

**Cross-Border Tourism and Confidence Building in J&K across LOC:
An approach to improve the quality of life and relationship between two sides of J&K**

Dr. Qurat-ul-Ain Shah
Assistant Professor, The Business School,
SSM College of Engineering & Technology, Parihaspora, Pattan.

ABSTRACT

India and Pakistan have always been indulged in terms of building healthy relationships across LoC. They have initiated a number of measures in Kashmir, including creation of bus services and limited trade relationships across line of control (LoC). There exists lot of imbalances in present scenario and interactions. It is imperative for India and Pakistan to expand cross LoC-confidence building measures and to add new initiatives that would address the imbalances. With the development of cross-border tourism, borders can be made irrelevant by promoting greater contacts through trade, tourism, travel etc.

There are various constituencies that favour this practice. These constituencies include traders, civil society, politicians, and professional groups having common interest and wish to establish closer links across the LoC. The trade and travel between India and Pakistan through Kashmir had extended to Tibet, Afghanistan, and parts of Central Asia. Both India and Pakistan treat cross-border trade as a political and not as an economic confidence-building measure. The cross-border tourism will prove to be an effective boon to the population of J&K in terms of social, economical, political aspects. It can serve two important purposes as an agent of peace and economic boost. There is a vast scope for improvement in the existing interactions and trade relationships between two sides across LoC in J&K with the help of Tourism establishment.

Jammu & Kashmir has taken initiative to develop infrastructure. As a result, there is an increased inflow of domestic and international tourists. The tourism establishment among India & Pakistan positively correlates with the immense opportunities to provide employment and improve quality of life of local population.

Keywords: *Tourism, Trade relations, Confidence-building, Quality life, employment opportunities, Package Tourism, J&K- LoC, India & Pakistan*

INTRODUCTION

The greater understanding can be build up between two parties by promoting greater interactions among the local population on both sides of intervening borders. The process of enlarging mutual understanding can be catalysed by the development of easy interaction among people on both the sides. The cross-border tourism in Jammu & Kashmir is uniquely favourable to address many problems. The former princely state of Kashmir, which was divided between India and Pakistan in 1947, embodies a bitter dispute that has endured over six decades. The cross-border tourism is favourable to J&K in many respects:

First, India and Pakistan were separated during the partition in 1947. Most of the families started living across the two borders as a result of this partition. J&K state divided into two parts, Pakistani-controlled Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) or Indian-controlled Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). The divided families are highly enthusiastic about the movement of cross border tourism. With the development of cross-border

tourism, borders can be made irrelevant by promoting greater contacts through trade, tourism, travel etc

Second, the natural flow of trade and commerce has been adversely affected by the division of Kashmir across LoC. This in turn has affected the economy. The promotion of tourism would not only restore the local economy but would rather encourage the establishment of services, private sectors, infrastructure, transport facilities etc.

Third, there is possibility to devise separate packages for tourists having various tourism purposes like adventure tourism, archaeological tourism, and religious tourism. The trade and travel between India and Pakistan through Kashmir had extended to Tibet, Afghanistan, and parts of Central Asia.

Fourth, the traditional culture of Kashmir which was based on the secular concept of “Kashmiriyat-an inclination toward composite culture” was marked by tolerance toward different religious beliefs. Different communities in Kashmir were able to live together in peace & harmony over the ages despite the complex religious and ethnic mix. The local situation in J&K was disturbed due to the unfortunate events in Kashmir recent years. Promoting cross-border tourism can play a major role in eroding these negative sentiments and may help re-establish the secularism that distinguished “Kashmiriyat.”

CROSS-BORDER TOURISM: A BUILDING BLOCK OF PEACE PROCESS IN J&K

The idea that has already been floated by Indian prime minister Dr. Manmohan Singh in 2006 of “making borders irrelevant” and largely agreed to by then president of Pakistan General Pervez Musharraf has enjoyed substantial support in the civil societies of India, Pakistan, and both parts of Kashmir. This study would support the said idea. Although cross-border tourism is not a new idea, it should be acceptable to the government of India and the Indian people at large as similar recommendations on improving cross-border interactions were already forwarded by Mr. Manmohan Singh. Due to the limitations and existing weaknesses in the cross-border confidence measure taken in 2005 like trade & bus services between Srinagar and Muzaffarabad, the present imperative for cross-border tourism arised. The inauguration of the said bus service was followed by the establishment of bus service between Poonch and Rawalakot. Both these bus services met the needs and aspirations of divided families living along the LoC. In Jammu region, there are many divided families outside the districts of Rajouri and Poonch in the Nowshera tehsil (administrative division within a district). There is a direct road between Mirpur and Nowshera, which was opened shortly after the earthquake in 2005. All the regions across LoC are connected through the bus service. Therefore, it is needful to enlarge this service.

The second major cross-border confidence-building measure is trade between J&K and AJK, which began in October 2008. Trucks carry specified goods and adopted the same routes as that of buses. Initially, the agreement called for a fortnightly movement of trucks, but, after few months a weekly exchange was introduced.

Like the bus service, the truck service also has serious limitations. Though the business community is happy about the opening up of the LoC for the movement of goods, but the trade restricted to a limited supply restricted to the geographical limits of Kashmir and is not permitted via Kashmir to other parts of India and Pakistan. The expectation of the people with regard to the trade was that it would allow businessmen to trade in different goods—from carpets to apples—all the way to the Gulf countries via Karachi.

Lack of adequate banking facilities also hampers trade. Businessmen complain that the cross-border trade is being hijacked by traders who do not belong to J&K. Due to the concessions provided; the local traders believe that the Indian-Pakistani trade across the Wagah border is now being routed through Kashmir, which is not benefiting the state.

Finally, both India and Pakistan treat cross-border trade as a political and not as an economic confidence-building measure. Given these basic differences in approach, and the wider Indian-Pakistani

trading experience, one can predict that the cross-border trade project will lose steam unless both countries take effective remedial steps.

Taken into consideration these constraints on cross-border trade there is a need to look beyond these two modalities to improve cross-border interactions. Hence tourism is a strong and logical confidence-building measure that can help in improving upon these criteria's.

EXEMPLAR OF TOURISM IN KASHMIR: STUDY OF PAST AND PRESENT PATTERNS

Kashmir is considered to be paradise on earth. Each sub-region—Jammu, Kashmir Valley, and Ladakh can offer potential tourism from different perspectives. Each sub-region of Kashmir has its own unique potential to attract tourism. On part of Indian side, J&K has the potential to attract tourists motivated by religious interests, leisure, or adventure. Depending on the interests of tourists, they could choose different regions or different circuits as their primary focus. Other part of Kashmir called Azad Kashmir on Pakistani side can offer attractive tourism also it is primarily free from violence and also it is endowed with great natural beauty, archaeological sites, religious places, and mountainous terrain, making it attractive for religious, cultural, adventure, archaeological, and recreational tourism. Jammu & Kashmir state is full of tourist activity, especially in terms of visits to Sufi shrines. Both in the Kashmir Valley and in Rajouri and Poonch districts, there are numerous shrines of Sufi saints who cut across regional and religious divides. For example, Shahdra Sharif, near Rajouri, is an important shrine where Baba Ghulam Shah is revered by Muslims, Hindus, Christians, and Sikhs from all over the region.

THE INDIAN SIDE



FIGURE 1: Srinagar is one of the world-famous tourist destinations of India.

The Kashmir Valley has become the primary tourist destination for national and international tourists. Gulmarg is considered to be an international tourist destination. Kashmir Valley has received a tremendous boost after 1947. The flow of tourists into the Kashmir Valley has been affected by the violence since 1989, but Gulmarg continues to attract tourists from all over the world into the valley (Fig 1). Over the last two decades, the Jammu region has witnessed a tremendous increase in domestic pilgrims, primarily to Mata Vaishno Devi's temple.

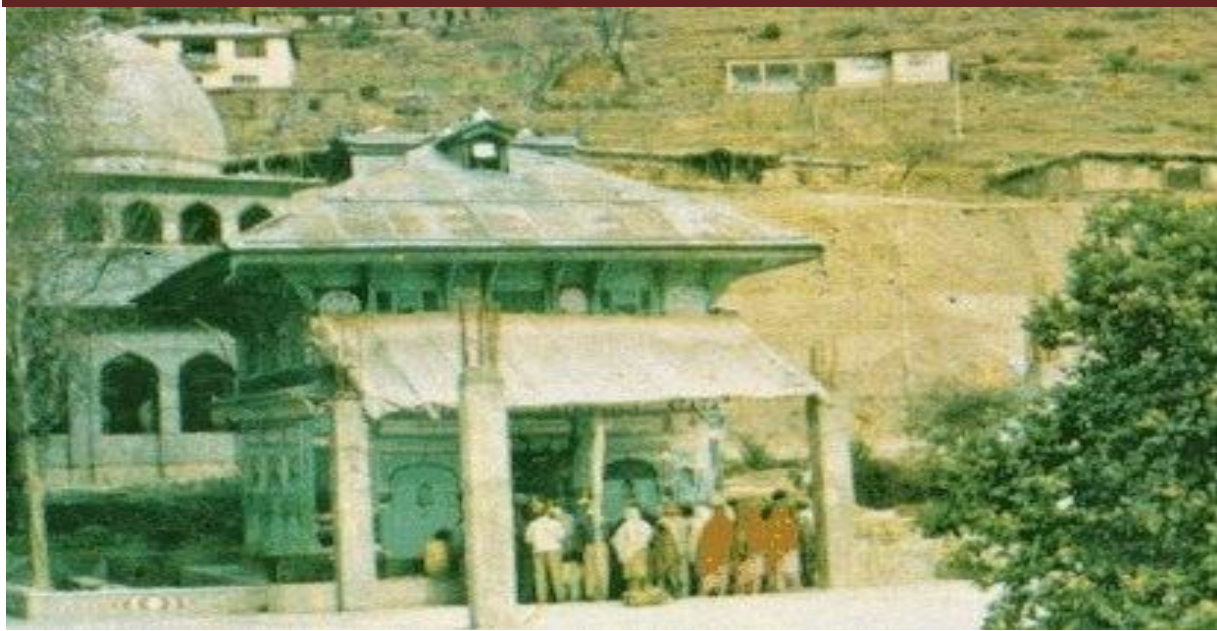


FIGURE 2: Roza-Shahdra Sharif (Rajouri, Jammu & Kashmir)

hindu and Sikh communities. Five shrines in particular—Shahdra Sharif (near Rajouri) (Fig. 2), Chota Mian (Mendhar), and Budha Amaranth, Sai Miran, and Nangali Saheb (all three near Poonch) have not only been the main attraction but have also inspired communal harmony. There is a huge potential for recreational and adventure tourism within the various districts.



FIGURE 3: Pangong Lake, Ladakh – The beauty and silence of Himalayas

And having everything to offer ranging from adventure to religious to heritage tourism (Fig. 3). The most important thing about Ladakh is that it is the peaceful region of the state. These three Indian controlled regions (Jammu, Kashmir Valley, and Ladakh) are connected with each other and rest of India by air.

THE PAKISTANI SIDE

On the Pakistani side, Azad Kashmir is the attraction for tourists all over. There are several routes that connect these regions for trade and can be used for cross-border tourism. The present Rawalpindi–

Muzaffarabad road also known as the Jehlum Valley road which was used to carry out various trade activities between Pakistani Punjab and Kashmir valley connects Rawalpindi to Srinagar via Muzaffarabad. In addition, the Sialkot–Jammu route through Suchetgarh connected Pakistani Punjab with the Jammu and Poonch and continued to Srinagar through Banihal pass. It was considered the shortest trade route. A third route connected Jhelum (a Pakistani city) to Srinagar through Mirpur–Kotli–Poonch–Uri. The districts of Mirpur and Rajouri and the tehsil of Mendhar depended mainly upon this route for their imports of daily necessities. A fourth route also known as Mughal road connected Gujarat (a Pakistani city) to Srinagar via Bhimber and Rajouri.

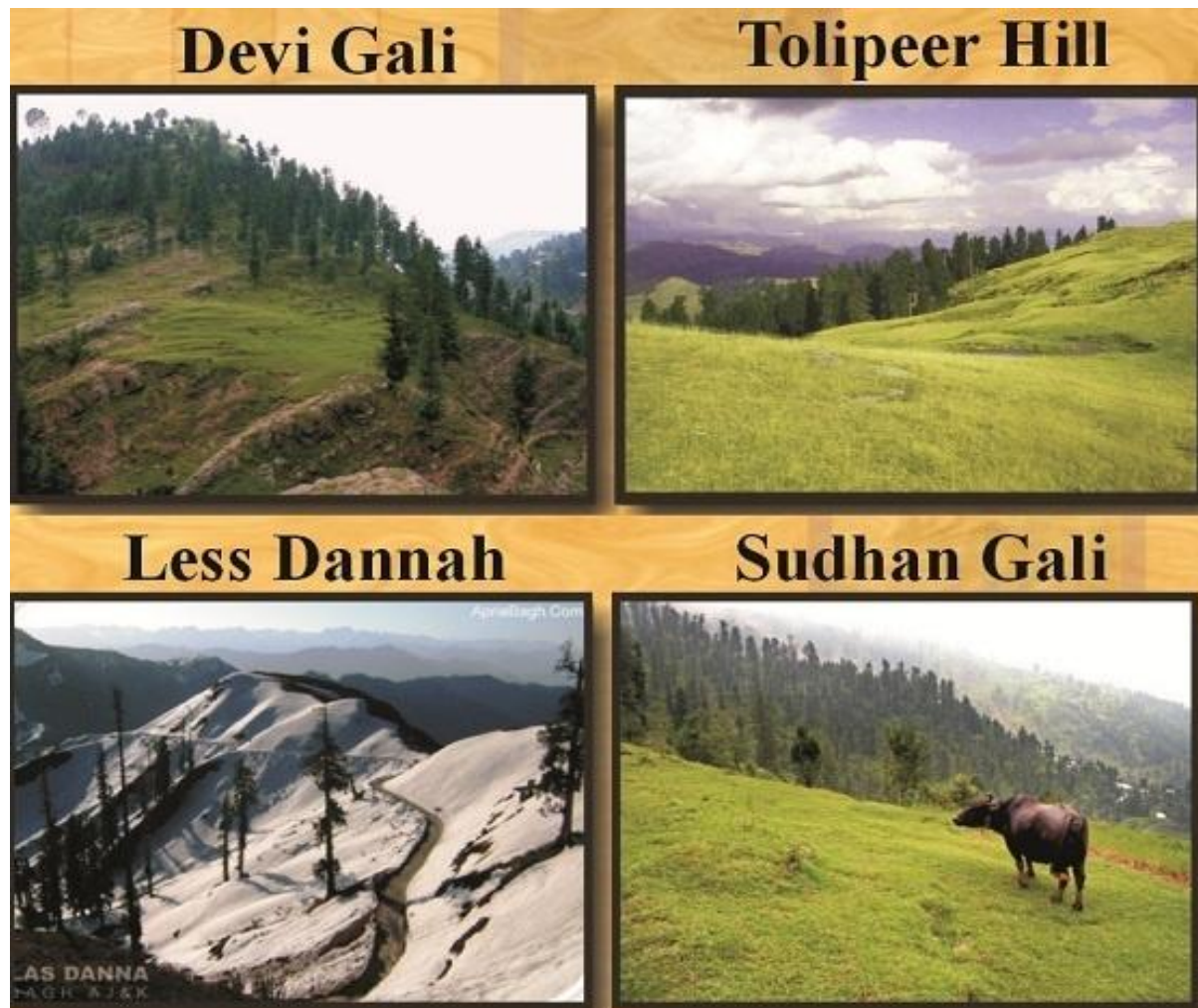


FIGURE 4: Azad Kashmir is one of the most beautiful and engaging valley and hill resort for tourism. It is not only the green, beautiful & engaging but it is also surrounded by the high snow Clad Mountains.

bullock carts or horse carts while traveling to Muzaffarabad and inside the city. The Mughals used the Bhimber–Srinagar route to visit the Kashmir Valley. The emperor Jahangir has also mentioned Bhimber in his book Tuzh-e-Jahangiri (Fig 4).

TOURIST NUMBERS

Tourists are attracted to Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) and Azad Kashmir (AJK) both from outside but there lies the difference in how these regions attract tourists. On the basis of this difference the strength of tourist industries across LoC is reflected. Jammu & Kashmir is well developed to attract highest number

of tourists every year but in comparison to J&K, Azad Kashmir is under developed as compared to rest of the Pakistan which inhibits AJK's ability to attract tourists from Pakistan or abroad.

Religious tourism has a vast scope in this region. Nearly one million tourists visit famous shrines such as Khari Sharif, Narian Sharif, Baba ShadiShaeed, Mai TotiSahiba, and SaheliSarkar each year. Domestic tourists have an increased inflow to this area because of its improvement in infrastructure, secure and hospitable environment free from conflicts. As per the records provided by the Department of Tourism and Archeology thousands of international visitors come to AJK as they belong to the Kashmiri diaspora living across the world. Table 1 represents the tourist inflow during 2008-12.

Table 1: Tourist visits to J&K, 2008–2012

Year	Number of visits by domestic tourists (in lakh)	Number of visits by foreign tourists (in lakh)
2008	76.46	0.46
2009	79.15	0.53
2010	76.39	0.55
2011	77.25	0.58
2012	82.16	0.75

Source: Ministry of Tourism, "Tourist Inflow in J&K," November 20, 2012 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jammu_and_Kashmir

of domestic and international tourists. J&K has created more than fifteen tourism development authorities in Leh, Kargil, and Zaskar (in Ladakh); Gulmarg, Pahalgam, Sonamarg, Manasbal, Kokernag, Verinag, and Budgam (in Kashmir Valley); and Rajouri, Poonch, Patnitop, Mansar, Baderwah, Kishtwar, and Sartal (in Jammu). Political uncertainty and bad governance pose threat to maintain and improve infrastructure further. There exists adequate basic infrastructure on which the tourism industry could be further developed and exploited through cross-border movements.

CROSS-BORDER TOURISM IN KASHMIR: OPPORTUNITIES

The cross-border tourism will prove to be an effective boon to the population of J&K in terms of social, economical, political aspects. It can serve two important purposes as a catalyst of peace and economic boost.

1. Tourism as a Catalyst of Peace

Development of the tourism directly depends upon the nature of the conflict in that particular region or area. India and Pakistan has always stood antagonistic to each other in terms of healthy relationship and trade relations. Cross-border tourism cannot have drastic impact on lowering down this conflict but can prove to be an effective tool in bringing Kashmiris together and will certainly act as a catalyst for peace between Pakistan and India. The economic conditions of the sub-regions can be improved with the help of cross-border tourism and this impact can also support to reduce tension in the sub-regions and to normalize the process. Any step taken to promote interaction between people on both sides of the LoC will be positive as it will bring people closer to each other. More the interaction among the people more will be the impact on peace. Thus intractability is directly proportional to the peace process. Jammu & Kashmir has been divided into two halves. There are divided families who live on both sides of the LoC. The cross-border tourism can bring these divided families together and help generate revenue, peace &

harmony for the regions itself. The concept of the Kashmiriyat can be re-generated with the help of cross-border tourism as it can help erode the negative perception and sentiments which has been created due to the disturbances in J&K in recent years.

2. Tourism as an Economic Boost

The step taken in Rajouri and Poonch district regarding the start of bus service created a boost in economic activity. The cross border tourism will also create positive influence on the economic aspect of the sub-regions by developing the infrastructure ranging from simple dhabas to big hotels. Movement of people for tourism purpose will enhance the interaction between two sides. There are numerous places in J&K that can attract tourists from all over India and outside. In addition to the development of infrastructure, cross border tourism can also address the problem of unemployment in both the sub-regions. Kashmir is known for its beauty all over the world but Azad Kashmir remained hidden in the eyes till the earthquake in 2005 which exposed Azad Kashmir to the world. Azad Kashmir is underdeveloped. With the development of the cross border tourism the economy of the sub-region will get boost and hence will improve the livelihood opportunities, especially for the rural poor.

CROSS-BORDER TOURISM IN KASHMIR: THREATS

1. With the development of the cross border tourism many doors for improvement can open up. The bundle of cross border tourism can pose threats also in addition to the opportunities. What are the risks? The first and foremost risk being the Security risk, the intelligence agencies fear about the militancy attack from the opposite sub-region.
2. The ministries of both the sides are traditionally suspicious of each other and have developed a negative approach. That is why the ministries (Home, Defence, and Internal Affairs) of both New Delhi & Islamabad go slow in taking the initiatives on cross border movement.
3. Cross border tourism can help develop better relationship among the two nations and regulate Kashmir dispute which is highly opposed by separatist leaders in the Kashmir Valley. These leaders create obstacles for the movement.
4. Most leaders and governance in both the sides are of different opinions regarding the cross border tourism. Some of the leaders & ministers believe that resumption of cross-border tourism, such as cross-border travel and trade, would undermine Pakistan's position on the Kashmir issue. Others (persons from Jamaat-i-Islami) do not favour cross-border tourism because they believe it would compromise the Kashmiri struggle for the right to self-determination.

CONCLUSIONS

Confidence building measure can be developed by the help of cross border tourism. There are the constituencies which can favour and obstruct the movement. These constituencies can be easily identifies. All the constituencies which favour the movement include local citizens, especially the divided families, are traders, civil society, and professional groups that either have common interests or wish to establish closer links across the border.

Cross-border tourism offers immense opportunities to provide gainful employment and improve the quality of life of the local population. The security community, which comprises armed, paramilitary, and police forces and especially the intelligence agencies, is wholly sceptical and believes that cross-border tourism would only add to problems of terrorism and insurgency. They are also of the opinion that any free movement of people and goods across softened borders would erode its centrality in Kashmir. These problems and oppositions can be addressed with framing of effective strategies related to the cross border tourism. The grand cross-border tourism strategy is developed. In order to avoid the

collapse of the strategy due to already mentioned obstacles and opposition following recommendations are made:

1. Creation of Package Tourism
2. Clear Distinctions between categories of Visitors
3. Ease in Travel and Communication
4. Necessary infrastructure building and required Structures
5. Allow Closer Interaction between the AJK and J&K Tourism Departments
6. Development of Professional Training Capacities
7. Generation of Private sectors

REFERENCES:

1. PR Chari and Hasan Askari Rizvi, "Making Borders Irrelevant in Kashmir", Special Report 210(Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, September 2008)
2. Rashid Ahmed Khan, and D. Suba Chandran, "*The Kashmir Dispute: Making Borders Irrelevant*" (New Delhi: Samskriti, 2009).
3. Manmohan Singh, "*PM's speech on launch of Amritsar–Nankana Sahib Bus Service*" (speech, Amritsar, March 24, 2006), <http://pmindia.nic.in/speech/content.asp?id=302>.
4. Working Group's report titled "*Jammu and Kashmir: Strengthening Relations across the Line of Control*," January 2007, www.hinduonnet.com/nic/jk/jkreport_2.pdf.
5. Suba Chandran, "*Expanding Cross-LoC Interactions*", Issue Brief 131 (New Delhi: Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, October 2009).
6. www.crossborderchallenge.org
7. www.scmp.com/cross-border-trade-tourism-study-find

(Primary Data collected by)

Interviews with divided families,

Interviews with businessmen in J&K,

Interviews with officers of the Kashmir Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Jammu Chamber of Commerce and Industry,

Interviews with different sectors of society in Rajouri, Poonch, Surankot etc.

Data based on figures provided by the J&K Tourism and Archeology Department, & Planning and Development Department.