

# Exploring the Sociolinguistic Dynamics of Naming Motivations among Telugu Catholics

Smita Joseph

The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad, India

Correspondence: [joseph.smita@gmail.com](mailto:joseph.smita@gmail.com)

ORCID ID: [0009-0006-6595-1685](https://orcid.org/0009-0006-6595-1685)

This article has been subject to a double-anonymised peer-review process.



**Copyright notice:** This article is issued under the terms of the **Creative Commons Attribution License**, which permits use and redistribution of the work provided that the original author and source are credited.

You must give appropriate credit (author attribution), provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use. You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits.

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

---

## Abstract

*This study focuses on exploring the motivations behind given names among the Telugu Catholics. By distributing survey questionnaires, data were collected on participants' motivations, aiming to generate qualitative insights. A total of 173 Telugu Catholics participated in this study on naming motivations. The findings revealed that Telugu Catholics negotiate their pre-Christian and Christian identities through naming styles. It is noteworthy that Telugu Catholic parents had the option of choosing between Christian names or pre-convert Hindu names. Consequently, parents tend to associate with specific categories of names while dissociating from others when selecting names for their children. The research conducted on the naming practices of this Indian Christian group opens up possibilities for further socio-onomastic investigations. Future studies can explore how different Indian Christian communities adapt through naming and examine the various naming techniques employed. By delving deeper into these areas, one can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the sociolinguistic dynamics within Indian Christian communities and their naming practices.*

**Keywords:** personal names; socio-onomastics; Social Identity Theory (SIT); Social Categorisation Theory (SCT); Telugu Catholic; naming motivations; Indian Christianity

---

## Introduction

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate how Telugu Catholics construct their social identities through naming practices. Based on recent studies in the field of socio-onomastics (e.g., on the use of name motivations in **Aldrin, 2017**),<sup>i</sup> this study analysed the names of Telugu Catholics.<sup>ii</sup> Current approaches in the field take into account the varied societal and ethnic needs of communities that are achieved through naming practices. To put it another way, names serve more than just 'identificatory or reference' functions (**Ainiala & Östman, 2017**). In the discussions that follow, I first give a brief introduction about the cultural, religious, and historical aspects of Telugu Christians. The community's background will give us a better understanding of the Indian Christian group and establish the context and significance of the study. This will be followed by the study's research questions.

The Telugu-speaking community first encountered Christianity at the beginning of the sixteenth century through the efforts of Franciscan missionaries (**Schurhammer, quoted in Babu, 2005: 32**). The Franciscans were the only congregation involved in the evangelisation of the Telugu-speaking people at this time. However, from the latter half of the sixteenth century, Jesuit missionaries began their evangelisation activities in the community (**Babu, 2005: 33**). The Augustinians and Theatines were the next sets of missionaries to try to convert the Telugu people to Christianity, arriving in the seventeenth century (**Babu, 2005: 38**). Of these two groups, the Theatines arrived first (**Joseph, quoted in Babu, 2005: 42**). The Capuchins, another Catholic congregation, arrived in the year 1645 (**Leoncini & Ames, quoted in Taneti, 2022: 32**). None of these congregations were able to win over many Indigenous people to Christianity. Instead, the first missionaries were limited to meeting the religious needs of the non-natives (e.g., Europeans). Therefore, Christianity did not begin, spread, or stabilise in the region during this period (**Joseph, quoted in Babu, 2005: 42-43**).

However, since the 1700s, the local population has embraced Christianity, the success of which can be attributed to the Jesuits of the Carnatic Mission.<sup>iii</sup> This period also marked the beginning of conversions of people from the upper castes, such as the Velamas, Reddies, and Kammās (**Kroot, 1910; Babu, 2005**). The first person who was baptised among the Reddies of Madigubba, a village in present-day Andhra Pradesh, was Timma Rayappa.<sup>iv</sup> Since he was a powerful and influential person, many people in the nearby localities also embraced Christianity. There are fascinating stories about the naming practices that began among the initial converts of the Carnatic Mission. After being attacked

by a group of bandits, the Reddy Christians abandoned their hometowns and relocated to Nellore during the 1700s. From then on, the Christians of the Reddy community have continued the tradition of using their family surnames, which are also the names of their place of origin. The community's descent can be traced to this place in the present day (**Babu, 2005: 55-56**).

In another instance, the first person in the Kamma caste group to convert to Christianity, under the Carnatic Mission in 1733, adopted the personal name Annamma. This name quickly gained popularity in the community among Kamma Christians (**Kroot, 1910: 241**). A large number of converts from the Kamma caste settled in Cuddapah (Andhra Pradesh).<sup>v</sup> However, when conditions deteriorated, they returned to Nellore and Guntur, where they had originally lived. Place names indicating their place of origin are appended to the proper names of Kamma Christians (e.g., Pudota, Etur, etc.) (**Babu, 2005: 56–57**).

As a result, many of the personal names of early Christians among the Telugu-speaking population became well-known in their respective caste-based communities. For example, Annamma, the personal name of the first Christian among Kammas, became popular in the community, whereas the name Rayappa gained popularity among the Christians of the Reddy caste group (**Kroot, 1910: 241**). Venkatagiri Christians (i.e., Christians from Venkatagiri, a place in Andhra Pradesh) are another group whose names indicate their Christian affiliation in Telugu. In the 1700s, Venkatagiri played a significant role in Christian missionary activities. The early Christians in this area were members of the Kuraba caste, a community traditionally associated with the occupation of weaving blankets. To this day, their descendants' Christian names can be traced back via this lineage (**Kroot, 1910: 64**).

In 1735, the Christians of Bukkapuram, a place in Andhra Pradesh, were strengthened by the addition of the Reddies, who had the surname Thumma appended to their proper names. The Reddy groups with the surname Thumma were originally from Anantapur district in Andhra Pradesh. The Reddy Christians of Bukkapuram were reputed for their devotion to Christianity. Rayalseema and Batsalapuradu (both of which are in Andhra Pradesh) are also noted for having large communities of Reddy Christians (**Kroot, 1910: 59-61**).

## **Methodology**

This study is based on data gathered from surveys administered to Telugu Catholics. The survey was made available to participants in different

modalities—both in person and remotely (e.g., via Google Forms, long-distance modes of participation wherein participants could return their filled-out questionnaires at their convenience). It was also circulated to participants in groups. Specifically, parish priests of Catholic churches in Hyderabad were approached for assistance, who would then make announcements requesting the participation of community members. Participants sat in groups and responded to the questionnaire individually. The questionnaire was bilingual, as questions on personal names were provided in English and Telugu (**Joseph, 2023**).

The research questions of the study are as follows:

- (1) What reasons do parents from Telugu Catholic communities provide for giving their children certain names?
- (2) What factors influence the naming motivations of the Indian Christian community?
- (3) What kind of linguistic, socio-cultural, and regional adaptation strategies can be seen in the given names of Telugu Catholics?

In total, 173 Telugu Catholics participated in the survey. Participants were asked to provide their full official names and the official names of their family members. Information was also collected on the social variables that could impact naming, such as the age of the participant and the ages of their family members, their employment details, and their educational and linguistic profiles. The community members were also required to provide information regarding their pre-Christian names (i.e., the given names of community members before they converted to Christianity) and caste backgrounds. I wanted to understand how caste interacted with participants' personal names because—among Telugus, and hence among Telugu Catholics—caste is a very important component of one's social identity (**Joseph, 2023: 153–169**).

In addition to questions that elicited information about participants' demographic profiles, the questionnaire included 23 test items exploring different aspects of Telugu Catholics' naming practices. Questions that elicited data on the reasons for the naming of community members were as follows:

- (1) 'Did your parents/relatives ever tell you why you got this name?'
- (2) 'Why did your children/siblings/spouse/parents get this (official) name? Please list the main reasons...' (**Joseph, 2023: 162–164**).

Judgment sampling was used to collect the names of Telugu Catholics in this study. In this sampling technique, the researcher decides the speaker categories before conducting the fieldwork. This can be contrasted with techniques in which community members or ethnographic participation guides the researcher about speaker categories in the community (**Schilling, 2013: 35–36; 41–42**). Two types of social groups were investigated for names: the Scheduled Castes and the General Category. Participants in these two categories were approached via local social networks, such as parish priests. Though this sampling technique was not wholly representative<sup>vi</sup> of the larger population, the patterns observed regarding the naming styles of Telugu Catholics can be generalised to the Telugu-speaking community as a whole. This is because decisions about which speaker groups to focus on were based on the study's research questions, which were drawn from informal interviews with members of the community and in-depth ethnographic participation within the community.

### **Historical Origins of the Community**

As mentioned in the Introduction, Christianity was introduced to Telugu speakers in the first half of the sixteenth century. Friar Luis do Salvador, a Portuguese Franciscan missionary, was the first Christian missionary to begin evangelistic work among the Telugus, dispatched as a Portuguese diplomat to the Kingdom of Vizayanagaram. Besides forging a treaty between the Kingdom of Vizayanagaram and the Portuguese, Friar Salvador was also granted the formal approval to spread Christianity to the native population (**Schurhammer, quoted in Babu, 2005**). He succeeded in converting a few locals. At the same time, other members of the Franciscan Order were involved in spreading Christianity in southern India. The initial converts belonged to lower-caste groups, such as the Golla (herdsmen), Saale (a caste traditionally associated with weaving), and Kummari (potters) (**Babu, 2005**).

Under the direction of Fr. Nicolas Pimenta, the Jesuits made their initial contact with the Telugus in 1597 (**Thanugundla, quoted in Babu, 2005**). A report that Fr. Pimenta gave to the Jesuit General provides an account of the Jesuits' activities among the Telugu-speaking people between 1598 and 1600. The Guerreiro report also details the Jesuits' activities between 1600 and 1609. These documents show that the Jesuits and the King of the Vizayanagaram Empire (Venkatapati Devaraya II) had a cordial relationship (**Babu, 2005**).

Because of this, the king and his family supported the Jesuits in their evangelical activities in the kingdom. But despite the Royal family's

support, the Jesuits could not spread their religion among the Telugus for various reasons. They failed partly because the Indians rejected the imposition of a foreign culture (**Babu, 2005**). The Portuguese were particularly disliked by locals because they ate beef, and in those days, only people from the lower castes did so. The eating of beef was actually prohibited for the upper castes in the highly casteist Telugu society. In addition, the Portuguese married women from the lower castes, further alienating them from the upper castes. The strained relations with the people and the King of Vizayanagaram Empire only worsened when the Portuguese razed a few Hindu neighbourhoods in Mylapore. All these factors contributed to the Jesuits leaving the Vizayanagaram Kingdom by the first quarter of the seventeenth century (**Kroot, in Babu, 2005**).

It was only in the eighteenth century that locals began embracing Christianity. The missionaries of the Carnatic Mission made this possible. From this point onward, individuals from the upper castes (Velamas, Reddies, Kammas, etc.) began adopting the religion (**Kroot, 1910; Babu, 2005**). Following the dissolution of the Jesuit missionaries of the Carnatic Mission in the eighteenth century, the Paris Foreign Missions carried on this work among the local populace (**Kroot, 1910: 61–64**), although the Carmelites also played a role in the early conversions of the Telugu people, arriving in Telugu-speaking regions in the last decades of the seventeenth century along with the Protestant missionaries and focusing on the local upper castes (**Taneti, 2022: 33**).

### **Social Identity Theory: A theoretical perspective**

Across all societies, people attempt to project a positive image of themselves (**Tajfel, 1981: 254**). This is driven by the need of every individual to see themselves in a positive light in a given community (**Turner, 1975: 9**). A person's self-image is shaped through membership in various social groups (**Tajfel, 1981: 254**), and an individual can belong to many social groups at any given point in time. The correlation between self-image and membership in various groups is closely related to the concepts of 'social categorisation,' 'social identity,' 'social comparison,' and 'psychological group distinctiveness' (**Tajfel, 1981: 254**).

Let us briefly look at each of these concepts. For Tajfel, social categorisation is a means by which 'the social' is equated with 'the individual'. Showing uniformity in 'actions, intentions and system of beliefs', a social group is a collection of individuals that can be conceptualised as a cognitive entity (**Tajfel, 1981: 254–255**). Additionally, a social group becomes relevant only in the context of other groups (**Tajfel, in Turner, 1975: 7–8**). Social categorisation refers to differences

between ingroup and outgroup memberships, in which the value system of a group plays an important role in preserving the distinctions between ingroups and outgroups (**Tajfel, 1981: 254–255**).

Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Social Categorisation Theory (SCT) are closely related. Van Knippenberg conceptualises SIT as that aspect of an individual's 'self-concept' that is derived from their understanding of belonging to (a) particular social group(s) and the salience of that belongingness (**1984: 563–564**). The salience attached to membership in a particular group includes the values and the affective components ascribed to it (**Tajfel, 1981: 255**). In contrast, SCT allows people to determine theirs as well as others' position in society based on their memberships in certain groups (**Turner, 1975: 7; van Knippenberg, 1984: 563–564**). One's social identity is based on how one defines themselves and their rank in this social order (**Turner, 1975: 7**). While SCT is a theory of mental classification, SIT combines the cognitive aspects of SCT along with the overt motives of people to build positive social identities (**van Knippenberg, 1984: 563–564**).

According to Tajfel, the core goal of SIT is for every individual to build a positive social identity (**van Knippenberg, 1984: 563**). The term *positive* here refers to the set of shared ideologies common to group members. These ideologies, or aspects of identity, are essential for creating and maintaining differences between relevant outgroups. In other words, intergroup differences are based on comparisons of differential values leading to hierarchical relations between the relevant social groups in question (**Turner, 1975: 9–10**). Therefore, members of a community can build a positive social identity by contrasting ingroup members with outgroup members. This differentiation can generate positive meanings for ingroup members if comparisons portray them in a positive light. There are various mechanisms for achieving a positive social identity, including moving to another social group that more accurately reflects one (**van Knippenberg, 1984: 563**), changing the characteristics of a group to be more favourable to its members, or assigning positive meanings to traits previously conceived as negative if changing group(s) is not possible (**van Knippenberg, 1984: 563; Tajfel, in Turner, 1975: 7**).

According to SIT, people generally engage in intergroup comparisons between ingroups and relevant outgroups. When members of a lower-ranking group realise the status differences between their ingroup and relevant outgroups, they either attempt to improve the comparable attributes of their ingroups or seek other ways to show supremacy. Since individuals derive their self-conceptions partly through the social group(s) to which they belong, membership in a low-ranking group might

have negative effects on one's social identity. As a result, members work on improving the group's standing by employing the strategies mentioned. In contrast, members of high-standing groups rarely feel the need to elevate their social status owing to it being assured by membership in said social group(s) (**van Knippenberg, 1984: 564–565**).

The features of a social group derive salience with respect to recognisable distinctions compared with the features of other relevant groups (**Tajfel, in Turner, 1975: 7**), such as the distinction in the personal names of upper- and lower-caste members, which is quite significant in societies stratified by caste hierarchies. The naming conventions of the lower castes are disparaged in relation to those of the upper castes (e.g., Kovind < Govind, 'another name for Lord Krishna'). If names are conceptualised as indicators of one's position in the social hierarchy, then this deliberate manipulation of meaningful names by the upper castes so that they become 'meaningless' is an attempt to maintain caste-based differences (**Buswala, 2023; Joe S. S., 2024**).

### **The Motivations for Telugu Catholic Names: A thematic analysis**

In this section, I address the research questions of this study. The first research question sought to investigate the motivations for Telugu Catholic names and was framed as follows: 'What reasons do parents from Telugu Catholic communities have for giving their children certain names?' The personal names of community members could be mainly classified into two main categories, Hindu and Christian.<sup>vii</sup> There was further sub-categorisation within these Hindu and Christian categories based on naming motivations. The next section looks at the different reasons for assigning Hindu names to community members.

#### ***Hindu Names*<sup>viii</sup>**

##### ***Category I***

The first category of Hindu names features names that were inherited from ancestors.<sup>ix</sup> These could also be pre-Christian conversion names of those individuals who converted to Christianity later in life as adults and chose not to change their names to maintain consistency in official records (**Joseph, 2023: 46, 82**). Names belonging to this type include common Indian names (e.g., Saritha, Deepak), names of Hindu gods and goddesses (e.g., Venkateshwar, 'Lord Venkateshwara'), symbols associated with Hinduism<sup>x</sup> (e.g., Lingaiah, a name based on a symbol representing Lord Shiva), etc. One of the respondents explained that this

type of name is assigned to community members because there is a tradition of 'naming children in memory of ancestors' and therefore 'a Hindu name' is selected (R.R.T., 2019).<sup>xi</sup>

### *Category II*

Hindu names belonging to this category reflect those in Category I but are given in order to avail caste-based reservations in government sectors (Joseph, 2023: 82). Dalit Christians hide their Christian identities because if they are revealed there is a high likelihood of being denied the caste-based privileges that are given to Dalits by the Indian Constitution. Since Christians lie outside the Indian caste system, they are not conventionally associated with the caste system. As a consequence, after embracing Christianity, Dalits would automatically be classified as Christians and not as Dalits (Taneti, 2022: 17–18).

A summary of participants' responses for this name motivation is as follows:

People use Hindu names for various reasons. They reflect the cultural heritage of the community and also function as an adaptation strategy. The upper castes use it because of their 'caste pride', but among the lower castes, they are used to avail reservation benefits (S.A., 2019). Christian names carry a stigma within the mainstream Hindu population—all Christians are seen as members of lower castes. Therefore, it is thus common to use the baptismal, Christian names in church, in the village, and in the private domains among family and friends, and Hindu names in public domains (Joseph, 2023: 82, 127). The use of two names, a Hindu and a Christian name, is like maintaining 'two identities' (S.P., 2024). Since the community embraced Christianity relatively recently, these two identities are maintained through naming practices.

### *Category III*

A third category features common Indian names or Telugu names which have covert Christian meanings (Joseph, 2023: 53). These kinds of names were derived through various linguistic processes.

The first of these are *loan translations*. The Telugu name Rayi ('stone') refers to the name Peter (Joseph, 2023: 80, 96), as Peter also means 'rock' or 'stone' in Aramaic, Greek, and Latin, the name's source languages (Hanks & Hodges, 2003). Other instances of this type of name include Chinnamma/Chinnappa, which is a combination of the Telugu word

*chinna* ('small') plus the Dravidian nominal *amma/appa* ('mother/father'), and refers to St Poulina, the feminine derivative of St Paul or Paul (from the Latin for 'small') (Joseph, 2023: 80). Another such name is Balaswamy, a combination of the Sanskrit *bala* ('child') and *swamy* ('lord, master'), which refers to 'infant Jesus'<sup>xii</sup> (see Table 1 below).

Table 1: Telugu Hindu names based on loan translations

S. No.	Name and its Variants	Target Language	Source Language
1.	Deva Swaroop	Sanskrit <i>deva</i> 'god' + <i>swaroop</i> 'wise' meaning 'one who knows god'.	English Dominic < Latin Dominicus 'god' (Hanks & Hodges, 2003)
2.	Rayi, Rayappa, Rayanna, Rayapu, etc.	Telugu <i>rayi</i> 'stone'	English Peter < Latin and Greek <i>petros</i> 'stone, rock' (Hanks & Hodges, 2003)
3.	Chinnamma, Chinnapu, Chinnappa	Telugu <i>chinna</i> 'small'	English Paul < Latin Paulus 'small' (Hanks & Hodges, 2003)
4.	Balaswamy	Sanskrit <i>bala</i> 'child' + <i>swamy</i> 'lord, master'	'Infant Jesus'

The second kind of names in this category are common Indian names wherein the original meaning of the names is *interpreted within a Christian context* among community members. Examples of such names include Prasad/-a, Sanskrit for 'food offered to God/deity/idol' (Christian meaning, 'offering to Jesus Christ, Communion'); Jyothi/Jyoti, Sanskrit for 'light' (Christian meaning, 'light of Jesus Christ'); Pavitra, Sanskrit for 'holy' (Christian meaning 'Holy Spirit'), etc. (see Table 2). One of the participants described such names as 'Telugu with a Christian sense' and as 'adaptation of Christianity into Telugu' (G.J., 2019). Hindu names in this category are also derived from the morphological process of compounding, such as the name Krishanti, in which *Kri* refers to 'Christ' and *shanti* the Sanskrit word for 'peace'.

Sometimes a specific sound in a Hindu name is given Christian meanings.<sup>xiii</sup> Examples include *Ajin*, where the first (*a-*) stands for St Anthony. The *-jin* is used to derive many neutral (non-religious) names, such as *Rojin*, *Jojin*, etc.<sup>xiv</sup> Another example identified in the dataset is *Dheeraj*, in which the first (*/dʰ/*) is linked to the sound */tʰ/* in the name Anthony, orthographically represented as 'th' (Joseph, 2023: 53).

Similarly, the name *Sharan*, which in Sanskrit means ‘shelter’, is interpreted as *Xavier* (*Showaraialyo* in Telugu) because of its phonetic similarity to the local Telugu variant of the Christian name. In the name *Devayani*, the first (/d/), orthographically represented as ‘d’, is linked with the initial sound in the name *Theresa* (as in, ‘Mother Teresa’), or /t/, orthographically represented as ‘th’.

Table 2: Indian names with inherently Christian meanings (Lugano & Mohan, 2024)

S. No.	Name/Variant Forms of Names	Derivation	Christian Meaning
1.	Avinash	Sanskrit ‘one who cannot be destroyed’	‘The indestructibility of Jesus Christ’
2.	Abhishek	Sanskrit ‘anointment’	‘One who is ordained to serve Jesus’
3.	Krupasagar	Sanskrit ‘ocean of mercy/compassion’	‘Jesus’ divine mercies’
4.	Rajarao	Telugu ‘king’	‘The three kings in the New Testament’
5.	Jayaraju	Sanskrit ‘victorious king’	‘Jesus’, ‘devotee of Jesus’
6.	Ratna	Sanskrit ‘consisting of pearls’	From the Book of Revelation where each of the 12 gates of heaven is made up of a single pearl
7.	Prasad, Prasada	Sanskrit ‘food offered to God/deity/idol’	‘Offering to Jesus Christ’, ‘Holy Communion’
8.	Jyothi, Jyoti	Sanskrit ‘light’	‘Light of Jesus Christ’
9.	Pavitra	Sanskrit ‘holy’	‘Holy Spirit’
10.	Rajesh	Sanskrit ‘king’	The final component of the name -jesh is interpreted as Jeshua ‘Jesus’.
11.	Samadanam	Sanskrit ‘reconciliation’, ‘resolve’, etc.	Peace, commonly understood as a Christian attribute
12.	Kiran	Sanskrit ‘ray of light’	Vision from God
13.	Guna	Sanskrit ‘virtue’	< Gunadala Matha, the name of a Catholic shrine in Vijayawada devoted to Mother Mary

Category IV

Names belonging to this category could be Telugu-sounding (e.g., the name *Rajapu*, or ‘kinglike’, which is a combination of *raja* (Sanskrit for ‘king’) and *pu < pole* (Dravidian for ‘like’); derived from local flower names (e.g., the name *Vardhan* is derived from local flower Nandivardhan)<sup>xv</sup>; or are common names used by Telugu speakers (e.g., Chiranjeevi). Table 3 lists the names belonging to this category. Such Telugu names help maintain Telugu culture and are generally preferred over English names; as one participant replied, since ‘Telugu Catholics are deeply rooted in their culture [...] they keep local names...’ (K.V., 2024).

Table 3: Telugu names

Serial No.	Name	Derivation	Telugu Meaning
1.	Rajapu	Sanskrit <i>raja</i> ‘king’ + <i>pu &lt; pole</i> ‘like’	‘kinglike’
2.	Vardhan	< Nandivardhan ‘a local flower name’	Name of a local flower
3.	Suvarna	Sanskrit ‘gold’	A common ‘pet name’
4.	Chiranjeevi	Sanskrit ‘one who lives long’	A common name among Telugus
5.	Moorthy Raju	Sanskrit <i>moorthy</i> ‘idol’ + <i>raju</i> ‘king’	A compound name consisting of two local names <i>moorthy</i> + <i>raju</i>

Category V

A significant number of names featured in the survey were those of Hindu gods and goddesses or based on Hindu customs and practices (e.g., names based on birthstones or Hindu astrology) (Joseph, 2023: 46–47, 94–95) (Table 4, next page). For a significant number of community members in the dataset, official (legal) names were the pre-Christian conversion names; none of the respondents used baptismal names as official names.

Table 4: Names based on Hindu gods, goddesses, and rituals (Smith & Narasimhachary, 1997; Lugano & Mohan, 2024)

S. No.	Name	Derivation and Meanings	Name Motivation
1.	Ravi	Sanskrit 'sun', 'the sun god'	'Ravi is the sun god' (V.T., 2019)
2.	Keshavulu	Keshav is another name for Lord Krishna, and Krishna is an avatar of Lord Vishnu. Lord Vishnu is a manifestation of Lord Venkateshwara, a popular deity among Telugu speakers.	'Named after Lord Venkateshwara' (V.T., 2019)
3.	Sheshaiah	Shesha is the snake on which Lord Vishnu is depicted as lying down. In this position, one sees Lord Vishnu's avatar in the form of Lord Ranganatha. Lord Ranganatha is a popular deity in south India.	'Sheshaiah means snake, ... Lord Vishnu' (V.T., 2019)
4.	Mahanandi	Sanskrit 'of Shiva'	'Named after Lord Shiva's vehicle "Nandi"' (B.B., 2019)
5.	Ramulu, Ramanna	In Hinduism, Lord Rama is perceived as an avatar of Lord Vishnu + Telugu <i>-anna</i> masculine ending.	'Lord Rama' (K.K., 2019)
6.	Dheeraj	Sanskrit 'patience'	'... his name starts with dh as per his birthstone' (K.V.B., 2019)
7.	Kondal Rayudu	Kondal Telugu 'name of a local rogue', Rayudu <i>rayi + -du</i> masculine ending	'Kondal Rayudu means Venkateshwara Swamy. The name refers to the famous Hindu deity at Tirumala' (J.K.R., 2024)
8.	Atchaiah	<i>achuthan</i> Sanskrit 'Lord Krishna' + Telugu <i>-aiah</i> 'father,' masculine ending	'Another name for Lord Venkatesh "achyuth"' (A.A., 2024)

### *Category VI*

Category VI features common Indian names defined as Sanskrit-derived, but are not associated with a particular religion, region, or ethnic group. There is a three-way distinction between Hindu, Christian, and these 'neutral' Indian names. For instance, one of the study participants was given a name that had a 'neutral' status, neither perceived as Hindu nor Christian, which could therefore be considered 'an acceptable Christian name' (K.M., 2024). One Christian participant felt that neutral 'Indian names were okay', while 'names based on Hindu mythology and Hindu gods and goddesses were not okay' (R.K., 2024).

Members cited various reasons for assigning Category VI names to their children. Some were either influenced by social media or by their real-life social networks. Examples of these names include Priyanka, Akshay, Raj, and Sivaji. Common Indian names were also given because they had a neutral status. In a typical case, one respondent, who converted to Christianity after marriage, changed her name from *Brahmini* to *Mini* because *Brahmini* means 'a woman belonging to the Brahmin caste' (Merriam-Webster, n.d.) and this was seen as an unacceptable Christian name by her husband's family, who thought *Mini* sounded more neutral.

### **Christian Names**

Another major category of names assigned to community members is Christian names. This section presents the types of Christian names given as well as the motivations for doing so. The stock of Christian names can be biblical, the names of saints, or epithets for saints or biblical characters. These names can also be Telugu variants of Christian names or Christian names that are English-derived (Joseph, 2023: 80, 97–99, 103) (Table 5).

In Telugu, the fricative sound /z/ is rendered as fricative /ʃ/ in word-initial position of names (e.g., Showr or Shour < Xavier) and as affricate /dʒ/ in the word-medial position of names (e.g., Jojappa/Jojaiah < Joseph; Moijeelu < Moses), as it does not exist in the language (Talkpal AI, 2026). Most male names end with either *-appa* (Joseph, 2023: 98) or *-ayya* ('father') (Burrow & Emeneau, 1984: 15, 19) (e.g., Showraiah, Showrappa). Occasionally, male names may end in the Telugu suffix *-lu* (e.g., Showrilu, Moijeelu).<sup>xvi</sup>

Female names end with the Dravidian nominal *-amma* ('mother', a marker of respect) (Burrow & Emeneau, 1984: 18) (Joseph, 2023: 98), e.g., Mariamma, Theklamma (Table 5). Where names have been derived by adding nominals *-amma*, *-appa*, *-ayya*, etc., the morphological process of compounding applies. Compounding can also be seen in the derivation of other kinds of names, such as Yesupadam (< yesu ('Jesus') + padam

(‘foot, servant’) = ‘servant of Jesus’). In cases where *-lu* is added to name bases, the morphological process of affixation<sup>xvii</sup> applies (Table 5).

Telugu words which end with consonant sounds are pronounced with vowels in word-final positions, i.e. the sound in which a word ends. (For example, in the word ‘car’, *r* occurs in the word-final position.) This rule is also extended to English loan words that end with consonant sounds, as they are pronounced with *-u* endings in Telugu (Kuncham & Padya, 2016). The non-native name *Lourdu* also follows this pronunciation rule (Table 5). Telugu variants of Christian names can be based on local church names (e.g., Showri vari Devalayam); be Telugu adaptations of saint names (e.g., Anthaiah) or Christian symbols (e.g., Sleevayya); or names of local martyrs (e.g., Teclamma) (Joseph, 2023: 46, 96–97, 100). They are perceived as a ‘nativisation of Christianity’ (G.S., 2019). Instances of non-native variants of Christian names (e.g., English-language variants) given are Mary, Maria, Regina (i.e., ‘Mother Mary’), John, Joseph, Moses, Samuel, Benjamin, and Noah.

Christian names convey strongly Christian identities and contrast with more traditional Hindu names (Joseph, 2023: 54). One study participant stated the reason for assigning Christian names was because ‘people should know by the names of Christians that they are Christians’ (K.V., 2024). Participants stated that their (Christian) given names were based on ‘a symbol of Christianity’ (G.S., 2019) or demonstrated devotion to a particular saint or biblical character. Additionally, Christian names function as an antithesis to Hindu religious practices.

Table 5: Telugu variants of Christian names

S. No.	Telugu Variant of Christian Name	English Variant of Christian Name	Type of Linguistic Adaptation	Derivation
1.	Showry/-i, Shourulu, Showrilu, Showraiah, Showrappa	Xavier	Phonological and morphological <sup>xviii</sup>	Word-initial consonant /z/ in Xavier changes to /ʃ/ + Telugu -aiah/appa/-lu ending
2.	Mariamamma, Marreddy	Mary	Morphological	Mariamamma < Mary + Dravidian -amma; Marreddy < back clipping of the name Mary to Ma + caste title Reddy
3.	Seceliamma/Ceciliamma	Cecily	Morphological	Cecily + Dravidian -amma

4.	Joji, Jojaiah, Jojappa	Joseph	Phonological and morphological	Word-medial fricative /z/ in Joseph changes to affricate /dʒ/ in Jojaiah/Jojappa/Joji + Telugu aiah/appa/-i ending <sup>xix</sup>
5.	Antonamma, Anthaiah	Feminine variant of Antony	Morphological	The Dravidian nominals amma and ayya have been added after back clipping the original name Anthony/Antony
6.	Theklamma	Tecla, Thecla	Morphological	Thecla + Dravidian - amma
7.	Yesupadam	Jesus	Morphological	The compound word comprising Yesu 'Jesus' + Sanskrit padam 'of the foot, servant', 'servant of Jesus'
8.	Lurdu/Lourdu, Lourdamma	Lourdes, referring to Mother Mary	Phonological and morphological	Lourd + Telugu -u ending; Lourd + Dravidian -amma
9.	Sleevayya	Sleeva	Morphological	Syriac sleeva 'cross' ( <b>'Saint Thomas Christian cross,' 2025</b> ) + Telugu ayya
10.	Moijeelu	Moses	Morphological	Word-medial fricative /z/ in Moses is rendered as affricate /dʒ/ leading to the following derivation: Moij + Telugu -lu
11.	Mathiya	Mathew	Morphological	Either of the two derivations: (1) The Hebrew variant of the name is Mat t thia ( <b>Hanks &amp; Hodges, 2003</b> ) (2) Math (via back clipping of Mathew) + ayya
12.	Annamma	Anne	Morphological	English Ann + -amma
13.	Theresamma	Theresa	Morphological	English Theresa + - amma

### **Christian-Hindu Compound Names**

Even after a widespread conversion to Christianity, the Telugu-language community has maintained, to an extent, ‘pre-Christian worldviews’, including Hindu ones (**Taneti, 2022**). In this section, I discuss the influence of both Hindu and Christian worldviews in naming practices.

Several Christian naming conventions show the influence of both religions. In the first type, two first names, one Hindu and one Christian, are given. Instances of such names in the dataset include Lourdu Ajay and Mary Sandhya. In such naming styles, the reasons for bestowing Hindu names, as well as the types of Hindu names, are similar to the motivations and types mentioned in the previous Hindu names section, and the motivations and name types of Christian names were also similar to those discussed in the Christian names category.

A few of the first names in this subcategory function as modifier-modified pairs. For instance, the name *Mary Rani*, which combines Mary and Rani (Sanskrit for ‘queen’), can be translated as ‘Mary, the Queen’. Similarly, the name *Mary Suvarna* (Sanskrit for ‘gold’) can be translated as ‘Mary House of Gold’. These are epithets or titles ascribed to ‘Mother Mary’ in the Catholic Church.

The second type of names reflecting both Hindu and Christian identities are names that embed caste titles or are compounded with a caste title.<sup>xx</sup> Instances of such names include Marreddy, Showreddy (Showr + Reddy), Bala Sunder Reddy, and Mary Naidu, etc.<sup>xxi</sup> According to one participant, the ‘caste system is very deeply rooted in the Catholics of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana states’ (**C.K., 2019**), which results in such names (**Joseph, 2023: 82**). Another respondent commented that ‘two names’ are given to ‘maintain both Hindu and Christian identities’ for recent converts (**S.P., 2024**).

### **Conclusion**

Telugu Christians are a composite of Dalit, Hindu, and Christian identities (**Taneti, 2022**). Dalits are a marginalised community within Hinduism, and the majority of Telugu Christians comprise the different subgroups of Dalits. Their conversion to Christianity can be understood as an attempt to improve their social status. Telugu society is highly stratified by the caste system, and in this system, Dalits are excluded from mainstream Hindu communities that are casteist in nature. As a result, they often imitate the practices of the dominant castes, such as Brahmins, to elevate their social status—a process referred to as Sanskritisation (**Taneti, 2022**).<sup>xxii</sup>

According to the dataset of Telugu Catholic names analysed, two kinds of names are given to community members, Hindu and Christian. Hindu names are mainly Sanskrit-derived, and the use of such names by community members can be seen as an act of Sanskritisation. Another motivation to use Hindu names instead of Christian ones is to avail the benefits provided by the Indian government to Dalits (see discussion in 'Hindu names'). The use of Hindu names by Telugu Catholics can thus be seen as a mechanism to achieve a positive social identity.

The Telugu variants of Christian names represent instances of colloquialisms in speech through naming. Such practices seek to create and maintain distinctions between the ingroup (e.g., Telugu Catholics) and the relevant outgroup members (e.g., non-Telugu Catholics). It can be argued that appropriating the local variants of Christian names is an instance of creating a positive social identity, as it distinguishes between the ingroup and outgroup members in a way that is advantageous to the ingroup members (i.e., this naming style creates solidarity among ingroup members, Telugu Catholics).

Furthermore, participants who saw Hindus as outgroup members preferred neutral names over names of Hindu gods and goddesses. More instances of neutral names include names with inherent Christian meanings (see Category III in 'Hindu names') vis-à-vis common Indian names with inherent Sanskrit meanings. The simultaneous use of Hindu and Christian personal names can be seen as an act of negotiating Hindu and Christian identities. In some cases, two first names are used officially, one Hindu and one Christian (see discussion in 'Christian-Hindu Compound Names'); in other cases, a Hindu name is used in public domains and a Christian name in private (see Category II, 'Hindu names').

Telugu Christians' compound Dalit, Hindu, and Christian identities (**Taneti, 2022**) is reflected in their naming styles. Within the SIT model, these styles can be understood as building positive social identities by members of low-ranking social groups as they seek membership in various social groups that contribute positively to their self-image. Within the SCT framework, a social group demonstrates consistent patterns or features that can be generalised to the entire community. This aspect of the theory's framework can be extended to a community's naming styles. Among Telugu Catholics, for instance, community members always have a choice to assign Hindu or Christian names (see 'Hindu names' and 'Christian names'). Other religious groups show similar trends. The traditional names of Kerala Syrian Christians, for instance, consist of a family name, the personal name of the father, and the individual's 'first' name, generally given during baptism (**Fenwick, 2009**).

SIT is a theoretical tool for analysing that part of one's self-perception based on membership(s) in different communities (**Tajfel & Turner,**

1986). In the event of naming, parents generally assign those names to their children that reflect the parent's identity, and, at the same time, resonate an identity that they aim for in their children (Aldrin, 2017). For instance, assigning a Christian name along with a caste surname can be seen as an accommodating strategy, wherein the caste surname reflects the ancestral identity of the parents and the personal, Christian name reflects the aspirations of the parents, so that the child will imbibe the qualities of the saint or the Christian virtues they are named after. The central purpose of SIT is to build a positive social identity based on ideologies which maintain intergroup differences (see 'SIT: A theoretical perspective'). While assigning names, parents often favour one kind of name over the other (e.g., Christian names vs. Hindu names, common Indian names vs. common Indian names with inherent Christian meanings, names of Hindu gods and goddesses vs. neutral names), thereby maintaining intergroup differences through naming.

The main theoretical claim that this study makes is that multicultural, multireligious, and multilingual societies often lead to the adoption of heterogeneous ideologies among that society's ingroups, such as those multi-religious ideologies taken up by the Telugu-Christian community (Taneti, 2022), which are reflected in their personal names.

---

**Editor's note:** An earlier version of this article appeared in the author's monograph *Proper Names of Telugu Catholics and Kerala Syrian Christians: Sociolinguistic and Historical Perspectives* (2023, Lit Verlag). It has been substantially updated and is reprinted here with permission.

### List of Tables/Images

Table 1: Telugu Hindu names based on loan translations

Table 2: Indian names with inherently Christian meanings (Lugano & Mohan, 2024)

Table 3: Telugu names

Table 4: Names based on Hindu gods, goddesses, and rituals (Smith & Narasimhachary, 1997; Lugano & Mohan, 2024)

Table 5: Telugu variants of Christian names

Dr Smita Joseph is an Assistant Professor of Sociolinguistics at the English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad, India. Her research focuses on Indian English and socio-onomastics. She teaches linguistics, sociolinguistics, and pragmatics across undergraduate, postgraduate, and doctoral levels. Her recent publications include two articles in the *International Journal of Anglo-Indian Studies*, where she explores Anglo-Indian identity through slang and naming practices, and one in the *Journal of Language and Culture* on code-switching in Indian English-language newspapers.



---

## References

- Ainiala, T., and Östman, J-O., 2017. 'Introduction' in *Socio-onomastics: The Pragmatics of Names*. T. Ainiala and J-O. Östman, eds., Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, pp. 1–18.
- Aldrin, E., 2017. 'Creating identities through the choice of first names' in *Socio-onomastics: The Pragmatics of Names*. T. Ainiala and J-O. Östman, eds. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, pp. 45–68.
- Babu, M., 2005. *Catholic Beginnings and Mission Expansion by Mill Hill Fathers in Nellore Diocese: A Historical Study*. Rome: Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, PhD thesis.
- Burrow, T., and Emeneau, M. B., 1984. *A Dravidian etymological dictionary*, 2nd ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Buswala, B., 2023. 'Undignified names: Caste, politics, and everyday life in north India'. *Contemporary South Asia*, 31(4), pp. 567–83. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09584935.2023.2262943> (last accessed 22 April 2026).
- Fenwick, J., 2009. *The Forgotten Bishops: The Malabar Independent Syrian Church and Its Place in the Story of the St. Thomas Christians of South India*. Georgias Press.
- Hanks, P., & Hodges, F., 2003. *A Dictionary of First Names*. Oxford University Press.
- Joe S. S., A., 2024. *Upper and Lower Caste Personal Names in Southern Kerala: A sociolinguistic investigation*. The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad, India. Ph.D. thesis.
- Joseph, Smita. 2020. *The Anglo-Indians in Hyderabad: Sociolinguistic, Historical and Anthropological Perspectives*. Delhi: Primus Books.
- , 2023. *Proper Names of Telugu Catholics and Kerala Syrian Christians: Sociolinguistic and Historical Perspectives* (Vol. 23). Lit Verlag.

Kroot, A., 1910. *History of the Telugu Christians*. Tiruchchirappalli: St. Joseph's Industrial School Press.

Kuncham, V., and Padya, R., 2016. 'Use of Translation Strategies from English into Telugu: A Case Study of Translation and Coining of Science Terms of Secondary Science Textbooks'. *International Journal of English Language, Literature and Translation Studies*, 3(3), pp. 648–54. Available at: <http://www.ijelr.in/3.3.16c/648-654%20VENKANNA.pdf> (last accessed 22 April 2026).

Lugano, K. G., and Mohan, S., 2024. *Sanskrit-English/English-Sanskrit dictionary*. Available at: <https://www.learnsanskrit.cc/> (last accessed 22 April 2026).

*Merriam-Webster*, n.d. 'Brahmani'. *Merriam-Webster.com*. Available at: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Brahmani> (last accessed 22 April 2026).

Mesthrie, R., 2020. Sociolinguistic patterns and names: A variationist study of changes in personal names among Indian South Africans. *Language in Society*, 50(1), pp. 7–28. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047404520000652> (last accessed 22 April 2026).

Rajagopal, K., 2026. 'SC status only for Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs : top court' 25 March. *The Hindu*. Available at: <https://www.pressreader.com/india/the-hindu-delhi-9ww5/20260325/281483577913731> (last accessed 7 May 2026).

Saint Thomas Christian cross., 2025. *Wikipedia*. Available at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint\\_Thomas\\_Christian\\_cross](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Thomas_Christian_cross) [Accessed: 5 January 2025].

Schilling, N., 2013. *Sociolinguistic Fieldwork*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Shanmuganathan, T., et al., 2021. 'Names and Naming Practices of the Telugu in Malaysia'. *Names: A Journal of Onomastics*, 69(2), pp. 34–42. Available at: <https://ans-names.pitt.edu/ans/article/view/2277> (last accessed 22 April 2026).

Smith, H. D., & Narasimhachary, M., 1997. *Handbook of Hindu Gods, Goddesses and Saints: Popular in Contemporary South India*. Delhi: Sundeep Prakashan.

Tajfel, H., 1981. *Human Groups and Social Categories: Studies in Social Psychology*. Cambridge University Press.

Tajfel, H., and Turner, J. C. 1986. 'The social identity theory of intergroup behavior' in *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, S. Worchel, and W.G. Austin, eds. Chicago: Nelson-Hall Publishers, pp. 7–24.

Talkpal AI., 2026. 'Why is the Letter Z Missing from the Traditional Telugu Alphabet?' Available at: <https://talkpal.ai/culture/why-is-the-letter-z-missing-from-the-traditional-telugu-alphabet/> (last accessed 7 May 2026).

Taneti, J. E., 2022. *Telugu Christians: A History*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

TOI Astrology., 2024. 'Is naming your child based on astrology a smart choice or just superstition?' *Times of India*. 27 September. Available at: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/astrology/others/is-naming-your-child-based-on-astrology-a-smart-choice-or-just-superstition/articleshow/113730612.cms> (last accessed 7 May 2026).

Turner, J. C., 1975. 'Social comparison and social identity: Some prospects for intergroup behaviour'. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 5(1), pp. 5–34. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2420050102> (last accessed 22 April 2026).

Van Knippenberg, A. F. M., 1984. 'Intergroup differences in group perceptions' in *The Social Dimension: European Developments in Social Psychology, Volume 2*. H. Tajfel, ed., Cambridge University Press, pp. 560–78.

---

**To cite this article:**

Joseph, S., 2026. Exploring the Sociolinguistic Dynamics of Naming Motivations among Telugu Catholics. *Exchanges: The Interdisciplinary Research Journal*, 13(2), 25-47. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.31273/eirj.v13i2.1827>.

---

**Endnotes**

<sup>i</sup> While onomastics mostly concentrates on the genesis and structure of names, as an extension of onomastics, socio-onomastics examines the pragmatic applications of names, i.e. the socio-cultural settings in which names are employed. The significance of names in the formation of social identities has recently been the focus of attention in the discipline. Such a viewpoint stresses the significance of names in day-to-day conversation, including changes in name use, the rationale for avoiding particular names, etc. This applies to the study of all name types, including first names, the focus of this study (Ainiala & Östman, 2017: 2).

<sup>ii</sup> The terms *Telugu Catholic* and *Telugu Christian* have been used synonymously in this article.

<sup>iii</sup> The Carnatic Mission started in the late-seventeenth or early-eighteenth century. For the Jesuits, the term *Carnatic* referred to the 'Kingdom of the Peninsula below the Ganges, the coast of Coromandel', but the Mission was not confined to the Carnatic region and covered parts of present-day Andhra Pradesh/Telangana, Maharashtra, and Karnataka. It also included a number of smaller regions under the indirect control of Mughal rulers. Most of these regions were Telugu-speaking at the time (Kroot, 1910: 9, 12–13, 73–74).

<sup>iv</sup> He was also called Tumma Rayappareddi (Kroot, 1910: 100).

<sup>v</sup> The Kamma Christians moved out of their ancestral home after converting, when family members disowned them for having embraced Christianity (Kroot, 1910: 294).

<sup>vi</sup> Many participants dropped out of the survey because they worried that I was sent by the Indian government to spy on them and that any sensitive information about names and caste they provided me might deprive them of caste-based benefits. Some also said they considered me an 'outsider' (Joseph, 2023).

<sup>vii</sup> Besides Hindu and Christian names, there were two other name types identified, unique names and western (non-English) names. Since these types of names constituted a small fraction of the dataset, they are not included in this discussion.

<sup>viii</sup> In this article, 'Hindu names' refers to names derived from Sanskrit.

<sup>ix</sup> Other studies on Telugu onomastics report similar findings regarding members of Telugu Hindu communities being assigned ancestral names (see Shanmuganathan et al., 2021).

<sup>x</sup> A study based on upper-caste Hindu names in southern Kerala makes this observation (Joe S.S., 2024).

<sup>xi</sup> The given names of participants have been used to exemplify patterns, but their full official names have been shortened to initials when they appear in citations. Participants were ensured that their full official names would not be revealed since this study is based on caste-based naming practices.

<sup>xii</sup> This is an epithet used to describe Jesus Christ from his birth through early teenage years.

<sup>xiii</sup> In Hinduism, the personal (given) name is developed from the first phonetic segment of the name that is governed by Jyotisha (Gatrad, et al., quoted in Shanmuganathan et al., 2021: 35). In Jyotisha or Hindu astrology, the horoscope becomes a deciding factor for assigning personal names, for example, by considering the most suitable sound segments in name-initial positions (TOI Astrology, 2024). In this subcategory of Telugu Catholic names, personal names are generated through Hindu rituals and practices but their connotations are Christian (Joseph, 2023: 47).

<sup>xiv</sup> See Joseph (2020) for further discussion on such types of names, called ‘rhyming names’, that constitute modern Kerala Syrian Christian names. Mesthrie (2020) also discusses rhyming names, a type of ‘neutral’ (i.e. non-religiously affiliated) name given to modern Indian–South Africans.

<sup>xv</sup> Traditional Telugu personal names can also be based on flora and fauna (Shanmuganathan et al., 2021).

<sup>xvi</sup> Shanmuganathan et al.’s (2021) study also attests the presence of this marker on Telugu male names.

<sup>xvii</sup> An affix is a part of a word that, when added, changes the word’s meaning, form, or syntactic category. Unlike a word, it cannot stand on its own. For example, in the word *teacher*, the affix *-er* changes the meaning (from ‘teach’ to ‘one who teaches’) and the syntactic category (from verb to noun) of the base word *teach*.

<sup>xviii</sup> The appending of names with Dravidian nominals is seen as morphological because they are added to name bases like suffixes (e.g., Jojappa/Jojaiah < Joj + *-appa/aiah*, Mariamma < Mary + *-amma*).

<sup>xix</sup> The *-i* ending in the name *Joji* is similar to how diminutives or pet names are derived in names like Robbie (< Robert), Katie, Katy (< Katherine).

<sup>xx</sup> Family names also form a component of Telugu proper names (see Shanmuganathan et al., 2021). However, since the focus of this study is the personal names of Telugu Catholics, I have omitted any discussion pertaining to family names.

<sup>xxi</sup> In the study based on the immigrant Telugu population in Malaysia, the use of caste titles in given names functioned as indicators of ethnicity (Shanmuganathan et al., 2021).

<sup>xxii</sup> Because Dalits face discrimination in mainstream Indian societies because the practice of untouchability excludes them, there is ‘statutory benefit, protection, reservation or entitlement’ for the community guaranteed by the Constitution (The Supreme Court of India, as cited in Rajagopal, 2026). However, the constitutional benefits and privileges accorded to Dalits do not apply to Dalit Christians, as ‘caste system is not recognised in Christianity’ (The High Court of Andhra Pradesh, in Rajagopal, 2026). This was affirmed in a recent Supreme Court judgement dated 24 March 2026 (Rajagopal, 2026). In this context, it becomes important for the community to retain their pre-Christian conversion names.