



cloth of culture

Avinash Rajah, who is Indian, and Kyla-Jayne Harris, a European New Zealander, met at a conference for World Vision volunteers and started going out soon afterwards. Avinash's parents live in Zimbabwe and Kyla-Jayne didn't meet them until they arrived in New Zealand one month before the wedding. Kyla reveals what happened.

My first introduction to Avinash's aunt, 'Aunty', was over the telephone six months prior to our wedding. She was delighted to converse with me, but after an hour of speaking with her, I was feeling terrified. She spoke of her beliefs on marriage; I listened. She spoke of how wonderful Avinash was; I listened. She mentioned what my gown should look like and then said she would look for sari material back in India. I was too busy memorising her advice on the sanctification of marriage to respond.

We wanted to incorporate Avinash's culture into the day as much as possible, so we purchased 24-carat gold wedding rings from an Indian store in Newtown, Wellington. However, after much reflection, we decided they were too gold-looking and chose to recognise Avinash's Indian culture through cloth instead – Aunty's original idea, no less!

Samples of embroidered silk began to arrive from India. I knew my team of designers would help create the perfect gown – one that would reflect my personality, my style and flatter my figure – and settled upon a unique design that mixed turn-of-the-century, alternative 'now' and a pinch of spice to match Avinash's embroidered jodhpuri suit.

We organized for Avinash's father, who is a pastor, to officiate the proceedings alongside our pastor. Avinash's father and mother had travelled all the way from Zimbabwe and I met them for the first time about one month before our wedding. At first, it was overwhelming trying to develop a relationship with Avinash's family and make a good impression while organizing our wedding. However, Avinash's parents ended up helping us finalise many of the finishing touches for our big day, making our introduction to each other a very special time. I learned even more about my husband-to-be as I observed the relationship he had with his parents.

Two weeks before the wedding, Avinash's sister and husband arrived from the UK. We had a full house, with Avinash's parents sleeping in the spare room, and his sister and brother-in-law on a mattress on the floor. One week before the wedding, a friend offered me her home to stay in, giving me time to prepare myself for the big day.

Finally, our wedding day arrived and I walked up the aisle to the glorious sound of Celine Dion and André Bocelli. Avinash took my hand in his and whispered, 'You look so pretty, you're beautiful.'

