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## **Naming, nation, and negotiations: Kodavas and their ‘illegible’ identities**

Sowmya Dechamma C. C.\*

*Centre for Comparative Literature, University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad, India*

This paper draws from the idea that acts of naming have constantly changed and that practices of naming need to be located in a larger network of practices and histories that to various extent determine a community’s changing notions of identity. I explore these changing notions of identity as performed through acts of naming among the Kodavas, an ethno-linguistic minority group from the Kodagu district, Karnataka State, India. My objective in this paper is to look at naming from three perspectives, constantly interacting with each other. I study naming from three different temporal locations, as informed by various factors. Firstly, what one might tenuously call as conventional naming practices among the Kodavas. Secondly, how these practices were affected by acts of legibility brought in through colonial intervention and thirdly, the gradual but perceptible shifts in contemporary naming practices that negotiate between legibility of a modern nation, legibility of a majoritarian Hindu practice and of a desired Kodava identity. My analysis points to fluidity of practices that can be termed ‘illegible’ to dominant practices thereby asserting identity in creative ways. Illegibility, I argue, makes identities unstable, less knowable and thereby not easy to contain.

**Keywords:** kodava; names/naming; identity; legible; nation

The incapacity to name is a good symptom of disturbance  
Roland Barthes

### **Introduction**

How do we understand the practices of naming among various communities in India? Despite efforts toward certain kinds of normativity from times colonial to the independent nation-state, the diverse practices of naming have been unwilling to conform to the legible norms of a modern nation. These practices rather depend on region, locality and more importantly religion, caste groups and other forms of community belonging. Especially because naming is an act that implies identity, and since contemporary politics in India is fraught with the politics of identity, analyzing the practices of naming among various communities, particularly minority communities, has the potential to help us to understand norms or the lack thereof, to understand moves toward assimilation or rejection of normative practices, or simply put, to analyze relationships between various communities and related implication for the idea of the nation state.

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\*Email: [sowmyadechamma@uohyd.ac.in](mailto:sowmyadechamma@uohyd.ac.in)

As is evident, names – surnames, family names, clan names and given names – play a very important role not only in the act of identifying an individual, but also in determining identities which imply cultural and historical affiliations to a community or group, thereby contesting/affirming/negotiating with ideologies that are current. Names symbolize, they mark both the individual and a larger intended group to which the name belongs. Naming practices throughout the world have never been constant. As Hansen points out, ‘The efficacy of a name, and thus an identity, in terms of the fixing or accruing of meaning and connotations, depends, [ ... ] on its constant performance’ (2001, 3). This performance of naming relates to concerns of identity that are never stable. Multiple ideologies/histories at play, varied interpretations for a particular name, changes in naming trends and fluid practices within communities constantly make meaning unfixable, performable. By looking at practices of naming as belonging to two extremes – “establishing an individual through naming as a member of a pre-ordained class or at the other extreme, name as a free creation on the part of the individual who gives the name ... (1962, 181)”, the Levi Straussian idea isolated the individual and community from relationships to other communities and histories. In the modern nation, naming practices on the other hand, are understood as process of legibility to which various groups have responded creatively (Scott et. al. 2002), and as acts of performance (Hansen 2001). This paper is based on the idea that acts of naming have constantly changed, and that naming is a social construct located in a larger network of practices and histories that reflect a community’s changing notions of identity.

I explore these changing notions of identity via practices of naming among the Kodavas, an ethno-linguistic minority group from the Kodagu district, Karnataka State, India. My objective in this paper is to look at naming from two different temporal locations – firstly naming practices were affected by acts of legibility brought in through colonial intervention, and secondly, the gradual but perceptible shifts in contemporary naming practices that negotiate between the legibility of a modern nation, the norms of a majoritarian Hindu practice, and of a desired Kodava identity. These negotiations are complicated by the fact that the norms of majoritarian Hindu practice do not play out in a linear fashion across communities divided by caste, region, community, religion, and various other factors. Strategies of assimilation into dominant religious discourses include the reinforcement of caste order through ritualistic practices, and disciplines of food, dress, language, and other day-to-day livelihood practices. To name in a fashion that is understood as Hindu, based on names that are Sanskrit in origin and communities’ negotiations with such assimilative tendencies is what interests me in this paper, especially in the context of Kodavas.

How do we understand legibility? When and how does a community, an ethno-linguistic minority become legible, knowable to the dominant – be it the colonizer or the immediate, dominant Hindu? What are the ways in which making meaning of the ‘other’ inform control, direct or indirect? Are processes of intelligibility usually one-sided, from the vantage point of power? Do communities negotiate processes that make them intelligible to the other, a kind of self-legibility? I argue that minority communities do not passively submit themselves to these normative processes but instead are creative, as is evident in practices of naming. By ‘illegible identities’ I mean identities that do not easily lend themselves to conformed meanings, to the standards of the modern nation-state, informed by the colonial and by the norms of the dominant religio-cultural systems. Illegibility makes identities unstable, less knowable and thereby not easy to contain.

This illegibility can also be understood through the now well-known concept ‘metis’, developed by James Scott in his *Seeing like a State*. Simply put, Metis ‘represents a

wide array of practical skills and acquired intelligence in responding to a constantly changing natural and human environment (1998, 313). Scott further elaborates as to how this change in practices and experiences is almost always local (317). This to me seems useful in understanding Kodava naming practices that have changed over years: it is a practical necessity to change names, but change nevertheless happens in a manner that is local, that requires an ‘imaginative translation’ (Scott 1998, 318) and a practical negotiation with the dominant discourse without submitting to it.

Considering the enormously diverse field of naming in India and the potential it holds in studying the politics of identity, studies on naming are rare. My understanding of naming and its relation to the modern nation-state is largely informed by and indebted to Scott, Tehranian, and Mathias (2002). Although my attempt is to extend their argument, Scott, Tehranian, and Mathias’s articulation of legibility and the way first colonialism and then the modern nation uses modes of legibility to ‘overlay and often supersede local practices’ (2002, 4) are crucial to read Kodava naming practices. Also crucial is their idea of how the growth and development of private property and thereby the burden of inheritance had/have implications for a legitimate male heir who bore a ‘proper name’ with an identifiable and equally legitimate surname. Taking off from this institutional and inherited nature of the legibility of names, my paper attempts to address how Kodava names have negotiated a contemporaneity imposed by a majoritarian Hindu discourse that attempts to normalize practices including naming.

My focus here is on the Kodava community that speaks the Kodava language in Kodagu.<sup>1</sup> Since Kodavas like many other ethno-linguistic minorities are oral in culture, so written records are hardly if not never available. What is available is in the form of songs, narratives, tales, and practices of day to day life. I have also made use of materials compiled by colonial ethnographers like Gover (1871) and Graeter (1870) via Kannada and English. I use names mentioned in these sources and in Nadikerianda Chinnappa’s *Pattole Palame* [Words on silk], a compilation of Kodava practices first published in 1924. Other than referring to names from folklore to access Kodava ‘ethnic’ names prior to the standardizing efforts of colonial times, I also use colonial and Indian ethnographical accounts of Kodavas and their names. From Rev. Moegling’s earliest ethnographical account in 1855 to M.N. Srinivas’s famous book on Coorg in 1949, names are referred to in many anthropological studies on Kodagu which indicate certain conventions of naming among the Kodavas. Colonial records, especially Public Instruction Records from 1875–1990 accessed from the British Library, gave me information regarding names of many students and also insights into the changing trend of names from an oral system of address to written documentation. The Land Registration Act dating from the Colonial period, that laid down rules as to the ways in which names had to be written down for registering property, also forms a major source of my study.

In order to discuss contemporary naming practices, I gathered names of school children from six schools located in Virajpet Taluk of Kodagu District. This *taluk* is numerically dominated by Kodavas, and most students were likely to be Kodavas. Some schools were able to provide data that had listed students by community. But in any case it is not difficult to identify a Kodava by name. Although class difference and naming does not figure in my analysis, it may be mentioned that these schools were not government run. They were privately funded and belonged to different class structures. Four schools were run by private Trusts held by people belonging to the Kodava Community. Two other schools were run by a Catholic convent. Since Kodavas rarely send their children to government schools, I did not include them in my study. In addition, five out of six schools provided the names of parents, and this greatly enhanced my understanding of changing

naming practices within a generation. One limitation however was that only three of five schools had recorded mothers' names. The remaining two had only fathers' names registered.

### Legibility of convention<sup>2</sup>

The people of Kodagu have traditionally been small-scale agriculturists with hunting and gathering as supplementary subsistence, until the arrival of coffee plantations with the British. Post-independence and until the liberalization of the Indian economy, Kodavas largely remained in Kodagu. It is only after the liberalization of the economy in the 1990s that Kodavas migrated in large numbers to Mysore and Bangalore, the cities closest to Kodagu. A cursory glance at the customs and rituals of most Kodava speaking peoples show that they are neither image worshippers nor include priestly Brahmins in any of their ceremonies,<sup>3</sup> and even today their festivals revolve around agricultural practices, none in the name of any Hindu god. Despite being outside the framework of Hindu-ness, the ruling powers, always outsiders, have found it convenient to label the Kodava as Hindu. Processes of naming indicate the same – that Kodava names, as suggested by Emeneau (1976), can be classified as belonging to a unique sub-system of Dravidian names, some having shared meanings with Tamil names.

Identification of a person happens at various levels – at the level of the individual, the clan, the village, the *nad* (a sub-division of the Kodagu region in pre-colonial times), and of the community at large. Conventionally, at least from the relatively well-documented times of the Haleri Kings from North Karnataka who ruled Kodagu between 1600 and 1834 (for a brief time in the late 1700s, Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan ruled Kodagu), the first level of identifying oneself has been through one's clan name – *okka peda/mane peda* in Kodava language, literally translated as clan/house name. Kodavas today are divided into around a 1000 clans (*okka*) and each clan has a specific name. Each clan can be traced to a particular village in Kodagu although there are some clans which are spread across two or three villages but share the same name, sometimes connected by ancestors, sometimes not.<sup>4</sup> The origin of clan names is highly debatable and there is no known history of how Kodavas came to acquire them.<sup>5</sup> Some root words of these clan names can be etymologically understood while most of them are not understandable and lack meaning in today's Kodava *thakk* (Kodava language).

Some clan names that can be interpreted are:

- Chekkera: clan of jackfruits;
- Nellamakkada: clan of good children;
- Ajjamada: clan of the grandfather;
- Ajjikuttira: clan of the grandmother.

However, the meanings of clan names such as Chotteyandamada, Chowrira, Chendira, Neravanda, and Bommanda<sup>6</sup> are beyond comprehension. Being a patrilineal community, Kodavas are given their father's clan name and the first question asked to a new person is '*neen/Ninga dada?*' (Literally – whose are you? Or to which clan do you belong?). The second level of identification could either be knowing (usually) the father's/husband's name and then one's given name. So one would usually identify oneself as Kambeyanda Ponnappa and Shanthi's daughter Muthamma. Also because the stock of given names among the Kodavas is relatively small – 'some sixty names for men and a slightly smaller number for women' (Emeneau 1976, 7) – it becomes imperative that a person is identified by her/his clan

name followed by the given name. It is also the practice that male given names are suffixed with -anna, -aiah (-ayya), and -appa, suffixes suggesting brother or father/elder. And female given names end with -avva, -amma (mother/elderly), -akka (sister). For example, Chennagappa, Bopanna, Somaiah and Chondamma, Ponnakka, Neelavva, and so on. This practice of suffixing the root with the above-mentioned suffixes, although prevalent among other communities in south India, is rarely or never in practice in contemporary times. How Kodavas have revived and used these names to negotiate an identity that separates them from other communities will be discussed later in the paper.

All Kodavas will identify Chotteyandamada Monnappa as a Kodava. This act of naming/identifying makes perfect sense to all Kodavas and to most other communities within Kodagu. But for communities outside Kodagu this may mean nothing, unless one 'knows' Kodavas. It is not easy to connect a person to his/her region/community just by name unless one is familiar with diverse forms of naming in different regions.

Legibility then acts itself out at various levels. For the immediate family and for most residents of the village, the informal levels of identification are legible and familiar. For 'outsiders', such informal means of identifying become illegible, unidentifiable. Legibility therefore forms a system of knowing whose boundaries are not exactly fixed, but are certainly limited. What is important here is to note that this act of knowing does not come with authority from above, but with the authority of being an insider. This authority of the insider's knowledge is accessible to all in the village, irrespective of the community one belongs to.<sup>7</sup> This points to how identification functions fluidly, how it is relative to the 'other' to whom one is giving account of oneself or another self. Ways of knowing depend on whether the outsider is a Kodava/non-Kodava from another village, or someone with some institutional authority, or even an ethnographer. Quite in line with Scott's analysis, these ways of naming and knowing are locally relevant: 'this local, practical index, which varied from place to place, that ensured that metis would be confusing, incoherent, and unassimilable for purposes of statecraft' (1998, 323). Tradition among Kodavas as amongst others is flexible, practical, and dynamic. As Scott argues, it is worth emphasizing the degree to which oral cultures (like the Kodavas), as opposed to written cultures, avoid the rigidity of orthodoxy. The reference to tradition is not textual and therefore there cannot be a fixed rule to be faithful. Metis then becomes a useful concept to understand how naming as a practical experience changes through performance.

Although Emeneau is tentative regarding Kannada influence on Kodava names,<sup>8</sup> he does attempt to locate the naming practices of South Asia (1978) as largely belonging to one pattern or network of connected patterns. His work largely documents the prevalent names among Kodavas and attempts to connect it to the Dravidian language-cultural pattern. Kushalappa's interpretations emerge from an anxiety to locate the Kodavas in a 'larger political history', a 'larger Hinduism' with which the community has had very tenuous relationships.<sup>9</sup> Both Emeneau's and Kushalappa's attempts to connect Kodava with Kannada, Malayalam, and Tamil display the ever present tentativeness in dealing with the culture of an ethno-linguistic minority that is unwieldy, and does not give in to easy interpretations. One way to legitimize, to have some control over a minority is through understanding, interpreting. This refuses to take into account the negotiations or other kinds of relationships language-cultures might have possibly shared, and also does not take into consideration what Chatterjee (1999) has called the 'heterogeneous time' – a time where different times do not just coexist, but coexist with contradictions. Here in this case, it can be seen as a time located in a shifting space between the conventional identification of individuals, and a time located in modern ways of documenting, knowing individuals, among other times. These are aspects that I will take up in the next two sections.

### Legibility of the colonizer

Although I largely deal with colonial law and practices in relation with acts of naming, I would like to note that the Haleri kings also introduced laws that formalized land holdings and categorized tenure systems between 1600 and 1834. The difference with the colonial law is that it clearly differentiated the individual as against the community or the clan. Informed by a modernity that perceived the ‘progress’ of the individual as an essential pre-requisite to the progress of the community and of a modern nation, colonial laws changed the way individuals identified with and related to the community.

Unlike the multi-layered and complex naming practices at the level of community, practices of the modern nation, as Scott, Tehranian, and Mathias note, require ‘a synoptic view, a standardized scheme of identification generating mutually exclusive and exhaustive designations’ (2002, 5). Through an exhaustive study of different societies of Europe and America, they argue that the standardization of naming practices was a feature of the making of the modern state. This process of state-making and state-naming could easily be called the conquest of illegibility. It was made possible through various modes of articulation – uniform property registers, the invention and imposition of meter, national censuses and currencies, and the development of uniform legal codes (2002, 6). Local knowledge and means of identification, however exotic, becomes illegible to the outsider-ruler, to the colonial order which required a knowable form of control. The unintelligibility of the local practices which varied according to caste, community and region across India was a huge barrier to effective rule for the colonizers. Therefore, regulation in practices of naming individuals (or places) that made sense, that translated the illegible to the legible and thereby controllable was a very desirable scheme.

Illegibility in the domain of naming has several significations. First, the individual did not carry a permanent surname; the surname did not denote occupation; was not standardized to indicate a male lineage; it did not indicate that one was heir to property of *his* father, it often did not indicate sex of the individual, ‘it was unsuited to the twin normative legal requirements of civilized life: property ownership and marriage by law’ (Scott, Tehranian, and Mathias 2002, 20). Among the Kodavas, property was not transferred from father to son but from an extended patrilineal joint family to the next generation of inheritors – all within the patrilineal clan. Most properties were small land holdings in the form of paddy fields usually subsistent in nature. Individual property holding was not allowed.

The land holding tenures were largely *Jamma* and *Saagu*, systems which are prevalent even today. Clans and joint families listed under these tenure had to perform compulsory duties called *hitti bitti chakri*<sup>10</sup> to the Haleri kings under whose rule these tenure systems were legalized. What the colonial takeover in 1834 did was to move legalize and legitimize individual land holdings (Srinivas 1952, 15–18). This led to individuals owning small pieces of land that changed the economy of production completely in Kodagu/Coorg (Vijaya 1991, 74–77). Naming of the individuals in a particular manner and individualization of property seems so inseparably connected that it might be worthwhile to connect this need of the nation-in-making to name individuals in particular ways so as to regularize, regulate, survey, identify through land registration acts, census, processes that bind the nation’s citizens serially, in the famous words of Anderson (1983). Seriality here does not involve a complete severance of the individual from the community but maintains a connection that fits a larger picture of the modern nation. It is in this context that the Land Registration Act of Coorg becomes relevant. This act not only laid down the rules for registration of land but also had a separate chapter on how to register names for the said purpose.

What did the Land Registration Act say on naming? Under the sub heading of Rules for Indexing Names referring to all regions within Mysore State and Kodagu (128–131), the

Act notes that there is no uniform system of naming; that practices of having a permanent surname varies from caste to caste, from region to region and works in a different way with Muslims and communities categorized as Hindus. The Act rules that there shall be no initials but only full names; in case a person is known by two names, both the names shall be recorded; the house name among the Telugus (which was possibly a village's name where the person did not presently reside) had to be recorded first;

In Tamil, Mahratta, and Uriya there are properly speaking no house names. Sometimes the person is distinguished by the name of the village which he has come, or which his family reside. In other cases he prefixes the name of his father or grandfather. The indexing must therefore be regulated by the initial letter of the person's proper name, or his father's name being entered under the head of addition, together with the person's ordinary place of residence, and any affix or prefix denoting rank, occupation, or caste ...In Malayalam, the names of Nairs, Nambudiris and Tirs shall be indexed with reference to the initial letter of the person's family name. The other castes have usually no house names, and whenever this is the case, the indexing must proceed on the principle laid down in the preceding paragraph ...The indexing of names in languages which are not generally in use in the Provinces of Mysore and Coorg, ...shall be proceeded on the same general principle as have been laid down for other languages (Raghavacharier 1880, 129–130).

One can notice how languages and communities are often interchangeably used and how this conflates both. Informed by a colonial sensibility, this process of recording names in a certain fashion standardizes practices of minorities into the norms of upper-caste Kannada speakers. The Act also mentions that names of native women should carry their husband's/father's/guardian's names 'and other particulars as may be necessary to identify her' (Raghavacharier 1880, 130). One has to note how practices of inheritance became markedly patrilineal inheritance. In case there was a rare woman registering land in her name, the means of identifying her as an individual became all the more connected to a male guardian (Srinivas 1952, 15–18). It is illuminating to look at samples provided. All caste names are of higher castes indicating that the possibility of lower castes owning land was next to nil.<sup>11</sup> This in Das and Copeman's words also served as an opportunity for the higher castes: 'corresponding to the state's interest in enumerating and identifying each individual or group entity and in developing the necessary bureaucratic apparatus to enable this, subjects too try to use the apparatus for their own strategic interests' (2015, 5).

Although I could not gain access to birth and death records where Kodava names were recorded (all probability they would not be recorded), practices of documenting names can be observed in school records of the time. The Public Instruction Records between 1864 and 1900 give us a good sampling of how individuals were identified and how their names were officially recorded. What emerges from a detailed observation of samples from the records listing members of school *panchayats*, from records of employment of students in public service, from statements of scholarship holders – all from 1875 to 1900 – is that recording of names aspires toward a legible consistency without ever reaching any kind of evolved fixed practice (1875–1900).

Mundanda Medaiya, Kolavandra Iyappa, Ballimandra Nanjappa, Chendanda Puvaiya, Baddira Nanjappa (all from 1875–1876), Kambeyandra Nanjappa, chendrimad Appaya, Chonira Kariappa, Paruvangala Bhimaya (1885–1886), C. Chengapa, K. Subhaya, C. Ganapathy, M. Chinnappa (1890–1891), B. Atchaya, P. Madapa, M. Madana (1891–1892), A. Chengapa, D. Kunjappah (1894–1895), C. Woothiah, C. Biddaiah (1896–1897), C. M. Biddiah, P. Appachu, K. B. Kariappa, C. Muddappa (1900–1901). From the above records, it is not too difficult to notice the change that is happening in the course of 25 years. For one, there are no female holders of office or scholarship holders until at least



1900. In the initial years, all Kodava names have their clan names prefixed with the given names. For example in Mundanda Medaiya, Mundanda is the clan name and Medaiya is the given name. This is almost religiously followed until 1885–1886 for the Kodavas since clan was/is the foremost unit of social organization and identification can never happen without the clan. For the non-Kodavas who do not have the system of clan (who going by names are probably either Brahmin or an occasional Gowda), there is an initial either prefixed or suffixed with the name. It is with the later records that one can notice some kind of consistency in writing of names where the clan name of Kodavas is reduced to an initial. Until 1900, the last colonial record I have access to, the father's name does not figure in documenting the name. It is only in 1900 that some names figure with two initials – C. M. Biddiah, where C most likely stands for the clan and M for father's name – a practice that is widely prevalent today almost without any exceptions. As an aside, it is curious to note the archaic spellings of these Kodava names that are very changed today. Woothiah is simply unrecognizable, a name now written as Uthaiah.

How have these practices of documentation produced a Kodava in a certain way, a Kodava who at first was known by *his* patrilineal clan but then later reduced to initials? To me, it appears that there is a constant interaction between what can be perceived as local and what can be understood as the 'other'. The clan name as locally identifiable and the initial that does not disrupt the dominant other's reading of the local. This interaction, as Appadurai so convincingly argued, produces a locality which is both relational and contextual – 'constituted by a series of links between the sense of social immediacy, the technologies of interactivity, and the relativity of contexts' (1996, 178). Naming for Appadurai is a technology of localization, localized through deliberate practices of performance, representation, and acting. For the Kodava, the sense of immediacy to the clan, the technologies of writing, documenting, interacting with colonial institutional practices, and interaction with other communities in a space that is outside customary, produced the idea of self as seen in practices of naming that legitimizes both the convention of the community and the modern individual. But then, this refashioning of the community both by the 'self' and the 'other' is not so smooth, not consistent, especially because naming is an act that involves self, community and practices ushered in by the colonizer. It is an unsettled, constantly changing process of how localities and their communities are produced. Records of naming help us understand new forms of legibility that emerged due to the 'democratic' needs of modern citizenship, of modern nation-states that were in the making. This required entirely new forms so as to fit the new socio-political mores (Scott, Tehranian, and Mathias 2002, 15). In the Kodava case, colonizers recorded only legitimized male heirs, overruling practices which were fluid and practices where women traditionally had definite marriage/divorce/widow rights (Poonacha and Uberoi 1996), and had rights to take decisions regarding children.

If the colonial period saw a move toward a permanent patronym through state-naming systems constantly interacting with local, community based identities, the newly independent nation-state continued these systems that were standardizing and typically hegemonic. The lack of context and particularity in the means of standardizing 'is not an oversight; it is the necessary first premise...where subjects can be treated as standardized units' (Scott 1998, 346) As we shall see in the next section, this often meant that interactions with state institutions and Hindu cultural systems necessitated a change in the 'official' naming system of the Kodavas, toward an appropriate identity, from the point of view of the state and of dominant Hindu cultural systems, but also and importantly from the point of view of Kodavas.

**Legitimately Kodava, legitimately Hindu and legitimately Indian?**

‘Hindu nationalism is folded in Indian experience of modernity’ (Hansen 2001, 9).

A study of contemporary naming practices among Kodavas obtained from names of school students in Kodagu and names of their parents suggests that modern acts of naming are not divorced from community practices. Practices do indicate a change even within the span of a single generation, indicating the community’s interaction with modern practices and with ‘outside’ Hindu systems, but also indicate a negotiation with conventional practices of the community.

Of the total 1964 names I gathered from schools, 1238 were of Kodava children. As mentioned earlier, identification of Kodava names is not very difficult. The names were identified as Kodava through their very particular Kodava names (Chondamma, Somanna), through the two-name practice where a sanskritized name is used with a Kodava name (as in Varna Neelamma, where Varna is Sanskrit-based and Neelamma is very specific to Kodava) and through a sanskritized name which is usually prefixed or suffixed by two initials (Drishya T. S.), one initial indicating the clan and other the father. These practices are rarely followed by non-Kodavas. Further, of these 1238 Kodava children, 649 were boys and 589 girls. Not all schools had records of parents’ names and of those which did, not all of them had recorded names of mothers. For analysis, I have considered data where names of both parents were available. Table 1 is names collected and their distribution along categories analyzed here.

It is interesting to note how naming patterns in the parent generation are drastically different from those of their children. While most fathers have conventional Kodava names as in C. B. Uthaiiah, most mothers have very non-Kodava sanskritized names as in Mamata or Shanthi. The two-name phenomena (Non-Kodava + Kodava as in Nikhil Muddappa or Chetna Chondamma) is the largest pattern of naming among the children. This two name practice is rare among the parent generation with only 14 and 9 for fathers and mothers, respectively. It should be noted that conventional naming of Kodava girls is low when compared to two-names and non-Kodava names. Non-Kodava names for girls are high in comparison with non-Kodava names for boys. Boys are given more Kodava names and two-names and a less percentage of them get non-Kodava names in comparison with girls and also in comparison with their parent generation. All these three categories had two initials either prefixed or suffixed. What can be deduced out of this? What does the two-name phenomenon tell us? What can we understand from this gendered difference in naming and how does this reflect on the community identity?

If one considers the Kodava case and locate it in the context of larger politics, naming patterns indicate how smaller communities like Kodavas negotiate with dominant cultural systems and with a modern nation-state defined by the very same dominant cultural

Table 1. Kodava names and their distribution along categories.

	Kodava students	Conventional Kodava names	Two names (non-Kodava + Kodava)	Non-Kodava names
Boys	649	218	310	119
Girls	589	126	239	226
Total Kodava children	1238	344	549	345
Fathers	493	287	14	192
Mothers	493	83	8	394
Total parents	986	367	16	576

systems, here of Hindu India. If one analyzes the naming patterns of the parent generation, one can see that the largest percentage of names of women are sanskritized. This generation named during the times of a nation-in-making emerging from colonial rule, during a period of uncertain identities in the wake of the gradual acceptance of brahminical Hindu practices as the norm. In this context, most women shed a specific Kodava name for a much more legible Sanskrit-based one. But as the carrier of the Kodava identity, the male inheritor was still ‘burdened’ by the Kodava name. To be Hindu-like did mean to be modern to a certain extent; it did mean acceptance by the outside world with whom interactions were becoming unavoidable. One can also notice occasional non-Sanskrit names like Rosy, Zarina, Cherry, Jeesa (from Jesus), Dolly, and so on among Kodavas of this generation. As an aside, I found many Muslim children being named with quite unconventional names like Thanha, Parhan, Harshal, Anish, Jusaina, Nashath, Jaseela – a practice that needs to be studied separately. The standardization in the Kodava case can hold true to some extent for the initials that reflect the permanent patronymic norm (as in Madappa C. M. or Dechamma K. D. in conventional naming, Shanthi K. A. as in sanskritized names and Rianna Thangamma D. K. as in two-name practice). Here, initials are the only legible norm – legible both for the modernizing nation-state and for the nation’s representative Hindu cultural codes. Since colonial times, when the process of reducing clan names and father’s names to initials began, to the times when these get consolidated in the modern Hinduized nation-state, one can see perceptible changes that make very illegible names labile to some extent. Kodava clan names and given names are unique and at times unpronounceable even to the neighboring Kannada speakers. It is through such legibilizing practices that mechanisms of control over smaller communities take concrete shape. There are rare instances when a child is given two names without initials but initials have almost become a norm with all styles of naming. These initials are almost written in English and not in Kodava or Kannada. Even when names and initials are written in Kodava/Kannada, the initials are just transliterated from English. For example, if a person’s name is Monappa K. M., the initial is written as ಕೆ. ಎಂ. which is just the literal transliteration of letters K and M. This gives us an interesting insight: that writing names and especially writing initials as a practice came in only with the coming of English as a language.

This only indicates the kinds of uncertainties a community undergoes in the process of being legibilized. The most interesting observation is in relation to the names of children and how they differ from those of their parents. This generation of presently school-going children are named in a pattern that is very Kodava, much more recognizably Kodava than their mothers. Although the number of girls with conventional names and two-names are still less than boys, and girls still get more non-Kodava names than boys, the percentage in comparison to their parent generation has increased enormously. This clearly points to a certain kind of assertion of identity made possible in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, with the politics of identity paving the way for the assertion of rights and of autonomy among minority communities. The Liberation Warriors of Kodagu, a movement that began in the late 1980s which now in its new avatar is known as the Coorg National Council (CNC), has in its agenda a separate Coorg/Kodagu State that can also be attributed a role in this larger play of identity. But then, the increase in the two-name pattern needs more deliberation. The practice where the child gets a non-Kodava + Kodava name with initials is relatively new; it can be traced back over the last 25–40 years. Even among school children, two-name is the largest pattern that can be noticed. Vathan Somanna K. N. for a boy and Deeksha Thangamma M. M. for a girl have almost become the normative pattern of how a Kodava child is named in recent times. It signifies an identity that is both Kodava and Non-Kodava, while simultaneously signifying an identity that can be read as neither Kodava nor non-Kodava.

For me, this indicates again the heterogeneous times with which a community has to interact. It also indicates how dominant cultural systems despite being assimilative can also be spoken back to. It tells us how a community takes its identity forward, asserts it even in novel ways without necessarily being assimilated into the larger fold, and reflecting on what is 'modern' for the community. It is possible to read into this an anxiety to assert oneself as a Kodava, as belonging to a community whose language and culture are deemed endangered, and as an anxiety to be accepted as a Hindu. Simultaneously, it does not lend itself into smooth acceptance of Hindu identity but resists assimilation into it, by asserting the non-Hindu Kodava. It is an in-between state of resistance, rejection, assertion of separateness, and uncertain acceptance. The case of Meithei names in the state of Manipur of North Eastern India may be seen as in some ways parallel, even though the political and ethnic context, and the relationship to the nation-state are entirely different to those of the Kodava.

Today, opposing political and religious alignments within Manipur are reflected through the choice of personal names. Those who espouse a clean break with the Indian political and religious hegemony use pre-Hindu style names. Those who would strengthen the tie between Manipur and India, while still cherishing pre-Hindu identity, move fluidly between use of pre-Hindu style names and Hindu style names. The manipulated use of two naming styles shows us that the relationship with India is precious, but tenuous, fragile and easily contested. (Chelliah 2005, 169)

The relationship between the Indian nation-state and the Kodava from the colonial times to present can be characterized as one between the hegemonic majority and a model minority (Dechamma C. C. 2012). The Kodava are always perceived and play into the idea of an ideal minority: hardworking, always already willing to sacrifice for the nation. At the same time, the Kodava interaction and relationship with dominant Hinduism and its brahminical practices has always been tenuous, questioned. This relationship with upper-caste Hinduism as influencing naming patterns of lower/backward castes has also been pointed out by Bean (1978) who in her study of Kannada names traces the change in naming patterns from the older practice. The older generation had names derived from local deities not part of the Hindu pantheon, whereas the names of the current generation reflect a heavily sanskritized Hindu interaction (Ilaiah 1998). This can also be read as a corruption of the dominant Sanskrit names and the cultural codes it represents. It is a process which Ilaiah has beautifully termed Dalitization, referring to the influence of Dalit (lower/backward caste) practices on the upper castes. A similar reading of Inuit names tells us that the two-name tag among the Inuits derives the first name from biblical sources and the second name from Inuit. 'In other words, Inuits have used Christian names to enrich their own traditional system' (MacDonald 2006, 7). This is to say that the Biblical is corrupted to become Inuit, and does not necessarily suggest the Inuit being corrupted by the Christian. This is also evident among the Tuvans of Russia where 'from the point of view of an endangered language community, name choice represents in the worst case a tenuous compromise among competing cultural domains' (Harrison 1999, 11). In a context where there is pressure to assimilate to practices that are Sanskrit-based, the manner in which Kodavas have imaginatively translated names may be understood as innovative, using *metis*, the practical knowledge that does not stick to tradition nor submit to hegemony. In this context, Kodava practices of naming resist being interpreted as a process of sanskritization – an approach that is top-down and does not allow space for lower caste agency beyond a form of mimesis. Kodava practices of naming rather can be understood as a strategy, consciously implemented to produce names with elements of Sanskrit but yet unlike Hindu names; a form of identification, then, which is distinctively Kodava.

Among the Kodavas, no one can mistake the name Shaan Bopaiah C. S. to be anything else than Kodava. It can never be that of a caste Hindu. I argue that the nature of naming among Kodavas suggests an ambiguous identity which provides space for us to question the dominant. Although the position where the Kodava stands is unstable, a position where the self is ungrounded, incoherent (Butler 2001, 22), especially because the knowing of self partly rests outside the self, in the other who is the dominant, negotiating with it here through the act of two-names shows a flexible identity, manipulating both the dominant and the conventional sphere of the ethno-linguistic minority. I argue that despite the apparent claim to be legitimately legible as Kodava, Hindu, and Indian, one sees a lack of consistency lending uncertain rich spaces for discourses on identity. It simply does not produce a good identity. Rather, in Povi-nelli's words, 'it inspires impossible desires *to be* this impossible object and to transport its ancient prenatal meanings and practices to the present in *whatever* language and moral framework prevails *at the time of enunciation*' (2002, 6, emphasis in original).

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### Notes

1. The relationship among Kodava speakers is characterized by a hierarchy where the dominant Kodava community within Kodagu is classified by the government of Karnataka as belonging to the Other Backward Castes (OBC) along with Amma Kodavas, Peggades, Airies, and others. Kodagu also has a sizeable Adivasi population, among whom Kudiyas and Kembatties speak the Kodava language and others like Yeravas and Kurubas, speak Yerava and Kuruba. Many native Dalit communities like Holayas, Madiga, Meda, and Maillas of Kodagu speak various dialects of Kannada. My focus is on the Kodavas, the dominant within Kodagu in relation to other indigenous communities mentioned above. The whole point of this article is also the relative nature of this dominance vis-à-vis the brahminical/Hindu order.
2. By convention, I mean a space within the Kodava community, defined by the changing norms of the community, a space where modes of living, modes of relationships, rituals, and practices are largely legible and accessible to everyone within that space.
3. Brahmins from neighboring Mangalore were brought to the area by the Haleri kings. Most Brahmins in Kodagu are thus Tulu speakers. Almost all Hindu temples in Kodagu date back to this period (mid-seventeenth century), coinciding with the arrival of Brahmins.
4. Other communities native to Kodagu such as Amma Kodavas, Peggades, Kodava Mapilles, Are-Bhashe Gowdas also have family names – mostly different from each other.
5. See Mookonda Kushalappa, <http://kushalmucon.blogspot.in/2012/10/coorg-clan-names.html>. Accessed on 10 February 2014.
6. Bommanda here does not seem to connect to the Tulu term *Bomma* which Amitav Ghosh discusses elaborately in his 'The Slave of MS. H.6' (1990). The term *Bomma* in Kodava does not have any meaning or any other references in the language culture. Neither can it be connected to *Bermer/Brahma like Ghosh* does in his work.
7. For example, Nemmale is a village (like most villages in Southern Kodagu) numerically and socio-politically dominated by the Kodavas, with a small population of Malayas (previously mid-wives, sooth-sayers, practioners of herbal-medicine) and Pulayas (Dalits, who were engaged in singing and playing drums at Kodava rituals).
8. 'to assume that it was Kannada style that was at the basis of the Coorg system, rather than that of some other South Indian Community, it is not certain...' (Emeneau 1976, 8).
9. Mookonda Kushalappa, 'Coorg Clan Names', <<http://kushalmucon.blogspot.in/2012/10/coorg-clan-names.html>>, [accessed 10 February 2014].
10. These duties varied from soldierly ones to guarding villages. For details, see Vijaya (1991, 1995).
11. The Registration laws in force in the territories of his Highness of Maharaja of Mysore and in the Province of Coorg: 1867, 132–133.

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