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Names as Adaptive Identities in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

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“Names are a part of every culture and that they are of enormous importance both to the people who receive names and to the societies that given them.” (H. Edward Deluzain, 1996)

Abstract:

Names have always been the first label given to a person as soon as it's is cut from the umbilical cord. It therefore becomes like a phatomine struggle to live up to its family, social, cultural and geographical remarks in Indian context, Yet no one can choose their own name. So a person can't choose his identity, but we are expected to create an identity for our own. Name is associated with the response system with its roots in cosmic sounds, and in order to establish its significance, mostly adaptive (economical, rural, urban, under-represented). A name-bearer will be named, that is, have had a personal name given to him, be known by a name in a formal social situation, be identified or described by some form of name in an official document, and be 'called' by a name by his intimates. These names are not necessarily the same at any one time; any of them can change throughout the bearer's life. This adaptive identity analyzed in this paper through the journey of Munna in Aravind Adiga's "The White Tiger." And therefore signifying the social and economical expectation of the urban 'light' life.

Keywords: Adaptive identity, anthroponomy, classification, designation, functionality, onomastic, prospography, names and economic roles.

Introduction

In the epistolary novel *The White Tiger*, the Chennai born indo-australian witer Aravind Adiga has explored many themes such as dark vs light, animals vs men, master and slave

relationship, the purpose of religion in India, castism, poverty, corruption and most importantly, the journey of self discovery. Through identity rusted in the form of names and the roles that comes with it. He has further explored the attributes of certain animals to symbolically show the concrete urban jungle. In intial chapters, Munna, the name had not transformed into an identity however the name shows a certain amount of immaturity in insigninacnce in the economic hiraraicy.

Although this is quite apparent through his inner dialogue, he could hardly do anything about it. The need to adapt is thus born. The struggle is however external, which manifests internally in the coming chapters. This can further be explained with an example from the Seleucid empire. There a Babylonian governor of the city of Uruk at the end of the 3rd century BC is mentioned who is named as 'Anu-uballit' whose other name is Kephalon, who is called from the mouth of the family' (Sherwin, 1993). In other words, this locally important man has had official names, both Babylonian and Hellenic, which have reflected his status and the political aspirations of a Babylonian family in a Greek-dominated world. Moreover, he has had an informal or 'pet' name by which he is known in his own home and to his own family (Stamm, 1939). Exactly the same thing happens today and without doubt it also has happened in the medieval period. At a time when formal personal names are often given for reasons combining respect for kindred, especially ancestors and inheritance. It is not uncommon for children (including those who survived infancy and those who did not) in the same family to share the same personal name. This can pose major problems for the historians who come across them in the written record, but there is no problem in the family. Because they have used a different name to address their each child. Addressing someone and referring to someone either in speech or writing is not the same thing; nor, as we shall see, are description, designation and denomination, all of which are features of the functions of names. Intimidating all this may sound, but such many-sidedness is part of the reason why names can yield so much essential evidence about people and the societies in which they live.

This transition is only possible once he adopts a different name. In theory, if it is true that every personal name signifies one and only one person, the converse, that one person will always be designated by the same personal name, is not. On the other hand, it is true that every human being is given a name sometime after birth; even though different names may thereafter be used or acquired by that person, he or she will always have a personal name (Alford, 1988). So a name is intimately associated to the referent, that is, the person to whom it applies exclusively, and therefore identifies. If we are at once to recognize the unavoidable fact of naming in relation to people, and to hold on to identification of the individuals in our group prosopography, how are we to approach the formidable complications of name variation and homonymy in our records, and in what sense can we identify an unnamed person and how? Before we can ponder such questions we have to ask further into the meaning and purpose of names, their relation to identity, and the whole question of the classification of names in a name system (Keats-Rohan, 2007).

The Significance of Names in Indian Context

After the *Namkaran* of the individual, then it is his responsibility to uphold the value, job and significance of the name. Munna's constant search to attach a meaning of self which is socially acceptable requires him to meet many individuals fulfilling their expectation of name identity. Some stand the test of time, like the school teacher Krishna who with his knowledge, preachy, authoritative attitude wants a student confidant to reassure his existence. He therefore names Munna to be Krishna's favourite childhood best friend Balram. Balram though highly learnt to be in the presence of Krishna can only remain a friend because of his caste. The transition from Munna (everyday-popular common name for preadolescence

boys) to Balram (intellectual friend of the upper caste Krishna), is the beginning of many names and many identities that is to follow. "Balram has worked out early in life that good deeds usually have awful consequences" (Rushby, 2008). In context is for us the all-important key to understanding the difficult bond between name and identity at this stage. If we study why, when and by whom a record containing name forms was written, we will have guidance as to how we can afterwards interpret the name. Just as our not knowing his personal name does not prevent the 'poor man' from being an individual, having a name recognised by a clerk does not mean that the referent was actually so named. However difficult it may seem to use, all proof concerning to names, including the lack of them, is enormously valuable: it should definitely not be taken for granted (Keats-Rohan, 2007).

Munna's transition to Balram might be insignificant to the story but it is through the "Bal" (strength) that he is confidently ready to sow the seed of his next identity, The White Tiger during his school inspection. Further visions will come from validating our own experience of names and the act of naming. Amongst the things what we will witness is how our own names change over time, with regard to different people and situations. We will also notice the felony taken when someone takes our name wrong; our very identity is being challenged during that time at a primal level. So much so that misusing, misrepresenting or mispronouncing a name are all strategies that are deliberately employed in order to disappoint, hurt or show contempt for particular people. Exactly the same is true of our written records, where the scribes dispose also of an additional device: to withhold the name overall. In doing so they cannot deny a person's individuality, but they can deny him his personal identity.

Balram to Ashoke Sharma- The Making of the Adaptive Self

Even though the narrator has successfully got a named Balram after simply being a Munna, it is not pleasant to be around on the "darkness." Because it has made him live the expectation of the societal name (Halwai) denoting a particular job. Halwai is not a family name; it is the caste that he belongs to. In Balram Halwai, a victim of the caste-based poverty that is rampant in the "The Darkness," the narrative finds its credentialed slum tour-guide (Shingavi, 2014). And also it is very important to note that his father never liked to be related with his caste and he rather became a rickshaw puller than being a sweet maker.

"... halwai... That's my caste - my destiny. Everyone in the darkness who hears that name knows all about me at once." (Adiga, p.63)

Once an inspector comes to the school and he starts to question the students to check to skills on their subjects. When nobody is able to answer any questions raised by the officer, only Balram has delivered the answers which made the officer highly impressed. Due to being overjoyed by the boy's response, the officer named him as The White Tiger. It is a very notable symbolism because The White Tiger's hide of white with dark brown stripes provides near perfect camouflage in the jungle, while the stripes provide the illusion of shadow. Thus, it can be considered that it makes it to dwell in both the world of darkness as well as that of the light. This enormous creature is also a deadly predator with the ability to take down prey

that ranges from small wild boar, to large buffalo, which are the animal attributes given to the landlords and the people from darkness.

“You, young man, are an intelligent, honest, vivacious fellow in this crowd of thugs and idiots. In any jungle, what is the rarest of animals – the creature that comes along only once in a generation?”

-The white tiger.

- That's what you are, in this jungle.” (Adiga , p. 35)

The White Tiger is also known to be drawn to a soul that has a powerful sense of conviction and inner strength. Therefore, it is believed that one who is blessed with this Power Totem will have strong ideas of what is "right" and "wrong," and will stand by this personal belief system, even if that means leaping in the face of popular opinion. So, it is made clear that Balram is levelling up in his morality scale and he is going to choose what is right.

When Balram moves to Delhi with his boss Ashok, there the more experienced drivers he works with call him 'Country Mouse', denoting his home town which is a small village. In order to escape the crushing poverty of what Adiga calls the 'Darkness', Balram must escape the caste system – and therefore his family name. He does so through resourcefulness, hard work and ruthlessness (Greaney, 2012). However, these traits aren't sufficient to climb up the social ladder and require him to see his master as a potential threat. This results in him orchestrating a murder, that which he is not guilty or concerned about. Rather with a tone of non-chalant calmness narrates the whole story to him of his becoming. In fact the attributes attached to him thus far has been subservient and foreshadowing people of authority, who never gave in to their full potential. With the acknowledgment of the inspector, a new animalistic sense of being emerges which results in him leaving his human incompetence all behind and adapting to an identity that denotes power that reverses the role that he was born into. The predator of economic and social “light”

Adaptive Identities as a Tool to Economic Hierarchy

With the modern shift toward the urban and the technological, the perception of both space and time undergoes a transformation, as each can be perceived as more efficiently used when filled to a higher capacity. High-rises allow more people and businesses to occupy a smaller space, while technological advances permit more work to be done in less time. Much of the argument hinges on how the word 'meaning' is understood in cognitive terms. If we look at Muanna's epistolary to the Chinese premier, he both detests and admires the significance that the country and its perception is held amidst other nations. Does a name have inherent characteristics, the authority to describe or denote itself alone, or extrinsic implication, the power to both denote (refer directly to) and connote (signify indirectly or suggest) its bearer? Linguist Sir Alan Gardiner, observed that: 'If "meaning" be taken to signify simply "exchange value", then obviously all proper names have meaning, since they are words and every word is a sound sign standing for something, this something being its "exchange value" (Gardiner, 1940).

On the other hand, whereas common names have meaning – i.e. significance – and connotation – the single word ‘dog’ will convey a complex picture of what a dog is – a proper name simply denotes a definite individual without offering any additional information: ‘Ordinary words, among which general names play a prominent part, directly convey information; proper names merely provide a key to information’: Like the name Dharam is a young relative of Balram's, sent to Balram by the family so he can be taken care of. Dharam is a sweet and obedient boy. Balram brings Dharam with him after the murder, and the two live together in Bangalore or the significance of the name Vijay-Balram's childhood hero, his model of a man who improved his station in life by forging his own identity.

The son of a pig herder, Vijay's first success came with becoming a bus conductor. Balram and the other village boys admire his prestigious job and his uniform. Later, Vijay enters politics and quickly rises in the ranks. By the end of the narrative, Vijay is a powerful politician, just as corrupt and power-hungry as any of the rich elites in the novel. The name thus providing a victorious retreat into the world of urban light.

Characters without names but animal Attributes

There are four animals who take control of the village Laxmangarh. They are The Buffalo, The Stork, The Wild Boar and The Raven. The Buffalo is the animal name given to one of the four landlords since he is the greediest of them all. He owns and operates the rickshaws in the village including the roads. So every thin hardworking working rickshaw person who sweat their blood out thought the day has to pay one third of their earnings to the landlord who just happens to be powerful guy in that region. Hence he gets the name Bufallo, which is lazy and comfortable all the times. To show his power, he ones wiped out an entire family of a person who is loosely connected to the kidnap of his son by the Naxals.

Another landlord who is described in the name of an animal is Thakur Ramdev. He is known as The Stork in the book, just like the name says, he is in control of the water bodies since he owns the river. He picks collects taxes from the fishermen for their boats. The Wild Boar is the next landlord who comes up with an animal name who controls the agricultural lands in the village. Much like the wild boar which lives on the agricultural land even on the time during the famines to eat the roots in fields, The Wild Boar owns the farmers who has to pay him for their hard work. The Raven is one of the Four Animals, who owns the worst land, the dry, rocky hillside around the fort, and charges the goatherds who use this land for their flocks to graze. He is called the Raven because he likes “dip his beak into the backsides” of the goatherds who can't pay. “Dipping one's beak” is a sexual euphemism that Balram uses. The Mongoose is the animal name given to Mukesh Sir and he is called upon as The Mongoose throughout the book. He does not question the family's business practices and condemns the civilised American way of life (Sebastian,2009).

In characterising the above the author establishes that a person's name could also be an attribute, devoid of any human naming ceremonies. Most of the attributes are related to animals that may not how to behave like a wild urban “light.” However, their attributes are

considered dark in human world. The contradiction is the basis of a hierarchy that roots itself deeply as an absolute attribute. The non-fluidity of identity when placed parallel to a dynamic character, it is bound to take a back seat.

Conclusion

Though the narrative could have been dismissed with the statement that it was the only way poor can defend themselves (Davis 41). It is more of their escape from poverty which is narrated as the conning of the rich out of their supposedly hard-earned wealth: through the dwindling benefits offered up by the state or through the various criminal acts, the poor are seen to survive on the unwitting largesse of the rich by discarding the identity given by society in the form of "name" and taking charge of baptising oneself with their choice of identity after much analysis.

Discarding the name is not something that is done as an impulse or dislike. But rather it is approached as mythical phoenix bird that shuns itself completely only to reborn again. The mere sense of not being in control of one's fate and frustration associated with economic divide is easily tackled by Munna, through years of learning and observing. A documented look through all that has been presented can only assert the hypothesis that name is not a given choice for which human have no control, but a saga of an underdog, whose name didn't signify much until he becomes his subconscious self-Ashok Sharma.

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