



# Desi Dating - What Will My Parents Think???

By: AJ

Dating. For most Americans it's a simple story of boy meets girl. Boy woos girl. Girl falls for boy and they live happily ever after. This, however, is not the case for second generation South Asians. For us, it's a little more complicated. Our bi-culturalism and the perception of dating in our community are two big factors. Dating, for some of our parents and friends consists of seeing the date once or twice in the form of bride-to-be, or, in some cases, not even seeing our mate until after marriage. The concept of dating to find love *before marriage* is fairly foreign and also quite new (even in the western hemisphere).

Second-generation South Asians are unique. They straddle the cultural divide between western values and eastern traditions on a daily basis. Each of us fall somewhere on the spectrum of make-your-own-yogurt, *masala-chai*-drinking, cricket-fanatic, traditionalist to hamburger-eating, American-football-watching, anglicized, namesake South Asian. A lot of this simply has to do with when we moved, where we moved to and how much family we had around. Naturally then, most of us look for the same sense and sensibility in our mates regarding culture and values. Interestingly, the attributes that divided us, such as geography, language, caste, and religion in the old world seem to fade away. Instead, our experiences, interests, ambitions, likes and dislikes, draw us together in the new world. Not to say that we completely forget the uniqueness of our regional traditions and histories, but, that they become less relevant. For us, dating provides an avenue to find that other person who shares our blend of culture, beliefs and values.

First generation South Asians saw this country as a land of opportunity, where they can raise their children in relative safety and bequeath them with plentiful opportunities. They wished their children be privileged to opportunities in career and education not available to the previous generation. They wanted their children to be spared from the unnecessary bureaucracy and rampant corruption, which limited their own choices. Our generation is truly blessed to have parents that have done so much for us. Accustomed to a plethora of choices - from cereal to careers - we find that the discussion about choosing our own mate, or dating, is often met with awkwardness, if not resistance.

This apprehension felt by parents is understandable. Dating for them is an alien concept. Often times, the perception of dating is molded by popular television shows (e.g.: *Sex and the City*, *The Bachelor*), where the main aim is to entertain with titillating scenes and the drama offered by jilted lovers. Another source of anxiety is from second-hand experiences from within the community. The stories usually start with the following sentence: "Did you hear about what happened to so-and-so's daughter/son who was dating that boy/girl?" These stories of heartbreak or duplicity are partially told to be more entertaining than fact. Regardless, they often do not serve the purpose of educating or helping.

Generally speaking, for second-generation South Asians, courtship is less about steamy romance, and more about taking ownership of their lives. After all, they will be the ones spending their lives that that other person. Making big decisions regarding where to live, how to raise their children and manage finances, etc. Understandably, parents prefer the safer option – something they have first-hand experi-



ence with – arranged marriage. Contrastingly, second generation South Asians find this option riskier and restrictive. It is riskier because when primed to meet their potential partner, it is difficult to think that one would reveal their flaws or poor personality traits. There is no way of finding out what the person is really like before marriage. Restrictive, because the time limit to make the big decision about an arranged marriage is short - usually less than a week. So, should any doubts come up at the last minute there is no going back! Of course, not all parents are entirely opposed to dating. Some prefer to limit the pool of potential dates or prefer to be intimately involved in the search itself. Depending on where your parent's fall on the traditional to liberal spectrum, the limiting factors change. Regardless of whether you think that your parents will accept your choice, it's always better to be open than to lead a double life.

*Here are some of the most common arguments from parents that I have heard when it comes to dating:*

- ◆ "You are rejecting your 'Indian' culture in favor of a western lifestyle."
- ◆ "All this work we've put into raising you with 'Indian' culture. What will happen to the next generation if you marry a 'gori ladki'?"
- ◆ "All this 'dating-shating' is a game. What happens if you get your heartbroken?"
- ◆ "What's the use of dating, half of all married Americans divorce anyway. **Look at us – your mom and I – together for 30 years!**"

Helping them understand your intentions will alleviate their anxieties. After all, they do want you to be happy. So let's look at some of these issues one-by-one:

- ⇒ Culture is dynamic and evolving. Many South Asian parents are in suspended animation regarding 'Indian' culture. Their concept of Indian culture is ossified in the decade when they left their home country. Today's Indians often are more 'westernized' than many of us here in the U.S. Just as the previous generation evolved culturally to thrive in their adopted home, our generation is evolving to make better decisions. It is not a rejection of culture, but an adaptation and evolution.
- ⇒ While 'gori ladkis' abound in the potential pool of dating candidates, it isn't a guarantee. As mentioned before, our biculturalism makes us unique, and our choices often reflect our own identity. While the chance of dating/marrying a 'gori ladki' is not nil, it doesn't mean that the future generation will be void of any Indian culture. I personally know people, who are half Indian and half non-Indian (like Welsh, or Vietnamese, or Kenyan etc). Besides their physical appearance and accent, they are as Indian as you can get. In some instances they marry back in the Indian community.

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