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Peacemaking Between India and Pakistan

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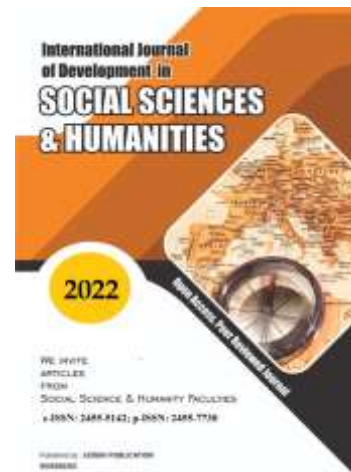
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On November 9, 2019, Prime Minister Narendra Modi opened the Indian side of the Kartarpur corridor at Dera Baba Nanak in Gurdaspur and praised Pakistan's decision to do so. On the same day, Imran Khan, his Pakistani counterpart, carried out a similar act at the recently built Darbar Sahib complex at Kartarpur in Shakargarh, Narowal District, which is a part of Punjab province in Pakistan. Prime Minister Modi compared the occasion to the historic fall of the Berlin Wall in 1991 and thanked his Pakistani counterpart for "understanding and for respecting the sentiments of India and working on it positively"¹ during the opening of the corridor.² During the infamous Lahore bus summit in 1999, former Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and his Pakistani counterpart PM Nawaz Sharif discussed the concept of opening a religious corridor. The concept was also advanced by the late Manmohan Singh in a 2004 address in Amritsar. It is important that the Kartarpur passage was opened despite the intense tensions that developed during the Pulwama incident^[a] and the August 2019 repeal of Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, which granted the state of Jammu and Kashmir

¹ "Kartarpur corridor: PM Modi thanks Imran Khan Niazi for understanding India's sentiment", The Economic Times, 09 November 2019, video.

² Ibid.

special status. [b] Despite the positive responses, the Indian government has already voiced security worries about the corridor, warning that it might be used by either extremist groups or Pakistan-backed Khalistani terrorists to brainwash Indian pilgrims.³ Several historical occurrences and statements made by senior Pakistani leaders can be linked to India's suspicions: Lt. General Javed Nasir, a hardline Islamist general who served as the head of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and the chairman of the Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, publicly stated that the Sikhs' demands for a distinct identity are legitimate and that the Indian government should respect them while According to Gen. Nasir, Khalistan might be established by "peaceful means." Analysts have frequently emphasised how Pakistan's political leadership conveniently adopts double standards when it comes to peacemaking endeavours with India in the face of threats and harsh criticism from fundamentalist organisations within their own nation⁴.

³ Khalistan (Land of Khalsa) is a Sikh separatist movement to create an independent nation for the Sikh community as their homeland. After the 1971 war, former Pakistani Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto started the conspiracy to start this movement as their revenge, with the help of Jagjit Singh Chauhan, a self-styled president of Khalistan government in exile. "You can't get Khalistan through military movement: Jagjit Singh Chauhan", India Today, 15 January 1993.

⁴ Harsh Pant, "India's challenge with Kartarpur", Observer Research Foundation, 14 November 2019.

RELIGIOUS DIPLOMACY CONTRADICTIONS

Pakistan's attempts to uphold its diplomatic promise to open the Kartarpur corridor have sparked conversations in India about how to capitalise on this encouraging attitude and react with a comparable act of peacemaking. Various parties from a range of political perspectives have proposed a number of alternatives that, in their opinion, could counteract Pakistan's "Kartarpur diplomacy". The renovation and opening of the Sharada corridor, which would enable Hindus and Sikhs to access the Sharada temple [c] in Neelum Valley, Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, is one of the key solutions being discussed. formal reports and media sources claim that India has already sent Pakistan a formal proposal in this regard, which is thought to have been well-received by their counterparts abroad. In the Indian subcontinent, religion and culture are frequently seen as being at the centre of social consciousness. The Latin term *religionem*, which means "respect for what is regarded as sacred or respect for gods," is the origin of the English word "religion."⁵ However, religion has become one of the main political forces dividing society as a result of institutionalisation and politicisation of belief. This has a long

history; the former colonial rulers of the subcontinent politicised religion and spirituality and used them as weapons; the results of these strategies eventually bred animosity between Hindus and Muslims, the two main religious groups in the region, and prompted the Two-Nation Theory to be put into practise, which led to the bloody partition of the subcontinent in 1947. The enmity and ingrained mistrust between the two South Asian neighbours frequently prevents attempts at friendship from succeeding, and these feelings have only become stronger over time as a result of the presence of virulent fundamentalists in both nations. It is well known that Pakistan is experiencing a severe crisis on numerous levels. Even after 70 years of being a distinct Islamic nation, Pakistan's largest problem is its identity crisis. According to a widely held belief, "the erosion of Jinnah's pluralist and secular vision of Pakistan has been due either to a state centralization disdainful of ethnic diversity or to a state-driven Islamization intent on disciplining, if not marginalising, religious difference."⁶ Religious figures like Sayyid Ahmed from Rae Bareilly (1786–1832) and Ismail Dehlavi (1779–1831) felt the need for "purifying the Islamic faith" and purging it of the local faith, i.e., Hinduism, in

⁵ <https://www.etymonline.com/word/religion>

⁶ Farzana Shaikh, *Making Sense of Pakistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009) 19.

the 18th century, which is when this process of Islamization began. These early communal endeavours eventually culminated in the Two-Nation Theory, the founding doctrine of Pakistan. Since the state's inception, this fundamental idea has haunted its sense of national identity, resulting in a deep conviction that Pakistan must be viewed negatively—as not being a part of the civilisational (Hindu) "Indianness". The religious emotions of sizable communities in both nations are obviously at the centre of people-oriented peacemaking initiatives, whether they are focused on the Kartarpur corridor or the projected Sharada corridor. Although in their early stages such projects were frequently regarded as a gauge of India-Pakistan relations, they eventually succumbed to political manipulation or were simply abandoned due to threats from fundamentalist forces or non-state actors. A recent example of a religiously motivated attempt at bringing about peace that failed is the reconstruction of the Katas Raj temple complex in Chakwal, Pakistan's Punjab province.⁷ The widely publicised temple repair was described by Pakistan's then-prime minister, Nawaz Sharif, as "a symbolic gesture to reach out to the Muslim nation's minority communities and also soften the

⁷ Hemant Rajopadhye, "Silenced histories, razed shrines: The difficult task of rediscovering India and Pakistan's shared heritage", Observer Research Foundation, 11 September 2018.

country's hard-line image abroad."⁸ However, despite the strong intentions and encouraging indicators of development, the project has reached a standstill. At Nankana sahib, where Guru Nanak was born, a similar incident occurred when a mob assaulted the revered shrine of Gurdwara Janam Asthan.⁹ These occurrences highlight the need to find more comprehensive solutions that foster a feeling of social consciousness and responsibility throughout all spheres of society in the subcontinent rather than merely relying on superficial countermeasures. Without addressing the underlying reasons of the identity crisis, populist and shallow uses of religious symbolism to promote peace against the backdrop of savage hostility between the countries will fail. Alternative measures should be used by the authorities. Even while they might not provide results right away, they are likely to eventually support the long-term viability of peacemaking initiatives that are primarily motivated by religious sentiments and communal identities. Investigating useful and constructive initiatives that are not shrouded in political showmanship would be one of the only long-term possibilities that may help

⁸ Drazen Jorgic, "At Hindu temple, Pakistan PM reaches out to minorities", Reuters, 12 January 2017.

⁹ K.K. Shahid, "Mob attack on Gurdwara Nankana Sahib a test for PTI govt", Pakistan Today, 4 January 2019.

create a common ground and finally open the path for peace in the subcontinent.

USING COMMON KNOWLEDGE TO PROMOTE PEACE

Punjab University's library, according to its website,¹⁰ has 8,671 manuscripts of writings written in "Hindi and Sanskrit" languages. The library owes a great deal to Dr. A.C. Woolner, a professor of Sanskrit, for his work in building the Sanskrit collection. His Sanskrit manuscript collection in the Oriental College Library was included in the Punjab University Library when it merged with the latter in 1913. According to the website, the collection has 9,075 manuscripts written in Sanskrit, Hindi, Prakrit, Sharada, Andhra, and Tamil. Additionally, this collection has around 2,000 palm leaf texts. The first book of Panjab University's catalogue of Sanskrit manuscripts¹¹ highlights the modest beginnings of the library's manuscript collection; in the 1880s, Sanskritist Pandit Kashinath Kunte, a Marathi speaker, first bought a small number of manuscripts from libraries in Lahore, Gujranwala, and Delhi. The collection then expanded while Dr. Woolner was leading it. This author has discovered through online research and

¹⁰ Punjab University Library (PUL) Collections-Manuscript Collections.

¹¹ Ram Labhu, Catalogue of Sanskrit Manuscripts in Panjab University (Lahore: Panjab University Library, 1932).

correspondence with Pakistani academics that the collection includes manuscripts of Vedic Samhitas like the Kapishtala Samhita of the Yajurveda and the Jaiminiya Samhita of the Samaveda. Vedic scholars believe the Jaiminiya Samhita to be significant because it contains a variety of ganas (musical melodies) that have not yet been discovered in other manuscripts. All other collective manuscript catalogues for India that are also missing these Richakas include those in the libraries in Oxford, Tübingen, Paris, Berlin, and Paris.¹² The Venkata Madhava Bhashya, the rarest and only complete copy of the commentary on the Rigveda, is another significant manuscript in the collection. The collection at the Punjab University Library also includes a large number of palm-leaf manuscripts of commentaries on the Brahmanas, which are Vedic liturgical texts. It is believed that the Grihya Samskaras and their genesis, the Grihya Sutras, are an integral component of the Vedic household ritual systems. One of the most significant Grihya Sutras is the Baudhayana Grihya Sutra. Perhaps the only manuscript to date is that of one of its commentaries, which is listed in this collection. This collection also includes numerous other special manuscripts in the areas of grammar, linguistics, Tantra,

¹² See note 8.

Shaivism, Kashmir Shaivism, Mimamsa (ritual theory), and Shaivism. The second volume of the catalogue of Sanskrit manuscripts available in the Punjab University Sanskrit collection¹³ mentions hundreds of additional manuscripts, covering a wide range of topics such as Samkhya, Yoga, Vedanta, Sikhism, Puranas, Gita, Bhakti, Kamashastra (erotica), Smritis (law books), Shilpa Shastra (architecture). There is information about comparable Sanskrit manuscript collections at the D.A.V. College in Lahore in the Woolner collection. In addition to these, records indicate that, of the 27,000 manuscripts in the Ganj Bakhsh library in Islamabad,¹⁴ 10% are written in non-Persian, non-Arabic languages. Although manuscripts in Sanskrit, Pali, Prakrit, or other indigenous languages like Punjabi or Khadi Boli are not specifically mentioned, there is a very high likelihood that they exist. Numerous references of Maharashtrian and Gujarati Sanskritists who spent several decades of their lives studying Sanskrit and other linguistic and ritualistic traditions in cities like Lahore, Karachi, Rawalpindi, and Gujranwala have been personally documented by the author. Large Jaina manuscript collections may also be

discovered in these cities due to the persistence of the Jaina trader community and Jaina temples even 70 years after Partition.¹⁵ Hundreds of texts representing the syncretic literary traditions promoted by the Natha Jogis, Sufis, and local boards of Punjab, Rajasthan, and Sindh have been produced in addition to the classical Hindu, Buddhist, and Jaina texts; if acquired and carefully studied, these could hold great potential to change South Asian historical discourse. Despite this wealth of information, reports state that "today, history is taught in Pakistani schools in a way that is nothing more than political indoctrination based on the separate identity of the Muslims and the Hindus."¹⁶ This can be characterised as a "hate Hindu, hide history" strategy that reinforces stereotypical enemy perceptions of India and leaves out the numerous shared South Asian traditions that show areas of harmony between the two nations. More academics are of the opinion that students don't learn history in social studies and Pakistan studies classes. They must read a selection of carefully chosen myths, fairy tales, and outright lies. Historical interpretations are therefore predetermined,

¹³ Punjab University Lahore Catalog of Sanskrit Manuscripts Vol 2.

¹⁴ "Ganj Bakhsh Library, Islamabad," Dissertation Reviews, 3 February 2014, <http://dissertationreviews.org/archives/7054>.

¹⁵ "Question No. 1128, Corridor to Sharada Peeth in POK"; "Pakistan Approves Plan to Open Sharda Temple Corridor in PoK for Hindu Pilgrims: Report", News18, 26 March 2019.

¹⁶ Ahmed Salim and Khan Zafarullah, eds., *Messing Up The Past: Evolution of History Textbooks in Pakistan, 1947-2000* (Islamabad: Sustainable Development Policy Institute, 2004) 6.

unassailable, and concretized because state-sponsored textbooks show how history can be appropriated to support a national philosophy or ideology. Extensive discussions in some reports and publications indicate that this is a recent development; the pre-Islamic heritage and history of today's Pakistan had, indeed, been a part of the curriculum before 1975¹⁷. However, it has been systematically removed from the syllabus over the decades. The historical significance of pre-Islamic history and heritage¹⁸ has thus been intentionally obliterated from the cultural consciousness of the average Pakistani citizen. This national amnesia about Pakistan's ancient and mediaeval pre-Islamic/non-Islamic past has resulted in the negligence of thousands of Sanskrit and Prakrit manuscripts and inscriptions attributed to Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist legacies. There is a lack of interest in studying ancient Sanskrit and Prakrit languages as well as all other non-Islamic cultures due to the demonization of Hindus and Hinduism¹⁹ and the deliberate distancing from the region's Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain

¹⁷ K.K. Aziz, *The Murder of History: A critique of history textbooks used in Pakistan* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2010). Also see, A.H. Nayyar and Ahmed Salim, eds., *The Subtle Subversions: The text of Curricula and Textbooks in Pakistan* (Islamabad: Sustainable Development Policy Institute).

¹⁸ See note 15.

¹⁹ See Salim, Ahmed, Khan, Zafarullah, Hafeez, Amtual, *Portrayal of Heroes and Villains in (Messing Up The Past: Evolution of History Textbooks in Pakistan, 1947-2000* (Islamabad: Sustainable Development Policy Institute), pp.49-60.

past. Independent journalist Sehyr Mirza, who is based in Lahore, points out that the Oriental College in Lahore's Hindi department did not reopen until Zia-Ul-Haq's rule in 1983. The college currently provides a certificate programme in Hindi. Mirza adds that a number of the books in the Hindi department's library were transferred from the Sanskrit department, which was shut down in 1947.²⁰ In these circumstances, the governments or the official academic authorities from the two nations should work together to develop academic cooperation and launch academic exchange programmes that could result in the training of a common language-script. These courses would not only help students learn the ancient languages and writing systems, but also help them recognise and get rid of the historical prejudices that have been persisted in for so long.

CONCLUSION

Populist initiatives based on religious diplomacy, like renovating the Katas Raj temple or opening up the Kartarpur corridor, draw a lot of media attention; however, most of the time, they lead to controversies (or, in some cases, momentary romantic fervour) based on untruths and ignorance. In this case,

²⁰ Sehyr Mirza, "Past Haunts the Present in Pakistan's Only Hindi Department", *The Wire*, 16 March 2018.

academic collaborations and interactions between the two countries will help the academic communities in each country develop more useful responses to proposals like the Kartarpur corridor. These scholarly endeavours will also aid Pakistani society in resolving its identity crisis. Importantly, by implementing such projects, the Pakistani government could instil a sense of security among the country's Hindu minority, which would enhance Pakistan's reputation internationally with regard to minority issues. While looking forward to celebrating the 75th anniversary of their independence, the governments of both countries should dedicate the year 2022 to the rediscovery of their shared culture and history, as suggested in an earlier ORF paper ²¹ by this author. Despite escalating tensions following the Pulwama attack and the repeal of Article 370, the Kartarpur corridor has come to symbolise the bilateral relationship between India and Pakistan. This development has demonstrated that despite obstacles, political intention, willingness, and positive action can open doors for fruitful academic interactions between the communities and institutions of Indian and Pakistani historians. The Indian prime minister has gained notoriety and respect as a mature

leader and is renowned for his respect and interest in the religious and cultural legacy of ancient India, particularly the rapidly vanishing remains of Sanskrit literature. Even his political adversaries now respect his abilities as a shrewd organiser and campaigner. Therefore, it makes sense for Prime Minister Narendra Modi to suggest that India and Pakistan celebrate their respective 75th Independence Days together and designate the year to the rediscovery of their shared history, culture, and heritage. This will not only establish a new standard in the turbulent history of the subcontinent but also give the shattered peacemaking efforts between the two neighbours more momentum. The Kartarpur diplomacy prepares the ground for such a win-win initiative to take shape. Long-term sustainability cannot be predicted for the Kartarpur Corridor or, for that matter, for any such attempts at rapprochement. Even the two countries' composite dialogue process has been fragile, prone to multiple fractures, and prone to collapsing at the slightest provocation. In order to launch a beneficial academic programme, the political leadership must capitalise on the momentum generated by the Kartarpur corridor breakthrough.

²¹ See note 15.

ENDNOTES:

1. “Jaish Terrorists attack CRPF convoy in Kashmir, kill at least 40 personnel” Pulwama terror attack: What happened on Feb 14 and how India responded” in The Economics Times, 16 February, 2019.
2. On 5 August, 2019, the Home Minister Amit Shah introduced ‘the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Bill, 2019’ in Rajya Sabha to transform the status of the state of Jammu and Kashmir to two separate Union Territories, namely Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir and Union Territory of Ladakh.
3. See, “No Article 370 for Jammu and Kashmir, historic move by Modi Govt” in India Today, 5 August, 2019.
4. Sharada temple or Sharada Peetham is a Hindu temple attributed to the goddess Sarasvati (the Hindu goddess of knowledge), and one of the foremost ancient center of traditional learning, located in the Neelum Valley in PoK. It is regarded as one of the three holiest pilgrimage sites for the Kashmiri Pandits. According to legend, Adi Shankaracharya, the foremost spiritual scholar and leader (8th Century A.D.) ascended the highest throne of wisdom, i.e. Sarvajna-peetham (the throne of omniscience) at this Sharada temple.

