

men of knowledge and wisdom who are of exemplary character should be followed. Sit with them and have faith in them. Give in charity, give with faith. Give even without faith, but give you must. Give well and with dignity. Give even out of shame. Give even with fear, i.e., as social compulsion and necessity. Give as a matter of social duty and discipline. If you ever have doubt what should be done or followed in practice—what is right and what is wrong—look to the men of knowledge and wisdom, men of vision and right conduct, who are dedicated to God, dedicated to society, kind at heart, and followers of righteousness, take them as your authority and follow their example. Do as they do. This is the ordainment. This is the precept. This is the essence of the Veda and the upanishad. This is the discipline. This is the essence of teaching. Follow this in thought and deed.

After the holy advice, what remains to do is thanks—giving and hospitality.

Everybody has his own style of thanks-giving. It also depends on one's personal appreciation and understanding of the style and content of the teacher's contribution to the pupil's growth from the natural man to the 'divya', the educated, cultured and 'Dharmic' person fit to live a person fit to live a meaningful creative life in civilized community. Hence Svami Dayanand in the 'Sanskara Vidhi' suggests the line of thought in thanks giving :—

Gentle folk, I acknowledge with gratitude and reverence the contribution my teacher has made to my growth from a mere natural being to an educated person with knowledge and wisdom. I promise and pledge that just as the Guru has given me education, so I will do my best to contribute to the education of others. Of course, I can never repay the teacher, but I shall never forget his favour and I shall ever hold myself bound and beholden to him in the bond of reverence and gratitude. I hope the guru will continue this sacred programme of instruction and I pray that God bless the learners and the teachers of the world to promote and advance the education, culture and virtuous living of mankind. May God bless us all with good health, long life, strength and courage, so that we all realize the comprehensive aims of life Dharma, economic and social being, happiness and prosperity, and ultimately freedom of the soul—each in his or her own manner and style according to his or her nature, character and style of action.

Then send-off to the teacher and the priests with befitting gifts, welcome to the graduate and hospitality to the guests and all before the assembly disperses.

## 13

### The Marriage Ceremony

Marriage (Vivaha) means a state of life in which the husband and the wife love each other in unison (as if both are one single self), live together, and carry on the affairs of life together to a successful end. Marriage is not an arrangement, not a contract, not a convenience, it is a union like the integration of two streams into one—once the two waters join, they become one, you cannot distinguish one from the other. About the Vaidic marriage Mrs. Annie besant says the following :—

"Nowhere in the whole world, nowhere in any religion, is there a nobler, a more beautiful, a more perfect ideal of marriage than you can find in the early writing of the Hindus."

The marriage ceremony is unique—The other ceremonies are performed in relation to one individual, this is performed in relation to two together.

#### The Match

(i) **The Age :** The right minimum age for marriage is 16 years for the girl and twenty four years for the boy. The maximum age is 24 years for woman and 48 years for man. The maturity which the body system of the male achieves by 48 years is achieved by the female system in 24 years. The age limits so prescribed mean that the man and the woman have observed continuous and uninterrupted discipline of Brahmachary (celibacy). If the discipline is broken prematurely, then the degree and quality of maturity is bound to be different. Hence the minimum age is 16 and 24 years, and the maximum, 24 and 48.

(ii) **Character and Personality :**—Marriage is a life-long affair. It is union rather than a matter of trial, error and retreat. Broken marriages are the result of hasty decisions and partial personality-equations. Vaidic marriage is a matter of long and careful observation of the parties' character and personality by the teachers and the seniors of the family and the community and also a conscious and fully responsible agreement by the parties concerned. For this agreement and harmony certain criteria are prescribed :—

1. The boy and the girl should be of harmonious and complementary qualities of mind and heart. Their intellectual, social and professional interests should be agreeable. Their ambitions and goals in life should be similar. In short, as Svami Dayanand says, marriage should be in the same varna, i.e., social group or class which has common interests and qualities of mind and heart. In today's world also, a teacher would like to marry a teacher; a businessman would like to marry in a business family; a professional would marry a professional and so on. Vasna does not mean caste. Varna is changeable in the same manner as the son of a teacher may join the army, and the son of an army officer may set up a factory. Similarly, in the past, if a person born in a Brahman family, failing to do well in education would go down in the social scale, and a person born in a shudra family but doing well in education and training would rise to the status of a Brahman or ksatriya or vaishya. The real thing is that the interests, ambitions, character and qualities of the consenting parties should agree, then alone marriage would be successful.

(iii) The boy and the girl should carefully know each other and then take a conscious decision to marry. Having married, they should carry out their obligations with full responsibility. The boy and the girl may also take the help of senior people who may interview the other party and advise.

**Symbols and Significance :—**The rituals performed in this ceremony are symbolic and significant. A brief account of the ceremony, rituals and significance is given below :—

1. Before the wedding, there should be yajna in the house of the bride and that of the bride groom. Yajna marks an auspicious beginning.

**2. Reception—**When the bridegroom and party arrive at the bride's house, the bride and her family and friends receive them, the bridegroom and other guests face east and the hosts face north. The bride greets the groom and offers him a seat, water to wash the feet, face and mouth, and 'madhuparka', a preparation of curd, honey and clarified butter. The bridegroom accepts the refreshment, mixes the ingredients, first offers it, sprinkling it in droplets, to the four directions, once in each—east, south, west and north and thrice toward the sky. Sprinkling it thus symbolizes sharing food with all the creatures and with his parents, other members of the family and friends. The house holder, now that he is going to be one, has to perform daily, among others, first yajna for parents and forefathers, atithi yajana by which he offers food to any chance-guest, and Bali Vaisvadeva yajna by which he offers food

to beasts, birds and insects. The three ingredients, apart from being nourishing, are cool (curd, sweet (honey) and smooth (ghee), these qualities in a person are marks of sweet manners and high culture. The bridegroom washes his mouth with double achamana.

**3. Gifts :—**After greeting and preliminary hospitality, the hosts take the bridegroom into the reception hall. The bridegroom sits facing east, his parents and party sit facing north, the bride sits in front of the groom facing west. A cow and other gifts are offered to the groom by the bride. The hand (ring one) of the bride is offered to the bridegroom who holds hers, palm upward, into his right hand, palm upward, and says he gratefully accepts her. The bridegroom offers her a dress with the upper garment. She retires to put on these and also the sacred thread. The bridegroom too changes his suit and also wears an upper garment.

**4. Preparation for the ceremonial yajna—**While the bride and the bridegroom are preparing to come to the vedi for the ceremony someone has to collect the materials for the yajna (Samidhas, camphor, ghee, and fire). One person from the bridegroom's side should have a jug full of water, go round the vedi, clockwise keeping it on his right, and sit south of the vedi, facing north, the jug well-placed. He has to be sitting there until the ceremony is over. Another person from the same party should hold a staff in hand and sit south of the vedi, facing north. The bride's brother or cousin has to sit with four liberal handfuls of roasted rice or millet and dry leaves of 'Shami' tree. He has to sit a little back of the bride's seat. One slab of stone has to be kept close to the seats prepared and kept ready for the bride and the bridegroom.

The Jug of water is a symbol of cool, the staff a mark of strength and confidence, the stone a symbol of firmness and determination, and the roasted rice a symbol of plenty, prosperity and happiness.

**5. The bride and the groom come to the vedi—**When the bride is ready for the ceremony, her family bring her up to the groom. The groom pronounces the mantra "Om Samanjantu visva-devah.....", takes her right hand into his right hand, and both come to the Vedi with the mantra "Om yadaisi manasa.....". Then they go round the Vedi clock wise with "Om bhur-bhuvah svah, aghoracakshh....." and Om bhur-bhuvah-svah, sanah pusha....." and sit on the seats kept for them west of the Vedi, facing east, the groom on the left, the bride on his right.

During this part of the ceremony, there are four rituals, the gift of a cow, gift of the bride, gift of clothes and meeting of the bride and the bride-groom.

**Gift of the Cow :—**The cow is a symbol of the nourishing power and ghee. The gift promises good health and a liberal and generous way of life time. It yields ghee for yajna. The cow now gifted has earlier been gifted to the daughter of the family and it is hers. She takes it to the bridegroom's family as a mark of continuation from her earlier life in her father's home.

**Gift of the bride :** The bride is a gift, a very limb of the family. But since she has been gifted away, the parents relinquish all claim on her though they retain their responsibility toward her. The groom accepts her with gratitude, therefore she becomes his sacred responsibility. A thing received as gift is a sacred responsibility according to the Vaidic tradition.

**Gift of clothes :** The hymn chanted at the time of gifting says that the clothes have been prepared with love and affection by his mother, sisters and all the daughters and women of the family. The bride then cherishes the gift.

**The meeting :** The other hymns which are chanted say that the bride and the bride-groom have chosen each other freely and consciously and they have freely decided to marry. Their lives are going to mingle into one like the waters of two streams. They will love each other like the very breath of life. They will support and sustain each other. Their eyes will be benign and they since, in fact, hold each other as the very pupil of the eye. As the air bears the fragrance of the earth and the rays of the sun bear the light, so since they bear and hold on to each other. When they take their seats by the Vedi, the bride pledges to join and follow the path of the bridegroom's life. This shows that the life of the two is now wholly integrated and they are one personality.

**6. General part of the yajna :** Now begins the general part of the yajna appointment of the priest/s, acamana, (sipping of water), anga sparsa (touching limbs of the body), agnyadhana (starting the fire), samidadhana (offering three samidhas), five ahutis of ghee, jalaprasecana (sprinkling water around the Vedi, and sixteen ahutis with ghee, i.e., 4 agharavaiyahutis, 4 vyahrti ahutis and eight astajyahutis. (Please refer to pp.....))

**7. The special part of the ceremony :** The special part of the yajna is the special part of the ceremony. It consists of :—

- (i) **Five ahutis with ghee :** These are four Pavamane ahutis beginning with "Om bhur-bhuvah-svah agna ayunsi....." and ending with Om bhur-bhuvah svah prajapate.....", and the fifth ahuti beginning with "Om bhur-bhuvah-svah tvamaryama bhavasi....."
- (ii) **Rastra-bhrt yajna with twelve ahutis of ghee and Sakalya (pudding or sweet cooked rice) :** This part of the yajna means that the bride and the bridegroom are now going to be full citizens, with full

responsibility to the family, community and the nation. They pledge to fulfil their responsibilities to the nation. The important thing to note here is that the vaidic ideal of life is sharing and contributing to the life of the nation through a yajnic way of life and fulfilment of responsibilities rather than insistence on individual sight.

- (iii) **Jayahoma with thirteen ahutis :** This part of the ceremony is dedicated to the success and progress of the home life. The secret and foundation of a happy conjugal life is love, mutual care and good will of both the partners. Either of the two is a complement to the other. Here we may remember an ancient Greek myth which says that originally God had created man and woman as one complete and composite human-being. By accident the two got separated, and through out life one is searching for the other until the other is found. Marriage, we can say, is a means of joining the two. If the partners are correspondent and complementary, the married life is happy. If they are discordant, it is unhappy. The Jaya-homa part of the ceremony is a prayer for mutual love and correspondence in a state of union of the hearts.

- (iv) **Abhyatana-homa :** The Abhyatana part of the ceremony with eighteen ahutis is a prayer for prosperity and expansion all round in every department of life—health, family, truth and virtue, honour and glory, peace and happiness. There is no end to progress and expansion, but the condition is : happiness and peace of the family in the interest of the family as an institution, society and the nation. Individual progress, or progress of the individual couple is not an end in itself, it is a part of a larger field, and the couple and the family contributes to that larger field through health and efficiency.

- (v) **Prayers for good cheer and a Happy home :** A home is a place of happiness and good cheer, vitality and longevity. Hence there are eight ahutis for safety and protection of the bride and her offspring, fertility, vitality, longevity, anatomic efficiency and overall cheer and delight. These are followed by four vyahrti ahutis.

- (vi) **Pani-grahana or Taking the hand of the bride :** The bridegroom then gives his hand to the bride, helping her to stand. He takes her right hand into his right hand and pronounces six hymns pledging his acceptance, love, support, faith, fidelity and confidence for a life-time.

- (vii) **Pradaksina and Sitarohana** : or going round the fire and touching the stone-slate : The bride and the bridegroom then go round the fire, the bride is helped to touch/ascend the slate of stone with her right foot, and both offer three abuties of roasted rice into the fire. The two going round the fire pledge to be one personality like the union of sa and ma in Sama, or the union of the sun and the earth (like Jupiter and Ge in Greek mythology), or the union of the Rk and Sama (knowledge and art/music/beauty). The bride touches the stone-slate as a mark of firmness in life. It is the bride-groom who exhorts her to be firm and determined in all her life in the family. The offering of roasted rice symbolizes that the bride severs all practical connections (but not the emotional and sentimental ties of nature) with her father's family and she is joining the family of her of her husband. The bride and the bride-groom repeat this process four times. The four circumambulations mean living a life of Dharma according to the four Vedas in a society functionally organized into four classes.

- (viii) **Sapta-padi or Seven steps in Unison** : After going round the fire four times, The bride and the bridegroom take seven steps forward in unison into the north-east direction—the direction of the rise and ascension of the Sun. The upper garments of the two are tied in a knot. The bridegroom leads and the bride moves with him step by step, neither remaining behind nor out-stepping him. There seven steps are symbols of living and working together. They also keep the steps in tune, the right step moves forward and the left joins it without over-stepping it. The first step is for nourishment, food and support, the second is for energy, the third is for wealth and prosperity, the fourth for happiness, the fifth for progeny, the sixth for the seasons, and the seventh for love, friendship and companionship. Only after these seven steps do the bride and the bridegroom become husband and wife.

- (ix) **Sprinkling of water** : The sprinkling of water is symbolic. It is a prayer and a wish for a happy and peaceful life for the couple. Secondly it shows that if there is a disturbance of the peace of the home, the members of the family and the community will not stand around as silent witnesses, nor will they add to the disturbance by fanning the flames, but they will sprinkle the waters of peace, understanding and forgiveness and maintain the blissful cool of the home.

- (x) **Sight of the Sun** : The bride and the bridegroom see the sun as part of the ritual. The sun gives light, removes darkness and observes the exact laws of nature. The sight of the sun means two things : The husband and the wife will observe perfect regularity and follow the laws of life and Dharma in their conduct. Secondly, they will work to dispel darkness and spread light. Life and happiness all round.

- (xi) **Touching the heart** : The bridegroom places his hand on the heart of the bride, so does the bride put her hand on the heart of the bridegroom. This ritual means that they share the heart and mind, thoughts, emotions and sentiments of each other. "Your heart is mine, and mine is yours henceforth." This is what the ritual means.
- (xii) **The bridegroom touches the forehead of the bride** : The bridegroom touches the bride's forehead to say that she is an auspicious personality, a very embodiment of virtue and good fortune. He then asks all to bless her with their good wishes. The bride thus is a gift not only of her parents but also of the whole community. The gathering blesses the bride.

After this, there is part of the special homa done which will be explained later. But there is the last abuti of this part, which begins with "Om yani kani ca ghorani.....", and means that if there be any weakness or defect in her person, the same is eliminated. Since its consigned to the fire with this last abuti. This is important : She was earlier selected because she was bright and beautiful, now that she has been selected and accepted, for that reason she is bright and beautiful. The question of her weaknesses, if any, has been closed for all time.

- (xiii) **Sight of the Pole star** : The Pole star is fixed, steady, in life. As the bride and the bridegroom see the Pole star, they pray for firmness in their vows of the pursuit of Dharma in their home life, and they pledge themselves to unflinching devotion to each other. This pledge is further confirmed by the next ritual.

- (xiv) **Sight of Arundhati** : Arundhati is a star that always shines close by Vasishta, another star. Arundhath was also the name of the sage Vasishta, these two are regarded as an ideal and virtuous couple. The sight of Arundhati symbolizes the prayers, wishes and pledges to remain together and support each other.

- (xv) One very important ritual is the bridegroom untying and releasing the locks of the bride's hair. This is performed after going round

the yajna fire and before taking the seven steps together. This is symbolic of a change from one life to another. Before marriage, the girl lives either in the teacher's home or in father's under the discipline of Brahmacharya (a life of celibacy). She also lives a simple and austere life without the use of beautiful clothes or cosmetics. The bridegroom releases her from this phase of life. He does it in seclusion or privacy and the two experience the first unique moments of a new life. The bride is free of the discipline of the father's home, and she is going to join the discipline of the bridegroom's home. This is symbolized by tying of a new knot whereby her garment is tied to the bridegroom's. The bridegroom may beautify the bride's hair, this is the beginning of a new life of conjugal love.

The wedding ceremony is the most elaborate and the most symbolic, because it marks the beginning of a most intimate, most comprehensive and a most responsible relationship in life. As the bride and the bridegroom come together and join in a single life of togetherness, their joint relationship with the world around changes. Earlier they were, each individually, a responsibility of the house-holders. Now onward, the three other asramas—Brahmacaris, Vana prasthis and Sanyasis will be their responsibility. Earlier, each one was primarily responsible for his/her personal growth and development, while the means were provided by others. Now they are responsible for the growth, development and maintenance of the three other asramas and have to provide the means of that social obligation, and, in addition, they have to maintain themselves together as a family. To be one from two, and from two to be many—this is the great movement of life. The wedding ceremony covers this elaborate nature of the sacrament.

### Vivaha Sanskara (The Marriage Ceremony)

#### The Rigural Part

The selection and appointment of priests/s (Om avasoh sadana sida.....etc. p.31)

There acamannas (p.32)

Anga spaosa (touching limbs of the body, p.33)

Hymns of prayer, Hymns of Benediction and Hymns of Peace (I svara-stuti-prare thama-upasana,

svasti-vachana, santi-prakasana, p.4, 20)

Agnyahana (Starting the fire with "Om bhur-bhuvah svah | Om bhur-bhuvah-sva rdyauriva bhuma.....etc. p.33)

Agni-pradipana (Raising the fire with "Om udbudh-yasvagne.....etc. p.35)

Samidadhana (offering three Samidhas with "Om ayanta idhma atma.....etc. p.35)

#### Greeting and Hospitality with Madhuparka

(Reception of the Bride-groom after the reception of the Wedding Part)

When the bride groom comes to the house of the bride, he stands facing east. Then the hosts and the bride should stand by him, facing north, and do the following :—

The Bride says :

सग्य भवान् आरम्भम् अर्चयिष्यामि भवन्तम् ।

Sāghu bhavān āstām arcayisyāmo bhavantam.

(We greet you with welcome and respect. We hope you are fine and happy.)

The Bride groom replies : ओम् अर्चय ओम् arcaya.

(Thanks for your Greeting. I greet you too.)

#### Offer of Asana (seat)

The bride offers a seat to the bride groom saying :

ओम् विष्टरो विष्टरो विष्टरः प्रतिगृह्यताम् ॥

Om viṣṭaro viṣṭaro viṣṭarah pratigṛhyatām ॥

(Please accept a seat/Please be seated.)

The bridegroom takes the asana (seat from the bride, saying—

ओम् प्रतिगृह्णामि ॥ Om pratigṛhṇāmi ॥

(Thanks, I take the seat/asana.) Having said this the bridegroom should receive the asana from the bride, spread it and sit on it facing east, chanting the following :—

ओम् वर्षांस्त्रिम् समानानामुद्यतामिव सूर्यः ।

इमन्त्समिच्छामि ये मा कश्चाभित्सति ॥

Om varṣmo' asmi samānānamudyatāmiva ।

imantamabhitiṣṭhāmi yo mā kaśchābhitaṣati ॥ Par. 1, 3, 8.