



REAL WEDDINGS

## An Elegant, Modern Indian Wedding with a Touch of *Harry Potter*

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[Kanak Jha](#), a PR and news coordinator at Amazon, and Teja Sumanth Peela, a senior product manager at Amazon, technically met online but had a ton of mutual friends who encouraged them to meet. Kanak had just transferred back to Arizona State University, and Teja was in town to interview for ASU's MBA program. "I don't develop crushes easily, but I was definitely head over heels for him," she says. After three years together, including one long-distance between New York City and Seattle, he proposed, after she made the move to the West Coast.

Once engaged, the couple wanted their wedding aesthetic to pay homage to their Indian heritage but also play off of their own experiences and memories together. “We would describe the aesthetic as modern Indian with boho elements for our pre-wedding events and modern desert elegance mixed with design elements from ancient Indian palaces for our ceremony and reception,” Kanak explains. The Haldi and Mehendi events were held at home, the Sangeet took place at a renovated barn, and the [JW Marriott Tucson Starr Pass Resort & Spa](#) was booked for the reception. To help plan all the events, the couple hired Jo Ann of [Apropos Creations](#).

The fall festivities at home embodied a traditional Indian wedding. There was a custom arch of colorful Indian umbrellas from Rajasthan and 100 feet of fresh marigold draped over the staircase. Their toran (front door decor) was made by hand in Salem, India.

For their wedding outfits, their families traveled to India twice, and to four different cities, to pull garments and jewelry—it took a year-and-a-half total. “For our Haldi, we chose simple FabIndia pieces that we could easily cover in turmeric paste, guilt free!” Kanak says. “For the Mehendi, I chose a fuchsia ruffle sari by designer [Ridhi Mehra](#)...While a sari was a unique choice for a Mehendi, the fuchsia was perfect as a traditional Indian color.”

At the Sangeet, the two wanted their venue to reflect their Arizona upbringings and mixed lanterns, pampas grass, rich draping, and a bold Moroccan-inspired structure for an “Arabian Nights” ambiance. The bride wore a gold Nakul Sen sharara from [Fashion By Rohini](#) with a tikka and pasa (headpieces). Teja matched her in a black and gold Masaba kurta from Mumbai. That evening, their wedding party entertained everyone with a 15-minute-long skit to different songs that stunned the couple and guests.

When it came to the ceremony, Kanak “dreamt of being a [Sabyasachi](#) bride, just like Priyanka Chopra Jonas and Deepika Padukone.” At the Mumbai flagship, she tried on seven lehengas in fuchsia and the traditional Indian bridal red. The last one caused her to shed happy tears, and she wound up wearing customary colors of rouge and gold. To complete her ensemble, the bride also wore a mangalsutra, which she created with [Sampat Jewelers](#).

Teja complemented Kanak well in an ivory sherwani, a blush colored safa (turban), and camel [Louboutins](#). And they both wore jewelry from Sunil Jewelers, where her parents had gotten their wedding jewelry too.

At the Mandap, an illusion of floating flowers was set against the Tucson mountains. “Bougainvillea blossoms all over the white marble palaces in India, so we decided to set the fuchsia flowers against a white stage to recreate scenes from these ancient dwellings we visited,” Kanak says. [Frostings Event Design Rentals](#) and [Inner Space Event Design and Rentals](#) made their vision come to life and helped change locations from the golf course to the terrace last-minute, due to intermittent rain.

“Teja and I chose to have a fusion ceremony, including unique customs from both regions of India where our respective families are from,” the bride explains. “I started off the wedding ceremonies with a Baraat—the groom’s wedding procession—by riding in on a mare, dancing with more than one hundred of my friends and family, and marching through the desert to reach the ceremony location,” Teja shares. “Right before Kanak walked down the aisle...I was smiling so hard, it made my cheeks hurt!”

Their officiant, Dharmasetu Das, helped them map out the different rituals—Kanak’s favorites were the Saat Pher and the Vidaai. The former is when the couple takes seven rounds around the fire, signifying their vows and promises to each other. Traditionally during each turn, the brothers of the bride fill her hands with puffed rice, but Kanak had her two cousins and her sister substitute in. “Having my sister pour the final two rounds of rice in my hands was really emotional for me. She’s always been my biggest protector and advocate in life, so changing this ritual to match that meant the world to me.”

The latter is when the couple is officially wed and the bride throws rice over her head, and her mother catches it in her sari. “Daughters are considered to be a blessing in a household, and throwing the rice back ensures that the bride’s blessings and love will stay with her family forever,” Kanak explains. “There wasn’t a dry eye during this ritual!”

Once married, the Mr. and Mrs. exited their ceremony via carriage, and then the bride changed into a heavily beaded, cream and silver gown with a four-foot feather train by [Falguni Shane Peacock](#), and the groom put on a classic black tuxedo, [Mont Blanc](#) cufflinks, and a Rolex that Kanak gifted him during their engagement ceremony.

Their reception was decorated with inspiration drawn from their love of Harry Potter. “Our vendors transformed the reception ballroom into the Great Hall from Hogwarts with a large chandelier piece, including Edison bulbs, fairy lights, and candelabra chandeliers mixed with greenery suspended over the dance floor.”

Guests dined on a delicious meal by [Saffron Indian Bistro](#) of dishes like Fish Malabar and Chicken Biryani. “My favorite part of the reception dinner was seeing the chefs making fresh naan on site!” she says. “It was so neat to see and so delicious—I had at least three pieces!” It was also the groom’s first time trying Falooda—a South Asian ice cream mixed with rose syrup and vermicelli—and he loved it.

After dinner, dancing commenced, and the newlyweds had their first dance to “Can You Feel The Love Tonight” from The Lion King and the Bollywood song “Mere Naam Tu.” “We are both huge Disney fanatics, and there was no better way to kickoff the wedding reception and show our love for one another,” Teja says. “Teja loves the song ‘Mere Naam Tu.’ It’s definitely different from your typical Bollywood love songs, and the meaning is very poetic,” Kanak adds. “We choreographed the dance together and had a blast practicing it for weeks before the wedding.”



One of Teja's favorite parts of the reception was when their parents surprised them with a dance that they had been practicing for weeks. "It totally caught Kanak and I off guard, but it was so beautiful seeing the families doing something really special for us."

The celebration continued until around 1:00 a.m. and then was moved to the patio, where friends chatted around a fire pit for three more hours. "So many of our guests had flown into Arizona for our wedding and were seeing old friends after so long," Kanak says. "It was really wonderful to have time to catch up with everyone, after the day ended."