

Tania Attends A Wedding



By Kanika G

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Tania's family had just arrived at the house where Aunt Poonams's parents lived in Bangalore. It was an actual house, two storeys high with six bedrooms and a backyard. Tania was awestruck. She had only ever seen apartments before. Never a house with a staircase on the inside. So cool!



Aunt Poonam was back from Baltimore for a few weeks. She was getting married. She was thrilled to see Tania and her baby sister Sonia. She had never seen Sonia before, and Sonia was almost a year old!



Aunt Poonam was Papa's cousin, and Tania called her "Poonty". Aunt Poonam had visited Tania a few years ago in Bombay. Tania was only a year and a half and had a hard time saying Poonam Aunty. So she shortened it to Poonty and that stuck.

The wedding was not until the next evening, but there was a lot going on. Poonty's mother, who Mama and Papa called Chachi, was getting Poonty's trousseau ready. There were beautiful *sarees*, *salwar kameezes*, jewellery and crockery sets. Mama

contributed a cute Japanese tea set. All of it had to be gift wrapped. Tania helped Chachi by handing her pieces of tape and ribbon.



Tania was not usually shy. But there were almost twenty people in the house, most of whom Tania had never met. All of them except Tania and Sonia were adults. So Tania stuck to her parents and Poonty. After lunch, Poonty told Tania there would be a *sangeet* ceremony in the evening.

Tania looked puzzled, so Poonty explained, "*Sangeet* is the Hindi word for music. A *sangeet* ceremony is done before the wedding. The bride gets together with her family and friends, and they all sing and dance. It is a fun and relaxed celebration."

In the evening, everyone got together in the large living room. Tania was dressed in an adorable *ghaghra-choli* Mama had bought her for the occasion.



Chachi had arranged for some snacks and drinks. Everyone was munching, chatting and drinking. The atmosphere was festive. Tania went to find Poonty. She found her sitting in a corner, and there was a lady drawing some pretty designs on her hand with a brown paste. The paste was being squeezed out of the tip of a plastic cone, like the icing cones used to decorate cakes. Tania asked, "Poonty what are you doing?"



Poonty drew Tania close with her free hand and explained, "Oh this is *mehendi*. It is a paste made from the extract of a plant. This nice lady can make lovely designs. I have to let the paste dry. After that it will crumble and fall off, but an orange print of the design will stay. By tomorrow, it will become dark brown. It is a tradition for brides to wear *mehendi* designs on their hands."

Twenty minutes later Poonty's *mehendi* was done and it was gorgeous.



Mama and Papa got *mehendi* designs on their hands too.



When the sun had set people started moving into the backyard. Poonty's father, Chacha, had the back yard decorated with colorful, twinkling lights.



Chacha had arranged for a DJ. The DJ played peppy Hindi songs from old and new movies, and a few Abba songs as well, including Tania's favorite *Super Trouper*. Although Tania loved to dance, she was feeling a little intimidated by all the adults there. Papa noticed and asked, "Tania, will you dance with me?" Thrilled, Tania joined in. Papa danced with Tania for a long time, and her *ghaghra* flared out beautifully when she twirled. Later, Mama and Poonty danced with Tania too. Tania enjoyed the evening immensely.

Next morning, Chacha and Chachi were getting ready for the *haldi* ceremony. Tania said, "Mama, I thought *haldi* was that yellow thing you put in food. So what is a *haldi* ceremony?"



Turmeric



Turmeric Powder

Mama replied "*Hal*di, called turmeric in English, is indeed the yellow powder we put in Indian food. But turmeric is also supposed to be very good for the skin. It helps to clean the skin and make it soft and bright. So during the *hal*di ceremony, we will put a paste made of turmeric powder, sandal wood powder and milk on Poonty to make her super pretty."



Poonty came into the room and sat on a small wooden stool. Chachi placed a bowl of *hal*di paste in front of her. Everyone took some paste and applied

it on Poonty's hands and face. Tania took a lot of paste in her hands and rubbed it all over Poonty's face and said, "This is so much fun Mama. It's like *haldi Holi!*"



Chacha had arranged for a big car to take everyone to the wedding hall in batches. Chachi, Poonty and Poonty's best friend Rashmi got there early. When Tania arrived there with her parents and Sonia, Poonty was fully dressed and looking so amazing in her gorgeous red *saree* and gold and diamond jewelery. Mama said, "It is tradition for the bride to wear a red *saree* with gold thread work."



Tania looked around the hall. There was a podium decorated with flowers. That was where the wedding ceremony would take place.



Rashmi, and another couple of girls who were Poonty's cousins, approached Tania. Rashmi said "Tania, we need to

steal Aditya's shoes. Can you help us?" Aditya was the groom.

Tania was shocked. "What!" she exclaimed. "No! Of course not. Stealing is wrong."

Mama heard them and intervened. She said "Tania, what they mean is they want to hide Aditya's shoes. It is a wedding game. Aditya is supposed to take off his shoes before he goes to the podium, and it is a tradition for the bride's friends and relatives to hide the groom's shoes. There will be someone there to guard the shoes. So it won't be easy. "

"Oh a game!" said Tania excited.
"That sounds like fun."

Relieved that the ethical issues were resolved, Rashmi said, "Yes and we think it's a good idea for you to do the hiding, because you are small and won't be noticed so much. They will be watching out for us."

Tania agreed, and was quite excited about her mission.



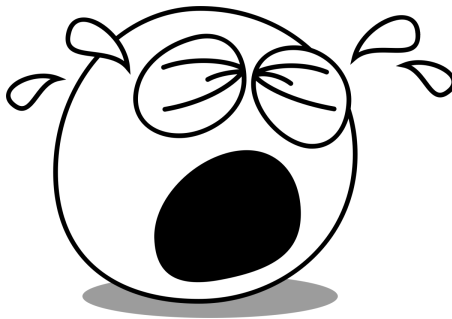
Everyone gathered together to receive the groom at the entrance to the hall. Aditya was on horseback in the midst of a band playing. His face was covered with a curtain of flowers and decorations. Aditya's family and friends were dancing and bursting fire crackers. It was quite a sight.



Soon after Aditya entered, he took off his shoes and climbed on to the podium. Members of the two families were greeting each other and everyone was busy. Tania decided this was the best time to take his shoes. But then she realized that there was a man guarding them. She wondered what to do, and came up with an idea. She went to find Sonia and told her something.



Aditya's 20 year old brother Arnav was all alone guarding the shoes dutifully, on his father's instructions. Suddenly, he found little baby Sonia tugging his pants, bawling loudly asking him to find her mother. Quite unfamiliar with babies, Arnav was at a complete loss. He tried to calm her with soothing words, but that only resulted in shriller and louder screams.



Flustered, Arnav picked up Sonia and dashed off to find Mama. In the three minutes that Arnav was gone, Tania easily grabbed Aditya's shoes and triumphantly handed them to Rashmi. Poor Arnav returned to find the shoes missing. Tania told Mama and Rashmi about her devious plan, and they giggled.



Tania was allowed to sit behind Poonty on the podium during the wedding, and she got to watch the proceedings up close. Poonty and Aditya had to put some mixture of food items into the fire and walk around it seven times and repeat some Sanskrit words the priest told them to. The ceremony was quite interesting. Later, Rashmi gave Tania one of the boxes of chocolates that Aditya had given Rashmi and Poonty's cousins to trade for his shoes.

After the ceremony, everyone had dinner and then Poonty and Aditya left for Aditya's house in a decorated car.



Tania and her family returned to Bombay the next day. What a wonderful time Tania had at the wedding!

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Thank you Brenda Whittaker, for correcting my grammatical mistakes.