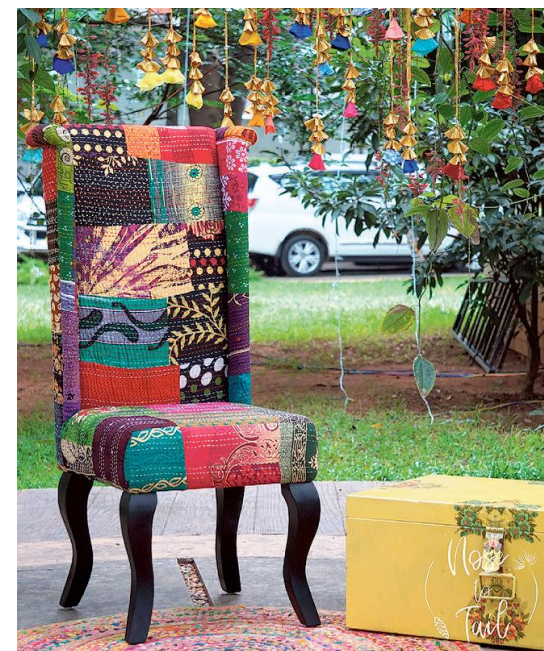




From paperless invites to recycling *lehengas*, families are turning to smaller, more sustainable weddings



**Waste-free weddings** (From left) Some of the eco-friendly decor by Nose and Tail; A virtual blessing in progress at a function organised by Wedding Wishlist • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

✶ K JESHI

The 'big fat Indian wedding' was streamlined this year. As e-invites and online attendance become the norm, courtesy the pandemic, not only are weddings turning into more intimate affairs, but couples are also showing more interest in sustainable, waste-free celebrations.

Recently, a Kongu-style wedding of Helga Mary Campbell and Stephen Inbaraj at Pollachi, near Coimbatore, saw the bride, Helga, dressed in a gown entirely recreated from repurposed clothes using zero-waste pattern cutting techniques. "Mulmul, muga, and summer silk fabrics were recycled to create the bridal trousseau. We opted for an elegant gown with organic thread work in breathable fabric," says Rachel J Amritharaj, a Delhi-based designer who conceptualised the wedding. "For the decor, we supported local craftsmen and used materials like clay, wood, straw and native flowers. The wedding feast included seasonal vegetables grown locally," Rachel adds.

#### Cutting waste

"With small gatherings, zero waste can easily be achieved," says Mumbai-based Aishwarya Lonial, who co-founded Nose to Tail with Indraj Khare, which specialises in sustainable weddings. "Right from invites to gifts, we cut down on waste generation at source. For an upcoming wedding in Delhi, we are using scrap cloth and tailor waste for the decor. We

# Made in heaven, but Earth-friendly



have tied up with NGOs like Feeding India and Robin Hood Army to donate excess food," Aishwarya adds.

Sanna Vohra, founder and CEO of The Wedding Brigade, an online portal that curates wedding fashion, suggests choosing paperless or recycled invites, opting for venues with recycling/composting facilities, buying from sustainable brands and using lo-

cally sourced flowers or recycled material for decor.

Mumbai-based RJ Preeti Bindas' wedding in August was one such; she calls the event "an extension" of her sustainable lifestyle. "We upcycled used tyres, used bottles and scrap for decor. Discarded telephone directories became gift envelopes wrapped in a glossy cover (which were made

from discarded car covers)," she says. Preeti continues: "Why do you need to order plastic water bottles for a two-hour function? The waste we leave behind takes millions of years to decompose."

Kanika Subbiah, founder of Wedding Wishlist concurs. "We have 1.1 crore weddings a year in India. Tonnes of waste goes to the landfill." Her company offers gift registry services. This, she says, can reduce waste generated by gifts alone by 50%. "Couples can also request guests to support charity as gifts," Kanika adds.

#### Meaningful events

There is a greater focus on replacing single-use plastic cutlery with steel jugs and glasses, wooden spoons, banana leaves and areca plates. Anujna Ravikumar, founder of Bengaluru-based Levitate Wedding recently helped organise a zero-waste wedding at Panchvati in Kanakapura, near Bengaluru. "We use roses, orchids, lillies and chrysanthemums



#### Scent of success

Kanpur-based Help Us Green (HUG) upcycles floral waste from weddings, temples and mosques as colours and incense sticks. Their latest addition is seed paper covers with tulsi seeds (picture above). "We have been getting orders from South India for seed covers to be given away as return gifts at weddings," says HUG's founder Karan Rastogi. The covers are available to order on Amazon.

Rastogi's team collected flowers that were being discarded due to events not happening during lockdown directly from farmers in a bid to support their livelihood. "We trained 25 farmers through an online programme along with the Government of Uttarakhand, and collected 10 tonnes of fresh flowers during the pandemic, which we used to make dyes, incense sticks, handmade paper, potpourri and so on," he adds.

sourced from farmers in the neighbourhood. The used flowers are upcycled as natural dyes," Anujna says, adding COVID-19 has been an influencing factor on these trends.

The pandemic has revived forgotten traditions, says Arabind Chandrasekhar, managing director of Kochi-based Tamarind Event Management Solutions. "If you look back 40 years or so, weddings were much smaller and conducted at homes, the safest place for any celebration. COVID-19 has made people realise that relationships matter and not revelry."

Tamarind, which holds destination weddings in Goa, Kerala and Tamil Nadu encourages clients to cut down on guests lists and use minimal resources for decor. "We also tell them to stick to a time limit to reduce use of diesel gensets."

Kanika says they organised over 60 registry weddings and another 40 virtual ones after the pandemic began. "Of late, we are seeing couples from Rajasthan, Punjab, Chandigarh and Ludhiana showing interest in virtual weddings. For an upcoming wedding, we have an eight-hour online function where we have ushers for every guest to make the virtual wedding a memorable one," she says.

Sanna Vohra too, expects an increase in virtual weddings. "There will be online streaming of the main ceremony for family and friends, or even sharing more intimate wedding moments like an at-home *haldi* or the post-wedding bride and groom games," she says, adding, "Weddings will still be beautiful, but excesses will be cut."