

Of funny names, surnames and more



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Rajiv Roy 25 April 2014 Updated 27 Apr 26723 views

Well if you think that Meghalaya is only famous for Cherrapunjee – the rainiest place on earth, Mawsynram – renowned for its hot water springs that can heal arthritis and other bodily pains, Mawlynnong – the cleanest village in Asia, Balpakram national park and the rest of it then you are wrong. There is another attractive side to this state, which is hilarious indeed. The names of the tribal people of this state, which has the potentiality to make people guffaw, endlessly. Have you ever heard of ‘Latrine’ and ‘Submarine’? These two terms, the former does not only mean the place where we go early morning to lighten ourselves and the latter is a vessel that can operate underwater. These two are actually the names of two voters of village called Umnih in Meghalaya’s Indo-Bangladesh border. Peculiar names are not only confined to these voters but such names are also found among the contestants, which can take you to the days of Napoleon and Hitler. If we rewind to the 2013 Meghalaya Assembly Election we can meet Adolf Lu Hitler R Marak from Bajengdoba constituency in Garo Hills whose name is derived from the German crusader Hitler. Then we have Frankenstein Marak from Mendipathar constituency, who got this name after baptize and Adviser Pariong from Nongstoin constituency, who is not a former adviser or something but a deserter of the state’s oldest regional party HSPDP followed by Coming One Ymbon from Raliang, about whom people from his constituency said that they don’t know when he is “coming” and “going”. We all know former Meghalaya chief minister DD Lapang, who was christened “Disco Dancer” by a national leader during his visit to Shillong some years back for an inauguration ceremony when Lapang was the state chief minister. When the media person asked him about his impression about the then dilapidated Guwahati – Shillong National Highway (popularly known as GS Road), the leader said that the bumpy ride was like “Disco Dancer” denoting the first two syllables “DD” of Lapang’s name.

Then there is Founder Strong Cajee, former legislator of Meghalaya's biggest constituency Mawlai, whose middle name "Strong" meant too harsh for a photojournalist inside the state assembly in the past when he was slapped because the journo took his photograph while napping inside the assembly, which went viral in the local media. This list is not small as we also have Manas Chaudhuri, whose initial is similar to the name of a wildlife sanctuary in neighboring Guwahati but that does not mean that the person Manas is a "wildlife" followed by Kennedy Cornelius Khyriem, whose name reminds us of former US president Robert Kennedy. Eureka FP Lyngdoh, from Mairang Constituency, implies the Eureka of famous Greek philosopher Socrates – who came out running from his bathroom shouting "Eureka, Eureka" when he got the clue to something.

Well it is learnt that giving such names to children by tribal parents is a fascination here. Now this is not the end of the name drain here. If you want more then here you are. There are names like 'Alexander', perhaps he had a mistaken lineage links with the world conqueror like English footballer Michael Owen, whose ancestors were mistakenly linked to the Khasi tribe by some here; alleged 26/11 Mumbai bomber, 'Bomber'; a Dawood aide 'Mafia'; 'Hilarius' of Raju Srivastava fame; 'Boldness'; the botanist 'Nesting'; the sleeping village 'Hamlet' and the un-successor called 'Predecessor'.

Though people faces harassment for their funny names wherever they go but they are not to be blamed rather their parents who are to be held responsible. That colonial hangover still at its peak can be gauged from these names as most parents name their wards without even knowing their real meaning. A school student is named Cornerstone – perhaps named after a foundation stone that it denotes. If noun, verbs and adjectives is used to named tribals in Meghalaya than countries are not far behind either. There are also peculiar names like Thailand and New York that one may come across here. It is said that a name defines the person but HH Mohrmen, who too has a funny word denoting one of his initials said in one of his recent article, “What’s in a name? Everything!” The Shillong Times, that name given unthinkingly can be a perpetual embarrassment to the carrier of that name. He is correct because a weird name can invite much unpleasant attention from others. One such youth from Manipur, Chanthoi Aheibam, was ridiculed during his college days in the national capital when he was called ‘Cinthol’ despite correcting his classmates several times. This embarrassment is also applicable in case of people from Meghalaya who counters surprising looks, enquiries from others similar to what they face in case of their place of origin which is often mistaken for China, Japan, Korea and other such countries with mongoloid appearance people, by mainlanders.

Mohrmen writes in his article, “It is also common to find Khasis named after western cities and countries, so we have persons named New York, Charlotte, Persia, Korea, Holland, Poland, England, New Zealand, Russia, Africa and Australia. Sometimes we have all the continents of the world in one family. In one election when the papers of the candidates were scrutinized, the opposition candidate raised objections that his rival had the word Doctor prefixed to his name. The candidate was asked to produce documents to prove that he is either a PhD degree holder or an MBBS. Pat came the answer from the candidate that the word doctor before his name is not a degree but it is part of his name... And I am not surprised because if parents can name their son ‘Side Drain,’ I see no reason why they can’t name him Doctor, Engineer etc., In fact I know a person whose name is Scientist.”

There are also families here who are fond of the heavenly bodies that they name their children after planets. However, what is unbelievable is when one names their children ‘Toilet’ and ‘Institute’, ‘Constitute’, ‘Prostitute’ – perhaps because of their rhythmic flow. Then there is ‘Kilometer’, ‘Xmas’, ‘Emperor’, ‘Comet’ as it can go on and on. Many take the double HH that prefixes Mohrmen’s name for “His Holiness”. He clarified in his article, “... the first ‘H’ is from my father’s name ‘Hamkhein’ and the next ‘H’ is the name that my parents gave when I was named at the church and which stands for ‘Helpme.’ Yes that’s right ‘Helpme’ – that’s’ my name. And yes there are times that I feel embarrassed and so using the contraption ‘HH,’ is an effort to make my name sound more normal and comfortable. But sometimes I put my name to good use and whenever people thank me for helping them I say, ‘It goes with the name.’”

Well all done with names, then comes surname. And here too one has to literally indulge in twisting their tongues in order to pronounce the correct surnames. Well how about trying these surnames from Meghalaya – Pde, Pdah, Malngiang, Sniawbahlang (a tribal name), Sniatlang, Myllemngap, Myllemnpdah, Ngapkynta, Nongbsap, Susngi, Sutnga, Khongsngi and Chyne. Well if you want any hint, then there is no silent letter in tribal names here. They tend to pronounce no matter how bizarre may be the placements of letters, like in case of the surname “Pdah”. The tribal names of places in Meghalaya area also mistaken by outsiders as many pronounce Ladrymbai, a coal rich belt of Jaintia Hills, as Latumbai.

And finally, who says only tribal names and surnames in Meghalaya are funny. Even gentleman language “English” can be equally funny. Read this one. Many says that English is a peculiar language and most people find the pronunciation difficult, say, if “to” is pronounced like the numeral “2” than why “go” is pronounced as “go” and not “gu” (not to be mistaken by the yellow element). It is learnt that the language is often practiced wrongly by many who are not in sync with the real meaning. Recently, a lady official sent an enquiry to a particular department in a state government of a particular state regarding a key issue. The department secretary replied to the lady official, “Dear Madam, with reference to your above please see my below”. In today’s world, where the mode of communication is English, all seems to be busy honing their technical skills but not the language, ironically. It has to be understood that the understanding of the nuances of English or any other local languages is poor. However, the gaffe was lost on the official who sent the reply to the lady official even after the context and nuance were explained to him.

Photo: Umium Lake is drying up due to lack of rain

Rajiv Roy

Shillong

BY RAJIV ROY

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