Names in Hyperreality: A Postmodern Outlook Towards the Role of Mass Media in Bengali Naming Patterns in Urban Context

Monalisa Bhattacherjee, M.A., M.Phil., NET
Research Scholar, Linguistics Department
North Eastern Hill University, Shillong, Meghalaya
Mobile no. - 7980817760
Prithamo12@gmail.com

Abstract

Names are a part of every culture. Not only are they of enormous importance to the giver and the receiver, but also act as signs. In recent times, the personal names of the Hindu-Bengali community of Kolkata have witnessed noticeable change. The contemporary personal names reflect Kolkata's transition from a traditional city of pre-colonial era to a contemporary post-modern place. Many of the personal names also give information about the influence of mass media in eroding the boundaries between the ethnic and the globalized cosmopolitan identity. Using a postmodern theoretical analysis of the data collected from four schools of Kolkata, this paper analyses the media-influenced hyperreal scenario within which patterns of names are going through constant mutation. The findings of this research provide insights into the connection of the hyperreal stage and the contemporary nomenclature system where the personal name acts as a floating signifier without any definite signified. Names will then reflect a psychosocial desire and the multiplicities and complexities involved therein which is different from the comparatively stable naming pattern of earlier times. The findings of this paper also put forth the contestation between ethnicity and cosmopolitanism as portrayed in the changing naming pattern.

Keywords: Hindu Bengali-community, personal names, mass media, postmodernism, cosmopolitanism, hyperreality, nomenclature, signifier, signified.

1. Introduction and Background

Names are related with every culture and are significant enough to have a close analysis. Names are the bearers of cultural, social and political information. The names are also the important signs of the desired or subconscious wishes or attributes that one feels when naming their children. According to Murray (2013), "Parents choose baby names to imply desired characteristics about their children".

Kolkata

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Monalisa Bhattacherjee, M.A., M.Phil., NET
Names in Hyperreality: A Postmodern Outlook Towards the Role of Mass Media in Bengali Naming Patterns in Urban Context   15

Kolkata, the capital of West Bengal, is located on the east bank of the Hoogly River. The metropolitan city of Kolkata presents a perfect picture of modern India along with traditional art and culture. The city Kolkata is the cultural capital of India and is the home for over 5 million people. The population of the metropolitan Kolkata is roughly around 14.59 million in the year 2016. In India, Kolkata is ranked third position after Mumbai and Delhi respectively. Kolkata is the principal business centre of East India and prospering IT sectors, thus, attracting a lot of migrants from other states who are permanently settled here for occupational purposes. In terms of literacy rate, Kolkata is one of the top cities of India with an overall literacy rate of 87.14% (Population of Kolkata, 2019).

The comparison of the difference in the population of Kolkata from Pre-Independence to Post-Independence time is given below in **Table 1** and **Table 2**

Table 1: Census of Kolkata by religion (1931)

Religion	Hindu	Sikhs	Jains	Buddhism	Muslims	Christians	Zoroastrians	Jews	Tribals	Others
Males	546,730	3,587	2,356	2,408	229,003	25,058	692	931	327	1,195
Females	274,281	1,096	793	594	81,811	21,403	507	898	99	242

Table 2: Census of Kolkata by religion (2011)

Description	Total	Percentage
Hindu	3,440,290	76.51%
Muslims	926,414	20.60%
Not stated	48,982	1.09%
Christian	39,758	0.88%
Jain	21,178	0.47%
Sikh	13,849	0.31%
Buddhist	4,771	0.11%
Others	1,452	0.03%

The birth of the city Kolkata can be traced from the history, where it says that British Government had merged three villages, namely Kalikata, Sutanuti and Gobindapur. Biswas (1991) says that Job Charnock, an administrator with the British East India Company is traditionally credited with the honour of founding the city. In modern time, Kalikata comprises the Central Kolkata, sutanuti comprises the North Kolkata and Gobindapur comprises the South Kolkata (Sutanuti- History of Kolkata, 2017).

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Names in Hyperreality: A Postmodern Outlook Towards the Role of Mass Media in Bengali Naming Patterns in Urban Context   16

The modern Kolkata is the city of diversified population; it is the meeting point of several ethnic communities who speak different languages, practising different cultures, traditions, beliefs and customs.

2. Related Works

Onomastic studies are of great importance. Hough (2016) opines that onomastics is both an old and a young discipline. Since in ancient Greece, names have been regarded as central to the study of language, throwing light on how humans communicate with each other and organize their world. The work of Egblewogbe (1977) is one of the major works on the personal names in Ewe. His work deals with the etymology and the typology of Ewe personal names. Agozie (2000) has also further analysed on etymology of the personal names among Ewes. Agozie mainly focuses on the association of the naming systems with the three esoteric cults. There are also works on onomastics dealing with the functions of personal names. Notable among them are works by Agyekum (2006) and Ansu-Kyeremeh (2000) in the African Society. Agyekum (2006), in his paper states that Akan names are not arbitrary labels. but they have social tags attached. These social tags have sociocultural functions and meanings.

In addition to the above works, few works have been done in onomastics related to Indian languages. Kachru (n.d.) made a preliminary investigation in anthroponymy of the Kashmiri Pandits of India. There he attempted to make an investigation of the naming pattern in a sociological context. In his study, he explained "the dynamics of the pandit names." Another work to be mentioned is the work of Devi (as cited in Singh et al., 2017, p.258) on the personal names of Meiteilon community of Manipur. Other works are also there on Marathi names and personal names of India by Jhungare (1975) and Karve (1947) respectively, but there is a single attempt of Dutta (1965) to make a linguistic analysis of the Bengali personal names. The study has given an extensive and detailed information about the Bengali naming culture of the traditional Bengal, but it has not make a comparison of the contemporary personal names with the old personal names. Again, it has not provided the reason for the change in the nomenclature system.

Goals of the Present Study

The primary goals of the present work are to answer and understand the following questions:
a) What is the reason behind naming their children?
b) What is the sociocultural information extracted from the contemporary personal names?
c) Why is there a change in the naming pattern from the pre-independence time to the present time?
d) What is the influence of mass media in giving personal names?

Along with these goals, there is also another motivation to understand the areas of contestation between ethnicity and cosmopolitanism as reflected in the changing naming pattern and the role of media influenced hyperreality within which the conflict takes place.

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Names in Hyperreality: A Postmodern Outlook Towards the Role of Mass Media in Bengali Naming Patterns in Urban Context   17

3. Methodology

Data for this research has been collected from both primary data as well as secondary data. A survey-based method is used for the collection of data. The primary data have been collected from personal interviews, telephonic interviews, school registers and much relevant information have been elicited through the structured questionnaire. The secondary data have collected from novels, short stories and biographies of eminent personalities of Pre-Independence time. Based on secondary sources, a total of 430 personal names have been taken for analysis. Out of these 430 names, 238 names are of males and 192 names are of females. All the personal names of pre-independence time have been collected from secondary sources. The contemporary names are collected from school registers of 4 different schools. A total of 200 names have been collected from an age group of 9-11 years.

A random sample has been done where a group of individuals for observation are selected who are representative of certain sections of the population about which the study is intended. Only few personal names are taken from the whole population and that too randomly from different schools of Kolkata. The schools are selected carefully. Two vernacular medium schools and two convent schools are selected for data collection to get a complete picture of the sociocultural and socioeconomic background of the informants.

4. Analysis
Kolkata in 21st Century:

Traditional outlook towards Bengali names is now in conflict with a foreign influence and as a result we have a process of different cultural assimilation, which is reflected in the contemporary naming pattern. In recent times, the metropolitan area has changed, and many alterations can be seen in the cultural, linguistic and economic ideologies. The rapid growth of IT sectors in this globalized era gives the way for a busy schedule in the lifestyle of the urban culture, influx in the immigrants and even it has also created a multicultural and multilingual environment in Kolkata. It has been observed recently that this cosmopolitan feature is giving rise to borrowing of personal names from different communities residing in Kolkata. With the modern globalized scenario, Kolkata is becoming more and more cosmopolitan in culture. There is a steady inflow of the influence of Western culture within the local Bengali culture and nowadays a process of assimilation and appropriation can be noticed in the context of Kolkata; that is to say, in all the metro cities, in different proportions. With the thriving market economy, cultural influences of different other provinces of India are making their presence in Kolkata. Local culture is coming into conflict with both regional non-Bengali cultures and Western cultures. It can be noticed that this multicultural scenario is influencing the naming patterns of the new generation Bengali people. Media and commercial entertainment industry also play a major role in this cultural shift. Ethnic identity is conflicting with Pan-Indian identity and at different instances, latter is moulding and appropriating the former. Now the proportion of the conflict between local identity and non-local identity varies from one part of Kolkata to another and also varies according to different social classes.

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Names in Hyperreality: A Postmodern Outlook Towards the Role of Mass Media in Bengali Naming Patterns in Urban Context   18

Hyperrealism

     The term 'hyperreality' emerges in the western postmodern scenario with the increasing power of modern capitalism and with the dominance of consumption over production. The term was popularized by French theorist Jean Baudrillard, who uses this term to denote the dominance of signifier over signified. His intention is to critique the increasing use of technology in the era of media reproduction, which he believes has broken down the boundaries between surface and depth or between the apparent and the real. In his book 'Simulacres et Simulation' (1981) explores the depthless world of unreflecting images. According to Baudrillard, in this technological age, science no longer refer to their "real life" referent but replace it in a world of autonomous "floating signifiers"; there has been 'an implosion of image and reality' (Selden et al., 2005, pp. 200-203). This phenomenon is in the word of Wakefield, leads "into the simulated non-space of hyperreality" (as cited in Selden et al., 2005, p. 201). Because of the emergence of postmodern communication technologies, like televisions, there is a proliferation of self-generating images across the postmodern surface. Thus, the hyperreal refers to the erosion of boundaries between authenticity and superficiality.

Shift in the Naming Pattern of Bangla

     The study describes the recent changes in the naming pattern of Kolkata from the Pre-Independence time to Post-Independence time. There are many Bengali personal names like *Mokkhoda*, *Tinkari*, *Ekkori*, *Elokeshi*, *Torulata*, etc. which have disappeared in the recent days and are not seen in the names of the present generation. It has been observed that names are now becoming transculturalized. The process of assimilation of different cultures is reflected in the current naming patterns of the Bengali community. The names like: *Barshona*, *Saronika*, *Nehal*, *Preet*, *Shreyansh*, *Jiorima*, etc. show a combination of traditional Bengali influences and Non-Bengali influences (both western as well as of other regions of India). Whereas certain names like *Sharon*, *Juliya*, *Sophia*, *Sun*, *Bullet*, *Fiyona*, *Misma*, *Camelia, Lisa, John,* etc. are completely of Non-Bengali origin, certain names like, *Barshona*, *Shreyansh* and *Shawn* though have Bengali components in the name, but at the same time have some Non-Bengali influence (in pronunciation) about them. In this context, parents want their child to stand out with its unique name. By examining the trend in the naming patterns from Pre-Independence to Post-Independence Bengal, we can get a glimpse of the present cosmopolitan culture of Kolkata and how the Bengali's are forming their identities in a postmodern hyperreal world through the choice of their names. The study has made an attempt to analyse the connection between the change in naming patterns and the modern consumption-driven culture from a postmodern point of view. Certain names in today's age become symbols used by a certain section in a particular community of the society to assert its affiliation to the fellow members of that section of society.

     Media, Internet and Commercial Hindi films play a large part in creating a global or a national identity, which comes in conflict with the local ethnic identities. Parents are urged by a desire to both retain and transcend the local ethnic identity. Bringing in a nonlocal flavour in the names of their children

Names in Hyperreality: A Postmodern Outlook Towards the Role of Mass Media in Bengali Naming Patterns in Urban Context   19

may satisfy the desire for becoming unique in naming their children. However, it has to be questioned what is at the basis of their choice, which would make them feel unique. Cosmopolitan Bengalis are no longer satisfied at restricting themselves to a local identity. Instead they are moulded by the desire to confirm to the newly created national and global identity. In an interview when some parents are asked the reason behind the choice of the names of their children, then they answered that they were highly influenced by some mega serials and block buster movies, So, they gave the names according to those heroes and heroines. Certain names in today's age become symbols used by a certain section in a particular community of the society to assert its affiliation to the fellow members of that section of society.

A connection can be drawn between this global and national identity with the dominance of capitalism and market economy. Media, internet and commercial mediums like movies create this desire. As a result, it can be inferred that the desire for these exotic names has an economic basis. There is a connection between change in naming patterns and the modern consumption driven culture in Kolkata. In this highly commercialized world, names thus, become signals which are, in the word of Surrenti, those names which are used in the context of consumer products, "deterritorialized from their authentic context." (as cited in Prato, 2016, p. 202).

5. Conclusion
Names in a Hyperreal World

Kolkata has witnessed a shift in the nomenclature system. The pre-independent Kolkata and the contemporary Kolkata have undergone a lot of changes. All these changes (socio-political, cultural, economic and geo-climatic) are visible in the naming pattern. This study has been restricted only to the socio-cultural changes that happened in Kolkata in the recent times. The nomenclature system of the contemporary time presents this profound change. The personal names are now signifiers without any one-to-one signified. The role of mass media is an important factor for the change in the society because the postmodern world is dominated by the stimulated reality created by the media discourse.

Names thus, in the words of Surrenti are deterritorialized from their authentic context. Names as signifiers are supposed to refer to some qualities or characteristics which the parents imagine to be existing in their children. The correspondence between signifiers and signified in context of personal names is supposed to be secured within the paradigm of traditional names and their meanings. The semantic aspect of a name, that is, its meaning is supposed to take its power from its traditional meaning and usage. It is not intention of the study to deny that the exotic names may also have some corresponding meanings. But in this consumption driven scenario, the particular meanings of names are losing their significance and instead names are becoming symbolic of a certain market driven desire on the part of the parents. The boundary between the surface and depth in the context of names is breaking down as the underlying semantic meaning beneath the names is becoming less important and only the surface of the names with its ornamentation and nonlocal flavour, is increasing in importance. Instead of depth only the surface of

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Names in Hyperreality: A Postmodern Outlook Towards the Role of Mass Media in Bengali Naming Patterns in Urban Context   20

the names is becoming marker of social prestige and uniqueness. As per Baudrillard's predilection on use of technology in postmodern world, here also technology like media is playing a crucial role in reducing the names to the status of "floating signifiers".

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Monalisa Bhattacherjee, M.A., M.Phil., NET
Names in Hyperreality: A Postmodern Outlook Towards the Role of Mass Media in Bengali Naming Patterns in Urban Context   21