



ARCHITECTURE

CHENNAI

## Want a Low-Cost, Green & Gorgeous Office? Award-Winning Architect Makes it Happen!

The building sports a 100 per cent rainwater harvesting system and a grey-water recycling option, while solar energy use is planned for the common areas.

by **Hema Vijay**

January 3, 2019, 5:50 pm

**W**hat business centre can an architect deliver with a modest construction budget and a small parcel of land?

It turns out quite a lot.

With Rs 1,200 per square foot towards construction costs, Chennai-based architect V S Vigneswar designed a building that became a hit with its corporate occupants, had a sustainable design that saved them around ten per cent of the energy costs metered by similar buildings in the area—plus, a handful of awards.

**Studying architecture at CEPT University, Ahmedabad, and Masters in Architecture at TU Delft, The Netherlands, Vigneswar, observes, “What defines my work is my commitment to adding value to built spaces through sensible design.”**

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Most commercial buildings in cities like Chennai, especially in the old city, are quite mundane because the limited ground space doesn't allow for a lot of design, or ends up getting Aluminium Composite Panel walls to get a sleek appearance.

But the problem is that such panelling traps heat into the building, which then brings about huge electricity bills for air conditioning.

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In a hot city like Chennai, this is beyond foolish, but unfortunately, this has become a trend. In contrast, Arcot Plaza is a simple, unpretentious and sensible building, with sound economics behind it.

Spanning a built area of 20,000 square feet, it is a small, sustainable business centre that addresses user comfort and aesthetics, working with Chennai's notorious sunshine, rather than against it.

This building won the Bronze Award in the Architecture Category of the *A' Design Award & Competition* held in Italy earlier this year for the "Value-Addition provided through Good Architectural Design". This is arguably the world's **largest** design competition, awarding designs, design concepts, products and services.

The building also bagged the Best Commercial Project Award at the Festival of Architecture and Interior Design 2017 in Mumbai and was judged the winner in the commercial category at the Delhi Architecture Festival 2017.

**So...how did this come to be?**

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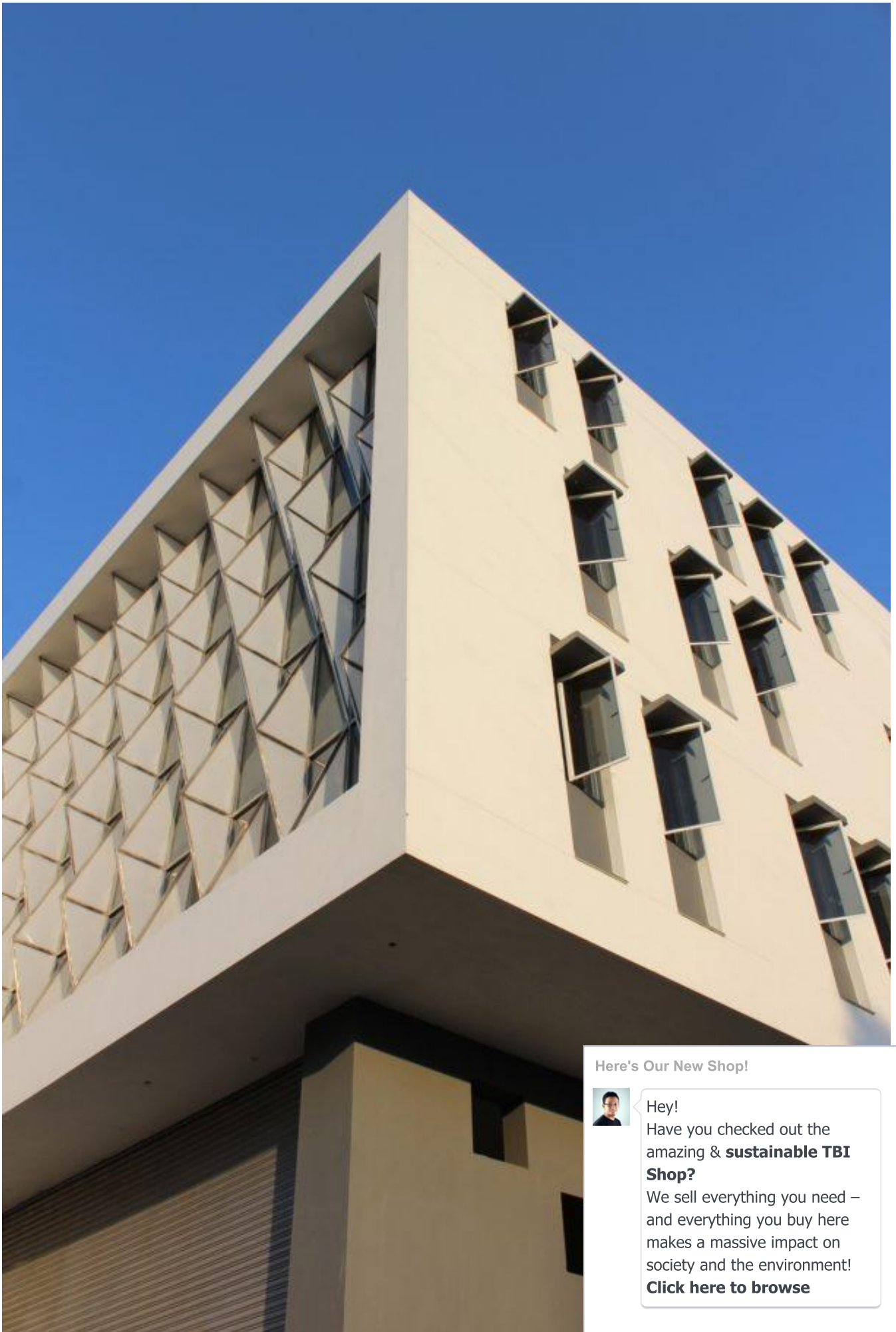


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Awards were the last thing on this client's mind. The brief given by the client to V S Vigneswar was simply: "Maximise the revenue potential of the site and attract 'corporate' tenants (banking sector already visualised!) through a design that stands out and involves a low operating cost."

The architect decided to go local, right down to the street. The site was on an arterial road in the heart of Chennai, so Vigneswar decided to open the building to the streets, rather than wall it in.

The site, a small plot of land measuring 7,620 square feet has its shorter side (21.5 m) facing the street. This didn't give him much space to create a complex design.

So Vigneswar decided to open up the building with an imposing double height patio adjoining the ground floor and mezzanine floors, with glass panes as the street-facing northern wall.

From the perspective of the building's user, the patio serves as a common lobby space for the ground and mezzanine floors, a space-saving feature that corporate clients would love. The upper floors have an independent entry through a driveway towards the centre of the building.

Continuing with the glass frontage of the ground and mezzanine floors for the rest of the floors, rather than a concrete façade overlaid by heat-trapping panels, he gave the building's street-facing side a solar-rated glass frontage. With this, cost-free day-lighting for the workspaces was achieved, Chennai being a city where heat and light are in surplus.

To cut off excessive solar heat falling on the glass and the associated glare, he structured shading devices in the form of triangulated fins in a designed pattern, the fins projecting perpendicular

**At night, when all is lit up, the fins reflect the building in intriguing geometric patterns... grabbing façade achieved at virtually no cost**

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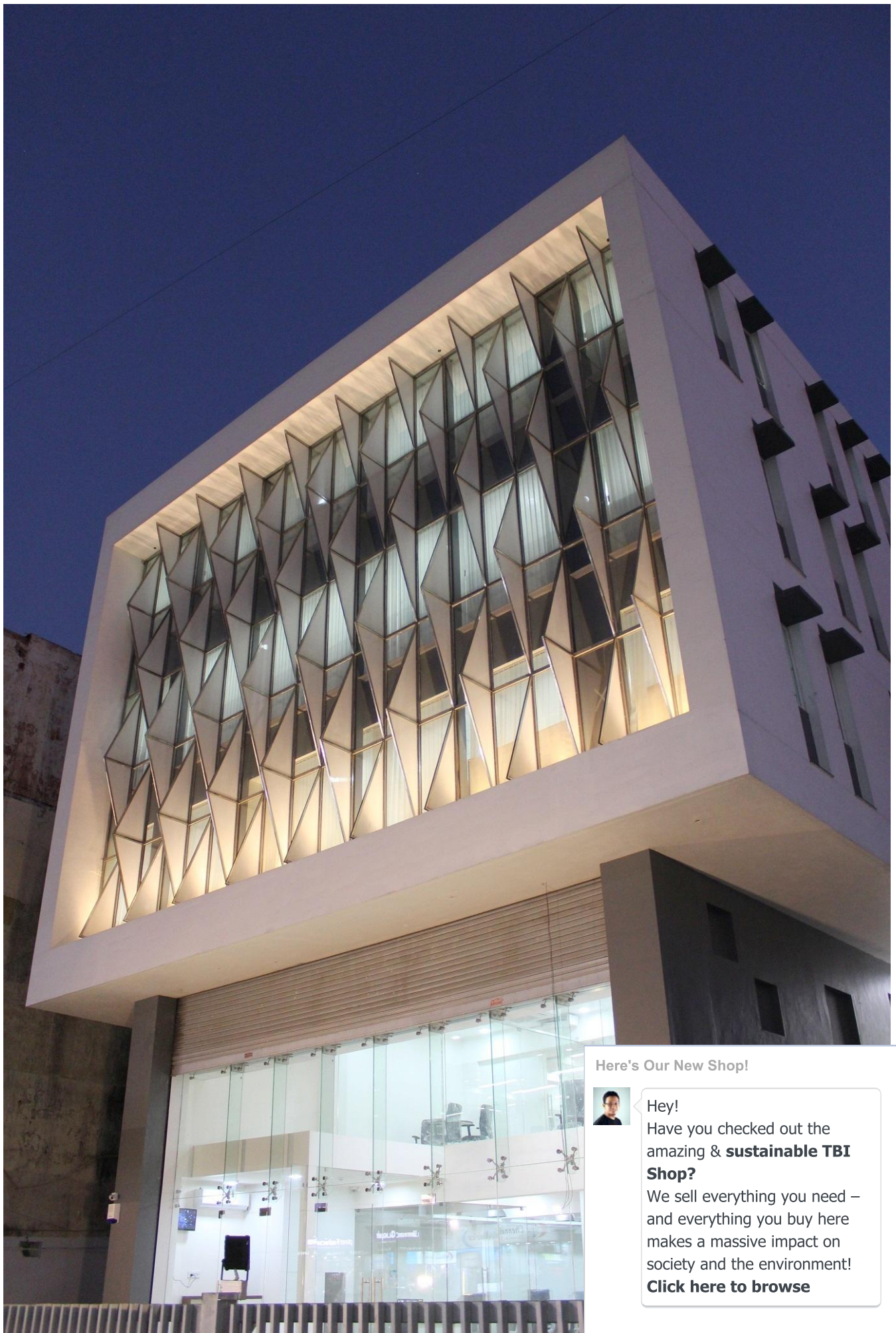


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“In Chennai, during summer, the setting sun moves northward. During such months, the fins provide diffused light. During other times, they cut the glare from the bright sky. It also offers an interesting view to the street from the office spaces breaking the monotony of the spaces,” says Vigneswar.

He continues, “While meeting the tight budget was the primary challenge, the other was in convincing the client that this kind of a building would be economically and commercially viable.”

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**Also Read: This Man Quit the Corporate World to Embrace Indigenous Architecture and Build Eco-Friendly Homes**

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For instance, most small multi-tenant commercial buildings have concrete front walls on which the firms flaunt their signage. Arcot Plaza’s glass facade doesn’t allow this. So, Vigneswar created space for displaying signage on the driveway’s entrance arch.

Further, the building’s side walls having been constructed with insulating AAC Blocks and recycled cement mortar, minimise heat gain from the hot Chennai air.

## What about ventilation?

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For this, he tried a variation of the traditional architectural design element '*kaatrupandal*' meaning 'wind tunnel' in Tamil.

But he did this without constructing a tunnel, simply by giving larger window openings on the eastern walls and narrower slit-window openings on the western face of the building, which limits the harsh western light and creates a pressure gradient that sucks in Chennai's south-west wind, creating a natural breeze.

All the utilities have been relegated to the building's posterior face. No unsightly AC or other ducts can be seen on the exterior. The architect ran the ducts through the ceiling beams and led them to the building's posterior, where the utilities find a place on exterior walls to access and maintain.

And of course, the building sports a 100 per cent rainwater harvesting and grey-water recycling option, while solar energy use is planned.

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areas.

So then, with the building's "A' Design Award" tag in mind, if you had been looking for some funky out-of-the-world appearance, you will be in for a disappointment. Frankly, there isn't anything spectacular about this building. What makes it superlative is its sound sense.

There is a misconception in society that design is expensive and that contractors can do the job of architects. But in this case, design is what brought out the economic and commercial benefits.

**"Good design is sound economics and good business. This has to be understood by the general population, specifically the builder community," notes Vigneswar.**



As of now, local governments hardly consider sustainable construction industry. "If they incentivise sustainable building, they will become much better places," he concludes.

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## You May Also Like: Photo Story: 7 Unique Indian Buildings That Won the Biggest Award in Architecture!

Arcot Plaza demonstrates that sustainable buildings can be a win-win for all concerned, and that the scale or budget needn't put the brakes on for such ventures. One hopes that it inspires more such developments on the cityscape. After all, sustainability is smart.

*(Edited by Shruti Singhal)*

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GENDER ISSUES

LEDE

MUMBAI

## Mumbai Couple Reverses Societal Roles, Proves Marriage Is All About Equal Partnership!

They were ridiculed for their choices by friends and relatives, but for this love-struck couple, the skewed gender constructs of the society were even more ludicrous!

by **Lekshmi Priya S**

January 3, 2019, 2:52 pm

In India, the idea of gender role reversal is something that baffles a majority of the population.

It's 2019, and while the fight for gender equality and equity continues to believe that the husband has to be the primary breadwinner, the wife is 'allowed' to work, she should be the one handling the household.

However, this couple based in Mumbai begs to differ and live differently—right from the early days of their relationship.

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**When Meenal Veejay Pendsay and Nand Kishor Kumawat met each other through the online dating app, Tinder, last year, sparks flew right away.**

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"When I joined Tinder, I was ridiculed. But it was worth it because on the 8th November 2017, we swiped. For the next 6 days we spoke every day for 12 hours. He was from Jaipur & I, Mumbai, but we'd sleep at 4.30 am & be back on the phone by 8.30—we'd even eat together while video calling! Everyone thought we were crazy!

On the sixth day I decided that I needed to meet him, so I purchased air tickets to Rajasthan. I lied & said that I was visiting my mom. He was speechless when I told him the truth.

Seeing someone in person is different, but when we met, it was amazing. He was sweet chivalrous & perfect. Our connection was so strong that it didn't feel new to be with him. I gelled with his family too!

We spent all our time talking. The night before I left, he said, 'I want you as my partner or wife.' And I agreed—I had no doubts.

Our relationship only grew stronger. We met twice a month, in Jaipur & Mumbai. He wanted to leave our homes. His job was there & my family was here. But he & I decided to move here, which people found odd. He started looking for a house. He said he moved for his wife, they laughed! But, he's never expected a woman—he didn't ask me to leave my life here & that's something I appreciate. We got ritually married in July. The day after he moved in, we performed the rituals normally done for the woman... but, we're equals. We consider ourselves 'husband' & 'wife' never mattered.

We've broken many traditions this way. Currently I'm earning & he's not. I have said he's a 'burden' on me because he doesn't earn. How does it work? He fixes things in the house, something I'm not inclined to do. He's planning to start a business then I'm supporting him. People have said nasty things about us because we pretend to be modern & accepting but when the roles actually reverse, everyone gets uncomfortable.

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But we're happy with the way everything is—we're madly in love & absolutely nothing else matters beyond that."

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In a society where the girl has to leave her home and job to be with her husband, Nand Kishor set a rare precedent by moving to Mumbai to be with Meenal.

They were ridiculed for their choices by friends and relatives, but for the love-struck couple, the skewed gender constructs of the society were even more ludicrous!

However, it was the unconventional manner with which the 'Griha Pravesh' ceremony was performed post their wedding, that broke all stereotypes.

The ceremony is usually observed for women entering their new households after marriage, but in this case, Meenal and her family held it for Nand Kishor.

"We've broken many traditions this way. Currently, I'm earning & he's looking for work. Many relatives have said he's a 'burden' on me because he doesn't earn. How does it matter? He does the chores & fixes things in the house, something I'm not inclined to do. He's planning to start his own business, till then I'm supporting him. People have said nasty things about us because of all this. Truth is, we pretend to be modern & accepting but when the roles actually reverse, everyone gets uncomfortable. But we're happy with the way everything is—we're madly in love & absolutely nothing else matters beyond that," **said** Meenal in a Humans of Bombay post.

May their tribe increase!

**You can read the entire post here:**

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Our relationship only grew stronger. We met twice a month, in Jaipur & Mumbai. Earlier we both didn't want to leave our homes. His job was there & my family was here. But slowly, he got used to Mumbai & decided to move here, which people found odd. He started looking for a job. At an interview when he said he moved for his wife, they laughed! But, he's never expected me to compromise because I'm a woman—he didn't ask me to leave my life here & that's something I admire.

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*(Edited by Gayatri Mishra)*

FEATURED IMAGE SOURCE: [HUMANS OF BOMBAY/INSTAGRAM](#).

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**Written by [Lekshmi Priya S](#)**

Shuttling between existentialist views and Grey's Anatomy, Lekshmi has an insanely disturbing habit of binge reading. An ardent lover of animals and plants, she also specializes in cracking terribly sad jokes.

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