

From **Charuavi**: Two entries for this week's creativity contest. The prompt is "wedding."

Bambi's Wedding

You might ask, what is there to write about weddings? Weddings take place every day all over the world. Yes, you are right, but still, each wedding is different. However, I never thought that the two weddings of my two daughters would be SO different.

Bambi's wedding was strictly an 'arranged' wedding. When she was in the final year of MBBS, I started looking around for a 'suitable boy' in a rather casual manner. She had already told me that she had not found anyone among her friends attractive enough to get married to and she did not want to remain a spinster all her life. In that case, an 'arranged' marriage was the only alternative.

I think I can write about 10 blogs recounting our experiences of the process. Some of them were funny, some were infuriating and some were heart-wrenching. Over the next two years, Bambi was rejected by some 6-7 people and Bambi also rejected about the same number of grooms.

Among the funny experiences, I particularly remember a letter we received which mentioned that the prospective groom had failed in 10 standard but was earning a good salary as a bus conductor and would be ready to marry in two years time after his sister was married and till that time we should WAIT. Can you believe it? This proposal was sent by the groom's father for an MBBS girl.

Among the infuriating experiences, I remember one where we had received a letter from a lady who particularly wanted a doctor daughter-in-law and so, she urged us to come and visit her at Pune. Accordingly, we went there only to be told that her thoughts had undergone a sea-change and now she did NOT want a doctor daughter-in-law.

Among the heartbreaking experiences was one where the mother of the prospective groom was in the final stages of cancer and wanted to see her son married before her demise. Unfortunately, she expired before the son could fulfill her wish.

Bambi finished her MBBS and during her internship, I stepped up the efforts to get her married.

Mr. Rao's son Vishnu was suitable in every which way. He had done his MS in USA, was good-looking, was employed in a good company and was on H1-B visa. Practical person that he is, he had decided to get married before applying for green card, and was visiting Mumbai with that intention. However, he had made it clear to his parents that he would get married if and only if he himself liked a girl. Otherwise, he would make another trip.

His parents had already decided on Bambi. Vishnu's father and his brother were so convinced that Bambi was the girl for their dear Vishnu, that they practically jeopardized the wedding by 'oversell'. For two days after the arrival of Vishnu, they constantly praised Bambi, her family, her looks, her intelligence, her smartness, her nature, her charm, her erudition so much that Vishnu became biased AGAINST her.

Bambi was the first girl they had lined up for Vishnu to 'see'.

We visited them that day with some 'pedhas'. We were greeted warmly by Vishnu's parents, we did some small talk and then Vishnu came out into the hall *with his boots on*. Most probably he had decided to cut short the interview and go out.

He looked at Bambi, Bambi looked at him and it was love at first sight between them. Both of them forgot the presence of all of us. Vishnu also forgot that he had planned to wind up the meeting as early as possible and go out.

I gently reminded Bambi to open the box of 'pedhas' and give to everybody. Bambi had eyes only for Vishnu, and absentmindedly, she opened the box upside down. All the 'pedhas' tumbled into the cover of the box and some 2-3 plopped down on the floor.

In the confusion, Vishnu took control of the situation and told us that it can happen to anybody. He also elaborated how his friend from Engineering College had done a similar thing.

For the next two hours, Vishnu and Bambi were talking in a corner while the rest of the people – his parents, his uncle's family and us – exhausted all topics of polite conversation, politics, films, TV serials, weather, traveling, books, music etc. When all other topics were over, Mr. Rao turned to Bunny, our younger daughter, who was quietly reading her Agatha Christie in a corner and asked her about her school, school friends, teachers, grades, Gathering, exams etc. We also finished tons of idlis.

Later, Vishnu said he wanted to talk with Bambi alone on the terrace, and again, for one more hour we thrashed out the topic of all kinds of sports.

Vishnu and Bambi came down from the terrace and I saw that Bambi was actually *blushing*. Vishnu declared that they had decided.

"Decided *what?*" asked Mr. Rao anxiously.

Vishnu was surprised. "To get married, of course!" he said.

Mr. Rao's relief was most visible. "Give me some water," he requested the servant.

Vishnu just refused to 'see' any more girls after that day saying that it was a waste of time. Mr. Rao had to persuade him to 'see' at least one girl because her parents had come to Mumbai all the way from a distant city.

The only thing that was left now was the formal 'Engagement' and the wedding. We, the parents of Vishnu and Bambi were quite capable of handling that small detail.

Bambi's wedding was a very happy, smooth, gala event. I will only mention in passing how Avi's brother scared us that now that the engagement had taken place, Mr. Rao would ask for "40X40" (Forty thousand rupees and forty tolas of gold) or "50X50" as dowry. Bambi declared that in that case, she will break the engagement. (Actually, Mr. Rao only suggested that we should not accept any presents or bouquets from the invited guests. There were no demands from their side.)

It was a very sweet wedding, but Chaos ruled. My brother had bought a beautiful *pale* yellow saree for Bambi. She was supposed to wear that saree during the wedding, but Avi's aunts conspired against it. They insisted that Bambi should wear the flamboyant, rich, bright yellow saree that I had bought for myself for the reception. As a result, I had to wear an old saree for the reception.

Poor Bunny! I had forgotten to bring her 'Reception saree' to the venue, though I had managed to bring her blouse. Mrs. Rao, magnanimous lady that she is, gave Bunny her own saree to wear (which was a gift from me) for the reception and which was, luckily, matching to the blouse.

I have also heard it said that my brother had accidentally locked my mother inside the room of the guest-house and then, try as he might, just could not open the door. My sister-in-law managed to open it by inserting her hairpin and twisting it around.

Bambi had only one grouse. She claimed that nobody was paying the bride and the groom slightest attention during the reception. People came to the dais, shook hands with Vishnu, greeted Bambi, posed for a photo and then sat about in the garden in small groups discussing politics if they were men and sarees and jewelry if they were women.

She was right. During the wedding-rites, even my own dear mother and my cousins were discussing how the ancestral property was divided among our family and Avi's aunt was grumbling to his mother that she was given a very ordinary saree as a wedding present.

I used to love watching the wedding video but not anymore. In twelve years, almost 50% of the people in the photo album or video have left for their heavenly abode.

Bambi herself is no more.

Bunny's Wedding

Bunny's wedding was altogether different from Bambi's wedding.

Firstly, it was a "love marriage". Bambi's had been an "arranged, Hindu marriage". Secondly, it was a Christian wedding, even though the bride wore a beautiful bright yellow saree instead of a white wedding gown and the rite of gifting of 'mangalsutra' was incorporated into the wedding along with the rite of the exchange of the wedding-rings. We also played a tape of 'shehnai' music in a low key in the background, during the reception.

Bambi's wedding reception was attended by more than 1000 people. (*We know.* We paid to the caterer for that many 'thalis'.) Bunny's wedding was a small, intimate affair with only about 50 people attending, most of whom were her university professors and classmates. (We had paid for 80 people to the caterer, but the Xmas holidays had started and many invitees were out of the town visiting relatives.)

Bunny's wedding was celebrated in three different countries at three different times. The actual wedding took place in her university's hall in the USA. Nobody from the groom's side could attend the wedding because all his relatives were in Germany (he is a German) and his parents were too old to travel. So when Ingo and Bunny went to Germany, they also

hosted a reception there. From our side too, only five people could attend, that is us and Bambi's family of 3 (Vishnu, Bambi and Mitali, who was just 3 years old at that time). So, when Ingo and Bunny came to Mumbai to visit us, we hosted another reception so that all our 'extended family' members and friends could meet Ingo. All the three receptions were small compared to Bambi's huge 'big fat Indian wedding'.

When Bunny was studying in USA, I had started looking around for a suitable boy for her. This time I was more at home. I had developed the confidence after Bambi's wedding, which was 'arranged' by us.

I short-listed some 18 boys for her and started corresponding with the parents of these 18 boys.

Immediately we ran into difficulties. It is not easy to arrange a wedding when the prospective bride is not here in India to 'show' to the parents of the grooms. The parents of the grooms also were in a quandary, because even though they preferred a girl studying in the USA and liked her photo, how to arrange for the boy and the girl to meet?

However, doggedly we were pursuing our objective when we first received a hint from Bambi. "Mom, go a bit easy on the groom-hunting" she said, "I think Bunny already has somebody in the mind."

"What nonsense!" I said, "She is too young to know her mind." (For a mother, her children are always too young to do *anything*.)

Bambi laughed. "Mom, you are the limit. You mean she is too young to know her mind, but old enough to get married?"

"That is different" said I.

"How?" countered Bambi.

"Listen! When we arrange a wedding, we will take into consideration everything, the boy's education, earning, family background, caste, creed, everything. We arranged *your* marriage. Didn't we? Do you have any complaints?" I asked.

"No. I have no complaints, but Mom, your own was a love-marriage. Did *you* bother about all these factors when you married Dad?" Bambi asked pointblank.

She was always an argumentative type person.

"So, hold your horses till Bunny tells you," Bambi advised.

"But I can't wait infinitely. How long should I wait before I can have a heart-to-heart talk with Bunny?" I asked helplessly.

"Her Convocation is just round the corner. In any case, you are coming here for that. So just chill and wait till then."

So, I 'chilled' and froze the 18 proposals that I had in the pipeline.

A few days before the Convocation, Bunny herself called and told us the NEWS that Ingo had proposed to her and she had accepted.

On our behalf, Vishnu, Bambi and Mitali had already visited the University and met Ingo. They had immensely liked him.

Then we swung in action. We told Bunny that she should get married while we were there for her Convocation. No 'going steady' for 2-3 years like in the Western world.

Ingo and Bunny were only too willing to comply with our wish. Ingo's parents were also very happy at the news.

So, we printed some sample wedding cards in Mumbai and sent to Ingo and Bunny for approval.

Imagine our surprise when Ingo pointed out that those cards were unacceptable because the standard Invocation to Gods "Shri Ganeshay Namah" was flanked on both side by the "swastika" symbols. The 'swastika' is now associated in Germany with Hitler and pre-war Nazi Germany and has fallen out of the favor of the modern German people. It is a 'taboo' now.

We had to replace the 'swastika' symbol with a cross because the cards were to be sent to Germany also, apart from India and USA, for Ingo's relatives and friends.

So, new cards were printed and sent, new sarees were bought, new blouses stitched, new jewelry, including 'mangalsutra' were made for Bunny and we carried suitcases full of stuff, to the maximum luggage limit set by the airlines, to USA.

So, Bunny and Ingo got married according to the Christian Catholic rites just one day after the convocation.

Bunny also has one grouse. Both she and Ingo had to do a lot of work for their own wedding – book the hall, decide the dishes, order the food, find a Minister, distribute the cards, ferry us to and from the airport etc. We would have taken care of all these if they were to marry in Mumbai.

Poor Bunny even refused to have Henna put on her palms when I offered to do it, because it will involve 3-4 hours of idle hands and she had laundry to do.

(Needless to say that during their Mumbai reception, they did not have to do ANY work.)

This wedding also was very smooth and sweet, though again, Chaos reigned. Bunny's two friends were the bridesmaids. They were all gung-ho about this Hindu-Christian wedding and wanted to wear sarees for the occasion. I draped the sarees around them quite properly and used a lot of safety-pins to guard against the mishaps, but I could not foresee all the possibilities. The girls found it extremely difficult to go up and down the stairs wearing the sarees. At the end of the ceremony, their sarees were all askew and they were glad to get out of the sarees and into jeans and tee shirts, I can tell you.

It is a good thing that the Minister had insisted on a 'rehearsal' of the wedding the day before, because we hardly knew anything about what we were supposed to do. We had attended only 2-3 Christian weddings in Mumbai as guests.

So, when Bunny's friend played 'The Wedding March' on piano, we three (Bunny, Avi and myself) **marched** like soldiers towards the pulpit while Bambi and Mitali walked ahead and strewed imaginary flower-petals in our path. Mitali was supposed to be the 'flower-girl'.

Bunny's friend stopped 'The Wedding March' and asked us, why we were walking so fast and then our misconception was cleared. They told us that even though it is called "The Wedding March", we were not supposed to '*march*' like soldiers towards the pulpit as though to "charge" it, but walk in a slow, steady rhythm towards it.

Thanks to the rehearsal, the next day we walked down the aisle slowly and gracefully towards the pulpit.

However, the rehearsal was of no use as far as the flower girl Mitali was concerned. The previous day, she was happy enough to strew imaginary flower-petals in our path, but when she was given the basket of real flower-petals to strew, she just hugged the basket tightly against her chest and declared "They are *mine*." Bambi's prompting also did not induce her to strew the petals.

We walked down the aisle which remained totally devoid of the flower-petals.

Vishnu had foreseen this kind of situation and had not entrusted Mitali with the ring but had kept it with himself. "Otherwise, when Bunny asks for the ring, we will have to chase Mitali all over the place because she *will* run, saying 'it is mine'. He had predicted.

Thanks to his foresight, the ring was given to Bunny at the proper time, the rings were exchanged, the 'mangalsutra' was put around Bunny's neck, and Bunny and Ingo had said "I Do."

Bunny was married.

With just these two words, she had acquired a whole lot of new relationships and responsibilities. She was not our daughter alone, but also a daughter-in-law to Ingo's parents. She was not only a sister to Bambi, but also a sister-in-law to Ingo's brother and his wife. In addition to Mitali, she now had two more nieces and a nephew.

I felt like hugging her tightly to my chest and say "she is *mine*." Even though I *knew* that she was no longer mine.

Ingo alone had the right to say that now.

In Bambi's wedding, I had cried unashamedly and freely. This time, I could not cry with abandon, but I brushed away my tears surreptitiously with the end of my 'Paithani' and looked at Avi.

There were unshed tears in his eyes too.