

MIND THE GAP

NOSHIN NAVAL

Barrister Noshin Naval is an activist, feminist and a columnist with a knack for sharp, satirical takes on social and societal issues. She can be reached at nawalnoshin1@gmail.com.



Backhanded Compliments: A South Asian Family Tradition

Every South Asian family has one. That omnipresent relative who buzzes around every family gathering like an over-caffeinated bee stings with their words, and then insisting they were “just joking.”



Let's call her Sharmeen Fuppi. You might call her something else—Aunty, Mami, Chachi, Bhabi—but the essence remains the same. She's nosy, opinionated, and always the first to sniff out drama, usually while wearing a sequinned saree that could blind you in direct sunlight.

Sharmeen Fuppi doesn't just attend weddings, funerals, or baby showers. She infiltrates them. She's the self-appointed Chief Gossip Curator of the family, armed with more intel than the CIA and a knack for backhanded compliments that could rival Jane Austen's best lines.

She is the Sherlock Holmes of sniffing out secrets. She has a sixth sense for scandal and a PhD in turning molehills into mountains. At a recent wedding, she managed to deduce—based on nothing more than the groom's slightly wrinkled sherwani—that he must have fought with the bride. By dessert, her theory had evolved: the fight was about finances,

his mother had interfered, and there was probably a prenup involved. None of this, of course, was remotely true. But why let the truth get in the way of a juicy story?

And don't even think about hiding from her. At any given gathering, she's stationed herself in the perfect spot—strategically near the food to intercept mid-bite with her rapid-fire interrogation.

“So, when are you getting married?”

“Why don't you have children yet? Is it a choice?”

“Oh, your child isn't in the top section... Don't worry, not everyone can be a genius like my Faria.”

You can't win with her. If you're single, you're doomed to be reminded of it. If you're married, she's got a list of critiques about your wedding, your spouse, or— heaven forbid—the size of your waist. If you've dared to have children, she's ready to compare your parenting skills to hers (which, in her eyes, are flawless).

And let's not forget her espionage skills. Sharmeen Fuppi has an uncanny ability to overhear every hushed conversation, even in a room filled with a hundred people, a dhol, and a hyperactive DJ shouting, “Everybody says hooo!” Whisper about switching caterers at the next event? She knows. Quietly mention your cousin's mysterious new “friend”? By the time you've finished your biriyani, she's drafted a thesis on whether he's suitable for marriage.

Her talents are her ability to stir the pot and sit back with the serene satisfaction of a chef who's just perfected their signature dish. “I didn't say anything wrong,” she'll protest innocently, after dropping a casual comment that turns the living room into a full-blown battleground. “I was just saying what everyone's already thinking!”

Of course, you can't not invite Sharmeen Fuppi to family events. She's family, after all, and in our culture, family comes before logic, personal space, and occasionally sanity. But deep down, you know the gathering would feel strangely incomplete without her. She's the chaotic spice in the otherwise bland dish of familial politeness. Without her, who would give you material for your group chats later?

So, the next time you spot your version of Sharmeen Fuppi at a gathering, take a deep breath. Smile through the backhanded compliments, laugh at her wild theories, and remind yourself that in the grand drama of South Asian family life, she's just playing her role. And who knows? Maybe one day, when she's not looking, you'll find the perfect opportunity to give her a taste of her own medicine.

By Noshin Naval

Illustration: Noshin Naval

#PERSPECTIVE

Fun, Fearless You!

Trashy shows on television are

addictive, but rarely ever educational. At best, it makes one feel guilty for wasting time watching meaningless but entertaining content! One such show that has caused mass hysteria is *Fabulous Lives Vs. Bollywood Wives*—trash television extraordinaire—on Netflix. For the uninitiated, rich, bored, has-been wives of Bollywood unleash their worst possible traits by making snide remarks, mindless gossip, discuss apparent health benefits of Botox and other sundry injectables decked out in designer duds and dripping in diamonds! Hedonism has truly become second nature to humanity, and such shows only highlight it!

Interestingly enough, one of the leading ladies on this show, Shalini Passi, is a force to be reckoned with. Not just another bored billionaire's wife, Passi is an artist, patron of arts, philanthropist, writer and that's just a few of her many talents. She refuses to indulge in gossip like the others, doesn't let criticism get to her, focuses on self-growth, and does exactly as she pleases! Sounds fabulous, right?

A new year is on the horizon and we're here for it. From making exciting plans that will create memories for years to come to making countless resolutions, we are doing it all! One of the key elements on that list ought to be self-growth. Who doesn't love to sit with friends and gossip about celebrities or other people? While it may seem harmless, it's an unhealthy practice for sure. Ideas, inspirations and motivational matters are just a few topics to explore with friends. Once you avoid gossip,

you'll be amazed how liberating it is!

Eat the right stuff. You are indeed what you eat and that double cheeseburger with fries and shake will make you feel exactly what it is—like junk! Reserve eating out for special occasions, even though we are constantly being bombarded with temptations. Food cooked at home is clean, fresh, and delicious, not to mention wallet-friendly too! Avoid caffeine-loading and say no to that bubble tea! Your body will thank you.

Nurture your hobbies. Put your phone down. Take up that book, sign up for guitar lessons, or learn salsa! Follow your heart and feed your soul by fuelling your passion, whatever that may be. Studies show that individuals with hobbies are much more likely to be happier and healthier than those who don't.

Perhaps the greatest resolution should be to focus on one's own self. Block out the noise, listen to your inner voice. Your own happiness should matter the most, not what others think of you. Wear that incredible outfit and let your unique style shine. Your greatest strength is your

individuality, and nothing is more attractive than a person who is true to their own self. In this new year, be yourself and embrace the love that comes your way for that!

By Sabrina N
Bhuiyan
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Rahman

