

## **Kartarpur Corridor: A Step towards Peace**

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### **Abstract**

*Kartarpur Corridor: is a Confidence Building Measure and an important step between two hostile neighbors (India and Pakistan). The corridor of Kartarpur links India's Baba Nanak Dera in Gurdaspur to Pakistan's Baba Sahib gurudwara. Both places are of immense importance to Sikhs, religiously. This Corridor can play harmonizing role in Indo-Pak rivalry in various ways. An Indian Sikh politician, Navjot Singh Sidhu said on Kartarpur Corridor inaugural ceremony that this corridor will increase people to people contact which will lead to normalize the relations between Pakistan and India. The aim of this study is to find out the economic, diplomatic and religious importance of Kartarpur corridor and its role in normalizing the relations between Pakistan and India. Descriptive and analytical method is used for interpretation of secondary data. The two states did not have good relations, a number of issues and challenges are involved in building this corridor but still it is expected that this corridor will play vital role in imparting peace between India and Pakistan. Religious affection of Sikh community from both states cannot be denied and henceforth some of the prominent Sikh leaders from both states stand for establishing of Kartarpur corridor. Economically Kartarpur corridor is important too, rise in people to people interaction will improve tourism in the area which will lead to economic growth of Pakistan. About \$300 million per year economic gains are estimated that this corridor may produce. Not only the visa but other facilities like hoteling, food and infrastructure will make economic advantage. Even Imran Khan (Pakistan's Prime Minister) said that this corridor will be a first step towards better economic relations between Pakistan and India.*

Keywords: Kartarpur, Corridor, Pakistan, India.

### **Introduction**

The partition of India left many problematic legacies, one of which is religious sites of three religions of India also separated by a hard border making the visits of these sites impossible by the hostilities of the two countries. The partition created problems for Sikhs also. The unjust demarcation of boundary by Redcliff award bifurcated the Kartarpur, divided the two important religious sites of Sikhs 'Dera Baba Nanak' left on Indian side while 'Gurdwara Darbar Sahib Kartarpur' on Pakistani side. (Goraya, July-December 2017). For a long time, it was not possible for Sikhs of India to visit Kartarpur shrine. Although an agreement 'Protocol on visits to Religious Shrines (1974)' was signed between India and Pakistan allowing the citizens of both sides to visit the Holy Places under

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certain conditions but the agreement always remain hostage to the animosity of India and Pakistan made the visits of the citizens of both sides almost impossible. The issuing of visas to the Sikh pilgrims largely depends upon the relation of the two states. When relations pervert the Sikh community has to bear the consequences. Then the Sikh community on the Indian side gathers in bulks and uses binoculars to see the Gurdwara and complete the rituals. Talking to the media Punjab Governor Chaudhry Mohammad Sarwar and Indian Politician Navjot Singh Siddhu claimed this corridor to be the fruit of 73 years continuous struggle of Sikh community. (Adnan, November 28, 2018).

Since partition the shrine remained abandoned. For the first time in 1994 Pakistan realized the importance of Kartarpur in Pak-India relations and gave proposal of visa-free access to Sikhs from India to 'Darbar Sahib'. Since then Sikhs of India press their government to accept the proposal of Pakistan and to allow them to visit the shrine. (Goraya, July-December 2017). The shrine is very important for Sikhs because Baba Guru Nanak lived and died here. Most importantly he gave the philosophy of Sikhism here and challenged the concepts of Hinduism (especially sanyas/renunciation and cast system). Actually, it is the birth place of Sikhism. There is a movement for visa-free corridor from Indian Sikhs since 1994 Pakistan's proposal while it became stronger since 2001. Chandigarh (Indian Punjab) Assembly too passed a resolution in October 2010 requesting Indian Federal Government to take Kartarpur Corridor issue with Pakistani government positively. At last Pakistan laid the foundation of Kartarpur Corridor of its side on November 28, 2018 by the Prime Minister Imran Khan.

Amid these years the development on part of India is hampered due to Indian attitude. They have shown aloofness over this corridor building as they consider it to be Pakistan heart winning victory of Sikhs: who is a major minority in India. Thus, Indian leaders on and off blaming Pakistan for being a safe haven for the Sikh community

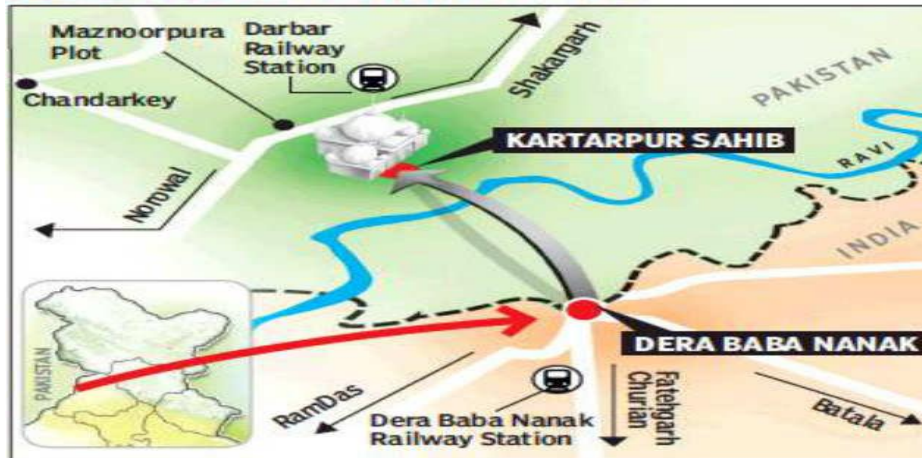
Some Indian analysts are of the view that the corridor is impossible due to India Pakistan all time tense relations. India is expecting a corridor to Kailash temple in Tibet Himalyas which Sikh community sees with suspicion as the Indo-Sino relations are neither smooth either. For security concerns the Sikh Community declares India to remain fearless as the Sikhs will go across border for their rituals. The Sikh community quotes the example of Saudi Arabia who for the offering of religious rituals never bans any country pilgrims from coming to Mecca Medina beyond being in severe uncongenial times. Same way the Sikhism

religious observances should not be seen in term of bilateral neighboring state relations.



Source: <https://maps.google.com/maps/>

### **DESIRED CONNECTION**



Source: <https://maps.google.com/maps/>

### **India-Pakistan Stand on the Issue**

India never positively welcomed Kartarpur Corridor because she remained suspicious about Pakistan's intentions. The negative statements of Indian politicians are also a hindrance to the cause of corridor. On 28 November 2018, Sushma Swaraj (then Indian Foreign Minister) issued a statement that "the foundation of the Corridor needed to be looked at in isolation, and did not in any way point to a resumption of dialogue". (The Daily Dawn, November 28, 2018).

The suspicion of India about the corridor was further increased by the Pakistani Foreign Minister statement that “Pakistan had thrown a googly at India” (The Daily Dawn, December 02, 2018). which strengthened Indian views of suspicion and also undermined purpose of the corridor. India believes that Pakistan’s initiative of Kartarpur Corridor has not to serve any goodwill but to push India towards the dialogue table (Wyeth, December 11, 2018). because formal talks between India and Pakistan have stalled since 2016 after terrorist attack in Kashmir for which India blamed Pakistan of sponsoring such terrorists while Pakistan denied the claim.

The BJP’s stand on Kartarpur is that. “This is a sociopolitical and religious issue. We do not see it as any diplomatic breakthrough.” this view showed by India by deputing “Sikh ministers for the ceremony, the government of India has kept it informal and religious.” (Maini, December 06, 2018). In an interview with BBC Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi told that Kartarpur project would help in improving India Pakistan relations. “The more people meet, the more they realize how much in common we have, and what we are missing by not resolving our outstanding issues.” (Dev, December 04, 2018).

PM Imran Khan declared this corridor building as synonymous to breaking of history bound chains. There is general perception on Indian side that military force and ISI don’t want peace with India but this perception is denied by Prime Minister Imran Khan Address that “My political party, the rest of our political parties, our army, and all our institutions are all on one page. We want to move forward,” PM Imran Khan spoke of his hope that “the two neighbors can one day be friends.” (Kermani, November 29, 2018).

However, India’s response was not much positive as her Foreign Minister, Sushma Swaraj, said “the initiative did not mean “bilateral dialogue will start”, adding: “Terror and talks cannot go together. The moment Pakistan stops terrorist activities in India, bilateral dialogue can start.” (Maini, December 06, 2018).

Whereas Pakistan denied several times the accusation of India that Pakistan is supporting Kashmir freedom movement, While Pakistan considers India liable for the ongoing state terrorism in Kashmir. Pakistan on its behalf has many times negated to be funding the terrorist’s blocks. But India insists that before any peace measures are to be taken Islamabad should keep its hands off.

Imran Khan in his first ever address as Prime Minister (August 2018), announced that “for every one step India takes on improving

relations, Pakistan would take two.” (Dev, December 04, 2018). But this announcement couldn't serve positive in both countries relations as a planned meeting between the India and Pakistan foreign ministers in September 2018 (on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly) was cancelled by India due to her anger over stamps issued by Pakistan remembering Indian atrocities in Kashmir. On the inauguration ceremony of Kartarpur project in November 2018, Prime Minister Imran Khan said that “There have been mistakes on both sides [in the past], but we will not be able to move forward until we break the chains of the past. The past is there only to teach us, not for us to live in.” (The Daily NEWS. July 26, 2018). He further stated on the same occasion:

“If France and Germany, which have killed millions of each other's people, can today be part of the same union with open borders and enjoy trade, it is because their political leadership decided they don't want to remain in the past.” (Hashim & Saberin, November 28, 2018).

Pakistan wants to restore peace talks on Kashmir with India. Imran Khan (Prime Minister of Pakistan) said at Kartarpur inauguration that Kashmir is the only issue between Pakistan and India. “The human race has reached the moon. Tell me what is the issue that human beings cannot solve? Can't India and Pakistan resolve one issue [Kashmir]?” (Maini, December 06, 2018).

To ensure the smooth coming of Sikh pilgrims to Pakistan for the 550<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Guru Nanak, Pakistan wants the corridor working to start in the earliest but the counterpart seems to be reluctant. Pakistan invites India for peace talks but India continuously takes a step back for not getting on softer tone for this corridor.

An international Analyst Michael Kugelman of Wilson Centre told the BBC that “the Kartarpur border crossing was a significant development but it would be wrong to suggest that the next step was a peace process.” “It's a confidence building measure but at the end of the day India and Pakistan are still at loggerheads”. (Dev, December 04, 2018).

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau India's visit in February 2018 was a tense experience for India because issues of Khalistani sentiment in Canada dominated the agenda. So soon after that India had little patience for this attempt of Kartarpur which will influence Sikh pilgrims. India warned Pakistan that such tactics would not be tolerated. The Indian Foreign Ministry issued a statement regarding the incident that “Pakistan was called upon to immediately stop all such activities that were aimed at undermining India's sovereignty, territorial integrity and

incitement of disharmony in India.” the statement further added, “It was conveyed that such repeated attempts by authorities and entities in Pakistan to extend support to secessionist movements in India amount to interference in the internal affairs of India. Moreover, such incidents during the visit of the Indian pilgrims went against the spirit of the bilateral Protocol of 1974 governing the exchange of visits of pilgrims between the two countries.” (Kermani, November 29, 2018).

India has long accused Pakistan of attempting to ferment separatist sentiment in Indian Punjab.

### **Analysis**

1. The decades of ongoing Indo-Pak tense relations could meet smooth friendly ties.
2. But the better relations of the two states may not last long if formal dialogues did not take place.
3. Besides India and Pakistan are struggling to bring the best possible outcome of this corridor; both for the Sikh community and the state relations.

Pakistan’s inauguration of Kartarpur Corridor in November 2018 couldn’t get positive response from Indian side due to many reasons

1. Upcoming Indian elections at that time which were announced to be held in May 2019 due to which Indian government couldn’t take step which could annoy Indian Hindu majority.

As the Indian elections were on its edge P.M Modi had to give a strong look to Pakistan for getting the Hindu nationalist votes to be in his favor. And this worked for him. Not only this Modi stance on Kashmir has further deteriorated Indo Pak relations and disturbed the Kartarpur corridor working, making his government strong as the support of Hindu extremist has been won.

Stuti Bhatnagar (adjunct fellow at the University of Adelaide) wrote in a note published on The Lowy Institute.

“Pakistan may be keen to embrace dialogue but “political realities in India are very different,” Amid ongoing state elections and ahead of a general

election in 2019, "it would not be in Modi's electoral interests to enter serious negotiations with Pakistan," she argued. "The ascendance of the Hindu nationalist narrative, which has become more pronounced since 2014, suggests that the electoral imperative for Modi is Pakistan-bashing rather than dialogue." (Wyeth, December 11, 2018).

2. An access to the Sikh religious site will lead to domino effect for other sites of other religions across the border also which will create further problems for Indian government. Like after Kartarpur Corridor, Hindus from held Kashmir also demanding from Indian government to give an access to a Hindu shrine (Sharada Peeth) in Azad Kashmir on Pakistani side.
3. India always blames Pakistan of supporting Sikhs separatist Khalistani movement in India. She still fears that this corridor will further heighten the Sikh separatist movement. Indian authorities are also wary of the corridor being used by Sikh nationalists who seek to create an independent state known as Khalistan. (Chandran, December 07, 2018).
4. The corridor will also create additional cross-border security challenges for both India and Pakistan.

India does not yet consider the Kartarpur Corridor development as a game changer/ big development in India-Pakistan relations. Raveesh Kumar (The spokesman of Ministry of External Affairs in Delhi) stated that

"It is deeply regrettable that the Prime Minister of Pakistan chose to politicize the pious occasion meant to realize the long-pending demand of the Sikh community to develop a Kartarpur corridor by making unwarranted reference to Jammu and Kashmir, which is an integral and inalienable part of India." (Chandran, December 07, 2018).

5. Corridor will give economic benefit to Pakistan which is not in the interest of India because the later believe that these economic gains will be used for military development of Pakistan.

World Bank conducted a study about the economic benefits of religious tourism in Pakistan, estimated that religious visits could exceed to 300,000 persons per year to Pakistan which will yield 300 million dollars per year economic benefit to Pakistan if proper facilities are provided. (Zuberi, December 5, 2018). Pakistan could also extend religious visits initiative to Sikh pilgrims from other parts of the world. The World Bank will provide 500 million dollars to government of

Pakistan for renovation of nine religious sites including Kartarpur shrine for attracting tourists to these religious sites from all over the world. Similarly, Kartarpur corridor also will increase economic growth and tourism of the region.

The corridor is also an economic opportunity for both countries. The removal of trade barriers will boost trade, service sector and help in economic development of the area. As the corridor consists of bulks of services to be provided for the pilgrims, the Punjabs' across borders welcomes corridor with open hands. Traders too want trade barrier to be reduced as the number of commodities will increase. Today the merchants need to take indirect route through Gujrat which limits the trade opportunities. The businessmen in Punjab are right behind this corridor building as they consider it to have big economic boosts and ultimately good economic relations of the adjacent states. (Maini, December 06, 2018).

The Kartarpur Corridor being the project for minority in two states can still prove a tension easing step. If not, immediate it can create an atmosphere of coming to negotiation table to solve other existing issues in future. Region over burdened with religious panicky can bring an opportunity for cooperation as the two intends to facilitate the pilgrims. Strengthening the ties with a progressive outlook will end up with substantial results but the final job of assuring détente remains to be noted. (Chandran, December 07, 2018).

### Conclusion

Pulwama attack again proved to be the tumbling rock in the ongoing normalization of Indo-Pak relations. Repeatedly the states have blamed one another of violating LoC. The recent Kashmir issue and Pulwama attack scenario could not even hinder the meeting of delegates regarding Kartarpur building hence lowering the tensed atmosphere. Kartarpur Corridor can be seen as a peace wave and confidence building measure between India and Pakistan. This corridor will not only ensure peace and tranquility among the religious distressed areas but will also help improve the tourism in the state as the people to people contact will increase and cross border movement will be enhanced.

The path to reestablishment of friendly relations if is not hindered by political interests and motives will lead to eradicate tensions. Likewise, the planning of building a visa free corridor will ensure smooth bilateral relations.



Sikh community being the major minority in both states also has the world's fourth largest religion. Their demands met after 73 years of struggle to perform their pilgrimage across border. This initiative can act valuable as confidence building measure between the two hostile neighbors always ready to fight. This corridor is too considered as Berlin Wall of Asia that must fall. As the BJP along its leader declared "Religious diplomacy or using faith to bring people and nations together has been very much successful tool in foreign policy." (Chandran, December 07, 2018).

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