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22.
Wedding kits:

New Beginings with Dignity and Beautiful Memories..

“नमक तेल की सोचती हूँ, ज़िन्दगी की नहीं, स्थिति बुरी है अब पता नहीं क्या करना है शादी के लिए.. एक रुपये की आमदनी नहीं है, रात भर नींद नहीं आती”

- राधिका

(I don't think about my life. My struggle is to get one square meal a day. I have no idea how I will fund my daughter's wedding. I have no steady source of income and the worry gives me sleepless nights) said Radhika, a worried mother. (Dungi village, Uttarkashi, Uttarakhand). Her daughter was getting married in the coming month of May in 2016.

Radhika's husband had died a few years back, leaving her behind to fend for herself and their two children. She struggled to make both ends meet and was able to educate her daughter till class 12th and her son till class 10th. The meagre widow's pension wasn't enough so she started working as a daily wage farm labourer. When her daughter's marriage was fixed, the anxiety about the wedding expenses plagued this single mother every day.

While weddings are about celebrating the coming together of two individuals and families, they also signify an immense financial burden.

In India, intangible concepts of 'honour' and 'dignity,' often drive peoples' actions, especially around wedding celebrations. There's an old Indian dictum, “There's no end to how much you can spend on a daughter's wedding or on constructing a house”. For millions, in the villages of India, even the basic arrangements at a wedding come at a heavy cost of a lifetime of loans from local moneylenders. The idea of a **'Wedding Kit'** emerged when we came across many rural families going into financial ruin, just trying to arrange a basic wedding. The Wedding Kit comprises of a bride and groom's wedding apparel like *lehenga* (a traditional long skirt worn by females at ceremonial events) and *sherwani* (a traditional long





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dress for men) and other essentials to start a new life.

The wedding apparels we get from the cities are carefully sorted and put together as a collection of new, fancier clothes by modifying and refurbishing while the recipients are identified based on their economic condition, through our own field teams, grassroots partner groups and local *panchayats* (village council). We even suggest that once a family uses the wedding dresses, they can pass them onto others in the community. *Reena* lived with her parents and three siblings in the village of *Siyuna* in *Uttarkashi, Uttarakhand*. As farm labourers, her parents had very limited means. When her marriage was fixed, their joy was overshadowed by the worry of arranging funds for the occasion. Like most young girls, she too had dreams for her wedding and her parents were also anxious to do everything they could to make the day memorable for her.

Goonj's Wedding Kit proved to be a boon for *Reena*. "My parents would have had to spend a large amount of money on renting out a lehenga and other accessories from the market. Thanks to the Wedding Kit, they will not have to do that. No lehenga in the market can be as beautiful as the one I got in the kit. I did not have to spend a single rupee on any cosmetics as the kit contained things that I could have never purchased in my life. I still use them and my friends say that it is different. These things are not available here in the local markets," says *Reena*. Goonj also came up with the idea of '**Pandaal Kit**' - a set of essentials such as utensils, blankets and *daris* in large quantities, as a community asset for major functions and weddings in villages.

This makes the arrangements for weddings more convenient in the village itself, reducing the overall expenses on weddings to a great extent. Since 2014, these *wedding kits* have been helping to create



new beginnings with dignity and beautiful memories for hundreds of families in the most remote areas of *Bihar, Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh, Bundelkhand region, Rajasthan, Odisha, Jammu and Jharkhand*. Weddings are made of sweet memories for all of us and that's why most of us don't want to part with our wedding dresses. That's also why we find it very difficult to get enough wedding dresses from urban India. We adopted a small Indian-style *jugaad* (an innovative alternative) to fill this gap by converting the traditional *Mata kee Chunnis* (A shiny scarf offered to Gods and deities in India) into wedding *lehengas* for rural brides. *Chunnis* are given away in bulk at temples and religious functions and women at Goonj turn these into beautiful *lehengas*, a sight to behold and a pleasant surprise for most visitors at 'Goonj's Processing Centres'.

So the next time you are dusting off your wedding apparel, think of giving it a new life to fulfil someone else's dreams.

UPDATE FOOTNOTE

Since **2014**, Goonj has provided more than **1700 Wedding Kits**, comprising wedding apparel and other essential items, to financially weak rural families across India. Our goal has been to alleviate the financial strain on these families while addressing societal pressures and expectations surrounding wedding celebrations. These kits play a crucial role for families by facilitating new beginnings with dignity while creating beautiful memories.

To extend the impact and sustenance of this initiative, the recipients of these kits are encouraged, to either return the *Wedding Kits* to Goonj's centres, or pass them on to others in need of these essential wedding items. This enables a sustainable cycle of support, promoting a culture of sharing and community empowerment as well.