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Impact of Religious Tourism on the Development of Smokeless Industry in Pakistan

Naila Masood Ahmad*

Ramsha Sohail†

Muhammad Masood Ahmad‡

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Abstract: *The purpose of this research paper is to examine the Impact of Religious Tourism on the development 'smokeless industry' that has the potential of igniting significant economic activity, thus creating employment, generating investment, and reducing poverty. The present study is descriptive in nature. Data were collected in view of facts reported in the secondary sources, including news items, national and international reports on tourism, books, journals as well as information gathered from interaction with the local people. The present study not only underscore the prospective implications of religious tourism in the country but also explores the challenges pervading the religious tourism sector in Pakistan. The findings of the present research paper indicate the below-par performance of concerned agencies was the main hindrance to promote tourism in Pakistan. Moreover, the key issues are non-development and maintenance of tourist spots, negative projection of security situation, visa restrictions, inadequate infrastructure, sub-standard transportation, and poor health services, which are badly affected religious tourism. This research paper will be assisted the policymakers in improving travel procedures and providing safety and security to the tourists in Pakistan.*

Key Words: Religious Tourism, Kartarpur Corridor, Smokeless Industry, Economic Development, Religious Harmony

Introduction

Religious tourism is often viewed as one of the most popular and oldest forms of tourism worldwide. It is also termed faith/spiritual tourism ([Phukan et al, 2012](#)) and pilgrimage tourism ([Rinschede, 1992](#)) as pilgrimages are historically considered to be the first form of well-planned and organized tourism ([Metreveli and Timothy, 2010](#)). Although religious

sojourns are as old as religious beliefs, the quantum has increased exponentially with the evolution of means of communication in recent times. Consequently, religious tourism has grown into a “multi-billion dollar niche” ([Wright, 2008](#)), contributing enormously to the hospitality and tourism sectors. While undertaking religious tourism, the devotees are not only inspired to

* Assistant professor, Business Studies Department, Bahria University Islamabad, Pakistan.

Email: Naila.bahria@gmail.com

† M. Phil. Scholar, Pakistan Institute of Development Economics, Islamabad, Pakistan.

‡ Chief Instructor, National Institute of Management, Islamabad, Pakistan.

perform rituals at their sacred places, but they are also motivated by the eagerness of sightseeing ([Shinde, 2010](#)). According to an estimate, the tourism industry is providing employment opportunities to more than 200 million people across the world and has contributed 10% to the world's gross domestic production (GDP) ([IATA, 2011](#)). There are around 600 million national and 300–330 million international religious journeys undertaken by tourists ([Egresi & Kara, 2012](#)). International tourism in contemporary times is considered an important socio-economic and political phenomenon having a profound effect on the lives of people ([Naazer, 2018](#)). Many of religious destinations like Saudi Arabia, Spain, Egypt, Portugal, Palestine, Israel, India, Iran, Iraq, Rome, and Nepal are among the most visited tourist destinations ([Zouni, & Digkas, 2019](#); [Paraszthy, 2015](#), [Rejman et al, 2016](#)). Religious tourism has become a significant economic opportunity for many countries which have a rich heritage in terms of religious sites ([Rana, 2015](#); [Hye & Khan, 2013](#)). The situation has recently dampened because of COVID 19–driven restrictions on international mobility but it is deemed to be a temporary phase. Once the situation normalizes, there is bound to be a resurgence of religious tourism across the globe.

Religious tourism entails manifold benefits for the people of host communities ([Kilipiris, 2016](#)). [Naazer \(2018\)](#) observes that careful expansion of tourism would lead to the preservation of native cultures and conservation of local heritage and environment. [Nath & Baruah \(2017\)](#) are of the view that this “smokeless industry” thrives on a large number of foreign visitors and may bring about the rapid development of the local infrastructure, creation of employment opportunities, and foreign exchange for the host economies. [Bhulia \(2014\)](#) adds that religious tourism also contributes toward conserving the cultural heritage and promoting global harmony and peace. [Rasul & Manandhar \(2009\)](#) are of the opinion that tourism not only triggers of economic activities but it also promotes sharing of knowledge, removes misunderstandings, and develops trust through “people-to-people contacts” among citizens of different nationalities and followers of diverse religious philosophies.

Religious tourism across neighboring countries can also facilitate cross-border business ventures ([Hjalager, 2007](#)). The South Asian countries host some common religious and cultural resources that can boost tourism and increase economic activities, thereby promoting peace and stability among the neighbors ([Khan & Khan, 2003](#)).

Pakistan is strategically located to immensely benefit from the potential of international religious tourism. Tourists from the region and beyond could be encouraged to explore the ancient civilizations, be exposed to spiritual ethos, and visit several holy places and Sufi shrines considered sacrosanct by the devotees of the Hindu, Sikh, and Buddhist faiths. ([Shaikh & Afraz, 2019](#)) and thus enormously benefit from this bonanza.

Kartarpur Corridor

The opening of the Kartarpur Corridor in November 2019 has raised fresh hopes for improving bilateral relations between Pakistan and India. The symbolic importance of the corridor has been termed by some as an episode of ‘religious diplomacy’ aimed at enhancing people-to-people interactions and for promoting trade relations between the two otherwise rival states. At the time of the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, Sikh shrines of prime religious importance like “Nankana Sahib, Sacha Soda, Hassan Abdal, and Kartarpur Sahib became part of Pakistani Punjab” ([Malik & Khan, 2019](#)). The Pant-Mirza Agreement of 1955 provides a charter for protecting the holy shrines in both countries, whereas the Bilateral Protocol of 1974 constitutes the regulatory framework to facilitate the cross-border visits of the pilgrims of the two countries ([Kashmir News line, 2018](#)). The Agreement permits four Sikh pilgrimages and three Hindu pilgrimages from India, allowing a total of 7,500 Sikhs and 800 Hindu pilgrims each year (Tribune, 2018). Similarly, India has allowed five pilgrimages by granting a visa to 1,350 Muslims from Pakistan. However, Pakistan has now offered to facilitate 5000 Sikh pilgrims to visit Kartarpur daily. Hence the opening of the Kartarpur corridor and granting permission to 5,000 Sikh pilgrims daily entails an exponential expansion of religious,

socio-cultural, and intellectual contacts among the people of both countries ([Sevea, 2019](#)).

Against this backdrop, this paper highlights the enormous potential of religious tourism in Pakistan while specifically emphasizing the fact that Kartarpur can develop into a large tourist destination and become a source of enormous economic ventures. The central theme is to highlight the potential of religious tourism as a source of promoting harmony among the followers of different religions as well as citizens of India and Pakistan, as well as flagging the salient issues which continue to hamper the growth of religious tourism. Kartarpur Corridor may have a far-reaching impact on the social and economic development of the region. The tourism industry can play a pivotal role in creating economic opportunities for the local people. Several scholarly studies have emphasized the positive correlation between economic development and tourism. Of special mention would be the studies carried out by ([Croes, 2003](#); [Dritsakis, 2004](#); [Steiner, 2006](#); [Khalil et al., 2007](#); [Hye & Khan, 2013](#)). Barring the exception of the Korean economy, the studies have established a statistically significant and direct connection between tourism and economic development. Besides, the sector is credited for smoothening the way for the voluntary transfer of huge financial resources from wealthy nations to poor countries ([Mitchell & Ashley, 2009](#)). It has also been highlighted that tourism plays a vital role in curbing unemployment across the globe. This study, therefore, seeks the attention of the government agencies mandated to formulate and implement policies, academia, private sector enterprises, mass media, and other relevant stakeholders so that they can proactively engage in efforts towards optimally exploiting the potential of religious tourism.

Research Objectives

- To identify the major pilgrimage sites that have the potential for attracting the devotees of other religions to visit Pakistan.
- To analyze the role of tourism in economic development, religious harmony, and social progress.

- To take stock of some salient issues hampering the development of religious tourism in the country.

Methodology

The present study is descriptive in nature. Observations were recorded in view of facts reported in the secondary sources, including news items, national and international reports on tourism, books, journals, as well as information gathered from interaction with the local people, discussions with the government officials, representatives of travel agencies, and the tourists. The information gathered from varied sources was corroborated by the field observation.

Results and Discussion

Potential of Religious Tourism in Pakistan

Pakistan is a cradle of various civilizations and the juncture of key trade routes for centuries. It is a land of many religions, including Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Sikhism, and Hinduism. There are thousands of temples of Hindus and Sikhs and stupas of Buddhists, in addition to Christian churches dating back to the colonial era scattered across the country ([Aqeel, 2018](#)). It has numerous shrines of Muslim saints and Sufis in different parts of the country that provide spiritual enlightenment to the visitors. In addition, hundreds of Buddhist sites are also scattered across Pakistan ([Ali, 2017](#)). Being home to multiple heritage sites of different faiths from the Indus Valley Civilization and Bronze Age civilization, Pakistan has immense potential to increase the generation of mass religious tourism ([Ahmed, 2016](#)).

Sikhism

About 20,000 Sikhs are residing in different parts of Pakistan ([Ali, 2018](#)). They are mostly Pashtun, settled in the provinces of KPK (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa), Punjab, and tribal areas. Many Sikhs have a lifetime ambition to visit the places of their Gurus in Pakistan. Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh religion, was born in what constitutes part of Pakistan. Some parts of the provinces of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were homes to scholars of

Sikhism. Several Gurdwaras of historical importance are located in Pakistan. Pakistan is home to approximately 195 Gurdwaras located across the country. The largest number of Gurdwaras is found in the province of Punjab, followed by other provinces, namely, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Balochistan ([TDCP, 2019](#)). Annually, four delegations of Sikh Yatrees (devotees) come to visit Gurdwaras in Pakistan. Furthermore, one day visa during daylight time to visit the Nankana sahib can be issued. This sacred place for the Sikhs is at a distance of only two hours' drive from the Wagah border. This option, if properly managed, can increase pilgrims from India manifold. It is estimated that revenue generation can be enhanced from Rs.208million to Rs.18 billion given some improvements are made. The revenue generation is not only restricted to the hoteling and transport business, instead, but it will also create multiplier effects in the shape of unintended and induced expenditures.

Hinduism

Two Hindu groups of pilgrims also visit Pakistan generally in April and November. They are mostly issued seven days pilgrim visas for a maximum of 200-400 pilgrims. The Hindus visit Katas Raj Temples in district Chakwal of Punjab on Shivratri and Krishna Temple at Lahore. Katas Raj is a complex of numerous Hindu temples linked to one another. The other contingent of devotees visits the place Hayat Patafi in Mirpur Mathelo, Sindh, to celebrate the birth anniversary of Swami Shad Aram ([Dawn, 2020](#)).

Buddhism

Pakistan hosts a rich extravaganza of Buddhist archaeological sites. The Buddhist civilization renowned globally as Gandhara Civilization existed in the territory currently part of the province of Punjab and the province of KPK in Pakistan. The main archaeological sites in KPK are found in Peshawar, Swat, Mardan, Swabi, and Buner. In the Rawalpindi district of Punjab, two major religious sites at Taxila and Mankiala resonate Buddhist past. Pakistan's tourism sector can immensely benefit if a

large number of Buddhist devotees visit sites of religious and historical significance located in Pakistan. If the government focuses on Buddhist sites, it can benefit from a significant number of approximately 500 million Buddhists residing around the globe ([Harvey, 2013](#)). Just within a radius of 30 km around Taxila city, more than 50 archaeological Buddhist sites situate. The most significant include Dhamarajika Stupa and Monastery (300 BC - 200 AD), Bhir Mound (600-200 BC), Sirkap (200 BC - 600 AD), Jandial Temple (c.250 BC), and Jaulian Monastery (200 - 600 AD). Then Takht-i-Bahi 120Km in the northwest of Taxila is another Buddhist monastery of great significance ([UNESCO, 2011](#)).

Economic Implications

Pakistan's religious tourism industry has the potential to capture a considerable market by facilitating Buddhists, Hindus, and Sikhs desiring to visit their holy sites. The recent development of the visa-free Kartarpur corridor may go a long way in attracting scores of Sikh devotees to Pakistan thereby lending impetus to the economic development in the country. According to an estimated total population of Sikhs around the world number, about 25 million and approximately 90 % of the total Sikh population reside in India. Out of that, 76% live in the Indian State of Punjab (Sikh Coalition, 2018). Besides, there are hundreds of thousands of millions of Sikhs who live in other countries around the world (Ahmed, 2016). The Sikhs consider it their religious obligation to visit their sacred temples in Pakistan ([Zuberi, 2018](#)). If the Pakistani government is able to market and provide better tourist facilities more than 300,000 Sikhs can be attracted to Pakistan annually, which is estimated to generate an income of \$300 million per year (Business Recorder, 2018).

The partition of India and Pakistan in 1947 divided thousands of families on both sides of the border. Millions of Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs, during the partition, were displaced, kidnapped, and killed in communal violence. It is impossible to present statistics reflective of emotional trauma and sense of loss suffered by aggrieved families on both sides of the border ([Bhat, 2018](#)). Divided Punjab

serves as one of the most enduring symbols of the partition between India and Pakistan. Even after the partition, people could not meet or be in touch with their loved ones for decades. Some have even lost their family members forever ([Roy, 2012](#)). Traveling across the border is a tedious task for the citizens of both countries. The citizens of Punjab, both in India and Pakistan were overjoyed with the thoughts of being reunited with their friends and families when the Prime Minister of Pakistan Imran Khan announced the opening of a corridor on the 250th birthday of Guru Nanak Sahib between Indian Punjab and Pakistani Punjab ([Zaheer et al., 2020](#)).

Despite having numerous religious heritage sites in Pakistan, the industry has not kicked off due to various issues including conservation of the sites, visa issues, and security of the visitors ([Ahmed, 2016](#)). [Rifai \(2015\)](#) of UNWTO suggests that religious tourism is an effective tool to foster sustainable development as it plays an important role in creating awareness of heritage and preservation of resources, promotes local development, and creates cultural harmony. [Gupta \(1999\)](#) is of the opinion that pilgrimages involve sightseeing, shopping and traveling to different places, and bringing home the local memorabilia. Pakistan has a rich cultural and historical heritage, so religious tourism can be combined with other tourist attractions for leisurely activities.

The opening of the Kartarpur Corridor promises economic growth and the promotion of religious tourism between India and Pakistan. It will help create and foster cultural, economic, and historical ties between both the Punjabs. Punjabis on both sides can greatly benefit from the trade as they are the major contributors of agricultural products to their respective countries. The increased interaction can play a vital role in boosting foreign exchange earnings by the country ([Hanif, 2019](#)). [Kurmanaliyeva\(2014\)](#) states that the faith of pilgrims prompts them to shop around and purchase religious souvenirs. In fact, they spend more money when they are on a pilgrimage. Some tourists also enjoy leisure activities along with their religious rituals. Consequently, religious tourism is becoming very enterprising, as people generally spend huge sums of money during their pilgrimage

([Tala, 2008](#)). Selling religious souvenirs and items used for performing religious rituals are bound to be profitable ventures for the host economy. In addition, significant revenue could be generated by marketing Pakistani handicrafts, etc., in the vicinity of religious monuments. Religious tourism products and services can also be offered as a package combined with sightseeing, adventure activities, camping, and social tourism in other parts of the country ([Kartal et al. 2015](#)).

It has also been documented by a World Bank study that Sikh and Buddhist religious tourism in Pakistan can produce PKR 20 billion per annum and generate 40,000 employment opportunities annually ([UNESCO, 2018](#)). Hence the government needs to organize tours whereby the pilgrims are not only confined to religious places but are also exposed to manifold vistas of sightseeing to enrich their knowledge of the historical, social, and artistic legacy of different parts of the country ([Kurmanaliyeva et al. 2014](#)).

Socio-Cultural Implications

Research suggests that international tourism also impinges upon the values, behaviors, lifestyles, moral conduct, belief systems, linguistic patterns, ceremonies, and interpersonal relationships of both the tourists and the host communities ([García et al., 2015](#)). The socio-cultural exchange between the people representing two distinct cultural streams can curb the prejudices and reduce tensions existing between the two. The interaction affords the opportunity of glorifying regional uniqueness by rejuvenating events, rites, costumes, music, dance, and festivals as well as culinary delicacies of their respective cultural milieus ([Andereck & Vogt, 2000](#)). It also helps local communities to reinforce their administration and regional planning. Such tourism can motivate the civic involvement of the local people in numerous activities in which both the host and the tourists can participate ([UNESCO, 2005](#)). Tourism-driven businesses demand a qualified and skilled workforce, so numerous opportunities for education and skill development for the host community spring up. In the instant case, both India and Pakistan share many socio-cultural commonalities stemming from their shared history.

They speak several common languages, have relatives on both sides of the border, and have similar tastes in culinary, music, dance, and folk tales. Kartarpur can serve not only as a corridor of peace and harmony but will also play a crucial role in reuniting many people having several things in common.

Political Implications

The gesture of opening of Kartarpur corridor for Sikh religious tourists from India was widely hailed by the people of the two countries in general and the Sikh community around the world in particular (Khalid, 2018). It has offered a ray of new hope towards establishing friendly and peaceful relations between two arch enemies. A visa-free passage across the border to Kartarpur was a long-nourished desire of the Sikh devotees (Tripathi, 2019). However, the favor extended by the Pakistani government was not whole-heartedly welcomed by some Indian political leaders as their politics thrive on animosity with Pakistan. Kartarpur corridor symbolizes a semblance of political victory for the people of the two Punjabs. Kartarpur corridor also represents a success of sub-national diplomacy. This passage will play a vital role in boosting religious, socio-cultural, economic links between the two countries and build stronger bonds in people-to-people communication (Kulkarni, 2018). Furthermore, Kartarpur Corridor is being looked upon as a model that can help to facilitate more religious travels between both countries (Sevea, 2018).

Implications for Sustainability

Religious tourism as compared to other forms of tourism ensures the sustainability of the visited sites as it does not involve the destruction of flora and fauna (Gupta, 2007). The local communities also participate enthusiastically in various ventures for their economic gains. Currently, we are witnessing a spectacle of destruction of the tourist sites across the country by an unbridled upsurge of local tourism. The scenic beauty and the peace and serenity of the northern areas are being trampled upon by the insensitive mobs of tourists who are

relentlessly polluting the environment and tourist attractions (Qasim, 2019).

Tourism development ensures sustainable income for local people that help in enhancing their quality of life by alleviating poverty. The sector generates new vistas of income generation in addition to creating individual employment opportunities (Lemma, 2014). Collecting fees for access to sites, providing transport and accommodation services, and selling eatables, souvenirs and handicrafts are some of the salient income-generating opportunities. The moment a tourist incurs expenditure, a series of additional spending is registered in the local economy. Hence, expenditure incurred by tourists has a ripple effect for various segments of the economy of a particular area. Tourism creates employment opportunities as tour guides, security guards, and managers are required to address tourists' demands. Also, taxi drivers, lodge owners, and handicraft workers may benefit from tourism ventures (Arshad et al., 2017).

Challenges of Religious Tourism Development

The above discussion illustrates that religious tourism is yet to attain its potential in Pakistan. The following discussion examines some of the key challenges constraining the promotion of tourism in Pakistan:

Low Precedence Accorded to the Sector by the Government

The government has never accorded due precedence to the tourism sector. Both the federal government as well provincial governments have failed to discharge their obligations in this regard. The lackluster performance of the government is truly reflected in the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness reports compiled from year to year. Pakistan continues to rank abysmally low in the index. In the year 2017, Pakistan was placed at 124 amongst the nations of the world by the World Economic Forum (WEF) (WEF, 2017). This

ranking speaks volumes about the way this sector has been ignored by the public sector.

Inadequate Engagement of the Private Sector

Having lamented the fact that the public sector has performed miserably in up scaling tourism in the country, it is equally important to evaluate the performance of the private sector. We are cognizant of the fact that tourism-related infrastructures need substantial investment and the government cannot solely provide all the financial resources. The best international practice is to engage the private sector in such infrastructure development activities. The response of the private sector, however, has been lukewarm historically. In addition, there exists no policy framework in the country which could attract private sector investment towards infrastructure development to boost tourism in Pakistan (Iqbal, 2017).

Security and Safety of Tourists

The safety of tourists is a prime concern for all travelers wishing to travel to any part of the world. Foreign tourists prefer to visit countries that provide safe environments. [Henderson et al. \(2010\)](#) explicate that terrorist attacks tend to have a significant adverse influence on the tourism industry. The tourism sector in Pakistan was gravely impacted by terrorism activities, which dented its efforts of wooing foreign visitors. The security situation in Pakistan has in recent times been defined by incidents of terrorist attacks, bomb blasts, cross-border disputes, and political unrest ([OSAC, 2020](#)). Law and order condition over the past few decades in Pakistan has been adversely impacted by the Afghan war, heightened tension between India and Pakistan, terrorist attacks and bomb blasts in Pakistan. Although Pakistan is struggling to present a positive image of Pakistan on international platforms, it has not yet become a popular tourist destination. The tourism industry is highly competitive and there is great competition among popular international tourist destinations (The London Post, 2018).

In order to promote tourism in Pakistan, the government of Pakistan in collaboration with the

provincial governments has to ensure an environment that is deemed safe for international tourists and other governments. In the last five years security scenario in Pakistan has considerably improved, thus rekindling the passion of religious devotees, including Sikhs, Hindus, and Buddhists desperately seeking to visit the holy shrines in Pakistan. However, no effort may be spared to make the voyage of international pilgrims safe. The government has to operationalize a two-pronged strategy to concomitantly ensure the safety of tourists and to erase the negative perception about the security situation in the country ([Khokhar, 2020](#)).

Acrimonious Relationships between Pakistan and India

Pakistan historically had a strained relationship with India since its independence. Both the countries have even gone to wars yet the conflicts between the two uneasy neighbors remained unresolved. Such conflicts have given rise to security apprehensions and trust deficit ([Garg, 2010](#)). Negative propaganda by Indian media about Pakistan as an enemy country has also raised public concerns. On the other hand, Pakistan has also failed in projecting a positive image of the country through mainstream media. Due to the trust deficit between the two neighboring countries, the cross-border movement is governed through a stringent and complex regulatory and administrative regime (Ashraf, 2018, The Nation, 2019).

Complicated Travel Procedures and Regional Political Environment

The most critical issue encountered by people in cross-border traveling includes complicated formalities, visas, use of currency, and other regulations administering international tourists, which seriously impede the progress of regional tourism. The “restrictive visa policies,” between India and Pakistan provide only city-wise approval for the citizens of both countries with deeply entrenched ‘police reporting mechanism’ according

to the schedules provided by the authorities on both sides of the borders ([Naazer, 2018](#)).

Skewed Policy Framework

The Pakistani tourism administration is hindered by replications and redundancies. The multiple agencies fail to disseminate inadequate data concerning currency, travel links, visa procedures, and prevailing security situations. The detailed online information to guide tourists to travel to the country is scant and whatever is available on the websites is generally obsolete. Moreover, information desks are also not found at tourism destinations. If Pakistan can improve its travel procedures and provide safety and security to the travelers in Pakistan, it can have great potential to develop its tourism industry ([Karim et al. 2012](#)).

Inadequate Services of Hospitality and Transportation

Hotels and restaurants of good standards are rare near most of the tourist destinations in Pakistan. In terms of amenities and facilities, Pakistan lacks behind international standards ([Naveed, 2018](#)). The government's efforts towards reviving tourism in the country are ostensibly riddled with contradictions. Against the vociferous utterances by the government about the potential of tourism in Pakistan, Pakistan Tourism and Development Corporation (PTDC) motels in the north have been ordered to be closed thus sacking the employees as well. The decision was reportedly taken because of irreparable financial losses sustained by the organization. Resultantly, 25 motels along with 300 employees have been affected ([Dawn, 2020](#)). In addition, poor connectivity by rail and air linking most tourist destinations continues to be a cause of serious concern for the tourists. Though road infrastructure has improved in recent decades, yet poor administration has hindered the promotion of tourism in the country ([Masood et al. 2011](#)). The situation becomes worse, especially in cross-border movement. Driving cross-border is also restricted between India and Pakistan.

Lack of Coordination among Relevant Administrative Agencies

The administration of religious tourism in Pakistan is shared by several agencies and departments at the Federal and Provincial levels (Pakistan Tourism Forum, 2017). The principal responsibility to manage the events rests with Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB). In the case of Sikh devotees, the Board collaborates with Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee. The provincial police are responsible to take effective security-related steps in liaison with the Special Branch of Police and the district administration ([Dawn, 2019](#)). They monitor the activities of the pilgrims to ward off any undesirable activities as the chances of the presence of spies in the garb of pilgrims cannot be ruled out.

Tourism in Pakistan has remained a Federal Government subject in the past. After the promulgation of the 18th amendment of the Constitution, it has become a provincial subject but still there continues to be a tangible sense of overlapping in terms of the responsibilities being bifurcated between the center and the provinces. Only the province of Balochistan has promulgated Balochistan Tourism Act and Travel Guide, 2014. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has been able to frame a Provincial Tourism Policy in 2015. A state tourism policy was drafted in 2016 in Azad Jammu and Kashmir, but it has yet to be implemented. The government of Punjab has approved the tourism policy in July 2019 with an aim to derive maximum economic gain through tourism, treating the sector as a provincial priority area ([Malik, 2019](#)). There is no dedicated provincial tourism policy with regard to Sindh as yet. In Gilgit-Baltistan, the subject of tourism is still under the purview of the Federal Government of Pakistan without any specific policy initiative or institution to promote international tourism.

Despite the many challenges and negatively propagated security situation, the influx of religious tourists from India has continued over the years. Pakistan has kept allowing Indian pilgrims to visit their holy places irrespective of the strained situation of Indo-Pak relations. But the same spirit has not

been reciprocated by India, and whenever there was a thaw in relations, it has stopped Pakistani pilgrims from visiting their holy shrines in India ([Muslim Mirror, 2018](#)). According to some surveys, eighty-three percent of the Sikh diasporas have shown their interest to visit Pakistan in addition to seventy-nine percent of the twenty million Indian Sikhs ([Ahmed, 2016](#)). However, the actual number of those who visited Pakistan is only ten percent of them. This number can be immensely enhanced by making some improvements and changes in the areas of visa issuance, security, and infrastructure.

Conclusion

Tourism is widely recognized as the world's largest industry which plays an important role in human resource development. The tourism industry in Pakistan is growing at a very slow pace. It has a lot of potential to generate employment opportunities in multiple spheres including, hospitality, infrastructure upgradation, and the transportation

sector. Consequently, it creates the need for rapid growth in tourism with trained and qualified manpower and dynamic policy changes, and infrastructure over-hauling to meet international tourism standards. The findings of this study indicate the below-par performance of concerned agencies mandated to promote tourism in Pakistan. Hence, we witness a stark mismatch between the actual progress and real potential of this smokeless industry. Several issues adversely impact the passion of foreign tourists. In the domain of recreational tourism, the key issues are non-development and maintenance of tourist spots, negative projection of security situation, visa restrictions, and lack of upfront and supportive national tourism policy. On the side of religious tourism, Pakistan has tremendous avenues to explore by promoting and supporting the religious tourists in Pakistan. The issues highlighted in this regard warrant the full attention of concerned authorities and policymakers.

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