

# THE BIG FAT BENGALI BIBAHO

KAZI AKIB BIN ASAD

Every winter brings with it the fog, the experience of wearing warm clothes, sipping hot coffee and movie nights with cousins and friends under the blankets. What it also brings are the beautifully decorated and scented wedding invitation cards from our relatives or parents' colleagues and so many unheard-of relations. No wonder it is also dubbed as the "wedding season". Suits for men, shawls for women and colorful pullovers for the young ones – it is a time for festivity, family and feast.

Even though we might say every wedding is unique on its own, there are some occurrences that speak the true language of the occasion. These sights can only be seen at weddings and have no reason as to why they haven't changed over the many years and generations that have come and gone – they have become a tradition. Let's go on a journey to discover these bundles of joy (not all of them) that are characteristic of the *bijer dawaat*.

*The 'gate dhora' and 'juta churi'* – At every wedding event when the groom is about to enter the venue, the siblings and cousins of the bride gather to block the gate until they receive a good amount of money from the *dulabhai*. Although many elders think of it as a hassle (or a reminder of the time they had to cough up a large sum of cash), people enjoy the scene. When everything is settled, they hide the groom's shoe and ask for more money. The Bengali way of blackmailing is such a wonder.

• *Baccha-kaccha and annoying aunties* – No doubt it is a time when many family members meet after a long time and a little fun goes a long way. Groups of children will be seen running around tables without a clue and hoards of

recently, they will go, "Oh maa, koto boro hoye gecho!" and the sort. Auntie please, so have you.

• *The khawa'r porbo* – This is perhaps the only memorable part of the wedding. With random strangers glaring like Clint Eastwood from across the table and the constant buzzing of "Side, please. Side, please," there are so many things to worry about. Which glass is mine – one on the left or the right? Are they serving *kacchi* or plain *polao*? Why on earth do cameramen shoot me right when I bite on the sumptuous bone? Where is that fresh dish of *rezaala*? Is the *aloo* gone? I just started on my meal; you could've served the *jorda* a little later! And on and on and on.

• *Paan intended* – After filling the stomach with oil-rich delicacies preferably in the 'first batch', most parents will nag to get over with the photo session with the lucky couple and head straight to home. But not without spending enough time to sort out their *paan* on the gateway. Some will stay over till the bride and groom start their feasting on a goat-like structure made of chicken. Now that is something.

These days we opt to spend most of our time in front of computers or with friends. However, there is no better way than to catch up with the family and enjoy a hearty meal than at a wedding. A class of its own and evergreen, the big fat Bengali *bibahos* are a treat to the eyes, and the tummy.



elderly people will be talking about their daily lives. There will also be young girls giggling away as boys follow them with eager eyes. And when you are introduced to someone who has not seen you

# Characters at a Wedding

DYUTY AURONEE

Bengali weddings are about big, happy faces. Though there are hundreds of them at a typical wedding, some characters, we can vouch, are common to every wedding you have attended till date.

**The Photobomber** - Whoever you are, I know you look nice. But you don't have to be a part of every picture. Why go stand in the middle of the newly-wed couple? They haven't adopted you. Off the stage, now! Also, when I say a family picture, I actually mean a "family" picture. So, please step aside for I know how 'crop' works.

**The Glutton** - A guest at a wedding is entitled to a single piece of roast and kebab but this uncle doesn't conform to the rules. And yeah, no stereotyping but this usually is a man, maybe in his forties, asking the waiter for an extra piece of roast and commanding the person next to him to pass the bowl of mutton curry for the fifth time. In the meanwhile, he has finished an entire pitcher of borhani.

**The Bride's Sister** - There was no problem if this person was actually the bride's sister but as you might have guessed by now, she isn't. She is someone who is the daughter of a distant cousin of the bride's uncle's nephew. Geddit? Well, same here. She will dance to all the Bollywood songs that there are, put on the trendiest of jewellery, the heaviest of make-up



and the prettiest of henna. She also gets a lot of attention because she looks as glittery as someone right out of a Hindi daily soap. Needless to say, men with DSLRs chase her and vice versa.

**The Pakhi Bhabi** - She is the living and breathing matrimony dot com. She has a son, in most cases whose name is Bablu. Well, Bablu is intelligent and good-looking and has an MBA in engineering. What? Bablu's mother is looking for a bride for him and she has delightfully laid her eyes on you. Hey auntie, your son is too good for me, just saying.

**The Wedding Crasher** - Ah, this needs no introduction. Every wedding has at least 2 to 3 people who are just, well, there. The most interesting thing is that they are not even people starving for good food. They are suited up, accented and use expensive perfumes. They also dare to walk up the stage and take selfies with the couple which later can be posted on social media with the hashtags 'wedding crash' and 'badass.'

**The Cheek Choker** - We know you have faced it even if you consider yourself to be a macho man or a strong woman. You had no idea she was your relative until she spotted you, grabbed you by the hand and started to feed you stories of how you were allergic to diapers as a baby. From time to time, she pulls your cheeks so hard that you realise why songs like 'Let It Go' are so meaningful.

ILLUSTRATION: HUMAIRAH SHAMS