

SPECIAL FEATURE

Weddings

in their many flavours

A typical wedding in Bangladesh is a melting pot of all things Bengali, and often blur the arbitrarily drawn lines of caste and class, only differentiated by the varying budgetary strengths. This unification of wedding and other celebrations becomes even more visible when we look into the steps and ritual observed in most weddings — be it meeting the family, presenting a token gift, or the brides return 'visit' right after a few days of leaving for her new home.

Some keep it simple, with just a day of revelry with friends and family, and others like a drawn-out affair, with four or five functions with different rituals and themes for each of them.

THE HINDU WEDDING

The first step of every wedding, after the decisions of marriage is made in case of arranged weddings, is where the families meet and finalise the nitty-gritties. In Hindu weddings, this ceremony is known as 'ashirbad' and it is during this event that the family of the bride and groom show their blessing by sprinkling 'durba' leaves and husked rice on them and by gifting gold. Then the priest fixes the 'logno', which is the 'auspicious time' according to the Hindu almanac.

The most interesting thing is that a Hindu wedding takes place at the exact time fixed, no matter how late or early the hour. Before the wedding ceremony a series of smaller occasions are observed.

The 'aiburobhat' is sometimes observe, akin to the western bridal shower. The close friends and relatives of the bride take some time to spoil her, give her gifts, and of course, arrange a scrumptious meal.

A number of pujas are also observed for blessings.

The next fun aspect of the wedding is the gifting of fish, and apart from so minor differences, this observed by most Bangladeshis. The groom's family sends a couple of ruhi fish dressed as a bride and groom to the bride's home. The fish carries a bit of vermilion on a coin inside the mouth, which is later on used by the groom to fill the hair-parting of the bride. Also, the holud used on the bride, must be ground by five married women for luck.

Next is the Holud ceremony. Traditionally, the groom's family makes a paste of turmeric and mustard oil, and applies it on his body by his

mother and a group of married women.

After the ceremony is complete, the remaining turmeric paste is sent over to the bride's, along with her dresses and wedding trousseau. Similar holud rituals are done for the bride, and sometimes, additionally, she then wears the traditional symbols of the Hindu married women, like bangles made of Conch.

Early on the wedding morning, the bride and groom are fed a mixture of sweet curd, flattened rice, sweets and the like, in a ritual called 'Dodhi Mangal,' which is the bride and groom's last meal until the wedding vows are said, as they are supposed to fast till then.

The bride's family offers the groom his trousseau in what is known as 'bastrodan,' which is also symbolic of accepting the groom into the bride's

family.

The wedding ceremony itself usually begins with 'Shaat Pak,' which is when the bride, with her face hid behind a couple of betel leaves, is carried by her relatives, around the groom seven times. The bride and groom then exchange flower garlands, and this allows for some light-hearted pranks too. Then the ritual of 'Kanya Sampradan' sees an elderly relative or the father of the bride 'give away' the bride.

Later the priest chants as the bride and groom say their vows around the 'sacred flame,' the wood for which is brought by the groom's family.

Sometimes, the wedding ceremony is broken up into two parts, and the latter is known as the 'Bashi Biye.'

