



Overdosing on panjabis

ANONYMOUS PANJABI RECIPIENT

Imagine every year, twice a year, someone gave you a pair of socks. It's a good dream, isn't it? Socks are useful and you wear them. Underwear would be better, being a more essential item, but we're trying to have a civilisation here.

Sadly we don't live in a sock-gifting utopia. Instead we find ourselves crushed under the cumulative weight of panjabis accumulated over the decades.

Why do we do this? Tradition, one could say, but many other things are traditional and we still pretend we want to get rid of them. Take sexism; that's been around for ages, but you have all these new ideas about gender equality and toxic masculinity and whatnot and at least in theory we're trying to get rid of the bloody thing. Imagine if someone gave you sexism on Eid, your family wouldn't ask you to smile and gratefully accept it.

Hmm. OK, maybe this is the wrong analogy to pursue.

All I'm saying is, just because you've been giving me panjabis every Eid for the past two decades, mom –

I'm calling out my mother with the security known only to someone writing under an alias – as I was saying, mom, it doesn't mean it's a good idea to give me another panjabi this Eid. In fact it's quite the opposite: the more panjabis I have the less I need.

You wouldn't understand this, you don't wear panjabis. Most of the aunts gifting me panjabis don't wear them either (at least to my knowledge, which is the extent of my business) so they can be forgiven for thinking I'm some sort of primordial deity that can only be satiated with regular offerings of traditional semi-formals. My aunts do have eyes though so they don't have any excuse for picking the panjabis that they do. I was born and raised in Bangladesh, and sure I attended those new-fangled English Medium schools and watched Animax as a child but I still share the aesthetic sense particular to our culture. We all know those panjabis are terrible.

It's almost like extended family buy these panjabis as obligatory gifts without actually caring if they bring any pleasure to the intended recipient, essentially participating in an expensive but culturally necessary

farce. But that can't be right.

And so you and I (if you're a man, or just a woman who receives panjabis, or whatever really so long as you can vibe with this) have closets full to bursting with the unnecessary and tacky generosity of family, adding another cloud of irritation to what had always meant to be a festive, spiritual occasion. You have to wear the gifts too, a new one every day of Eid. If you're lucky you'll look decent in one or two of them, and these are the ones you should make sure your friends and romantic interests get to see you in. You may think it'll be alright if you turn up to your Eid date in your in the panjabi you were cursed with by your mejho khalamoni; your date is a reasonable person and will understand. They won't. It's horrible. Take it off.

The obvious thing to do is to give it all to the unlucky poor after the coast is clear – but make sure you donate far away from your mejho khalamoni's neighbourhood. She will know, and will not appreciate your selfless act of charity.

The writer is a coward withholding his identity. Mock him by pointing at this page and going, "Hnnrf hnnrf skronk."

The art of making small talk

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All those debating and 'Best Delegate' crests you're stocking your shelves with are no match against twenty minutes in a room packed with faces you see twice a year. Suddenly speaking becomes the toughest task in the world. Since our phones pick the perfect time to run out of battery life, and you can only pretend to scrutinise the bare wall for so long, the art of making small talk is one, one must master to survive.

ELEVATOR

An elevator does not necessarily give you the luxury of time to conduct insightful conversations about Britney Spear's downfall or your thoughts on politics. You need to mind the conversation length. Elevator small talk is usually a simple greeting. With acquaintances, you can take it a step further and ask where they're headed or comment on their attire. But that's the limit. You can't ask open ended questions and put them in a situation where they'll be late for a meeting or slammed by the elevator door.

FAMILY REUNIONS

Once a year one random family member of yours will feel to urge to have every single one in the family under one roof in

order to strengthen family bonds, create an opportunity to post pictures on Facebook captioned 'fambam' and create three hours of sheer awkwardness for you. This is a dawat filled with people who claim to be your second or third cousins, distant mamas, in laws of your in laws, with whom your parents expect you to have some sort of blood connection to find common ground over. The safest bet is to pick one family member you're certain everyone in the family hates and strike a conversation about them. Families that judge together, definitely stick together. If not you'll at least have a good flow of communication for half an hour. Just make sure said person of interest isn't their mom. It tends to get confusing with large families.

WEDDING

You're probably only attending the wedding for the biriyani or to show off your brand new lahenga and click some potential Instagram pictures. With that comes the downside of actually having to socialise. It's not that difficult to make small talk at a wedding. Compliment them on what they're wearing, ask where they got the dress from, hunt down cute guys together. Stretch the conversation till they serve the biriyani. You don't have to speak anymore when you've got your mouth stuffed with roast.



GENERAL TIPS

- When in doubt talk about the weather.
- It's easier to bond with people over mutual hatred than mutual interest. That way you can have an assured steady flow of conversation.
- People with ear phones on, looking at their mobiles are the universal 'Do not disturb' sign. Do not approach them,

results won't be very fruitful.

- Do not bring up how awkward it is, that does nothing but heighten the awkwardness.
- If offered a choice, pick a toddler to communicate with rather than an adult. Adults expect sane, polite conversation. You can talk about the colour of your poop with a toddler.