

[Indian names tell all]

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Indian names tell all



Indo Canadian

By Joan Mayo

Learning a new language is a challenge alright but it's also downright difficult. Finally 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 aunt 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 relatives 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 *tia* and his wife a *thice*, whereas your father's younger brother would be a *cha* *chi* 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 *phoocho* and their husbands *phoochher*. 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 *mumma* and their wives *mumnee*. Mother's sisters are all *mussee* and their husbands *musser*.

call her *bhangi* the "ji" on the end being a sign of respect. All sisters are *bhanji*, all first and second cousins and in fact any woman near your own age. Both men and women address other women as *bhanji*. If the woman is elderly you would address her as *bailee* 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 *pabee*, and again brothers can be *cousins* or close friends.

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

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 *bada* but if you are the older he must call you *bada*. 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

They have separate names for grandparents too. Your father's father would be your *babba* and your father's mother your *behee* or sometimes *dahdee*. However your mother's parents would be a *nana* and a *nummie*.

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would be my *jessance* but my husband's younger brother is my *chare* and his wife is my *dhirraane*.

Another proof that women are not treated as respectfully is in the use of these terms as swear words. Never do the Punjab 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 brother's wife I was always introduced as her *jessance* and everyone knew instantly how we were related.

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