

SPECIAL FEATURE

# Rena Effendi's Bangladeshi Weddings

Rena Effendi came to Bangladesh as a part of the Vogue team and to capture the glitz, glamour, cultural and traditional values of the rural and urban weddings.



Award winning photographer, Rena Effendi started taking pictures in 2001 and became a full-time photographer in 2005. Although her work focuses more on the after effects of post-war regions and environmental disasters, she has always loved photographing the cultures of different places.

The first thing she does when she has to cover a large story on daily lives is ask: "Where's the wedding or where's the funeral." To her these are the two most important elements in addition to the birth of a child, as it allows her to not only document family and friends, but also their emotions and connections --.

"The most amazing opportunity to see this microcosm of family and friends and the perfect setting that captures either celebration or grief," says Rena Effendi.

As we start to discuss about Bangladeshi weddings, she is amazed as well as happy to

weddings in Bangladesh are. I saw a full range of weddings from rural, to the more upscale urban ones and everywhere there is a production and they go on for several days and each event has specific rituals attached to it," she says as she sips on her tea. Rena loved the whole concept of the entire family involved and could not believe the number of guests invited to every event, let that be in the village or in the city.

"It feels like a full spectrum and that goes for any kind of wedding from an upscale one, to a neighborhood tucked away, to one in a village," Rena says. She thought weddings in the village were one of a kind as she witnessed an entire village coming together to celebrate; something that she had never seen and felt was probably an immense load of pressure for the family of the bride and groom.

"It is unbelievable, like shooting a movie almost," says Rena.

She also visited a parlour and was surprised by the hours long makeovers that most brides in the city go through for their wedding events. It was hard for her to com-

after so many years," Rena commented.

But Rena personally loved the village weddings that she attended as the settings were quieter, smaller, less of a production and allowing her more flexibility.

"In this kind of setting you get to see the rituals more up close and better and trace their roots. In the bigger weddings, such as the ones in Dhaka, I felt like I was in competition with a team of photographers and the rest of the people who were trying to take a snap of what was happening of the entire squad of friends," she said and candidly compared it to almost being like a war zone or trying to get a snap of a celebrity.

The environment was hectic for her to work in as she primarily works with film cameras, which is a much slower camera in general and requires some steadiness.

"In day light it is nice but at night against artificial or evening lighting, it becomes more of a challenge since I am competing with other photographers as well," Rena said.

She also observed other significant contrasts between the rural and urban ones: "The city weddings seemed to be more a vanity fest, people arrive and start taking pictures instantly and there are big teams of photographers, videographers involved and it seems to me that a large portion of the wedding is basically the guests taking pictures with the bride and groom. In rural weddings that really was not the case. People just mingled, talked and even if people did take pictures it was not done by professional photographers."

Rena Effendi laments about the preparation of the fish, gift wrapping and dance rehearsals for the holud.

"I loved how they dressed up the fish. I found that to be lovely, cute and so humorous and quirky. I love these kinds of details as they are my favorite things to photograph like the lipstick, bindi, nose ring and the little outfits put on the fish. The dedication and effort that friends and relatives of the soon to be married couple put in, rehearsing for weeks just for the bride and groom, I find these gestures to be stunning. I guess they already have a captive audience, but I could never imagine my own friends doing that for me let alone get on stage for me," she said.

Overall, she said she loved photographing in Bangladesh, describing the whole experience to be beautiful and memorable.

By Supriti Sarkar

Photo: LS Archive

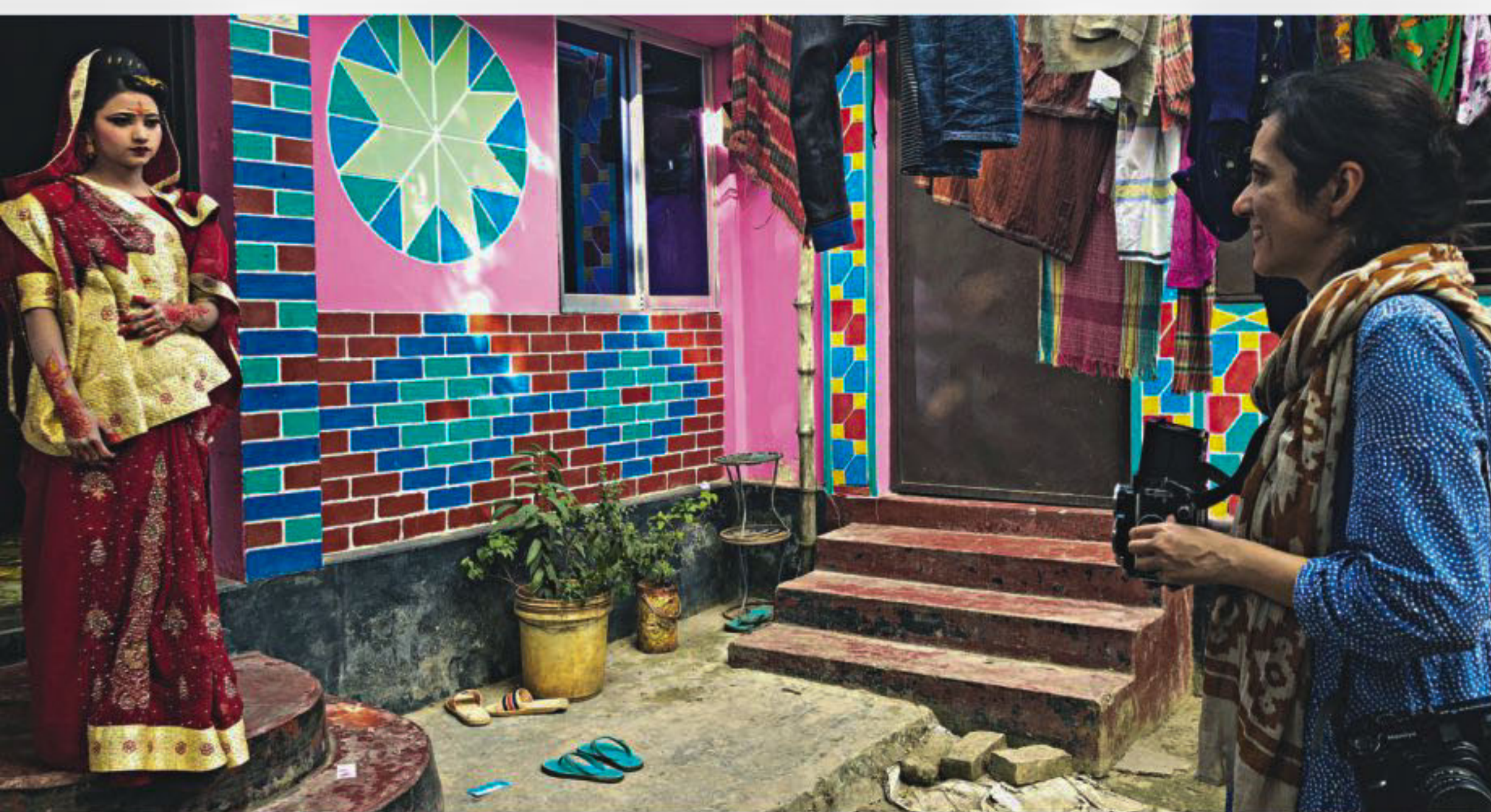


PHOTO COURTESY: SOCIAL MEDIA

see the preservation of rituals and traditions. Of the five weddings that she photographed in and outside Dhaka, two of the weddings were of a bride and groom who both lived abroad but chose to come back and get married here traditionally, be with families and have them be a part of the celebrations. Many of the marital traditions in her home town, Azerbaijan have been lost, even in the villages where once brides would arrive in horses has been replaced by cars.

"I didn't realise how much of a production

prehend let alone relate, drawing on instances from her culture in Azerbaijan, saying, "I can understand how some women put more effort into their makeup but not hours, I can only imagine how stressful it becomes for the bride but the result is very beautiful. Colours of the attire, jewellery, it was all beautiful and elegant, especially the tikli, I hope to wear one, someday, somewhere. The nose ring and the bead work that goes around the hair. I love that brides are still doing it, holding onto the traditions even



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