

HINDU HYMNS IN SCHOOLS: A NEW CONTROVERSY HITS IIOJK

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



As the weather is about to take a turn, the Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) once again found itself in the grip of yet another controversy. This time, a video showing Muslim students in several government-run schools of IIOJK being forced to sing Hindu hymns such as Raghupati Raghav Raja Ram. The videos surfaced on social media causing great distress among Muslims of the region.¹

While expressing her surprise and anger, former Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti tweeted “Jailing religious scholars, shutting down Jama Masjid and directing school kids here to sing Hindu hymns exposes the real Hindutva agenda of Government of India in Kashmir. Refusing these rabid dictates invites Public Safety Act and Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA). It is the cost that we are paying for this so-called ‘Badalta J&K’.”² She went on to say that India is a democracy where all communities live with their due rights. The constitution of India guarantees that all communities can follow their religion. However, “our religion too is a target now. Kashmir is being made a laboratory of a rabid Hindutva agenda.”³ Muttahida Majlis-e-Ulema (MMU) Jammu and Kashmir which comprises 30 religious, social, and educational organizations also expressed its outrage saying that “this matter is a cause of great concern and an attempt to undermine our religious identity...

¹ “Controversy erupts in Kashmir after Muslim students 'forced' to sing Hindu hymns,” Deccan Herald, September 20, 2022, <https://www.deccanherald.com/national/north-and-central/controversy-erupts-in-kashmir-after-muslim-students-forced-to-sing-hindu-hymns-1146703.html>

² “Muslim students being forced to sing Hindu Hymns draws ire in Kashmir,” Hindu, September 20, 2022, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/muslim-students-being-forced-to-sing-hindu-hymns-draws-ire-in-kashmir/article65910773.ece>

³ Ibid

“Protection of our religion and Islamic identity is as Muslims our fundamental religious responsibility; and deliberate interference in this by the government, education department or any other agency will neither be accepted nor tolerated.”⁴ They further emphasised that “it is becoming clear that there seems to be a deliberate plan to push our young generation through state-run educational institutions towards apostasy, to wean them away from Islamic beliefs and identity, to speed their so-called ‘integration’, with the Hindutva idea of India. This is a very serious matter.”⁵

Apart from Kashmiri political parties, mainstream political parties like the Communist Party of India-Marxist also came forward to express their apprehensions over the development saying that diktat has exposed the BJP government’s agenda of saffronisation of education. “The rituals and beliefs of a particular caste or faith cannot be imposed on the education system of a secular nation. Such activities can prove detrimental to a harmonious educational atmosphere.”⁶

Surprisingly, top leaders of the National Conference, Farooq Abdullah and Omar Abdullah did not condemn the move but Farooq Abdullah was quoted as arguing that India is a secular country and “if I am chanting bhajan, is it wrong? If a Hindu visits Ajmer Dargah, then will he or she be transformed into a Muslim?”⁷ But at the same time, the spokesperson for National Conference Imran Nabi Dar did not shy away from criticising the move and wondered “Children are being made to sing Hindu devotional songs. Have our education institutions been turned into a political tool?”⁸

Though, it is being said by the officials of the local government that the hymns are being practised in schools as part of the preparation for the upcoming Gandhi Jayanti.⁹ However, Modi’s continuous efforts to undermine Kashmiri’s identity and impose its Hindutva ideology is no longer a secret. It is in this connection that the latest development once again made it abundantly clear that the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party is leaving no stone unturned to fulfil its agenda of creating a ‘Hindu Rashtra’ where Muslims are only allowed to live if they adopt Hindu symbols and pay allegiance to Hindu religion in their public lives.

⁴ “Controversy erupts in Kashmir after Muslim students ‘forced’ to sing Hindu hymns,” Deccan Herald, September 20, 2022, <https://www.deccanherald.com/national/north-and-central/controversy-erupts-in-kashmir-after-muslim-students-forced-to-sing-hindu-hymns-1146703.html>

⁵ Ibid

⁶ “Forcing school children to sing Hindu hymns unwarranted : CPI-M,” Kashmir Media Service, September 20 2022, <https://www.kmsnews.org/kms/2022/09/20/forcing-school-children-to-sing-hindu-hymns-unwarranted-cpi-m.html>

⁷ “‘Badalta J&K’: Islamic scholars slam govt for ‘forcing’ kids to sing Bhajans in school,” India Tomorrow, September 26, 2022, <https://indiatomorrow.net/2022/09/26/badalta-jk-islamic-scholars-slam-govt-for-forcing-kids-to-sing-bhajans-in-schools/>

⁸ “Controversy erupts in Kashmir after Muslim students ‘forced’ to sing Hindu hymns,” Deccan Herald, September 20, 2022

⁹ Gandhi Jayanti is celebrated every year on October 2 to mark birth anniversary of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi.

For the people of IIOJK, this policy has double implications. Not only they are being forced to adopt Hindu culture but also to forget their unique cultural and political identity. The people of IIOJK are being forced to shut their right to self-determination under UN auspices. While making delusional announcement of having solved the Kashmir issue,¹⁰ little does Modi realise the resilience of the Kashmiri people who are determined to protect their cultural and political identity and also continue their struggle for their fundamental right of self-determination.

¹⁰ "In poll-bound Gujarat, PM Modi targets Nehru over Kashmir, Says he walks in footsteps of Sardar Patel," Indian Express, October 10, 2022, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/pm-modi-targets-nehru-over-kashmir-8200462/>