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To cite this article: Javid Ahmad Ahanger & Muzamil Yaqoob (2023) The politics of rhetoric: examining popular discourse in Jammu and Kashmir, Third World Quarterly, 44:9, 2080-2097, DOI: [10.1080/01436597.2023.2217757](https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2023.2217757)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2023.2217757>



Published online: 09 Jun 2023.



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The politics of rhetoric: examining popular discourse in Jammu and Kashmir

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ABSTRACT

This study examines diverse political slogans in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) from 1947 to 2019. It discusses the rhetorical impacts of these slogans and how they impacted and shaped the diverse ideological orientations across the different regions of J&K. Building on the rhetorical function that political assertion serves through the use of slogans, the article analyses slogans that have shaped the cultural and political trajectory of J&K since 1947. The analysis is insightful for understanding the political history of J&K and the role of institutions and processes like the party system and elections in the smooth functioning of democracy. Though considerable literature exists on J&K's politics and conflict, however, the subject of slogans has remained largely neglected, despite the significance that they hold for a comprehensive historical understanding of the region. Studying this subject, we believe, not only opens a political window to analyse regional history differently but also highlights how the rhetorical functions of political assertions shape popular opinions and hold the potential to impact thought patterns and cultural settings. Strategies to develop slogans and how the political parties and other groups used them will be analysed contextually and the developments that have shaped the modern political history of J&K.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 5 April 2022
Accepted 22 May 2023

KEYWORDS

India
Jammu and Kashmir
slogans
politics
elections
conflict

Introduction: the rhetorical function of slogans

Psychologists, anthropologists and political scientists hold that slogans are born in societies that experience difficulties in development. Change creates fissures; some upholding the status quo while others herald a change. The emergent patterns of this process hold that groups resort to sloganeering, mobilisation and communication to highlight their concerns. The slogans are coined to meet the changing social conditions and the need for authorities to establish control (Lu 1999). Political mobilisation is integral to the political processes, and 'slogans are the most convenient and practical means of mobilising people' (Nianxi 2009, 109).

Slogans, throughout the human history, have been the significant core apparatuses for social revolution and political control in authoritarian and democratic nations. They recognise, assert and identify one's identity and group feelings. Slogans constitute a prime instrument for 'government communication' (Hartig 2018), 'raising consciousness' (Denton 2009),