



# ISRAEL-PALESTINE CONFLICT; KERALA STANDS OUT FROM THE REST OF THE NATION

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**Abstract:** The state of Kerala in India has emerged as a strong supporter of the Palestinian cause, despite facing criticism from right-wing alliances. India's foreign policy has shifted towards aligning with Israel, as seen in Prime Minister Modi's swift support for Israel in the recent conflict. Kerala's support for Palestine challenges this shift and promotes a more comprehensive and sensitive narrative in the country. This article delves into the discussion on how Kerala has been so vocal about its solidarity to the cause of Palestine.

**Index Terms** – Solidarity for Palestine, Kerala, India, Protests, Muslim-majority, Kashmir, Narendra Modi, Israeli-Palestinian conflict

## Introduction

The Israeli-Palestinian row which has been stirring heat over the entire West Asia has sparked protest rallies in various parts of the world. However, one place known for its vocal pro-Palestinian stance has remained conspicuously quiet - Indian-controlled Kashmir. In Muslim-majority Kashmir, Indian authorities have foisted uncompromising restrictions on solidarity protests and discouraged mentioning the conflict in any kind of religious sermons, reflecting India's efforts to hold in any form of protest that could challenge its rule in the disputed region. This article intends to explore the unique stance of Kerala, a state in India, and delves into the reasons behind its solidarity for Palestine.

## The Context: Kashmir's Silence

Kashmir, being a territory split between India and Pakistan, has always exhibited a deep-rooted anti-India sentiment and has historically shown solidarity with the Palestinians. However, Indian authorities have imposed strict measures to nip in the bud any pro-Palestine protests, fearing that they could surge towards demands for an end to Indian rule in the region. These restrictions on protests in Kashmir are a part of India's broader strategy to subdue dissent and maintain control over the disputed territory.

## Kerala's Vocal Solidarity

In contrast to the silence in the north, the southern end of the country, the state of Kerala has emerged as a bastion for pro-Palestine sentiments in India. The state, illustrious for its manifold religious and cultural practices, has a history of conducting many protests and rallies in favour of Palestine. Despite facing severe condemnation and backlash from the right-wing alliances, Kerala has remained a stalwart supporter of the Palestinian cause.

## **The Solidarity Youth Movement**

The Solidarity Youth Movement, a Muslim youth organization under the state unit of Jamaat-e-Islami Hind, has been in the forefront in organizing pro-Palestine rallies and events in Kerala. Their recent protest, "Youth Resistance Rally," which had extreme anti-Hindutva taglines like "Uproot Bulldozer Hindutva and Apartheid Zionism" garnered attention and triggered controversy. The rally gained global attention for featuring a virtual address by Khaled Meshaal, the leader-in-exile of the Palestinian resistance group Hamas.

## **Kerala's Protests and Backlash**

Kerala's vocal solidarity with Palestine has always been a topic for heated discussions and debates across the country. Hindu nationalists, pro-Israel activists, and right-wing journalists have instigated a hate campaign against the Solidarity Youth Movement, accusing them of extolling terrorism and encouraging anti-Hindutva sentiments. The ruling party, CPI(M) has been hosting various protests and rallies against the pro-Israel stance of the country, strongly expressing its solidarity with the people of war-ravaged Palestine. Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC), the opposition party has also announced its unwavering solidarity with the people of Palestine, upholding its long-held stance in the issue. This shows how the various political parties in the state, despite their ideological differences, have been unanimously voicing their protest against the country's deviation from the pro-Palestinian sentiments.

## **India's Shifting Foreign Policy**

There has been a perceptible shift in India's stance on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict under Prime Minister Narendra Modi. India has a prolonged history of maintaining an intricate balance between its pro-Palestinian stance and its congenial relations with Israel. Nevertheless, Modi's government has explicitly deviated from India's long-held support for Palestine, aligning itself more closely with Israel.

## **Modi's Swift Support for Israel**

Modi was one of the first global leaders to express solidarity with Israel, in the recent wrangle, censuring the attack by Hamas as terrorism. This swift support is an evident reflection of the changing dynamics of India's foreign policy, which now inclines towards a staunch alignment with Israel.

## **India's Abstention in the United Nations**

India has marked a clear departure from its usual voting record by its abstention in the United Nations General Assembly vote, which called for a humanitarian cease-fire in Gaza. The abstention can be well interpreted as its departure from the traditional altruistic position of supporting the Palestinian cause and it also draws attention to the shifting priorities of India's foreign policy.

## **Domestic Impact and Ideological Alignment**

For a country with a considerably large Muslim population, India's realignment with Israel's position on the conflict has potential domestic insinuations. Critics maintain that this shift in foreign policy is in alignment with the dogmatic leanings of Hindu nationalists, who form a major vote bank for Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party. Moreover, Indian television media also reverberates with the narratives of Hindu nationalists, further exacerbating anti-Muslim sentiment in the country.

## **The Impact on Kashmir**

The imposed silence on Kashmir over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict not only revokes their freedom of expression but also contravenes the religious obligations for many Kashmiris. Restrictions on Friday prayer gatherings and the suppression of voices that speak for Palestinian rights have created a sense of exasperation and helplessness among the Kashmiri population.

## **Kashmir's History of Solidarity**

The long-standing history of Kashmir, showing solidarity with the Palestinians, has witnessed large anti-Israel protests, often escalating into confrontations with security forces. It is evident that the suppression of pro-Palestine sentiments in Kashmir not only curtails freedom of expression but also intensifies the existing grievances against Indian rule.

## Kerala's Resilience and Commitment

Despite facing criticism and backlash, Kerala remains unwavering in its solidarity with Palestine. The variegated religious and cultural fabric, exquisitely interwoven with its history of social activism and political awareness, has contributed to its resilience in supporting the Palestinian cause.

## Kerala's Unique Socio-Political Landscape

Kerala has an environment conducive to pro- Palestine sentiments, which it owes to the socio-political landscape, characterized by its progressive perspectives and adherence to social justice. The state's vibrant civil society, comprehensive political discourse, and strong indispensable political movements have played a crucial role in sustaining Kerala's solidarity with Palestine.

## Conclusion

Kerala stands out as a beacon of pro-Palestine solidarity in India. The state with its exceptional allegiance to social justice, political awareness, and manifold religious fabric has facilitated an environment where the Palestinian cause resonates deeply. Kerala continues to demonstrate its unswerving support for Palestine, challenging the shifting dynamics of India's foreign policy and promoting a more comprehensive and sensitive narrative in the country.

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