

MIXED MARRIAGES ... AND A CURRY FOR GRANDMA

It's a fact: most English grandparents don't like curry.

And Asian elders can have problems with roast pork, two veg, potatoes and gravy.

So the top table of an average UK mixed marriage has a cultural food problem from the word 'go'.

But that's only the tip of the iceberg lettuce for Raj Somaiya. As one of the UK's leading wedding planners and caterers he is high on the list of organisers that the Asian community turns to for their own 'mixed marriages'.

For Raj, who runs Manchester-based **Payal Events**, understands the complex religious cultures, traditions, food and décor behind some 40 different types of Hindu, Muslim, Bengali and Sheikh ceremonies. And that includes Punjabi and Gujarati Mandap weddings, Gurdwara Sikh weddings, Pakistani Nikah ceremonies and Valima receptions.

"Our mixed marriages don't end with an English bride and a Hindu groom," he says. "Asian cultures are very complicated, too, and most of our own mixed marriages are not obvious outside our communities – but they are more common than you think."

Such as a mixture of Sikh and Punjabi, Gujarati and Bengali, Sri Lankan and Muslim. And their ceremonies can be different right down to the venue – from Muslim mosques to Sikh temples. But **Payal Events** is geared up for the fairytale events they become.

"We are becoming a main choice for mixed weddings," says Raj, "because we specialise in challenges and actually enjoy solving the problems. No matter how complicated it gets, both families will want to respect each other's traditions. So, often, we will have two ceremonies – one for each culture – on the same or a different day.

"And we have to compromise on the menu – maybe with main courses from one culture, sweets from another or a buffet service to feed, for instance, Gujaratis who don't eat meat and Sikhs who do.

"With a mixed English and Indian wedding, English people tend to love Indian food and get very excited about the Asian ceremony even though they may be scared of making a mistake on the day.

"But grandparents don't usually eat curries. And Asian elders have often been brought up in India and don't always take to European dishes. So we need to have different food for the top table."

It can also be important to know how mixed Asian marriages happen. Professionals - usually medical people such as doctors, nurses, pharmacists and opticians - have more because of the social interaction of their university years. Asian businesspeople tend to be introduced by their families. So businesspeople and professional don't tend to marry each other very often.

"No wonder, sometimes, that wedding planning is a specialist market," says Raj. "But 'problems' is not a word that anyone wants to hear on their wedding day. We have them ... so they don't have to."