

## Marriage Rites and Rituals [Iyers]

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### 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. Sesa 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 off evils. It is also customary to break a coconut before the party departs to ward off 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: -

- i. 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.
- ii. 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 Grahnam 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 than 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.

## [Tamil Wedding Ceremony](#)

Tamilians have their own rituals followed before, during and after the wedding, which look very vibrant. All the customs are followed with religious observance. All the people, right from the prospective bride and the groom to the family members, friends and relatives have the festive mood, which is set by the ceremony. The ambience is filled with nothing but happiness and celebration. The festive spirits are boosted up among the people, witnessing the ceremony, by the colorful and elaborate rituals that are conducted before, during and after the marriage.

The pre-marriage rituals followed by the Tamil speaking Brahmins include fasting, puja and exchange of gifts. The groom is received by the family of the bride. The wedding ceremony is also elaborate, which incorporates the rituals that are typical to the Brahmin community, such as oonjal, kashi yatra and kanyaadaan (wherein the bride sits on the lap of her father). Post-marriage, the bride and the groom are given treats and gifts. After swearing in as the wife, the bride enters the groom's home to prosper his life there. This is the way most of the marriages are conducted among the Tamil speaking Brahmins in India and all over the world. In this section, we have given detailed information on the traditional Tamil wedding ceremony.

## [Tamil Pre-Wedding Rituals](#)

Tamil wedding is a vast affair, wherein a number of rituals are followed. Well before the wedding day, people (including the family members of the prospective bride and the groom) are engaged in the preparations of the ceremony, which is considered a very important turning point in the couple's life. This is the reason why, marriage is given supreme importance and a number of ceremonies are conducted before, during and after it. You would just like to stand and witness the typical Tamil Brahmin wedding, which incorporates unique customs. Explore all about the Tamil pre-wedding rituals in the following lines.

## Tamil Pre-Wedding Customs

### Panda Kaal Muhurtham

Panda Kaal Muhurtham is a pre-wedding ritual conducted by the Tamilians, in order to seek blessings from the Almighty. Generally, a short ritual is performed a day prior to the wedding, wherein both the families of the bride and the groom offer prayers to the Lord. This is done to ensure that the wedding preparations proceed without any hassle.

### Receiving The Groom

When the groom's family reaches the wedding venue on the morning of one day before the wedding, they are greeted and welcomed warmly, by the bride's family, by offering them a tray containing flowers, beetle nuts, fruits and mishri. Rose water is also sprinkled on them.

The bride's brother applies tilak made by mixing sandalwood paste and kumkum, on the groom's forehead. Thereafter, the brother also puts a garland around the groom's neck. Then, the bride's mother serves a delicious dessert prepared from condensed milk. Thereafter, aarti is performed by an elder female member of the bride's family. In order to culminate the ritual and to ward-off the evil eye, a coconut is broken on the ground.

### Vratham & Pallikai Thellichal

Vratham (fasting) takes place one day prior to the marriage. The fasting is performed by the bride as well as the groom's family. In the mean time, Vedic hymns are chanted, which is conducted by the priest (Vaadyar). This ritual is performed to invoke the blessings of ancestors and the Almighty.

Pallikai Thellichal ceremony is also held a day before the wedding. It involves the filling of clay pots with nine varieties of grains. Married women pour water from either sides of the pot. This is followed by

singing of traditional songs. The grains are allowed to sprout, by soaking them in water for a day or two. Then the clay pots are kept inside the pond, so that the fishes can feed on the sprouted grains and shower blessings to the couple, who is going to tie the nuptial knot.

### [Naandi & Jaanavaasam](#)

Naandi ceremony is conducted to honor the Brahmins by presenting gifts and sweets to them. They are specially invited and the families seek their blessings, to ensure that the wedding is carried on smoothly.

Although the ritual of Jaanavaasam has faded away with the passing time, it is still followed by some Tamil Brahmin families. During Jaanavaasam, the groom boards a beautifully decorated car. He is accompanied by a large marriage procession of close friends and relatives. Professional musicians are called invited to entertain the procession by playing the traditional wedding songs. Fireworks form part of marriage celebrations. The bride's brother puts garland around the groom's neck, in order to welcome him at the entrance of the wedding hall.

### [Nicchiyadharatham](#)

The bride's parents offer prayers to Lord Ganesha, who is believed to banish all obstacles. A puja is conducted in the presence of priest. The groom's family presents a new sari to the bride. Her forehead is adorned with a tilak made from chandan and kumkum and her sari's pallu is filled with fruits, beetle nuts, turmeric, kumkum and coconut. In addition, a flower garland is tied around her waist. Aarti is done for the bride.

### [Reading Of Lagna Pathirigai](#)

The priest plays a prominent role in the reading of Lagna Pathirigai, a pre-marriage ritual conducted by the Tamil Brahmins. He also announces other details related to marriage, including the

muhurtam and the venue for the wedding. Thereafter, mouthwatering lavish dinner is served.

### [Tamil Wedding Rituals](#)

Tamil wedding rituals are very elaborate. They involve a number of ceremonies that are performed to ensure that the bride and the groom, who are going to tie the wedding knot, enter their new phase of life in the most elegant manner. A number of ceremonies revolve around the wedding, which is very charming to look at. Every stage of the rituals is performed with religious observance. The ambience is filled with festivity. You would be highly enthusiastic about what is going to happen next, if you witness a typical Tamil Brahmin wedding. Go through the following lines to know more about the Tamil Brahmin wedding rituals.

### [Tamil Wedding Customs](#)

#### [Mangala Snaanam & Kashi Yatra](#)

After applying oil, and a tilak of haldi-kimkum, the bride and the groom take the mangala snaanam (holy bath) at the respective homes, on the dawn of the wedding day. After having the mangala snaanam, the bridegroom pretends that he is leaving for Kashi and he is no more interested in performing the role of a householder. He stops only when the girl's father persuades him to take the responsibility of his daughter, by marrying her. Then the groom heads his way for the wedding pandal, where the bride and her family receives him. This beautiful custom is known as kashi yatra.

#### [Exchange Of Garlands & Oonjal](#)

After the groom enters the pandal, he exchanges garlands for three times with the bride. This ceremony is full of fun and frolic. Thereafter, they are seated together on a swing. Married women give the newly weds spoonful of milk and banana pieces to eat.

## [Kanyadaanam & Muhurtham](#)

As the groom reaches the mandapam, the bride's father welcomes his son-in-law. The groom's mother-in-law puts kajal in his eyes. Thereafter, his father-in-law washes his feet, considering him as God. The bride is then seated in her father's lap with a coconut in her hands. Thereafter, the bride and her father offer coconut to the bridegroom. In the meantime, the bride's mother puts water over the coconut. This gesture symbolizes the kanyaadaan of their daughter. The bridegroom's family presents their daughter-in-law a nine-yard sari that she has to wear, when the mangalsutra will be tied around her neck.

Seeking the help of her sister-in-law and aunts, the bride wears the nine-yard sari and enters the mandapam. A sack of paddy is kept on the floor and the bride's father is made to sit on it. The bride is asked to sit on her father's lap. Paddy represents abundance and good fortune. The yoke of a farmer's plough is taken and touched to the forehead of the bride. It is done with the hope that the couple will always walk together. The priest and the relatives touch the Mangalsutra and thereby, bless the newly wedded couple. Thereafter, a sacred yellow thread is handed over to the bridegroom, which he puts around his wife's neck and ties two knots. The third knot is tied by the groom's sister. The three knots symbolize the union of the mind, spirit and body.

## [Saptapadi](#)

The bridegroom takes his wife's right hand in his left hand and leads her around the holy fire for seven times. In every round, she touches her feet to the grindstone hoping that their union will be firm forever.

## [Tamil Post-Wedding Rituals](#)

After organizing an enthralling wedding ceremony, the family of the bride and the groom head towards preparing the venue for the post-

wedding celebrations. While grihapravesh is the post-marriage custom common in almost every region in India, the Tamil Brahmins have their own way of culminating the auspicious ceremony. Apart from grihapravesh, wherein the bride enters the groom's house formally in order to prosper his life there, many other rituals are exclusive to the Tamil-speaking Brahmins in India. Learn more about the Tamil post-wedding rituals in the article.

## Tamil Post-Wedding Customs

### Sammandhi Mariyathai

Depending upon the financial status, the families of the newly wed couple exchange gifts and clothes, to mark the culmination of the wedding. This custom is popularly known as sammandhi mariyathai.

### Laaja Homam & Paaladaanam Custom

The bride's brother offers popped rice to the groom, which he offers to the holy fire. By doing this, the couple seeks the blessings of Agni that represents the divine power and light of God.

As a part of Paaladaanam custom, the couple seeks the blessings of the elderly members of the family by touching their feet.

### Grihapravesham

After the completion of wedding ceremony, the bride is taken to her husband's house. Aarti is performed to welcome the newly married couple, as they stand at the doorstep to enter the home. Thereafter, a lavish feast is served at the wedding venue, when the newly wedded couple returns from home.

## Reception Party

To facilitate intimacy, the groom's family hosts a reception party in the evening. People bless the newly weds and convey them their heartiest wishes. This is the time, when family, friends, relatives and faraway acquaintances attend the reception party to shower blessings, gifts and best wishes on the newly married couple.

## [Tamil Iyengar Brahmin Wedding Rituals](#)



A very large community, the Tamil Iyengars (Ayyangars) are known for their superior intellect, high levels of education and good looks. This community is largely based in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. Being Brahmins, their wedding rituals are long and elaborate and a typical wedding can last for four or five days. For most ceremonies two 'pujaris' officiate - one representing the bride's family and the other the groom's.

There are bound to be variations in the ceremonies and rituals



depending upon the city or state the Iyengars have been living in for several generations.

Some common surnames: Iyengar, Ayyangar, Srinivasan, Gopalakrishnan, Jagannathan, Ramakrishnan

### [Vethalepak: Exchange of gifts between the bride and groom](#)

This is a kind of engagement ceremony where the bride and groom exchange saris, suits and gifts. The bride goes to the groom's home carrying a platter laden with two silver lamps, a coconut, fruits and flowers. After the exchange of gifts, she leaves the platter behind and goes back home.

### [Pandalkal or Chapra: Blessing the wedding venue](#)

An auspicious beginning to any Iyengar wedding commences with purifying the marriage 'pandol' (canopy). The 'pandol' is made of leaves and branches of trees and it is purified by pouring milk, saffron and 'kumkum' (vermilion) on the base of the bamboo poles placed at its corners. The purification ritual is performed by a 'pujari' or any respected elder of the family who is well versed with the rituals of marriage.

### [Devar Samardhne: Seeking blessings from deities to keep the marriage free from any impediments](#)

This ceremony is also known as 'perumal thadhyaradhne' and is a puja performed on the morning of the wedding day by the bride and groom separately in their homes. The deities are invoked to bless the marriage proceedings and keep all the rituals free from obstacles.

### [Varapooje or Janwaasam: Heralding the arrival of the groom and inviting him to the 'mantap'](#)

On the evening prior to the wedding, the first function is 'mapillai azaizsu' (literally, heralding the arrival of the groom and his party). The groom and his family are garlanded by members of the bride's

family and are served refreshments and allowed to rest before the 'varapooje' or 'janwaasam' (puja performed to honour the groom).

The groom is ceremoniously led to the marriage 'mantap' and the pujari reads aloud the 'Iagna patrike', announcing to the audience the antecedents and credentials of both the families.

**Nischathartham: Commitment to be married is made and announced to all**

This ceremony is performed as a commitment to the forthcoming wedding and announced to the community. Five 'sumangalis' (married ladies) pound a handful of 'urad dal' (lentils) on a dry grinding stone decorated with flowers, kumkum and turmeric. This is done symbolically to wish the couple a happy married life.

A room is filled with stainless steel cooking vessels, silverware, kitchen gadgets, linen, towels and other items the couple would need to run an efficient home. This display is called 'bidadi mane' by the Iyengars belonging to Mysore and 'sheer' by the Iyengars from Chennai. The Chennai Iyengars display the 'sheer' on the morning of the wedding day.

**Nandi or Vratham: Anointing the bride and groom**

This ritual is held separately in both homes and usually in the morning. It is the commencement of all marriage rituals, where the groom's hair is anointed with oil and he bathes with soap-nut powder.

The bride goes through a similar ritual in her home and after her bath, changes into a new sari, wears flowers in her hair and jewellery and is made to sit down for the 'muth aarthi'- a traditional 'aarthi' performed for her with a lighted 'diya' (lamp), 'kumkum' and flowers.

**Kashiyathre: The groom embarks on a mock pilgrimage**

Just before the main wedding ceremony, the groom dresses himself as a pilgrim by wearing a 'veshti' (simple white dhoti), 'chappals'

(slippers), carries an umbrella, walking stick and makes an attempt to proceed to Kashi (sacred pilgrimage site in the city of Benaras) to take 'sanyas' and lead a celibate life!

The bride's father prevails upon him to give up this line of thought and accept his daughter's hand in marriage instead. After much cajoling the groom relents and returns to the 'mantap' to be married!

### Oonjal or Sambandhmale: The couple exchange garlands

The groom enters the 'mantap' discarding his pilgrim's 'avatar' (form) and is garlanded by the bride. He in turn garlands her and then the couple is seated on a decorated 'jhula' or swing. 'Aarthi' is performed for them and the bride's father washes the groom's feet.

### Piddishuttal: The couple is protected from 'dhrishti' (evil eye)

While the bride and groom are seated on the decorated swing, rice dipped in turmeric and 'kumkum' are showered on them to drive away evil. After this they enter the marriage 'mantap'.

### Kanyadaan: Giving away the bride

In Chennai, the Iyengars follow the ritual where the bride and groom hold hands and enter the 'mantap' whereas the Iyengars from Mysore have a custom where the bride and groom have to hold the hand of their respective mothers-in-law.

The bride is seated in her father's lap all through the 'kanyadaan' ceremony. The couple together holds a coconut dipped in turmeric and the bride's mother pours water onto the coconut. All through the 'kanyadaan', the 'vollagam' (clarinet like instrument) is played accompanied by the 'tabla' (Indian drum).

### Mangalaya Dharane: The groom ties the sacred 'taali' on the bride

The sacred 'taali' (a small inscribed gold ornament, strung on a yellow thread) is kept on a silver platter along with a piece of jaggery, rice, a coconut and a heavy nine yard Kanjeevaram sari

which is given by the groom's mother to the bride. This platter is taken around to all the guests for their blessings.

The bride changes in to the nine-yard sari, wearing it in the 'katche seera' style and returns to the 'mantap'. Amongst Vedic chants, the groom ties the first knot of the 'taali' around the bride's neck and his sisters tie the other two knots.

#### [Akshathe: The couple is blessed with the showering of coloured rice](#)

All the elders present at the wedding are given coloured rice, which they shower on the couple after the 'mangalaya dharane'. The bride's mother gives the groom a 'paan' or betel leaf to proclaim her support of the marriage. The groom slips silver toe-rings on his bride symbolizing that henceforth he will look after and protect her.

#### [Homa or Havan: Lighting of the sacred fire](#)

The 'pujari' lights the sacred fire in honour of the nine planets and the gathering keeps the fire ignited by pouring 'ghee' (clarified butter) into it. The fire is not allowed to go off till all the ceremonies are completed.

#### [Saptapadi: Seven steps around the sacred fire](#)

The groom's 'shalu' (shawl) is tied to the bride's sari 'pallav' and the couple takes the seven steps around the fire, repeating their seven marital vows.

#### [Nagoli Vasthra: The bride's family welcomes the son-in-law into the family](#)

The bride's family, who present him with a suitcase, new clothes, and a diamond ring, gives the groom a ceremonial welcome.

#### [Grupravesha: The bride is welcomed into her marital home](#)

On the bride's arrival, an 'aarthi' is performed for her at the doorstep by her mother-in-law and she takes her first step into her new home by tipping over a small heap of rice with her right foot. She must

ensure that the rice spills as far as possible, bringing prosperity into her new home! She is then taken to the family 'puja' room where she prostrates before the deity and is given a silver or gold coin which she puts into a silver pot filled with water.

### [Sambandhi Virandh: Both families exchange gifts](#)

To celebrate the successful completion of the wedding the families of the bride and groom exchange lavish gifts. These gifts can range from jewellery, clothes or electronic items - depending on how much each family is willing to spend.

### [Reception: Post wedding celebrations](#)

The reception is not mandatory for the Tamil Iyengar community, though many families do opt for it these days. Friends and relatives are invited to meet the newly-weds and the families' host a grand dinner in a hotel or marriage hall.