



INDIAN ASSAULT ON SOCIO-CULTURAL IDENTITY OF KASHMIR

By
Misbah Mukhtar
Research Associate
&
Azzah Iqbal
Intern
India Study Centre (ISC), ISSI

Edited by
Dr Saif ur Rehman Malik

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(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)



The world is not unaware of India's limitless tyranny in Kashmir. Its oppression is not only limited to the revocation of the Article 370 and 35A but also extends to renaming of lands in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK). By doing so, India has aimed at threatening the socio-cultural identity of the people of IIOJK. Initially, India relocated the special status of Kashmir on territorial grounds. Later on, the Indian authorities changed the names of many cities, universities and roads after Hindu emperors and monarchs in an attempt to culturally assimilate IIOJK with India.

Ram Nath Kovind, the President of India, signed the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganization (Removal of Difficulty) Order 2021 on 17 July 2021. After Kovind's signature, the names of the Common High Courts of Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir and Union Territory of Ladakh were changed to High Courts of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh respectively. The names were changed for convenience and consonance. The idea was to make them similar to the names of Indian High Courts.¹

The Jammu Municipal Corporation (JMC) is primarily responsible for changing names in the Jammu city. Resolutions have been passed to rename the airport, university and chowks after Hindu Dogra

¹ Peerzada Ashiq, "Jammu Varsity, Airport to Be Renamed After Dogra Monarchs," *The Hindu*, March 2, 2020, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/jammu-varsity-airport-to-be-renamed-after-dogra-monarchs/article30964937.ece>

monarchs.² Jammu airport is proposed to be named after Maharaja Hari Singh Jammu Airport, and Jammu University after Maharaja Gulab Singh Jammu University. The historic Jammu city chowk is already renamed Bharat Mata chowk, and Kachi Chawni Chowk as Atal Bihari Vajpayee Chowk.



Source: Twitter March 1, 2020³



Source: Twitter April 25, 2020⁴

The tactics of changing names is not only limited to educational and governmental institutions but also extends to media houses. The names of some prominent institutions like radio stations have also been changed. Jammu's radio station's name was changed to All India Radio Jammu. Similarly,

² Ibid.

³ Deepika Singh Rajawat, Twitter Post, March 1, 2020, 8:28 PM, <https://twitter.com/deepikasrajawat/status/1234138361935216640?lang=en>.

⁴ Deepika Singh Rajawat (Kashir Koor), "If Name Changing Will Improve Work Performance, Please Rename Prime Minister's Office. Thanx Pic.twitter.com/yjt1scrjcr," Twitter (Twitter, April 25, 2020), <https://twitter.com/DeepikaSRajawat/status/1253945827459915776>.

the radio stations at Srinagar and Leh were renamed as All India Radio Srinagar and All India Radio Leh respectively. Similarly, Kashmir's Water Supply Department is now called Jal Shakti Department. In the same manner, parks, indoor stadiums, hospitals and avenues are all in line for a name changing spree by the hands of Indian authorities in IIOJK.⁵



Source: Twitter⁶

Table presenting an overview of the name changing spree in IIOJK

Sr. no	Place	Old name	New name
1	Court	Common High Court of Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir	High Courts of Jammu and Kashmir
2.	Court	Common High Court of Union Territory of Ladakh	High Courts of Ladakh
3.	Chowk	Jammu city chowk	Bharat Mata chowk
4.	Chowk	Kachi chawni chowk	Atal Bihari Vajpayee Chowk
5.	Radio station	Radio Kashmir Srinagar	All India Radio Srinagar
6.	Departments	Water Supply Department	Jal Shakti Department
7.	University	Jammu University	Maharaja Gulab Singh Jammu University (Proposed)
8.	Airport	Jammu Airport	Maharaja Hari Singh Jammu Airport (Proposed)

The trend of name changing has seen fluctuations over the period of time. Initially, the purpose of changing the names was to make them more localized. When the British colonization ended in 1947, the Indian government changed the names of many cities for better understanding of the local

⁵ Twitter (Twitter), accessed August 27, 2021, https://twitter.com/jalshakti_jk?lang=en.

⁶ Twitter (Twitter), accessed August 27, 2021, https://twitter.com/Jalshakti_JK.

population. For example, Calcutta's name was changed to Kolkata; Madras became Chennai; Pondicherry became Puducherry; and Bombay became Mumbai.

Indian historian Mridula Mukherjee said that the Hindu rhetoric of getting rid of Muslim dominance through name changing dates back to colonial scheme of 'divide and rule' i.e., create religious divide to strengthen imperial rule. She further said changing names "will remain a desperate attempt to make ideological and political points to spread certain kinds of views and prejudices."⁷ Over the years, the same tactics of renaming were used inside IIOJK with a different agenda in mind. The recent name changing spree in IIOJK gained momentum after the revocation of Article 370 and 35-A in 2019. The idea was to alter the identity of Kashmiris and to revive the 'Hindu glory' which was jeopardized after the Muslim invasion in the sub-continent.

In India, a "Name Changing Committee" is responsible to take care of such matters. Whenever the name of any place has to be changed, a request is presented before this Committee. It then goes to the Standing Committee. If the changes are approved, it then goes to its 'Civic Body House' which finalizes the change.

Previously, the same pattern of renaming can be clearly seen within the Indian borders. In the third week of July 2021, a proposal was put forward by Munirka Councillor Bhagat Singh Toka to change the name of Mohammadpur village in South Delhi to Madhavpuram. The decision was backed by BJP. From this it can be deduced that BJP's hate driven policies have allowed them to introduce drastic changes, affecting the Muslims, within the country too.

So far it was India's internal matter until it made an attempt to do the same in IIOJK. Even Indian historians and activists are of the view that moulding the events of history and changing names reduces the sphere of factual history. Name changing in IIOJK not only promotes Hindu glory but also erases the memory of Kashmiri culture and heritage. The solution for the Kashmir issue under UN resolutions lies in an unbiased plebiscite under the UN auspices, which has been incessantly refused by India. However, such an assault on Kashmiri cultural identity is a step forward towards altering the socio-cultural landscape of the Valley in order to gain favourable outcomes if India ever agrees on conducting a referendum. "People who have grown up with a critical attitude towards

⁷ "India is on a Name Changing Spree to Erase the Mughal History," *VICE*, August 27, 2021, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/jgxz83/india-is-changing-names-of-streets-museums-cities-to-erase-mughal-history>.

history and the past will keep saying this is not right. But 15-20 years later, they will all be dead,” said Sohail Hashmi, New Delhi-based historian and heritage activist.⁸

Even from a conservative estimate, if Indian attacks on Kashmiri cultural history are not stopped, it will only take India two generations to be successful in robbing Kashmiris of their centuries old cultural identity and its memory. Therefore, in order to preserve the future of Kashmiris, where they are the sole masters of their destiny, it becomes pertinent to preserve their present connection with their history by calling India out on its abominable actions in IIOJK.

⁸ Ibid.