

A match made in heaven

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A SOLEMN and simple occasion like a marriage has unfortunately created several serious social problems for us. It is no doubt a desirable thing, besides being a religious obligation as far as the Valima is concerned, to entertain family members and friends when two people become man and wife. But the way our wedding functions are arranged and celebrated these days sometimes borders on absurdity, resulting in immense wastage of food, money and time. It also results in a great deal of inconvenience to the invitees, who come from all parts of the city and even outside.

The process starts when a mother begins looking for a bride for her son. The boy himself may be a poor specimen and may belong to the middle class or even lower, but his mother wishes to find for him a girl who is tall, slim, pretty and educated. More importantly, her parents should be rich enough to give their daughter loads of jewellery, furniture, refrigerator, colour TV, crockery, cutlery, etc. A car would be most welcome and would go a long way to establish the bride's rating as a daughter-in-law. Of course she has also to bring clothes for the relatives of the groom. The list might include anybody else as dis-

tantly related as possible. The key point here is that you should not leave anything undone in any respect if you wish to see your daughter happily married.

For several days before the wedding the houses of the bride and the groom are illuminated by hundreds of colourful electric bulbs. Punctuality is the worst sufferer on such occasions. If you are invited at 8pm 'sharp', you can safely go at 10pm and still be ahead of many others who will keep trickling in even after 11pm. Most likely, when you make it to the venue of the wedding, even the Barat might not have arrived. The anxious host will keep assuring people that the wedding party is on its way and expected to arrive any moment. Nobody seems to be in a hurry. Little boys and girls decked in their finest clothes run about to

keep the proceedings lively, fires have not yet been lit under the dishes containing food, the liveried staff of the caterer is sitting and yawning and waiting to serve the equally frustrated and famished guests. Some professional match makers utilize

the time to do some business by going round and questioning pretty girls present there to find out their names, the names of their parents and their addresses to explore the possibility of finding suitable matches for them. The neverending search for

prospective brides continues at all marriages while the arrival of Barat is awaited.

Every wedding ceremony is accompanied by at least six functions, spread over two weeks, when the bride-to-be comes under the focus of the girls' family. She is made to



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3 wear yellow clothes, which she has to don until the day of her marriage, known as Mayun. Beating of the ceremonial drums starts and continues for the rest of the week. During this time, she remains surrounded by friends. It is essentially a function that is arranged to put the girl in the right frame of mind, but now Mayun is also held for grooms for fun.

On day three, Rasm-i-Hina or Mehndi takes place for the girl. The

boys' mother and sisters, accompanied by their relatives and friends, take henna to the girls' house and the next day the compliment is returned by the girls' family. This takes us to day four. These functions are supposed to be exclusive purview of females of the two sides, but many boys also gate-crash the functions, of course with the connivance of the elders. These functions provide a good opportunity for young boys and girls to see and be seen for future

matchmaking. The girls come dressed to kill and are even encouraged by their mothers to look their best.

All Mehndi functions are held with gay abandon, with loads of singing and dancing. The latest fad is that everybody should wear yellow clothes and shoes. Even the colour of the *shamiana* should match. An important event of the evening is the display of the dowry being given to the bride. Clothes and ornaments of the bride are laid out in a separate section and everybody is invited to see what the girls' parents have done to ensure that their daughter leaves their home well-provided for.

On day five, that is D-Day, the arrival of the Barat is the highlight of the show. The Barat takes its own sweet time to arrive. The Nikah takes place with signatures on the marriage contract. The bride is dressed in all her finery while asked three times in the presence of two witnesses if she agrees to marry her intended. The same question is also put forth to the groom in a separate section. As soon as this is done, everybody rushes to be the first to congratulate the groom and his parents, followed by warm embraces. While the wedding feast is still in progress or even before, an elaborate session of photography commences at the stage where every relative and friend of the groom and the bride gets himself, or herself, photographed with the new couple. If delayed,

some of the guests start leaving even though they have had nothing to eat. The activity on the stage, however, continues for another hour or so. The time for departure of the newly-wed couple finally arrives and they walk to their car, followed by the girls' mother, brothers and sisters.

The bride's departure from her parents house is symbolized by the Rukhsati that takes place amid much sobbing and crying by the girl, her parents and close relatives and friends. Valima follows the next day or the day after that, and is supposed to be the drop scene of the drama.

All these functions are spread over as many days and each function has to be held with pomp and ostentation and, of course, eating to one's heart's content. It is all right for those who can afford to indulge in that kind of luxury. But others who are not so fortunate have to follow week-long drill just for face-saving, even if they have to borrow money from friends and relatives to put up the show. At the end of it all, the bride's father is left to foot the bill, while everybody congratulates him for having discharged the responsibility successfully.

Although we talk a lot about simplicity, one finds that nobody likes to practice it. You will find the most vocal social reformers (male or female) unashamedly doing all, if not more, when the time comes for marriages of their own sons and daughters. ■