



THE AMBANI WEDDING: OPTICS AND OPPULENCE

THE INDIAN BILLIONAIRE MET GALA EQUIVALENT WEDDING THAT TOOK THE WORLD BY A STORM FOR MORE REASONS THAN ONE.





Indian weddings in itself are an extravagant affair, a celebration that is easily a week-long event with a long list of festivities. In India, a wedding is not just a union of man and wife, it's also a show of social standing, wealth and status. In many ways, an Indian wedding is similar to a business merger, the only difference being it's a familial affair and the merger is blending two entire families that have their ways of doing things. Similar to a business merger, there are negotiations even for a wedding from monetary discussions to ceremonial discussions; it takes a village to plan an Indian wedding and that's the beauty of it.

A common family in India is likely to spend more than they should for a wedding, but what happens when you're the son of the richest man in Asia getting married to your girlfriend that also comes from money? In that case, it's not a simple wedding; it's a wedding that goes down in history and go down in history it did!

The Ambani Family and their wealth

The Ambani family patriarch Mukesh Ambani is the richest man in Asia and the 9th richest man in the world with a net worth of 112 billion dollars. The Ambani family runs Reliance Industries which is a conglomerate with hands in everything from petroleum, energy, oil, telecom and retail. What began in 1958 as Reliance Textiles a small start-up company founded by Dhirubhai Ambani, Mukesh's father, has turned into a multifaceted powerhouse today. Mukesh Ambani has three children Aakash, Isha and Anant Ambani with his wife, philanthropist Nita Ambani. Every family member is involved with the business and manages some part of it. The Ambani wealth today is so extensive that it makes for a tenth of India's GDP. From grocery products to mobile

network, the Ambani family has a monopoly in every field not only that they also own a hospital and a school. While their other businesses such as retail, energy, telecom are accessible to the common man, the school and hospital aren't easily accessible to everyone as they cater to a different demographic: the wealthy. The Ambani family has been in the public eye for a long time now, especially in India but the wedding of their youngest son has intensified the interest in the business tycoon family for obvious reasons.

The Wedding

Anant Ambani, the youngest son of billionaire conglomerate Mukesh Ambani got married to his long-term girlfriend Radhika Merchant this July in a wedding so extravagant that calling it lavish is an understatement. While the official wedding took place in July the festivities began in December when the youngest heir to the Ambani fortune proposed. In January, the official festivities began with the engagement party that had many known Bollywood stars in attendance but it was the pre-wedding celebrations where the real traction began. The first pre-wedding party took place in the Indian city of Jamnagar which witnessed not just household names from India but also international figures like Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg, Ivanka Trump and many more including a performance by Rihanna that cost 8 million dollars. The second pre-wedding took it a step further and the billionaire family flew all of their guests to a luxurious cruise that went made stops in a couple of European cities and had performances from Katy Perry, Backstreet Boys, Pitbull and even the world-famous Andrea Bocelli. The family rented out the town of Portofino for the attendees to enjoy Andrea Bocelli perform.



The official wedding ceremonies took place in Mumbai, the Ambani family's city of residence at the Nita Mukesh Ambani Cultural Centre (NMACC) which is a performing arts and multi-disciplinary cultural and exhibition space founded by the Ambani matriarch Nita Ambani. The *Sangeet* ceremony which is like a music and dance party included a performance from Justin Bieber for which he charged 10 million dollars. The wedding had Bollywood celebrities, Indian cricketers, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, British former Prime Minister Tony Blair, Priyanka Chopra along with her husband Nick Jonas, John Cena, the Kardashian sisters Kim and Khloe, FIFA president Gianni Infantino, stylist Law Roach, to name a few were in attendance. Anyone that is practically royalty in some way in the world was found in attendance at the wedding.

Significance of the wedding

Reports say that the Ambani family spent an estimate of 600 million dollars on the wedding which to a regular person would seem like an unthinkable amount to spend, especially on a wedding but when you're the richest family in Asia, spending 600 million dollars seems ordinary. Simply put their wealth is so immense that the millions they paid the artists to perform were like loose change to them. This wedding showed the most extravagant form of a big fat Indian wedding. The wedding of the youngest heir made it last official big-fat Indian celebration the family would have for many years to come which would explain why it was so grandiose. A last hurrah if you will. However, this wedding seemed far from a last hurrah, if anything it felt like a debut.

The Ambani family has been the richest family in India for years, this wedding was the most indirectly direct manner for the Ambani family to show the limitless reach of their wealth and power and introduce itself to the rest

of the world as the powerhouse they are. From the clothes to the jewels to the people in attendance, everything had an undercurrent of a very clear message: influence. There is no denying that the opulence wasn't to match the status of their wealth but it is also abundantly obvious that the opulence was for optics. Even if the wedding truly was just a celebration and had no ulterior motives; an Indian wedding is still a great way to give the investors and business partners a good party and the publicity couldn't have hurt. No publicity is bad publicity so whether the reviews are good, bad or mixed; the wedding is all anyone could talk about more so an international scale.

Rome was not built in a day and neither are billionaire conglomerates, it would almost be naïve to assume that the way this wedding was conducted wasn't intentional. When a high-profile billionaire carries out any task, it is safe to assume it is strategic in some way. The extent and intent of the strategies would only be revealed if and when it is allowed to become common news, until then all anyone can do is speculate. In the meantime, it cannot be denied that it wasn't just the Ambani family that received publicity from the wedding; Bollywood celebrities were discussed on a global scale, the international attendees and performers were discussed more in India, the fashion designers from India gained viewers overseas and many haute couture designers were introduced to the Indian viewers. In many ways, the wedding saw a blend of markets, cultures, fashion and luxury unlike ever before.

The wedding also was significant in changing the narrative of India as a stereotypically poor country. The rest of the world perceives India in a certain way due to the pop culture representation and the shock factor generated by the grandiose of this wedding has definitely brought about a new wave of discourse. Before this wedding, the wealth concentration in India wasn't as frequently brought up in common discussions and while



the wedding has also received backlash for highlighting the wealth disparity; the monocentric perspective of India being solely a poor country has shifted.

Billionaires in India

Recent reports announced that the Indian city Mumbai dethroned Beijing as the billionaire hub of Asia. After witnessing the wedding of the year this shouldn't come as a surprise that Mukesh Ambani is a leading factor in Mumbai dethroning Beijing. On the Billionaires of Bombay list, Ambani is followed by Gautam Adani who is also a household name in India. In recent years, with the economic growth India has witnessed a huge rise in the number of billionaires in the country. According to Forbes data, from 1991 to 2024 went from one to 200 Indians on the Forbes 2024 list of Billionaires of the world their cumulative wealth reaching close to a trillion dollars. Asia's top 2 richest men are the aforementioned Indian billionaires. The average wealth accumulated by the 10,000 richest individuals of the total population of India is 22.6 billion which is 16,763 times the country's average. While this rapid growth in economy has had obvious repercussions on the rift between the rich and the poor; the rise in the number of billionaires and the wealth concentration in India especially in the recent years is impressive nonetheless.

Disparity of wealth

While the economic growth has allowed India to enter the global market as a worthy contender. The global position of India doesn't necessarily translate within internal borders in the same capacity. It is certain that the number of billionaires in the country has risen but that doesn't mean the people below poverty lines are experiencing a

shift in their financial standing. The gap between the wealthy and the underprivileged has only gotten wider and harder to close. This is concerning as the rich get richer and the poor get poorer or their situation remains more or less unchanged. On one hand, Mumbai has emerged as city with the most billionaires in Asia but on the other hand it still remains the host of the largest slum in Asia. The polarity of wealth within the same city is as astounding as it is worrisome. During Prime Minister Narendra Modi's two terms in office, India's economy has grown 8.4% which is a commendable feat however during Prime Minister Modi's time in power; the wealth and income gap between the rich and poor has also widened considerably, a fact his critics and opposition party Congress have highlighted time and again given his close relationships with the top 1% of the country.

The disparity of wealth in the country is not just due the rapid growth in the economy and an unequal concentration of wealth and income. The gap widens due to the privileges that come with money. The poor remain poor with lesser opportunities to put themselves in positions of better income due to lack of resources that could equip them too. Lack of advanced and quality education forces the lesser privileged to remain in lesser paying jobs where they as opposed to those with privilege having the doors open for them at a whim. While the *crème de la crème* can easily afford to cultivate themselves as global citizens, the urban poor can only dream of having that life whereas the rural poor as so far removed from it that the existence of such a life is a myth to them.

It is this disparity of wealth in the country that makes the wedding and the immense show of wealth a lot more difficult to process because while the top 1% of the world that was at the wedding was adorned in jewels and decked in their best outfits experiencing the finer things in life,



there are people living in unfortunate conditions, barely getting by and making scraps to survive on.

Conclusion

Everyone is allowed to do with their wealth as they please but do the more fortunate have an obligation to help the less fortunate? Does an excessive show of wealth, when a big part of the country remains below poverty line seem inconsiderate? While many might argue that a grandiose demonstration of wealth is unnecessary and the money could be used to help people; the Ambani's are not obligated to use their wealth for Indian citizens and the rest of us, spectators of this wedding have no right to comment on how they should use their wealth. People that live under the spotlight are prone to judgement from those witnessing their actions however the opinion of the masses is just that: an opinion; not right or wrong. In an ideal world, the wedding wouldn't have been discussed as much as it was, especially in terms of money because there would be no poverty and the wedding wouldn't have highlighted the underprivileged. It isn't the show of wealth and power that is the real problem here, it is the revelation of the sad truth of the profound disparity between the rich and the poor. A universal truth that exists in every corner of the world which makes people have a bitter aftertaste and makes the wedding a tougher pill to swallow.

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