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MEN'S AND WOMEN'S NAMES

A STUDY OF A BRAHMAN COMMUNITY

Kin Milinda asked the sage, "How are you known? What is your name?"

"I was named Nāgasena by my parents, the priests and the others... But Nāgasena is not a separate entity. Just as the different parts of the chariot when they are brought together form a chariot, so when the constitutive elements of existence are brought together in a body, they form a living being".

Later the king asked, "What becomes reborn, Nāgasena?"

"The name and the form (*n*āmarūpa) are reborn".

"Is it this name and this form that are reborn?"

"No, but through this name and this form, deeds, whether good or bad, are performed, and by these deeds, the *karma*, another name-and-form is reborn".[1]

This dialogue from the first century B.C. explains, with a slightly different meaning,[2] a cardinal notion for Hinduism, the prin-

[1] *Les questions du roi Milinda*, translated from the Pali by Louis Finot, Paris, Boccard, 1963.
[2] In the Buddhist context, *nāmarūpa* refers to the psychosomatic composite.

ciple of individuation. Designated by the composite *nāma* (name) and *rūpa* (form), this notion illustrates the consubstantial relationship between the person and his name.

This concept of name is related to a widely-held Western belief (Dupaquier 1984, Zonabend 1984, Vernier 1989). The eschatological perspective in which it is cast is less familiar to us. In the course of successive rebirths (*saṃsāra*), the name is subject to the same law as the form to which it is firmly attached. The principle remains the same, the application differs. We know that in this ideology the flow is interrupted when the *ātman*, the Self, deprived of its individuality (*nāmarūpa*) "conquers, or better, recognizes the identity of the self with the absolute" (Malamoud 1978:78).

The brief observations on names that I wish to present here do not have this purely speculative nature. Instead they concern meanings, means of transmission, the identity they define. However, in India social behavior and the ends of man are intertwined. The dialogue of King Milinda with the sage Nāgasena announces the type of reflections that naming often provokes.

It was while doing a survey on relations between mothers and daughters in Mahārāshtra that I became interested in forenames.

The general hypothesis was that girls and boys received a different education, that mothers especially transmitted attitudes and behavior models tending to re-create in their daughters their own legal inferiority and to develop in boys the conviction of their superiority.

But in the urban and educated Brahman *milieu* of Poona where I was doing my research, discrimination between girls and boys is discreet, almost invisible. Girls can study and marry late; girls and boys apparently enjoy the same liberties and are subject to the same constraints.[3]

Yet how is it possible to explain that so many boys and so few girls are named after divinities? Why, for example, is the choice

[3] In studying relations between mothers and daughters at the time of puberty, this appearance seemed less certain to me. The liberty of daughters is at that moment subject to certain restrictions, and the behavior model transmitted to them assists in the construction of a demeaning image. Cf. van Woerkens-Todorov, "First Menstrual Periods", *Economic and Political Weekly*, April 28, 1990.

of forename left to the mother when she gives birth to an unwanted daughter?

In attempting to respond to these questions, I was getting away from my point of departure, namely that the act of naming made it possible to explore relations between mothers and daughters. But this is only one especially revealing element of the family structures involved. One essential element, among others, of the symbolic order that underlies these structures, the bestowing of a name is an open window on the procedures that aim at reproducing or contesting the traditional inequality between feminine and masculine identity.

I. RELATIONSHIPS

Meanings of names and dividing the world

In France there are specialized books[4] for discovering the meaning of a name; etymology, mythology, hagiography or even history make it possible to assign to a name moral values or a psychological coloring, in short to define a certain significance that has gradually been eliminated over the years.

In the Brahman community of Poona, the situation is different. The etymology of names, generally Sanskrit, and the tales, Puranic or epic, in which they figure are known to all. Presenting these tales as they are told or establishing the motives that determined their choice would be too lengthy a procedure here. But an exploration of the semantic fields—relatively limited—to which names belong and the contrasts and complementary elements they exhibit, depending on the genus to which they belong, allows us to grasp the enduring nature of the traditional division of the world into the sexed elements to which they correspond.

Theophoric names

When I recounted in India how a friend was allowed to register

[4] See for example by A. Dauzat, *Le Dictionnaire étymologique des noms de famille et prénoms de France*, Paris, Larousse, 1951; or, less scientific and more popular, *Un prénom pour la vie*, by P. Le Rouzic, Paris, Albin Michel, 1978.

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the birth of his son at the Marseilles city offices only after six months of negotiations, that he was required to swear that he had English ancestry before the clerk would agree to enroll a child named Milton in his register, I was told that in India there is total freedom. Any word in the dictionary (any adjective or noun) could become a name. Were not Sputnik, Keru (garbage) and Dondhu (stone) sufficient proof?

It is true that no one in India is required to register a child with the civil authorities. Most often it is when the child enters school that parents for the first time announce the complete identity of their child, and we shall see that this identity does not answer to the same constraints as those with which we are familiar. It is also true that in India there are no canonical lists of acceptable given names, such as those proposed by our Christian calendar of saints. But Sputnik, Keru and Dondhu are unusual and infrequent. Indeed "each cultural region of India has its preferences for certain names and the suffixes applied to them. For the Marathas, each family has its familial divinities (*iṣṭadavatā*), and children are given the names of these familial divinities. Although Śiva and Bhavānī are the most popular, Viṣṇu and Kṛṣṇa are as well represented" (Karve 1946).[5]

In the Brahman community of Poona, the predominating names for men are linked to Viṣṇu: Satyanārāyaṇa and Nārāyaṇ are homonyms for Viṣṇu. Puruṣottam, the best of men; Acyut the imperishable, the firm, the solid; Janārdan, who excites or stirs up men; Padmakara, whose hand is shaped like a lotus (one of the attributes of Viṣṇu), etc., designate him in a periphrastic manner. The preferred forms of his avatars, Kṛṣṇa and Rāma, are naturally well represented. Balkṛṣṇa, Hari, Keśav and Madhav (the latter "has authority to drink *soma*") designate Kṛṣṇa, while the epic hero is denoted by Rāmcandra, Rāmeś (Rāma-iśvara, the lord Rāma), Lakṣman, the brother of Rāma, etc. The partiality for Viṣṇu even leads certain families to avoid carefully any name containing the phoneme *ś* (श), judged to be too *Shivaesque*. A syllable of the name represents the entire name.

Less widespread in this *milieu* are names linked to Śiva, such

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[5] The ethnologist I. Karve is, to my knowledge, the only author who has worked on this subject in northern India. The article that I quote, around five pages, announced a large survey of the question. The results have not been published to date.

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as Mahadeo, Śrīkaṇṭha (who has a beautiful throat), or even Vinayak, which designates Ganeś, his good-natured son, the remover of obstacles, well-liked by Mahārāshtra.

The mothers or wives of these men with divine names most often have names of Vishnic goddesses (Maithilī, wife of Rāma, or Rukminī and Rādhā , wives of Kṛṣṇa, etc.). But other goddesses are found as well, such as Aminā, the goddess with fish eyes who is very famous in southern India, or Varuṇā, wife of one of the most ancient Vedic gods. Later we will see in what circumstances and for what reasons girls generally do not receive theophoric names until their marriage. Until that time their names for most part belong to other categories.

CONTRAST AND COMPLEMENTARITY

Sunlight, water and night

Although theophoric masculine names are numerous, there are also many that proudly occupy a place in the heavens under the twofold aspect of light and sun: Prabhāka, Dinkar, the sun, and his son Dineś, Sureś, the master of the sun, and Rohiteś who reigns over the red Dīpśikka, burning like fire, Sūbhaś, Prabhakar and Prakaś, who shine magnificently, and Prasāda, both sparkling and pure, all illustrate the Marathi saying that "sons are the light of the lineage".

Conversely daughters would seem to be its shadow, if we examine the many feminine names derived from night and the stars. The imminent night, close to the red twilight of Aruṇā and Aruṇatā; sometimes bright thanks to the presence of the full moon (Indu, Indumatī) and the stars (Uttarā, Revatī) or barely lit by a single crescent of the moon (Umāśeśi), the night is most frequently totally obscure, as designated by the very many Rajanī and Niśā.

We can note that this dichotomy between diurnal masculine names and nocturnal feminine names, just as other pairs of contrasts or complementarity, represents only a majority trend (to which we could rightly contrast the masculine Bālcandra—New Moon—and the feminine Uśā—Dawn).

Within the limits of this perspective we can observe that the

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earthly realm seems taken up by feminine names that refer to water, often called dark, as in the expression *kālāpānī*, which designates the ocean.

From Saritā, the noun for river, to the particular river Natravatī or the Irawatī river, that flow respectively in Karṇātaka and in Burma, where the two women so named were born, to the Ganges (Gaṅgu, Mandākinī), to the Indus (Sindhu) or even the heavenly currents of Śarada and Sarasvatī or the ocean Sahagirī, water is feminine.

The enduring nature of these contrasts and complementarities, which can be found almost term for term in Vedic hymns, is striking. According to these hymns the universe is made up of "two great divisions, the heavens and the earth, normally designated by the terms *dyu*, to shine and *pṛthivī*, the earth (from *pṛthu*, broad). Masculine elements are "heaven, the sun, lightning, fire and the sacrificial beverage" (we can recall Madhav, "authorized to drink the soma", p. 4); feminine elements are "the earth (*bhūmi, pṛthivī*), dawn (*uśā*), night, the waters in general, offerings and prayers" (Bergaigne, 1963).

Animal and vegetable. Glory and modesty

Some forenames are derived from the animal kingdom, such as Sudhākar and Madhukar, producers of honey; while many feminine names are of vegetable origin.

Before discussing the latter, I will describe the circumstances that resulted in a boy being given the name Nāgeś, meaning the cobra snake. This will make it clear, in an exemplary manner, how a name can coalesce completely with an individual's personal history.

The very day that his mother gave birth to this male child in the house of her parents (according to the custom, quite respected, in Maharashtra), a cobra entered the house of her in-laws. One of the members of the latter family immediately sent a telegram to the young mother stating that the new-born child should be called Nāgeś.

There was no need to have further recourse to astrology for determining the child's name. The serpent was obviously sent by

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Viṣṇu, shown in mythology to be protected by the nine heads with open hoods of Ananta, the endless serpent who offers his coils to the body of the god at rest.

In addition to these references, the name Nāgeś also brings a troubling analogy to light. The birth of the child, just as the sudden appearance of the animal, implies the abandon of its natural domain, the darkness of water, to become visible to men. No doubt the name Nāgeś, imposed and pre-determined more than selected, makes it possible to transfer to the child the "auspicious" nature of the serpent and to celebrate an exceptional occurrrence in which the two houses and the two families both seem to have been endowed with a son simultaneously. This double effect is given even in the name itself: Nāgeś connotes the fabled Nagas, serpents with the body of a man. In addition this onomastic anecdote, in a marvelously theatrical manner, confirms the tradition dictating that the name of the son is chosen by the paternal family.

Let us return to female names linked to the vegetable world. Flower names abound, and of these the most represented by far is the lotus. This attribute of Viṣṇu that "flowered and grew from his navel to give birth to Brahmā" is associated with his wives, Srī and Lakṣmī, who "are born of him, cling to him, have his color, his thighs, his eyes..." (Zimmer, 1951, 90-91).

The very numerous Kamlā, Puśpā, Sarojā, Kumundinī, etc., designate through metonymy the god preferred by this community. These feminine names have their masculine equivalent, Padmakara, encountered earlier, with one difference. He whose "hand is in the form of a lotus" is not identified with the attribute of the god but possesses it, just as the divinity does. In this vegetable realm can also be found Kusum (an undetermined flower), Mukulā (the bloom of a flower), Latika (delicate climbing plant) or even Vanamālā, garlands of forest flowers.

At the level of physical and psychic characteristics, the division is equally pronounced. Of course virile qualities linked to combat and victory are preferred for boys (Ajit, Vijaya, Sañjaya or Yasvant, bearer of glory), rather than aesthetic qualities like the fascinating beauty of Manohar or the solidly virtuous nature of Sudhīr.

Similarly female names designate qualities that are especially appreciated in women. The moral qualities of Mridulā who shows

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compassion, Suśīlā, virtuous and good-natured; Mādhurī, sweet as honey; the timid Sarmila and Vinita, or Sulejhā who blushes as easily; the beauty of Priyādarśna that one loves to look at or Śringari, magnificently adorned.

Vedic hymns and the accompanying tradition attribute a sex to the gods, to the components of nature, to ritual tools and products. Since sacrifice is the very form of the primordial being Prajāpati, who had multiplied himself, it was necessary to form *a-jāmi* couples, couples of different sexes, in order to ensure reproduction of the human race. The names deriving from this division of the world create and celebrate the relationships between the abstract and asexual elements they designate and the people who bear their names. More than rituals, which the passage of time can alter and modify, despite the concern for precision so insistently demanded by the texts, they are certainly one of the favorite objects of the tradition they perpetuate in its integrity.[6] The immense variety of names attached to this tradition in the Brahman community of Poona attests to the vitality of the tradition, even despite a progressive trend that aims at eliminating the social-religious constraints it induces.

II. Discrepancies

Depreciating names with apotropaic value

Depreciating names are used when birth occurs in a threatening context. The role of these names is to ameliorate the disturbed order by outsmarting destiny. ''Those who have still-born children or infants who die in early childhood or those who have difficulty bearing children give depreciating names to their children. It is believed that a child with such a name cannot fall under any evil influence, whether human or divine. ... Children with

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[6] This symbolic dichotomy of the world into feminine and masculine elements extends as well to dictates of a sociological order, linked to considerations of sex and caste, which Manu placed in his *Laws* (Book II, 31-33). Thus, ''the name of a Brahman, by the first of the two words that make it up, expresses a favorable opportunity; that of Kchatriya, power; that of Vaisya, wealth or Soudra, abjection. As for the name of a woman, it should be easy to pronounce, soft, clear, pleasant and favorable; it should end in long vowels and resemble the words of a benediction''.

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such names are considered impure by destiny and consequently will not be mistreated by it'' (Enthoven 1924: 232).

In Gujarat and Mahārāshtra these depreciating names recall the preventive action performed before naming the child. Thus a child is rolled in the dust and then named Dust (Dhulio); it is placed on the stomach of a woman from a low caste and called Mangya, Bhilya, Maharya, names derived from the woman's *jā- ti* (Mang, Bhil, Mahar). Parents can also simulate the purchase of a child; they give it to someone and then buy it back for a symbolic price, giving rise to names like Ekkaudi or Tinkaudi that designate the number of *cauris* paid for the child. The child can also be clothed in beggar's rags, treated like a beggar and called Bhikya (Masani 1966). Deceiving death implies first of all acting on the body in order to provide concrete proof of its slight value; the name then attributed is intended to retain and hold captive the benefits of the exorcism.

In practices of this kind one generally acts on the name in order to influence its bearer. Here one acts on the bearer so that his name can effectively serve as a shield, that it designate in order to dissimulate, we are tempted to say that it speaks an untruth, so that death, the true menace, can be averted. Death is thought to fall into the trap of a realistic illusion that consists in believing that the signified and the image (dust, stone) are identical to the person so called (the child), while men are thought not to be fooled. They know that "one does not need to begin with their names in order to know things; one begins with the things themselves" (Genette 1976: 238).[7]

These death-defying or goddess-defying names are most often destined for boys as seen in the lists given in the work by Enthoven. Among names ranked in this category and meant for girls, most, such as Bhārā (Burden), Arnā (Never again), etc., are not meant to protect them but express in an explicit manner the disappointment linked to their birth. The asymmetry is striking. Hidden by the dust of his name, a boy repels death, whereas a girl attracts it since her name stigmatizes the sex into which she has fallen.

That girls are less desired and their lives consequently less valu-

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[7] In "L'Age des noms", chapter devoted to Marcel Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu*.

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able than those of boys is still true in India today. In this study feminine names reflecting such an attitude attenuate its terms. The disappointment at giving birth to a daughter is replaced by the hope that the next child will be male.

In a subtle and knowing manner, Revatī, the final star of the constellation Pisces to bear a female name, attests to this hope. The desire for a son is no doubt implicit as well in dedicatory names like Desire (Manīśā, Āśā), Prayer (Arthī), Offering (Añjalī), etc. Between these names, which speak of an unsatisfied desire, and their bearers who incarnate this dissatisfaction while at the same time charged with producing a remedy for it, the solidarity of the link, the consubstantiality is destroyed. The daughter's identity is defective, and the discrepancy between her name and herself bears traces of this.

The disqualifying value of these names is nevertheless almost imperceptible; it requires an explanation or an interpretation. The example of Vismaya, ''Stupor'', ''Astonishment'', fourth daughter in a line that had no sons, no doubt expresses the same disappointment more abruptly, by synecdoche.

For reasons as varied as they are inviolable, the overriding duty of women is to bear sons.[8] Let us review these reasons briefly. First of all the birth of a son allows the father to repay the congenital debt owed to Yama, the god of death, which he incurred at his own birth. Only a son, because of his sex, is authorized to perform the ceremonies which, at the death of the father, will make it possible for the latter not to wander endlessly as *bhūta* (spirit) and to join the group of the spirits of the dead (Malamoud, 1980). Then, by strengthening this fundamental link that unites father and son, social custom requires that the eldest son, heir to the patrimony, continue to live with his parents to whom he owes assistance and protection during their old age. Finally, a son is integrated into his family, and more broadly into society, by numerous and developed rituals whose social and religious force is important. In comparison, a daughter occupies a radically opposite position. She is not expected to play any role in her original family since through her marriage, the sole *samskāra* (ritual aiming for ''perfection'') that tradition allots her, she will

[8] There is an immense bibliography dealing with this subject. See that contained in the article referred to in note 3.

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leave the parental household relatively early. She represents a lost investment, since she will go to live with her husband's family, and an expense, since it will be necessary to pay her dowry when she marries, etc. Sons, on the other hand, remain attached to their original family household.

The female names that I have just noted bring out the power of this social dictate. Naming helps in the construction of the genus. The message addressed to daughters in this way is often based in an aggressively negative ideology. In the community in question here, the birth of daughters is well received, but it does not always erase the regret at not having had a son. The discrepancy between desire and reality is not the same for boys and girls, and the depreciating names reflect, somewhat modestly, fundamentally different attitudes toward sons and daughters. We shall now see, through conditions of choice and transmission, that the classifying function of names reinforces these differences.

III. CLASSIFICATIONS, TRANSMISSION AND CHOICE OF NAMES

The ritual of the first forename (nāmākaraṇa)

In Marathi lands, the ritual of the first forename (*bārsa*), common to children of both sexes, is traditionally celebrated in the maternal household of the mother (where she gave birth), in the presence of married women (whose husbands are living and who preferably have sons), of the paternal aunt and often the mother-in-law.[9]

[9] The cradle is surrounded with lamps, and the floor and the wooden bench on which the mother of the baby sits, are adorned with *rāngoḷī*. The round, elongated stone used to crush the spices (in Marathi *varavaṇṭhā*) is covered with a beautiful cloth and adorned with jewels. When so decorated this stone is called *gopyā*, "the one who is protected". Two women pass this stone back and forth over the cradle while pronouncing five names of gods, adding the suffix *ga*, "take": Śkikṛṣnaga, Śrīraṅgga, etc. The fifth time the *gopyā* is passed under the cradle. The child is then given the same treatment before being given to the mother, who whispers its name in its ear. Then the mother turns her back to the cradle and pushes it; depending on the distance the cradle moves, her next pregnancy will occur sooner or later. The child's name is then announced aloud. The mother takes the child in her arms and sits back down on the decorated bench; she receives presents, jewels or saris, and jewels are placed on the child who has been returned to the cradle. This

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Up until the end of the century (cf. Stevenson who observed Brahman rites in Gujarat), the procedures differed depending on the sex of the child: the lapse of time between the birth and the ceremony of the name, the favorable moment for performing this ceremony (even days for girls, uneven days for boys), the number of syllables in the name (even for girls and uneven for boys), etc. The care attached to marking the difference between male and female children was clearly demonstrated at each step of the process. This is no longer the case today.

Who chooses the name?

Traditionally the Brahman chooses the name in accordance with the position of the *nakṣatra* at the moment of birth.

Movements of the stars are tracked in India by the position of the constellations neighboring the ecliptic, *nakṣatra*, and the zodiacal constellations, *rāśi*. The horoscope is determined according to the position of the twenty-eight *nakṣatra* that include the twelve zodiacal constellations and are divided into *pādā* (four quarters) designated by two or three conventional syllables (Renou 1953: 730 ff.). The first letter of the child's name as well as its horoscope (*kuṇḍali*) are determined together following consultation of the heavens.

ceremony ends with the chants *baina Rām*, "those that the mother of Rāma sang at his birth".

In this ritual sequence, the close of which confirms the preference for Viṣnu already noted in relation to names, manipulation of the stone is reminiscent of preventive actions performed on children whose life is threatened; indeed it has the same function, that of counteracting the evil eye. But the mechanism of the realistic illusion is somewhat different; the evil eye is here thought to be driven away by the artefact *gopyā*, which is disguised to take the place of the child. The child does not assimilate the protective virtues of the stone through its own name; it does not take part in the nature of the stone. But the child receives its beneficial influence through imitation and contagion.

We note that the mother promises before her relatives to postpone or not a new pregnancy, even though she turns her back to the cradle that she shoves blindly, with the force being used to push it depending certainly on her desire. A rite of exorcism and a fertility rite, then, are both found in this ceremony of the name in which the paternal aunt (*nanaṇda*), representing the masculine line, plays an important role in the choice of a name.

I thank H. and G. Pointevin for their valuable information concerning this ritual.

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But the name indicated by the Brahman is not always the one the paternal aunt whispers in the child's ear. She is the one who suggests the name, in consultation with the father and the paternal grandparents; and according to tastes and circumstances, the genethliacal name (*janmarāśi*) is disregarded. Occasionally there will be a trace of it thanks to accommodations that are made; for example the first letter is retained (Citrā thus became Caru), or else the meaning remains, to the detriment of the form (Rohiteś, the lord of the red, became Dinkar, the sun), etc.

Sometimes members of the paternal line refuse to name a female child in order to indicate their lack of interest and their scorn for the mother. It is then the latter who must select a name.

In contrast to this failure of the "ritual of incorporation" (Van Gennep) represented by the paternal refusal to name his daughter, there are the narcissistic choices made by some other fathers. Lara (from *Doctor Zhivago*), Kimnaya (after the American actress Kim Novak), Sputnik, Roshan (Persian name meaning "bright") are purely subjective choices, with no regard for tradition and which have no masculine counterparts as far as I know. Indeed to name or not to name means for the father to assign his daughter to a class: "wanted/not wanted". In the latter case the mother is obliged to name the child and generally tilts toward the sense of familial disapproval (Ardhā, Vismay, Āśā). In the former case the name is, to the contrary, the foundation of a personal identification from which the mother is excluded.

Two rituals for the second given name

In a striking manner the paths divide for boys and girls when a second name is given. This name is conferred during two different rituals considered equivalent by tradition.

Boys receive a second given name during their ritual initiation, *upanayana*. When the sacred cord is passed over the left shoulder of the applicant, "the instructor takes the boy's right hand in his own and asks him what is his former name. The new name then given by the guru will be used in the daily prayer; apart from the daily prayer, this name should not be used with only the old name being used" (Stevenson, 1920: 103).

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Women receive a second given name at the time of their marriage, in the house of the husband's family. The husband takes a tray (*thalī*) filled with rice or flour and traces the new name in it with his ring while pronouncing it aloud.

As Manu affirms in his *Laws*, marriage is for girls what *upanayana* is for boys. "The marriage ceremony is recognized by legislators as the replacement for women of the sacrament of initiation prescribed by the Veda; their zeal in serving their husbands takes the place of a visit to a spiritual father, and the care of their household the tending of the sacred fire" (Book II, 67).

Initiation represents for a boy a second religious birth that leads him and brings him near (this is the meaning of *upanayana*) to the guru whose task is to instruct him in the sacred texts. The new name he receives, secret and inalterable, corresponds to a ritual identity that a temporary use of other names does not menace and that is added to his social identity.

For a girl, on the other hand, the marriage name replaces her original one (which will still be used, however, in her original family). Whereas the boy symbolically leaves the world of women (he is fed by his mother for the last time) for the world of men linked to the gods, the daughter leaves her family geographically for her husband's family whose gods and ancestral shades (*pitr*) she will now serve by marrying one of the sons. For both boys and girls the new given name corresponds to a new stage in life: *brahmacārin*, student, for the former, and *patnī*, wife, for the second. But for the boy, the initiatory name is added to the social name, whereas for the girl the new name takes the place of the old one. Identity, depending on one's sex, is either accumulative or successive.

One of the marks of the integration of a wife into the husband's family is the change of her name. This practice, common in the Brahman community of Poona, is followed absolutely in certain cases. Here, in order of their importance are the principal ones: first when the husband's family demands that it be so; then when the wife's name is taken from mythology and does not agree with her husband's name. Ānanda, which designates Śiva, cannot have as wife Rohinī, mother of Balarāma, the elder brother of Kṛṣṇa; and Pārvatī, wife of Śiva, cannot have as husband Keśava, which designates Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa. Rohinī will have to become

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Pārvatī, and *vice versa*. It is now clearer why young girls do not often have names of goddesses; it is more reasonable to know the name of one's god before becoming his wife-goddess.

A third reason, and the one most often cited by those involved, is that the name of the new wife is already being used in the family. As we have seen earlier, the "confusion" that arises is perhaps not merely of a practical nature.

A fourth reason is that the name is changed if it is defamatory (Arnā...), "inauspicious" (Kaikeyī, the mother-in-law of Rāma) or that it "sounds bad".

If girls' names often seem to be freely inspired by fiction or current events, the reason is that they will be changed at the time of marriage. The given name of a girl is temporary; the freedom of choice in its regard can be explained by this custom.

The symbolic scope of this change is often quite strong, as in the case of a woman named Kumudinī, which designates, she said, "a mass of lotus whose petals open during the full moon" and who was renamed Nirmalā, "without stain, without impurity", as if to eliminate any suspicion of an erotic nature that her previous given name evoked.

The change of name can also be the occasion for affirming one's originality and difference. Puśpā (also a lotus!) was renamed Diśā (Direction) by her husband, university-educated and atheist, who told her, "You will direct our house". But Diśā, is also very close (except for the letter D) to the innumerable Nights, Niśā, of her contemporaries, from whom he wished to distinguish her. Puns and witticisms, as again in the case of the woman named Nīlā (the Somber one) whom her husband cleverly renamed Sunīlā so that she would become a "good" Nīlā (the prefix *su*, laudatory, good, excellent, just), do not at all mean that this new identity is to be taken lightly. Both Diśā and Sunīlā received a very explicit message. Their marriage implies obligations, even though the woman in the second example seems politely to have been credited in advance of their realization.

In many respects, therefore, the given name serves to classify a person, first according to genus (masculine or feminine), to a desire (satisfied or not), by category (such as that of god when it is a boy and that of the timid when it is a girl), by status (twice-born, apt for study of the sacred texts for boys, bride for girls).

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Names also serve to classify children within the same lineage, as for example when they contain an identical syllable (like *su*, in Sumitrā, Suśīlā, etc.), which often corresponds to the name of a god (Rāmpyarī, Rāmdulari, etc.). In this sense the given name somewhat usurps the role of the patronym by assigning the person to a parental group.

The given name also classifies those who do the naming. The paternal aunt, the father, husband and Brahman play a pre-eminent role and exercise an authority over the child named, ritually created and confirmed by the bestowal of the name.

At the center of an extremely dense network of meanings and classifications, the name is defined not only in relation to the world of the living, as we have just seen, but also in relation to the world of the dead.

The forbidden name and the good name

In Mahārāshtra (as in Gujarat, cf. Stevenson), the chosen fore-name cannot be that of a living relative. I. Karve (1946), refers to the case of a Maratha family with fifty male relatives who all had names of Vishnic origin; the supply of these names was exhausted and so they had recourse to Shivaesque names in order to keep from violating the rule. What is this rule?

It was pointed out to me that it would be embarrassing to caress or to lecture a child called by the same name as its grandfather, for whom such acts would consequently be disrespectful. Calling a person by his given name implies an equal or even superior relationship, like that of an elder person to a younger. Let us recall that married couples never pronounce their spouse's name. A married woman, for example, designates her husband in the third person or by using impersonal expressions: *tikade*, this one, *svatan*, himself, *ghārate*, the master of X if there is a male child.

But these customs illustrate without explaining the rule given above. The extreme case of twins makes it easier to understand the core of the question, as long as we take the precaution of stressing that twins are not two contemporary persons with the same first name but two "identical" persons with different names.

Twins are sometimes discredited in mythology. Yama, the god

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of death, and Yamī, his twin sister, supposed to perpetuate the human race, form a *jāmi*, sterile, couple because of their shared birth. Closer to us, in the songs of women of Piparsod, the twins Kuśa and Lāva of Rāmāyana are transformed into non-twins; one is born of his mother Sītā while the other is born in a magical fashion (Chambard 1980). Herrenschmidt (1989: 41) shows that in Andhra twins, symbols of equality, are "unthinkable".

Homonymous names can be understood as an expression of twinship, equally unacceptable because it is the source of anomy or at least disorder. Unclassified persons are not only disturbing; their existence represents a threatening irregularity in the perspective of dharma.

"To bring to light the necessarily differentiated and differentiating nature of dharma, the normative texts use an explicit formula and speak of *varṇa-aśrama-dharma*, meaning the dharma proper to each social class and to each phase of an individual life" (Malamoud, 1978, 72-73). The principle of *svadharma* assigns specific obligations to every human being depending on his sex and age, his caste and occupation, his position in the family. Onomastic identity creates an equality that divides and corrodes this differentiating and hierarchical principle upon which the durability of the world reposes.

Being called by the name of a deceased grandmother or grandfather is, on the other hand, a common practice. "It is a good thing", I was often assured, for "the unrealized desires (*ichchha*)" of the eponymous ancestor "have more of a chance of being realized in the family through one of his grandchildren". The "right" name is explicitly attached to belief in reincarnation.

This belief is one of the consequences of the theory of *Karman* to which Nāgasena alludes. "All good or bad acts (conforming to dharma) have desire as first principle; they have a double set of consequences. They have immediate effects, and there are results that will be felt in the beyond. The man who accumulates good acts in his lifetime will, after his death, enjoy a stay in heaven whose length depends on his life, or will be reborn in happy conditions, a god or an eminent man" (Malamoud, 1978, 70-71). The grandson does not inherit the grandfather's character, as we might say, but his desires that remained unrealized in his previous life, the "remainder" of his *karman*. All the Aśok of the same

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lineage would thus be one and the same person seen in the course of a series of reincarnations.

The remainder, made up of unrealized desires, is a particular, but very embedded, interpretation of this belief. Its echo can be found in the *vratasāvitrī*, the prayer of Sāvitrī,[10] that many Brahman women of Poona very faithfully execute in the hope of finding their husband in seven future existences.

The forbidden name is also frequently explained in terms of *karman*. For, it is said, naming a grandson after his grandfather while he is still alive would mean not leaving the latter sufficient time to realize his *karman*; his present and future lives would be irretrievably muddled.

The classifying role of the name functions in the world of the living and of the dead, obligating the one named as well as those who name him. The name crystallizes different aspects of the socioreligious organization that are part of the person's identity. In order to clarify this notion, it is necessary to examine the status of the family name in relation to the given name in order to discern their roles in the construction of this identity.

IV. IDENTITIES: FIRST NAME AND FAMILY NAME

Traditions

Recognition of one's own identity, and consequently of one's full name,[11] is an important element of personalization. In Mahārāshtra women were ordinarily called *bai*, woman (found, for example in the name of the famous Panditā Rāmabāī), without recognizing any other individual mark for them. Men, however,

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[10] The *vata savītrī vrata* is linked to the legend of Savītrī who married her husband Satyana although he was destined to live but one year. When Yama, the god of death, took his soul and left his body at the foot of a banyan (*vata*), Savītrī implored and obtained from Yama that her husband be reborn. In order to rediscover their husband in the course of seven successive lives, women fast for three days before the full moon of the month of Jyesta, then adorn themselves before praying by a banyan tree for the goddess to be merciful to them.

[11] The complete identity would also require indicating the name of the common ancestor in the male line to which one belongs and the name of the *gotra*, since one must marry into the same *jati*, but belong to a different *gotra*.

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were called by their first names followed by suffixes indicating respect, such as *rāo* (raja), *kākar, kāku*.

This practice can be compared to the one prevailing in Tamil Nadu among the Pramalai Kallar as described by Louis Dumont (1957: 136-137): "Tevar (*tēvar*) fundamentally signifies chief even though it can be extended to all the men of the group [...] the most general usage is to add Tevar as a suffix to the name of every man. Thus someone named Karuppan is politely referred to as Karuppattevar [...]. Moreover, it is characteristic that there is no feminine form of the word 'Tevar'; the wife of a Tevar is only an *ammāl*, a woman or lady, while a Kallar woman is a kallaci, a 'Kalla'''.

Regional variations

In Tamil Nadu as in Kerala, the distinction between the family name and the given name is not pertinent; the first term, designating filiation (for us the patronym), is the second term (which corresponds to the person's name) of the preceding generation. Thus Kumeradam Sivapprajhasan will call his children Sivapprajhasan followed by their own "name", Rajarajeshwari, for example if the child is a girl. The first term is most often indicated by an initial, so that S. Rajarajeshwari, is the daughter, even though we might never have suspected it, of K. Sivapprajhasan. The alternation of the two identifying terms, coupled to the fact that the term of filiation is valid only for a single generation, represents a special system peculiar to southern India.

In northern India, including Mahārāshtra, the distinction between the patronym and the forename is similar to our own practices.

The patronym is quite often a toponym,[12] or else an occupation and, consequently, the caste or sub-caste to which one be-

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[12] Cf. A. Burguière, "Un nom pour soi", *L'homme*, Oct.-Dec. 1980, t. XX, No. 4, p. 26. "The surname is [...] a patronym information [...] individuals are registered by a baptismal name and an hereditary surname formed from the names of places, of trades or baptismal names". In nineteenth-century reports made by the English (settlement reports) among Hindus and Muslims for determining land revenues, the names of professions, honorary titles, geographic origins, etc., are registered as patronyms.

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longs. Let us take the imaginary, but typical, example of Viṣṇu Despande. The combination of forename and patronym indicates a complementarity between the absolute and universal quality of the divine Viṣṇu symbol and the particular and social aspect designated by Despande, "hereditary civil servant of the Marathi administration, responsible for receiving the taxes of a region, *pargana*". The two terms correspond to two goals of man (*puruṣārtha*), deliverance and profit, *mokṣa* and *artha*.

Identity is defined by two terms whose function is similar to the one we assign them in our culture. One term, the hereditary name, designates filiation; the other, the given name, which is the real and individualizing name of the person, designates the individual belonging to this filiation.

The relationship between these two terms and their meanings is different, on the other hand, because it refers to a different ideology and type of social organization. For example, marriage for a woman means the loss of the given name and family name that linked her to her family. Sheila (given name) Keśava (father's given name) Kirtikar (father's family name) becomes Uṣā (given name in marriage) Hemānt (husband's given name) Bambavale (husband's family name). Women inherit neither the material goods nor the symbolic goods formed by their name.

Innovations

In order to regain use of these names,[13] new solutions, renouncing the symbolic function of the father's name, are today enjoying a relative success. The child receives either the family name of the mother (matronym) or else a name made up of the given names of the two parents. Thus Añjalī and her husband Vijay will register their daughter Haimā in school by the name of

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[13] This new awareness for given and family names, considered as individualizing signs contributing to the affirmation of one's existence as a person, appears in the first scenes of a film entitled *Paroma* in which the actress Aparna Sen is called by members of her husband's family, who ask for her help by using different terms expressing their relationship, as is the custom. No one pronounces her given name; she only exists through the bonds of marriage that link her to those around her. "Who am I?", she asks herself.

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Añjalīvijay, with the order depending on euphony. In this composite name in which both parents appear in the form of their individual (given) names, we can recognize an effort similar to the one observed earlier with regard to a letter or syllable common to children of the same lineage. The name is, among other things, the original receptacle; the letter or syllable linguistically forms a common matrix representing the carnal mother, just as the combined names of the two parents represent their marriage and union. The name thus formed indicates in a sense the absolute beginning of filiation.

The case of the gods, their avatars and their wives

The gods in India are named in a variety of manners, corresponding to their different aspects, linked to a given episode of their mythology or to their "descents", *avatāra*; they are then reborn as men, *nāmarūpa*, name-and-form. Indian polytheism is also polytheonomy.

The wives of the gods are also known by various names, such as Sītā, the model wife of Rāma, called Vaidehī, Maithilī, Jānakī. Sītā, which means "furrow", links her to the circumstances of her birth. When Janaka "traced the circle of Vedi in the field, then I came forth splitting the earth", she relates (*Rāmāyana*, sarga CXVIII, verse 28 ff). Sītā, called *ayoni-jā*, born without *yoni*, without matrix like many mythological heroes—is an illustration of the myth of autochtony in which the earth plays the role of mother. According to the epic, Sītā belongs to the line of Videhas and marries Rāma of the line Ikṣvaku. But this overly-human filiation is forgotten in practice. Sītā, like Rāma and like the gods in general, has no need of patronyms; a single word suffices to identify them. The diversity of their appellations, which indicates the abundance of forms they assume, corroborates this privilege, for each one is self-sufficient.

A single name suffices for naming the gods. For men, with their given names and family names, it is different. But there is no real equivalent in India to an identity in the legal and normative sense we are familiar with in the West. The distinction between a given and a family name does not exist in the south; in Poona where

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this distinction occurs, the construction of the hereditary name that I described above (which apparently draws its inspiration and legitimacy from customs of the south) indicates that this is still being shaped. The rules, different by region, are more highly developed at certain levels of the population. Their flexibility also indicates that in this multi-caste society, the group to which one belongs is sufficiently bonded that a patronym is not absolutely necessary to indicate filiation. "Everyone knows *who* this girl is, *who* this boy is", it was often explained to me. Thus at the level of the extended family (and at the village level), people, almost like the gods, are known simply by their first names.

Moreover, this anthroponymic instability is perhaps linked to the fact that in India the components of a person are different from our own. In Mahārāshtra one distinguishes the *ātman*, the Self, the individual soul called, thanks to the spiritual body (in Marathi *lingadeha*), to be reborn in the material body (*sthūladeha*) that one receives in the course of one's successive lives (Carters, 1982: 124-126). The proper name fails to "name" the essential, the *ātman*, which represents in this transmigratory perspective the only authentic identity. (Only theophoric names, which designate men as divine manifestations, recognize its existence.) It only names the transitory forms that one assumes in the course of various existences. Our introductory fable has already shown us this.

V. MODELS AND MODES

The decline of religious references in given names is an important index of the emergence of new tastes and new collective ideas. The marked influence of history, more precisely of the struggle for Independence over names, is proof of the commitment to this struggle.

Given names are taken from major political figures of the times (Arunā comes from Aruṅa Asaf Ali, famous freedom fighter; Sarojā from the equally famous Sarojinī Naidu, militant in the "Quit India Movement" and friend of Gandhi, poet, musician and singer; Ārvind from Ārvindbābū, pronounced Aurobindo in Bengali) or from more distant eras (such as Aśok, from the

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name of an emperor converted to Buddhism who placed his power at the service of non-violence). These names undoubtedly reflect a similar nationalist feeling.

Alongside this, "more neutral" names, connoting "more universal values" (in contrast to mythological names), as was explained to me, were very popular in the 1950's. Boys called Vijay (Victory), Ajay (Invincible), Santoṣ (Contentment), Samdha (United) belong to this category as do girls named Amitā (Infinite, Limitless), Ādityā (Free of all Bonds), Muktī (Liberated), Jayā (Victory).

Girls seem to have benefitted from these new aspirations as much as boys if not more. No doubt this is linked to the fact that in Poona there exists a long progressive intellectual tradition, going back to the nineteenth century. The city was the center of several important reform movements in which appeared such distinguished persons as Ranade, Karve and Gokhale for whom improvement of the status of women was a priority. Thus the first university for women was created in Poona at the middle of the century. Is this the reason that so many women today are called Vidyā, Knowledge, in contrast to the tradition that forbade them access to it? I am tempted to think so.

This aspect of naming, linked to regional or national history, refers back to a phenomenon that even more broadly can be set in the process of Sanskritization in India. The imitation by hierarchically lower castes of castes that are superior to them can take the form, among other ways, of copying given names in a sort of "vertical circulation".

Innovation seems to come from Brahmans seeking originality—as in the masculine names Apūrva (Unprecedented), or Tusāra (the Dew), names that had hitherto been unknown—or from a certain sense of "*chic*", by adding the ending *li* to female names, as in Sonali, Vaiśalī, Rūpali, etc. This search for novelty, for the "Brahmanical touch" as it is said in Poona, is obviously a reaction to the homogenization that makes it so difficult today to guess the social origin of persons from their first names. The study of the changing styles in "symbolic, obligatory and gratuitous possessions", as Besnard (1979: 345) so rightly defines it, would be revealing for the feeling of caste, of attachment to what is specifically Marathi, etc.

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In the Brahman community of Poona, the living memory of the etymology of names, the legends in which they figure, confers on them a predictive power and makes of them models. For boys as well as for girls the name represents a plan of action: an ideal to be achieved, a statement of regret, the fear of death.

Because these meanings are in direct contact with an ideological division of the world, because this makes it possible to classify the person named as well as the one doing the naming by sex, role and familial and social status, the given name directly illuminates representations and practices that help construct a person's identity. This identity, which it represents and confers, demands recognition by others and by oneself of the symbolic order that underlies the systems in which life in society is organized.

The interiorization of this identity—successive for women, accumulative for men—invites reproducing to a large extent the statutory inequality between people of different sexes.

Nevertheless, in the community being studied here, certain innovations in the area of given names are expressions of different aspirations: equality of the sexes, more universal values than those proclaimed by mythology, or the recognition of an historical, regional or national dimension. The names for girls seem to attest to these new aspirations even more than do names for boys. The reason for this is that sooner or later, at the time of their marriage, they are given a second name of the traditional type, putting an end to the freedom they enjoyed during childhood and adolescence.

In conclusion, like the vampire of famous tales, I would like to ask a riddle that leads us back to the problem raised by the dialogue at the beginning. This riddle deals with double names, a category that suggests another conception of the statutory inequality betweeen men and women.[14]

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Usage limits double names (that is names containing a masculine and a feminine component) to men. Perhaps this is because of the myth of Prajapati, the first *puruṣa*. We know that he, through desire and after a long ascetical practice, succeeded in issuing the female element he needed in order to reproduce himself. Names like Lalitāśaṅkar, Sītārām or Lakṣmīnārāyan are a reflection of this theogony in which the female element is contained in the masculine element.

This exclusiveness is not absolute, however. Female ascetics are also given double names such as Śivmāyā, Gurubhaktī, etc. Their names are constructed on the model of the Vedic light-earth, *dyavapṛthivi* (Macdonnell 1971: 126); for their masculine counterparts the order is reversed with the feminine element preceding the masculine. As for names in general, the ending indicates the genus in both cases.

But the important difference does not reside in this fact, even though grammatically correct, but in another. At the level of their meaning, these double names are symmetrically opposites of one another. For some they imply the coexistence and the accumulation of the two elements, masculine and feminine (androgyny), whereas for others they represent, ideally, that these two elements have been absorbed and neutralized. It could then be asked what happens at the rebirth of these men and women whose names evoke Śiva in one of his most serene forms (Ardhanarisvara), half man and half woman.

This riddle will remain unanswered. For according to Hinduism, the *ātman* has no sex.

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