SIGNIFICANCE OF THE KARTARPUR CORRIDOR: PAKISTAN’S COMPLIANCE WITH INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS RELATING PROTECTION OF THE RIGHTS OF RELIGIOUS MINORITIES

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A R T I C L E  I N F O

Article History:
Received: 21 Jan 2020
Revised: 22 Feb 2020
Accepted: 10 May 2020
Available Online: 30 Jun 2020

Keywords:
Kartarpur Corridor, Religious Minorities, International Standards, Pakistan

JEL Classification:
Z12, K14

A B S T R A C T

Historically, Pakistan has remained on the lists of countries failing to meet international standards relating freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief. Although, the constitutional and domestic legal structure of Pakistan provide rights to religious minorities, yet government remains less interested in the implementation of such rights. Moreover, restrictions on the rights of religious minorities and social pressure of the religiously dominance society have been forcing the religious minorities to step back from claiming their constitutional rights. Despite, being signatory to many international instruments relating rights of minorities, Pakistan has never reached to a level to claim obligation of those international standards. Kartarpur corridor for Sikh pilgrims which has been widely acknowledged for giving a new dimension and a positive development towards the protection of the rights of minorities, as well as improved Indo-Pak relations. Keeping in view the positive response it is expected that it would lead to provide minorities a good-will gesture and pave the way for better diplomatic relations and increased trade between India and Pakistan. This paper investigates the significance of the Kartarpur Corridor in the context of Pakistan’s Efforts to Oblige International Standards Relating Protection of the Rights of Religious Minorities. This paper explores the expected outcomes of the project in the context of the protection of the rights of religious minorities and symbolic significance of the project by employing religious diplomacy as a mean to develop improved trade and diplomatic relations.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Pakistan has remained a hotspot in the eyes of the international community due to discriminatory acts against religious minorities (Bales, 2012). The enforcement of Blasphemy laws against minorities in Pakistan has remained another issue. Many of such accusations have been made against minorities based on personal differences and accused persons have often been presumed guilty immediately without having any investigation or substantive evidence (Global Human Rights Defence, 2019). The Sikh community had faced various discriminatory treatments along with other religious minorities in Pakistan. In 2011 Taliban demolished the houses of 11 Sikh families in Orakzai Agency on their refusal to pay jizya ransom (A form of Tax put on non-Muslims living in a Muslim State) and before that 2010, a Sikh youth was beheaded in Khyber Agency on the same ground. It caused thousands of the members of Sikh community to migrate from tribal areas towards Peshawar, Hassanabdal and Nankana Sahib (Khalid, 2018).

More than 10 prominent Sikh leaders were murdered in Peshawar from 2014 to 2018 that created a situation of fear and fury among Sikh community in Pakistan. It was reported in January 2020 that:

"scores of protesters surrounded the Gurdwara Nankana Sahib, on Friday afternoon, threatening to overrun the holy site if their demands for the release of suspects in an alleged forced conversion case were not met.” (Sheikh, 2020)"

The religious intolerance reached to its peak in 2011 in Pakistan when Islamist fundamentalist extremists killed hundreds of minorities in 2011 (Human Rights Watch, 2012). The Government kept playing the role of a silent
spectator and merely kept condemning the brutal and ruthless acts of the extremists by making statements only (Human Rights Watch, 2011).

The Indo-Pak relationship has observed various breakdowns and limited advancement. Prolonged rancour has subverted the geopolitical environment on both sides of the border. Notwithstanding the bitter relation between the two big states of the subcontinent, several people from both sides of the border on and off play their part to resolve the terrific issues and reduce the tensions between the two neighbours (Sevea, 2018). Therefore, any goodwill gesture or even a slight effort which could improve the bilateral relations between two from any side is highly welcomed and appreciated by the other side. Kartarpur corridor for Sikh pilgrims has been widely acknowledged for giving a new dimension and a positive development towards the Indo-Pak relation. Keeping in view the positive response it is expected that it would lead to the better diplomatic relations and increased trade between the two countries. The project which includes the construction of bridge and a road is regarded as a diplomatic masterstroke by Pakistan. Kartarpur has a wide symbolic significance and effect on Pakistan’s diplomatic relations, international relations and the use of employing religious diplomacy as a mean to develop improved trade and diplomatic relations (Azhar, 2019). When it comes to relationship between two nuclear-armed states of South Asia there is no second opinion that the history is full of unresolved issues, mistrust hostility and unending conflicts. A range of inharmonious events relating to ideology, disputed regarding partition, territorial disputes, the hostility, the negative sentiments against each other and several other issue where Kashmir conflict is worth mentioning. Despite various efforts to make peace the two countries face complex circumstances when intended gain for one side is viewed as equivalent loss to the other and the intervention of international lobby makes the situation worst.

2. INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS RELATING FREEDOM OF THOUGHT, CONSCIENCE, AND RELIGION

International Human Rights Law provides international standards relating freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief under various provisions of international instruments. These protections are primarily guaranteed under the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948” (UDHR Art. 18), “International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 1966” (ICCPR, Art. 18), “European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms 1950” (ECHR, Art. 9), and “UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief 1981” (Art. 1). The UDHR and ICCPR define the freedom of thought, conscience and religion as follows:

“Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.” (UDHR Art. 18).

“Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.” (ICCPR, Art. 18)

The right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief, includes freedom to change one’s religion or belief (UDHR, Art. 18, ECHR, Art. 9(1), and “OSCE Copenhagen Document”, Art. 9(4)) and also provides freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of one’s choice (ICCPR Art. 18(1)), and “freedom from coercion which would impair an individual’s freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his or her choice” (ICCPR, Art. 18(2) and UN 1981 Dec. Art. 1(2)). Moreover, “freedom to manifest religion or belief in worship, observance, practice, and teaching” (DHR, Art. 18, ICCPR, Art. 18(1), UN 1981 Dec., Art. 1, and “OSCE Vienna Document, Art. 16(d)) and “permissible limitations on the freedom to manifest religion or belief” (ICCPR, Art. 18(3) and UN 1981 Dec., Art. 1(3)) are protected under International Human Rights Law. International Human Rights Law considers religious minorities as vulnerable group in those states where religious minorities exist and provide protection to minorities by requiring the states to implement the International Human Rights Law standards. The social, cultural and religious aspects of minorities make them vulnerable in various communities. There are various provisions of international instruments which contain rules relating protection of the rights of minorities:

"In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, or to use their own language." (ICCPR, Art. 27)
"In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities or persons of indigenous origin exist, a child belonging to such a minority or who is indigenous shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of his or her group, to enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practise his or her own religion, or to use his or her own language." (CRC, Art. 30)

"States shall protect the existence and the national or ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic identity of minorities within their respective territories and shall encourage conditions for the promotion of that identity." (General Assembly Declaration 47/135, Art. 1)

"Persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities (hereinafter referred to as persons belonging to minorities) have the right to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, and to use their own language, in private and in public, freely and without interference or any form of discrimination." (General Assembly Declaration 47/135, Art. 2)

3. FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF IN PAKISTAN

Pakistan is a signatory to most of the international instruments, including international declarations and treaties, which form the international framework for the freedom of religion or belief. Pakistan has the responsibility to uphold certain obligations relating the rights of religious minorities. Pakistan is, although signatory to all leading instruments relating protection of the rights of minorities, however, lacks the obligation in terms of incorporating these rights at the domestic level. Moreover, the enacted laws on the rights of minorities remain least effective when it comes to implementation. The constitutional legislative structure of Pakistan follows a dualist approach to adopt international treaties, and international treaties need to be ratified through legislation before their incorporation into domestic law. The Sharia values often make it difficult to incorporate those provisions of international laws that are repugnant to the clear injunction of Islam. Pakistan is often criticised by the international community for not being able to bring domestic legislation in line with international treaties. Despite, a lot of criticism and lacking a comprehensive mechanism for the protection of minorities, Pakistan provides various provisions in the domestic legal structure of the state for the protection of the rights of religious minorities. The legislation on the rights of minorities has remained very slow in Pakistan, in the transitionary period from Zia’s legacy to democracy. The constitution of Pakistan contains provisions relating the rights of minorities.

Table 1. Constitutional provisions related to freedom of religion or belief and minority rights (Constitution of Pakistan, 1973)

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<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Article. 36</td>
<td>“Protection of minorities”</td>
<td>“The state shall safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of minorities, including their due representation in the federal and provincial services.”</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Article. 20</td>
<td>“Freedom to profess religion and to manage religious institutions”</td>
<td>“Subject to law, public order and morality: (a) every citizen shall have the right to profess, practise and propagate his religion; and (b) every religious denomination and every sect thereof shall have the right to establish, maintain and manage its religious institutions.”</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Article. 21</td>
<td>“Safeguard against taxation for purposes of any particular religion”</td>
<td>“No person shall be compelled to pay any special tax the proceeds of which are to be spent on the propagation or maintenance of any religion other than his own.”</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Article. 22</td>
<td>2 Safeguards as to educational institutions in respect of religion, etc.”</td>
<td>“(1) No person attending any educational institution shall be required to receive religious instruction, or take part in any religious ceremony, or attend religious worship, if such instruction, ceremony or worship relates to a religion other than his own. (2) In respect of any religious institution, there shall be no discrimination against any community in the granting of exemption or concession in relation to taxation. (3) Subject to law: (a) no religious community or denomination shall be prevented from providing religious instruction for pupils of that community or denomination in any educational institution maintained wholly by that community or denomination; and (b) no citizen shall be denied admission to any educational institution receiving aid from public revenues on the ground only of race, religion, caste or place of birth. (4) Nothing in this Article shall prevent any public authority from making provision for the advancement of any socially or educationally backward class of citizens.”</td>
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The blasphemy laws are treated as seriously punishable crimes under Pakistan Penal Code for everyone committing blasphemy. In fact, blasphemy laws are applicable to all the citizens of Pakistan, however, the public sentiment considers generally puts accusations of blasphemy on minorities. The Pakistan Penal Code treats blasphemy as under:

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Any person of the Quadiani group or the Lahori group (who call themselves 'Ahmadis' or by any other name) who by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representation, refers to, or addresses, any person, other than a member of the family (Ahle-bait) of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), as 'Bait-ul-Mumineen'; (b) refers to, or addresses, any person, other than a wife of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), as 'Ummul-Mumineen'; (c) refers to, or addresses any person, other than a member of the family (Ahle-bait) of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), as Ahle-bait; or (d) refers to, or names, or calls, his place of worship as 'Masjid'; shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to three years, and shall also be liable to fine. “(Sec. 298-B (1))

Any person of the Quadiani group or Lahori group (who call themselves 'Ahmadis' or by any other name) who by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representation, refers to the mode or form of call to prayers followed by his faith as 'Azan', or recites Azan as used by the Muslims, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to three years, and shall also be liable to fine.” (Sec. 298-B (2))

Any person of the Quadiani group or the Lahori group (who call themselves 'Ahmadis' or by any other name), who, directly or indirectly, poses himself as a Muslim, or calls, or refers to, his faith as Islam, or preaches or propagates his faith, or invites others to accept his faith, by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representations, or in any manner whatsoever outrages the religious feelings of Muslims, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description of a term which may extend to three years and shall also be liable to fine.” (Sec. 298-C)
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Theoretically, the national legal framework of Pakistan provides various protection to religious minorities compatible with international standards relating protection of minorities. The constitution of Pakistan and other laws provide minorities various rights including freedom of worship, equality and non-discrimination. In practice, many of the rights available to minorities are denied. Moreover, there are many laws in Pakistan that adversely affect minorities and their rights. There are certain provisions in the Constitution of Pakistan that protect the rights of minorities, as well as certain aspects of the constitutional and legislative structure of Pakistan that broadly contradict the protection of the rights of minorities. The government remains more interested to enforce restrictions on religious minorities, instead of protecting the rights of religious minorities, due to multiple factors. Islam being the state religion of Pakistan serves as a policy for framing laws of the state. Although, Islam provides adequate rights to religious minorities, yet the dominance of the right-wing over the left-wing narrative in the country forces the government to put restrictions on religious minorities in the name of Islam. Quadianis are declared as a minority in 1974 constitutional amendment that is considered as a popular decision. The Pakistan Penal Code puts various restrictions on Quadianis and treats the violation of these restrictions as crime, as follows:

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| 5.  | Article 25 | “Equality of citizens” | “(1) All citizens are equal before law and are entitled to equal protection of law.  
(2) There shall be no discrimination on the basis of sex.  
(3) Nothing in this Article shall prevent the state from making any special provision for the protection of women and children.” |
| 6.  | Article 26 | “Non-discrimination in respect of access to public places” | “(1) In respect of access to places of public entertainment or resort not intended for religious purposes only, there shall be no discrimination against any citizen on the ground only of race, religion, caste, sex, residence or place of birth  
(2) Nothing in clause (1) shall prevent the state from making any special provision for women and children.” |
| 7.  | Article 27 | “Safeguard against discrimination in services” | “(1) No citizen otherwise qualified for appointment in the service of Pakistan shall be discriminated against in respect of any such appointment on the ground only of race, religion, caste, sex, residence or place of birth.” |
“Whoever, with deliberate and malicious intention of outraging the religious feelings of any class of the citizens of Pakistan, by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representations insults the religion or the religious beliefs of that class, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to ten years, or with fine, or with both.” (Sec. 295-A)

“Whoever wilfully defiles, damages or desecrates a copy of the Holy Qur’an or of an extract therefrom or uses it in any derogatory manner or for any unlawful purpose shall be punishable with imprisonment for life.” (Sec. 295-B)

“Whoever by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representation or by any imputation, innuendo, or insinuation, directly or indirectly, defiles the sacred name of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) shall be punished with death, or imprisonment for life, and shall also be liable to fine.” (Sec. 295-C)

The Anti-Terrorism Act, 1997 (ATA) is intended to incite religious hatred for all religions, including hate speech. In practice, the blasphemy against a religious minority is rarely enforced or even reported. The enforcement of laws relating religious minorities are often treated on discriminatory basis. Historically, the constitutional right of minorities relating “freedom to manage religious institutions” has never been taken seriously by the government. The authorities have been refusing to grant permission to religious minorities for constructing their places of worship, due to social pressure and fear of public disorder. In fact, informally organized persons have been threatening, intimidating, and using unlawful means to seize and forcing the owners to abandon their places of worship. The Ministry of Minorities has the responsibility to protect the constitutional rights of minorities. The budget is allocated to the Ministry of Minorities to assist the indigent minorities, repairing their places of worship, small development projects, and celebration of religious festivals of minorities.

4. KARTARPUR CORRIDOR: A GLIMMER OF HOPE

Punjab is proud of its intellectual and cultural heritage it offered to its inhabitants and the world. This creative land gave birth to several religious traditions and intellectual movements (Hayer, 1988). Guru Nanak Dev is one of the iconic figures the fertile land of Punjab produced. Sikhism a new religious tradition was founded by Guru Nanak Dev (1469-1539). Guru Nanak Dev spent last 18 years of his life in Kartarpur Sahib, the village named and inhabited by the Guru himself (Singh, 2009). The Darbar Sahib Gurdwara is of immense importance to the Sikh faith. With the Partition of India in 1947, people living in the new states of India and Pakistan found themselves cut off from religious institutions that they revered (Singh, 2000). The Sikhs in Indian Punjab were separated from key religious institutions. Several of their religious sites now fell in Pakistani Punjab. Amongst these is the Kartarpur Sahib Gurdwara (Singh, 2019). Kartarpur is situated near Shakargarh but before August 1947 it was a part of District Gurdaspur which produced famous personalities such as Urdu poet Barkat Ram Zaman, Punjabi poet Shiv Kumar Batalvi, and politician Sir Fazl-i-Husain. Kartarpur is very close to the Indo-Pakistan border. Although India-Pakistan boundary line stretches over 2980 km touching the held-Kashmir, Punjab, Haryana, Gujarat and Rajasthan etc. on Indian side and AJ &Kashmir, Punjab and Sindh on the Pakistani side. It was the first place wherein first Gurdwara was established and the first Langarkhana was set up and run by Guru Nanak Dev. First Sikh sangat or community was shaped on the same land under the aegis of Guru Nanak Dev (Grewal, 1998).

Kartarpur Gurdwara remained closed after 1947 because no Sikh was there to use it as a learning base and it being a border area was also a sensitive place for both the Pakistani and Indian armies. The Punjabis in general and Sikhs were the most affected population because of the 1947 partition and the India-Pakistan rivalry (Shukla, 2019). Despite all odds, this place remained alive and intact because of the Muslims who have profound respect for Guru. The religious travel between the two countries is regulated by the 1974 Protocol between India and Pakistan to visit religious places. In signing this protocol, India and Pakistan agreed to allow “organised parties” of pilgrims to visit specific sites. These pilgrims are to be issued “Visitor Category” visas. In accordance with the 1974 Protocol, an agreed upon number of pilgrims can visit specific sites and their travel is facilitated and regulated by the host country. Sikh pilgrims from India can travel to Pakistan four times a year to mark important Sikh commemorations. In total, Pakistan has agreed to issue 7,500 visas to Sikhs from India and facilitate three Hindu pilgrimages constituting a total of 800 pilgrims annually. On its part, India has agreed to allow 1,350 Muslim pilgrims from Pakistan to perform five pilgrimages. The actual number of visas issued each year is affected by cross-border tensions (Pinkney & Whalen, 2018).

In the 1950s, the Sikhs started Ardas in which they daily prayed to God to provide them an open opportunity to see Kartarpur and other holy Sikh places lying in Pakistan. Sikhs fixed a point near Dera Baba Nanak Sahib on Indian
side to see a slight view or Darshan of the Kartarpur Gurdwara. During war between India and Pakistan in 1965, the bridge on the River Ravi was destroyed as a defence strategy. During the Sikh struggle for Khalistan in the 1980s, few Sikhs had access to this Gurdwara (Sharma, 2019). Hence the idea of the Kartarpur Corridor has been in circulation for several decades. During the years of 1990 and 2000s, the government of Pakistan started the repairing work on the Gurdwara Sahib. During 2004-5, Gen. Parvez Musharraf and India agreed to open Kartarpur, Lahore, Amritsar roads and Railway line of Khokhrapar and Monabao but could not succeed. Pakistan People’s Party also maintained the same policy. Many objects the PPP government especially Aitzaz Ahsan (ex-interior minister) that he handed over the list of the Sikh struggling for Khalistan, but he rejected this allegation. The May 2018 elections gave popular mandate to Pakistan Tahreek-i-Insaf and famous former Indian cricketer Navjot Singh Sidhu was invited by the Prime Minister Imran Khan in oath taking ceremony. The idea came into the limelight again when Sidhu visited Pakistan in a personal capacity to attend Khan’s inauguration as the Prime Minister in August 2018. Upon returning to India, Sidhu declared that he had been assured by Khan and the chief of the Pakistani military, General Qamar Bajwa, that Pakistan would open the Kartarpur border in time for the 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak in 2019. Later, the foreign minister of Pakistan, Shah Mahmood Qureshi announced:

“Pakistan has already conveyed to India its decision to open Kartarpur Corridor for Baba Guru Nanak’s 550th birth anniversary. Prime Minister Imran Khan will do break ground at Kartarpur facilities on 28th November. We welcome the Sikh community to Pakistan for this auspicious occasion.”

(Azhari, 2019)

It was stated in the press release of the Foreign Ministry of Pakistan in November 2018:

“In line with the principles of Islam and the Quaid-e-Azam’s vision of a peaceful neighbourhood, Pakistan’s initiative will further facilitate Sikhs, especially from India. Pakistan’s Kartarpur Spirit can be a step forward in the right direction from conflict to cooperation, animosity to peace and enmity to friendship.” (Foreign Ministry of Pakistan, 2018)

In November 2018, Vice-President of India, Venkaiah Naidu stated while laying the foundation stone of the corridor at the Indian side:

“I am happy that Pakistan accepted the long-pending demand of Kartarpur corridor fulfilling the demands of the Sikh community. Now, you would not have to take a long and arduous route through the Attari border. The corridor will become a symbol of love and peace between both countries.” (Tribune, 2018)

Following this, a prestigious ceremony was held where Imran Khan inaugurated the Kartarpur Corridor’s attended by Navjot Singh Sidhu (Congress) and Har Simrat Kaur Badil (Akali) who made religiously emotional speeches and thanked the Pakistani and Indian governments on the friendly understanding regarding the corridor. This step is being perceived as a sincere effort of Imran Khan, Gen. Qamar Javed Bajwa and Novjot Singh Sidhu. Sikhs and Muslims believe that these three leaders have honoured Guru Nanak Dev in true sense and his followers by creating an environment which helped permit the Kartarpur Corridor, a visa free visit for the Sikh pilgrims (Chawla, Hassan, & Kaur, 2020). Though this initiative was regarded as Pakistan’s diplomatic triumph, but the recent incidents have changed that status as India ruled out any possibility of peaceful dialogue further after revoking the special status of Kashmir by abolishing article 370. However, both countries have their own obvious domestic calculations and reasons behind getting this corridor opened and to be seen taking the credit for it. Kartarpur project may have opened a tiny window of opportunity. According to Zeeba T Hashmi “again trying to revive their movement with the help of Pakistani intermediaries.” Some pockets of support for Khalistan are still visible in Pakistan today, with the state taking no action against them.” Mosharraf Zaidi said in an interview, “Pakistan has doubled down on its resolve to see lasting peace in the region with the move. Islamabad has demonstrated its desire for peace even after New Delhi cancelled meeting of the foreign ministers of both countries on the side-lines of the United Nations General Assembly. Pakistan has always been on front foot to achieve peace in the region and has repeatedly wanted New Delhi to follow suit,” Defence Analyst Talat Masood told The Express Tribune that, “This is a step in the right direction and shows that we [Pakistan] are a peace loving nation.”

5. OUTCOME OF KARTARPUR CORRIDOR

Although, the Kartarpur Corridor has direct impact on the Pakistan-India relationship but 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 uses anti-Pakistan propaganda to win the elections (Kamboh, 2018). The well-known daily “The News” analysed about the internal politics of India that both the political parties are trying to project the Kartarpur Corridor as their respective success.
5.1 Political Scene in Pakistan

The Prime Minister of Pakistan, Imran Khan’s new government in Pakistan, the opening of the corridor provides an opportunity to illustrate that it has the political will to back up its rhetoric about developing better ties with India. The government seems interested in using religious diplomacy and religious tourism to normalize relations with India. In his speech at the ground-breaking ceremony, Imran Khan stated that the agreement to open the corridor could be an opportunity for India and Pakistan to chart a new path of friendship and peace. Imran Khan stressed that his “government, his party, all political parties, the military and all Pakistani institutions were on the same page” and were committed to work for a new “civilised relationship” with India. The reference to the military is important as it plays a major role in shaping the country’s foreign policy.

5.2 Impact on International Community and Relations

While mentioning the impact of the corridor on international community, the statement of US State Department Spokesperson Morgan Ortagus can be resorted to who dubbed the Kartarpur project as:

“Inpressive” and an important step towards “Promoting greater religious freedom”, adding that “this project will transform a move, three-acre site across a sensitive international boundary. Congratulations to India and Pakistan on this initiative”. (EFSAS, 2019)

It would be pertinent to point out, that The UN head, Antonio Guterres, also visited the Corridor during his visit to Pakistan. He welcomed the opening of the Corridor in November 2019 as “paving way for interfaith harmony and understanding by facilitating visa-free cross border visits by pilgrims to holy shrines.” In a meeting of UN human rights chapter, DR. Jasdev Singh Rai, an eminent writer and human right activist, appreciated khan’s endeavour to facilitate Sikh community.

5.3 Trust of Minorities

The offer to open the border to access the Kartarpur Sahib has infused a sense of confidence among the Pakistani minorities. The initiative and development on the Kartarpur Corridor for the Sikhs has defused the anti-Pakistan propaganda as for several years a strong lobby has been propagating on the plight of the minorities in Pakistan but now the world has come to know about the real social setup of Pakistan. By this move and by completion of Kartarpur Corridor, the extremism will be discouraged in Pakistan and such facilitation will redress the Sikh grievances if existed.

6. CONCLUSION

Keeping in view the outcomes of the Kartarpur corridor and the present scenario, it can be analysed that the opening of the corridor surely has fulfilled the promise it made to orthodox, as well as improved the image of Pakistan among international community, maintained the internal stability of the country and has will prove beneficial from economic perspective but in case of diplomatic view it has not met the demand to that extent. The decision of opening the corridor raised hopes between masses that in addition to better relation between two states it would result in closer trade linkages, but event after event including Balakot strikes and Palwama attack 2019, the tussle of governments regarding Kashmir issue, revocation of its special status under article 370, recall of High-commissioners and other similar incidents has smashed such hopes. When Pakistan made the announcement of fulfilling India’s long pending demand for corridor, it was expected that this would lead to a new sense of understanding and better relations between the countries as well. But as always, this move was also undermined by India’s suspicion that Pakistan might use it to encourage Khalistan movement. India and Pakistan have been in the state of persistent conflict which dates to creation of these two sates after decolonization. Indo-Pak relation has undergone a tense period because of India’s policy regarding Kashmir followed by the revocation of its special status and abolishment of article 370. Recalling of High commissioners from both sides and suspension of bus and train service. Pulwama attack is also worth mentioning after which two nuclear armed states of South Asia engaged into aerial fight making the situation worst. In this whole scenario the construction and inauguration of Kartarpur corridor should be a flicker of hope and positive development. Opening of Kartarpur corridor is no doubt a step forward towards the right direction by Pakistan and India. It being a revolutionary step will cast a colossal impact on the politics of this region and will also bring stability to the social structure of Pakistan.

Kartarpur corridor has religious significance for the Sikh community, but apart from religious perspective it has the ability for reducing the tensions on both sides of the border and can also prove beneficial for trade purpose and tourism. While reconciliation is a strong term to use, still this initiative has led to expectations that the bitter relations will come to ease to some extent. Both the governments need to understand their main responsibilities to materialize
the hopes of Sikh community as well as people around the world. The facilitation of Sikh community must be the main objective of any policy designed or to be designed by the officials on both sides of the border. The spirit of agreement between Pakistan and India can be maintained by the by taking measures based on religious harmony in its essence. As much as the corridor has potential to enhance the channel of trust and opportunity, it simultaneously widens the channel of responsibility as being situated on the border, it will never be freed from watch, monitoring and supervision by the agencies of both rival countries which can hatch conspiracy anytime.

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