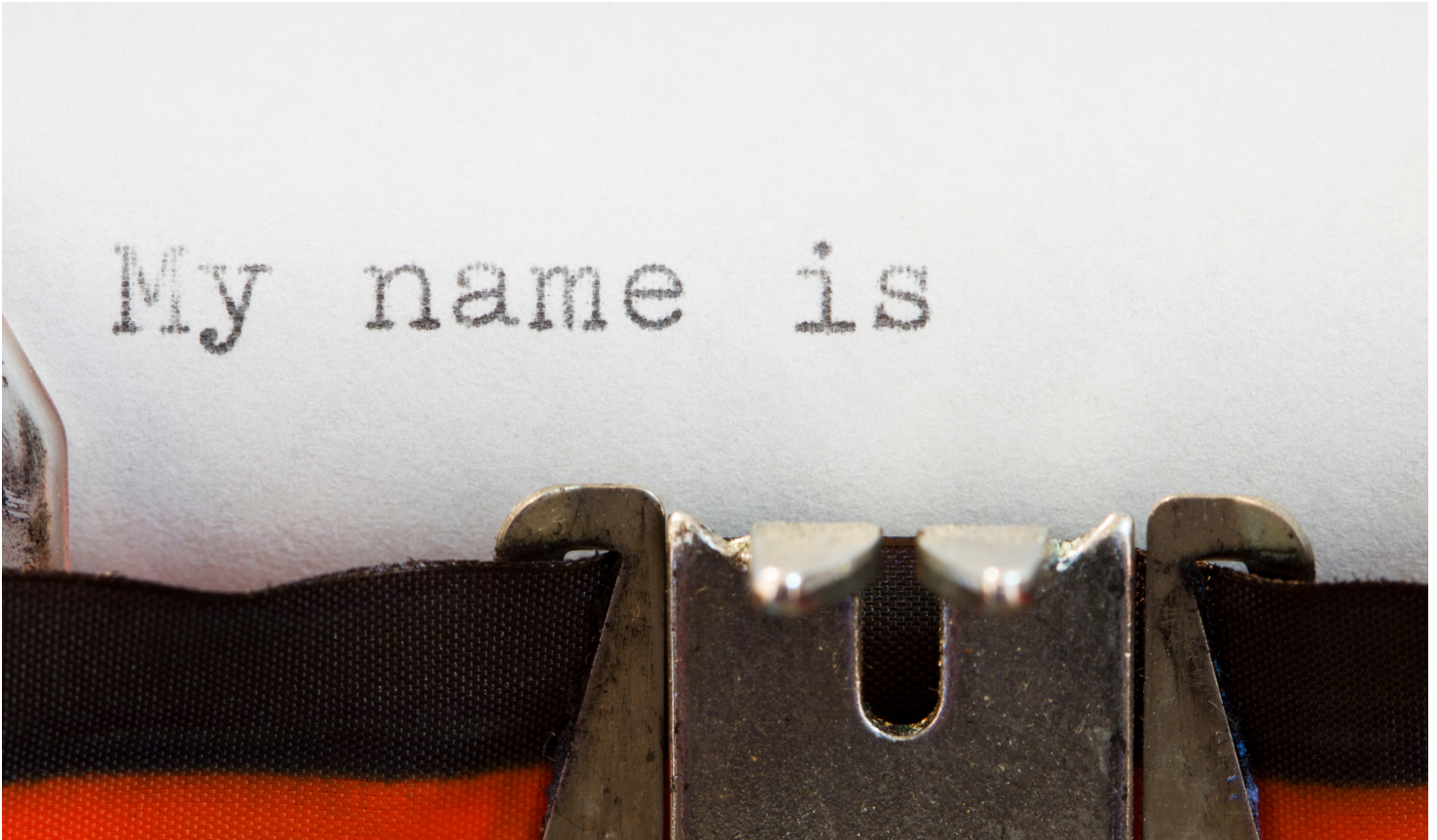




Forever, Ms Sanghera!



By: Harjit Kaur Sanghera, MSc, BA (Hons)
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Ladies, have you thought about changing your name after marriage? Ever been asked, "are you going to change your last name after marriage?" How did the person react if you ever said no? Have you heard the following?

"OMG! You're supposed to!"

"It's always been like that"

"You're overthinking it! It's just nice tradition and it doesn't really mean anything"

"That's not normal!"

"What's the point of marriage?!?"

"That can cause problems in your marriage"

"Women are supposed to change their last name" "I did, my sisters did, my mom did"

"Nope, you're gonna have to!"



This norm of taking our spouse's name stems from a long-standing tradition that is still prevalent in many South Asian cultures. Daughters are born, raised, and educated in their parents' home, only to be told that we were never theirs.

I will continue to carry my maiden name, Sanghera, and the most I'll do is go from Miss. to Ms. Sanghera. For me, changing my last name, would mean losing:

- My identity: I have been Harjit Kaur Sanghera since birth. I would be giving up myself if I changed my last name.
- My connection to my parents: I have the utmost respect for my mother and father. Like most newcomers, my parents worked tirelessly. My father's lung was surgically removed due to a work-related injury. My mother had just clocked in a 12-work hour shift, the day as I was born. Considering all the sacrifices my parents made to educate, raise, and instill in me values that have shaped me into becoming the outspoken woman that I am, carrying their last name is the least I can do to honour their work.
- My familial roots: In my family, women, alongside men, toiled hundreds of acres of land in Punjab, India. What is even more impressive is that I come from a lineage of women who fought against the British regime to acquire freedom in India. It's because of their struggle as women that I continue to enjoy rights and freedoms as a second generation Sikh-Canadian woman.
- My values: One of my main issues with the name change question is that men don't have to answer it, yet women must put in a lot of energy thinking about the decision. Men just don't carry that same burden.

South Asian women, such as myself, are brought up in liberal countries like Canada where we have the choice; however, the belief that heterosexual women must give up their familial names for that of their husband's is rooted in patriarchal customs.

I asked a few of my friends, would they change their name after marriage - why or why not? Most of them responded with thoughts similar to mine. One friend said "nope, as I have established an identity with my last name in academics, my profession, and my networks." Another friend said, she might hyphenate, but her spouse must include her last name too. Ultimately, it's an individual choice whether a woman wants to give up, keep, or hyphenate their names; however, if it's a given that men will bear their family name forever, then women must also have that same right.



Harjit Sanghera is a Sikh-Canadian woman and currently resides in Mississauga, ON. She completed her undergrad at McMaster University and then went onto teachers college to pursue a Masters of Science in Education. Harjit is a teacher and a LINC instructor in the Peel region.