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Identity Transformation in Post-Article 370 Jammu and Kashmir: Demography, Governance and Socio-Cultural

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Abstract:

The study examines state-led policies and measures of identity transformation implemented by the Indian government in Indian-Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) through the lens of identity transformation theory (ITT). Following the August 2019 revocation of the special autonomous status of the state under Articles 370 and 35A, the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government introduced a range of legislative and institutional measures to restructure the demographic, cultural, socio-political and religious identity of the internationally recognized disputed territory. The study argues that these measures constitute a broader mechanism through which the collective identity of Jammu and Kashmir is being redefined within the political and constitutional framework of India. Using qualitative document analysis, the study examines constitutional and legislative documents, parliamentary debates and statements, administrative orders, policy measures, academic literature, human rights reports and national and international media sources. Drawing on Identity transformation theory, the research analyzes how legislative reforms, demographic policies, institutional restructuring, socio-cultural interventions and administrative changes contribute to the transformation of the region's identity and socio-political representation.

Keywords: Jammu and Kashmir, Hindutva, demographic engineering, legislative and institutional transformation, articles 370 and 35A

INTRODUCTION

The state of Jammu and Kashmir has remained a major source of geopolitical tension in South Asia since the partition of the subcontinent in 1947, characterized by prolonged socio-political unrest and conflict. Since then, successive Indian governments have treated Kashmir according to its vision of being an "integral part of India" by force. However, following the Bharatiya Janata Party electoral victory in 2014, the right- wing of the RSS came to power, with its election manifesto emphasizing the transformation of the region's identity and demographic composition. To achieve this objective, the long-standing effort to abrogate Articles 370 and 35A was pursued. In August 2019, the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, whose government has pursued policies associated with Hindutva, implemented the constitutional and legislative measures that altered Jammu and Kashmir's previous constitutional status. BJP claimed that Articles 370 and 35A

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constituted obstacles to the development of Jammu and Kashmir and that their revocation would promote prosperity and normalcy in the region while bringing an end to violence (Government of India, 2019).

On August 5, 2019, the Government of India undertook constitutional and legislative measures that unilaterally revoked Jammu and Kashmir's previous autonomous status. After the revocation, provisions of the Indian Constitution and other central laws of New Delhi were extended to the region, bringing its legal and constitutional framework more closely within the direct application of the Union of India (Bhat, 2017).

Following the abrogation of special status, several political and developmental claims advanced by the BJP-led government have been proven false; the consequences have been different from those announced by PM Modi. The people of Jammu and Kashmir have continued to face significant socioeconomic losses in the post-2019 period. Nearly seven years after the revocation, unemployment has increased, tourism has declined, and natural resources have been exploited. The claims of a return to normalcy have also proven false. For many residents, these conditions continue to raise concerns about livelihood security and access to basic necessities.

The changes that have intensified following the revocation include demographic changes, the destruction of natural resources and the economy in the name of development and discrimination in the reservation policies. The Indian policies have left no stone unturned in seeking to alter the identity of the Kashmiri people and to suppress dissent. Legislative measures have been introduced to declare non-natives, mainly Hindus, as natives of the state. In addition, the job quota for Hindus has increased, while that for Muslims has decreased (Khurshid, 2016).

In any conflict zone, identity serves as a fundamental principle of political order. In the state of Jammu and Kashmir, the administrative and structural changes introduced by the occupying authorities not only alter the structure of governance but also reshape the perceptions of the people of the region regarding political legitimacy and their sense of belonging. The study proposes Identity Transformation Theory (ITT) as its analytical framework to examine these dynamics. Therefore, the post-2019 Indian governance, institutional, structural, administrative and constitutional reforms are examined as a structured process of identity transformation process and their outcomes are evaluated using ITT's conceptual framework.

This paper focuses on the following research questions: How did the post-2019 measures transform the legislative, demographic, institutional and socio-cultural identity of the Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir? How does Identity Transformation Theory explain the mechanisms through which these measures reshape the collective identity of the Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Berger and Luckmann (1966) provide a vital theoretical foundation for understanding identity as a socially constructed and continuously evolving process. They explain how institutions, social practices and shared meanings shape individuals' and communities' perceptions of reality and their sense of belonging. Although their work does not specifically address Jammu and Kashmir, their conceptualization of institutional and social processes provides a useful foundation for examining

how state policies can influence collective identity. Building on this perspective, the present study applies Identity Transformation Theory (ITT) to examine how institutional, legislative, demographic, cultural and administrative interventions may contribute to reshaping the identity of a politically contested society.

Khurshid (2016) examines the political environment surrounding electoral participation and governance in the region. His analysis provides insight into the political relationship between the Indian state and Jammu and Kashmir and establishes a broader political context in which subsequent constitutional and institutional changes occurred. Similarly, Bhat (2017), in *Special Status of Jammu & Kashmir: Article 370: An In-depth Analysis*, highlights the constitutional significance of the autonomous status and the distinctive legal and political place of Jammu and Kashmir within the Indian Union. His work is particularly relevant for understanding the constitutional framework that existed before the changes introduced in 2019.

Muneer and Rehman (2020) examines how changes in laws governing residency, land ownership and citizenship may influence the demographic structure of the region. Their analysis is particularly relevant to understanding the relationship between legal reforms and demographic restructuring. Hussain (2024) examines post-2019 developments through a broader settler-colonial and neo-colonial perspective. His work draws attention to the relationship between the weakening of Kashmiri identity and broader processes of socio-political restructuring.

Khan (2024) focuses on political constraints, changes in governance and suppression after the revocation of the special status of the state. Collectively, these studies contribute significantly to an understanding of the region's post-2019 political environment; however, they primarily examine these developments through legal, political or human-rights perspectives. Recent literature and media-based studies have also documented changes in the cultural, educational, linguistic and religious spheres. Bhat (2025), for instance, discusses the declaration of a Jamaat-affiliated madrasa as unlawful and the consequences for students, while Casadei (2026) reports on the seizure of schools associated with Jamaat-e-Islami. Drabu (2026) discusses the changing status of the Urdu language in Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir, highlighting concerns regarding its declining institutional role. Taken together, these studies indicate that the process of identity transformation is not limited to legislative or demographic changes but also runs through language, religious institutions, education and literature.

Overall, the existing literature provides substantial evidence regarding demographic and constitutional transformation, political suppression, educational limitations, cultural regulations and changes in linguistic and religious practices in Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir. However, these aspects have generally been examined in isolation rather than as interconnected components of a broader process. Consequently, there remains a need for an integrated theoretical analysis explaining how these different state-led interventions operate together as mechanisms of identity transformation. This study addresses this gap by applying Identity Transformation Theory to examine the post-special autonomous status demographic, institutional, legislative, cultural and symbolic transformation. It mainly investigates how these steps contribute to the transformation of socio-political representation and the collective identity of the state of Jammu and Kashmir as an internationally disputed region.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study uses Identity Transformation Theory (ITT) as an analytical framework for understanding how state institutions can influence collective identity through changes in law, governance, political representation, demographic categories, education, culture and public narratives. The framework is grounded in the broader understanding that identity is socially constructed, dynamic and subject to change rather than fixed or immutable.

Berger and Luckmann (1966) emphasize that social reality is produced and reproduced through interaction, institutionalization and shared meanings. From this perspective, institutions do not merely administer an existing social order; they also participate in constructing and maintaining the categories through which individuals and communities interpret social reality. The concept of identity transformation is particularly relevant when political and institutional structures undergo significant change. Todd (2005) argues that changes in collective identity are closely connected with broader processes of social and institutional transformation.

Identity categories can therefore be affected when the institutions, practices, resources and social classifications through which people understand belonging are altered. Building on this broader theoretical foundation, the present study operationalizes identity transformation through five interconnected mechanisms (Luckmann, et. al., 1966).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research design based on document analysis. The objective is to examine how post-2019 administrative, legislative, institutional, demographic, educational and socio-political measures have contributed to the transformation of collective identity in Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir. The research draws on both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include constitutional documents, parliamentary debates and statements, administrative orders, government notifications as well as administrative orders and official statements by political leaders regarding Jammu and Kashmir. These sources are used to identify the formal changes introduced by the Indian state and to establish the institutional and legal basis of the policies examined in the study. Secondary sources included peer-reviewed research papers, books and reports published by human rights international organizations, think tank publications, op-eds and news coverage from regional and international media outlets. These sources provide contextual information and competing interpretations of the political, social, demographic, cultural and institutional developments examined in the research. Collectively, the primary and secondary sources enable the study to examine both formal policy changes introduced after 2019 and their broader implications for identity transformation in the region.

REVOCATION OF THE STATE'S AUTONOMOUS STATUS: ARTICLES 370 AND 35A

The revocation of Articles 370 and 35A had long been one of the primary ideological goals of RSS, which consistently advocated the revocation of the special status of Jammu and Kashmir in its electoral process, particularly during the 2014 and 2019 electoral campaigns. The statement became a key element of the BJP's Hindutva-focused political campaigns and electoral manifestos. In 2014, Narendra Modi, a long-standing RSS member and current Prime Minister of India took charge.

The RSS's long-standing objective was achieved in 2019 when the BJP-led government revoked the provisions of special autonomous status under Articles 370 and 35A, claiming that these provisions were obstacles to the peace, prosperity and development of the region and that their removal would contribute to restoring normalcy in the region (Mehta, 2003). However, this approach can be understood as a superficial attempt to portray these measures as contributing to peace in the occupied region, while in reality, it was an attempt to undermine the very identity of its people.

The revocation was celebrated by its proponents as the "beginning of a new era of development," reflecting the dominance of the RSS and the implementation of laws and policies aligned with its ideological framework. In a nutshell, these measures are an attempt to marginalize the Muslims of the region by depriving them of their autonomy; the actions of the BJP were consistent with the RSS's broader ideological vision of a Hindu Rashtra in India. The autonomous status of the IIOJK served as a mechanism for preserving the identity of the region and its distinct sense of sovereignty and belonging.

Post-Article 370 Identity Transformation in Jammu and Kashmir

Demographic Regulation and Political Reclassification

Following the revocation of Articles 370 and 35A, the Indian government introduced a series of legislative and administrative measures aimed at redefining the status of the region and facilitating demographic changes particularity affecting the Muslim identity of the state.

These legislative measures included reforms concerning domicile and land ownership, including amendments to the Jammu and Kashmir Civil Services (Decentralization and Recruitment) Act that replaced the category of "permanent residents" with "domiciles of Jammu and Kashmir." Through these measures, the BJP is promoting the demographic and political integration of the non-local, predominantly Hindu population, contributing to the dilution of the Muslim majority (Gokhale, 2020).

After the revocation, the BJP amended several reservation bills in 2023 as a part of its redefinition aimed at marginalizing Muslims in job quotas, representation in the legislative assembly and education. This was implemented through structured planning, leading to the formal legalization of the amended provisions. The following section examines the principal amendments and their implications for demographic and political representation.

Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes Order (Amendment) Bill (2023)

The Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes Order (Amendment) Bill, 2023, was amended to add other communities, mainly Hindu groups such as the Gadda Brahmin, Koli and Padri tribes, Safai Karam Chari, Valmiki, etc., to the Scheduled Tribes list of Jammu and Kashmir. These communities were living in Jammu and Kashmir but were not permanent residents of the state; they were outsiders, so after the amendment, their status was granted as natives of the state, which affected the real residents of the state, particularly Muslims.

Based on population estimates, the Jammu region benefits from the current reservation rules and laws. The Jammu region received six seats during the delimitation process, whereas Kashmir received just one. This shows how the BJP's policies are changing the demographics of IIOJK and depriving the local indigenous population.

Table 1. The Population of the Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes

Regions	Scheduled Tribes (STs) Population	Scheduled Castes (SCs) Population
Jammu	810800 (63%)	917724 (99.22%)
Kashmir (Valley)	464306 (37%)	6761 (0.73%)

(Revenue Department, J&K)

Jammu and Kashmir Reservation (Amendment) Bill 2023

It was amended for the reservations in Jobs and professional institutions and the term "weak and Underprivileged Classes" was redefined as other "Backward Classes."

Jammu and Kashmir Reorganization Order (Amendment) Bill (2023)

This bill increased the number of seats in the legislative assembly of IIOJK from 107 to 114. 24 seats out of 114 are left vacant for the people of Pakistan-administered Jammu and Kashmir (PAJK), which is commonly known as Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), and for the first time nine seats are reserved for scheduled tribes (STs). It also reserved two seats for "migrants of Kashmir" and "displaced persons" from (PAJK) each. As per the bill amendment, the category of displaced persons primarily includes Kashmiri Pandits and Kashmiri Hindus (Adnan Rehman and Sania Muneer, 2020).

Before August 2019, Jammu and Kashmir had its own legal and institutional framework for allocating seats in the Legislative Assembly. Following the revocation, a delimitation commission was established in 2020. The commission was tasked not only with delimiting the seats of J&K but also those of Assam, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland.

Table 2. The Population Ratio in IIOJK both before and after Delimitation.

Regions	Representation before delimitation	Representation after delimitation	Population representation ratio before delimitation	Population representation ratio after delimitation
Jammu	37	43	42.64:43	42.64:48
Kashmir	46	47	57.36:56	57.36:52

(Data shared by Revenue Department, J&K)

Following the delimitation process, the Kashmir region received one additional seat, increasing its total representation from 46 to 47 seats, while the Jammu region's seats increased from 37 to 43, with the addition of six seats. It's interesting to note that, despite Kashmir being the majority region, Jammu's share in the Assembly increased from 43% to 48%, whereas Kashmir's share decreased from 56% to 52%, as shown in the table (Centre for Social and Contemporary Research, 2026).

From the perspective of Identity Transformation Theory, since 2019, the BJP's strategies in IIOJK reflect state-led efforts to alter identity through legislative and political restructuring. The

transformation from “permanent residents” to “domiciles” expands the scope of belonging, thereby fading the boundaries of indigenous identity.

Changes to reservation laws and representation in the state institutions result in a redistribution of power towards non-locals, mainly Hindu populations. Together, all these measures are an attempt to dilute and transform the Muslim majority identity into a redefined socio-political structure.

Waqf Bill Amendment

In 2025, the Indian Parliament introduced the Waqf Amendment Act; this amendment increases governance control over the properties of Waqf and also permits other members, mainly Hindus, to hold top positions in the Waqf board. This amendment is a significant shift in the administration and governance of Islamic religious properties of India.

Apparently, the BJP-led government has presented this amendment as an effort to improve the administration and development of Waqf property, but the underlying reality is something quite different. The Indian government intends to change the basic structure of the Waqf board. It is a threat to the religious sites and Mosques due to the increasing presence of non-Muslim members on the board. There have been several incidents in which Hindu groups have vandalized religious sites, including shrines, graveyards and mosques (Purohit, 2026).

Educational RESTRUCTURING

Restrictions on Historical and Political Literature

The ruling government in India has banned 25 books addressing the socio-cultural and political history of Jammu and Kashmir. The historical understanding of Jammu and Kashmir has traditionally been tied to both oral traditions and written records. The restricted works include books written by internationally renowned authors such as Victoria Schofield, Christopher Snedden and Alastair Lamb, as well as by Kashmiri authors including M. Yusuf Saraf and A.G Noorani, mainly focusing on the constitutional, socio-political and cultural history of Jammu and Kashmir.

The order effectively banned the 25 books from being circulated, possessed or accessed within the Himalayan region by declaring them "forfeit" under India's new criminal law introduced in 2023. According to the Indian government, these books spread "False Narratives" and "secessionism," foster a ″Culture of Victimhood," and radicalize young people in the area. In IIOJK, bookstore raids and intimidation of book sellers are still ongoing (Mollan, & Javed, 2026).

Restrictions on historical literature extend beyond limitations on freedom of expression; it declares war on memory itself. And in Kashmir, that war is being fought page by page. If it continues, then the history of Kashmir will be written not by its people but by those who are ready to remove it.

Politicization of Medical Education and Muslim Representation in IIOJK

Education in IIOJK has also become a subject of political contestation by the Hindutva regime. For admission in Shri Mata Vaishnu Devi Medical College, Jammu, students must apply and qualify through the NEET examination. A total of 50 seats were available, of which 42 seats were secured by Muslim students, mostly from Kashmir and the remaining 8 were secured by Hindu and Sikh students. Yet the presence of the majority Muslim in this college was politicized by the BJP's policies towards Kashmiri Muslims (Staff, 2026). After seeing the result, the Right-Wing of the

Hindutva regime started protesting against Muslim students, claiming that since Hindus fund the college, why should the majority of Muslim will study here?

The Modi regime has turned admission into a religious contest. Kashmiri students who applied for this test paid the required fee, hoping for a better future. Their parents support them in a region with high unemployment, dreaming that their children will study and secure a better future, but the BJP is doing everything to deprive Kashmiri students of their educational rights.

State Regulation of Islamic Literature and Religious Organizations

Under the BJP's vision of what it describes as "Naya Kashmir" (New Kashmir), the people of the region have since increasingly faced restrictions and been silenced as the Indian government has shown no tolerance for any form of dissent in IIOJK. Authorities in IAJK raided bookstores and seized 668 Islamic books. Most of the seized books were authored by Abu Ala Maududi, a prominent Islamic scholar of the twentieth century.

The booksellers faced harassment after raising their voice against this act. This is the alarming situation regarding religious freedom, cultural expression and the regulation of Islamic literature in the Muslim-majority region. Any individual or organization advocating for the Socio-political and religious rights of the Kashmiri people is banned or declared unlawful under draconian laws. Several socio-political and religious organizations, including Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen and Public Action Committee, have been banned.

Before the elections of 2024, several political and religious organizations, including Jammat-e-Islami Jammu and Kashmir, the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), Muslim League Jammu Kashmir, Tehreek-e-Hurriyat Jammu and Kashmir, Dukhtaran-e-Millat Jammu and Kashmir and Democratic Freedom Party, were also banned and declared unlawful by the fascist regime. The Indian government views these organizations as a threat to national security, public order or the constitutional integrity of India. A number of religious scholars and political activists have also been arrested or detained. All these efforts by the BJP are aimed at suppressing dissent in IIOJK.

Limiting the people and organizations of the occupied region that articulate religious identity and political aspirations weakens the collective resistance of the people and creates the circumstances for the establishment of a state-sponsored identity aligned with the ideology of the occupiers, which is Hindutva. This is also an attempt to dilute the real identity of the state and reshape it according to their ideological and political agenda.

Ban on Religious Institutions (Madrasa)

The authorities in IIOJK have declared Madrasa Jamia Siraj-Ul-Uloom in South Kashmir, Shopian, an unlawful entity under the Draconian Law, the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, by alleging its links to the banned organization Jammat-e-Islami. This decision has affected the future of nearly 600 students enrolled at the institution. Banning religious institutions is a move to distance the Muslim community, especially youth, from their religious teachings, norms and practices, while creating spaces for alternative state-sponsored ideological narratives (Bhat, 2025).

The authorities are not only aiming at closing Madrasas but also at banning private schools affiliated with any Islamic organizations. Fifty-eight private schools, linked to Jammat-e-Islami, were also seized. These measures are part of a broader strategy by Hindutva politics to control the

educational institutes in the occupied region. These measures also reflect the politicization of education and its impact on the identity of the people.

Socio-Cultural Regulation, Political Suppression and Identity Transformation

Ban on the Urdu Language

The Socio-cultural fabric of the IIOJK has historically been shaped by linguistic, cultural and religious traditions, with Urdu occupying an important place in the region's literacy and institutional life. State-led policies of the Indian government are an attempt to alter the Socio-cultural practices by introducing new value systems, economic avenues and lifestyles, particularly for the youth of Kashmir. These policies act as a mechanism that directly influences religious norms under the framework of modernization and employment.

In IIOJK, a substantial body of the Islamic and Socio-political literature is written in Urdu. Urdu is not a literary language in the region, but it also plays a significant role in the administration, mainly in the Revenue Department. Important official land records have traditionally been maintained in Urdu. Recently, another controversy emerged in IIOJK after the authorities issued a notification for stakeholder consultation, proposing the removal of Urdu language as a compulsory qualification for a revenue administration post. Prior to 2020, Urdu was the only Official language of the region (Drabu, 2026). This attempt is a deliberate attempt to gradually weaken and marginalize the language over time.

Opening of Liquor Shops

In IIOJK faces significant employment challenges, particularly among youth, for whom access to stable employment remains a major socio-economic concern. At the same time, the region has a Muslim-majority population with established religious and sociocultural norms concerning alcohol consumption. Under the pretext of economic development and modernization, the authorities are introducing opportunities and policies that are damaging the religious and social fabric of the region.

Consumption of alcohol is prohibited in Islamic norms; however, authorities have permitted its sale and open consumption. This is a blunt disgrace of the local Islamic tradition and it is negatively influencing the Kashmiri youth. Hindu tourists are now openly consuming alcohol in Kashmir; a large number of liquor shops are open in Kashmir, violating the cultural norms of the region.

The hypocrisy of the Hindutva-led Indian government is seen in that, on the one hand side they are launching the "Nasha Mukt Kashmir" campaign and on the other hand, they are providing avenues for selling these items which are forbidden in Islam. This is the most alarming step to draw the Kashmiri youth toward drug addiction. These acts highlight the policy contradiction that raises serious questions regarding the socio-cultural sensitivity and public health governance in the region. To fade the identity of the region, through proper planning, the BJP is working to alter the religious, socio-cultural and political norms of the occupied region

Ban on Religious Practices and Festivals

Major religious gatherings, including Fridays and Eid prayers, at Jamia Masjid Srinagar and Eidgah have at times been restricted. Several religious leaders were also placed under house arrest or

detention. The Indian occupied forces have continuously enforced these bans by sealing mosque's entrances and placing the region's religious scholars and leaders under house arrest to prevent them from leading sermons.

On the Eid festival, when a large number of Muslims gather, the strength of the people increases and many offer prayer outside the mosques or alone. Authorities have justified restrictions on Eid gatherings on the grounds that large congregation can cause traffic jams. But during Hindu festivals such as Diwali, large public celebrations also take place and increase public activity for several days ("Modi govt again bars," 2026).

These Hindu festivals are permitted and supported by the administration. These discriminatory approaches to the festivals and restrictions on religious gatherings reveal the bias of the authorities. The religious festivals and practices are now politicized by the Hindu regime.

Political Suppression, Surveillance and Control

Tools of Suppression Against Atrocities

Since the BJP came to power, the tools of suppression have intensified. In such an environment, anyone who speaks about the bitter realities and brutalities of Kashmir is subjected to punishment for a sin they never committed. The Indian government has suppressed every form of dissent in IIOJK, snatching away the Historical, cultural and socio-political literature of the occupied region and attempting through various policies to alter the religious identity of the region.

Whenever the people of IIOJK speak up about these brutalities, several tactics and tools of suppression are used against them. The BJP government has suffocated the Kashmiris, especially the youth of IIOJK, politically, socially, morally and psychologically. Living in their own homeland, they continue to exist in a constant state of fear, as though they are living in a prison.

Draconian Laws

The entire region of IIOJK is governed under the framework of draconian or black laws, which grant extraordinary powers to the Indian armed forces. These laws are frequently employed by armed forces and other agencies to conduct detentions without formal investigation, carry out raids on the homes of Kashmiris and exercise broad authority with no accountability for the Indian armed forces. Under the protection of these draconian laws, the Indian forces are shielded from actions such as illegal detention, physical abuse, rape and other human rights violations.

There are several laws and mechanisms, including the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), Public Safety Act (PSA), Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), Cordon and Search Operation (CASO) and National Investigation Agency (NIA).

Together, these laws serve as special tools of suppression in IIOJK, allowing detention without trials, labeling Kashmiris as terrorists without conviction, granting forces special powers to arrest with legal immunity and bypassing local police and courts.

Youth Detained without Investigation

The people of Kashmir, especially the youth, have been subjected to a total and all-encompassing system of oppression, with over 10,000 enforced disappearances and 8,000 custodial killings

attributed to torture in custody (Wani, 2025). Detaining Kashmiri youth is described as the hobby of the Indian armed forces and it is very common in IIOJK.

Despite claims of development, employment and restoration of normalcy by the BJP government, the socio-economic and security challenges continue to affect the region's youth. Kashmir has the highest unemployment among all the other states of India. This Hindutva regime is closing all the avenues of justice, employment and prosperity for the Kashmiri youth. Even the parents are not sure when sending their children to schools or college, whether they will return home or disappear at the hands of the Indian armed forces authorities.

Suppression of Journalists and News Outlets

Living under occupation, where speaking or writing the truth is prohibited, many journalists in IIOJK still dare to write and speak the truth. The Indian authorities treat Journalism as a crime and several journalists, such as Khuram Pervaiz and Fahad Shah, have been imprisoned for writing the truth and highlighting the brutalities of the occupying forces that authorities seek to suppress.

The Indian government seeks to turn the Kashmir Valley into a cage, in which people live without any complaint or dissent. News outlets are frequently subjected to raids and administrative restrictions. Kashmir Times, one of the most prominent news outlets in the region, was raided by authorities, while Kashmir Walla was banned. The Indian government wants to control the narrative of the people of the region and suppress voices that reveal the ground realities of the region. The restrictions have been intensified on press freedom and freedom of expression (Khan, 2024).

Collective Punishment of Kashmiris

The BJP government has adopted a new strategy aimed at depriving Kashmiris of their own property, land, jobs and basic rights. Whenever an incident occurs in IIOJK or elsewhere in India, the Kashmiris are often subjected to collective punishment without proper investigations.

During the May 2025 crisis, immediately after the incident, many people in Kashmir were detained, beaten, tortured and had their homes demolished without investigation. Kashmiris faced this collective punishment not only in IIOJK but also in different parts of India, where traders, students and doctors were harassed, beaten and assaulted by Hindu extremists.

Human rights organizations have also documented concerns in their reports that, after the revocation of Articles 370 and 35A, the Indian policies toward Kashmir underwent significant changes, resulting in Kashmiris' collective punishment for crimes they never committed (Sharma, 2025). This pattern shows the broader shift in governance and security policies and systematic exclusion, control and marginalization of the Kashmiris.

Surveillance

The people of Kashmir are living in constant fear, as military checkpoints are everywhere in IIOJK. A network of checkpoints is deployed every few hundred meters, closely monitoring the civilian population, alongside the CCTV surveillance system. If a student is going to school, the Indian armed forces stop them for no reason, monitor their movement and take their mobile phones,

checking call detail records (CDRs), or subject them to various forms of torture regarding their privacy.

Surveillance is not limited to students or ordinary civilians. The government employees and journalists are also subjected to digital surveillance. The cyber and crime branches of the IIOJK's police also monitor the social media activities of the people of the region; with reports indicating that individuals may face questioning, legal actions or other restrictions in connection with online content considered critical of the authorities.

The prisoners released on bail are monitored through a GPS tracking device. During Fridays or on any other religious occasions, the summoning of clerics is also monitored. They are instructed by police or armed forces not to discuss themes on freedom or the right to self-determination and conflict in the region, but only focus on social issues like drugs, cleanliness, etc. Authorities have also begun profiling mosques and the person responsible for their administration. Religious places are now treated as sites of potential surveillance (Molnar, 2026).

Discussions and Application of Theory

Identity Transformation Theory (ITT) provides a useful framework for understanding how state policies can reshape collective identity through changes in institutions, laws, demographic structures, cultural practices, education and public narratives. The findings of this study indicate that the transformation following 5 August 2019 in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) operates through several interconnected mechanisms identified within the theoretical framework. Rather than treating legislative, institutional, demographic and socio-cultural changes as isolated developments, ITT examines these actions to be understood as mutually reinforcing processes through which the political and social meaning of identity, belonging and representation is reconstructed.

There are five mechanisms of the Identity Transformation Theory: political-legal reclassification, demographic regulation, cultural governance, educational restructuring and symbolic and narrative reconfiguration.

The first mechanism**,** political-legal reclassification**,** is particularly noticeable in the alterations introduced after the revocation of Articles 370 and 35A. The replacement of the prior permanent-resident structure with a domicile-based system changed the legal limitations of belonging in Indian-Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir. Similarly, modifications in legislative representation, reservation policies and delimitation revised the institutional mechanisms through which governmental representation is distributed. From an ITT angle, these changes are substantial because identity is partly built through legal categories that define who is recognized as belonging to a political community and who has access to its institutions. The transformation of legal status therefore extends beyond administrative reform; it can influence perceptions of citizenship, political inclusion and regional belonging.

The second mechanism, demographic regulation**,** is reflected in changes concerning domicile, land, reservations and political representation. ITT directs that demographic structures are closely connected to collective identity because population composition impacts governmental power, institutional representation and the social atmosphere of a region. In IIOJK, changes in process for

domicile eligibility and modifications in political representation have consequently become important dimensions of the post-2019 transformation. The concern is not simply the numerical composition of the population but the link between demographic change and the rearrangement of political and institutional power. The findings therefore show that demographic policies should be examined alongside legislative and political restructuring rather than as separate administrative measures.

The third mechanism, cultural governance**,** includes the regulating of religious practices, religious organizations, public and cultural expressions and Islamic literature. Restrictions on religious practices, actions against religious literature and the regulation of Islamic literature impact the institutional spaces in which collective religious and cultural identity is reproduced. As a result, the regulation of these practices influences how a community expresses and transmits its identity. The findings of the study show that cultural governance in IAJK runs not only through direct restrictions but also through the reorganization of the public setting in which religious and cultural practices take place.

The fourth mechanism, educational restructuring**,** is evident in the regulation of educational institutions, religious schools, historical literature and the wider production of knowledge. The restrictions on books addressing the political and historical issues of Jammu and Kashmir, together with actions affecting religious educational institutions, demonstrate the importance of education and knowledge production in the construction of collective identity. ITT highlights that identity is reproduced across generations through the transmission of historical narratives and educational practices. When specific interpretations of history are banned or limited while alternative narratives take larger institutional support, this procedure shapes how younger generations recognize their past, political belonging and affiliation with the state. Thus, educational strategy becomes an important instrument through which competing identities and historical narratives are negotiated.

The fifth mechanism, symbolic and narrative reconfiguration, is evident in limitations on journalism, public gatherings, digital communication and political expression. The restrictions on media and journalists, together with surveillance and limitations on political expression, influence the ability of people and societies to articulate alternative understandings of their cultural and political identity. Within ITT, collective identity is not shaped only through official laws; it is also transformed by narratives about legitimacy, peace and normalcy, and history. Controlling the spaces through which such narratives are communicated affects the public construction of identity. The suppression of dissent and intensified surveillance consequently contribute to narrowing the range of narratives that can be publicly stated.

Taken together, these five mechanisms demonstrate the interconnected nature of identity transformation**.** Legislative reorganization creates new groups of belonging; cultural governance regulates social and religious practices; educational interventions impact the transformation of culture and history; demographic policies influence the composition and representation of the population; and limitations on narrative transform how the people understand the transformations. ITT therefore suggests that the developments following the revocation of the special status should not be examined as isolated policy initiatives. Their consequences emerge through their collective

interaction and their impacts on the demographic, cultural, political and social foundations of the combined identity in the disputed region.

The findings also extend the application of ITT to an internationally recognized disputed region. In such a perspective, identity is closely linked to questions of historical memory, territorial belonging, political legitimacy and self-determination. The changes in legal and institutional classes therefore have consequences beyond regular authority. Transformations in who is documented as a resident, who obtains political representation, which histories can be publicly disseminated and which forms of religious and political expression are permitted can reshape how the population understands its connection with the region and the state. From this viewpoint, the transformation following the revocation of the autonomous status in IIOJK is a multidimensional process in which social regulation and institutional restructuring interact to redefine the boundaries of the collective identity.

Overall, the application of ITT shows that the transformation of identity is most significant when multiple mechanisms operate simultaneously. The case of Indian-Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir shows how educational, legislative, demographic, cultural and narrative interventions can collectively alter the circumstances under which identity is reproduced and politically expressed. A similar design is observed in Palestine, where Israel's settlement expansion, territorial destruction, legal-administrative reforms, demographic changes and control over cultural and historical narratives have collectively influenced the reproduction and political expressions of the identity of Palestine. The theory thus provides a clear analytical framework for linking apparently separate post-2019 changes and explaining their larger consequences for belonging, cultural continuity, political representation and collective identity of the India-Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the ongoing socio-political and cultural transformation in Indian-Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir following the revocation of Articles 370 and 35A reflect a significant process of identity transformation within the occupied region. It argues that policies pursued by ruling BJP under the ideological framework of Hindutva, are contributing to the shift in region's collective identity. The Identity Transformation Theory argues that Identity is an evolving phenomenon that is influenced by socio-political, cultural and demographic transformation.

The five interrelated mechanisms of the ITT- symbolic-narrative reconfiguration, demographic regulation, Socio-political reclassification, cultural governance and educational restructuring provide an analytical framework for examining the policies implemented by the Indian government after the revocation of Articles 370 and 35A and their impact on the identity of the occupied region.

It also emphasizes that states can alter and influence collective identity through coordinated institutional mechanisms operating with broader structural conditions and with the consent and equal participation of the people. However, in the case of IIOJK, the study finds that these mechanisms are implemented through Hindutva-led state policies to alter the identity of the occupied region. Following the revocation of Articles 370 and 35A, the mechanisms of the ITT became visible through changes in governance structures and political-legal reclassification. The Indian government introduced new domicile and residency laws that enable non-natives, mainly Hindus, to be recognized as natives of the occupied state. The government also declared them as

natives of the state to alter the demographic setup and the Muslim identity of the state. Within the framework of ITT, these measures represent the mechanism of demographic regulation.

The cultural governance mechanism is reflected in the regulation of social festivals and practices within the region. The study finds that restrictions on Muslim festivals in the Muslim-majority region, alongside the promotion of Hindu festivals and cultural activities, are attempts to reshape the cultural atmosphere of the region.

Similarly, educational restructuring is evident in efforts to revise or restrict historical narratives on the religious, socio-political and cultural history of the occupied region. These are deliberate attempts to rewrite the history and literature of the region by those who are attempting to erase it and to rewrite it by changing the context, so that the youth of the region remain unaware of the historical facts. It is also an attempt to suppress the young voices.

Symbolic-narrative reconfiguration is reflected in the control of the public through the imposition of draconian laws, detention of journalists, raids and restrictions on news outlets. These measures can suppress the truth, hide the sentiments of the people and promote the false narrative that there is normalcy in the region and that people are living happily.

The study concludes that all five mechanisms of ITT are applied through administrative, political and institutional measures as a tool to transform the identity of the region. The decision-making policy of the ruling party in India is heavily influenced by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which has rehashed the governance approach for IIOJK, following the revocation of Articles 370 and 35A. The systematic persecution of the Kashmiri people and modifications in political autonomy and governance mechanisms have not only reconfigured the state and society of IIOJK but also impacted the community of the region and collective belonging. These transformations have also affected the perceptions of citizenship, regional identity and autonomy, converting them into sites of political and social contestation.

The study, therefore, concludes that understanding identity in conflicted, occupied and politically contested regions requires serious attention to both levels of structural transformation and narratives through which these transformations are interpreted and experienced by the people.

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