

INDIA

Double standards: environmentalists ignore \$600 million wedding pollution

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They called it "the wedding of the year." That between Anat Ambani and Radhika Merchant, the billionaire Indian newlyweds the whole world has been talking about. For those who might have missed the news, the July 12 wedding in Mumbai was preceded

by a full four months of festivities that kicked off with a party March 1-3 at the Ambani family's property in Jamnagar, in the Indian state of Gujarat, to which some 1,200 people from across the globe were invited. Media reports say it was attended by entertainment personalities, politicians and other international figures, including Bill Gates, John Elkann, Mark Zuckerberg, among others. A Hindu temple built especially for the occasion was even inaugurated during the celebration.

There were more celebratory events in the following weeks and then, in late May, the couple invited another 1,200 or so people to a four-day Mediterranean cruise that started in Palermo and stopped in Rome, Genoa, Cannes and concluded in Portofino. Each evening the guests were entertained by a different show. The Italian media reported that in Genoa, the performances by the international singers kept the city awake all night because of the very high volume which lasted until dawn, provoking many phone calls of protest and requests--albeit unheeded--for intervention to put an end to the noise.

Vogue and other fashion magazines described the jewellery and gowns worn by the bride from time to time, from the one for the "toga party" organised in memory of the fact that Anat and Radhika met in their college years and which required the work of more than 30 tailors to make, to the archival Yves Saint-Laurent gown, "a rare piece of fashion history"-the bride explained - purchased from designer Mimi Cuttrell, "one of the most influential people in the fashion system."

In Mumbai, as tradition dictates, the actual wedding took place over three days and concluded with a final reception on July 15. Again hundreds of guests converged from every continent to attend the ceremonies held in the Jio World Convention Center, a convention center owned by the Ambani family that can accommodate up to 16,000 people. The newlyweds chartered three Falcon-2000 jets to take the guests to their destination. "Each plane will make multiple trips across the country," Rajan Mehra, managing director of charter company Club One Air, explained to Reuters news agency.

The media reported that, in all, the "wedding of the year" must have cost about \$600 million, an impressive figure for many, but not for the couple's two families. Mukesh Ambani, Anat's father, with a capital of more than \$123 billion is the 11th richest person in the world according to Forbes, and Radhika belongs to a family of pharmaceutical tycoons. But, the ostentatious, unbridled opulence they displayed has aroused some discontent among their compatriots to which Thomas Isaac, former finance minister of the state of Kerala, among others, has voiced: "It is indecent, scandalous," he wrote on X, "legally it may be their money, but such ostentatious expenditure of money is a sin

against Mother Earth and against the poor.

How they spend the money is certainly indeed their business. The casual arrogance with which they have ignored the rights of others is, however, another matter. If in Genoa they deafened the city and the hinterland overnight, in Mumbai they did worse. The main streets of the city of 22 million people were closed daily for many hours because of the wedding, and this exacerbated traffic problems already made dry problematic by flooding from heavy monsoon rains.

But Isaac brought attention to another aspect of the wedding, the sin against Mother Earth. Indeed, it should have raised an uproar among environmentalists across the planet who should now be busy calculating how much Co2 was released into the environment during the four months of festivities culminating in the wedding in Mumbai; how much pollution the land, water and air suffered, not to mention noise pollution; and again, how much food was wasted and, with it, the energy used to produce it. Think of all those private planes, the cruise ship, cars used, and then, the immense consumption of energy to light, run air conditioners and amplifiers, cook... The ecological footprint imprinted on the Earth by this wedding is a chasm of monstrous size, an absurd contribution to the depletion of available natural resources for the current year (obviously for those who believe in the science of the ecological footprint).

Huge demonstrations would have been organised to protest against such a wedding, its unquestionable excesses would have raised outrage, created scandal, if the bride and groom had been European or North American instead of Indian. Instead, the indifference so far shown, the absence of criticism from those who take action for much less gives pause for thought.

Those who in good faith worry about the state of the planet and are outraged by social and economic inequalities, those who today continue to accuse us Westerners of unbridled consumerism, of disrespectful display of wealth in defiance of those who have nothing, of exaggerated pursuit of status symbols, and those who instead accuse us of wasting, polluting and using more resources than the planet can produce while irresponsibly condemning the Earth to become a barren, scorching rock, well, they must finally realise that they are living out of date and out of reality.

It is time for them to turn their attention elsewhere, to the rich "others," those in so-called poor, developing, emerging countries, because the Western way of life has long since ceased to be the primary and sole cause of environmental degradation and unacceptable justice, if it ever was.