

Proper Name and Identity: A Study Based on Kolkata and Kerala Anglo-Indians

Existing studies on the personal names of Anglo-Indians show that the community has a tendency to adopt European (or western) names. Adopting European names enables the Anglo-Indian community to trace their lineage to Europeans, who they see as a standard for emulating various forms of cultural practices, names being one among them. Unlike other Indian Christian communities (e.g., Telugu Christians, Kerala Syrian Christians), the community has not assimilated to Indian naming styles (e.g., studies on Hyderabad Anglo-Indian community shows this to be the case). The present study explores the trends in naming for the Anglo-Indian communities of Kolkata and Kerala in order to observe the similarities and/or differences in the community's naming styles. To investigate this problem, the naming practices of Kolkata and Kerala Anglo-Indians were investigated. The questions administered to the community obtained the official name of the research participant and their family members, the context that determined the naming of individuals, and aspects of names that indicated an Anglo-Indian identity. Sixty Anglo-Indians (forty-four Kolkata Anglo-Indians and sixteen Kerala Anglo-Indians) participated in the present study. Preliminary qualitative findings show that the personal names of community members were commonly picked from (1) the western media, (2) Christian religious characters, (3) the community's social networks, etc. For most research participants, the personal name and the surname indicated an Anglo-Indian, that is, a European or a British, identity, and the community's proper names contributed to an aspect of Anglo-Indianness.

Keywords: socio-onomastics, Kolkata Anglo-Indian, Kerala Anglo-Indian, personal name, surname

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