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Personal Names and Politics – A Case Study of Tamil

L. Ramamoorthy, Ph.D.

1. Introduction

On every occasion thousands of people eagerly wait to hear the speech of their leader in party meetings organized by Dravida Munerrak Kazhagam, DMK. The crowd maintains absolute silence when the leader M. Karunanidhi starts addressing the party cadres by name. When he utters the phrase `en uyirinum meelaana anbu uTanpirappukkale!’ “You, my loving brothers and sisters, who are more valuable than my life” there is great roaring applause with passionate enthusiasm. In fact, the crowd has been waiting for that utterance from the mouth of their leader. In response to the address from the leader, they shout ‘kalaingar! Tamilinakkaavalar! vazhka’ (Hail Kalaingar, the protector of the Tamil race).

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This enthusiastic response from the followers of various political parties (with different words and phrases of greeting to greet their leaders) is and was seen and heard in Tamilnadu for M.G. Ramachandran and Ms. Jayalalitha and others. These leaders' beginning sentences addressed to their cadres greatly enthuse them and everyone around is affected with passion and love for their dear leaders.

Each leader has his or her own phrases to address the general public and their party cadres. Invariably, the phrases refer to kinship relationships between the leaders and their followers – brother, sister, elders in the family, etc. For an outsider, these may look strange and they may wonder as to why they use kinship terms in the political meetings which are formal gatherings. Why does the crowd hail the leader with some titles instead of their names? What is the role of this title in political domain? Why do they not use personal names? What is the politics of naming?

In this context this paper tries to explain those aspects with a brief introduction about the language of politics.

2. Language of Politics

Politics is connected to power. The political power is associated with the power to make decisions, to control and distribute resources, to control other people's behavior and often to control their own values. The acquisition of power and the enforcement of one's own political beliefs can be achieved in a number of ways. (Thomas Linde 1999). Political discourse is one among them. Political discourse is a type of register with special lexical items and syntactic features. Annamalai (1999: 7) states that the special property of the political discourse is the use of formal or ordinary language with the meanings of implicit or explicit ideological import and the communicative strategies of persuasion through an unconscious or conscious process. The communicative strategies employed in this language are to make an emotive behavioral and cognitive influence on the receiver to bring him or her to the point of view of the sender of the message.

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The political discourse of Tamil politicians, especially the politicians belonging to the Dravidian parties, is famous for its flavor of style and hyperbolic in content. The leaders of the Dravidian movement created a new trend in the political discourse. It is a well-known fact that the Dravidian parties captured power by focusing on the social inequalities and opposition to the imposition of Hindi through their trend-setting political discourses. They took Tamil language as a tool to achieve their political agenda. They established themselves as the saviors of Tamil language and Tamils. Their use of language was totally different from the expected rules of political communications. Emotional appeal, a vocal declaration of love towards language and culture plus a rhetorical oratory were their planks to fight against their adversaries.

The use of language by Dravidian politicians was totally opposite to the rules generally proposed for clear, effective communication in politics . They use lot of metaphors, similes, longer and circuitous expressions with passive construction. It is very common for a person who wishes to assert his authority and superiority to use long words to impress, to intimidate or to mystify and confuse the audience. Similarly, the uses of passive construction often sound more formal and more twisting and prove to be very difficult to understand. In spite of all these seemingly disadvantageous features, they embraced the ornamental and complex style, and succeeded in establishing close contact with the public.

The reason for the success of this style was that they used Tamil politically as a symbol. They created lots of images about Tamil language, and through the use of this language an intense political intent. The very phraseology they used was of cultural heritage and linguistic purity. They changed their Sanskritised proper names into those of pure and classical style. Thus the Dravidian parties not only created new trends in political discourse but also in the address and reference system of place names and proper names.

3. Names and Status

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Before attempting to explain the address / reference system in Tamilnadu politics, relationship between names and their status shall be seen, since status is always associated with power. Names are merely linguistic categories used to identify the individuals in a society as any other linguistic category. Personal names provide information about the sociocultural and religious background of the individual and also the belief system of the society he or she lives. Naming pattern also changes from society to society. The Tamil names do not have first name, surname or last name. The first letter of the father's name is taken as the initial of the personal name.

Apart from this, any suffixes and/or prefixes added to the name give status to the person. Prefixes attached to the personal names indicate his status in the society. Two types of status can be categorized using a name. They are 1. Ascribed status, and 2. Achieved status. The ascribed status is the status handed down to the person by virtue of his birth in a particular caste group. Caste name was attached to the personal names of males in the past. These indicated the caste of the individual and the assumed social status of the individual was revealed. This practice was given up around the 1920s and 1930s and people started using only their initials (which stood for the first letter of their fathers). This has become the most common practice now.

There are also some suffixes which indicate higher status when attached to the names. The suffix -a:r for male and amma for female indicate that the person has got some social recognition and honor. The suffix - a:r is a typical honorific added to a large number of personal names in Tamil right from the Cankam Age.

(eg) Siva lingam – Siva lingamar

Saraswathy - Saraswathy ammal

The second type of status is gained by one's own talent in a particular field, through their achievements. This status shall be called as achieved status. The examples for achieved status are the academic titles like pulavar, vidwan, munivar which traditionally indicate academic and/or religious achievements. Other titles like paavalalar, naavalalar indicate one's talents. These achieved titles are normally added before the names.

When a person achieves some status in the society, the place where he belongs to is also added along with his name.

Example:

Madurai Somu

Cikkal Shanmugam

Pammal Sambandam

The italicized words all indicate the place to which the person belongs.

Most of the personalities belonging to the field of music normally have their place names before their personal names. This is added to distinguish him from other persons who possess similar personal name, even as these indicate great status and achievement in the field. In due course, the place names alone would become sufficient to refer to these artistes. The musician or the scholar comes to be known simply by the place name. The suffix – aar is added to the place name to denote the person. Example:

Vaalaippaadiyar,

Thindivantthaar, etc.

An interesting situation in Tamilnadu is that the place names and titles are used to address or refer to a person instead of personal names, and this is considered to be proper form of address and reference.

Thus, it is worth analyzing the use of the titles instead of personal names. Why do the place names indicate power positions, and why do the public address the people using their titles or place names, and not their given personal names? In order to understand this, the relationship between the person who addresses and the addressee is to be analyzed.

4. Address Terms and Power

Addressing is a type of speech act one performs to attract the attention of the other individual. The personal names need not be used for addressing purpose. Addressing

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system also varies from society to society. In a society, where a person has first name and surname, he may be addressed by either first name or personal name. Where there is no first name, then he can be addressed by some other names. The study of address system is as significant as the naming system.

A variety of social factors comes into the scene when a speaker starts addressing a hearer. Normally a person may be addressed by a personal name, title, nick name, first name, last name, simplified name, or some other pet names. Addressing shows the relationship that exists between the speaker and hearer and also it varies on situations such as formal versus informal, politeness versus rude, familiarity and non-familiarity. Apart from this, the status such as age, sex, economic condition, caste, etc., play a role.

In addressing others, the choice of personal name in Tamil indicates familiarity and status. Use of personal names for addressing higher level people is impolite and hence people add the suffix –ayya (sir) with the personal name to address or refer to them. The higher status is associated with power. So, intimate relationship is mostly avoided in the power domain. Addresses using titles like Professor, Doctor, etc., of the person also indicate less intimate but formal relationship. In other words, in the situation where power operates (power may be due to age, economic condition, sex, and other types of status), it is always formal and devoid of personal content.

Intimacy can be expressed by the use of first name, nick name and simplified names or pet names. The usage of pet names or nick names for addressing shows greater intimacy. Reciprocal use of personal names indicates familiarity, equal status, and lesser formality.

In society where status is ascribed one, non-reciprocal use of names and other type of graded address terms are found to be used depending upon the social structures .

5. Addressing in Political Domain

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As mentioned earlier, the political domain is heavily loaded with power. In the power domain normally we can expect formal and non-intimate forms of addressing. The addressing system in politics is different and peculiar. Even though it is a power system, we find the use of pet-names, place names, nick name and even kinship terms for addressing the persons of different status.

The address system in Tamil Political domain can be explained from two perspectives. They are 1) The address by the leaders. 2) The address by the party people.

I Address by the Leaders

The formal political meetings are arranged in a systematic way. The politicians are invited to address a meeting in a graded manner. The prime speaker normally speaks at the end. All types of formalities and grades that characterize the power domain are strictly followed. In the case of addressing system also, it is expected that the ranks of the party workers and public are to be addressed in a formal way. But the actual situation is contrary to the expectation. Each party leader, especially the former chief ministers, has exclusive use of addressing phrases to address the public. Others are not expected to use such phrases.

DMK leader M. Karunanidhi

- a) Enatarumai utanpirappukale (My beloved brothers and sisters born in the same family as I was)
- b) Kalakak kanmanikale (Endearing gems of our party)

AIADMK Leader M.G. Ramachandran
Former chief minister

“en rattattin rattangale”

“The blood of my own blood” (a rare phrase that defies rational or biological analysis), yet it invoked passion and devotion.

Ms. Jeyalalitha, the present chief minister.

“en idaya deivam puratcit talaivarin rattattin rattangale”

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“The blood of the blood of my mentor-god in my heart, revolutionary leader (MGR)”

The other politicians normally address the public as “Periyoorkale, taiymairkale”, “thozharkale”, etc., ladies and gentleman and comrades, kalakat tozharkale “fellow party workers”. But the former chief ministers address the party workers as people born with him in the same family, or his own blood, to show their affection.

Even though love and affection are not expected in the power domain, the power in politics is achieved by hard work of the party cadres. They form the basis of power. In the democratic setup, the popularity of the politician depends on how much he mingles with people and party workers. The leader makes the party workers feel that they are part and parcel of him. To express the oneness, they use these phrases.

These types of usages have their roots in the very foundation of the society. The Indian society, unlike the western societies, considers the family and blood relations most important ones for support and adoration. The party leaders consider the party as their family and the party workers as their family members. This is the highest status one can accord to a person he loves. This familial love served as a link between one and another and created harmonies homogeneity among the party cadres. The party workers also consider their leader as their family member and address him as ‘anna’ ‘elder brother’. This is not used for all but the leader they love the most. Use of kinship terms to address the leader can be further elaborated by taking usages like taatta, ‘grandfather’ ma:ma ‘uncle’, annai ‘mother’ tambi ‘younger brother’ in the political domain. The great leaders like Gandhi, Nehru, Indira Gandhi are introduced to the children using the kinship terms like ta:tta, ma:ma, and annai. The leaders who are loved by the people are given the status of family members. Keeping these sentiments in mind, the leaders address the people and party workers using the chosen ‘kinship terms’.

II Address by the Party People

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The address/references of the party workers attested in Tamil system are many and varied. Some people address their leaders using kinship terms.

Amma ‘mother’ to refer to Jeyalalitha

Annai ‘mother’ to refer to Sonia Gandhi

Doctor ‘Ayya’ ‘father’ to refer to Mr. Ramadoss of a political outfit

Some people use titles to refer to their leader

‘Kalaingar’	Karunanidhi
puratchi talaivar	MGR
puratchi talaivi	Jeyalalitha
na:valar	Nedunichelian

Some leaders are addressed by the place name with –a:r suffix

va:laippa:diyar	‘Ramamoorthy’
Panruttiyar	‘Ramachandran’
Kaatu vettiyar	‘Guru’

The very famous system of address is the simplified or abbreviated form of their personal name.

MGR	-	M.G.Ramachandran
Vaiko	-	vai.Gopalsamy
NTR	-	N.T.Rama Rao

There are also certain metaphors with a divine and spiritual flavour used to refer to their leaders as noted below.

Idaya teivam	-	‘God in the heart’
Kaaviri taaye	-	‘mother goddess Kaveri’
Tamil kaavalare	-	‘protector of Tamil’

The status of power increases with the equation of the leader to an elevated status. In the political domain, the leaders are powerful and are equated with god/gods. The party workers consider themselves as disciples. Similarly the titles also reflect the power status. There are certain institutional power titles like talaivar, ‘president’, ceyalaalar ‘secretary’ porulaalar ‘treasurer’, etc. These titles are equal to the titles of achieved status such as doctor and professor in the society. If these titles are used for addressing, then the situation

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is very formal and we can assume a power difference operating in that context. But the use of kinship terms, short names and place names for addressing is a peculiar form in the power domain.

6. Power, Formality and Intimacy

In order to explain this, we have to distinguish the titles from each other and the reason for using these titles by the people. The titles may be classified into two types such as 1) the institutional titles 2) non-institutional titles. The institutional titles are the titles explained in the previous section which include President, Secretary, etc. The non-institutional titles are the titles given by some great personalities, or by common people out of affection and appreciation of the work of the leaders. These non-institutional titles not only give status to the holders but also help the public/party workers to move close with the leaders.

As referred to earlier, if the lower cadre politician addresses his leader by name, then it will be very impolite. The same politician addresses the leader by using institutional titles then it becomes very formal and so the non-institutional titles are used by the lower level politician to please the leader in a polite way. In the situations where intimacy is not permitted, these titles function as the markers which give power as well intimacy in the formal situations.

7.1 Politics in Naming

The role of politics in naming is also an important process in personal names. By taking politics as a power domain, we have explained the status of names and the use of names for attaining certain personal ends. But in the case of politics in naming, we can discuss certain ideologies with reference to naming practice. There are three important political ideologies that need to be mentioned in the naming practice. They are

- 1) Politics of purism
- 2) Gender politics and
- 3) Politics of social justice

7.2 Politics of Purism

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Religion is the fundamental factor in the naming practice of Tamil society. In the name of religion, Sanskrit language penetrated and pervaded in every aspect of the life of the Tamils. Naming is not an exception. Domination of Sanskrit was such that it questions the very identity and independent nature of Tamil. Even now, one can see the impact of Sanskrit in naming. People, in the name of fancy, try to select simple, attractive Sanskrit names for their children, for example: Sujitha, Rasmitha, Parjanya, etc. A movement was initiated by a group of scholars at the beginning of the 20th century to oppose the domination of Sanskrit. Even though the ideology of pure Tamil movement was against the domination of Sanskrit, it had a covert ideology of restructuring the power pattern of the society. Due to this covert ideology, the pure Tamil movement received the political patronage of Dravidian parties. The movement was used by them as a spring board to highlight the ancient origin of Tamil and this elevated the culture of the Tamils.

The fore-runners of the movement even changed their personal names to pure Tamil names. They almost replaced all Sanskrit place names, and personal names by the chaste Tamil names.

Vedachalam	=	Maraimalai Adigal
Maatrubuudan	=	Taayumanavan.
Suriyanarayana sastry	=	Pariti maa kalainar

Tamil consciousness in the richness and independent nature of Tamil language was propagated by the purists. People, out of love for Tamil language, named their children and next of kin with the names of literary personalities and characters.

(Tamil selvan	Ilango
	Tamilmani	valluvan
	Sentamil ko	Kambanatan

There has been a practice of the party workers, rather a fashion if not a ceremony, to request their political leader to name their children. The leaders of the Dravidian parties select pure Tamil names in order to show their affinity towards Tamil. Since protection and

promotion of Tamil is a predominant aim in their political agenda, they name the children of their rank and file of their party in pure Tamil.

The purists also advise the parents to select pure Tamil names for the children. They even put up boards containing pure Tamil names in the streets for their business establishments. Lots of secular Tamil names, old Tamil king's names, (Kuricil) came into practice due to a Tamil consciousness.

7.3. Names and Gender Politics

Social inequalities always create power difference. In the case of gender also male domination could be noticed in the naming and address system. Women are considered as weaker and dependent. The assumed physical nature and the unfair cultural practices made them inferior to males and an object of conjugal felicity and enjoyment. The same is also reflected in the naming practice.

The differences such as non-availability of words and non-reciprocal use of address terms reveal the power difference. There are certain honorific prefixes for male and female equal to mister. From the usage of these suffixes for male, we cannot differentiate whether a person is married or not. But the prefix *Tirumati* differentiates married women from unmarried women. There is also a practice of taking husband's name with the personal name of female after marriage. Marriage is made an important cultural event for women. Adding the husband name with the personal name indicates her dependence and male domination. The women's identity is revealed through male's names.

The naming system sometime reflects the gender politics. So long as the girls are named after god or nature, there is no problem in the power status. But names are given on the basis of their face, eyes, speech, etc., and these indicate gender politics. There are certain names like poonkodi, Teenmoli, Malarvili, etc., describe the nature of body parts. There are no such names for male using body parts. These names indicate they are considered by men as an object of enjoyment.

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In the addressing system, women are forbidden to use the name of their husband for addressing, whereas husband can use wife's name. In some societies, even uttering the husband's name is a taboo. This type of differential use of language shows the gender difference. But nowadays, these practices are changing due to the modernization of the society.

7.4. Politics of Social Justice

The ascribed status created social inequalities. In the naming practice also one can notice this difference in the traditional societies. The so-called high caste people generally tend to use the names of major deities, whereas the socially suppressed people use the names of minor deities. The names Sudalai, Karuppan, Muniyan, etc., are some of the names used by the so-called lower caste people. In some cases, names of the latter category may be used in non-Brahmin castes without reference to social hierarchy. Even though the people belonging to different castes in a village may worship village deities and name their children after them, people still keep separate identity by some means. For example, Muniyan is the small deity of a village; people use the name differently to show their caste hierarchy. A person from a suppressed caste may use the name as Muniyan. The suffixes ending -an are relatively less honorific than the other suffixes. The people belonging to the other castes take the name with the suffix 'samy'. i.e Muniyasamy. People sometimes use caste names to show their caste identity and their status. Hence we find names like Muniyasamy Thevar, Karuppanna Chettiyar, etc. Here the use of the caste name gives their identity. The people of suppressed caste do not use their caste name.

In the address system also, even a boy belonging to a so-called high caste could use the name of the older man of a so-called low caste to address that person. The so-called lower caste people addressed the others as 'samy'. But, happily now-a-days, the trends are fast changing, providing opportunity for all to exchange mutual respect. There has been an awakening among the suppressed classes. Due to this awakening, they are proud of their own identities. Hence the people belonging to so-called lower castes also use the caste

names to show their identity like any other people. Pallar, Parayar, Parayanar, are Pakadai are some of the titles now added to the personal names.

8. Conclusion

The process of social change brings change in every aspect of life. Because of the power of non-native and alien languages and cultures, many indigenous practices among the Tamils are nowadays vanishing. Naming practice is also subjected to such processes. Even though English hegemony is felt in all aspects of life, Indian Hindu people do not yet take English or European names. Even as most Tamil Christians tend to adopt the names from the Bible, they also show a tendency to use British or European names. There is also a tendency among the Hindus in urban parts of India (but mostly among those settled in western nations) to make their Hindu names sound like western names. Fancy Sanskrit names are being selected now-a-days without any caste difference. The popularity of Pure Tamil names has begun to wane.

The use of names in the political domain is more of a personal nature and politics in naming is of an ideological one. The use of pet names, titles, and simplified names, etc., in the political domain indicates the intimacy and familiarity intertwined in the formal and power domains.

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L. Ramamoorthy, Ph.D.
Central Institute of Indian Languages
Ministry of Education
Government of India

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Mysore 570006
Karnataka
India
ramamoorthyil@gmail.com

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