

Narratives Of Nationhood: A Study of Political Rhetorics on 26 October in Jammu and Kashmir

The evolving nature of political dynamics of the entire Kashmir region brings with itself the demand to analyze and revisit the solemn occasion that marked the beginning of the conflict. At initial stages it appeared to be a temporary dispute that required negotiations and diplomatic dialogues of India and Pakistan along with the assistance of international community; however, the situation fluctuated when a cold response in form of deniability was received from India. From time to time the tactics of molding facts into opinions and changing of perspectives for narrative building and personal gain has been the primary source of political rhetoric. Such can be noticed in the narratives of nationhood which varies for all the 3 major groups i.e. India, Pakistan and the locals of Kashmir.

The dilemma of this action in context of Kashmir started on 26th October when the accession of Kashmir or to be fairer the illegal occupation took place as the event wasn't just a momentous step but the very agent of the modern conflict. A tremendous transformation is noticed in the rhetoric of India regarding the accession as their perspective has never been a monolithic one and major shifts are being carried out from viewing it as a conditional step of going towards to considering it as a final and integral part of current political discourse.

Indian State Rhetoric and Its major evolution:

The very primary purpose of Indian militarization and occupation was to bring in stability to the region and tackle with the tribal fighters who wanted to rescue the masses from Maharaja's brutalities. The historical rhetoric started with this initiation as India herself was accepting the option of plebiscite or referendum but with some extensions. Evidence to it can be noticed in the accompanying letter from Mountbatten the very next day of the accession in which he stated;

“...it is my government’s wish that as soon as law and order have been restored in Kashmir and her spoil cleared of the invader, the question of the State’s accession should be settled by a reference of the people.”

This clearly highlighted the will of people via a plebiscite to be the foundation for the permanent settlement of this conflict.

At the start decades India’s government although were reluctant to practical of the action but somehow accepted it as their leaders stated to be carrying out a referendum in the future to decide the permanent fate of the region till 1950s. However, the dynamics changed with the shifts in the security policies of India and Pakistan leading to the shifting of concepts and modification of Kashmiri rhetorics. The last knot to the situation ending up the possibility was noticed in the 1972 Simla delegation after which the idea of referendum vanished as a whole.

The story of plebiscite entered into a space of impracticality after the unfolding events and Kashmir resumed to be experiencing ongoing militancy, popular protests, use of force against peaceful strikes, snatching of freedom of speech, illegal killing and never ending proof of brutalities. The day of illegal accession continued to be observed officially with an awareness of political sensitivity of IIOJK which came to a permanent end with the abrogation of article 370 of Indian constitution in 2019. The day is now celebrated with more pronouncement and assertiveness contemplating on the idea that the “historical wrong” has been corrected, claiming the illegal occupation to be right decision and a permanent solution to the conflict.

Reaction of Other Parties:

Unlike India, Pakistan along with the locals of IIOJK from the very first day stresses on the will of people and rise this issue on international stage considering India’s occupation to be illegitimate and fraud. It views the subsequent deployment of troops as a start of a long, oppressive rule that started since 1946 and continues till now. It is reflected in their international engagements where Pakistan rises the Kashmir issue to gain international assistance in its peaceful resolution. Pakistani state rhetoric in the context of IIOJK is one of victimhood and resistance which views the Indian occupation as a majoritarian betrayal.

The rhetoric of Kashmir contrasts with that of India; as since occupation, Kashmiri people were waiting for the referendum to be conducted as none of the population was ready to accept the document of accession as final or legally binder and were considering the Maharaja Hari Singh and its decision to be de-facto. This stance led to their prolong resistance and unacceptance of Indian government in the region to be recognizable which can be felt in regular protests and their struggle of independence against occupiers. The population of Kashmir which consider the Indian rhetoric evolution to be illegitimate as denial of them was never consulted and views the occupation day as a battleground of memory and broken promise of plebiscite which further provoked the subsequent political brutalities.

Conclusion:

The major competing narratives co-exists in the political landscape of these states shaping public opinions, justifying political decisions and guiding international opinion. The rhetoric that started from being a temporary holder of the region to stabilize the region gradually evolved with the unfolding of changing political dynamics, perceived threats from Pakistan and change in the political stance leading to the complete contrast in the narrative by the ongoing militancy and complete integration by India after abrogation of article 370 in 2019 viewing the step as correcting the historical wrong by portraying the instrument of accession as the legally binding document and withdrawing from the promise of referendum rising the unrest in the region. Kashmiri locals since day one demands their right of self-determination and are resistant to Indian occupation. Their efforts are recognized by Pakistan which condemns Indian oppressed movements in IIOJK and calls the international community to take actions on the Kashmiri behalf bringing socio-political stability to the region at the meantime, preserving the will power and basic rights of people in the region.

About the Author: Abna Yaqub is a Research Fellow at YFK and the author of this report.