

# Reviving or Distorting – A Study on the Trend of Renaming Places and Erecting Statues

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## ABSTRACT:

India is known for its ethnic and cultural diversity since time immemorial. It has been accommodative of people belonging to different religions, cultural backgrounds, and locale. This paper tries to locate how the recent trend undertaken by various state governments across the country's landscape to rename cities, iconic places and the practice of erecting statues of stalwarts with political mileage has been perceived by people across the country. The paper also tries to find out how these changes have had an impact or consequence on the lives of people residing in a particular place where the change has taken place. On analyzing the responses collected through an online questionnaire the paper concludes that most of the respondents perceive these measures as ineffective in reviving India's past glory but rather as a potential source of harm to the society.

**Keywords:** Renaming cities, Culture, History, Political mileage, Nationalism

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## I. INTRODUCTION

In the past five years, more than 25 places have been renamed by various state governments with the intention of erasing either the colonial influence or the Mughal influence. Few of the earlier name changes such as renaming Madras to Chennai, Bombay to Mumbai, Bangalore to Bengaluru has met with limited success. Nine out of ten people still use the old names to refer to these places despite it being quite some time since these names came into existence. These changes are mostly reflected and utilized only by the government for official and administrative purposes.

Despite the poor success rate of these measures, the governments do not seem ready to stop themselves from renaming cities and iconic places. The Uttar Pradesh government headed by Yogi Adityanath renamed Allahabad to Prayagraj as recently on October 16, 2018, with the intention of reviving the city's lost glory. But, this move seems audacious as the city ranks 96<sup>th</sup> in the list of 111 liveable cities of India, which shows that there are more pressing demands to be addressed than the name change. Following the suite of Allahabad, the Himachal Pradesh state government is seen contemplating the move to rename the city of Shimla as Shyamala soon.

## II. THE THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

- **Binaries:**

Binaries refer to the combination of two things, a pair. The concept of binary was first raised by French structural linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, who stated that signs (words) have meanings not as a plain reference to real objects, but by their opposition to other signs. For the example, the meaning of the day is understood by contrasting it to the idea of not being the night. According to him, these are very common in the cultural construction of reality and vital in constructing ideological meanings.

The Britishers used various binaries such as white/black, civilized/savage, us/them, west/east, Orient/occident to project themselves as people who were superior to the colonized. They legitimized colonization by stating it was their burden to civilize the colonized, which is commonly referred to as ‘the white man’s burden’.

The Britishers utilized the binary of us/them to validate their culture, practices, beliefs, and ideologies to be better than those of the colonized. By stating so, the colonizers were able to make the colonized believe that they were inherently inferior to the colonizer which would eventually aid them in sustaining and expanding their rule over the colonized.

- **Decolonization:**

Decolonization refers to the process of revealing and dismantling the power of colonizer in all forms. This includes dismantling the latent aspects of those institutional and cultural forces that had sustained the colonizer’s power even after the attaining political independence.

For example, India got itself freed from the colonial rule in the year 1947, but till date has been extensively utilizing the language of the colonizer (English) and has adopted innumerable western practices and traditions such as the adoption of western food and apparels.

### III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How do people perceive the increasing trend of changes made to the names of cities, iconic and public places across the country?
- Do people feel that erecting statues of leaders and stalwarts belonging to the past as a viable measure of remembering them / appreciating them for their contributions?
- Do people perceive these measures as effective in erasing the British / Mughal past of the country?
- How have these changes impacted the lifestyle of people and the social fabric of the country as a whole?
- Do these measures contribute to the increased sense of nationalism among people or the vice versa?

## IV. SAMPLE

Hundred people across the country both male and female aged between 18 to 60 years took up the online questionnaire. The sample can be termed as a microcosm of our country's rich diversity.

## V. DISCUSSION

The data collected has been attached towards the end of the paper under appendix.

Sixty percent of the respondents felt that the increasing trend of changes made to the names of cities, iconic and public places across the country as ineffective and was made with the only intention of gaining political mileage and as silent tactics adopted by the government to "Hindunise" the country.

Whereas around thirty percent of the participants felt these measures to be a step ahead by the government in the right direction of reviving the lost past and tradition of the country. The remaining ten percent of the respondents were either non-committal about their stand or left the question by stating that time would give the answer. The responses weren't divided based on the participant's gender but, were considerably affected by the age of the respondents.

The younger population, i.e., the ones either in their adolescence or early adulthood constituted the major chunk of the sample who stated that these changes were ineffective and was made with the only intention of gaining political mileage. Whereas the older generation i.e., people aged 50 and above constituted the major chunk of the sample which stated these measures to be progressive in reviving the lost past and tradition of our country.

This difference across different age groups can be attributed to the strongly held values and traditions of the people belonging to the older generation when compared to the younger ones. This difference can also be attributed to the increased awareness about our country's past and culture among the elderly than the younger ones. On the other side, this also points out how older generations are more vulnerable to be deceived by the false propaganda of the politicians when compared to the younger ones.

In line with the previous question, around fifty-five percent of the respondents felt that the practice of erecting statues of leaders and stalwarts belonging to the past as a viable means utilized by the government not to validate their contribution to the nation but to manipulate the minds of people and garner their support. They perceive it to be yet another tool of propaganda used by the government.

Around thirty-five percent of the participants felt that the practice of erecting statues of leaders and stalwarts belonging to the past as the right way to recognize their innumerable contribution to the nation and as a viable mean for people to remember them. Remaining ten percent of the respondents were non-committal about their stand.

In line with the previous question, the age difference was found to be prevalent in this one too with the more elderly respondents being in support of the government's initiative than the younger ones, the reason for which would be the same as the previous one. Out of the thirty-five percent who were supportive of the government's initiative more than sixty percent were female.

This slight gender difference could be attributed to the difference in emotional levels between men and women. In general, women are seen as individuals who are more emotional when compared to men. On applying the same principle here, one could attribute greater women's supportive stand of the government's initiative to the greater emotional connect they tend to have with the concept of nation and national icons or symbols.

More than eighty percent of the participants felt that these measures won't be effective in erasing the colonial past of the country, given our inability to decolonize our minds. With our country still perceiving them (British i.e., west) to be superior and following the path lied by them changing the names of places which reflected their presence sounds childish. This could be attributed to the widespread prevalence and domination of English, as a language of communication and survival in our country despite it being an alien language to us. This could also be attributed to the western form of education being taught in our country's educational institutions alongside with the adoption of a western sense of fashion and cuisines.

The remaining minority of the respondents felt that these measures may not be enough by themselves to erase the colonial past of the country but as significant pointers which would help the country in progressing towards achieving the same. This could either be attributed to their limited understanding of the cultural dominance of the west over us even today or to their optimism about erasing the country's colonial past through making these minor attempts.

Whereas more than sixty-five percent of the respondents felt that these measures were undertaken by various state governments in line with their idea of creating a 'Hindu Rashtra', by erasing the Muslim identity associated with those places. They felt that this measure would potentially affect the sense of belonging among the people of Islam and they would end up becoming immigrants in their own land.

The remaining percent of the participants felt that these measures were undertaken by various state governments to revive the lost glory of those places by retaining their old/traditional names and not as a desperate effort of the government in creating a sense of alienation among the Muslims. No observable difference was found among the participants based on their gender and age group for this question.

More than forty percent of the participants felt that these measures have not affected their lifestyle as well as the overall social fabric of the country in any way. This could be attributed to the limited awareness among the

people about the happenings around them, how the governments have been successful in minimizing the ground level impact or to people's limited exposure to the stated changes.

Around thirty-five percent of the respondents felt that these measures have affected their lifestyle as well as the overall social fabric of the country in a negative way. This could be attributed to the increasing sense of divide among the Hindus and the Muslims, increasing conflicts among both the sects and how there has been a situation of unrest prevailing in the country.

The remaining minority of the respondents felt that these measures have improved their lifestyle as well as the overall social fabric of the country. This could be attributed to one's strict identification with the country's past glory and tradition and also how he/she has been exposed selectively to the impact of these measures.

The difference could also be attributed to one's religious identity as it is the Muslims who are majorly affected. In contrast, the Hindus feel that they are reclaiming their lost ground and their sense of identity. They experience more sense of belonging to the country as they feel that successive governments since independence have continuously ignored them to appease the minority and it is only now that their needs and demands are getting addressed/fulfilled. (Religious affiliations of the participants were not collected given the religious sensitivity of the issue)

Similar to the previous question, no observable difference was found among the participants based on their gender and age group for this question.

Finally, the majority of the respondents felt that these measures were actually contributing to the decrease in sense of nationalism than aiding in improving it. Since nationalism is an ideological construct and India traditionally being aligning itself with the notion of tolerance and acceptance of differences based on various social and cultural factors increasing notion of a single, 'Hindu' identity of the country has been met with stiff resistance from people belonging to various quarters of the country.

A minority of the respondents felt that these measures were instrumental in increasing the sense of nationalism among the citizens of the country. This could be due to their alignment with the proposed single, 'Hindu' identity of the nation, due to their limited awareness about the potential harm faced by the people belonging to other religions especially the Muslims due to these measures or due to their blind and strict political affiliation.

These measures taken by government can be seen as the modified and ornamented version of the Us / them binary used by the west to suppress and erase the culture of the east which according to them was primitive, uncivilized. In this case, the conscious efforts taken by various state governments to create and reinforce the binary of Hindus/Muslims, where Hindus allude to the concept of 'us' whereas Muslims alludes to the concept of them.

This binary stems from their belief of Hindus as indigenous people of the land whereas Muslims as invaders who must be suppressed. Also reinforcing the binary of Majority/Minority, where the majority (The Hindus) is considered superior to the minority (The Muslims). As binaries shape the ideologies held by people, which in turn would influence their behavior, attitudes, and beliefs these measures are seen as extensively troublesome to the social fabric of the country and could potentially lead to the irrevocable downfall of the country.

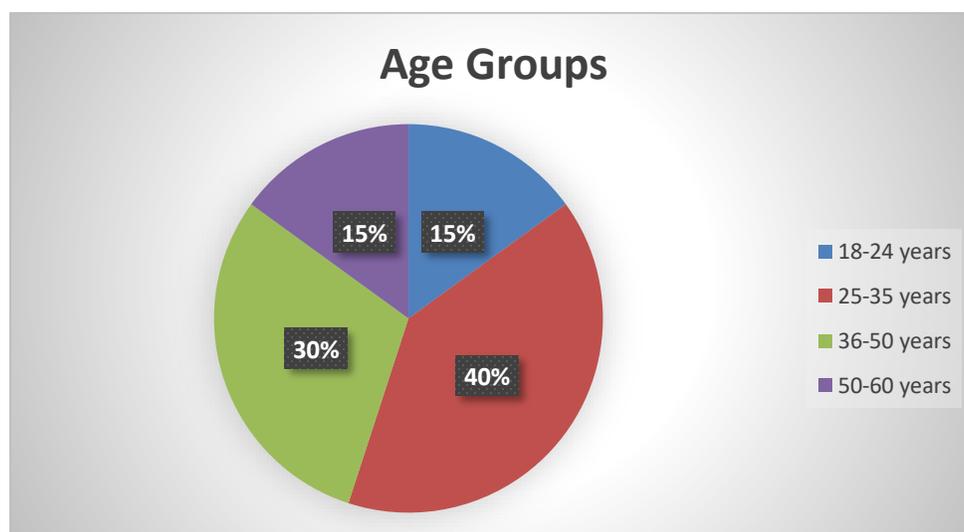
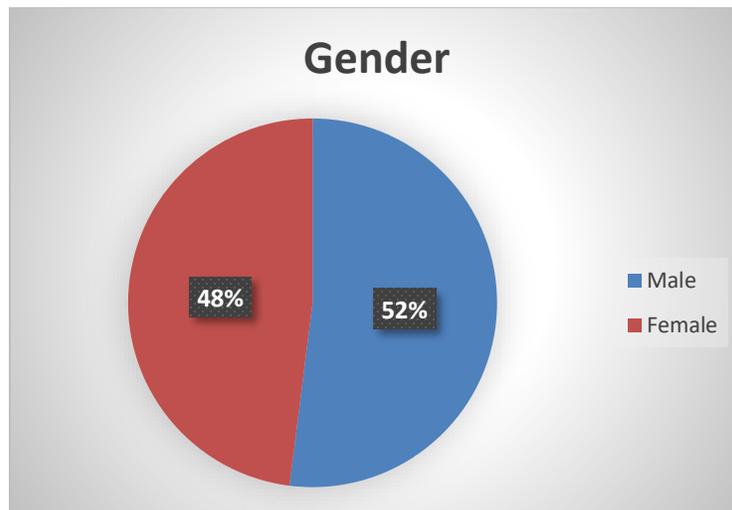
## **VI. CONCLUSION**

It is very clear that people perceive the process undertaken by various state governments to rename cities, iconic and public places as ineffective in retaining/reviving our country's traditions/lost glory but, instead would lead to social and cultural instability. Also, the very limited awareness among people about the potential impact and costs these initiatives could bear is clearly seen. The need of the hour is to educate people about the latent intent of the government behind initiatives of this type and about the wide range of lasting consequences it could have on our country.

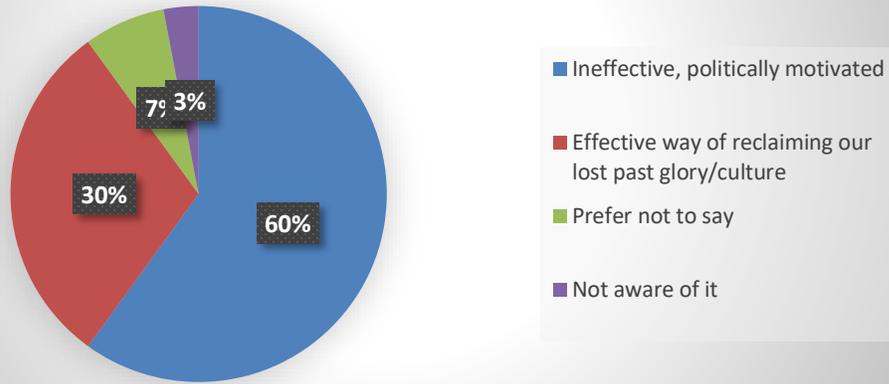
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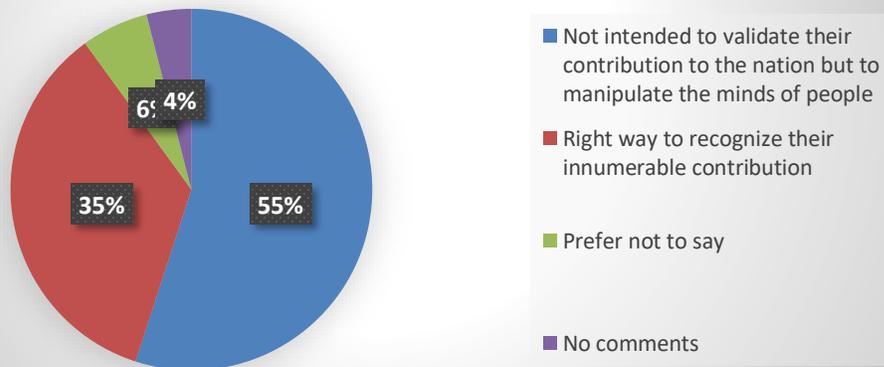
## APPENDIX



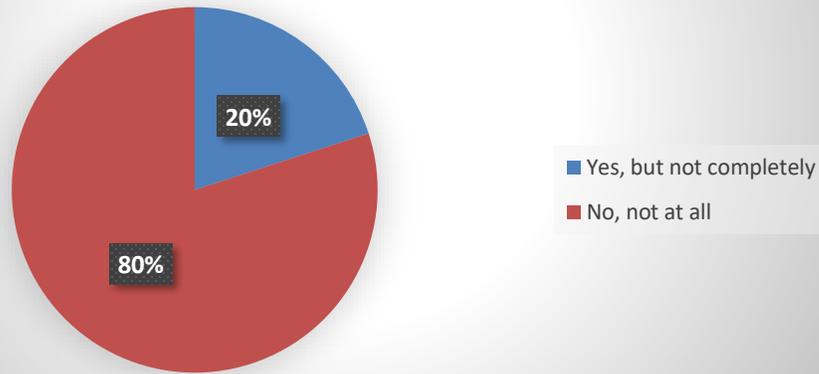
### How do you perceive the trend of renaming cities, iconic and public places?



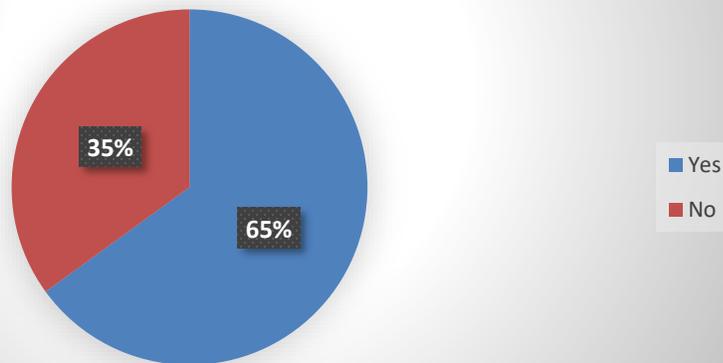
### How do you perceive the government's efforts in installing statues of leaders and stalwarts belonging to the past?



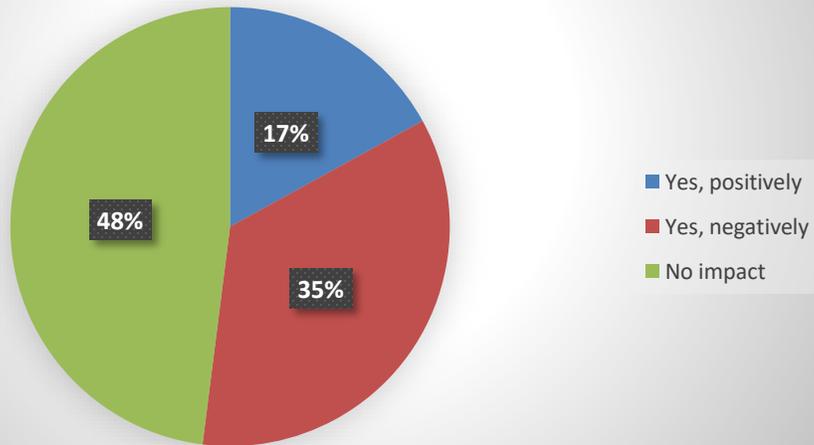
**Do you feel these measures taken by the government will be effective in erasing our country's colonial past?**



**Do you perceive these steps undertaken by the government as a way of creating a national Hindu identity?**



**Do you feel the impact of these changes on your personal life style and social fabric of the country as a whole?**



**Do you feel that these measures contribute in aiding one's sense of nationalism?**

