

Vastushastra and the Lagna Mandap

by Arun Naik

Marriages are getting more lavish and sumptuous with doses of innovative ideas and extravaganza thrown in because everybody from the bride and groom to the parents and relatives want to make it a memorable event. But beneath the brohuahua the Hindu wedding ceremony follows a very dignified custom and centers around elaborate pre-and-post marriage rituals

Vastushastra has an innate relationship with temples, alters, rituals, religious ceremonies and sacramental functions. The Sulvasutra of Apastambha written as early as 2500 B.C. offers details of designing ritual altars according to the rules of Vastu Shastra. A Lagna Mandap is a temporary temple which is erected to perform pujas, and therefore is governed by certain principles of Vastushastra. This Mandap holds the actual ceremony of marriage which needs to be performed with devotion in order to form a good foundation of a happy married life. It is here that the bride's parents invoke various gods and deities, pray to them, seek their blessings, and finally in their presence give away their daughter to the groom who marries her right there in the presence of these gods. And then the ceremonial fire is lit, which is the act of invoking *Agni* who is also the priest of the gods and accepts the havi of the gods on their behalf (*havi* is *ahuti* or the offering made in the sacred fire). Finally the bride and groom circumambulate *Agni*, offer their prayers, seek the blessings of all invited gods, parents, elders, and the bramhins. Once the ceremony is over, the gods are requested to return to their abodes. It is a beautiful ceremony in spirit and practice which deserves our highest respect and whose sanctity should be maintained to ensure the blessings for a happy married life.

The following points should be kept in mind about the Lagna Mandap:

Environment

The Lagna Mandap should be built in a clean area which has been purified by sprinkling holy Ganga water. Once the priest begins to create the alter and the mandap, it is a good practice to restrict admission to the Mandap area. In particular, shoes and all other footwear, cigarettes and alcoholic drinks should be categorically banned from entering the Mandap.

Location

Build the Mandap in the North-Eastern part of the area. North-East is the abode of Ishaan and therefore the chosen direction for all religious and spiritual activities.

Shape

A Lagna Mandap is always built square. Square shape denotes stability and its four equal sides denote a proportionate and balanced development in all aspect of married life. Fortunately most of the Tenthouse contractors and Mandap decorators follow this practice out of sheer convenience of modular construction. The four pillars of the Mandap should be of Bamboo and not of iron pipe as most decoratos use, and alongwith the entire Mandap should be beautifully decorated with flowers and banana trunks. One must note that Iron is prohibited from use in any temporary ceremonial structure and in all religious ceremonies in the form of utensils and vessels, not because Iron was not known or not in use in the earlier times, but because Iron vessels are used exclusively in black magical rites.

Ceremonial Fire

I have noticed in indoor marriages sometimes a fire is lit outdoors – often in the mason's circular pan - and is brought in for an ultra-quick havan and is quickly taken away because of the smoke. This is a typical case of convenience taking priority over importance of the ritual, is a wrong practice and should be avoided. The hawan ceremony is to be enjoyed and not done away with in a hurry. After all, it is an occasion of making offerings to the gods.

Two types of arrangements are prescribed in Vastu for Hawan: a Hawankund and a Hawan Vedi.

A Kund is a pit either dug in the ground or created by erecting bricks. It has to be a Sarvatobhadra - equal in length, width, and height. This may prove to be cumbersome and is best avoided. Also to be avoided is the oft-seen tin hawan-kund which resembles a squarish tapered bucket. Neither its shape nor its metallic construction are acceptable in the agamic tradition.

The other arrangement is a Havan Vedi, a square platform of 18" x 18" made of fresh, clean, unbroken and washed bricks, covered with clean sand and finally decorated with colours.

Seating Arrangement

One should sit facing East or North when performing the Puja or the havan. Ever sit facing South for any auspicious function. This is more applicable to the bride and the groom.

Adherence to the Muhurt.

The element of Time is critical for Vastushastra. The world is a cyclic movement of the Divine Consciousness in Space and Time, and the latter, like an invisible stream or a mountain rapid, constantly moves ahead with its currents, undercurrents, rapids, draughts, tides which have a

non-patterned cyclic nature. When we choose to make a movement, either we are moving with its flow or moving against it. Muhurt, or the north-indian mahoorat, is the moment when the flow of Time is favourable for marriage and one should make an effort to stick to it.

The Lagna Mandap is a Temple where the meaningful ceremony of marriage takes place. For best results in later life it is important to maintain its rules and dignity.

Q

Why are men made to wear the sacred thread during a hindu wedding? Is it of any Vastu significance?

A

In a hindu wedding the bride's father gives away her daughter to the groom. In the vedic custom it was mandatory for a bramhachari to undergo the ceremony of Yagyopavit which entitled him to study under a guru, accept alms (in this case the hand of the bride), study, and perform yagna. In modern times the custom continues in its present form and has little to do with Vastu.
