

The Aspiration for Freedom in Kashmir: A Kantian Perspective

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Abstract: This paper examines the applicability of Immanuel Kant's theory of Freedom, with its emphasis on autonomy and the role of reason to understand the aspiration for freedom expressed by the People of Kashmir. By exploring Kantian concepts such as Porale principle the in net right to freedom and the principle of Universal laws this analysis considers how these ideas resonate with the desire for self-determination in the region. This discussion acknowledges the nuances and complexities of applying abstract philosophical frameworks to concrete and contested political situations including the challenges of translating individual autonomy to collective aspirations and navigating competing historical narratives. Ultimately this article aims to offer a distinct ethical perspective on the issue of Kashmir freedom highlighting the principle of dignity and universality in considering the future of that region.

Keywords: Freedom, Categorical Imperative, Autonomy, Practical Freedom.

1. Introduction

The geopolitical Conflict surrounding Kashmir is predominantly analyzed through the Prisms of territorial Sovereignty, national Security and real politik. Strategic discourses routinely reduce the region to a Zero-sum border dispute between nuclear armed neighbours, while legal debates center on historic treaties and international resolution. Yet, beneath these Macro political dynamics lies a fundamental human dimension; the sustained political aspirations and moral agency of the Kashmiri people themselves. By framing the conflict solely as a contest between sovereign States, Orthodox International relations models frequently risk obscuring the central ethical question- the moral legitimacy of self-determination and individual autonomy.

To move beyond the limitations of strategic pragmatisms, political philosophy offers a critical normative lens. In particular, the moral philosophy of Immanuel Kant provides a robust framework for reevaluating the aspiration for freedom in Kashmir. Kant's ethical system built upon the imperatives of human dignity, moral autonomy and the unconditional demand to treat rational beings as ends rather than means fundamentally challenges state centric paradigms that prioritizes territorial integrity over individual agency.

2. Kantian Autonomy and Political Heteronomy

At the core of Immanuel Kant's practical philosophy lies the principle of autonomy-the capacity of a rational agent to be self-governing to act according to laws that they impose upon themselves through reason. In "groundwork of metaphysics of morals" Kant posits "autonomy as the Supreme principle of morality and the ultimate source of human dignity". Kant Immanuel "groundwork of metaphysics of morals". Conversely, heteronomy occurs when an agent's action or governing laws are determined by external forces, institutional dictates on alien authorities rather than their own rational will.

When translated into the domain of political rights, this moral distinction between autonomy and Heteronomy serves as a rigorous criterion for political legitimacy. A country in an administrative regime cannot claim authentic moral authority of its citizens in a condition of structural heteronomy. Where laws and political arrangements and public policies are executed entirely without their authorship, representation or consent.

3. Political Heteronomy in the Context of Kashmir

In the historical and geo political reality of Kashmir, the legal status, territorial division and governance structure of the region have routinely been defined by external state actors. From a Kantian perspective, when a population's political destiny is detected by external security calculations, unilateral constitutional alterations or military administration that population is subjected to political heteronomy. being constrained by another's choice in so far as if it can coexist with the freedom of everyone else under the universal law the demand for self-determination is thus an effort to reconcile political existence with moral agency: a transition for state where authority is passively endured to one where governors reflect the United rational will of the citizens. To content within a heteronomous arrangement is in Kantian terms, to ask rational agents to surrender the very feature autonomy that endorses them with moral dignity.

4. The Categorical Imperative and the Formula of Humanity

To evaluate the political treatment of a population through Kantian ethics, one must subject state practice to the test of the CI. While Kant offers multiple formulations of this

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foundational principle, the second formula, the formula of humanity, provides the most direct normative standard for political relationship under such conditions.

1. Citizens are rendered passive subjects rather than acting as coauthors of the legal order, individuals become recipients of top-down administrative directives.
2. The capacity of individuals to shape their public life, assemble and participate in collective self-governance is subordinated to state imperatives.
3. It treats citizens as immature dependents incapable of deciding what is good for themselves, regardless of any material development or infrastructure the state provides.

5. The Aspiration of Freedom as an expression of Rational Autonomy

Viewed through this normative framework, the Kashmiri aspiration for freedom- whether articulated as political self-determination, constitutional autonomy or civil Liberty is not merely an ideological movement or a manifestation of regional nationalism. Rather it can be understood as a rational assertion of autonomy against systematic heteronomy.

For Kant, every human being possesses an innate right to freedom, defined as independent from skilled, the individuals residing within that territory are subject to systematic instrumentalization. From a Kantian perspective, this instrumental approach violates the formula of humanity. It asserts that no state project, strategic imperative or historical claims can claim moral validity, if it relies on the permanent instrumentalization of people.

6. The Original Social Contract, the Civil Condition and the limits of Emergency Governance

In the metaphysics of moral Kant transitions from individual moral duties to political obligations, arguing that the existing state of nature is not merely a practical recommendation but an imperative or reason.

In a state of nature, human rights are inherently provisional, exposed to unilateral force and orbital power. To secure these rights, individuals must enter a lawful civil condition under a public system of legislation. He conceptualises social contract which serves as an absolute normative benchmark for testing the legitimacy of any existing law on government.

“Act in such a way that you treat humanity whenever in your own person or in the person of any other, never merely as a means to an end but always at the same time as an end. To treat rational beings as an end is to acknowledge their inherent moral worth, their capacity for choice, and their right to participate in decisions that alter their fundamental existential and civil conditions. Conversely, to treat individuals merely as a means to instrumentalize they are reducing them to tools, bargaining chips or passive objects used to achieve an external goal, such as geo political dominance, territorial consolidation or national pride.

7. Geo-political Instrumentalization V/S Human Dignity

In the standard discourses of international relations, Kashmir is frequently analyzed as a buffer zone, a flagship of strategic rivalry or a territorial symbol integral to state identity. when powerful state actors approach a populated territory primarily as a geographical prize or as security.

8. Conclusion

By shifting the analytical focus from geo political real politik to Kantian moral philosophy, the Kashmir conflict is transformed from a dispute over territory into a fundamental question of human dignity and political right. Immanuel Kant's philosophy demonstrates that political stability built on external imposition, emergency laws on strategy calculation is inherently provisional and morally incomplete.

Immanuel Kant reminds us that true Peace (Perpetual Peace) is not merely the absence of war Maintained by Coercive balance of Power but the Presence of justice granted by universal law. The Kashmiri aspiration for freedom, when understood through this lens, is a national demand to transition from Political heteronomy to moral and civil autonomy - an assertion that no lasting Peace can exist where human dignity is Made Secondary to the dictates of the State.

“An Original Contract..... is the only condition upon which a civil constitution and so a universal law, can be established among men...” It Obligates every lawmaker to frame his laws such that they could have arisen from the United will of an entire people.

When this contract of reason is applied to Kaslo mir, the tension between Kantian Public right and actual governance structures become Stankly apparent. For decades, governance in the region has frequently operated through exceptional legal mechanisms- such as prolonged emergency powers, administrative detentions, movement restrictions and the suppression of digital and civic spaces.

In the Kantian framework, true Political stability can't be built through enforced compliance under an enduring state of exception. Authority becomes legitimate only when its laws can be acknowledged by rational citizens as products of their own Collective legislative will.

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