

# South Asian parents blind to secret dating game

By Anu Balasubramaniam  
and Cynthia Peranandam (CUP)

Dating doesn't seem like an all-too-arduous task in Canada, but many South Asian youth are restricted from dating for religious and cultural reasons.

In South Asian communities, young people rarely have the opportunity to be alone to engage in any dating activities, such as going to a movie or restaurant.

Many Indian cultures consider it disgraceful for a boy and a girl to be seen alone without their parents or relatives present. But this attitude rarely reflects what actually happens, as secret dating becomes part of young South Asians' lives.

Traditional belief forbids interaction between the sexes before marriage. Premarital sex is considered adultery in most religions. Some forms of Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism do not support premarital dating, and Christianity only supports monogamy.

Furthermore, homosexuality is not acknowledged in most South Asian families. Gays and lesbians who do brave the hostility and come out are often disowned by parents.

More and more often, however, young gays and lesbians are getting support from people within their community, including their own families.

Not many young people are comfortable speaking openly about dating. In fact, no one was willing to use his or her real name for this article.

A 21-year-old female Indian public policy and administration student at York University, said: "I cannot be seen alone with any guy, whether he is Indian or white, and I will not date a guy because it is something that will bring a great deal

of shame and humiliation to my family. I am not willing to jeopardize my family's name."

Another 18-year-old female Indian psychology major at York, who lived in Abu Dabhi for 12 years, said: "In Abu Dabhi, the girls go to secondary school in the morning and the guys go in the afternoon, and even in some townships in India,

"I went out with a guy for about seven months, then my parents found out about it. They told me that I had to stop seeing him immediately because he was a white guy and if I didn't, they would commit suicide. That way, they wouldn't have to live through the humiliation I would bring to the family's name. I didn't have a choice. I just had to break up with him."

there are separate public buses for men and women.

"The Muslim community does not permit any contact between the opposite sexes, unless for some legitimate reason. However, now in Canada many Muslim girls and guys see each other at universities."

Many East Indians who migrate to western countries are breaking away from their cultural boundaries. They engage in

premarital dating and premarital sex with or without the consent of their parents.

This does not mean their parents assimilate to western culture as easily as they do.

Therefore, many youths are in a state of conflict. They are forced to keep their relationships a secret. They are afraid to tell their parents because of the consequences.

"The consequences of premarital dating within the Indian community are quite severe," said a 24-year-old female Sri Lankan business student.

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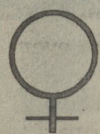
Many male students admitted that the Indian culture does not restrict their behaviour. A second-year York political science student who is Sikh said: "There still is this notion in our religion that arranged marriage is the way to go, but in Canada, our community does not seem to enforce it. My parents do not have any objections to me choosing a girl to marry, but they would like to give their consent."

A male Sri Lankan university student said: "It's true. It's a double standard. My parents never say anything when I go out, but if my sister asks to go out they say no most of the time, even if it is just with her friends."

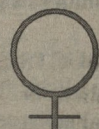
An Indian second-year student, also at York, said: "I'd probably want to have an arranged marriage, anyway. No one

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