

Changing Patterns of Personal Names Among the Maharjans of Katmandu

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A multi-generational analysis of personal names of the Maharjans (farmers) of Katmandu, Nepal, shows significant differences between traditional names and contemporary names. The names of gods and goddesses are popular among those over 40, but are absent among those under 20. The names of younger Maharjans do not show the caste and ethnic affiliations which characterize those of older generations. Such differences can be attributed to changes in the attitudes and expectations of the Maharjans and to changes in the community's political, economic, and social structures.

Introduction

Studies of personal names and naming practices have often been ethnographic; there is an extensive literature consisting of descriptions of namegivers, the time of naming, the types of names given, the restriction or free use of names, and the meaning of names, generally treating names as if they were static labels (Alford 1988). However, some recent studies show how names evolve over time, along with changes in society. Herbert (1995), for instance, demonstrates how naming practices in several language groups in South Africa have changed along with changes in the bearers' attitudes toward the ethnic identities they find favorable. Suzman (1994), in an analysis of rural, farm, and urban Zulu names, notes that contemporary names differ from traditional names due to the redefinition and nuclearization of the family.

The present report adds to this second category of studies by considering the naming practices of one segment of the farmer caste of the Newar ethnic community, commonly known as the Jyapus, who live in Katmandu, the capital of Nepal. *Jyapu*, from Nepal Bhasa¹ *jya* 'work'

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and *phu* 'capable', is considered to be a non-honorific name by this group, the members of which would rather refer to themselves as *kisan*, a Nepali word meaning 'farmer' (Gellner and Quigley 1995, 158).² *Maharjan* is often used to refer to the farmer caste (Nepali 1965). Here I will examine changes in the traditional names and naming practices of this particular Maharjan community in light of corresponding changes in the community's political, economic, and social organization. I am aware of no previous studies of naming practices of any group in Nepal.

The Newars are a majority in Katmandu and in the nearby cities of Patan and Bhaktapur. Katmandu, Patan, and Bhaktapur lie in the Katmandu valley, the original home of the Newars. Although Katmandu is small, with an area of about 83 square miles and a total population of less than half a million, it is the largest and most densely populated city in Nepal. Moreover, it is the seat of government and the main center of communications, commerce, and education. It is also the home and culture center of the Newars, who speak Newari, a Sino-Tibetan language. Although the Newars comprise only 3% of the total population of Nepal, they constitute almost half the population of Katmandu. The other half consists of Chhetris and Brahmins, the second major ethnic community (whose language is Nepali, the national language), smaller ethnic communities from the plains and areas near the Indian border, and foreigners, especially Indians, Chinese, Japanese, and Europeans.

The Newar community is highly stratified and characterized by a strict caste system, which was introduced in the fourteenth century as a means of classifying the various occupational groups; it is still the primary basis of social differentiation among the Newars. This does not necessarily mean that individuals within a certain caste must perform the traditional tasks associated with that caste. However, members of a particular caste bear surnames that overtly identify their caste and thus their relative social standing within the caste hierarchy. The castes within the Newar social system differ from one another in terms of customs and restrictions relating to food, marriage, and other religious rituals and practices (Gellner and Pradhan 1995; Ishii 1995).

A partial description of Newar castes, modified from Rosser (1966, 85-89), along with their traditional occupations and illustrative surnames, is shown in table 1.

Table 1: Newar Castes in Descending Hierarchical Order.

| Caste | Traditional Occupation | Traditional Surnames |
|---|---|--|
| <i>la chale ju pim</i> 'the ones from whom water can be taken' ³ | | |
| 1. Deo Brahman | Family Priests | Raj Uphadhaya |
| 2. Bhatta Brahman | Temple Priests | Bhatta |
| 3. Jha Brahman | Temple Priests | Jha |
| 4. Gubhaju/Bare | Family Priests, Gold and Silver Smiths | Sakyabhiksu Vajracharya |
| 5. Shrestha (Sheshya) | Merchants | Shrestha, Malla, Josi, Pradhan, Rajbhandari, Maske, Raj Lawat, Amatya, Raj Vamsi |
| 6. Uray (Udhas) | Merchants, Craftsmen | Tuladhar (merchants), Tamrakar (coppersmiths), Awa (tilers), Lohankami (masons), Sikami (carpenters), Madikami (confectioners), Kamsakar (workers in alloys) |
| 7. Jyapu | Farmers | Maharjan, Dangol, Suwal, Musa, Duwal, Sapu (cowherd), Lawat, Kabhuja |
| 8. Kuma | Potters | Kumale, Prajapati |
| 9. Saymi | Oilpressers | Manandhar |
| 10. Khusa | Palanquin Bearers | Khusa, Tandukar |
| 11. Nau | Barbers | Napit |
| 12. Kau | Blacksmiths | Nakami |
| 13. Bha | Funeral Duties | Karamjit, Bha |
| 14. Gathu | Gardeners | Bammala, Mali |
| 15. Tepe | Cultivators | Tepe |
| 16. Pum | Painters | Chitrakar |
| 17. Duhim | Carriers | Putwar, Dali |
| 18. Balami | Fieldworkers | Balami |
| 19. Pulu | Funeral Torch Bearers | Pulu |
| 20. Chhipa | Dyers | Ranjitkar |
| <i>la chale ma ju pim</i> 'the ones from whom water cannot be taken' | | |
| 21. Jogi | Musicians, Tailors | Kanphatta, Giri Dom, Kusle, Danya |
| 22. Nay | Butchers, Musicians | Kasain, Khadgi |
| 23. Kulu | Drum-makers | Kulu |
| 24. Pore | Fishermen, Sweepers | Pore, Deola |
| 25. Chhami | Sweepers | Chhami, Chamkhala |
| 26. Halahulu | Sweepers | Halahulu |

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The demarcation between *ju pim* and *ma ju pim* is precise and immutable, and each group has its own internal hierarchies and subhierarchies. The castes from 1 through 4 are priestly, 5 and 6 are high castes, 7 is the upper lower caste, 8 through 16 are lower castes, 18 through 23 are unclean castes, while 24 through 26 are untouchable castes (Nepali 1965, 150).

Each caste has characteristic surnames by which members can be identified and placed in the hierarchy; thus the surnames indicate to others within the overall caste system the degree of deference or authority a Newar should have. Individuals are born into a caste and there is very little mobility between castes; however, a few instances of Jyapus (caste 7) becoming economically prosperous and adopting Shrestha (caste 5) surnames have been reported (Nepali 1965, 167).

The largest caste in the Newar caste system is the Jyapu caste. Greenwold (1978, 483-84) found that Jyapus constituted 24% of the Newar population in Katmandu. Within this caste there are a number of common surnames, such as *Maharjan* itself, *Dangol* (specialists in measurements), and *Suwal* (cooks). Maharjans produce the grains and vegetables that sustain the population and they perform domestic tasks for pay for people belonging to other castes; thus they are viewed "as much as servants as they are as farmers" (Gellner and Pradhan 1995, 159).

Among the Jyapus, the ritual of child naming is observed during Pasni, the rice feeding ceremony, the day when the baby is fed rice for the first time by relatives, neighbors, and friends. Traditionally, the rice feeding ceremony takes place on the fifth month after the child is born if it is female and the seventh month if it is male. The names are traditionally selected by family priests, known as Gubhaju,⁴ who also write up elaborate horoscopes for the child. This latter custom is extremely expensive since Gubhajus have become increasingly rare and their priestly fees have gone up enormously in recent years. Many of the young parents I interviewed admitted not having any horoscopes for their children.

Methodology

Data for this study were collected in the summer of 1998 in Katmandu through extensive personal interviews in the homes of Maharjans. I interviewed 57 Maharjan families and each family had, on

average, seven members. All of these families lived in Katmandu Metropolitan City Ward Number 12, which is composed of several small settlements called *nani* (or *bahal~bahil*), enclosed quadrangles paved with bricks and surrounded on all sides by lines of brick houses with exquisitely carved wooden doors and windows. Maharjans living in such *nanis* are agnatically related; their descent is traced through the males in a family. Typically, a *nani* contains one or more Buddhist monuments (stupas), a platform for dance performances (*dabu*), a well, a temple of Ganesh, the elephant-headed god, and a *phalcha*, a shelter where community members sing hymns. In front of the houses are open spaces where people wash clothes, dry grains, do household chores, talk to their neighbors or have feasts to commemorate important ritual events.

As a member of the Shrestha caste,⁵ supposedly higher than the Jyapu caste in the Newar social hierarchy, I was an outsider, although I belonged to the same ethnic group as the Maharjans. I was viewed suspiciously at first and many of the Maharjans were initially hesitant to participate in the interviews, but with the help of two Maharjans, a father and his daughter, who were from the area and were well-known and respected within the society, I was able to gain comfortable access into the community. I would visit with each family early in the morning before most of the family members had left for work. Often I would speak with the males and get the names of all the family members from them. Then I would go back to talk to the women and younger children. The people willingly participated in the interviews once the purpose of my visit was explained to them. I asked four questions: "What is your name?" "Who gave you that name?" "What is the meaning of your name?" and "Do you like your name?" I wanted to focus on the frequency of different types of names (religious, circumstances of birth, personal characteristics, etc.) and the bearers' attitudes toward their names in order to identify cross-generational changes in naming and attitudes toward names. Other demographic information, such as the age and gender of each participant, was also collected.

Results

The interviewees (and thus their names) were categorized into three age groups: those over 40 (132 responses), those 20 to 40 (155 responses), and those under 20 (99 responses). These were the categories which I found most useful in considering naming patterns over generations.

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The older informants had been named by Gubhajus, but many Maharjans of the second group had been named by their grandparents, and those of the youngest group had been named most often by parents or other relatives.

Names of Those Over 40

Personal names provide a symbolic system of identification, which is maintained socially and is based on shared assumptions and expectations of the community members, thereby signaling various types of sociocultural information. Akinnaso (1980), for instance, in his study of Yoruba names, shows how personal names are related to the African value system and to underlying cultural assumptions. He also shows how sociocultural meaning can be retrieved from the names. In like manner, the personal names of Maharjans also signal important sociocultural information.

The names found among members of the oldest group can be classified into four types. The most popular names in this group are those related to the names of gods and goddesses, particularly from Hindu:⁶

Male Names

- Bhimnarayan—One of the Pandava Brothers in the *Mahabharata*
- Chandraman—Chandra, the Moon God
- Devnarayan—*dev* 'god'
- Gangaram—Ganga, the Sacred River of India
- Gopal—Name of Lord Krishna, an Incarnation of Vishnu
- Govind—Name of Lord Krishna, an Incarnation of Vishnu
- Hari—Name of Lord Krishna, an Incarnation of Vishnu
- Indranarayan—Indra, God of the Sky
- Krishna—Name of Lord Krishna, an Incarnation of Vishnu
- Krishnabhai—Name of Lord Krishna, an Incarnation of Vishnu
- Luxminarayan—Luxmi, Goddess of Prosperity
- Machhenarayan—*machhe* 'fish', an Image of Lord Narayan
- Narayan ~ Naraan—Names for Vishnu the Protector
- Padamnarayan—*padam* 'lotus', Associated with Religious Rites
- Radhakrishna—Radha, Wife of Lord Krishna
- Ram—Ram in the Epic *Ramayana*
- Shankarnarayan—Shankar, a Name of Shiva, Lord of Destruction
- Tulsi—The Sacred Plant, Worshipped and Used in Religious Rites

Female Names

| | |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Chandramaya | Krishnadevi |
| Durga—Goddess of Destruction | Luxmi |
| Ganeshmaya | Parbati—Wife of Lord Shiva |
| Ganga | Rammaya—Wife of Lord Ram |
| Harimaya | Saraswoti—Goddess of Learning |
| Jamuna—A Sacred River | Sita—wife of Lord Ram |
| Krishnamaya | Surya—The Sun God |

Most of these religious names are used for both males and females, often with such characteristic gender markers as *-maya* (< Nepali meaning ‘love’) for women and *-narayan*⁷ for men.

The second type of name found in this older age group describes the bearer’s place in sibling order or family position:

Male Names

| |
|--|
| Babu ⁸ —Male Child |
| Babukazi |
| Baburaja |
| Kanchha—Youngest Son (< Nepali) |
| Macha ⁹ —Youngest Son |
| Machabhai |
| Machakazi |
| Macharaja |
| Mahila—Second Male Child |
| Sanukanchha ¹⁰ —Younger Sibling |

Female Names

| |
|---------------------------------|
| Chhori—A Daughter |
| Kanchhi—Youngest Female Child |
| Machanani—Youngest Daughter |
| Maicha ¹¹ —Baby Girl |
| Nani ¹² —Baby Girl |
| Nanichhori |
| Nanimaiya |
| Nanimaya |
| Nanimayaju |
| Tarimaicha—Oldest Female Child |

The third type consists of names signifying physical or personal characteristics:

Male names

| |
|----------------------------|
| Balabhai—Handsome |
| Budhinarayan—Wise, Smart |
| Chiribabu |
| Chirikhha—Short |
| Ghorcha—Unattractive |
| Gyancha—Wise |
| Kalubau |
| Kalubhai |
| Kalunarayan—Dark Complexed |

| |
|----------------------------|
| Kalusingh ¹³ |
| Khencha ¹⁴ |
| Nhusinarayan—Cleft Lip |
| Pakacha—Backward, Immature |
| Sencha—Big Round Face |
| Suku |
| Sukubhai |
| Sukucha—Lean and Thin |

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Female names

Buddhimaya—Wise, Smart

Burimaya—Acts Older Than Her Age

Gyani—Good, Obedient

Names of the fourth type found among members of this age group are related to the time or place of birth, or to circumstances associated with the birth:

Male Names

Ashanarayan—*asha* 'hope'. Offering hope for a brighter future.

Asta—Born on or near asta, the eighth day of the lunar calendar.

Astanarayan

Dasnarayan—Born on or near das, the tenth day of the lunar calendar.

Dhanabhaju—*dhana* 'wealth'. Born after family's economic success.

Dhanakazi

Nhuchhe—'new house'. Born in a new house.

Panchanarayan—Born on or near panchami, the fifth day of the lunar calendar.

Purna—Born on or near purna, a full moon day.

Purnanarayan

Tirtha—Born after parents returned from a tirtha, a holy pilgrimage.

Tirthaman

Female Names

Tirthamaya

Dhanamaya

Purnamaya

Punmaya

Dasmaya

Astamaya

A few names relate to precious stones, especially diamonds:

Male Names

Herakazi—*hera* 'diamond'¹⁵

Heranarayan

Motikazi—*moti* 'pearl'

Motilal

Female Names

Heradevi

Heraluxmi

Heramaya

Herasobha

Moti

Bhaju, *kazi*, *narayan*, *bhai*, and *raja* are popularly attached to the male names and *maiya*, *maya*, *nani*, *chhori*, *luxmi*, and *sobha* to the female names in this group. A diminutive suffix, *-cha*, is added to a name when the addresser is older than the addressee, and it is used freely with both male and female names. Depending on the context, *-cha* can be either endearing or demeaning. It can be used by an older Jyapu to a younger Jyapu affectionately, but can be demeaning when it is used

by an outsider, particularly someone from another caste. I have heard Newars of higher castes use this marker at the end of the names of their servants, or to anyone they think is inferior to them in status. *Maicha* is used especially by upper caste members to address any Jyapu woman.

A summary of the categories and frequencies of names found among the older interviewees is given in table 2.

Table 2. Names of Those 40+.

| | Total | | Male | | Female | |
|-----------|-------|------|------|------|--------|------|
| | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| Religious | 42 | 33.6 | 22 | 52.4 | 20 | 47.6 |
| Family | 31 | 24.8 | 12 | 38.7 | 19 | 61.3 |
| Personal | 21 | 16.8 | 18 | 85.7 | 3 | 14.3 |
| Birth | 19 | 11.2 | 12 | 63.2 | 7 | 36.8 |
| Gems | 12 | 7.2 | 4 | 33.3 | 8 | 66.7 |

Seven names were outside these categories.

Names of Those 20-40

The names of people in this age group show some similarities to as well as a number of differences from those found in the older group.

Names of gods and goddesses:

| Male Names | | Female Names | |
|----------------------|---------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| Arjun ¹⁶ | Indraman | Chandramaya | Radhika |
| Balkrishna | Krishnaman | Durga | Rammaya |
| Bhimsen | Narayandas | Ganga | Saraswoti |
| Budhha | Ram | Gita ¹⁹ | Sita |
| Ganesh | Radhakrishna | Krishnadevi | Tulsi |
| Gautam ¹⁷ | Shiva | Luxmi | Uma ²⁰ |
| Gopal | Shyam ¹⁸ | Mangaladevi | Vishnu |
| Gopilal | Shyamkrishna | Narayandevi | |
| Hari | Vishnu | | |

Names indicating kin or family relationships:

| Male Names | | Female Names | |
|------------|-----------|--------------|------------|
| Baburaja | Macharaja | Macha | Nanichhori |
| Bhairaja | Sanukazi | Machanani | Nanihera |
| Macha | Sanuraja | Micha | Nanisobha |
| Machakazi | | Maiya | Sanu |
| | | Mayaju | Sanumaiya |
| | | Nani | Tarimaicha |

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Names referring to physical or personal characteristics:

Male Names

Pakacha

Sukucha

Female Names

Gyanihera Sintali—Very Slim

Gyanisobha Sukumaiya

Names related to the time or circumstances of birth:

Male Names

Ashanarayan

Asta

Astanarayan

Basant 'born in Spring' Tirthanarayan

Dasnaraya

Dhanabhaju

Panchanarayan

Tirthalal

Female Names

Astamaya

Basanti

Dasmaya

Panchmaya

Purnadevi

Tirthamaya

A few reported names in this age group refer to precious stones:

Male Names

Hiranarayan

Motikazi

Pannakazi

Ratna—jewel

Ratnaman

Ratnasobha

Female Names

Heradevi

Herasobha

Hirasobha

Motimaya

Ratnahera

Perhaps the most remarkable changes seen in the names of this group compared with those of the older group is in the use of masculine and feminine name markers. The older *bhaju* has disappeared and there is only a single instance of *bhai* among the male names, but there is a marked increase in the use of *raja* and *kazi*, e.g., *Sanukazi*, *Sanuraja*, *Jujukazi* (< Newari *juju* 'king' + *kazi*), and *Baburaja* (*babu* 'baby boy' + *raja*). *Babu* and *sanu* compounded with *kazi* 10 times and with *raja* six times. Among the female names *nani* 'baby girl' and *chhori* 'daughter' have been reduced considerably, and *sobha*, the name of a female deity, is found more often, e.g., *Nanisobha*, *Hirasobha*, *Ratnasobha*. *Sanu* has become popular among both the males and the females of this age group. The names related to the order in the sibling set have been reduced; in particular *Kanchha* and *Kanchhi* are absent.

Particularly noteworthy is the fact that many names that had been popular in other ethnic communities, in particular Brahmins and Chhetris and higher Newar castes, become frequent in this age group:²¹

Male Names

Bijendra

Bimal

Birenda

Dinesh

Kamal

Kiran

Narendra Raju

Naresh Ramesh

Nirmal Roshan

Rajan Suraj

Rajendra Surendra

Rajesh Suresh

Female Names

Anju

Bimala

Bina

Kalpana

Manju

Mina

Nirmala

Rachana

Rita

Roshani

Shanta

Shanti

The names of those in the 20-40 age group are summarized by category in table 3:

Table 3. Names of the 20-40 Age Group.

| | Total | | Male | | Female | |
|-----------|-------|------|------|------|--------|------|
| | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| Religious | 43 | 28.1 | 24 | 55.8 | 19 | 44.2 |
| Family | 33 | 21.6 | 11 | 33.3 | 22 | 66.7 |
| Personal | 7 | 4.6 | 2 | 28.6 | 5 | 71.4 |
| Birth | 16 | 10.5 | 10 | 62.5 | 6 | 37.5 |
| Gems | 12 | 7.8 | 6 | 50.0 | 6 | 50.0 |
| New Names | 42 | 27.5 | 22 | 52.4 | 20 | 47.6 |

Two names were outside these categories.

A comparison of tables 2 and 3 shows that there has been a marked decrease in the number of names having to do with personal characteristics, a decrease from 17% in the older group to less than 5% in this group. Conversely, one category that was insignificant in the older age group, new names, is frequent in this group; in fact, such names account for more than one-fourth of all names and they equal religious names in frequency.

Names of Those Under 20

The names of the members in the youngest age group are considerably different from the names of the oldest age group and even from those in the middle age group. Traditional names relating to gods and goddesses have nearly disappeared, and those relating to physical and personal characteristics, and kin and sibling relationships have dropped out of use entirely. Furthermore, no names compounded with *kazi*, *bhaju*, *raja*, *maya*, *nani*, *narayan*, *sobha*, *hera*, or *sanu*, so characteristic of the older groups, are reported. The names are so different in fact from the older, traditional names that grandparents often complain of not being able to pronounce or even to remember these new names and so they find it necessary to address their grandchildren with terms of endearment such as *babu* or *nani*. The new names appear to be chosen

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largely on the basis of personal preference and they are drawn from the inventory of names popular among the other Newar social castes and ethnic groups, most often those supposedly higher than the Maharjans in the social hierarchy. In addition to carrying over many of the new names shown above for the 20-40 group, new names for this group include:

| Male Names | | Female Names | |
|------------|--------|--------------|---------|
| Anil | Rakesh | Anita | Roshani |
| Manoj | Suresh | Kabita | Sabina |
| Prabin | | Ramita | |

The names in the under 20 age group are summarized in table 4:

Table 4. Names of the Under 20 Age Group

| | Total | | Male | | Female | |
|-----------|-------|------|------|------|--------|------|
| | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| Religious | 5 | 5.1 | 3 | 5.8 | 2 | 4.3 |
| Family | 0 | -- | 0 | -- | 0 | -- |
| Personal | 0 | -- | 0 | -- | 0 | -- |
| Birth | 1 | 1.0 | 0 | -- | 1 | 2.1 |
| Gems | 0 | -- | 0 | -- | 0 | -- |
| New Names | 93 | 93.9 | 49 | 94.2 | 44 | 93.6 |

Changes in the names over apparent time are shown in table 5, which summarizes the names in the various categories in the older, middle, and younger age groups.

The types of names found among the members of the two older age groups show essentially the same patterns, although there are some differences in degree. The names of those in the younger group, however, are significantly different from the more traditional names found in the older and middle age groups. These new names do not have the apparent meanings of the earlier names nor do they reflect the sociocultural realities of the community or the expectations of Jyapu society as the earlier names did, especially those of the 40 and older group.

Table 5. Changes in Names in Apparent Time.

| | Group 1, 40+ | | Group 2, 20-40 | | Group 3, -20 | |
|-----------|-----------------|-------------------|-----------------|-------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| | Male Names N | Female Names % | Male Names N | Female Names % | Male Names N | Female Names % |
| Religious | 22 | 32.4 | 24 | 32.0 | 3 | 4.3 |
| Family | 12 | 17.6 | 11 | 14.7 | 0 | -- |
| Personal | 18 | 26.5 | 2 | 2.7 | 0 | -- |
| Birth | 12 | 17.6 | 10 | 13.3 | 0 | 2.1 |
| Gems | 4 | 5.9 | 6 | 8.0 | 0 | -- |
| New | 0 | -- | 22 | 29.3 | 49 | 94.2 |
| Total | 68 | 57 | 75 | 78 | 52 | 47 |

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Changes in Names and Changes in Society

The changes in the names can be seen as part of the social and economic changes taking place in the Maharjan community and in the larger communities of Katmandu and Nepal with which it interacts. The personal names of the oldest group, and of the second group to a large extent, are closely linked to the caste system and to the particular castes of the people who bear the names, thereby marking them as distinct from members of other castes.²² Such name markers as *bhai*, *raja*, *kazi*, *narayan*, *babu*, *maiya*, *nani*, *chhori*, *sobha*, and *hera* have traditionally distinguished a Jyapu from a non-Jyapu.

It has been noted (e.g., Rosser 1966; Nepali 1965; Toffin 1994) that Newar ethnic solidarity, language, and culture have been maintained and strengthened by the caste system since it requires that different castes perform specific ritual duties during ceremonies and on other religious occasions. The Jyapu caste, for instance, plays an important role in the lives of upper caste Newars. Traditionally, in a variety of ceremonies, it is the Jyapu who are required to deliver invitations to the relatives; such invitations are not valid unless they are delivered by a Jyapu. At the birth of a child, a Jyapu is sent to the maternal uncle's house to convey the news. Jyapus play an even more significant role during the funeral of a higher caste Newar; the Jyapu provide the music known as *kaha(n)* at the funeral procession (Nepali 1965, 181). Requiring such ritualistic duties from the Jyapu (and also from other lower castes) have helped to keep them at their cultural station. However, as Shrestha (1996) has pointed out, the 1964 legal code of Nepal declared that all castes are to be equal before the law. Since then the Newars have lost many of their traditional distinctions. Many of the lower castes whose duties are still very important at certain domestic and social events are now unwilling to perform these tasks, especially in growing metropolitan areas like Katmandu. At the same time, many of the Newar customs are changing; the traditional music at the funeral of upper caste Newars, for instance, has largely disappeared.

Gellner and Pradhan (1995) observe that Maharjans are now emerging from "the shadow of high caste patronage, and from the economic dependence which went with it," thereby causing "the imminent breakdown of the traditional agrarian order" (180). Many

Maharjans support Communist candidates for public office and young Maharjans no longer timidly accept the authority of the higher castes. Most Maharjans now acquire at least a primary education and older Maharjans desire better education for their children. The increasing employment of Maharjans as drivers, clerks, shopkeepers, and lower level administrators has now motivated younger Maharjans to remove and to avoid all caste markers, hence the disappearance of *bhai*, *raja*, *kazi*, *narayan*, *babu*, *maiya*, *nani*, *chhori*, *sobha*, and others as names or parts of names. As illustrations of the changes which have taken place, my data show six men of the 20-40 age group working as drivers at various government or private companies, and 14 having low-level governmental service positions. Those in the older group could not have hoped to hold such jobs.

While the caste system helps to perpetuate Newari traditions and culture, it is also a divisive force since it clearly underscores the social hierarchy among the castes. From the lowest caste, the untouchables, to the highest caste, Brahmins, all are identified as Newars. An effective way to dismantle this hierarchy is to take on the names of the higher castes or those of other ethnic groups, or to adopt new names entirely.²³ There are numerous examples where members of the Jyapu caste, as a result of education and financial success, have adopted the surname *Shrestha*, formerly found only among members of upper Newars castes (Rosser 1966; Nepali 1965). Because of these adoptions, the Shrestha surname is often viewed suspiciously by upper caste Newars. Such naming practices are increasing among the younger group of Maharjans whom I interviewed, not so much with surnames but in the increasing use of given names which were once found only among other, higher, castes.

The data reported show an abundance of kin terms, such as *chhori*, *nani*, *macha*, and *babu*, used as personal names among members of the older group, fewer in the middle group and none among the younger group. The Maharjan has been a relatively close society, with members living in family units in adjacent bahals. Until the early 1980s, the Maharjan worked primarily as farmers or wage earners with the younger family members helping their parents in the fields and with chores around the house. Since there was very little interaction between the

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Maharjan and members of other communities, public identity was of little importance; for each person status was found within the family and in the immediate neighborhood.

In 1951, the oligarchy of the Rana family, which had ruled Nepal since 1846, came to an end and the valley of Katmandu was open for the first time to people from other parts of Nepal and to foreigners as well. Many schools and colleges were opened, offering new educational opportunities (although mainly for the higher castes). Late in the 1980s the political, social, and economic situations began to change and after the political revolution which ushered in a democratic government in Nepal in 1990, the conditions changed greatly for everyone, including those of the lower castes. People from outside began to migrate to Katmandu and those with money began to buy land and build houses. Many Indian businessmen have and are continuing to settle in the Katmandu valley, and especially in the city of Katmandu. Malla (1992) expresses concern that these immigrants will soon outnumber and displace the Newars in their homeland (24). Land prices in the late 1980s and early 1990s rose so quickly and went so high that many people, including—and perhaps especially—Newars who owned land in Katmandu, began to sell and move to the outskirts, where they could still buy large parcels of property and build spacious houses. And so did many of the Maharjans whom I interviewed; by selling arable land at high prices, they were able to renovate their old houses or build new concrete ones, thereby improving their living standards. Their children now go to good schools and they can afford modern luxuries such as television sets and nicer home furnishings, which are the modern status symbols of Nepal.

The influence of television on the younger generation cannot be overestimated. Western popular culture and Indian movies and television programs in particular have all made deep impressions on names and naming. In the past, religious names, such as those found in the two older groups, were common and they were given in the hope of transferring to the named the impressive characteristics of the namesake, protecting the bearers from evil spirits or bringing happiness, good luck, and prosperity to their families. But now the associations of movie actors and actresses, and famous fashion models, are sought. *Manisha*,

the name of the famous Indian actress whose parents are Nepali, is a prime example.

Easy access to the larger society through schooling, media and the like has made members of the younger generation aware of their identities not only in their own but other communities as well. Younger Maharjans now realize that the uniqueness of their traditional names have identified them as Jyapus, and I was told on many occasions that these traditional names had become embarrassing. Young parents whom I interviewed were at first hesitant to discuss honestly why they would not use *babu*, *kazi*, or *narayan* in their children's names. They would simply say that such words would make a name unnecessarily long or difficult to pronounce. Although they would not say directly that these names identified them as Jyapus, they did admit the difficulty their children would have in school if they had such names. Their fears are understandable since a Jyapu name can easily evoke a stereotype of "a mud-bespattered fieldworker, poor, rough in manner and speech, illiterate, ... a peasant and a worker" (Rosser 1966, 92), a stereotype that was true generations ago and is, unfortunately, still largely true today. Two of my older interviewees, each in their seventies, one woman and one man, clearly saw the reasons why children were no longer being given traditional names. Both of them said that traditional names expressed the Jyapu identity, and no one wanted to be a Jyapu any more.

Two college women in their early twenties expressed their negative attitudes towards traditional names by changing their names. One shortened her name and the other discarded her old name and adopted a new name. The first feels that she has influenced the naming of newborns in her neighborhood; her favorite names are *Smriti*, *Shraddha*, *Mini*, and *Nikil*. When asked why she liked those names, she simply said that she had heard them, especially on television and in movies. She thinks traditional names are "ugly." The second woman, who changed her name from *Dhanamayaju* to *Gita*, did so because she thought her original name was too long and too different from those of friends who had more modern names. When asked why she chose that name, she said it was the name of an actress in one of the Indian movies she liked so much.

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The names which are current among the younger generation of Maharjans do not reveal their caste or their ethnic associations. (Their surnames do show their caste status, but since surnames are not used in address, caste membership is not always apparent.) The personal names now commonly used are the ones also frequent among other, higher castes. When one of my friends wanted to name her daughter *Manisha* several years ago, family members asked her not to because *Manisha* had become so common that even Jyapu children were given that name. Because of such naming practices, the burden is now upon those who are members of the upper castes to seek to preserve their identity and their status through names. It appears that the higher Newar castes have begun to take names for their children from Nepal Bhasa, their native language, after borrowing names from Nepali, the national language, as well as from foreign sources. Names such as *Itaha* 'sacred thread' have been reported, representing a Newar strategy to set some castes apart from other castes whom they feel have encroached upon their territory by adopting their names.²⁴

Conclusion

This study has dealt with only a small segment of a single society, the Newar community of Katmandu; even so, it shows that names and the changes they have been undergoing and continue to undergo reflect various facets of language, society, and culture. Names as universal markers of identity undergo change as communities change with the introduction of new ideas and increased aspirations and desires motivated, in this case, primarily by westernization and increasing democratization of community and country.

Notes

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1. In the fall of 1995, the government of Nepal officially changed the name of the language *Newari* to *Nepal Bhasa*, the name native speakers had long been

demanding. However, the name *Newari* is still often used when referring to the language of the Newars. For discussion of this issue, see Shakya (1997).

2. Nepali (1965) spells *Jyapu* as *Jyapoo* and considers it to be derived from *Jya* 'work' and *poo*, a kind of paddy, particularly a *tauli* paddy (67).

3. In Newar caste organization, cooked rice and water play crucial roles in defining further caste distinctions; for example, unclean and untouchable castes are those from whose hands not even water is accepted, let alone cooked rice, by higher castes. A member of a higher caste can get water from a river, no matter how dirty it is, for religious purposes, but when it is touched by someone belonging to either the unclean or the untouchable caste, the water becomes impure and thus cannot be used. By extension, unclean and untouchable caste members are not allowed to enter the houses of higher caste members, thus prohibiting all interactions between them. The unclean or untouchable castes live on the outskirts of a town. *Jyapus* are allowed to enter the houses but not the family kitchens of higher caste members since water can be accepted from their hands but not cooked rice. For further discussion of this topic, see Nepali (1965).

4. *Gubhajus* are the priests for Newars who are Buddhists; most *Jyapus*, including the Maharjans in this study, are Buddhists although they revere Hindu gods and goddesses as well. However, the majority of Newars are Hindus, whose priests are the Deo Brahmins.

5. I was born into the Shrestha caste with the surname Malla; my surname was changed to Shrestha by marriage.

6. I have glossed each name or name formative the first time it appears; when it appears subsequently, in the same form or as part of another name, it is not usually glossed. Thus *Chandraman* is glossed but *Chandramaya* is not.

7. The name *Narayan*, which is also one of the deity names, is productively used as the second element in a number of male personal names. When addressing a man, his full name is used; for example, *Indranarayan*. *Krishna* is also attached to a number of names, both male and female.

8. *Babu* means 'baby boy' and is borrowed from Nepali. This name is frequently applied to younger siblings and is a common term of endearment used by Nepali speakers for young boys.

9. *Macha*, literally 'a child', is used for younger siblings.

10. *Sanu* is derived from Nepali, and means 'little'; it is used for the youngest child in the family.

11. The word *mai* means 'a woman' and is here used along with the diminutive marker *-cha*.

12. Like *babu*, *nani*, borrowed from Nepali, is used as a term of endearment. This name is frequently applied to females who are the only daughters in the family.

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13. *Kalu* is derived from Nepali *kalo* 'black'; it is often used as a derogatoryly.

14. *Khencha*, meaning 'Parbatiya' is considered offensive because it refers to someone who is "hill-born" and therefore rude and uncivilized, unlike someone who is "Valley-born," i.e., born in the Katmandu Valley, the center of government, education, and commerce.

15. *Hera* is used by most Newars as a term of endearment for children.

16. One of the Pandava brothers in the Mahabharata.

17. A name of Lord Gautam Buddha.

18. A name of Lord Krishna.

19. Another name of Durga, goddess of destruction.

20. Wife of Lord Shiva.

21. Although there are few references giving the ethnic origins or associations available, I am sure of the names given here because of personal knowledge and also because they can be easily checked in telephone directories where they are given with their respective surnames which are, as mentioned above, associated with particular castes.

22. Among these new names there is also a tendency to choose names that rhyme with the names of other siblings. One set of brothers is named *Prashant*, *Nishant*, and *Soshant*; a set of sisters is named *Binita*, *Sunita*, and *Minita*. Names of younger children, especially those under eight, are apt to be foreign, such as *Samin*, *Mayushma*, *Smriti*, *Pooja*, *Binita*, *Kripa*, *Rosy*, *Mini*, *Shradhha*, *Manish* and *Manisha*.

23. This has also been shown to be true of many Hindu communities in India which are characterized by the caste system (Mehrotra 1994).

24. A parallel case is reported by Mistry (1994) where, in Gujarati, those lower in the social hierarchy have adopted Sanskrit names, the traditional names of the upper classes, forcing those in the upper classes to create new names from foreign as well as native sources.

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