

## Malfunctions and Future of Renaming Streets

Nidhi

M.A, Delhi School of Economics, New Delhi, India

### Abstract

Renaming of streets creates a plethora of problems. Nostalgia and memory has a role to play in understanding the connections with old names. A change in street names deprives people of the “sense of belongingness”. Once renamed it requires timely up gradation of sign boards to avoid confusion. To make the process of renaming streets more efficient it is important to focus on some interesting or unique street naming themes- branding of streets, names after flowers or animals, climate change awareness themes etc.

**Keywords:** nostalgia, sense of belongingness, homonyms, right to participate, distributive injustices

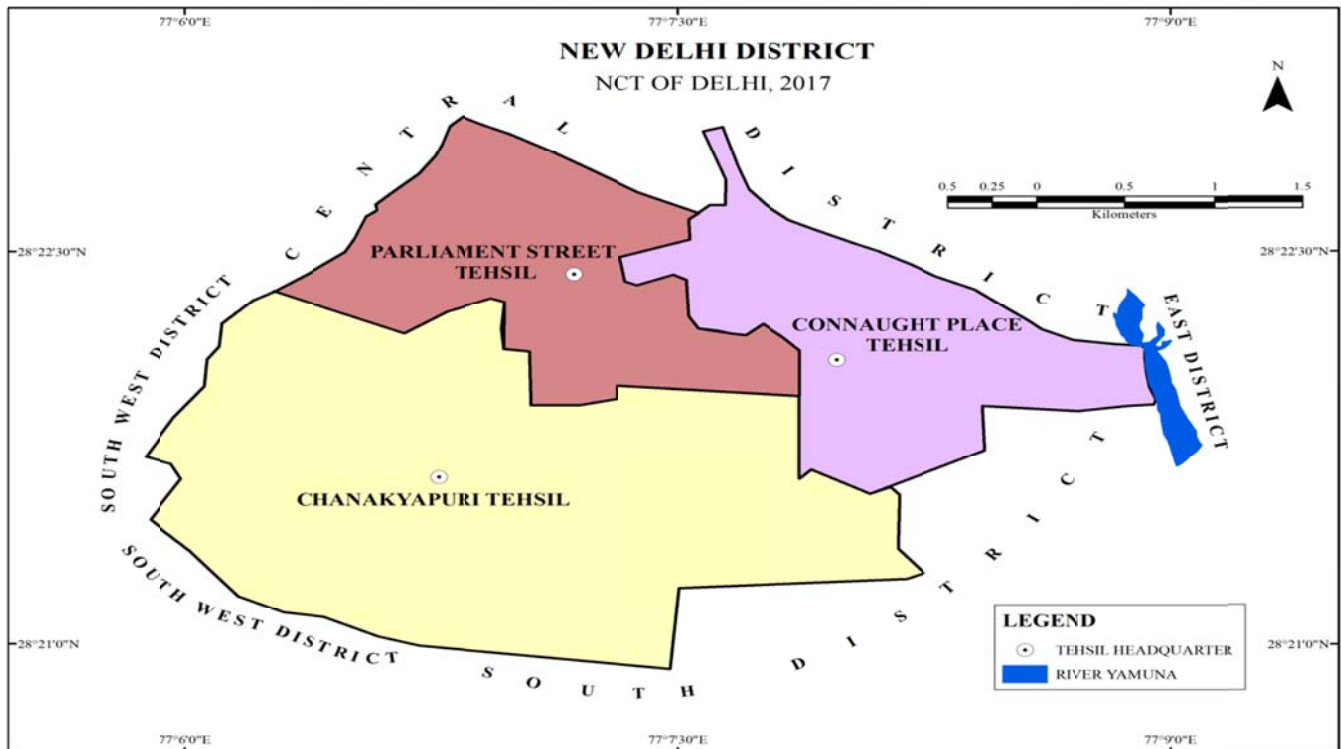
### Introduction

Renaming of streets creates lot of problems for both the residents and outsiders of the city. The problems range from additional cost borne by government to change road signage to loss of sense of belongingness to the street. In addition, it creates confusion for the people and controversies. The streets which existed with same name for 30-50 years and renamed

suddenly which deprives people of their memories associated with the streets.

### Methodology

New Delhi district is a part of one of the eleven districts’ of New Delhi, capital of India. It consists of three Tehsils- Chanakyapuri, Connaught Place and Parliament Street Tehsil.



Source: Census of India, 2011.

Fig 1: Map 1.1 Tehsil Map of New Delhi District

A total of thirty streets were selected for the study. Selection of streets was based on importance in terms of coverage and road system hierarchy. Therefore, streets of every type (arterial, sub arterial and local) covering all three tehsils of New Delhi were selected.

Some of the selected Streets were planned and built in colonial time and were renamed after independence. Therefore, the Street names can be compared along with examining implications or renaming.



Source: Prepared by researcher

Fig 2: Map 1.2 Location of Streets selected for the study

The New Delhi district was selected for the study because it was the site of Lutyens Delhi in colonial time and at present holds a special status in terms of serving as a memoir which needs to be maintained and preserved. Therefore, historical analysis of Street names in pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial times can be undertaken. Also the change of Street names in this area has wider implications.

**Political Pressure to rename streets**

Renaming streets accomplishes two types of functions, practical and symbolical. The arguments that surround street renaming are especially evident when they involve historical commemoration, that is when the struggle to name a street is linked to deciding who has the right to determine what is remembered (and forgotten) publicly and officially. In modern societies, authorities are in charge of establishing and modifying street names. Therefore, the act of naming or renaming is an expression of state power. Commemorative street names have the function of implementing and legitimating the socio-political order as it is perceived by the present administration of the state (Azaryahu 1996). Political powers make use of the urban setting in order to promote and broadcast their ideological perspective into the social reality of everyday life. In some cases, the internal

organization may be dictated even by the influence of international organizations.

Even after the guidelines issued by Ministry of Home affairs that streets rename can only be an exception only in cases directed by Government of India, there are still fresh cases of renaming streets which were part of the history. A recent example is the renaming of Aurangzeb road to APJ Abdul Kalam road.

There are raised concerns about the influence of politics in renaming of streets. Several streets in Delhi are renamed after personalities idolised by the ruling government. Sometimes the streets are named after senior Party leaders, celebrated politicians, and founders of the political party and so on.

**Homonyms in Street names**

A homonym is a group of words that share the same pronunciation but have different meanings, whether spelled the same or not. A more restrictive definition sees homonyms as words that are simultaneously homographs (words that share the same spelling, irrespective of their pronunciation) and homophones (words that share the same pronunciation, irrespective of their spelling) – that means they have same pronunciation and spelling, but different meanings. The relationship between a set of homonyms is called homonymy.

**Table 1:** Homonyms in Street Names in India

Common Street name	Cities
Janpath	Bhubaneswar
Rajpath	Bhubaneswar
Tilak Marg	Pune, Mumbai and Dehradun
Zakhir Hussein Marg	Darjeeling
Sardar Patel Marg	Chennai, Jaipur and Mysore
Kasturba Gandhi Marg	Bangalore
APJ Abdul Kalam Road	Bangalore
Akbar Road	Hyderabad
Prithviraj Road	Jaipur

A total of ten streets out of the selected thirty streets were found to have same names in other cities of India. The homonyms in street names create confusion for the public. The foreign tourists who come to visit India may also make misperceptions and misunderstandings about the streets due to common names. The guidelines of naming streets prevent the naming of streets by same name to avoid confusion.

**Cost of Renaming streets**

The cost of renaming a street can be seen in two ways. One, is the cost of money required to take appropriate measures in order to communicate the change in street name to the public and both private and public institutions. Second is the cost of memory as the street name was the part of peoples’ memory and they had a sense of history with it. The former cost can be approximated to a certain extent, but the latter cost is uncountable.

**Cost of Money**

- A notification regarding renaming of street is released in Hindi, English, Urdu and Punjabi newspaper which costs approximately, 3 lakhs rupees.
- New road signages are required. Two road signages are fixed on either side of the Street. The cost of one road signage is approximately 30,000 thousand rupees.
- New Delhi Municipal Corporation uses its own permanent labour to fix the new road signages. The salary of permanent labourer is 35,000-30,000 rupees and that of temporary labourer is around 15000-16000 rupees. This labour is used for other purposes as well other than changing of road signages. Therefore, the cost of money in terms of labour salaries cannot be approximated as the labour is not entirely used for changing road signages.
- A notification is sent to Survey of India, Post Office and all public/private buildings situated on the concerned street regarding change in street name.

**Cost to Memory**

Respondents assert that changing street names is an attempt of rubbing out history, and for that reason, it should be stopped. This suggests that the old street names are not simply about the people the streets were named after, but also an entire historical period –the British period. The old street names must be maintained out of respect for history.

The most immediate justification for the use of street names that were officially changed thirty years ago tends to be a simple “We’re used to it”. Respondents often reveal habit and familiarity with old names as being a basic reason for using the names they do. While on one hand it is easy to dismiss this reason as being too simplistic or lame, it is equally easy

to take this to be the only reason and stop exploring the problem altogether.

They seem to consider it natural for them to use old street names because this is the name they have always used. It is not simply habit; it is also the willful continuance of a habit to use old names and antipathy for the new ones.

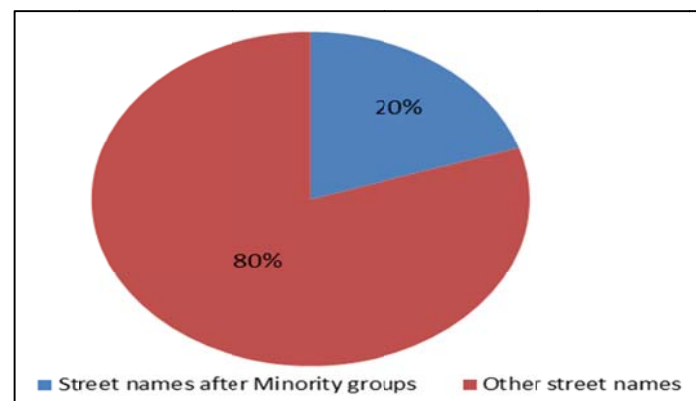
**Names as Memory-Holders**

Many respondents, when enquired, admit that the street names are more than just names. The city is both the actual physical environment –the buildings, the streets. The street is also connected with memories of the people that explain the respondent’s perception of the street. Therefore, this is a kind of unique relationship between a name and the street. Respondents, while associating their precious memories with the old names, are unable to transfer this attachment onto the new names.

**Distributive injustices of street naming**

In viewing Street naming as a field for debating identity, memory, and justice, it is important to think about naming as a cultural right. The ability of street names to (re)distribute certain meanings and identities across the city does not simply raise the visibility of minority communities, but signals an important widening of the ‘distribution of citizenship’ (Dunn 2003) and broader messages about who matters and belongs.

The theme of distributive justice appears in the remarks of many minority communities who wish the streets to be named after personalities belonging to their cultural group. One of the respondents stated “streets should be named after North-eastern personalities”. North-east has always been detached from the mainland, both physically and culturally. Naming of streets after north-eastern personalities will help to bridge the gap and also the people from seven sisters will feel a sense of belongingness in the distant city”.



Source: Prepared by Researcher

**Fig 3:** Distributive injustices in Street Naming

**Procedural injustices of street naming**

The politics of belonging also stresses the importance of the ‘right to participate,’ which gives ‘inhabitants the right to take a central role in decision-making surrounding the production of urban space’ (Purcell).

Exercising the right of participation citizens can use their rights and directly challenge the hegemony of street naming mostly after personalities belonging to majority groups.

Naming and renaming streets involve decision-making procedures and policies in addition to general ideological perspectives of ruling government.

A participatory justice for citizens would address the problem of limited participation of people in local government decisions about whether to name a street for dignitaries and which specific street to rename. In many street name debates it has been observed that those who own property along potentially renamed streets often play a major role in name changes, even though the street is a public space rather than a private property.

**Street Names with no (Female) names**

While looking at distribution in terms of street naming the most profound difference has been found in case of gender. Only 6% of the number of streets bearing names of persons refers to a feminine personality. It could be argued that present reality is the result of Patriarchal mind set. Feminine roles have been long recognized to be limited to the private sphere of life. At the same time, men have always been associated with roles associated to the external domain of household, which allowed access to social positions and roles with influence and prestige.

Within about 10 Km from each other in New Delhi district lie two streets named after women. After making way past Kasturba Gandhi Marg and stopping at Mother Teresa Cres, it becomes hard to find a street named after a Woman. The streets named after Mahatma Gandhi’s wife Kasturba and the Nobel Peace Prize laureate used to be called Curzon road and Willing don Crescent respectively. Surrounding these two streets is APJ Abdul Kalam road, Akbar road, Dr Zakir Hussain Marg and Sri Aurobindo Marg.

**Table 2:** Gender disparity in Street Names

Street name categories	Share in Street names (%)	Share in Street names (in numbers)
Street names after women	6%	2
Street names after Men	94%	28
Total	100%	30

Source: Prepared by Researcher, 2017

New Delhi’s streets are full of Men’s names- mostly men of power. For women, with a few exceptions, the names are of those who have had some relationship with a man in position of power. Names of streets not only mark out city with prominent people associated with it, they also introduce a city to visitors. They are significant markers of how the society looks at itself, a reflection of city’s history and what it values. The non-consideration of the contribution of 50% of city’s population is unimaginably patriarchal.

**Updating Changes in Street names**

Changes in street names need to be updated timely to avoid confusion. It requires to be updated in Global Positioning system maps, Road signage and others digital maps provided by private marketing firms such as Google. New Delhi Municipal Corporation plays no role in sending out notifications about street name change to the private mapping companies. New Delhi Municipal Corporation just makes a press release regarding the change in name.

**Updating Changes in Road signage**

Before Common Wealth Games (2010), the road signage was

drawn on stones with black and red font colour. After 2010, a Road Signage Code was adopted by both Municipal Corporation of Delhi and New Delhi Municipal Corporation using green radiant hoardings to make road signage. New Delhi Municipal Corporation approximates a budget which would be required for updating signage, which is added in the overall budget.

This is sent to the Ministry of Home Affairs and Prime Minister Office which in turn releases the money for the budget. Since the area of jurisdiction under New Delhi Municipal Corporation is small of about 33 km<sup>2</sup> as compared to the area of jurisdiction under Municipal Corporation of Delhi, the budget allocated to it is also less. New Delhi Municipal Corporation has its own workers to install road signage.

**Updating Changes in Global Positioning System**

The Global Positioning System is a network of Satellites that orbit the Earth and send a signal to receivers and navigation devices. Every year, some 5% of streets are changed in some way. The navigation system needs mapping software which is regularly updated. Global Positioning System is updated every three months or four times in a year.

Digital Mapping companies work constantly to update the mapping software and make it available to the navigation device users. The digital maps come with street level detail to help in finding way conveniently. Global Positioning System receivers come with latest preloaded maps but with time they need to be updated using mapping software.

Map updates can be availed in two forms: either purchase or expansion card from the retailer and downloading updates online on computer.

**Updating Changes in Google Earth Maps**

There is no set schedule for updating maps, at least not the one that Google make publically available. Google policy is to update the maps once in every five years, but it is often not updated.

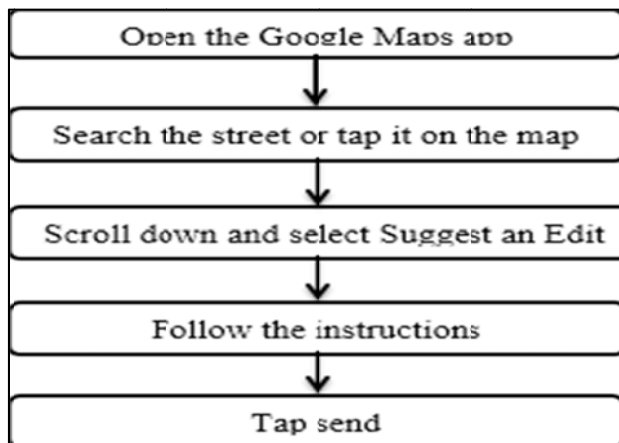
When it comes to regional scale maps, Google sources it from its partners. When it comes to detail information like changes in street names, Google would use information available in public domain by government agency to update the street names.

In places where there are no government maps, it depends on volunteers who contribute to these maps. Users can report changes in street names by using the report a problem link found at the bottom right corner of the map. Users can also edit changes in street names if they wish by using Google Map Makers to edit changes in street names. Google Map Makers is the site where these information including changes in street names are updated, which then goes through a moderation process before it is finally published.

Google has also started a new service called “Local Guides where one can add or update feature information including changes in street names.

Local Guides is a global community of explorers who write reviews, share photos, answer questions, add or edit places and check facts on Google maps. To become a local guide one needs to sign up with their Google account and select their current location.

One can edit changes in street names by following process-



Source: support.google.com, 2017

**Fig 4:** Process of editing Street Names using Local Guides service in Google Maps

Google reviews the edits, so the changes made in street name might take some time to be updated on the map. Google may email the local guide about the status of edits made and may forward the questions from other people who review his/her edits. The maps are changed every minute by users with the help of Google Map Makers and Google using data provided by the official government bodies.

### Future of Street Names

At present the future of street names looks like to be named after Politicians, World leaders and other famous personalities. Most of the street names are proposed by politicians themselves and they are also involved in taking decision about street christening. But the naming of streets after politicians separates them from local public and nowadays large scale protests and controversies are witnessed around naming of streets after politicians.

Respondents were queried about the future themes for naming of streets. Here are the themes for street naming which were proposed by them-

- Branding of streets- Streets can be named after international/local brands. Such a theme of street naming will also help in proper maintenance of street by the brand owners because their name is associated with the street. It is also a great marketing idea for the promotion of brand name in the city. Government can also benefit from it as it will be helped by these private companies for proper maintenance of streets along with receiving revenue from the branding company as well.
- Numbering of streets- New Delhi can have numbering street system just like in United States of America. The advantage of this theme is that it does not result into any confusion and is non-controversial. Also, it will create uniformity in street naming system. The theme will be completely unbiased as it consists of numbers.
- Plants, animals and Flowers- Streets can be named after plants, animals and flowers. This theme is unbiased and non-controversial. Also the names of streets will be distinctive unlike the present names.
- Landmarks, Monuments, Mountains and National Parks- This theme for naming streets is a mix of history and geography. The streets presently are also named after local geography and history of the street. Landmarks help in

avoiding confusions.

Many other interesting themes are planned by some countries to name their streets. One of them is climate change awareness theme where the streets are named after sustainability so as to aware people about climate change mitigation practices. Other interesting themes are naming streets after famous women to raise concern about equality of women, scientific discoveries etc.

### Conclusion

The act of renaming streets highlights important implications associated with it. First is the presence of political pressure to broadcast ideological perspectives in urban landscape by using tool of street renaming. Second is extra financial burden on the government bodies to install new signs and symbols. The cost of memory is not quantifiable but certainly very important to evaluate. Third is creation of confusion for public, post offices, etc. Additionally homonyms also generate some amount of misunderstandings. Fourth is the lack of public participation in street (re)naming. The future thrust should be on to unravel such themes of street naming which create awareness on relevant issues, unbiased, non-controversial and efficient to use.

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