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**PROSPECTS OF PEACE AND INTERFAITH HARMONY IN SOUTH ASIA:  
A STUDY OF KARTARPUR SAHIB CORRIDOR**Amna Mahmood,<sup>1</sup> Akhtar Hussain Sandhu,<sup>2</sup> & Manzoor Ahmad Naazer<sup>3</sup>**ABSTRACT**

Punjab, the land of peace and prowess, proved intellectually very fertile and blessed region. The Kartarpur Sahib Corridor opened a plethora of divergent paradoxical perceptions as some consider it a “corridor of peace” while many present it as a “corridor of terror.” Some believe, this corridor can increase Sikh influence on both sides of the corridor. A heated debate regarding objectives and impact of the corridor on conflict-ridden South Asian region emerged and moved several writers to discuss the phenomenon. Both Pakistan and India interpret this initiative differently at diplomatic level. Pakistan believes it as a forum to create interfaith harmony in Pakistan as well as the South Asian region. The traditional Indian mindset postulates it as a maneuvering tool to strengthen Khalistan movement. Whatsoever the rationale of Indian or Pakistani government has developed, its impact is multi-dimensional. The study evaluates the prospects of peace-building through the Kartarpur Sahib Corridor as well as its impact on common life and religious tourism.

**Keywords:** Pakistan, Punjab, Sikhism, Interfaith harmony, minority, Kartarpur, Guru Nanak Dev

**INTRODUCTION**

The Kartarpur Corridor was inaugurated on the eve of 550<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev, the founder of Sikhism. Kartarpur Sahib is located in district Narowal, the Pakistani Punjab, where Baba Guru Nanak spent last 18 years of his life. The days spent in Kartarpur were “the most important period of his life in terms of his posthumous influence.” This way, Kartarpur was not just a religious place for them, rather it became a religious, political and social forum because Guru Nanak often used this platform to castigate and condemn the injustice in the society, politics and religion. Kartarpur was the first Gurdwara established by Guru Nanak but shortly after the appointment of Guru Angad as Guru Nanak’s successor, a new village was founded in Khadur Sahib and thus Khadur became center of Sikh religious pursuits. While Guru Nanak’s son, Sri Chand, took reins of Kartarpur (Grewal, 1990). As Sri Chand was the founder of the Udasi sect, Kartarpur remained under their control for centuries. Sikh Empire granted them “revenue-free land-grants” (Oberoi, 1994).

Darbar Sahib was badly damaged due to the Ravi River flooding at the beginning of the last century and it remained neglected until Maharaja of Patiala, Bhupinder Singh, donated Rs. 135,600 for its reconstruction (Anant, 2018). Unfortunately, even after the Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925 and the restoration by the Maharaja of Patiala, Sikh control of Darbar Sahib, Kartarpur did not survive. As a result of partition of Subcontinent in 1947, Kartarpur fell on the Pakistan’s side of the border. It is

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situated near Shakargarh district Narowal, Punjab (Pakistan). Before the partition, it was a part of District Gurdaspur, now located in India. In addition to the violence of partition, still-present dispute over Kashmir, bordering Punjab to the north, guaranteed that the border would not be a peace door. Sikh community suffered a lot due to the division of Punjab, not only were lives and property lost, but they were also deprived of open access to more than 75 percent of their most historically significant Gurdwaras, including the birthplace of Guru Nanak (Pannu, 2019). Kartarpur Gurdwara remained closed after 1947 because no Sikh was there to serve it. Being situated in the border area, it also proved a sensitive place for both Pakistani and Indian armies. Although a train ran through the village and it had a station and platform as well but all was de-functional after partition due to the apathetic attitude of the governments (Anant, 2018).

Despite all odds, this place remained alive and intact because of the Muslims who have profound respect for Baba Nanak Sahib. Jatts especially the Randhawa clan of the areas maintained the modesty and sacredness of the place and arranged cleanliness of the building and the surrounding. Randhawa family, the local administration of Shakargarh and Auqaf department of the government looked after the building and surroundings of Kartarpur sahib. This elaborates devotion of the Muslims towards Baba Nanak. This sacred place remained a symbol of respect and blessings and credit goes to the local Muslims who maintained its sanctity and importance. Despite less facilitated, the religious glamour, glory and radiance of this sacred place was retained by the Muslims when the Sikhs had no access to it. The distance of Kartarpur is 27 km from Shakargarh, 3 km away in Pakistan from Pak-India border while Dera Baba Nanak Sahib (Gurdwara Shri Darbar Sahib where Baba Nanak's ashes buried) is only one km from the Pak-India border on Indian side. Both the places are related to Guru Nanak Dev and his family. In the 1950s, the Sikhs started Ardas (prayer) in which they daily prayed to God to provide them an open opportunity to see the sacred Sikh places left in Pakistan:

“Vichhrhey gurdhama de khuly darshan didarey bakhsho” (Dhillon, 2020).  
(O God! grant us the open opportunity to visit the Sikh holy places left in Pakistan)

### **OPENING OF KARTARPUR CORRIDOR**

The Sikhs fixed a point (Darshanasthan) near Dera Baba Nanak Sahib on the Indian side to see a slight view of Kartarpur. The restless souls approached the point from where they tried to view the Kartarpur Gurdwara. Pippa Wirdee opines, during the Sikh struggle for Khalistan in the 1980s, few Sikhs had access to this Gurdwara (Virdee, 2018). Jagtar Singh also maintains that “Pakistan has been harbouring Sikh militants for years” (Singh, 2019). Bhabishan Singh Goraya (personal communication, Dec. 25, 2019) refuted it by saying that a news published in the Indian newspapers that Pakistan was constructing a terrorist camp near the border but as a matter of fact Pakistan was renovating the Gurdwara Kartarpur Sahib was massively damaged in the Indo-Pak war. The Operation Blue Star was a ruthless attack of the Indian army on Harimandir Sahib, Amritsar in June 1984. Gian Singh Sandhu (2018) writes that the rumour spread by Jagjit Singh Chauhan that Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, a leader of the Sikh freedom fighters, escaped to Pakistan during the Indian military attack on Golden Temple which was not true. Bhindranwale was murdered in Operation Blue Star against the Sikh freedom fighters hiding in Golden Temple in 1984.

In the ups and downs, Kartarpur Sahib retained its importance and Muslims and Sikhs kept on visiting Kartarpur. Narowal became an independent district in 1991. During the peacemaking efforts between Pakistan and India in 1998-99, Pakistan's Prime Minister Mian Nawaz Sharif and his Indian counterpart Atal Bihari Vajpaee concluded friendly session but the prevailing bitterness

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blocked this wave of cordiality. In the 1990s and 2000s, the government of Pakistan carried out renovating work on the Gurdwara Sahib. During 2004-05, government in Pakistan and India agreed to open Kartarpur, Lahore, Amritsar roads and Railway line of Khokhrapar and Monabao (Talbot, 2010) but this understanding could not materialise. Pakistan People's Party (PPP) government (2008-2013) also maintained the same policy. Many criticize the PPP government policy especially of the first tenure of Benazir Bhutto (1988-1990) during which Aitzaz Ahsan, the then interior minister, had allegedly handed over the lists of the Sikh freedom fighters struggling for Khalistan to the Indian government. He, however, rejected this allegation. Najam Sethi (2019) told that Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Shareef were ready to open the Kartarpur corridor but the establishment opposed it.

After the May 2018 elections, Pakistan Tahreek-i-Insaf (PTI) came into power and Imran Khan took oath as Prime Minister of Pakistan. Being a cricketer, Imran Khan invited Kapil Dev, Navjot Singh Sidhu and Sunil Gawaskar to join him in the oath taking ceremony on 18 August 2018 but due to the pressure by the extremist government led by Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) and media only Navjot Singh Sidhu dared to join the event. Sidhu's entry with a "magic Japhhi" or hug added a new chapter in the political and religious history of Pakistan, India, Punjab and Sikhism. Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff (COAS), Gen. Qamar Javed Bajwa, being a Jatt embraced Sidhu who reciprocated the same zeal on the basis of the cultural ethos and racial affiliation. Gen. Bajwa also expressed the desire to open Kartarpur Corridor which overjoyed Sidhu because the Sikhs had been praying for decades to have an open opportunity of pilgrimage of this sacred place. The "magic Japhhi" of Sidhu and Gen. Bajwa infuriated the Indian politicians and media (Singh, 2019). Sidhu retaliated with more forceful enthusiasm and responded to all the questions raised by the opponents daringly with sound arguments based on cultural, moral and religious grounds. Jai Teg Singh Anant acknowledged that Sidhu being a man of prowess and joviality saluted his friendship with Imran Khan and went to Pakistan. He did not talk against anyone, therefore, real credit of Kartarpur corridor goes to Sidhu who proved to be an ambassador between India and Pakistan (Anant, 2018). Ch. Parvez Ilahi bluntly claimed in response to the statement by Mohinder Pall Singh in the Punjab Assembly that the Kartarpur Corridor was opened only because of Gen. Qamar Javed Bajwa and his *Japhhi* ("Kartarpur Corridor: MPA," 2020). Sidhu alleged that the entire fuss was created out of jealousy as the Indian Prime Minister was ignored by the Pakistani government and not invited in the oath taking ceremony. Many ups and downs came in the way of the Kartarpur Corridor project but ultimately it was approved by Pakistan and India. Despite chaos and hue and cry, India had to approve this project. On 26 November 2018, Indian Vice President Venkaiah Naidu and Capt. Amrinder Singh laid the foundation stone of Dera Baba Nanak-Kartarpur Sahib corridor as a counterblast to the Pakistan's credit ("India's vice-president," 2018).

On 28 November 2018, Imran Khan inaugurated the Kartarpur Corridor's project in a prestigious ceremony attended by Navjot Singh Sidhu, (a leader of main opposition party, Congress) and Harsimrat Kaur Badal (a member of Shiromani Akali Dal Party) who made religiously emotional speeches and thanked the Pakistani and Indian governments on the friendly understanding regarding the corridor. This step was perceived as a sincere effort of Imran Khan, Gen. Bajwa and Sidhu. Sikhs and Muslims believe that these three leaders have honoured Guru Nanak Dev in a true

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sense and his followers by creating a facilitative environment which helped permit the Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims to have a visa-free visit to Kartarpur Sahib ("PM Imran Khan," 2019).

Jai Teg Singh Anant while translating the Sikh emotions of happiness thanked Imran Khan and Sidhu on this endeavour. Jathedar Kuldeep Singh Wadala had been visiting the border (Dera Baba Nanak Sahib) since January 2001 and kept on praying until his death. He came to the border area for more than 400 times with *langar* just to sensitise the desire and demand of the Sikhs to open this border point so that they could visit Kartarpur Sahib (Anant, 2018). Bhabishan Singh Goraya claims that he visited Pakistan on 14 April 1994 and told the Aukaf officials present in the Panja Sahib about the Kartarpur Sahib. He realized that Pakistan had soft corner for the Sikhs and in opening the Kartarpur langha (corridor). On return to India, he pledged to raise his voice for the Kartarpur langha in India. In January 2001, he convinced Jaswinder Singh Advocate to join him in this campaign. They advertised the date of Ardas near border for the Kartarpur Langha through wall chalking and newspapers. On the publication of the news in *The Tribune*, the Indian secret agency called Jaswinder and inquired about the campaign after which he refused to continue and disassociated from the campaign (J. S. Advocate, personal communication, Dec. 27 2019). Bhabishan Singh Goraya went to Wadala village near Jalandhar on 20 February 2001 to meet Kuldeep Singh Wadala who had been expelled from the Shiromani Akali Dal by Parkash Singh Badal and was trying to survive in the politics with a new party Akali Dal (Democratic). First Kuldeep flatly refused to undertake this campaign but Goraya's solid arguments especially the point that this campaign would be a non-political campaign, convinced him to work on it. He asked Goraya to join him in the party meeting likely to be held at Dhariwal district Gurdaspur and talk about the Kartarpur langha. On 28 February 2001, in the meeting Goraya presented his stance on the Kartarpur corridor and highlighted the favourable attitude of Pakistan. The participants zealously agreed to launch a campaign as a religious move. The party of Wadala published the posters and on Vaisakhi they converged at Anaj Mandi, Dera Baba Nanak. Goraya told that they came to know about Jaswinder Singh Advocate's presence along with about 200 Sikhs there in the Gurdwara. They had already reached the place and recited Ardas, therefore, he was blessed with the opportunity to be the first who had Ardas on the border for Kartarpur langha (Goraya, 2019). As the Wadala group consisting of around 2000 people headed towards the borders, the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) interrupted their movement. Goraya asked Kuldeep Singh Wadala to recite prayer (Ardas) at the point who along with other Sikhs performed Ardas. After this, a meeting at Jalandhar structured a body named Kartarpur (Ravi) Darshan Abhilakhi Sanstha with the following officeholders: Kuldeep Singh Wadala (Head), Jasbir Singh, Gojinder Singh Bajwa, Udham Singh Aulakh, and Bhabishan Singh Goraya

Goraya got separated from this Sanstha after three years but he continued his separate Ardas every month on *Sangrad* as they had been doing under Wadala. His Ardas also contained the prayer of the solution to the Kashmir problem and peace between India and Pakistan. He organized Sangat Langha Kartarpur in 2003 under his own patronage. On the opening of the Kartarpur corridor in 2019, they displayed big banners showing the pictures of Imran Khan and Navjot Singh Sidhu (Anant, 2018). Various leaders desired and worked to have access to Kartarpur Sahib but honour was bestowed to Sidhu who proved an "ambassador of Muslim-Sikh unity" (Anant, 2018). In June 2008, the US official John Warlick McDonald visited Darbar Sahib area which highlighted Kartarpur

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langah issue in India. Actually, when he tried to talk to the media persons, the BSF officials stopped him to speak. He obeyed with resentment and commented that “this is the situation of freedom of press in India.” The same was published widely in the newspapers which highlighted the Kartarpur langha issue in India (Goraya, 2019).

### **Pakistan’s Initiative to Open Kartarpur Corridor**

The Pakistani government assigned the Frontier Works Organization (FWO), an organization run by Pakistan’s military, the duty to work on the Corridor and November 2019 (the eve of the 550<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev) was fixed as the completion time. In January 2019, the Pakistani government appointed Muhammad Faisal as focal person on the Kartarpur Corridor project and sent the draft proposals to the Indian government to expedite the dialogue regarding the final agreement. The government also proposed to appoint some focal person in India so that both the countries might approach some viable route to achieve consensus on the feasibility report. On 22 January 2019, the Indian government threw the proposal back to Pakistan and sought the Pakistani delegation to come to Delhi for further talks on the project which Faisal declared as a delaying and childish tactic (Siddiqui, 2019).

The Indian government intended to cripple the sincere efforts of the Pakistani government and such maneuvering could be detrimental to the peacekeeping effort in the South Asian region but things were settled and India consented to the points relating to exchange of visitors as proposed by Pakistan. They agreed that the process would continue to create an environment of understanding even after the completion of the project. The document presented by Pakistan was to permit the Sikhs only a 4-hour stay in the Kartarpur Sahib which would remain open from 8 am to 5 pm daily; the visitors would have to apply a month before the proposed date of the visit and on approval, the visitors would get permits. The visitors having valid passports would get security clearance from the Indian government and come to Kartarpur in a group of 15 persons. The Indian government would provide the visitors’ list to Pakistan three days before the visit date. The visitors would eat nothing except *Parshad* during the stay at Kartarpur (Mehmood, 2019). Apparently, it seemed awkward to force the pilgrims to move out of the place after few hours and they were not allowed to buy or eat anything even then it was the biggest blessing for the Sikhs to be allowed to visit their sacred place after several decades. If proved successful, both the countries could facilitate the pilgrims more in future as Pakistan issued a new visa policy on 25 January 2019 which permits the Sikhs having the US and Canadian nationalities to apply for visa even on the arrival at the Pakistani airports (“Highlights of Pakistan’s,” 2019).

### **KARTARPUR CORRIDOR AND PROSPECTS OF PEACE AND INTERFAITH HAROMONY**

The opening of the Kartarpur Corridor paved the way for popularization of the Punjabi nationalism and reunion of the Muslim-Sikh communities after a long time. It created a sense of unity among the Punjabis. Anant (2018) resented the loss of the Punjabis only, first in 1947 and then in the Indo-Pak wars 2018). The Kartarpur Corridor can be interpreted in various ways. One of the most important results is the revival of the Punjabi brotherhood in the Punjabs (Indian Punjab and Pakistani Punjab). The Punjabis met each other after 72 years and shared the hilarious memories of the joint living in the pre-partition Punjab and the painful stories of 1946-47 migrations. The Sikhs visited the paternal and maternal villages locating in different areas of the Punjab and met the old men and



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women whom they found still alive. The Muslims gave them an enthusiastic welcome; they kept on weeping looking at their forefathers' birthplaces. Many Sikhs took water or soil of the houses as the sacred relics to their homes. This brotherly affection set a new era of the Punjabi brotherhood. The sharing of the traditions, values, past stories and joint living created a sense of unity between the Sikhs and Muslim young generations which can sensitize the Punjabi people to think of the Punjabi nationalism. It can further promote and sensitize the Punjabi language, literature and history. Some links it to the idea of the greater Punjab or Khalistan but as a matter of fact this is merely a sharing and celebration of the common culture. The Kartarpur Corridor deals with the affairs relating to the economic, religious, cultural, political, literary, archeological, social, regional and international domains.

Although, the Kartarpur Corridor has direct impact on the Pak-India relations however, interestingly, it will affect the internal politics and social trends of India in general and the Punjab in particular. The electoral history of India verifies that the ruling political party of India always used anti-Pakistan propaganda to win the elections. But the understanding on the Kartarpur Corridor can further impact the traditional strategy in the Indian electioneering campaign despite the fact the BJP will sell the enmity with Pakistan. In the past, the world saw the confused BJP leadership sometimes talked against Pakistan and sometimes tried to take credit of the Kartarpur Corridor. The Indian government on 550<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev decided to issue a currency having picture of the Guru to please the Sikhs. They also decided to commemorate this year as the year of Guru Nanak Dev but generally it was realized that the BJP was not happy on the opening of the Kartarpur Corridor. "BJP orchestrated attempts to control leading Sikh shrines" that created conflict between BJP and Shiromani Akali Dal (Sharma, 2019). The Lok Sabha elections were likely to be held in March 2019 while the threatening environment created by the central government made the Punjab's Chief Minister (CM) scared and under-pressure, therefore, he did not come to Pakistan on the earth-breaking ceremony of the Kartarpur Corridor despite of his family's direct and undeniable contribution to the history of Kartarpur sahib. He seemed least interested in this project perhaps he was under duress of the BJP drive and he was also expected to be retired from the politics after this tenure. Moreover, the CM was under a constant pressure that PM Modi could topple his government and impose governor rule in the Punjab if some mistake was made by the Congressite CM. The Congress was also canvassing for the forthcoming state and the Lok Sabha elections. The elevating popularity of Navjot Singh Sidhu also disturbed the CM who objected the statements given by the Jatt Minister because this popularity could pave the way to the CM office in the coming time. If it happens, this would set a new era of social, cultural and political history of the region because Sidhu is the only politician in the political history of India who raised the voice for regional peace with a blunt determination. The Kartarpur Corridor was being perceived as a symbol of harmony and peace that would replicate the Pak-India relations as the dream of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) to ensure the borderless travel in South Asian region could not come true (Anant, 2018). In addition, the development and trade will elevate the social and economic status of the Punjabis and other people.

The offer to access the Kartarpur Sahib infused a sense of confidence among the minorities in Pakistan. The initiative, development and the completion of the Kartarpur Corridor has defused the anti-Pakistan propaganda as for several years a strong lobby has been propagating about the plight

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of the minorities in Pakistan but now the bold step of the Kartarpur Corridor by the present government has made the world realize about the real picture of the Pakistani society and conducive environment created by it for inter-faith harmony. The completion of Kartarpur Corridor is a jerking blow to the extremism in Pakistan. The facilitative and capacious attitude of the Pakistani government and the Punjabi Muslims has totally changed the Sikh perception towards Pakistan. Sidhu rightly articulated that 140 million Sikhs would work as mouthpiece of Imran Khan ("Imran Khan has won," 2019). The same can be witnessed on the social media. The Sikhs in the UK, France, Germany, Canada and other countries have protested against the BJP government's measures against the Muslims in India and demonstrated their unremitting support for the Kashmiri people. They condemned the abolition of article 370 and 35A of the Indian constitution by the BJP government. The acting head of Akal Takht Giani Harpreet Singh reiterated the Sikh religious tradition to support the depressed faction anywhere in the world. He declared that Sikhs would support the Kashmiri people because their Gurus preach it. The Sikhs would stand against the barbarity inflicted on the Kashmiri women (Khanna, 2019).

The initiative of Kartarpur Corridor taken by the Pakistani government has blocked the Indian propaganda in which the Sikhs were misguided that the Pakistani Muslims did not respect the Gurdwaras and the Sikh sacred places. In the past, Sikhs were brainwashed that the Gurdwaras in Pakistan were full of dirt (Muslman gandgi sutt dendey ne) and they had demolished the Sikh sacred buildings but now Sikhs are obviously clear about the Indian blame game against Pakistan (Pannu, 2019). Many Sikhs living in different countries scared enough from the extremism did not come to Pakistan. Recently, the Sikhs who came to Pakistan expressed their feelings and emotions that they had slight fear when they were planning to come to Pakistan but as they got along with the people of the Pakistani Punjab they found nothing strange. All people, language, responses and environment were familiar and all this made them very comfortable and happy. They enjoyed a warm hospitality and love of the Punjabi brothers and many times tears sprang to their eyes on the devotional welcome by the Punjabi Muslims. The Indian government took up the Kartarpur Corridor initiative as a political gimmick. Initially, the approval of the Kartarpur Corridor was not included in the cabinet meeting agenda. Even the media in Delhi opposed this proposal and declared it "as corridor of terror." Amrinder Singh and anti-Kartarpur corridor faction shared their grievances on different occasions (Singh, 2020). The Chief Minister of Indian Punjab vented his frustration at the reluctance of the centre to sanction the necessary funds for development to start the construction of the infrastructure for the corridor. Vocal voices in the press, too, raised security concerns about the development, with some sections openly hostile, citing the legacy of Sikh militancy and the on-going insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir ("India concerned about," 2019).

Despite the opposition by many in India, the corridor was enlisted later in the cabinet agenda with its main objective to counter the Pakistan's move (Anant, 2018). The BJP intended not to approve this corridor but the rejection could root out the BJP and Akali Dal politics from the Punjab. Therefore, the BJP's hate-ridden politics failed to further damage the Guru's mission in the Punjab and they approved this project. On the other hand, the world witnessed Pakistan's respect for Sikhism and the moral and political support to the Sikh community as to Gurharpal Singh, "no formal opposition has been expressed against the initiative" (Singh, 2020).

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The Kartarpur Corridor has been taken as a liberal gesture at international level and Pakistan was admired as an anti-terrorism country. In a meeting of UN human rights chapter, Jasdev Singh Rai, an eminent writer and Director, Sikh Human Rights Group, appreciated Imran Khan's endeavour to facilitate the Sikh community by opening Kartarpur. Now the Sikhs in UK and other continents feel that Sikhs are safe while traveling to Pakistan (J. S. Rai, personal communication, 2019). Sevea writes: "The construction of the Kartarpur Corridor has been widely hailed for the opening of a new chapter in India-Pakistan relations. Many hope that the goodwill generated by the corridor and the increased people-to-people contacts it will generate could lead to better diplomatic relations between the two countries" (Sevea, 2018). Shingara Singh Dhillon in his book and interviews expressed his gratitude and exquisite words in favour of the government of Pakistan (Dhillon, 2020).

Reportedly, Afghan and Indian agencies launched a terrorist attack on Kartarpur Sahib in the starting months of 2020 but the Pakistani forces arrested the conspiracy and the facilitators in the suburb of Kartarpur. To dent this situation, the BJP forces in the coming days can try to sabotage this mutual understanding just to reassert in the politics with their extremist agenda. Guru Nanak Dev's message of inter-faith harmony, love and peace can be seen in the Gurdwaras wherein people belonging to every religion can go and eat food. In Kartarpur Sahib, the presence of a Christian Langri, Muslim and Sikh visitors amused Gurmeet Kaur because Nanak's teaching was being practiced there in the real spirit. Gurmeet Kaur writes that all the people irrespective of their religious backgrounds should be allowed to go to the darbar because "After all, Baba Nanak belonged to the Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and the atheists alike" (Kaur, 2018). Samiullah Malik, a known journalist from UK, told that although the Sikhs supported Kashmiri people in Europe but he had disagreed with Imran Khan and Gen. Bajwa on the Kartarpur corridor policy. Before this government initiative, he along with other friends had chalked out a solid plan on Kartarpur corridor as a gesture for religious harmony and presented to Gen. Parvez Mushraf but it was not properly taken up (Malik, 2019).

The role of religio-political parties in Pakistan is usually criticized especially being against the minority rights, but neither religious people nor religio-political parties opposed the Kartarpur Corridor that was a good sign of accommodating attitude of the religious political parties towards the Sikhs. A weak sound on Qadian few miles away from the border was listened which made no point so was not taken up by any faction. The world admitted that the PTI government had opened the Kartarpur corridor with good intentions and its main purpose was to project the Pakistan's belief on the inter-faith harmony and equal rights and privileges of the minorities in the country as propounded in the speech of Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah on 11 August 1947 (Khan, 2009). Jinnah shared his future vision of Pakistan:

Now, if we want to make this great State of Pakistan happy and prosperous, we should wholly and solely concentrate on the well-being of the people, and especially of the masses and the poor. If you will work in co-operation, forgetting the past, burying the hatchet, you are bound to succeed. If you change your past and work together in a spirit that every one of you, no matter to what community he belongs, no matter what relations he had with you in the past, no matter what is his colour, caste, or creed, is first, second, and last a citizen of this State with equal rights, privileges, and



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obligations, there will be no end to the progress you will make. You are free; you are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other place or worship in this State of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed -- that has nothing to do with the business of the State. As you know, history shows that in England conditions, some time ago, were much worse than those prevailing in India today. The Roman Catholics and the Protestants persecuted each other. Even now there are some States in existence where there are discriminations made and bars imposed against a particular class. Thank God, we are not starting in those days. We are starting in the days where there is no discrimination, no distinction between one community and another, no discrimination between one caste or creed and another. We are starting with this fundamental principle: that we are all citizens, and equal citizens, of one State (Jinnah, 1947).

The Kartarpur Corridor is a fulfillment of Jinnah's dream of interfaith harmony in the Muslim state wherein many religious minorities have been living. The Constitution of 1973 embraced the same regarding the Sikh, Hindu, Christian and other communities with equal treatment as equal citizen of Pakistan. The UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, rightly observed that opening of the Kartarpur Corridor was "a practical proof of Pakistan's desire for peace and interfaith harmony" in South Asia ("Kartarpur opening," 2020).

## **CONCLUSION**

Time has cleared the nature of the Muslim-Sikh relations that rulers and masses are totally different components of any society. Therefore, decisions taken by the Mughal rulers against the Sikh Gurus cannot be translated as the true and collective will and consent of the Muslims living under the Mughal rule. The saints contributed marvelously to the religious conversion as well as the communal peace in the Subcontinent. There were the saints who spread Islam and Sikhism in the Hindu dominated society without imparting fear and violence. Interestingly, these saints are still playing pivotal role in maintaining inter-faith harmony, coexistence and communitarian peace in South Asia. It is pleasant feeling that the Sikh prayers (Ardas) have turned truly fruitful after 72 years and nearly 14 million Sikhs utter "Pakistan zindabad" with the religious fervour because the devotees always pray for the prosperity and security of the sacred land.

The Kartarpur Corridor, being a revolutionary step, will cast a tremendous impact on the politics of India, Kashmir and social setup of Pakistan. Being situated on the Pak-India border, it will never be freed from the watch, monitoring and supervision by the agencies of both the rival countries which can hatch any conspiracy anytime. The Kartarpur Corridor is presented as the Pakistan's initiative, therefore, BJP was not comfortable with the project so can never tolerate the success or a sense of superiority of Pakistan in the foreign and internal affairs. The existing tide of extremism can restrict the governments to maintain their respective administrative influence in the affairs relating to permit, process of the permit, documentation, searching the visitors, suspicion on the visitors which sometimes can cause an ill-will. Therefore, at the Kartarpur point Pakistani government should deploy Sikh and minority personnel along with other Pakistani officials for the checking and searching the visitors. Pakistan ought to devise a mechanism to ensure respect and security of the Sikh visitors. Still not a single complaint of misconduct by any deployed personnel has been

reported so this ought to be appreciated. Nevertheless, some precautionary measures should be taken to prevent any negative image of Pakistan and to avoid any embarrassment and propaganda. The Pakistani policymakers should work out the contingency plan to counter any emergency and embarrassing situation. The facilitation of the Sikhs should be the main objective of any policy designed or to be designed by the Pakistani authorities. The Sikh position regarding oppressed groups in the world specifically their support for the Muslims locked in the Indian-held Kashmir and victims of the citizen act is highly plausible and admirable. This open support to the Muslims and other marginalized groups of India has been appreciated by the nations of the world who believe in the human rights and inter-faith harmony.

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