

# India: And the bride wore white

**Wear in the World | Most Indian brides wear red for their big day. Now, some are putting a modern stamp on an ingrained wedding tradition. By Sujata Assomull**



**T**his might sound remarkable to western ears, but in much of India, wearing white to your wedding was once unthinkable. Historically, white has been associated with mourning: a hue of widowhood rather than celebration. Traditionally, bridal-wear leaned towards red, a colour symbolising prosperity and auspicious beginnings in Hindu customs. Some regional variations exist: brides from Maharashtra often look to green, while in Kerala a white and gold sari drape has long been part of some wedding dress codes. But until recently, wearing white, even as a guest, would have ensured the wedding was the talk of the town for all the wrong reasons.

Now, younger millennials and Gen Zs are putting their stamp on longstanding wedding traditions. For many, that starts with challenging traditional dress codes. Some brides are turning to shades of white for their reception looks – or even for the actual religious wedding ceremony.

“I used to think it was a rebellious act, but what I’ve seen in my brides who choose white is that it’s more of a quiet confidence,” says New Delhi-based Shweta Kapur, founder and creative director of 431-88. The label, founded in 2012, is known for its elevated take on everyday essentials and a relaxed approach to cocktail wear. “They don’t second guess, they don’t ask for opinions, they just know. It comes from inner clarity. You don’t need the noise of colour to make a statement.” Five months ago, Kapur launched her first wedding collection with a capsule of 12

pieces to the surprise of many, as bridal-wear had not previously been part of her label’s vocabulary. The response, she says, has been strong.

Kapur’s own wedding in December 2024 was a blueprint. The multi-day celebrations became a viral moment in India due to her fashion-forward choices that spoke of her minimalist aesthetic, earning her an article in Harper’s Bazaar India titled “Designer Shweta Kapur’s wedding wardrobe was a masterclass in personal style over bridal clichés”.

“I was looking for restraint when I was shopping for my wedding. Being a comparatively older bride in my late thirties, I wanted something that was more me and something I could be myself in,” says Kapur. For the *dhol* night, a pre-wedding celebration centred on music and dancing, she wore an outfit anchored around a crisp white men’s shirt from her own label with a mirror-work gold skirt by Itrh, enhanced with mirror tassels on the yoke and shoulders. For the *pheras*, the wedding ceremony, she wore a Jade by Monica and Karishma custom-made design: a delicately embroidered sage green *lehenga* (a traditional Indian skirt worn with a fitted blouse and *dupatta*, a scarf, the chosen silhouette for the religious wedding ceremony.) For the reception, with 1,000 guests, she chose a pristine white cocktail sari with pearl accents again by her own label.

It was Gen X brides, the mothers of today’s brides, who introduced a special “gown function” at Indian weddings, a moment inspired by western red-carpet glamour, giving brides their first chance



Alia Bhatt wore an ivory and gold sari during her wedding to fellow Bollywood actor Ranbir Kapoor in Mumbai, 2022

Left: Shweta Kapur in one of her wedding looks  
Getty Images

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to wear a gown during a wedding celebration.

Now, that boldness is being pushed further: shades of white are entering other key celebrations such as the *sangeet* (dance and music evening), the *dhol*, a lively drum procession, and for those making a bold statement, even the *pheras* (the sacred wedding vows).

The move towards brides wearing white can be partly attributed to younger generations being influenced by western codes. Many have graduated from universities in the UK, North America and Australia, bringing back a more fluid, less codified approach to occasion dressing. But it mainly reflects the way in which Indian brides are embracing a new approach to dressing: many want something more individual, less prescriptive, and rooted in personal

style rather than tradition alone. “Young urban couples are pretty much making autonomous decisions when it comes to the creative direction of their wedding. It is not just the wardrobe, but the venue and the number of functions,” says Divyak D’Souza, celebrity stylist and costume designer. Indian wedding festivities were traditionally dictated by elders and parents.

Part of this shift can be traced back to the pandemic. During the Covid-19 pandemic, weddings shifted from the grand “Big Fat Indian Wedding” to intimate gatherings, which encouraged simpler silhouettes, muted palettes and pared-back embellishments. Brides began experimenting with softer shades, which felt simultaneously modern and respectful of tradition. “People weren’t looking to be ostentatious. Everything went more minimal, more demure. Simpler silhouettes, softer colour palettes and I do think that’s influenced what we’re seeing now,” says D’Souza.

This trend has been given validity by celebrity brides, notably when actress Alia Bhatt wore an ivory and gold sari (that commentators preferred to call *chai*-coloured) by Sabyasachi Mukherjee at her intimate Mumbai wedding in 2022.

Four years later, Shades of white are no longer outliers but fixtures across bridal collections today from couturiers such as Rahul Mishra, who reinterpret tradition through softer palettes, intricate embroidery and lighter silhouettes – clothes a bride can dance the night away in. White (or shades of it) is no longer a sign of rebellion but rather a recalibration.