

1. A little bit about yourself and about Spencer, with a focus here on Spencer's earliest exposure to Indian culture.

I was born and raised in the US, but have always had a deep connection to my cultural roots. My parents made sure my brother and I knew our traditions and history so we grew up reading the mythology, learning rituals and prayers, etc. We went to the temple often while growing up and celebrated all of our major holidays, so Indian and Hindu culture has always been a strong part of my upbringing.

Spencer has always been interested in international cultures, but was first exposed to Indian culture and Hindu weddings in college when he became friends with people from South India. Since we got together in 2018, he's gotten more immersed in our culture and traditions. He's a big fan of South Indian food in particular! He's been to many Indian weddings, including North Indian, South Indian, etc, even my cousin's Tamil wedding in India! He's been fascinated with the number of diverse customs and rituals involved in each type of wedding.

2. How did you end up choosing a very traditional Tamil wedding and how did that choice dictate the pick of venue and wedding caterer

From the beginning of our wedding planning, I knew that I wanted to incorporate traditional parts of Tamil Brahmin weddings. I loved watching my parents' wedding videos and wanted to be able to have the rituals from their wedding in our celebration. It was really important to both Spencer and me to have the blessings of our ancestors as we entered into our marriage. Spencer has always had a lot of respect for cultures from across the world, and was very excited to experience many unique traditional aspects to our fusion wedding.

We considered many different venues in the Triangle area, and eventually settled on the HSNC main hall because we knew they would be able to accommodate space for the oonjal, homam on stage, and space for lunch. It was also a nostalgic venue for my family as we've attended many functions at HSNC, and have performed several times at Tamil Cultural Association events! Once we decided on HSNC, our planner, Rajeev (of Uthsaav), suggested that we consider a traditional banana leaf lunch as it would be easier to pull it off at a temple hall as opposed to some of the other wedding venues in the area. We had already selected Lime & Lemon as our caterer, and they were easily able to provide lunch with both the banana leaf and buffet options. Usually, Tamil Brahmin wedding food has no onion or garlic, and L&L was able to create a full menu with that restriction. Most of our guests (both Indian and non-Indian) really appreciated the unique experience of eating off of banana leaves - many people stayed for seconds!

3. What were the rituals you incorporated like oonjal, malai Matral etc

The day before the wedding we did a pandal kaal and viradham. We also did naandi, paaligai, and nichyadaartham. On the wedding day, we started with the Malai maatral, oonjal with pidi soothal. We also did kanganam (tying of the yellow thread), Kanya dhanam, vara pooja,

mangalya pooja with nugathadi. We did a mangalya dharanam with me sitting on my dad's lap and Spencer and his sister tied the 3 knots on my mangalsutra thread. After, we did pori idudhal with my brother, and ammi midhithal. Then we went outside to look at the Arundhadhi star. The ceremony ended with removing the kanganam.

Back in India, weddings cannot happen without a strong community. Especially for a traditional Tamil wedding, you need a village with all close family and friends taking part. In North Carolina, we didn't have many family members who were able to come to the wedding, especially from India, so we had a strong group of friends who have been our family in the US. From the day the wedding date was set, they became part of our planning process and helped us incorporate the traditional aspects of the wedding and sharing their experiences from other weddings. They checked in with us regularly to make sure we had the confidence to move forward with such a big event with many moving parts. Having Rajeev as our planner was also incredibly helpful as he knew all of the traditional rituals we wanted to do and knew what was needed to pull it off. It was through their help and support that we were able to enjoy the ceremonies in a way that felt like home for my parents.

4. Was this your dream wedding?

I never grew up with a "dream wedding" in mind, but I knew that I would want to incorporate my culture in any wedding I had. Growing up in the US, preserving Indian culture and practices has always been important to me, so that we don't lose what makes us unique. Tamil weddings have so many unique aspects, like the oonjal, madisar, etc, and I wanted to be able to honor that tradition as Spencer and I took our step into the next stage of our lives.

5. Any story or anecdote you would like to share?

A couple of our family friends summarized all of the rituals and emceed the whole ceremony, explaining each ritual before it happened so everyone knew what was happening on stage. This was incredibly helpful not only to non-Indian guests, but for other Indian friends who aren't familiar with the traditional Tamil Brahmin practices. It was also helpful for me and Spencer on the stage to know what we were doing in between all of the rituals!

The banana leaf feast was the biggest hit! We were concerned that our non-Indian guests and family members wouldn't like the traditional way of eating, but in fact they were the ones who enjoyed it the most! This was all new for most of Spencer's family and they all told us it was one of the best meals they had ever had, mostly due to the traditional way of eating.