

[Indian names tell all]

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Learning a new language is a challenge alright but it's also downright difficult. Funny enough I've had no problem with the names of foods. I guess everyone wants to know the correct names of the foods we enjoy. What has been a problem though is learning the terms for all the various relations.

At first I was inclined to think, 'why can't they just call everyone kumki and uncle they way we do,' but when you stop to think about it, it is a far more sensible way. To us an auntie could be one of several relations but in the Punjabi language the term used will tell you exactly how that person is related. The same applies with uncles, grandparents, brothers, sisters and in-laws.

For example, your father's older brother would be a thia and his wife a thice, whereas your father's younger brother would be a cha cha and his wife a cha chice. In the Punjabi language anything masculine ends in an "aw" sound and anything feminine ends in an "ee" sound.

Your father's sister would be called phocha and their husbands phocher. Already we have an exception to the above rule but fortunately they are few. We soon learn that women are not very important when the same term is used for all. For example your mother's brothers whether younger or older are all called mummy and their wives mummy. Mother's sisters are all mummy and their husbands mummy.



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They have separate names for grandparents too. Your father's father would be your hubba and your father's mother your be-bee or sometimes daddie. However your mother's parents would be a nana and a nannce.

Brothers and sisters pose another problem. In India, cousins and second cousins are considered brothers and if a man came from the same village in India and the two families were very close he is not only called a brother but treated as a brother. The term you use would be determined by his age. If he is older than you he is your beeda but if you are the older he must call you beeda. A younger brother is addressed by using his first name.

The relationship for a sister is almost the same but goes one step further. Seldom would you address a woman by her first name. It is much more polite to call her bhanji the "ji" on the end being a sign of respect. All sisters are bhanji, all first and second cousins and in fact any woman bear your own age. Both men and women address other women as bhanji. If the woman is elderly you would address her as be-bee never by her name.

As with brothers and sisters there are separate terms for sisters-in-law and brothers-in-law, depending on how they are related. Using my own family as an example, if my brother were older than me his wife would be my pubebe, and again brothers can be cousins or close friends.

As for my husband, my brother is his sahla and his wife is my husband's sahlee.

My husband's older brother would be my jaiha and his wife my jetsanee but my husband's younger brother is my dhare and his wife is my dhiraanee.

Another proof that women are not treated as respectfully is in the use of these terms as swear words. Never do the Punjabi people use God's name in vain. If they want to really insult someone, they use a female term such as a mother-in-law, a sister-in-law or a female dog. Of course there are many jokes about the female side of the family as well.

It all sounds very confusing at first but once learned it makes a great deal of sense. When I was in India with my husband's younger brothers wife I was always introduced as her jetsanee and everyone knew instantly how we were related.

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