

The Construction of Jammu's identity

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ABSTRACT

Due to Jammu and Kashmir's highly complex, multi-ethnic, and multicultural nature, there have been assertions of multiple identity groups on the lines of ethnicity, culture, language, caste, gender, region, religion, and so on. Among them, regional assertions play a critical role in the internal politics of Jammu and Kashmir. The focus of this paper is on Jammu's regional identity. Politics in the Jammu region is centred on the discourse of regional deprivation and discrimination and imbalances. Rekha Chowdhary, in her book "Identity Politics in Jammu and Kashmir," argues that Jammu asserts against these imbalances primarily through a 'Jammu identity.' Therefore, Jammu's identity is central to the politics of the region. Identity has been the lens through which academicians have looked at the region. Taking a socio-constructivist approach, which argues that identities are constructed, context-specific, and relationally produced, this paper is an attempt to understand the nature and construction of Jammu's identity. It traces the roots of this identity by analysing events in the state's political history, which gave rise to the articulation of Jammu's identity. It applies the concept of 'self' and 'other' to Jammu's identity and shows the relativity of this identity. Lastly, the paper will look at the various political discourses used by the elites of the region in the past two years to construct and consolidate Jammu's identity.

KEYWORDS:

Jammu's identity, 'Self and Other', Identity Construction, Political Discourses, Kashmir.

INTRODUCTION

Due to Jammu and Kashmir's highly complex, multi-ethnic, and multicultural nature, there have been assertions of multiple identity groups on the lines of ethnicity, culture, languages, caste, gender, region, religion, and so on. Among them, regional assertions play a critical role in the internal politics of Jammu and Kashmir. The erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir was divided into three administrative units- Jammu, Kashmir, and Ladakh, each with its own distinct identity and culture. The focus of this paper is on Jammu's regional identity. The article is structured as follows. After a brief introduction and review of the concept of identity and major arguments related to it, the paper analyses the Jammu region's complex and diverse character and argues that Jammu's identity is constructed and is not cultural but political in character. This is shown by putting light on the roots of this identity. In the next section, the concept of "self" and "other" are explored to show the relativity and context specificity of this identity. The final section critically analysis various discourses, motivated by historical experiences, and their role in the construction of identity in general and Jammu's identity in particular. This study considers discourses produced by elites (politicians, activists, and public intellectuals), and for that speeches, interviews and comments by them in the last two years (which are specific to Jammu's identity) are studied. Online newspaper articles and videos are examined for this purpose.

Politics in today's world revolves around the concept of identity as the sphere of politics is dominated and occupied by identity politics. There has been a global rise in the assertion of groups based on their identities for recognition and dignity, which they were long deprived of and sometimes, also by dominant groups to maintain their status in the society. The recent George Floyd and Black Lives Matter protests in the USA or protests at Shaheen Bhag against the Citizenship Amendment Act are examples of such assertions.

With the rise in Identity politics globally, there has also been a surge in literature dealing with the concept of identity. The use of identity as a concept is not limited to any one particular discipline but is a subject of study and research in various disciplines like Sociology, Political science, International Relations, Psychology, Anthropology, and many others. Hence, multi-disciplinary approaches are employed to study this concept. Even with many scholarships on the concept, there is much confusion surrounding it. The word 'identity' has its roots in the Latin word 'idem' which means 'sameness.' Identity, as Hogg and Abrams define, is "people's concepts of who they are, of what sort of people they are, and how they relate to others" (Hogg and Abrams 1988). It is a way people define themselves and make sense of others. Most contemporary literature on identities sees it as a construct, which is relative, flexible,

and context-specific and dynamic. Therefore, identities are not natural but are constructed in specific circumstances and for specific goals and purposes. While arguing that identities are constructed, Mouffe says that the idea of 'self' is always created in the presence of 'other' (Mouffe, 1993). All of this applies to Jammu's identity, which was constructed in a specific context; Kashmir playing the role of the 'other.'

PLURALITY OF THE REGION

In order to understand the nature of Jammu's identity and to trace its roots, it is first essential to look at the diversity of this region in terms of ethnicity, religion, caste, language and also, geographically. As per the census of 2011, the population of the Jammu division includes 66% Hindus, 30% Muslims and the majority of the remaining belongs to the Sikh community and others. This population is further divided into various castes, ethnicities, and sects. The languages spoken in this region are Dogri, Punjabi, Hindi, Kashmiri, Urdu, Gojri, and a lot of local dialects like Bhaderwahi, Pahari, Himachali, Pogri, and Siraji (Puri, 2001). Dogri is the most spoken, especially in the Hindu belt of the region. This administrative unit of Jammu and Kashmir is divided into geographical sub-regions like- Pir Panjal region, Chenab Valley, and Ravi-Tawi Kandi plains, each with its own distinct culture and identity. Therefore, it is a region where people have multiple and overlapping identities based on ethnicity, language, culture, sub-region, class, and caste. It is in this context of the diversity of multiple kinds; many questions arise relating to Jammu's identity like- Is there anything like Jammu's identity? What is the nature of this identity? How was/is constructed? What is the base or cementing element of this identity?

ROOTS OF JAMMU'S IDENTITY

The present image of the Jammu region or its identity is a result of various historical events like division of the state into three administrative units (Jammu, Ladakh, and Kashmir), Partition, Indo-Pak war of 1947-48, state's accession to India, and consecutive Kashmir-centric state governments. Hence, Jammu's identity is political and political in the sense that it was created from above as a result of state categorization. At the time of partition, the state had a population of around four million out of which one million were in the areas occupied by Pakistan during the first Kashmir war of 1947-48 (Khan, 2018) most of them belonged to Jammu region. The war changed the region's demography, which played an essential role in the realization of Jammu's identity and its nature. According to Balraj Puri, Jammu got its regional consciousness when the political power was shifted from Jammu-based Maharaja to the Kashmir-based leadership (Puri, 2001). The two regions (Jammu and Ladakh) faced a lot of discrimination and ignorance by the state. This resulted in various protests and unrest in

the two regions, and growing demands for a union territory, separate state, and regional autonomy. The unfair allocation of resources vis-à-vis Kashmir forms the central discourse in Jammu in which Kashmir is seen as dominating not only the power structure of the state but also controlling the economic and material resources. It is based on this that the "popular perceptions have been articulated around the concept of regional imbalances and discrimination" in Jammu (Chowdhary, 2010). Regional movements in India are generally divided into two waves, the first wave of regional movements (Vidarbha, Telangana, and Uttrakhand) is linked mainly to economic deprivation whereas the first wave (the 1950s and 1960s) was grounded in linguistic and cultural assertions (Kumar, 2000). Pradeep Kumar also argues that demands for statehood, while driven primarily by economic factors, have typically involved also the political construction of identity. Interestingly, Jammu's case does not belong to any of these waves as it is not just the economic or cultural but, most importantly, the ideological differences between the two regions, which shapes the identity of the Jammu region. The long history of regional discrimination and ideological differences regarding the state's final status have produced anti-Kashmir feelings and political discourses, which have played a significant role in the construction of Jammu's identity.

KASHMIR AS THE 'OTHER'

In Identity politics, it is in the presence of the "other"; the "self" makes sense of itself and vice versa. It is in this sense, the process of identity creation is relational. For instance, Kashmir works as an "other" in the construction of Jammu's identity. This brings to light the interrelationality of Jammu's identity. It is only in the context where Kashmir is present; Jammu asserts its identity. In all other contexts, people in Jammu assert their other identities based on religion, ethnicity, and sub-region. Hence, Jammu's identity is context-specific, and it is only in the context of Kashmir; we can see the performative aspect of Jammu's identity.

DISCOURSES USED BY ELITES

People, individually and collectively, make stories, discourses, and narratives for both 'self' and 'other.' Through these stories, discourses and narratives they interact with others and social interactions with these constructed ideas about "self" and "other" further shape identity and consolidate it. Hence, discourses play an essential role in the construction as well as the institutionalization of an identity. The representation of 'us' and 'them' is generally done through discourses of various kinds, especially by using the strategy of 'positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation' ([Van Dijk, 2000](#)). Discourses are nothing but a

formal way of thinking which can be expressed through languages and through which we understand reality. Whereas political discourses operate in the sphere of politics. Political events are converted into texts, signs, symbols, and this finally gives birth to political discourses. They carry much information in them. For Van Dijk, political discourse is produced by a political actor to carry out a political action (Van Dijk, 1997). On these lines, political speeches, comments, and interviews (which are relevant to this) of politicians, academicians, and political activists of the Jammu region are analysed to study the nature of discourses produced, which help consolidate Jammu's identity.

There are three kinds of discourses used to construct Jammu's identity. It is through the prism of these discourses everything is fathomed. These three discourses are not independent of each other but are part of the same whole. The first one is "Anti-Jammu" and "Kashmir-Centric" discourse. This discourse is used to describe governments, policies, and politicians and how all of them ignore and discriminate with the region or people of the region. From Article 370 to recruitment policies to results for government jobs, all events are seen and narrated through this discourse of Anti-Jammu and Kashmir-centric by the elite of the region. Even the central governments were labeled as Anti-Jammu as there was this perception among elites of the region that the central government is giving attention to Kashmir and ignoring the aspiration of the Jammu region though the perception changed after BJP came to power in the Hindu-belt of the region. The politicians, spokesperson, and cadres of BJP also used the same discourse to justify the abrogation of Article 370 and bifurcation of the state. The second discourse is related to 'patriotic-Jammu' and 'separatist-Kashmir' or 'anti-national Kashmir.' This discourse tells us about the dominant narratives of ideological differences between the two regions and the stereotypical images of the region. The politicians in their speeches use this discourse to show how the region gets ignored by the central governments even though the people of Jammu are patriotic. On the recent ban on the internet in the whole state after the abrogation of Article 370, many activists from Jammu spoke against it through this narrative. The underdevelopment of the state is also shown through the discourse of 'separatist-Kashmir'. Not just in the Jammu region, this particular discourse is being used in the whole of the country and especially, by the right-wing political parties to gain votes. The third is the 'anti-Hindu' discourse, which was used extensively in 2008 in the protests related to the Amarnath land issue. Even, Deepika Rajawat, a lawyer of Asifa's rape case, was termed as 'anti-Hindu' for taking the case and 'anti-Jammu' for relying on the charge sheet filed by state government's SIT. Through this discourse, Kashmir is shown as anti-Hindu. The discourse has given rise to communal politics and also, electoral

gains to BJP in Jammu. The identity of Jammu is constructed by portraying Kashmir as anti-Jammu, anti-national, and anti-Hindu. This is what Van Dijk was suggesting how the self is constructed by a negative presentation of 'other.'

CONCLUSION

This paper has analysed identity through a socio-constructivist approach and shown that Jammu's identity is constructed by the interplay of various historical and political events. The study has revealed the relative nature of Jammu's identity by using the concept of 'self' and 'other'. It has also revealed the various kinds of discourses used to construct and make sense of Jammu's identity by presenting the 'other' in negative way. This study also contributes to understanding the politics of Jammu's identity and the socio-political elements which are underplayed to shape this identity.

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