Author's Note

The inspiration for this book came from the young Indians in the United States who have approached me in the past three decades to seek my advice and to have me officiate at their weddings. Upon the advent of the internet these young people have sought me not only through word of mouth but also, after researching the relevant material available in cyberspace, through my website (www.avsrinivasan.com).

Most of the procedures and the corresponding mantras are, of course, in the Sanskrit language, which Hindus consider to be "deva bhasha," meaning the language of the gods. What is disturbing to the lover of this ancient tongue is that this most sophisticated and truly beautiful language is hardly in use nowadays except by priests who chant the mantras and by scholars.

The usual difficulties of translation have been encountered here. The subtle interweaving of sound and meaning, common to all classical languages, is such that translations can lose their spirit and intent if they do not preserve the original sense. On the other hand a vague and imprecise rendering will make the result obscure and dull. Thus it is necessary to preserve both the intent and the content intact as we transport ritualistic ideas from one culture to another.

Add to this difficulty the fact that all mantras are poetic in the original rendition and this adds another burden in that it demands preservation of some feature of sound and cadence. Thus the translator walks a fine line in taking the ancient wisdoms in these mantras and retaining their beauty in English. These are the hurdles faced in developing a treatise such as this for use by English-speaking readers.

That is not all. The authority for most of the steps followed in a Vedic wedding ceremony obviously issues out of the Vedas. And the latter are admittedly complex. Even the Pandava prince Yudhishtira admitted this when he declared: ´ÉiÉrÉÉ ÌuÉÍpÉ³ÉÉ: (*srutayo vibhinnaa:)* i.e. the Vedas are abstruse (*MBh)*. Fortunately we are not dealing with deep philosophies here but only the Vedic mantras that cover the events in a wedding, beginning with reception of the groom and concluding with sending the bride off to the couple's new home. Thus the context is somewhat simpler, and this is a help.

Many of the terms used in the text are transcribed from languages with differing alphabets. Over the years the best known among them have been spelled (or misspelled) in varying ways. For the sake of accuracy diacritical marks have been used in the ritual Sanskrit sequences and the Glossary. However, for the general reader's comfort, the application of diacritical marks has been minimized in the main text in favor of familiar usage. The general attempt has been to balance accuracy with ease of use, even where there may be some loss in consistency.

Apart from about a dozen or so references drawn from a variety of sources in Sanskrit, Kannada, Hindi and English that throw some light on possible interpretations of the mantras, the author has relied on the celebrated dictionary of Sir Monier Monier-Williams. No claim is made that all the translations are perfect and flawless. The author will be grateful to receive comments and suggestions that will be accepted with gratitude when we consider a future edition.

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