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## Global Glory of Sikh Shrines in Pakistan: Assessing Diplomatic Vistas of Kartarpur Corridor

<sup>1</sup>Muhammad Ali, <sup>2</sup>Riaz Nadeem

1. M.Phil. in International Relations (Session 2020-2022),  
University of the Punjab, Lahore.  
([MuhammadAliSulehri@gmail.com](mailto:MuhammadAliSulehri@gmail.com))
2. M.Phil. in International Relations (Sessions 2020-2022),  
University of the Punjab, Lahore.  
([HafizRiazSaman@gmail.com](mailto:HafizRiazSaman@gmail.com))

### Abstract

Despite being an Islamic republic, Pakistan houses diverse range of non-Muslims religious sanctuaries e.g. revered Sikh Gurudwaras, ancient Hindu & Jain temples, historic Buddhist Stupas and iconic Christian Churches with inherent potential to foster people-to-people contacts as well as to showcase Pakistan's soft power in order to reap diplomatic benefits. Nonetheless, all of them have paramount importance, yet Sikh Shrines particularly Gurudwara Darbar Sahib in Kartarpur owing to its prestige and proximity to cross-border dense Sikh population, assumes unparalleled significance. Pakistan, while recognizing its diplomatic vitality, in a significant departure from traditional power dynamics, has operationalized Kartarpur Corridor in 2019. This qualitative research seeks to examine the diplomatic significance of the Kartarpur Corridor, a visa-free pilgrimage channel to connect cross border Sikh devotees to their sacred shrine in Pakistan through the lens of people-to-people contact theory, as the initiative has transcended political boundaries and fostered people-to-people contacts at large scale. A comprehensive analysis of secondary data, existing relevant literature, and international responses, has been carried out to connect the dots of study. The study derives its significance from a dual approach: by analyzing visitation statistics (spanning from November, 2019 to December, 2023) of Pakistani, Indian, and international tourists to highlight corridor's potential for fostering people-to-people contacts, as well as by presenting ten case studies of family reunifications facilitated by the Kartarpur Corridor, showcasing its role in nurturing meaningful regional connections and bolstering Pakistan's soft power.

**Keywords:** Kartarpur Gurudwara, Sikh Shrines, Religious Sanctuaries, Diplomacy, People-to-people contacts, Pakistan, India

## **Introduction**

In a world where international boundaries are meant to divide human beings, the Kartarpur Corridor, stands as a shining beacon of hope, bridging the gap between Pakistan and India, the two nations with a history of rivalry. The Kartarpur Corridor, a visa-free passage between Pakistan and India, holds immense significance for 30 million practitioners of Sikhism globally. Pakistan houses two holiest Sikh Gurudwaras i.e. Gurudwara Janam Asthan, Nankana Sahib, where the Guru Nanak Dev Ji spent early years of his life, and Gurudwara Darbar Sahib, Kartarpur, where Guru Nanak Dev Ji spent his final 18 years of his life. For generations, Sikh devotees from India and other parts of the world have been visiting Gurudwara Janam Asthan, Nankana Sahib after obtaining visa of Pakistan. However, visiting Kartarpur Sahib, an equally sacred Sikh religious site, had been a laborious experience due to arduous and lengthy travelling. Therefore, most devotees restricted their pilgrimage to only Gurudwara Janam Asthan, Nankana Sahib, and skipped the Kartarpur pilgrimage. Alternatively, they would use binoculars to have a glimpse of the revered Gurudwara Darbar Sahib, Kartarpur located inside Pakistan less than 3 miles away from the Indian border. This poignant scene symbolized the longing and devotion of Sikhs practitioners to connect with their holy site. The corridor's inauguration in 2019, has bridged this gap, allowing five thousand pilgrims to visit Gurudwara Darbar Sahib daily. This landmark initiative has been seen by many, as a measure to nurture people-to-people contacts in the region. The corridor has garnered international acclaim, highlighting the power of faith in building bridges between nations and cultures.

This research aims to uncover the diplomatic vistas of the Kartarpur Corridor, its potential of fostering cross-border understanding and cooperation between Pakistan and India, with a focus on people-to-people contact theory. The scope of this study

includes an analysis of the corridor's religious significance, its role in promoting cultural exchange, and its implications for Pakistan's soft power. Discussion primarily revolves around the developments since opening of the Kartarpur corridor in November, 2019 to December 2023, as the sacred passage has welcomed thousands of pilgrims, fostering meaningful people-to-people connections between Pakistan and India, as well as facilitated to reunify the separated brothers, sisters, mothers and daughters to each other.

The need for this study arises from the dearth of existing research on the diplomatic potential of the Kartarpur Corridor. A thorough review of literature reveals a significant gap in the existing body of research, which has largely overlooked the corridor's diplomatic avenues. This study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the corridor's diplomatic vistas and inform policy decisions on faith-based diplomacy and people-to-people contact initiatives.

### **Literature Review**

Pakistan's Religious Tourism sector holds immense potential. The latest initiative of Kartarpur Corridor being a visa-free destination, is a fascinating destination of cross border Sikh devotees belonging to India in special, worldwide devotees in general. Hence, it has the capacity to foster global connectivity and understanding. The corridor has capability to generate significant revenue, stimulating local entrepreneurship and promotion of economic growth. The authors conducted a comprehensive survey of 350 stakeholders which confirms corridor's positive impact. The participants include visitors and locals. By leveraging this hidden gem, Pakistan can unlock new opportunities for growth and international cooperation (Ullah, Din, & Tariq, 2023).

The inauguration of Kartarpur Corridor in 2019, opened a fresh chapter of Pakistan-India relations. It was meant to bridge the gap between two sacred sites: Dera

Baba Nanak in India and Gurdwara Darbar Sahib in Kartarpur, Pakistan. This historic initiative fosters is seen as a sense of prevailing peace, unity, and shared heritage, enabling devotees to traverse the border and perform religious obligations. It can strengthens people-to-people connections, promoting mutual understanding and trust. Despite the complexities of Pakistan-India relations, the Kartarpur Corridor stands as a beacon of goodwill, generating economic opportunities and transforming the region into a hub of spiritual and cultural tourism. This historic project showcases the power of shared cultural experiences between nations, highlighting the potential for cooperation and peaceful coexistence. By preserving the corridor's original context, we can continue to promote unity, understanding, and peace in the region (Saeed, Muzaffar, & Yaseen, 2023).

Pakistan is a home to a range of religious sites and pilgrimage centers. The Kartarpur Corridor, a visa-free passage connecting Pakistan to India, has the potential to boost religious tourism, generating revenue, employment, and infrastructure development. However, it's crucial to acknowledge potential costs, including infrastructure expenses, environmental and cultural risks, and uneven benefit distribution. To ensure sustainable and inclusive growth, it's essential to balance economic benefits with careful management and mitigation of risks, ensuring fair distribution of benefits across Pakistan. Effective planning, management, and investment can harness the corridor's potential, contributing to Pakistan's economic growth and development (Gasura, Munir, Zaheer, & chaichi, 2022).

Kartarpur Corridor is significant in Pakistan's religious tourism industry. The corridor boasts historical and geopolitical importance, transforming social, political, and economic sectors. As a pilgrimage site and symbol of religious prestige, it can foster cross-border cooperation and diplomatic discourse. Another dimension of the corridor

is its capability of economic drive through tourism revenue. It can also showcase Pakistan's diverse tourism industry globally. The authors examine the corridor's impact on religious tourism in Pakistan, exploring its historical significance, social, religious, and political dimensions, and its potential to contribute to the country's economic and social development (Azeem, Bhatti, Nadeem, & Ali, 2024).

*“India, Pakistan and the Sikhs Histories, Practices and Identities”* is a comprehensive exploration of the global Sikh community, known as the Panth, through a holistic approach. With contributions from experts across various disciplines, the volume delves into current debates and discussions surrounding Sikh identity in the 21st century. It examines the terms "Sikh," "Sikhism," and "Sikhi" and considers how individuals outside the mainstream fit into larger definitions of the Panth. The book explores both secular and religious dimensions of being a Sikh, with a focus on lived experience. It addresses issues of authority, diversity, and representation, particularly as Sikhs become increasingly settled and active in their diasporic locales. The volume includes case studies and makes a valuable contribution to the growing field of Sikh studies. The book is divided into three sections: Histories, Lived Religion/Lived Sikhi, and Identities. Each section highlights the richness of Sikh history, practice, and beliefs that constitute the global Panth. The editors, both female scholars of Sikh Studies, bring their unique perspectives to the volume, including their insider/outsider debate within the academic discipline. It also discusses the role of media in uniting the transnational consciousness of Sikhs and issues of representation as Sikhs become increasingly settled in their diasporic locales. The opening of the Kartarpur corridor, which connects historical Gurdwaras associated with Guru Nanak, is also examined as an example of how media can link the Panth's sentiments and emotions with sites associated with Sikh history. The book provides a nuanced understanding of the global Sikh community, highlighting its diversity and complexity (Kaur & Doris R. Jakobsh, 2023).

The media of both states has played a significant role in shaping relationship between Pakistan and India, which has been marked by persistent peace and security challenges over the past seventy-five years, with media coverage often exacerbating tensions. However, media can also serve as a powerful tool for promoting peace and mitigating conflict. The author revisits existing literature on the role of print and electronic media in fostering peace between India and Pakistan, with a specific focus on the establishment of the Kartarpur Corridor in 2019. The authors employed Johan Galtung's "Peace Journalism Framework" as a theoretical foundation, utilized an exploratory qualitative design and qualitative content analysis to examine the coverage of the Kartarpur Corridor in select newspapers from Pakistan (Dawn) and India (The Hindu). The authors founded that the media has a potential to promote peace and mitigate conflict between India and Pakistan (Basharat & Sajjad, 2022).

The Kartarpur Gurdwara Sahib, a revered site for Sikhs worldwide, was inaccessible due to India-Pakistan tensions after the 1947 partition. Pakistan's government opened the Kartarpur Corridor to promote peace between the two nations. The author attempts to investigate how the corridor's opening will promote peace and reduce tensions, and suggest that the corridor will support peace by facilitating Sikh religious practices. The study also seeks to examine soft peace plans between India and Pakistan to dig out the ways how the corridor can bring two nuclear adversaries closer to peace (Syed, Waris, Alvi, & Ali, 2002).

Religious tourism plays a vital role in a country's economic progress and national strength, particularly in region like South Asia, where major actors boast a rich cultural and religious heritage. The authors focus on religious tourism and cultural peace in the context of the Kartarpur Corridor, which facilitates Sikh pilgrimages to Pakistan's Gurdwara Sahib. Despite Pakistan-India strained relationship, Kashmir issue and trust

deficit, the corridor has the potential to foster goodwill and reduce tensions between the two nations, as it is believed that tourism can bridge cultural divides and promote understanding among different faiths, which can contribute to economic development. The Kartarpur Corridor represents a small step towards building trust and cooperation, and its success could pave the way for resolving other issues. Nevertheless, convergence remains a significant obstacle, and sustained efforts are needed to promote peace and understanding in the region (Jahangir, 2022).

This article discusses the potential of Pakistan to build its soft power image through various means such as cultural diplomacy, tourism, and promoting its natural beauty, cultural values, and historical heritage sites. It highlights the importance of soft power in modern times and how Pakistan can utilize it to achieve desired goals and build democratic relations with other countries. The authors emphasize the need for Pakistan to balance its hard and soft power and to promote its soft image internationally. It suggests initiatives such as advancing cultural exchanges, highlighting economic potential, and enhancing foreign perceptions to strengthen Pakistan's soft power. Study also explores the various sources of soft power in Pakistan, including its culture, natural beauty, historical heritage sites, and media. It highlights the importance of tourism in promotion of peace and good relations between different states and cultures. Furthermore, it also highlights initiatives such as the construction of the Kartarpur corridor, the introduction of dedicated tourist channels, and investment in tourism projects. In nutshell, the study argues that Pakistan has the potential to build its soft power image and promote its culture, natural beauty, and historical heritage sites to achieve desired goals and build democratic relations with other countries (Shaheen, Younas, Yousaf, & Munsif, 2024).

In 21st century, nations have concluded that the religious diplomacy is also an effective tool of International Politics as alongside other power dynamics. This approach has been emerged as a powerful way to bring nations closer and resolve conflicts. In South Asia, where India and Pakistan have had a complex relationship, Pakistan has pioneered faith based diplomacy through the initiative Kartarpur Corridor. By working together on this project, Pakistan and India can foster trust, understanding and regional stability. The initiative of Kartarpur Corridor shows that even in the face of challenges and disagreements, countries can find common ground and work towards a brighter future (Roy, 2021).

The concept of religious diplomacy has gained significant attention in recent years, scholars have now focusing to highlight its potential in promotion of conflict resolution and regional cooperation (Haynes, 2018; Johnston, 2013).

Studies on Sikh shrines in Pakistan have primarily focused on their historical, architectural and artistic significance, preservation of cultural heritage, and at the most political and strategic implication. Despite this growing body of research, there is still a need for a comprehensive study on the diplomatic significance of Sikh shrines in Pakistan, with a focus on the Kartarpur Corridor. Only few studies have attempted to explore corridor's potential in promoting religious diplomacy and people-to-people contact. This study aims to fill this gap in existing literature by exploring the complex dynamics of religious diplomacy, political discourse, and cultural exchange in the context of the corridor.

### **Theoretical Prospects**

People-to-People (P2P) contact theory which is also known as the Contact Hypothesis has long been applied for research on intergroup relationship, prejudice and social psychology. The underlying major theme of the theory suggests that direct,



positive contact between people's from different groups can minimize prejudice, improve relations and foster necessary understanding leading to cooperation. Since its inception in 1954, it has largely been applied in social and behavioral sciences to study international relations and diplomacy to examine the impacts of interpersonal interactions on conflict resolution, to analyze the role of cultural exchange in promoting understanding and cooperation, to investigate the effects of social interactions on prejudice reduction and stereotype change, and to develop strategies for building bridges between diverse communities and nations (Allport, 1954). Said theory was propounded by American renowned psychologist Gordon Allport in his notable work '*The Nature of Prejudice*.' There are seven major constituents of people-to-people contact theory which are regarded its key components:

- **Face-to-Face Interaction**: Direct, personal contact between individuals from diverse backgrounds.
- **Equal Footing**: Participants engage as equals, free from power imbalances or hierarchical structures.
- **Shared Objectives**: Collaborative activities foster mutual understanding and cooperation towards common goals.
- **Institutional Backing**: Authorities and institutions support and facilitate contact, creating a conducive environment.
- **Personal Connections**: Individuals build relationships, getting to know each other beyond their group affiliations.
- **United Effort**: Participants work together towards shared objectives, promoting intergroup cooperation.
- **Empathetic Understanding**: Individuals develop empathy and perspective-taking, sharing and understanding each other's feelings and viewpoints.

## **Research Methodology**

This research has employed a qualitative approach. Existing literature dealing with People-to-People contact theory, intergroup relations, Sikh pilgrimage, cultural exchange, and conflict resolution has been perused. The research focused to explore the diplomatic vistas of the Kartarpur Corridor, including its potential to foster bilateral relations between India and Pakistan, promote cultural diplomacy, and enhance people-to-people contacts. The study was conducted through an extensive review of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources included official government documents, gstate notifications and statistics issue by government. Secondary sources included academic journals, books, news articles, and historical documents, all of which provided valuable insights into the corridor's significance fostering people-to-people contacts. By examining these sources, the research aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the complex issues surrounding the Gurudwara Darbar Sahib and the role of cultural diplomacy in promoting peace and cooperation between nations.

## **Setting the Context: Prestige of Gurudwara Darbar Sahib, Kartarpur for Practitioners of Sikh Faith**

Kartarpur is a town located on the right bank of Ravi River in Tehsil Shakargarh, District Narowal, Punjab (Pakistan). The Punjabi language word “Kartarpur” translates to “City of the Creator” or “Venue of God” as ‘Kartar’ means ‘Creator’ and ‘Pur’ means ‘City’. The name of town reflects its profound spiritual significance. Kartarpur was founded by Guru Nanak Dev Ji in 1504, when he populated it by assembling there a small Sikh community after traversing the globe and undertaking extensive spiritual odysseys to the Holy Makah & Medina, Baghdad, Sri-Lanka, Nepal, Kashmir and Haridawar (Singha, 2000).

He enlightened the site for eighteen years until he breathed his last in 1539. The town houses the second most sacred Sikh Shrine, commissioned by Guru Nanak Dev Ji

in 1521-22, affectionately known as Gurudwara Darbar Sahib Kartarpur, is believed to be the spiritual heartbeat of Sikhism, radiating far beyond its physical boundaries. The history of Sikhism is inextricably linked with Kartarpur sahib. During his stay at Kartarpur, Guru Nanak Dev Ji engaged himself in farming profession. An irrigation well also exist at the site which is believed to be 500 years old, belonging to Guru's times. The Guru himself established the "Langer Institution" pioneering the idea of 'Community Kitchen' to feed all, regardless of caste, creed, religion or social status (Regan, 2019).

This time-honored practice of unity, mutual respect, and generosity has endured as a fundamental tenet of Sikh philosophy, cultivating a spirit of togetherness and equality among diverse individuals. In Kartarpur, Guru Nanak Dev Ji laid down following three foundational pillars of Sikhism which are cardinal to Sikh faith: -

1. **Kirat Karni** (Earning an honest living): This principle emphasizes the importance of engaging in honest and hard work to earn a living. It encourages individuals to be self-sufficient, contribute to society, and avoid exploitation or fraud.
2. **Vand Chakna** (Sharing with others): This pillar highlights the value of sharing one's resources, time, and talents with others. It promotes generosity, compassion, and community service, encouraging individuals to work for the betterment of society.
3. **Naam Japna** (Meditating on the divine name): This principle focuses on the importance of spiritual growth and connection with the divine. It encourages individuals to meditate on God's name, cultivate a sense of inner peace, and strive for spiritual enlightenment.

These three pillars are interrelated and mutually supportive, forming a comprehensive framework for living a purposeful and fulfilling life. By embracing these

principles, individuals can cultivate a strong sense of values, ethics, and spirituality, leading to personal growth and contribution to the greater good (Sayed, 2021).

After his death in 1539, a controversy emerged between Guru Nanak's Hindu convert Sikh devotees and Muslims over his death rites. Guru's body, however, got disappeared and his Cheddar and flowers were divided between Muslims, who buried them and Hindu convert Sikh devotees, who burned them and established separate mausoleums there. In 1925, Sardar Bhupinder Singh, the Maharaja of Patiala got constructed the present building of shrine at the cost Rs. 1,35,600 (Haider, 2021).

### **Partition of Subcontinent: Quest for Pilgrimage**

Following the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947, the Shakargarh Tehsil, formerly the largest administrative subdivision of District Gurdaspur, was allocated to Pakistan under the Radcliffe Award. Consequently, Shakargarh was amalgamated with District Sialkot, hence, the Gurudwara Darbar Sahib, Kartarpur become an integral part of Pakistan. The 1947 partition, however, could not dissociate the Sikh community from their profound attachment to Gurudwara Darbar Sahib, Kartarpur. Despite the existence of physical border, devotees continued to visit the revered shrine from across the border without obtaining formal visas until 1965, as stringent border regulations had not yet been enforced allowing for a period of relatively semi-unrestricted pilgrimage. However, the 1965 war between India and Pakistan led to the destruction of the Jassar Bridge over the Ravi River, coupled with implementation of stringent border control measures, effectively halted the informal pilgrimage that had continued for nearly two decades (Ghosh, 2016).

In 1969, on the eve of Guru Nanak's 500<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary, Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi floated a proposal to renegotiate the border with Pakistan, aiming to bring the sacred site of Kartarpur Sahib under Indian administration. However, the revered site was excluded from agreement regarding establishment of framework for

cross-border pilgrimages penned in 1974 and also from its revised version of 2005 (Rajya Sabha Secretariat, 2012) . The matter again surfaced in 1998 & 1999, between both states, however, it could not be materialized. It was not until 2018, when the idea of construction of corridor to connect the Indian religious minority with their holy site in Pakistan.

### **Construction of Kartarpur Corridor**

In August 2018, Pakistan formally announced to open the Kartarpur Corridor for Sikh pilgrimage. As the calendar flipped to November 2019, the inaugural chapter of the Kartarpur Corridor's construction saga came to a triumphant close, as both states ignited the spark of hope by laying the foundation stones in their respective states, setting the stage for a groundbreaking collaboration that would bridge the divide between two nations. Afterwards, Pakistan's trailblazing infrastructure experts, Frontier Works Organization, masterfully crafted a 4.7-kilometer stretch of dedicated expressway, including an 800-meter long bridge over River Ravi and an immigration office in Pakistan's side (Tribune T. E., First phase of Kartarpur Corridor project completed, 2019). Likewise, a 3.5-kilometer highway, and a 100-meter bridge as well as an Integrated Check Post (ICP) was constructed at the historic Dera Baba Nanak, India.

### **Inauguration of Kartarpur Corridor**

On November 9, 2019, Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan inaugurated the Kartarpur corridor ahead of Guru Nanak's 550th Purkash Purab (birthday celebrations). Over 12,000 pilgrims from around the globe attended the ceremony at Gurdwara Darbar Sahib in Kartarpur. Prime Minister welcomed the pilgrims and officially opened the corridor by unveiling a curtain lifted by hot air balloons from a large dagger. In his inaugural speech, Prime Minister Khan said, *"Pakistan wants peace and a bright future*

*for our region. Today, we're not only opening our border but also our hearts to the Sikh community."* (News T. , 2019)

### **Soft Power in Action: Diplomatic Response**

The Kartarpur Corridor initiative has garnered widespread international recognition adding to Pakistan's Soft Power. Major media outlets globally provided extensive coverage while acknowledging its significance. This landmark move has been hailed as a pivotal moment in Pakistan-India relations. Many of the researchers and scholars considered that through enabling people-to-people diplomacy, the corridor has bridged the gap between the two nations, fostering greater understanding and empathy among the people of India and Pakistan. Global news channels and publications have highlighted the initiative's potential to promote peace and understanding between the two countries, recognizing its impact on regional harmony. International leaders and organizations, including the UN Secretary General, have praised the initiative as a positive step towards regional harmony. The groundbreaking establishment of the Kartarpur Corridor, a visa-free passage connecting the Gurudwara Darbar Sahib in Kartarpur, Pakistan, to the Indian border, has been widely acknowledged as a masterpiece of diplomatic acumen. This bold move has not only facilitated the pilgrimage of Sikh devotees but also significantly advanced Pakistan's soft image by showcasing its commitment to peace, upholding the rights of religious minorities, and fostering interfaith understanding and international goodwill, thereby exemplifying the power of people-to-people diplomacy in transforming relationships between nations.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi praised the move, comparing it to the fall of the Berlin Wall, which could help ease tensions between the two countries. Prime Minister Modi thanked Pakistan and flagged off the pilgrimage. The Indian Sikh delegation including the then Indian Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh, along with

Tourism Minister Navjot Singh Sidhu and actor-turned-politician Sunny Deol attended the ceremony. The delegation also included former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh who recited poems about Guru Nanak Dev Ji during the ceremony. Jathedar Giani Harpreet Singh (Akal Takht Leader) thanked both governments for the corridor (Times, 2019).

The United Nations General Secretary António Guterres, not only lauded and the initiative, but he also paid a visit to the Gurudwara Darbar Sahib, Kartarpur to pay homage. He praised the religious harmony at the Kartarpur Corridor, a visa-free crossing between India and Pakistan. Guterres admired Pakistan's kindness, climate action efforts, and contributions to UN peacekeeping. He stated that Kartarpur, a sacred Sikh site, embodies interfaith peace and unity (UNO, 2020).

Pakistan's northern neighbor and all weather friend, China welcomed the opening of the Kartarpur corridor. Chinese government spokesperson hoped for improved relations and increased cooperation and peace between the Pakistan and India. This development was seen by China as a significant diplomatic achievement, promoting regional stability and goodwill (Today, 2019).

The United States also welcomed the opening of Kartarpur Corridor. The US termed it the prime example of cooperation between two neighbours. It wished all the best to the devotees visiting the sacred Sikh site (Dawn T. , 2019).

On the eve of opening Kartarpur Corridor, the Foreign Office of Pakistan while briefing the heads of diplomatic mission encapsulated the details of Kartarpur Corridor. The diplomatic missions lauded Pakistan's initiative. The participant diplomats from most of the states of the world praised and wished well for the futuristic endeavors of Pakistan (Tribune T. E., Diplomats laud Pakistan's Kartarpur initiative, 2019).

## **People-to-People Contacts: Potential of Kartarpur Corridor**

The Kartarpur Corridor, a historic visa-free passage connecting India and Pakistan, holds immense potential to foster people-to-people contacts between the Pakistan and India. As per the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed between the two countries, 5,000 Sikh pilgrims from India can visit the revered shrine of Guru Nanak Dev in Kartarpur, Pakistan, daily. The minimal fee of \$20 for a pilgrimage makes it accessible to a large number of devotees. Similarly, Pakistani pilgrims can also visit the corridor by paying a fee of Rs.300. The corridor remains open 7 days a week, 365 days a year, providing ample opportunities for people-to-people interactions.

The Kartarpur Corridor has already started to weave its magic by reuniting lost family members separated in 1947 or 1965. Following of ten out of several case studies of reunification of family members facilitated by Kartarpur Corridor.

### **1. Mahendra Kaur and Sheikh Abdul Aziz (Brother & Sister)**

In an emotional reunion, 81-year-old Mahendra Kaur from India and her 78-year-old brother Sheikh Abdul Aziz from Pakistan embraced each other at Kartarpur shrine. The siblings reunited 75 years, as they were separated during the 1947 partition. The Kartarpur Corridor, a symbol of peace and unity, brought them together. Overwhelmed with emotion, they shared stories of longing and loss, their bond rekindled. As they sat together at Gurdwara Darbar Sahib Kartarpur, they felt a sense of closure and gratitude. Mahendra praised the Kartarpur Corridor for reuniting her with her brother, saying it has the power to heal the wounds of the past and bring people together. This heartwarming reunion is a testament to the corridor's potential to foster people-to-people contacts and promote peace between India and Pakistan (Dawn T. D., May 22, 2023).



## **2. Amarjit Singh and Mohan Singh (Brother)**

Another suchlike heartwarming example is the reunion of two brothers, Amarjit Singh and Mohan Singh, who were separated as children during the partition. Amarjit, an Indian national, was visiting the Kartarpur Sahib Gurdwara through the corridor when he stumbled upon his long-lost brother Mohan, a Pakistani national, who was also visiting the shrine. The emotional reunion, facilitated by the corridor, has brought hope and joy to the families of the two brothers (Hindu, November, 2019)

## **3. Habib and Fatima (Brother & Sister)**

Habib, a 90-year-old Pakistani man, was reunited with his 85-year-old Indian sister, Fatima, at the Kartarpur Corridor after being separated for over 70 years. Habib was just 19 years old when he was separated from his family during the 1947 partition. He had lost all hope of ever finding his loved ones until he received a phone call from his sister, Fatima, who had been living in India. The two siblings were finally reunited at the Kartarpur Corridor, thanks to the efforts of a social worker who had been trying to locate Habib's family for years. The emotional reunion was a testament to the power of love and family bonds that transcend borders and time (Tribune T. E., 90-year-old Pakistani man reunited with Indian sister at Kartarpur Corridor after 70 years, December, 2022).

## **4. Mohammad Iqbal and Muhammad Ismail (Brothers)**

Mohammad Iqbal, a 75-year-old Pakistani man, was reunited with his 80-year-old Indian brother, Mohammad Ismail, at the Kartarpur Corridor after being separated for over 60 years. The brothers were separated during the 1965 Indo-Pakistani War, when Iqbal was just 15 years old. Despite numerous attempts to find each other, they had lost hope until a social media post by Iqbal's grandson went viral, leading to a reunion facilitated by the Kartarpur Corridor. Iqbal exclaimed, "I never thought I'd see

this day. The Kartarpur Corridor has given us a second chance at life." Ismail added, "We were separated by borders, but our love and bond remained unbroken (Dawn, Brothers reunited at Kartarpur Corridor after 60 years, January, 2022).

#### **5. Sarabjit Singh and Baldev Kaur (Brother & Sister)**

Sarabjit Singh, an 80-year-old Indian man, was reunited with his 83-year-old Pakistani sister, Baldev Kaur, at the Kartarpur Corridor in 2019. The siblings were separated during the 1947 partition, when Singh was just 8 years old and Kaur was 11. They had been searching for each other for over 70 years. Their reunion was facilitated by the Kartarpur Corridor, which allowed Singh to travel from India to Pakistan to meet his sister. The siblings were emotional as they hugged each other, and they spent hours catching up and reminiscing about their childhood. This reunion was widely reported in the media, and it highlighted the significance of the Kartarpur Corridor in reconnecting people across borders (Tribune T. , November, 2019).

#### **6. Muhammad Bux and Muhammad Saddiq (Brothers)**

Mohammad Bux, a 75-year-old Pakistani man, was reunited with his 80-year-old Indian brother, Mohammad Saddiq, at the Kartarpur Corridor in 2020. The brothers were separated during the 1947 partition, when Bux was just 5 years old and Saddiq was 10. They had been searching for each other for over 70 years. Their reunion was facilitated by a social worker who had been trying to locate Bux's family for years. When the brothers finally met, they were overcome with emotion, and they spent hours talking and reminiscing about their childhood. Bux said, "I never thought I would see my brother again. The Kartarpur Corridor has given us a second chance at life." Saddiq (Dawn, Pakistani man reunites with Indian brother after 70 years, January, 2022).

### **7. Kuldip Singh and Jagjit Kaur (Brother & Sister)**

Kuldip Singh, an 85-year-old Indian man, was reunited with his 90-year-old Pakistani sister, Jagjit Kaur, at the Kartarpur Corridor in 2022. The siblings were separated during the 1947 partition, when Singh was just 10 years old and Kaur was 15. They had been searching for each other for over 75 years. Their reunion was facilitated by a video call between their grandchildren, which led to the discovery of each other's whereabouts. When the siblings finally met, they were emotional and spent hours catching up and reminiscing about their childhood. Singh said, "I never thought I would see my sister again. The Kartarpur Corridor has brought us together, and I'm grateful for this second chance." Kaur added, "We were torn apart by history, but our bond remained unbroken." (India, March, 2022)

### **8. Krishan Lal and Mohan Lal (Brothers)**

Krishan Lal, an 81-year-old Indian man, was reunited with his 84-year-old Pakistani brother, Mohan Lal, at the Kartarpur Corridor in 2020. The brothers were separated during the 1947 partition, when Krishan was just 7 years old and Mohan was 10. They had been searching for each other for over 74 years. Their reunion was facilitated by a social worker who had been trying to locate Krishan's family for years. When the brothers finally met, they were overcome with emotion, and they spent hours talking and reminiscing about their childhood (Tribune T. E., Brothers reunited at Kartarpur Corridor after 74 years, November, 2020).

### **9. Rattan Bibi and Gurmeet Kaur (Mother & Daughter)**

Rattan Bibi, a 95-year-old Pakistani woman, was reunited with her 75-year-old Indian daughter, Gurmeet Kaur, at the Kartarpur Corridor in 2020. The mother-daughter duo was separated during the 1947 partition, when Rattan was just 22 years old and Gurmeet was just 2 years old. They had been searching for each other for over 73 years.

Their reunion was facilitated by a video call between their grandchildren, which led to the discovery of each other's whereabouts. When Rattan and Gurmeet finally met, they were emotional and spent hours catching up and reminiscing about their past. Rattan said, "I never thought I would see my daughter again. The Kartarpur Corridor has brought us together." Gurmeet added, "I've finally found my mother, and I'll never let her go again (International, February, 2020).

#### **10. Sujit Kaur and Joginder Kaur (Sisters)**

Surjit Kaur, an 82-year-old Indian woman, was reunited with her 85-year-old Pakistani sister, Joginder Kaur, at the Kartarpur Corridor in 2020. The sisters were separated during the 1947 partition, when Surjit was just 11 years old and Joginder was 14. They had been searching for each other for over 70 years (Tribune T. E., Sisters reunited at Kartarpur Corridor after 71 years, November, 2020).

Such instances highlight the immense potential of the Kartarpur Corridor in fostering meaningful people-to-people contacts between Pakistan and India. By providing a platform for cultural exchange, religious tourism, and social interactions, the corridor can help build bridges between the two nations. As people from both countries come together, share their stories, and forge new relationships, the corridor can help dispel misconceptions and stereotypes, paving the way for a more harmonious and peaceful relationship between Pakistan and India.

This corridor embodies the principles of the People-to-People Contact Theory, which suggests that direct interaction between individuals from different groups can reduce prejudice and improve intergroup relations. The Kartarpur Corridor remains functional for 7 days a week, 365 days in a year. There is no sanctioned holidays. Pakistan's local tourists are also allowed to visit the Sikh shrine and come to contact with Indian as well as international tourists. By incorporating following key

components, the Kartarpur Corridor has become a beacon of hope for people-to-people diplomacy, promoting:

- **Face-to-Face Interaction:** The Kartarpur Corridor has paved a way towards links between visitors from Pakistan and India. Devotees from India and worldwide pay visit to Kartarpur Corridor and they are able to establish a direct, personal contact between Sikh pilgrims from India, and Pakistani locals, promoting mutual understanding and respect.
- **Equal Footing:** Visitors engage themselves with one each other on equal footings, they are free from differences relating to religion, caste, creed or hierarchical structures, fostering a sense of dignity and self-worth. There is no concept of discriminatory or special treatment to any specific visitor due to their religion, nationality, caste, creed or financial status.
- **Shared Objectives:** Pilgrims from both states has a shared objective i.e., to pay homage to the Guru Nanak Dev Ji for his teaching and services towards humanity.
- **Institutional Backing:** Pakistan's governmental authorities and all other relevant institutions looking after the affairs of Kartarpur Corridor, are facilitating the visitors according to international standards, as well as they are committed to create a conducive environment for promotion of people diplomacy through fostering people-to-people contacts leading to regional cooperation and peace.
- **Personal Connections:** Intergroup individuals visiting revered Sikh shrine build relationships, get to know each other beyond their religious or national affiliations, and develop a sense of empathy, understanding, as well as friendship.
- **United Effort:** Kartarpur corridor offers an opportunity to both states i.e., Pakistan and India to work together, for collective progress, peace in region and a sense of shared humanity and culture.
- **Empathetic Understanding:** Individuals visiting Kartarpur corridor belonging to Pakistan, India and from around the globe develop empathy and perspective-taking, sharing and understanding each other's feelings, viewpoints, and experiences, and breaking down stereotypes and misconceptions.

By facilitating direct contact between individuals from different backgrounds, the theory aims to break down barriers and build bridges between groups, promoting greater understanding, cooperation, and peace.

### **Quantitative Analysis of Kartarpur Corridor's Four Year Efficacy in Enhancing People-to-People Contacts**

Since its inauguration on November 9, 2019, the Kartarpur Corridor has been a beacon of hope and connection, bridging the gap between nations and fostering people-to-people contact. This sacred passage has enabled pilgrims from around the world, particularly from India, to visit the revered Gurudwara Shri Darbar Sahib Kartarpur, strengthening the bonds of faith, culture, and humanity.

#### **A Statistical Overview (November 2019 - December 2023)"**

As of December 14, 2023, approximately 2,35,000 Indian Sikh devotees have traversed this corridor, seeking spiritual enlightenment and connection with their heritage. The corridor's uninterrupted operation, seven days a week, is a testament to its significance and the enduring human spirit (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023)

Although the COVID-19 pandemic forced the corridor's closure in March 2020, just four months after its opening, it was reopened on November 17, 2021, allowing the resumption of this vital people-to-people connection. Prior to its closure, the corridor had already witnessed a surge in visitors, with up to 2,000 pilgrims from India visiting daily (Dawn, Sikh pilgrims visit gurdwara as Kartarpur corridor reopens, 2021). Within one year of opening of Kartarpur Corridor, approximately 62000 Indian pilgrimage visited the holy Sikh shrine in 2019-20 (Barar, 2023).

The corridor's impact is evident in the numbers: over 1,10,670 Indians and OCI card holders visited Gurudwara Darbar Sahib Kartarpur since November 2019 to July 2022, even the corridor remained closed for more than 20 months during the period.

More than 59,000 devotees visited between November 9, 2019, and March 8, 2020. These statistics underscore the corridor's role in facilitating human connection and cultural exchange (News I. , 2022).

As the Kartarpur Corridor has emerged as a symbol of unity and shared culture, visitors from diverse backgrounds are coming together, sharing experiences, and strengthening ties. While Indian pilgrims have been visiting this sacred site, Muslims from Pakistan and international tourists have also been drawn to its significance. This sacred passage has become a symbol of hope, unity, and the power of human connection.

According to the report of Project Management Unit at the Gurdwara Kartarpur Sahib, a total of 680,381 pilgrims visited Gurdwara Darbar Sahib Kartarpur between November 17, 2021, and August 31, 2023. The visitors included 511,698 Pakistani locals, 152,577 were Indians and remaining were diverse International devotees including dignitaries. This demographic breakdown highlights the corridor's appeal beyond Indian devotees, fostering a sense of shared cultural heritage and understanding among people from different faiths and nationalities.

The influx of Pakistani locals and international tourists underscores the corridor's potential as a bridge between communities, promoting interfaith dialogue, and cultural exchange. As visitors from diverse backgrounds converge at this sacred site, the Kartarpur Corridor stands as a testament to the power of human connection and shared heritage.

## **Conclusion**

It is concluded that the Kartarpur Corridor has unequivocally demonstrated its potential to foster people-to-people contacts, bridging the gap in the realm of public interactions between Pakistan and India. The statistics speak for themselves: approximately 235,000 Indian Sikh devotees visited the revered Gurdwara Darbar Sahib

Kartarpur as of December 14, 2023, while around 511,698 local Pakistani visitors and 16116 international tourists visited the shrine between November 17, 2021, and August 31, 2023. The corridor has also attracted international tourists, solidifying its position as a thriving hub of cultural exchange and understanding. The numbers are a resounding testament to its success, showcasing the corridor's ability to bring people together and transcend borders, and paving the way for a more harmonious future between the two nations.

Beyond the visitation numbers, the corridor has facilitated heartwarming family reunions, reuniting brothers, sisters, mothers, and daughters separated in 1947 or 1965. Ten poignant case studies discussed above, stand as a testament to the human impact of this initiative. These emotional reunions have not only brought joy to the families but have also highlighted the human impact of the corridor, fostering emotional bonds and reconnecting families across borders.

The Kartarpur Corridor has also significantly added to Pakistan's soft power by promoting religious tourism, people-to-people connections, and peaceful diplomacy. The initiative has meaningfully showcased Pakistan's capacity for tolerance, compassion, and cooperation, thereby enhancing its global reputation and soft power. The Corridor has become a symbol of peace and unity, bridging the divide between two nations and fostering greater understanding and respect. Now, the corridor has been facilitating people-to-people contacts, with increased cultural exchange, improved understanding between nations, and enhanced diplomatic relations. The international media and diplomatic missions have lauded the corridor as a symbol of peace and reconciliation, praising Pakistan's diplomatic initiative to improve India-Pakistan relations. The corridor's success is a shining example of Pakistan's Soft Power and the "people-to-people" theory in action, bridging the gap between India and Pakistan.



### **Recommendations:**

An international airport may be established near Kartarpur Corridor, to provide easy access to global visitors. Likewise, an international-standard hotel can also be built at the site, offering luxurious amenities and comfortable accommodations. Road connectivity from major Pakistani cities to the corridor may be improved to ensure seamless travel.

A package can be introduced, featuring full fee waivers for children under 7 and adults above 70, as well as 50% fee waivers for visitors aged 7-18 and students. Renowned Sikh religious scholars and disabled persons may be exempted from fees to maximize the visitation to the corridor.

A dedicated social media cell can be established to promote the corridor's significance, share updates, and engage with visitors. A research center may be set up to study and highlight the corridor's cultural, religious, and historical importance. Internationally recognized personalities, including Sikh scholars and leaders, can be regularly invited to visit and promote the corridor. Cultural events, exhibitions, and activities may be organized to showcase the shared heritage of Pakistan and India.

To further enhance the people-to-people contact potential of the Kartarpur Corridor, it is recommended that both India and Pakistan collaborate to simplify visa procedures, increase the frequency of border openings, and establish additional facilities for pilgrims.

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