



When weddings are a cosy affair

My father loved match-making and has to his name the success of more than ten successful matches, some of them going strong still, some celebrating their 50th year together! What made him the happiest, however, was those spontaneous weddings he planned.

The story goes that once he went with his friend to a girl's house, and luckily, the prospective groom and the bride-to-be liked each other. He took the talks further and when everything seemed settled, got them married off instantly with whatever was there in the fridge and to the utter surprise of my mother, came back home with the bride and the groom at 4AM in the morning. In his defence, he said his friend was permanently moving abroad soon.

Scaled-down weddings, if not that sudden, are back on the social scene. The culture of intimate weddings is one good thing that came out of social distancing. To the dismay of many, prior to this lockdown, Bengali weddings were becoming a multi-million affair.

In the recent past, we had a mini wedding-like-occasion for each programme; the most recent fad of romantic proposals and pre-wedding photo sessions in outdoor locations were all the rage last season. Series of occasions like the 'paka kotha' or formal agreement between the two families, then the elaborate and grand formal engagement.

As the wedding dates drew closer, occasions like the trousseau and gift packing days with dance rehearsals, the holud, the mehendi, the rong khela, the list went on! The dance and songs were on the menu with equal gusto as the real programmes. Then the registration or aqd/nikkah ceremony, and finally, the often crore-taka wedding ceremony



itself, rounded up with a grander formal reception.

If by chance you agreed to having an early nikah, then there would be a mini holud ceremony to go with it (for reasons best known to the couples' parents), and again, another grand one before the formal receptions, often a year later.

Holuds in yesteryears were beautiful, homely affairs. There were no wedding planners with their elaborate paperwork; just a creative cousin, who took the lead and drew white 'alponas' on the 'uthans' or backyards, tied some old saris as backdrops and added banana plants strung with marigold garlands, placed some terracotta pots decorated with mango leaves and flower garlands to the dais.

For entertainment, there was the famous 'leela bali' wedding song and dance. The ceremony had to end by sunset, the menu was homemade pithas, parathas and beef bhunas, along with the mandatory fish fry. This was followed by

the small wedding on the rooftop of the family house.

I agree, with time, social cultures and events change for the better. We were holding destination holuds, which are like day-long fairs or carnivals, and destination weddings closer to nature among easy flowing green beautifications were the rage before the COVID-19 lockdown. People who were not going to exotic foreign locations were going for such wedding in our



beautiful beach locales and farm houses. However, few things do not stop because of any pandemic invasion, it might take a back seat, but life events surely go on.

The most recent wedding that I remember is of a colleague's sister. She made the prettiest bride ever in bright red sari, red lipstick and a simple head ornament — the tikli. The mother prepared some of her excellent home cooked recipes especially for the groom, the two families met, and the kazi solemnised the nikah in their living room.

All brides look pretty, but she looked ethereal in makeup done by herself. I had never seen a more beautiful bride.

My son's friends got married recently; the two kids went to the kazi office in their matching PPEs along with their families, came back home, ate their favourite kachchi biriyani, and had a blast with friends connected through zoom from all over the world. Now that was a wedding too, and a fun one at that!

The couple is now happily living their dreams.

If I were to plan a wedding now amid this lockdown, I would take all the good ideas from each decade and shape my own programme.

The rooftop wedding, I would call it — Fairy lights with fragrant beli flower garlands hanging from the off-white gazebo tents; small round tables surrounded by few chairs upholstered in off-white and gold colours. It would obviously start as a tea party with loads of finger foods and desserts on food stations, and elaborate tea bars.

The nikah would be solemnised by the kazi right there and the two families, with few friends and cousins of the bride and groom, could dance till the sunset, and the mother of the bride would serve hot plates of kachchi; everyone blessing the newlyweds to a lifetime of togetherness.

The wedding industry was a huge one, with thousands of small businesses benefitting from it. It has all taken a dip, but once we experienced the grand festive weddings, how far can we fall from it. We can adapt to things very easily, so, let's make intimate weddings this season while keeping social distancing the mantra.

— RBR
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