



The Allahabad In Prayagraj

(The editorial is based on the article “The Allahabad in Prayagraj” which appeared in The Indian Express on 25th October 2018. It analyses the process of renaming cities across the country.)

The famous quote “*what is in the name*”- attributed to equally famous English poet and playwright William Shakespeare seems to hold much relevance for modern India. Names in India are never just names. Today there seems to be a lot in the name.

The naming and renaming of places is not new in India. The British, for example, renamed Kochi to Cochin, derived the name Calcutta from Kolkata and affirmed their power through urban planning and architecture. Recently, several cities, as well as streets and bazaars in the country, have been renamed.

By renaming Allahabad, the Uttar Pradesh government has reignited the debate around the relevance of such a move. While some see it as a correction long overdue, many see it as a move to use history to polarize the present to fulfill political agenda.

About Prayagraj (Allahabad)

- This is the city of Ganga-Jamuni Tehzeeb which represents the diverse culture of Hindu-Muslim unity.
- The popular belief is that when Mughal emperor Akbar visited the region in 1574 to quell a rebellion, he changed the city’s name from the erstwhile Prayag to Illahabad (the abode of the Gods), which then got anglicized by the British to Allahabad.
- Although there are written records of the city being called Illahabad or Illahawas in Akbarnama and other books written around that period, there is no written document to suggest that the name of the city Prayag was changed and made Illahabad.

Why Prayagraj?

- Hindu religious and mythological texts such as Matsya Puran and Padma Puran, have addressed the city as the most sacred of all sacred places.
- Among many rivers and their confluences, Triveni holds a special place for the Hindus. The confluence of the sacred river streams forms a triangular curvature of religious significance for those who follow Hinduism.
- Thus, the suffix ‘raj’ signals that this is the ‘king’ among all Prayag.

Reasons behind renaming cities

- In order to free itself from the daunting memories of the colonial rule and to cherish a new identity created by the sacrifice of the millions of people which got the people their independence, names

of the states or the cities were realigned to alternative local names.

- But in contrary, the current renaming of historical cities named after Muslim personalities or of Urdu dialect is mostly based on the cultural and ethnoreligious grounds rather than linguistic one - even though the Urdu language is one of the official languages.
- Therefore, this campaign to rename historical places and roads is being seen by many as an attempt to rewrite history and undermine the historical personalities of a particular community. For example - renaming historical Mughal Sarai Railway Station after Deen Dayal Upadhyaya or renaming Lucknow's famous and historic 'Hazratganj Chauraha' after former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee as 'Atal Chowk.
- Sometimes renaming is not only about religion, but this comes as an outcome of unspoken custom and culture of the particular place. The demand for changing of the name also comes from people themselves - through violent protests or through a mass campaign.
- Political parties also use the name-game for creating vote banks. Across India, many governments have done so - from Chennai and Gurugram to the scuttled attempt to conjure a Paschim Banga (in place of West Bengal).

Procedure for Renaming a City

- Renaming of a city is a thoughtful task that is given to the State Legislators.
- The first step involves raising of a request in form of a resolution by any Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) which proposes the renaming of any particular city or street.
- On the basis of the request of the MLA, the issue would be deliberated upon and the consequences of the same shall be discussed upon. So, the second step involves the deliberation over the request of the renaming of the city or the street.
- The final step involves voting of the validity of the resolution. If there are majority votes in favor of the resolution, the said resolution shall be declared passed. If the majority of votes for a resolution are not achieved, the resolution shall fail. The majority here involves a simple majority.
- The State Legislation on the basis of the majority view shall make the necessary changes in the name of the state or city.

Procedure for Renaming a State

- One of the most cumbersome task for the Parliament is the procedure that needs to be followed in order to rename a state. The Constitution of India provides for the renaming of a state under Article 3 and Article 4.
- A bill for renaming a state may be introduced in the Parliament on the recommendation of the President.
- Before the introduction of the bill, the President shall send the bill to the respective state assembly for expressing their views within a stipulated time. The views of the state assembly are not binding, neither on the President nor on the Parliament. But the process must not be skipped as it is of vital importance as any law so made will be affecting that particular state.
- On the expiry of the period, the bill will be sent to the Parliament for deliberation.
- The bill in order to take the force of a law must be passed by a simple majority.
- The bill is sent for approval to the President. After the approval of the said bill, the bill becomes a law and the name of the state stands modified.

Issues

- This move creates dissatisfaction particularly among the minority population in question who are against the decisions. This may further lead to mob violence, communal violences etc.
- Changing names after they have gained universal recognition sows the confusion in people's mind.
- Enormous resources and paperwork is required to establish the new political/official identity of not only the city but of the entire district. Government and business stationery have to be discarded and remade at a cost to the environment.
- The biggest cost may be in re-educating outsiders about the name change, an intangible line item whose true costs are difficult to calculate.

- It leads to politicization of community memories. But not only do such endeavors not acknowledge the ruptures they create, they also overlook the history of cultural consciousness.
- Renaming results in tangible changes, but several intangible aspects of places continue to be associated with the lived reality of communities. For example, Varanasi may today be the official name of the historical city, but culturally, its idea will always be “Banarasi”.
- Renaming cities result in economic and logistical upheaval. A large amount of the taxpayers' money is spent on changing signboards on public properties such as railways, metros, buses, and street signs, not to mention the time and energy invested in bureaucratic, administrative and legal procedures. Maps have to keep pace with the frequent renaming.
- Satellite cartographic networks often fail to keep up with the frequency of changed ground realities and people and transporters waste time to reach their destinations.

Way Forward

- Historical facts and popular belief are often not natural allies. Political parties should not use a popular belief as a political stunt, making the situation worse.
- Legislators should focus on development and should not continue fragmentation and create more ruptures in society.
- The government and civil society need to make sure that cultural landscapes contain names, symbols, languages, and scripts that belong to all the different castes, religious communities, and other groups of the country, so all Indians can genuinely feel at home in their homeland.

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