

## SABIR AHAMED FIFTH COLUMN

### THERE'S A LOT IN A NAME

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Editorial

**hat's** in a name? A lot -- when it comes W to India. Today, a Muslim name runs a higher risk of suffering discrimination. Names, thus, provide deep insights into society, `touching on issues such as gender, ethnicity and social class differences'.

The study of the names of infants has emerged as a distinct subject of research. The pioneering work by R.G. Fryer and S.D. Levitt, titled "The Causes and Consequence of Distinctively Black Names", revealed the stupendous social cost of having distinctively black names. Another study by the BBC in association with the University of Bristol's Centre for the Study of Ethnicity and Citizenship found that "Muslim men are 76 per cent less likely to be employed than their white Christian counterparts in UK." Applicants with Muslims names being rejected by employers in India's private sector or flat owners refusing to rent rooms to Muslim tenants are not unheard of. Trace the roots Is the naming process connected to religion? In India and elsewhere in South Asia, a name indicates the religious identity of a person. A Muslim sounding name has an Arabic origin, while a Hindu name is rooted in a Sanskrit word. Another prevalent practice, especially popular in southern India, is the addition of the name of one's native place or that of a forefather to a child's name. Parents have also been known to name their children after celebrities or a community hero.

But convergences and divergences are common, as is evident from the following data. Popular choice A study of 2.4 million names of students at the secondary level in West Bengal in 2017-18 revealed a deep diversity in naming conventions. The top five names of girls among Hindus were `Puja', `Priyanka', `Riya', `Susmita' and `Priya'; for boys, they were `Rahul', `Sourav', `Suman', `Biswajit' and `Akash'. `Priyanka' and `Rahul' have found a favoured place in the top ten names among other social groups too. Our analysis also showed that the popularity of `Sourav' corresponded with the hey day of Sourav Ganguly's cricketing career.

`Sabina', `Sabana', `Rubina', `Salma' and `Nasima' are some of the most popular names chosen for Muslim girls, while `Samim', `Sohel', `Imran' are preferred in the case of Muslim boys. Among Sikhs, `Simran', `Riya', `Amrita' and `Gurpreet' were the favourites for girls, while boys were frequently named `Amandeep',

`Balbinder', `Manjit' and `Manpreet'. Interestingly, `Priyanka' was one of the most popular names among girls who are Christian; `Nikita', `Anisha', `Neha', `Anjali' and `Manisha' were also common. These names are also chosen for Buddhist girls, along with `Sandhya', `Nima' and `Roshni'. `Rohit', `Rahul', `Abhishek', `Rohan' and `Raj' are popular choices for Christian and Buddhist boys.

We came across `Rahul', `Biswajit', `Sanjoy', `Amit' and `Sourav' for boys' names among scheduled castes and scheduled tribes: they are perhaps indicative of upward mobility. The names of girls for SCs and STs were similar to those chosen for Hindu girls. There were recurrences of the names of goddesses, such as Lakshmi, Saraswati and so on. Complex matrix Naming conventions are thus based on complex, overlapping ideas concerning ethnicity, religion, and region. India lacks adequate data to understand its diverse naming conventions. This calls for investment in recording and making available birth registration data..