

India-Pakistan Reciprocal perception & misperception towards Religious Diplomacy: A Case Study of Kartarpur Corridor

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ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of religious diplomacy has become a decisive icon of the contemporary International politics in 21st century and symbolized as the key factor of normalization and conflict resolution. The region of South Asia has emerged as the most conflict-prone area with certain core and periphery disputes. There has been a mixed and multiple disclosure of reciprocal perception between the intelligentsia and the statesmen of India and Pakistan towards their bilateral clashes and its solution. The construction of Kartarpur corridor complex 2018-19 proved as the trade mark of the endorsement of religious diplomacy comes out from the secular voices of the arch neighbors with a great hope of socio-economic uplift even in the presence of high risk nuclear encounter. The kartarpur corridor project has been pre-dominantly perceived as the prime paradigm of future peace and prosperity in the region.

Keywords: Religious Diplomacy, Perception, Symbolism, Tourism, Co-Existence

Introduction

In an age of globalism, revolutionary scientific advancement and use of information technology, India-Pakistan the two neighboring states are still victims of misperception and distrust about one another. The element of distrust has ever widened already fractured and broken bilateral relations. Although, both the states have close socio-cultural, Religio-political and literary historical ties but continue to stay at great distant. The elements of perception, misperception and distrust have ever played an important role in formulation of bilateral relations in the regional and global politics. The misperception factor during the Cold-war period, episode of Cuban Missile crises 1962 between US and Soviet Union took place because of misperception and miscalculation towards the each other and brought the two nuclear super powers at the verge of outbreak of nuclear war (Gosh, 2009). The politics of miscalculations and trust deficit has played a significant role alleviated and aggravated multiple conflicts and rivalries in international relations i.e. Iran-Iraq, Saudi Arabia- Iran, Arab-Israel, US-Iraq, North and South Korea wars were the result of the similar practice. The environment of ambiguity and chaotic politics between India and Pakistan led the increase of misunderstanding and victimize the region of South Asia. The bilateral indo-Pakistan relationship

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remained under the continual bitterness and generated more conflict prone opportunity which took both the states in the situation of nowhere. The domestic factors, global and regional geostrategic environment have always played an active and electric role in creation of misperception and formulation of policy perspective towards each other (Adnan, 2014). A number of far right extremist organizations and non-state actors across India-Pakistan borders are working on influencing and creating an harsh political environment, animosity, anti-state syndrome against each other in the context of decision making process. In India some leading far right organizations like Rashtria Swayamasevak Sangh [RSS], Vishav Hindu Parsad [VHP], Bajrang Dal [BD], Hindu Rashtra Dal [HRD] have derived their violent politics from Chankya Kotlia's Vedic doctrine and inspired by Savarkark's Hindutva ideology (Jafferlot, 2009). These organizations are working under the majoritarian Hindutva rule of BJP and legitimate shelter given by Modi administration. These extremist wings with the promotion of Hindutva raj, Hindu ultra-nationalism and Indian muscular nationalism in Indian politics have hurt and damaged badly the Indian secular notion of democracy. The socio-religious imbalance, political polarization in Indian democracy, minorities victimization, Hindu-Muslim public disorder, the Gujrat persecution, demolishing of Babri Mosque and recent Delhi Muslim killings are the brief look on hardliner mindset that influence on Indian internal and external policy making agenda (United States Commission on international Religious Freedom Annual Report, 2021) (Jaferlot, Mehta, Rej, S, Sagar, & Verma, 2019). In Pakistan, some rightist religio-political organizations are active and occasionally influence Pakistan's policy towards the neighboring India. Tahreek-e- Taliban Pakistan [TTP], Jesh-e-Mohammad [JEM], Siph-e- Sihaba [SSP] and Tahreek-e-Labaik Pakistan [TLP] (are proscribed organizations by ministry of interior, Pakistan) have strong anti-India policy mindset (Dawn,2012). These extremist organizations occasionally manage anti-India rallies, seminars and engaged public demonstration to put pressure on Islamabad in the context policy making towards India (Afzal, 2018). The destructive religious clergy and their horrible doctrines in both India-Pakistan sometimes are the main hindrance in the peace process. These non-state actors have frequently jeopardized the restoration of normalization in bilateral relations between India and Pakistan. Any sincere peace efforts are apprehended by this phonetic clergy as treason in India-Pakistan and hinder the way of peace in the region of South Asia.

Exposure of Religious Diplomacy in South Asia

India-Pakistan place down the foundational stone of Kartarpur Corridor in November 2018 and after the construction, completion and opening of holy Kartarpur Corridor in a short period of time in November 2019 was an outbreak of religious diplomacy in South Asia (Chandran, 2018). Although, both the neighboring states with nuclear arsenals have geostrategic, historical and contemporary issues such as Kashmir conflict, war history, water sharing disputes,

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confrontation at borders, rising political temperature, global and regional political stand-off, despite all that religious diplomacy between India and Pakistan played an anchor role to melt the ice and cool down the rising political temperature. Even after Indian sinister act of 5 August 2019 putting Kashmiri people under cage and broken linkages, high level diplomats engaged from both sides India-Pakistan border to negotiate terms and modalities about Kartarpur Corridor and people of both east & west Punjab were involved that ultimately bridges the gap through the application of religious diplomacy that was created in 1947 partition. Primarily, fusion of religious diplomacy in region South Asia initiated by Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan.(Mamoon, 2018). Pop Francis paid his first ever visit to Arab peninsula, United Arab Emirates [UAE] to held an interfaith harmony meeting with grand Emam of Egypt's Al-Azhar Sheikh Ahmed el-Tayeb. Both the religious giants Pop Francis and Sheikh el-Tayeb insist on positive and effective use of religions to create interfaith harmony, interreligious tolerance and to make this world better to live for. Both the leaders have exchanged a mutual document on "human fraternity" and inaugurated the construction of "The Abrahamic Family House" where a mosque, church and a synagogue will be constructing in one place (Macmillan, 2019). The construction and opening of holy Kartarpur interfaith Corridor on the same UAE's model of religious diplomacy is an outbreak and clear depiction of religious diplomacy in region South Asia. Religious diplomacy in the context of conflict resolution approach is the only key source for peace and stability in the region South Asia. Along with, Prime Minister Imran Khan of Pakistan fulfilled the ages-long demand of 14 crore Sikhs across the globe by adopting religious diplomacy instead of using religion for dirty politics. The rational of International politics compels the political leadership to pave the way for consultation, diplomatic engagement, table talks, mediation and negotiation to resolve the conflict and not to putting people into the darks of starvation, poverty and ignorance. Prime Minister Imran Khan speaks at the inauguration ceremony of Kartarpur Corridor: "The Kartarpur Corridor project will be the beginning of a new era of friendship and trade relations to protect the people of South Asia poverty and hunger" (The express Tribune, 2019). The completion and opening of Kartarpur Corridor is a practical illustration of religious diplomacy in region South Asia. This remarkable achievement in the history of India-Pakistan relations with the manifestation of religious diplomacy was considered as a stepping stone towards lasting peace, prosperity and public connectivity by United States of America, Canada, United Kingdom, Australia and appreciated by Sikh community around the globe. The public gatherings and people to people contact would ultimately change misperception into a good will gesture that leads to greater socio-economic, religio-cultural connectivity and normalization of strained relations in South Asia. Even after Modi administration's abrogation of article 35A and 370, putting 8 million Kashmiri people under siege and snatching their democratic right of self-determination, opening and working of Kartarpur Corridor

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depicts the significance of religious diplomacy between India-Pakistan particularly and in perspective of lasting peace in South Asia.

The Indian Mindset and Perception

The socio-political composition of Indian society is very diverse so the Kartarpur peace development had a 'Mixed reaction' from different religio-political sections of the Indian society, and media. India electronic media launched a malicious campaign against Pakistan believing that Pakistan used religion for politics, exploited Sikh religious site and sentiments to propagate khalistani spirit in the minds and thoughts of Sikh pilgrims (RAJOPADHYE, 2020). Sushma Swaraj the former Indian foreign Minister expressed about Kartarpur Corridor opening: "Bilateral talks and Kartarpur Corridor are the separate things and cannot be perceived identical process. I am happy on Pakistan response the Indian demand of the construction and opening of the Kartarpur Corridor complex. The India-Pakistan talks can be associated with the issue of terrorism" (Sevea, 2018). The influential Indian media houses tried to malign the efforts of religious diplomacy in the wake of Kartarpur peace project and created an ironic perception about Kartarpur peace complex, all apart still India has to advance or go along with the symbolic importance of this peace project and glance of religious diplomacy that is to promote interfaith harmony, inter-religious tolerance, idea of mutual co-existence, religious freedom and human fraternity. Indian political parties and leaders used Kartarpur development for their political agendas and tried to get attention of Sikh community for the general elections 2019 in India. Indian rational and democracy oriented leadership appreciated and considered the opening of Kartarpur Corridor as an encouragement towards normalization of bilateral relations. Congress leader and former Prime Minister of India Dr. Manmohan Singh participated in opening ceremony and said: "I hope India-Pakistan ties improve as a result of this happening" (The Economic Times, 2019). Another Congress MP and former cricketer turned politician Navjot Singh Sidhu express his views enthusiastically as: "Imran khan has won the hearts of 140 million Sikhs, Pakistan open its heart and border for Sikh community by opening the Kartarpur Corridor" (Daily Times, 2019).

A Reckless Throw of the Dice

A bulk of conventional Indian analysts regarded the Kartarpur development as a Pakistan's ploy for India to sponsor and support Khalistani movement in Punjab, India. As per Indian analysts, Pakistan's premier intelligence agency ISI has involved in flaring up the ongoing Sikh separatist as aiming Sikh referendum 2020. The Hindutva mindset editorialize the Pakistan's initiative towards a civilized bilateral relations through religious diplomacy as Pakistan's 'Hidden agendas' and associated Kartarpur initiative as reckless throw of the dice.(Sahni, 2018). On the other end, Indian query does Pakistan really worked, propagated and

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exploited Sikh religious temple? The inarguably answer to this query comes from Jinnah's speaking: "Our objective should be peace with in and peace without, we want to live peacefully and have cordial and friendly relations with our immediate neighbors and the world at large. We have no aggressive designs against anyone. We stand by the United Nations [UN] charter" [founding father of Pakistan] (Shamsi, 2021). On another occasion Quaid-e-Azam addresses: "You are free; you are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other place of worship in this State of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste..... "We are starting in the days where there is no discrimination, no distinction between one community and another, no discrimination between one caste and creed and another. We are starting with this fundamental principle that we are all citizens and equal citizens of one State".(Burke, 1973). Pakistan continues Jinnah's democratic inheritance and upholds the teachings about religious minorities. Prime Minister Imran Khan speaks at Kartarpur inaugural ceremony: "That the inauguration of Kartarpur Corridor is a manifestation of the fact that our hearts are always open for the believers of different religions as enjoyed by our great religion and envisioned by our father of the nation" (Tribune express, 2019).

The Success Ratio of Religious Politics

A moderated, intermediate and rational quarter of Indian politics and society encouraged the society has encouraged the efforts taken into account of religious diplomacy between India and Pakistan. The positive and effective use of faith and diplomacy bridges the gap between two Punjabs of South Asia and become a source of connectivity despite all the historical and contemporary disputes. Such as Kashmir conflict, Siachen war and many so on regional and geostrategic issues between Indian and Pakistan, religion's philosophy of interreligious tolerance, interfaith respect and harmony eliminated the hatred, further resentment, and brought the people of both Punjabs closer to each other and open the model way for trade and economic connectivity (Shukla, 2019). Bajwa-Sidhu hug diplomacy worked for peace and stability, although Indian media came hard on this very development and created a storm but later on Navjot Sidhu clearly nailed all the propaganda as he made known that Gen Bajwa came to me and spoke that "Navjot we want peace..."(GEO NEWS, 2018). Pakistan tried to open up to have an sophisticated relations and offered to India dialogue diplomacy to solve all bilateral disputes peacefully but Indian prime Minister Modi rode to Indian muscular nationalism and waste the considerable option to save people from hunger, poverty and ignorance. A 'mixed faceted' response came from the liberal and conventional divisions of the Indian society as the liberal factions applauded the opening of Kartarpur Corridor but the immoderate groups clearly discarded the peace initiative. Consequently the rational and liberal segments of the society both

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in India and Pakistan hoped for enactment and further use of religious diplomacy with the forward looking approach (Shukla, 2019).

The Symbolic Significance of Kartarpur Peace Initiative

The construction and functioning of Kartarpur Corridor has a great symbolic importance of change, prosperity and model for looking forward approach for all the involved stake holders India, Pakistan and Sikh community residing all over the world. The sense of rationality with the blessings of Guru Nanak Dev Ji prevails and Sikh Yatrees around the world got direct access to their holy Gurdwara Kartarpur Sahib. Kartarpur Corridor paved the way and open possibilities for greater trade and economic connectivity for both the countries. The opening and operationalization of Kartarpur Corridor encourages for the development of such other corridors for greater connectivity, inter-faith harmony, mutual coexistence, inclusive environment and idea of living together with the exhibition of religious diplomacy and tourism between India and Pakistan. These steps and initiatives would play a vigilant role in changing the misperception about each another (Times of India, 2018) (Chawla, Hassan & Kaur, 2020). Kartarpur peace project set a right direction for both the countries India-Pakistan to solve their decade's long disputes through negotiations, and diplomacy. Alongside, with the normalization and restoration of cricket diplomacy, train and bus service to increase public interaction, bilateral trade and commerce (Sevea, 2018).

Religious Diplomacy Makes the Old Dream True

After the partition of united India in 1947 the several major Sikh holy shrines fell in Pakistan and many Muslim religio-cultural visiting places left in India which deprived the direct access of the pilgrimages. Later on, Indian-Pakistan signed a mutual religious protocol in 1974 to accommodate and ease the pilgrims, but certain hostile disputes and conflicts between the arch neighbors remain the biggest hurdle in the facilitation and implementation of the latter and spirit of the religious protocol of 1974. The Sikh community resides in India and across the world was the foremost victim of this continual bitterness between the two nuclear states of South Asia. In the past different governments in India and Pakistan took different steps related to opening Kartarpur Corridor. The idea of opening Kartarpur Corridor in Feb 1999 was floated by the Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee during his visit to Lahore. Pakistan also agreed to build a corridor to connect Kartarpur Sahib, Narowal to Dera Baba Nanak Gurdaspur, India. After that successive governments in Pakistan Gen. Musharraf, Pakistan People's Party and Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz government tried different options to give direct access to Sikh pilgrims to their holy Shrine Kartarpur Sahib (Mitra, 2019). Prime Minister Imran Khan desired to use religious diplomacy with an approach of interfaith harmony to open Kartarpur Corridor for the facilitation of Sikh community on the occasion of Navjot Singh Sidhu visited Islamabad to participate

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in oath taking ceremony of Imran Khan in 2018, Pakistan's civil-military leadership told Sidhu to build a peace corridor from Kartarpur, Pakistan to Gurdaspur, India. Consequently different meetings and talks held between India and Pakistan to set modalities about the operational mechanism of Kartarpur Corridor (MOFA, 2019). Pakistan opens the Kartarpur Corridor considering the Sikh community decade's long demand of direct pilgrimage. Thus the courageous and rational initiative taken by PM Imran Khan led the manifestation of religious diplomacy in the bitter environment of South Asia and paved the deep rooted and long back dream of Sikhs across the world comes true (ARY News, 2019). All Sikh community celebrated 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev Ji and measured the opening of Kartarpur Corridor "as biggest birthday celebrations in the World". Captain Amrinder Singh stated: "The entire Sikh community feels happy as their 70 years old wish to visit the religious shrine comes true" Thus, the 70 years long standing wish of Sikh community fulfilled through the administration and enforcement of religious diplomacy.

The Divergent Dimensions

The construction and working of Kartarpur Corridor project attains a monumental significance and divergent dimensions due to uncertain indo-Pakistan historical relations. The Kartarpur development has symbolized and portrayed the real picture of religious minorities living in Pakistan. Pakistan as a responsible member of international community expressed and manifested its commitment towards minorities and norms of religious freedom by the inaugural of Kartarpur Corridor. On the other hand in India, ruling Bhartiya Janata Party conceived Kartarpur development as a Pakistan's strategic agenda or propaganda to create instability in east Punjab, India. The ruling government In India worked half-heartedly and with the gesture of 'not willing' to open Kartarpur Corridor. Pakistan's initiative to provide direct access to deprived Sikh pilgrims received much admiration from international community (Cheema, 2019). Kartarpur Corridor development is a great source to boost economic activity for both India and Pakistan. The construction industry including roads, terminal buildings and construction of temple complex accelerated economic activity in Pakistan, furthermore religious tourism and traveling from India and all over the World would generate immigration revenue in Pakistan (Daily News, 2019).

Religious Tourism a Way Forward for Peace

The religion has acquired a pivotal place and influence for maintenance of peace and stability in the contemporary world politics. The developed world i.e. United States, Canada, Germany, France, and England etc are working on religious diplomacy beside the conventional methods of trade and tourism to create the homogeneous the global environment. The phenomenon of religious tourism has a

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great socio-economic impact on societies. The social composition of India-Pakistan becomes multi-ethnic, multi-cultural; multi-religious with the stratification of linguistic and ethnic diversity can be converted from animosity to peace and stability through the potential of religious tourism. After partition of united India in 1947, many sacred places of different religions fell in both sides across the border (Yaseen, Jatho, & Muzaffar, 2016). Some most important religious places of Sikhism in Pakistan are: Gurdwara Nankana Sahib, Gurdwara Sri Kartarpur Sahib, Gurdwara Panja Sahib, Gurdwara Dera Baba Sahib Lahore, Ranjit and Singh Samadhi Lahore. Furthermost Essential places of Hinduism in India-Pakistan are: Katas Raj, Kali Mata Temple, Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Hanuman Mandir, Mirpur Mathelo, Shri Krishna Temple Aanand Dham, Ghotki, Himalayan Chota Char Dham, Kedarnath Temple, Mathura-Vrindavan, and Rameswaram. Sacred Places of Jainism in Pakistan are: Karoonjar Jain Mandir, Virvah Jain Mandir, Bhoesar Jain Mandir, Jain Digambar Temple Lahore, Nagarparkar Jain Temple and Tain Mandir. Holiest laces for Buddhism in Pakistan are: DharmaRajika Stupa, Taxila, Ghandhara Civilization, Monastery of Takht-i-Bahi, Northwest of Mardan, Votive Stupas, Mingora, and Shingardar Stupa, Swat. Muslim Indo-cultural religious visiting sites in India are: Ajmer Sharif, Rajasthan, Dargah Qutub Sahib, Mehrauli, Dargah Nizamuddin, Delhi and Dargah Shah Waliullah Dehlvi, Delhi. India-Pakistan are the home of multi-religious worshiping sites. Both the countries could attract a number of thousands pilgrimages by increasing religious tourism. Ultimately multi-faith public interaction and gatherings can lead to peace and prosperity between India-Pakistan (Awan & Khalid, 2020) (Zaheer, Mubraiz, & Alvi, 2020).

Religious Diplomacy as the myth of Heritage and Legacy

The exponent of Sikh religion Guru Nanak Dev Ji has ever sermonized respect, tolerance and interfaith harmony. He delivered for humanity and preached to Do Work, Do Mediate and share in charity (Chawla, Hassan & Kaur, 2020). Guru Dev Ji carried the philosophy of love, tolerance, equality and peace. Guru Nanak's philosophy turned into religious diplomacy and became a source of religious, cultural, political connectivity, public interaction and spreading peace and love in the wake of opening Kartarpur Corridor between India and Pakistan. His philosophy and teachings give birth to the idea of coexistence in the region and world (The Economic Times, 2020). On the eve of Kartarpur Corridor, Pakistan's foreign minister Mr. Shah Mahmood Qureshi paid tribute to Guru Nanak Dev Ji in these words: "It is the seeds of love planted by him have blossomed today" (Qureshi, 2019).

Implications of Religious Diplomacy

The commencement and operationalization of Kartarpur Corridor produces a glimmer of hope and peace between two arch rivals of South Asia. The opening model of Kartarpur Corridor in a time of dissension, political confront and schism between India and Pakistan as an extraordinary and peculiar achievement towards peace. The construction of Kartarpur Corridor in the aspect of lingering conflict and issues i.e. Kashmir dispute, Sir Creek border, water sharing conflict between India and Pakistan, expounded the ray of hope to solve the long and deep rooted issues through the application of religious diplomacy. The holy Kartarpur corridor opening even after the autocratic action taken by Modi administration in aspect of invalidation of article 35A and 370 expands the peace implications of religious diplomacy and increases trade connectivity, people to people connectivity, inclusive capacity and sympathy towards different ethno-religious communities residing in India and Pakistan (Brar, 2020). It has created a ray of hope for both the nations and governments to quench the thirst of an appetite of peace and normalization despite the divergent domestic calculations, perceptions and policy preferences in the regional and global politics.

Conclusion

The working and functioning of Kartarpur corridor project has invited the people of India and Pakistan to come closer even through a worldwide social media campaign. There are a number of vlogger and YouTube channels have launched a worldwide campaign to explore the heritage and culture of each another. Therefor the ice has melted through the opening of Kartarpur shrine and changed the standstill and static environment of the region. The people of India and Pakistan got opportunity to enhance the volume of bilateral trade aiming to eradicate ignorance, poverty and hunger in South Asia. The Kartarpur corridor model has settled the precedent for the proceeding of further identical projects to improve socio, religious and political relationship between India and Pakistan as the great sign of peace and prosperity in the future course of action. The region like, Arabian peninsula, Afghanistan, middle east and Korea can learn a lesson from the experience of the working of religious diplomacy in the context of cultural, political, social and economic homogeneity. Kartarpur Corridor initiative not only projects the connotation of religious diplomacy in South Asia but also show case the actual and constructive role of religion in outrageous environment of South Asia. This particular initiative played an anchor to change the perception towards the well-being of minorities in Pakistan. The inaugural of peace project bring people of both India-Pakistan close to each other and start interaction of high level diplomatic convergence which proves the coherent of international relations i.e. peace building & conflict resolution through dialogue and diplomacy.

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