

Personal Names in Jaffna Tamil Society: a sociolinguistic perspective

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It is clear that the primary function of personal names in modern society is the identification of individuals. As the value and significance of names differ from society to society, the variation in the naming custom can be noted. Personal names are very significant in Jaffna Tamil society. Each generation has different types of names. The society is very conscious of the pattern of names. Thus, names are symbolic and have translational meaning. This study investigates the characteristics of the naming system found in the language which has its own culture and traditions. For instance, in considering the races – whites or blacks; the different communities within a country – Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims etc., in Sri Lanka, the rise of the personal names has its connection with place and culture. This raises many questions about personal names in our minds. The naming process involves the meaning and the association of that name. This is why Levi-Strauss (Barnes: 1982) argues that in naming, someone is always signified, either the namer or the named. So the role of name can give significance (or signification) to the namer or the named. It is remarkable that Jaffna people are too biased towards naming. It is mainly that name could play a role in revealing one's caste, religion, region and ancestry of Jaffna society.

For example,

tarmaraasaa a person of charitable nature
kuNarattinam a person with good qualities

Contributing to this paper, as a Dravidian family of Tamil language has number of attributes of personal names, particularly in Jaffna Tamil society is taken into account (A Tamil speaking Dravidian family is take into account in this paper). In this paper, the methodology followed includes qualitative and comparative analysis. A sociolinguistic point of view has been adopted for the analysis. This research may thus be considered to emphasize and describe a number of characteristics of the naming system, that may be of interest to scholars of Dravidian languages. It seems that there is a great need for re-thinking in this aspect.

Key words

Personal names, society, culture, traditions, Dravidian, attributes, re-think