikka Badam,
Arabia Preecechai,
Irakkin Pistaa,
Kashmir Akroot,
Kumkuma poo potta,
Karkandu Palai,
Kudam Kudamaga ,**

Kudithe Theerpal ... (Engal sambandhi.....)

(Translated in to free English verse)

**Our daughter's mother in law,
Never takes food, never—**

**If it is Idlis , she takes but 200,
If it is Thair Vadai she takes only 500,
She also takes ,
Varieties and Varieties ,
Of Puliodarai, Ven Pongal,
Kai Murukku, Boondhi , laddu,
And then kuzhal lots and lot ,
But..... (Our daughter's mother.....)**

**She only drinks , poor lady pots and pots of milk,
If mixed nice with crystal sugar,
American Badam,
Dates from Arabia,
Pista from Iraq,
Akroot from Kashmir,
And ofcourse lot of saffron,
But.... (our daughter's mother in law....)**

Appendix 2: Some legal clarifications of a Hindu marriage

Q: What are the prohibited degrees in a Hindu marriage?

The following would come within prohibited degrees of relationship with regard to Hindus:

- a. If one party to the marriage is a lineal ascendant of the other;
- b. If one of the parties to the marriage is the wife or husband of a lineal ascendant or descendant;
- c. Marriage between a man and his brother's wife or uncle's wife or his grandfather's or grandmothers' brother's wife;
- d. Marriage between:
 - i. brother and sister;
 - ii. uncle and niece;
 - iii. aunt and nephew;
 - iv. children of brother and sister;
 - v. children of sisters;
 - vi. children of brothers.

However the Hindu Marriage Act recognizes the marriages mentioned above if the custom or usage applicable to the parties to the marriage permits such marriages. Only if their custom or usage does not permit such marriages would the parties be held to be within prohibited degrees of relationship. Custom that allows such marriages should be ancient, certain and reasonable and should not be opposed to public policy, decency or morality

Q: What ceremonies should be observed to solemnize a Hindu Marriage?

Hindu marriage can be solemnised according to the customary rites and ceremonies of either the bride or the bridegroom. Customary rites and ceremonies mean religious rites traditionally performed by the caste or community to which the bride or bridegroom belong. It should be shown that such custom has been followed definitely from ancient times and the members of the caste, community or sub-caste had recognized such ceremonies as obligatory. Rites and ceremonies consistently followed for more than 25 years within a particular community and had been uniformly observed and not discontinued at any point of time would be said to be customary rites and ceremonies for the solemnization of a valid legal marriage. According to the Arya Samaj rites, the invocation before the sacred fire and the sapthapadi are essential ceremonies.

Q: What is sapthapadi?

Sapthapadi symbolizes those aspects of life, which the parties to a marriage undertake to share in togetherness. The seven steps taken stand for the vows they make before the almighty. It is only on taking the seventh step that the marriage would be said to be solemnized

Q: Is sapthapadi, i.e., the custom of the bride and bridegroom taking seven steps, an essential part of a Hindu Marriage?

If the customary rites and ceremonies traditionally performed by the caste or community, to which the bride or the bridegroom belong, do not include 'sapthapadi gaman', it would not be an essential part of the marriage. If it is proved that 'sapthapadi', is not a part of the ceremony it need not be performed. Otherwise 'sapthapadi' remains an essential ceremony in a Hindu marriage.

Q: Would a marriage be valid on the observance only of sapthapadi?

Where 'sapthapadi' and invocation before the fire is observed, without observing the customary ceremonies, which are neither ancient and definite nor obligatory and unalterable, such marriage would still be valid.

Appendix 3. Making arrangements for the marriage by the bride's parents -Some points.

The iyer marriages (98%) of the rites and rituals are arranged by the bride's father. Since this is a complex duty , some of the arrangements , which he should not loose sight of are mentioned here:-

1.Preliminary Discussion with the Bridegrooms parents.

The brides father should discuss the following points with the grooms father preferably after the Nischayathartham performed in the groom's house: -

- a. Suitable and convenient date for the marriage (He should also take in to consideration the convenience of the bride and her mother)
- b. Dowry, ornaments, vessels and other items expected by the grooms family.
- c. The amount of money needed to be paid for the suit to be worn by the groom during reception.
- d. Ring size of the groom .
- e. Slipper size of the groom.
- f. Design of the Thali (What pattern has to be inscribed on it)
- g. Approximate number of guests accompanying the groom.
- h. The Cheer .This should include the number of large Murukkus (With Vari number), muthuswaram, Laddu, Neyyappam or Adhirasam, Mysorepak and quantity of Thirattupal. Also the number of packets of Small murukku and two sweets each packed separately in cover .(this is for distribution of the groom's party to their relatives and friends. Any special demand by the groom's party should be noted.
- i. Find out whether they would bring their own Vadhyar and if not whether it is necessary to arrange a separate Vadhyar for them locally.
- j. Request them to inform their travel plan sufficiently early.
- k. Exact name of the grooms father , mother and groom for printing the marriage invitation by the brides family. Care should be taken to print the name of the groom and bride as they appear in their passport , if they are going abroad after the marriage.
- l. Find out the addresses of their close relatives to whom invitation letters have to be posted by the bride's father.
- m. The number of copy of the full set of Albums and Video cassettes required by them. If the groom lives abroad find out whether , it has to be in what mode and whether they require it in a CD.
- n. Find out whether they require any hotel rooms to be booked for the groom's friends and other VIPs.

2. Fixing up of a hall.

This is possibly one of the very important aspects of the work to be done. Most of the good halls are booked very early. If necessary help of few friends who have their own vehicles can be requested. The major consideration is the number of guests expected to attend the function, the timing of the Vritham, Nischayartham, Marriage reception and the travel programme of the groom's family. Since most of the Groom's relatives and friends are new to the place where marriage is conducted, sufficient accommodation should be available in the Hal. If it is not available alternate accommodation has to be searched. Once the hall is located and available on the day of the marriage, it should be booked for a minimum of two days. It is important to find out from the manager of the hall

- a. Number of Chairs available in the hall
- b. The number of chairs available in the dining hall
- c. The number of rooms available (whether all of them have attached bath rooms and if not the number of common bath rooms), Personally inspect how neat they are. Also find out whether hot water facility for bath is available.
- d. Whether they will provide the vessels and stow with the hall free?
- e. Whether there is a generator in the hall?
- f. Whether there is provision for extra decoration with them?
- g. Whether they have a swing for the Oonchal ceremony?
- h. Whether they have Homa Kunda for performing homa.
- i. The number of servants who are available with the hall and their remuneration.
- j. The number of cars that can be parked inside the compound.
- k. At what time the hall will be handed over to them and when it has to be handed back.

Before leaving find out the correct name , address, telephone number, telegram address if any of the hall and also the transport facility to the hall from different parts of the town. Make a list of bus numbers passing near by.

3. Fixing the Marriage contractor.

Nowadays it has become a practice to fix up the cook cum contractor to help us conduct the marriage. He normally takes care of the food aspect of the marriage function .He also supplies the Cheer to be given, fixes the Nadaswaram, supplies all the traditional necessities of the marriages during the marriage including flowers. Once a good contractor who is not too busy on the day of marriage is located, you have to inform him:-

1. The menu for breakfast, lunch, tiffin time and dinner for the two days of the marriage and approximate number of expected guests during each time. Normally one of these times the marriage reception will be held. Detailed menu for the reception also should be told to him.
2. He should be told about the cheer items to be supplied to the Sambandi as well as the requirements for the bride's family.
3. He should be told about the number of Kuttis which he has to supply along with specification of the filling like cashew nut, boondhi, paruppu thengai etc.

He would normally take charge of the following items:-

1. Mangala Vadhyam
2. Flowers , garlands as required

3. Materials required by the priests
 4. Thamboolam packets for the guests attending the marriage
 5. Coconuts for Sambandhi
 6. Putting of Kolams as and when required
 7. Materials for Arathi , Pachaipudi
1. Photographer and video coverage
 2. Decoration of the hall

It is essential at this stage to make extensive consultation with friends or relatives who have already arranged marriages so that the contract money be fixed at reasonable limits.

4. Fixing the priest to conduct the marriage.

If the marriage is being arranged in our normal place of residence, the priest would necessarily be our family priest. If not through known people we have to fix the priest. He would be the best person to fix up the muhurtham lagnam for the marriage. The contract rate for him to conduct the marriage (bride's party) should be also settled at that time. If the groom's party wanted us to arrange a priest for them , the same priest could be told about that also.

5. Printing of marriage invitations

It is essential to know about the name of the groom and his parents clearly before this is attempted. The groom should be asked whether he wants his qualification and designation should be put in the invitation .It is extremely important to spell the name of the groom and bride as it appears in the passport, if they are intending to get visa to a foreign country. Any good printing house will have several models and a suitable invitation could be chosen. Some families believe in printing a traditional invitation in Tamil apart from the regular invitations. If this is necessary , arrangements should be made for that also.

If it is proposed to have a music concert during the reception, the artist concerned should be contacted and fixed before printing the invitation.

5.(a) Purchase of silk saris for the bride and others

This is a very important purchase. It is necessary to decide where these are to be taken. Apart from the 9 yards Koorai Pudavai , a minimum of 4 saris for the following occasions have to be taken:-

1. Nischayartham
2. Kannonchal
3. Shanthi Muhurtham
4. Thozhi Pongal

It is also customary to buy a silk sari for the mother of the bride, brides sisters, her brother's wives, Mami and Athai. Also a sambandi Pudavai for the groom's mother has to be purchased. Little girl children of the family also get Pattu Pavadai. In view of the economy, it is preferable to purchase all these at this time.

5(b) Purchase of Veshti and Uttariyam for the groom and Materials for Kasi Yatrai

The groom has to be given a Pattu Veshti and Uttariyam.Vratha Pattu) .Besides Two grand Veshtis with lot of zari border (cotton) has to be purchased for him to wear during Kasi Yatrai.One more extra set of Veshti has to be presented to him .

For Kasi yatrai , it is necessary to purchase an umbrella, a walking stick, a hand held fan, a holy book and slippers.

6.Making of the thali

It is a custom to give order for this on a shubha muhurtham day. In olden times the gold smiths used to come to the bride's house and start melting the gold during a muhurtham.Apart from the two thalis the other paraphernalia like Gold Kundoos also should be made.

7.Ordering for jewels

Most of the families do have all the necessary jewels for the bride .It may be necessary to give them a special polish. It may also be necessary to make a few more ornaments for the bride based on modern fashion. Since most of the girls transfer the thali from the yellow Kayiru to a Kodi after the marriage, it is necessary to make one such kodi, with a provision for putting the thalis in that.

It is necessary at this time to order for a ring to the groom. Most families also put a gold chain to him during the Nischayathartham.

It is also necessary to have a pair of Pudupanam for the Dharma Virtual function. If not available two small gold coins of the least weight possible can be got made.

8.Silver vessels

Most of the groom's parents expect a few silver vessels.The most essential are panchapathram and Uddarani for the groom, silver lamp(some families insist on a pair of lamps) and silver Kukuma Chimizh. It is also essential to purchase two silver cups called Madhuparka Kinnam.

In addition a silver plate for taking meals for the bride and the groom is also usually given. Two small silver cups for receiving and drinking Palum Pazhamam would avoid lot of problem when this ceremony is going on.

9.Brass vessels

For the Oonchal, it is necessary to buy two lamps, two thambalams and two Chombus made of brass.

10.Purchasing of mats.

It is a custom to inscribe the names of the bride and groom on the mat given during the marriage. If this is decided upon , then it is necessary to get them made. This is available only in few centers of Kerala and Tamil Nadu. But if ordinary mats only are to be given, these are readily available.

11.Posting of Invitations

This is a very time consuming job. Close relatives expect a personal letter along with the invitation. Nowadays it is got separately printed. It is better to consult as many relatives and friends as possible so that no important person is missed from the list of invitees.

It is also necessary to identify the persons to whom the special invitations printed in tamil has to be sent.

A personal hand written letter has to accompany the invitations being send to very senior elders of the family.

It is a custom to personally go to the Groom's parents house along with Coconut, Thamboola , flowers etc and inform them of the marriage. If any brides relations stay near the place of the groom they can do it on behalf of the bride's parents.

If there are any near relatives of the groom staying in the same town as the bride's parents, they also should be invited personally with coconut, thamboola and flowers.

12.Arrangement for a photo and videographer

It is necessary to get a professional who has covered iyer marriages before. Unless this is done, it would be necessary to put along with him somebody who is conversant with the marriage function, so that the function is covered nicely. It is necessary at this stage to tell the photographer the number of rolls that he has to expose. Taking a picture does not mean it has to be printed. A professional can give only few best photos of each occasion. The videographer has to be told , the number of copies that he has to make. If it has to be copied in a CD, this again has to be told to him.

13.Arrangement of Transport.

Though a transport contractor has to picked up based on the charges as well as the number of good vehicles he has, the micro arrangements have to be made only a day before the marriage. If the grooms party is arriving together, it may be necessary to hire a van. If not a two or three cars will suffice. But it is important to note that adequate arrangements should be made to give transport to the groom's pary. It would be better to give them control of the vehicle , so that they can use it as and when they like.

14.Inviting local guests

This is another aspect of the marriage which is very strenuous and needs lot of planning. Initially a list of people should be made and then each and every one of the house should be asked to go through it. Later a detailed plan as well as a time table should be drawn up. If older relatives like brothers or sisters or sons and daughters who are married live with you or in the same town, they can be asked to share this onerous work. They can invite on behalf of you. Nowadays, more and

more use of the telephone is being made. The invitations can be posted as usual and can be followed up by a telephone conversations.

15. Purchase of presents to near relatives and honoured guests.

This is another item that needs detailed planning. Normally the elder and old enough younger sisters of the bride, her sister in laws are presented with a silk sari for the marriage. The budget depends on our capacity to spend. Similarly it is also a custom to present saris to the paternal and maternal aunts. It is also necessary to purchase suitable presents to the cousins of the bride. Sometimes cash present is made to them, so that they can choose their own presents. It has also become customary to give token presents to all women guests during the marriage. But all these need to be discussed among the nearest family members and decision taken based on our capacity to spend.

It is also a custom to present very close male relatives with Veshti and Uttariyam. The requirement should be estimated and sufficient quantity purchased.

16. Contacting the Grooms party and finding out their travel plans.

Since the groom's party normally comes from some other place, it is necessary to receive as many of them as possible and provide them transport to the hall. So a very clear timetable of their arrival should be drawn up. It would also be necessary to ask them whether they need any arrangements made for their return reservations.

17. Sumangali Prarthana

This is normally observed before the marriage. Arrangements of the function and its conduct vary from family to family. This should be conducted according to the family traditions. But normally a 9 yards sari is taken and presented to one of the sumangalis and one Pavadai is presented to a the girl invitee.

18. Arranging for a beautician

Most of the brides want to be made up by a talented beautician of their choice for the reception. If this is so, her time should be booked. If the beautician can come and do her job at the hall itself. There is nothing better. Before this the brides do decorate their hands with Mehandhi (marudhani) .If there is no expert in the family circles, arrangements for this also needs to be made.

19. Two days before the marriage.

Close relatives would start arriving from various destinations to the marriage. It is necessary to accommodate them properly and look after them. Since most of them are closely related it is hoped they would not mind some slight discomforts. It is better to employ a cook to take care of the cooking in the house on this day, so that the bride's parents are available to look after last minute final details and also to look after several guests. If closely related relatives come forward, they can be entrusted with different aspects of the marriage like transport, looking after Sambandi, etc.

It is essential to procure sufficient number of locks and duplicate keys to the different rooms in the hall. Since the grooms party are to be properly looked after, it is better to keep a few pieces of toilet soaps, combs, mirrors, tooth brushes, paste,

kumkum tins, Vibhuthi, use and throw shaving sticks etc. this is to help those people who forget these things while coming to the marriage. If the hall does not provide beds, bedspreads, pillows etc, arrangements should be made to hire these also. A very detailed plan of the programme for the next two days should be drawn up and individual responsibilities assigned. Also all things to be taken to the hall are to be packed properly.

If the vritham is the next day morning, the toilet items purchased for the groom along with oil , Payaru, Vellam and sweet should reach the grooms party early in the morning and is traditionally given by the aunt of the bride. Nowadays it is a custom to give a full toilet set to the groom during this occasion. This should consist of toothbrush, toothpaste, Shaving set, mirror, toilet powder, hair oil and comb.

This is also the time for the lady of the house to plan as to the responsibilities like palikai, oonchal, arathi etc to the different female relatives.

20. One day before the marriage

This day could be extremely busy, if the vritham is on this day morning and the repetition is being held in the evening. If these are not there the day would not be that tight.

The most important activity is to receive the groom's party in a proper way. As soon as they get down from the car, the groom's parents are to be honourably received with Thirattu pal, thamboolam, coconut etc along with mangala vadhyam. The groom should be garlanded during the occasion by the bride's father or her brother. Also Arathi should be arranged to prevent evil eyes. Then they should be lead to their quarters and made comfortable. If there is Vritham, they should be called to that function in a traditional manner with coconuts and paruppu thengai kutti. It is normal to observe the Kappu Kattal to the bride simultaneously. If this is only next day, then arrangements should be made for their breakfast and then lunch.

Normally the first function is Mappilai Azhaippu and Nischayathartham. A decorated car has to be got ready for the Mappilai Azaippu. Normally this is not included in the contractors duties. A near by temple also has to be identified and the priest of the temple informed in advance for the Pooja. It is important to see that the VIPs of the grooms side are escorted to this function in a proper way. Old people have to be provided transport.

If the reception is held after the Nischayathartham , then the beautician should be forewarned about the timings, Either she should be brought to the hall or the bride taken to her place in time.

The guests for the reception should be received at the entrance by a very small group consisting of members from both bride's and groom's side. Teen age or younger girls belonging to both families do mostly this. Both families should assign some one elder to recognize the VIPs arriving to the function. It is necessary to introduce the bride's family guests to the groom and very important ones to his parents. For this purpose the bride's parents should always be near the stage. It is better to entrust other important responsibility like accompanying the guests to the dinner etc to other relatives and friends. Most of these guests will not be coming for

the marriage. So it is essential that the Thamboola packets be distributed to them while they are leaving.

If the Vritham has not taken place that day, it is essential to see that the materials for Vritham to the groom reaches them before they retire.

21. The day of the marriage.

Most of the functions on this day would go like clock work , thanks to the experienced contractors and priests. But it is essential that all guests are received properly and given break fast if they come early. It is also essential to enquire from the groom's side as to any problem they face and solve it. The bride's parents would be extremely tied up with the ceremonies for most of the forenoon (till Mangalya Dharanam) .So it is essential to identify capable people and delegate responsibilities to them. The bride's mother has to decide as to who will participate in the Oonchal and Paligai from her side. She should ask the groom's mother to nominate 2 members from her side who will participate in the paligai from her side. She should also think in advance the people from her side who will participate in the paligai in the groom's side. It is also essential that she decides in advance about her relatives who will participate in the alathi in different occasions. She should also keep an experienced lady relative in tying 9 yards sari to the bride. She should also delegate the responsibility of giving presents to her friends after the end of the function to her friends and relatives.

Early morning the veshtis and Uttariyams purchased should be distributed to the male relatives, Similarly the saris purchased also needs to be distributed. This is either done in an informal way by simply handing it over to them or ask the eldest member of the brides relatives to hand it over individually in a formal function. One male relative should be entrusted with expenditure and receipt of money. As and when sudden demands are there for cash, he should be in a position to meet it. He also should receive all cash presents and neatly account it. He would hand over to the priest the cash presents to the sister of the groom who ties the second and third knots of the thali .This is normally the same amount as the groom's party gives to the brother of the bride after laja homam. Other expected expenditures are Sambhavana for the Mutts and various small amounts of dakshinas as directed by the priest.

All the preliminary purchases made for various functions should be available in the hall. It is essential to see that the coconuts , thamboola bags and cheer items to the groom's party handed over to their representative in time.

Immediately after the marriage the groom and bride are taken to the groom's quarters and brides house for giving them Palum Pazhamum. Somebody should be deputed to go to the house slightly early and make it presentable to receive the guests. After that the registration of the marriage should be done. This can be done easily , if preliminary arrangements are made for the same. If by chance the groom and bride are little delayed, their lunch with the important members of both families should be retained. This is important because sometimes , if much larger number of guests come, the material cooked would not be sufficient.

Most of the guests would like to meet the brides parents before they go. If palaharams and presents are to be distributed to them, arrangements should be made for the same.

If there is Nalangu this should be arranged in the after noon. Though most of the brides party would be dead tired before evening, it is necessary to treat the groom and his guests in a befitting manner. They should be provided transport to the bus stand or railway station as and when they want it.

While all this is going on arrangements should be given a final shape to the nuptials. According to sastras it should be held in the boys house but now it is a custom to hold it on the day of marriage. It can either be held in brides home or in a convenient hotel. But it is essential that the views of the bridegroom and his parents be ascertained before arranging it in a hotel. Somebody should be put in charge of decorating the room and taking there essentials like a lamp, milk to drink, flowers, fruits etc.

If bulk of the groom's guests depart on the same evening, it would be necessary to give them food packets for the way. The marriage contractor normally supplies this. It is a custom to supply Kattu Chadam to the departing guests of the groom's party.

Normally there is a feast for dinner on that day. But some people prefer simple meals. The wishes of the groom's party should be ascertained regarding this.

A few of the people accompanying the groom normally stay over to the next day. They should be well taken care of. If the Mantap has to be vacated, then they should be provided alternative accommodation.

On the next day tall the groom's party would depart. It is essential to give them Kattuchadam and also provide them transport.

It is also essential that some elder relatives accompany the bride and groom when they depart to their house. Arrangements for their reservation (if they are going by train) should be done well in advance.

In some cases the father in law (bride's father) foots the bill for the Honeymoon of the couple. Again early arrangements for journey and stay has to be made .