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The Dying Temples of Hindus and Sikhs in Potohar Plateau: A Case Study of Katas Raj Temples

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Abstract

This paper evaluates the impact of partition on the historical temples of Hindus and Sikhs in Pakistan, especially in the Rawalpindi division. This paper will discuss a case study of Katas Raj's temples. Katas Raj temples are located in the Chakwal district of the Potohar Plateau. The ancient Katas Raj temples are inscribed in the list of UNESCO World Heritage. This paper consists of three sections. The first section is about the introduction and religious significance of Katas Raj temples. The second section describes the early condition of Katas Raj before the partition of India and Pakistan. At the same time, the third section of this paper explains the impact of partition on these temples and the current condition of Katas Raj temples. This article highlights the current issue of drying up of the sacred pond of Hindus in Katas Raj and its importance in the Hindu religion as they believe that the pond originated when their Lord Shiva shed his tears on the death of his wife, Sati. The nature of the study is qualitative, and interviews with locals of Chakwal district collect the data; secondary sources are based on books, articles, journals, newspapers and magazines.

Key Words: Katas Raj Temples, Sacred Pond, Dying Heritage, Renovation Projects

Introduction

Katas Raj temples symbolize renowned heritage and harmony between the Muslim and Hindu nations in the Potohar region of Pakistan. The Katas Raj temples are a composite of seven temples in the Chakwal district. Some say that it was in Katas where Al-Beruni wrote his book "Kitab-ul-Hind" and calculated the radius of the Earth (Siraj). The word 'Katas Raj' is derived from the Sanskrit language "Kataksha," which means weepy eyes (Ali, 2015). Initially, it was called a poisoned spring because of its unpleasant water. After that, it was described as Amar-Kund and later Kataksh-Kund, meaning spring of rainy eyes. According to a different story, the early name of Katas Raj was Teksh Raj, which means "King of snakes" (Ali, 1998). These seven temples are within walking distance from each other and surround a famous pond called

"Katas," which is regarded as holy by the Hindus as they believe that the pond originated when their Lord Shiva shed his tears on the death of his wife, Sati. These temples are a treasure of Cultural Heritage for Pakistan and a source of religious harmony across the border. The Katas Raj temple complex is associated with the eras of the Hindu Shahis from 615-950 CE and is devoted to their Lord Shiva. The Katas Raj temples are located at a height of 2000 feet. These temples are near Choa Saiden Shah in the Chakwal district of the Potohar Plateau. Katas Raj temples are situated near the M2 motorway interchange, which connects Islamabad to Lahore.

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Religious Significance of Katas Raj



Figure 1: Katas Raj Temples

The temples of Katas Raj are the second most sacred place in the historical Punjab region, after the temple in new Himachal Pradesh at Jwalamukhi. It is said that the Pandavas brothers of “Mahabharata” fame visited this region and these temples were constructed to honour their holy visit. It is also said that this region was called Dvaitavana in the past and the Pandavas brothers lived in this area during their exile period also; a series of questions were carried out between the Yakshahs and Pandavas here. The Sath Ghara, or the Seven Temples region, is where the Pandavas took refuge during their 12-year exile ([Akram, 2015](#)).

According to the Brahmanical story, this site is associated directly with Lord Shiva in the Hinduism Shaiva tradition. Shiva is considered the supreme and chief God in the Hindu pantheon, also known as Maha-deva. He is a famous Hindu deity believed to be the creator, preserver and destructor by all beings in Shaivism, which is one of the four most widely followed sects of Hinduism. However, the believers of the Tri-murtis concept of Hinduism considered him “the Destroyer” or “the Transformer” ([Godlaski, 2012](#)). His heartbroken sorrow when he heard about the death of his wife Sati led to heavy rainfall of tears, which eventually formed two pools of holy water, one at Pushkara near Ajmer and the other in the Katas region.

Some people have reviewed that the first Shiva Ling belongs to Katas ([Babary & Zeeshan](#)). In some Hindu religious books, Katas is considered the birthplace of their supreme God Rama as well as Ayodhya, but this statement is quite controversial among Hindus as old teachings and traditions of

Hindus never mentioned this place as the birthplace of Rama and Ayodhya.

The Early History of Katas Raj

Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, visited Katas Raj temples, so this place became a sacred destination for Hindus and Sikhs. Ranjit Singh, the Emperor of the Sikh faith, also regularly worshipped and visited these temples. He visited this area for the Vaisakhi festival in 1806, 1818 and again in 1824. According to a story, the Hindu God Shiva was born in the Katas Raj region and his birth gave much eminence to this place (Hussain, 2021). Many Hindus also believe that the holy book of the Hindu religion, Mahabharata, was written in the Katas Raj region ([Ali, 2015, p. 97](#)).

Katas Raj Temples were a famous pilgrimage site for the Hindus before the partition, where large numbers of Hindus visited to participate in *Shivratri*. This festival is celebrated every year in the month of Phalgun on Chudash Badi (14th of the dark night). There was a Shiva linga inside the temple, and Hindu women used to worship this stone as they believed that worshipping this would bring them a good husband, just as Sati found Shiva as his husband ([Naz, 2018](#)).

It is said that in 1006 CE, a famous Muslim ruler Sultan Mahmud Ghaznavi (971-1030 CE) invaded a district of Punjab, Bhera in Pakistan ([Khalid, 2017](#); [Niazi, 2019](#)). So, at present district, Chakwal, including Katas Raj comes under his sovereignty. Under his patronage, Al-Beruni lived and learned Sanskrit in this area ([Ali, 2015, p. 119](#)). After the Mughal Empire's decline in Punjab in the mid-18th century, the Sikhs rose and occupied most of the areas of central Punjab. Hari Singh, a Sikh general and administrator and a prominent personality, visited these holy temples of Katas Raj during his time. He built a Haveli in that area, whose remnants can be seen today. The purpose of Hari Singh was to use Haveli as a means of spreading and guidepost for Hinduism in Punjab. After the partition, this Haveli was transformed into Madrassa and its doors and gates were displayed in the Taxila museum as a symbol of heritage ([Bansal, 2015](#)).

After the separation, the local community of Hindus left this region, vacating temples, and

moved to India. The bond between the Hindu community and the neighbourhood Muslim population was great to such an extent that the local Muslims went with Hindus to the close by town of Choa Saiden Shah to say goodbye to them, from where they departed for India. In 1965 before the Pak-Indo War, Indian pilgrimages visited the Katas Raj sanctuaries for the Shivratri celebration. Before the partition of the Indian subcontinent, Katas Raj was a place of everyday liveliness and spiritual harmony, but after the partition, the bitterness among the governments of India and Pakistan afflicted the home of Lord Shiva. After the war, these pilgrimages were banned from entering this region till 1984, after which pilgrimages were allowed to visit these places in small groups and travel as part of a pilgrim fleet. Many Hindus of India wanted to pay a visit to Katas Raj temples, but visa restrictions are a major hindrance.

Current Situation of Katas Raj

Katas Raj's temples are ruined after the partition as the local Government has been neglecting them for years. The small number of the local Hindu community who used to visit there are unable to maintain the large Temples complex. The sacred pond in the temple complex is being polluted by litter and locals also use this pond for enjoyment. Indian Hindu pilgrimages were not allowed to visit these holy temples after the Indo-Pak War in 1965. They were forbidden to visit these places until 1984. The illegal destruction of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya in 1992 weakened political relations between the two nations. Religious conflicts rose, and around 30 temples in Pakistan were burnt and demolished by bulldozers. According to Hindus, Babri Masjid was constructed where their deity Rama was born. The Government of Pakistan declared a holiday on December 7 to record their protest against the destruction of Babri Masjid. Many assertive students of Quaid-i-Azam University Islamabad burnt the sculptures of Indian Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao and yelled for Jihad against Indian Hindus. Religious emotions of Pakistan toward the Babri Mosque worsen the concerns of authorities towards Katas Raj and other temples Hindus (Khalid, 2017).

During Musharraf's time, ties were increased with Delhi and pilgrimages were invited to visit Katas Raj. In 2005, when Indian Deputy Prime Minister, Lal Krishna Advani inspected the temples of Katas Raj, he expressed great sorrow after seeing the dilapidated state of Katas Raj temples. Pakistan proposed to restore these temples in 2005 and the restoration project began in 2006. The pond surrounded by the temple complex was cleaned, and the temples were painted and renovated. Blue informational boards were installed around the temple complex.

In 2006, 300 Indian Hindus visited Katas Raj temples to participate in the *Shivratri* festival. This became a tradition for Indian pilgrimages to visit Katas Raj for a short time, but after the Mumbai attacks, Indian pilgrimages were restricted to visiting these sites. In 2010 and 2011, about 2000 Pakistani Hindus from different far-flung areas continued this tradition of celebrating the festival of Shivratri in Katas Raj temples. The wedding ceremony of Hindu couples from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was held during the Shivratri festival of 2011 whose family lost their properties during floods in Pakistan in 2000. Katas Raj is not just a sacred place for Indian Hindus; Pakistan also has a small proportion of the Hindu community. The Pakistani Government has failed to give the due right to Hindus to worship freely. The local Hindu community of Pakistan cannot openly worship Shivaratri and the rest of the year. The temples are only opened to the public on the occasion of the Shivaratri festival, but local Hindus are not allowed to enter these temples for security purposes because Indian pilgrimages are performing their worship there and Government has to provide full security to them ([Naz, 2018 #14](#)).

Hindus living in Sindh and other areas of Pakistan want to visit Katas Raj temples but are locked out for the rest of the year. The Hindus local representatives' group blamed Government for not enjoying their rights and authority during the festival of the year. Liaqat-Nehru Pact ([Ali, 2014 #15](#)) (The Liaqat-Nehru Pact was a treaty between India and Pakistan in which refugees were allowed to return to dispose of their property, seized women and looted property were to be returned, forced conversions were unrecognized, and minority

rights were confirmed) was signed in 1950. According to this pact, the head of the Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB) should be a Hindu, as the trust was made to look after the holy places of Hindus and Sikhs. Still, the recent chairperson (Dr Aamer Ahmad) is a Muslim violating the pact.

The recent chairperson, Dr Aamer Ahmad, only visits Katas Raj when some Indian pilgrimages or notable Hindu personalities visit Katas Raj. While the rest of the year the temples are closed to the public. Dr Kumar moaned in an interview, "How can a Muslim look after a place of Hindu worship the same way as a Hindu would do?" In an interview, Randhawa, a local Hindu from Pakistan, said that the duration of the Shivaratri festival is one day and one night. The night of Shiva is very blessed for us, and we have to perform worship at night. But the Government didn't provide boarding and lodging facilities to accommodate Hindu pilgrims from Pakistan ([Dhakku, 2014](#)).

In 2017, the Prime Minister of Pakistan Nawaz Sharif allocated a sum of Rupees 1 million for Katas Raj but due to the negligence of concerned authorities, this amount could not be used efficiently for the conservation of Katas Raj. Only shikharas were installed in the Hindu temples. On February 2017, about 200 Indian pilgrimages visited these temples during the *Hindus Katas Dham* festival and by 2018, the Pakistani Government gave visas to approximately 139 Indian pilgrimages to attend the famous Dham festival in Katas Raj

The pilgrims were led by Shiv Partab Bajaj, who told the media that this site is very holy to us and we are happy that the Evacuee Trust Property Board of Pakistan is maintaining and preserving our sacred site. We are glad to know that the Chief Justice of Pakistan has taken action on the drying up lake of Katas and we are hoping for a possible solution ([Dhakku, p. 2018](#)). Murtis of these temples could not be remained safe from looters and plunderers. Apart from the cement factory several tons of coal is also being dug at this site which exposed this site to torrents of underground water. After the partition, the Buddhist sites preserved a sign of heritage but Hindu heritage was ignored because of the conflict of partition. The negligence of Katas Raj in historical research can be noticed. A student of Quaid-i-Azam University Islamabad

performed detailed research and study about the historical temples under the title of "Hindu Temples in Chakwal," but surprisingly, his study didn't include the temples of Katas Raj (Iqbal, 2005 #16). One of the reasons for this negligence is that the road constructed by Sher Shah Suri (1472-1545 CE) from Peshawar to Kolkata didn't include the district of Chakwal. Also, when the British decided to construct a road, they preferred the same route. So, this area remained neglected.

In 1935, Sir John Marshall (Director of India Archeological Survey) discovered the remains and ruins of the Gandhara Civilization in the Taxila region of Punjab-Pakistan. This added international prestige to the Cultural Heritage of Taxila. This significance of Taxila put Katas Raj on the back foot and eclipsed its value. According to an article by an Indian journalist, the Pakistani Government had failed to maintain the ancient worship places of the Hindu community. Dr Shuaib Suddle's one-man commission was made by the supreme court which includes three supporting members, Dr Ramesh Vankwani, Saqib Jilani and the Attorney General for Pakistan (*Most Hindu sites in Pakistan in a state of decay: Report, 2021*).

The report formed by one personal commission was submitted to the Supreme Court of Pakistan on February 5, 2021, and it depicted the decaying picture of the ancient Hindu sites. On January 6, these members of the commission visited Katas Raj. The findings in the report said there is a need for collaborative efforts to renovate Katas Raj temples. The report requested the supreme court to direct the Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB) to get involved in reconstructing these temples. In its orders of January 5, the Supreme Court called the ETPB to submit a detailed report about the condition of these temples.

According to the ETPB letter, out of 365 temples, only 13 temples were being supervised by them while leaving the management of 65 temples with the Hindu community and yielding the rest of 287 temples to land mafias. In Pakistan, the largest minority community is Hindus. According to an estimate, about 7.5 million Hindus are living in Pakistan. But according to community estimates that about 9 million Hindus live in Pakistan. The major

ratio of Pakistani Hindus are settled in Sindh, where they share their culture with Muslims, but the majority of them often complain of harassment by extremist Muslims.

The Sacred Pond Condition

Hindus believed that the pond originated when their Lord Shiva shed tears on the death of his wife Sati. They considered its water to be sacred and a cure for all diseases. The water in the pond is believed to wash away all the sins of a person and the pond is associated with Lord Shiva. After the partition, Katas Raj became a part of Pakistan and Hindu pilgrimages came to visit this site substantially. In the Pervaiz Musharraf regime, four cement factories were established near Katas. The cement factory is a water-intensive inductor fed on the local water bodies of Katas. Salman Rashid, a travel writer, said in his blog: "From a little puddle in March last year, they have enlarged it to a size greater than the original I had known since my first visit in 1967".

Some Hinds claimed that the depth of the pond in Katas is limitless, but according to Punjab Archaeology Department, its depth is estimated to be 150 feet. The pond is partly artificial and the rocks were teared up to enlarge the pond's basin. There was a masonry wall once but now the water flows through damage and ruins of the embankment. The problem arose of implementing renovations of new age into ancient complexes. According to a study by Bahauddin Zakariya University, the concentration of inorganic elements and heavy metals near the Kallar Kahar is not within safe limits (Iqbal, 2006 #17). Such water shortage problems did happen before in the Katas region.

During the early 2000s, when a small number of cement factories were set up in Kahoon Valley of Salt Range, whose direct source of water was rain, the local communities began to experience a decrease in groundwater, the same happened with Katas Pond. After 9\11, Pakistan wanted to maintain its image in the world, so Musharraf started a large-scale renovation in 2005. A pitcher of holy water from Katas Raj was sent to Indian politician LK Advani who visited Katas Raj in 2005. The pitcher presented as a gesture of harmony across the border. In an interview, a member of the Evacuee

Property Trust Board (ETPB), Faraz Abbas, said that Katas Raj is a Hindu heritage site that falls under Pakistan's domain and funds for Katas Raj renovations are granted from the federal government budget.



Figure 2: Dying Pond of Katas Raj

In the year 2012 and again in 2017, the water level of this pond was found to be significantly decreased. Unfortunately, in May 2017, the water level became so low that the temple stairs were exposed, which were previously submerged by pond water. Waseem Ahmad Raja, a native of Chakwal, had been fighting for the drying water case for many years against the powerful authorities of Chakwal. Syed Muhammad Abu-Bakr interviewed Raja and told him that the water level reached a dangerous end in 2017 in Katas Raj. The cement factories are responsible for this water depletion installed in 2008. He applied to the Environment Protection Agency (EPA) of Pakistan in October 2008 that some of the cement factories before their installation in the Katas region had promised the natives that they will take water from the Malkana region which is a nearby village for their industrial use, but they later diverged from their promise.

A site inspection was done in 2009 by EPA but the EPA gave an obscure statement that water scarcity could not be proved and asked the factory owners to plant 30,000 trees in that area to prevent pollution (Abubakar, 2018). This level of water also drops because of the epic plantation of eucalyptus plants in the nearby areas ("Industrial activity drying up Pakistan's Katas Raj temple pond," 2017). Once, the water from Katas Raj Pond was used to irrigate Loquat gardens in Choa Saiden Shah and the water from the pond was used as a source of drinking water for Choa Saiden Shah and Katas villages but

now these plants are irrigated by using a water bore. Bestway Cement, owned by London-based businessman Anwar Pervez, lies within a few kilometres of the complex, while DG Khan Cement, owned by Mian Muhammad Mansha, Pakistan's renowned businessman, is just over 10 kilometres away from the Katas Raj temples complex. Due to this area's scarcity of water, these factories were allowed to use only 140 cubic meters of water per day.

But when the Supreme Court took action on the drying pond of Katas, it was informed that each factory consumed over 300 cubic meters of groundwater daily, almost double the permitted limit. The Chief Justice of Pakistan advised the Government that alternate water resources should be provided to the factories. He insisted that if the Government had to shut down the tube wells or stop the water consumption of the factories, they should do it. Time was provided to factories to find an alternative arrangement for water disbursement ([Abubakar, 2018](#)). Asif Shuja Khan, former director-general of the Pakistan Environment Protection Agency (EPA) said that he firmly opposed the installation of cement factories in Kahoon Valley because of the fear of water scarcity in that area but environmental approval was illegally issued to the factories by the EPA Punjab.

Director of the Environment Protection

Department, Naseem-Ur-Rehman said that no doubt installation of cement factories is the major cause of the drying up of Katas Lake but it is not the only reason responsible for that, as uncontrolled water usage by natives of Kahoon Valley is also a major reason for the withering of Katas Lake. A group of researchers did calculations to find the fluctuations of groundwater in the Katas Raj region. The study uses the Visual MODFLOW model (MODFLOW is the U.S. Geological Survey modular finite-difference flow model, which is a computer code that solves the groundwater flow equation. Hydrogeologists use the program to simulate the flow of groundwater through aquifers) using hydrological data of the region provided by the Punjab Mines & Mineral Department and the level of groundwater fluctuations was forecasted for the next 10 years (2020-2030). The results indicated that the abstraction rate was more than

40% resulting in an average of 0.50 m/year of water drawdown around the temples of Katas Raj {Hasan, 2020 #18}. The results showed that the over-abstraction from 2011 to 2020 around areas of the Katas Raj temples was the main cause of the drying out of the sacred pond. This could cause severe environmental hazards for the native people in 2030 if they remain neglected by the authorities {Hasan, 2020 #20}. Chief Justice of Pakistan, Mian Saqib Nisar said that Katas Raj is of Pakistan heritage and every citizen of Chakwal who raises a voice against this matter should be included in the committee willing to give the minorities their due rights.

In all processes, the minorities were not enjoying their right to manage their charitable and religious institutions freely. The struggle remains wasted because the land of Kallar Kahar nor the lake is owned by Government all the land comes under 'Shamlat', which is owned by all citizens of Kallar Kahar. The district coordination manager of Chakwal said that the problem could not be solved unless the land was acquired. The issue of who possesses the territory is just a waste of time and the real responsibility of renovation falls under ETPB and the Punjab Archaeology Board. The Government of Pakistan took many actions to renovate the pond, and no effective results could come out because of the lack of knowledge about proper groundwater management.

The pond condition is expected to worsen in the future because of the expansion of the Salt Range cement industry to meet the cement requirement for the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) projects and other economic development projects in Pakistan. In an interview, Asif Shuja Khan said that cement factories are the main competitors in the valley which are pumping and drying up the lake water for their industrial use, but we can't neglect the fact that the situation of Katas pond is worsening because of many other factors like increase in natives population, changing agriculture patterns, increased fruits and vegetable plantation, increase in a number of domestic tube wells and rainfall variability. ([Abubakar, 2018](#)). If Pakistan started considering Katas Raj as a glorious heritage, only then can it Spotify its importance internationally and earn much from tourism.

Qualitative Study about Katas Raj

Materials and Methods

The qualitative study was performed and data were collected by participant observation. Also, in-depth interviews were filled with two natives of Chakwal district, Muhammad Saleem who worked in the District Attorney Office ([Saleem, 2021](#)), Chakwal and Naveeda Gulshan who was a teacher in a government school ([Gulshan, 2021](#)) and also from two locals who worked in Mandar as a caretaker.

Results and Discussions

Katas Raj temples hold a sacred place in the hearts of the Hindus because of the sacred pond and the Pandavas brothers' story of those who were banished from their state and took refuge here. It is considered the second most sacred temple in the world after Pushkar Raj {Babary, #19}. Hindus believe that Ajmer Pushkara and Katas Raj pools were formed as the result of the tears shed by their Lord Shiva over the death of his wife Sati. Shiva's tears were fallen in two places: one drop of tear fell in Ajmer and the other fell in Katas Raj. The Katas Raj is situated near the Chakwal district in the Potohar Plateau. It is composed of Satghara (Seven) temples dating from the 8th to 10th century A.D. These temples are extended from Mari, which is on the west, to near Jhelum in the east ("[Restored Katas Raj to bring harmony](#)," 2006). The sacred water of Katas further adds to the importance of this area because Hindus from all over the world come here to purify themselves and perform their worship. The water of Katas Pond has the same holy significance in Sikhism as that of the water of Ganga in Hinduism. There is a stone called Shiva Linga inside the temple, which is dated back to the 5th to 6th century A.D. Hindu women believed that when they worshipped Shiva Linga, then they would be rewarded with good spouses, as Parvathi found Lord Shiva in return for worshipping Shiva Linga. When Hindus could not perform their religious rituals in the Shiva temple, they started worshipping in Ram Chandra temple, which is a modernly constructed temple. Hindus have been worshipping here since 1947. On the third floor, there is a temple and the 1st and 2nd floors are used as residential areas. Some sculptural remnants of

Hindu gods are also present there. According to the Cunningham report, at the entrance of the temple, a red stone is placed, and there is a staircase that goes down directly to the pond through the Ram Chandra temple they believed that Hindu women visit it for bathing and washing their sins. It is said that there were seven temples initially, out of which 4 were dissipated and 3 temples still exist. Katas Raj consisted of 6 small temples and one large temple in the centre. The style and architecture of these temples resemble the old Kashmiri temples. All of their main characteristics, like trefoil arches, dentils, fluted pillars and pointed roofs, are found in the temples of Katas Raj. After the Babri Masjid incident and Mumbai attacks, Hindu pilgrimages from India stopped visiting Katas Raj and in 2005, the Government handed the Katas Raj to the Directorate General of Archaeology, Government of Punjab. After 15 years, the Katas Raj was handed over to the Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB). The decision was taken in accordance with the orders of the Supreme Court of Pakistan. Many governments took the initiative to renovate these temples but still, a lot more work is needed to be done to attract tourists from around the world. After the installation of cement factories, the water table of this region was disturbed, and this caused a decreased water level of the sacred pond of the Hindus but after the efforts done by the Government of Punjab, the water in the pond was somehow restored. Some development projects have been done by the Government but still, this site needs more attention from the authorities. In November 2012, when Nitish Kumar, the chief minister of the Indian state of Bihar, visited these temples, he was impressed by the renovation work done by the Government and he hoped that this cultural harmony and oneness across the borders should remain intact. There is a need to build resorts and hotels near Katas Raj to facilitate the pilgrimages and the Shiva complex must be expanded. The dining hall should be built, and the Government and washrooms should provide some filtration plants for clean water are needed to be built.

Renovations of Katas Raj Temples

For decades Kats Raj was not in good condition.

The temples were decaying, and the pond was filled with garbage and litter from the locals. The murals inside the temple disappeared with time because of the ravages and the negligence of the Government. The Ex-Deputy PM of India, Lal Krishna, inspected these sanctuaries in the year 2005 and in 2006 work for the restoration of temples was started by the Government of Pakistan. In July 2006, PML-Q's president Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain while addressing the plaque unveiling ceremony of the Katas Raj renovation project, said that Rs 330 million would be spent on the construction of the road from Kallar Kahar to Choa Saiden Shah, which led to Katas Raj. He said a four-star hotel would also be constructed after its revival and made an international resort for all the pilgrimages. Indian High Commissioner Shevshankar Menon, who attended the ceremony, said that this day would be marked as a historic day keeping in view the promotion of interfaith harmony between India and Pakistan.

Punjab Chief Minister Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi, Religious Affairs Minister Ejaz-ul-Haq and Senator Mushahid Hussain also attended this groundbreaking ceremony ("[Restored Katas Raj to bring harmony](#)," 2006). Again, on October 25, 2012, Ch. Shujaat Hussain, who was the Chairman of the Katas Raj Temples Committee, inspected the site and interrogated about the ongoing renovation work taking place at the Katas site. He also told the media that 600 million rupees had been devoted to the construction of Kallar Kahar-Choa Saiden Shah Road on which Katas Temples are located, 10 million rupees would be spent for the construction of a periphery wall around this historic site, while Rs. 30 million would be allocated for the maintenance of the water supply ([Dhakku, 2018](#)).



Figure 3: Indian Hindu Pilgrimages

In December 2017, Chief Minister of Punjab, Shehbaz Sharif, while reviewing the progress and measures taken for the rehabilitation of Katas Raj temples, said that there would be a complete ban on the installation of cement factories in this area as the Salt Range has been declared a negative zone region by the Punjab Government. He further ordered that authorities should take proper measures for the development and restoration of Katas Raj temple and stated that it was the people's responsibility to protect the holy sites of minorities in Pakistan. Provincial Minister Asif Bha, chairman of Evacuee Board Sadiqul Farooq, the chief secretary, secretary's law, minerals, and provincial minister Tanveer Aslam Malik from Chakwal attended the meeting.

Soon after, in January 2017, Prime Minister Muhammad Nawaz Sharif inaugurated the renovation project and a filtration plant near Katas Raj temples. He said that I am the Prime Minister of all Pakistanis, be they Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Christian or any other, you all are equal to me. He directed the Chairman of the Evacuee Trust Board to make sure that the properties and belongings of the minorities were safe. ("[PM Nawaz inaugurates restoration of an ancient Hindu temple](#)," 2017). Rs. 51.06 million was spent on the purchase of murtis. These murtis were then installed in the seven temples of Katas Raj. In 2012, the sanctuary lake water was draining, so the local factories were closed temporarily to regain the water level. In 2017, the Pakistani Government introduced a filtration plant to give water to pilgrimages ([Rajopadhye, 2020 #21](#)).

In 2016, when this sacred and historic pond was drying out because of the installation of four cement factories in the nearby areas_ ([Hasnain 2021](#)). After the danger was accounted for, the Supreme Court of Pakistan took a Suo Motu notice and began hearing the case in November 2016. In the court continuing, Chief Justice of Pakistan, Mian Saqib Nisar expressed that the concrete manufacturing plants here were polishing off water worth a large number of rupees without putting in their taxes. He further expressed that the dues ought to be forced on the manufacturing plants and on the off chance that the Government didn't make

the right move against them, the court would bring this matter into its hands.

In 2017 during a case hearing, Nisar said, "This sanctuary isn't simply a position of social importance for the Hindu community, yet in addition a piece of our public legacy. We need to safeguard it". He further commented that the Bestway Cement factory should be closed. Allah will shower his mercy and the production will meet the demand by other means. He said that he would visit the area by himself and ordered the factory owners to pay the dues. He further suggested they use the Jhelum River for water consumption ("[Water to Katas Raj to be restored at all costs: C.J.," 2017](#)). The judges' bench was also resented during the court proceedings about the case of the removal of statutes from the sanctuaries of Katas Raj and furthermore the shortfall of sculptures in the Shiri Ram and Hanuman sanctuaries. They were informed that an Ex executive of Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB) procured a huge number of rupees from defilement by selling these sculptures and icons and got away from Pakistan.

In 2018, the decision was taken by the court on this issue deciding that the concrete production lines would need to use water from another source as well as they would have to pay the price of water they had consumed in the past to the Government of Punjab. The court ordered Bestway and DG Khan Cement production lines to consume water from the Jhelum River. However, the factories did not follow the court orders and their water supply was cut down by the authorities in August 2018. The pond's destiny is still unknown as two more cement factories- Gharibwal Cement and Dandot Cement were installed outside the red zone area. There was a lot of destruction after the Babri Masjid incident in India, but still, Pakistan ordered new statues of deities from India. Rs.10 million renovation project was inaugurated by Former PM Mian Nawaz Sharif.

New walkways are constructed between the temples and the cages are set up and filled with monkeys and birds, 36 guest rooms are under construction for 400 pilgrimages. On December 14 2019, about 100 Indian Hindu pilgrimages visited

Katas Raj. Foolproof security arrangements were made for them. ETPB reserved hotel rooms and made special arrangements for their safe stay near temples. They were received at the great hall in Katas Raj by MNA Aftab Jehangir, Parliamentary Secretary for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony Dr Aamer Ahmed, ETPB Chairman and other officials concerned. Mr Ahmed, on this occasion, said that if a single hug between Prime Minister Imran Khan and Navjot Singh Sidhu could magically provide free visas to Indian Sikhs, why can't the natives of both Kashmir meet? ([Dhaku, 2019](#))

Conclusion

Katas Raj is the second most holy place for the Hindus after Pushkar Raj in Ajmer Sharif; about two million people from all over the world annually attend the religious festival at Pushkar Raj and the Indian Government earns about Rs. 5 billion from it. Pakistan should also look over this matter seriously as Katas Raj could be the Hindus' second most visited holy site. Pakistan can also earn millions from tourism but there is a need to build hotels and restaurants for the pilgrimages and provide them with basic needs so that they could be attracted to this site. The Pakistani Government should issue visas for Indian pilgrimages to motivate tourism in Pakistan. Much more restoration work is needed to be done in Katas Raj temples but the major issue is the drying pond of Katas. The religious and cultural significance of Katas Raj cannot be denied. Katas Raj is not only a sacred place for Hindus but also the cultural heritage of Pakistan, so as a nation, we should protect our heritage as it is a sign of living nations that they respect their heritage and culture. According to a well-known saying, a society that destroys its own history gets destroyed by history. Unfortunately, there is a need to do more research work on this topic. The discovery of the Gandhara Civilization had put this site on the back foot and the focus of archaeologists had shifted towards that area. The migration of the majority of Hindus living in this area to India after the partition has also caused general negligence about the historical and religious significance of this site. There is a great need to highlight the significance of this historical and religious site.

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