Indian Names: A Guide for Science Editors

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In the English-language naming convention, a given ("first") name, a surname (family name), and sometimes a middle name are used. That system, however, is not inherent to many cultures where English is not the first language. Naming conventions used in some parts of India, for example, follow different systems. Recognizing the difference and taking a sound editorial approach to it can help in appropriate attribution , citation, and indexing of the many English-language scientific papers by authors with Indian names.

Effect of the Colonial Past

In many parts of India, there originally was no concept of using surnames as understood in the Western world. Under British colonial rule, however, Indians were expected to follow a naming system that corresponded with the British naming convention. People in different regions of India responded differently to the requirement. Indians in the northern, western, and eastern regions seemed to adapt more easily to the new convention. For example, the physicist Satyendra Nath Bose (as in Bose-Einstein condensate) had Satyendra as his given name, Nath as his middle name, and Bose (a common Bengali surname) as his surname.

Indians in the southern region found the modification more difficult because their original naming system was complex. A complete, spelled-out southern Indian name typically contains the name of the native (or ancestral) village, the father's name, the given name, and occasionally the caste title. For example, if the well-known English fiction writer RK

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Narayanan had to spell out his name, it would be Rasipuram (village name) Krishnaswami (father's name) Ayyar (caste title) Narayanan (given name).

To conform to the English-language naming convention, the following formats have been used:

- Many Indians in the south use caste titles (Iyer, Aiyengar, Rao, and so on) as their surnames.
- Some others use the father's given name (or the husband's given name, in the case of married women) in place of the surname. In such cases, a father and son (or daughter) will have different surnames; for example, if Ramanujam Murthy has a son named Ganesh, Ganesh Ramanujam would be the son's complete name.
- A few use the ancestral village name as the surname.

Points That Cause Confusion

When asked to supply one or two initials and the surname, authors with names in the English-language format provide the initials of the given and sometimes the middle names and spell out the surname. For example, Roger William Smith will provide R W Smith. However, many southern Indian authors who use the father's given name as a surname spell out their own given name and use the initials of the father's given name. Thus, Chandrasekhara (father's name) Venkata (father's middle name) Raman (given name) is the spelled-out name of physicist C V Raman (who was awarded the Nobel Prize for his work on scattering of light). The point to bear in mind is that Raman is the given name, not the surname.

If C V Raman wrote one paper using the author name C V Raman (in keeping with the practice of using the initials of the father's given name and middle name) and another paper using the name Raman Venkata Chandrasekhara (in trying to keep with the English-language naming conven-

tion), it would appear that two authors, C V Raman and R V Chandrasekhara, have written the papers. Confusion also occurs if an author who has always used the father's given name instead of the surname suddenly starts using the caste title or village name as the surname. To avoid problems in indexing journal articles correctly by author names and with attribution, authors should use a consistent format to write their names.

Editorial Policies

It appears that few (if any) style guides and journal instructions specify how to write or use complex Indian names. And the journal editors interviewed allow Indian authors to follow the conventions of their choice. Alexis Mogul, production editor of *PLoS Biology*, says, "*PLoS* style for Indian names is generally to follow the author. We recognize that there are some complicated naming conventions, but we do not have a house style for nontraditional names, so we just trust authors to put their names how they want them." That policy can result in inconsistent formats (spelled-out given names of some authors and spelled-out surnames of others) in the same reference list. For example, a reference list in the *Journal of Investigative Dermatology* includes "Sudha PM, Low S, Kwang J & Gong ZY", in which Sudha is the given name of the author, but the other spelled-out names are surnames.

Another journal that prefers using names as given by the authors is *The Lancet Oncology*. David Collingridge, editor of this journal, says, "*The Lancet Oncology* orders Indian names (and those of other nationalities) in the order supplied by the author(s). We feel this the best way of ensuring published names are [consistent] with the authors' expectations (and in turn correct culturally)."

Indian names continued

Guidelines to Avoid Confusion

Following a few simple steps will go a long way in helping authors, editors, and other authors citing works of authors with Indian names.

- For authors: Be consistent. Always list your name in the same way. Editors and other authors can then avoid problems in attributing, citing, and indexing.
- For editors: Whether or not authors (in India and elsewhere) follow the English-language naming convention, insist that they use a consistent format for their names in all the materials submitted for publication.
- For those citing Indian authors: Spell out whichever name the author spells out. There is no need to determine whether it is a given name or surname. If an author spells out more than one name, try to see how the author has cited himself or herself. If in doubt, contact the author.
- For correspondence: When corresponding with an author, follow the author's format. If unsure, spell out the complete name.

Bibliography

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