



# Ties That Bind, Borders That Separate: The Enduring Impact of Jammu & Kashmir Partition on Divided Families

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## ABSTRACT

The cross -LoC exchange as an outcome of peace process has yielded significant result for building peace in the region and likewise among India and Pakistan. It becomes quite apparent as per the understanding of the people that the exposure to visitors from AJK to J&K particularly to the Poonch and Rajouri has changed their mindset significantly. The study finds that as per the host (families receiving the guest from other side of the LoC) observations, most of the visitors came with perception of the area having lack of religious freedom and sense of suppression of the Muslims whereas the visit has astonished of the same as false propaganda. The other important aspects which really surprise them are the multi-religious society with manifestation of co-existence. Study further finds that the people exchange has shattered much of the propaganda orchestrated form militant organizations operating from Pakistan.

**Keywords:** Peace building, partition, border, conflict, borderland, dialogue, autonomy, diplomacy, ethnicity.

## Introduction

Peace building has a rich history characterized by various people-to-people exchanges and initiatives aimed at resolving conflicts and fostering understanding across the globe. Following World War II, organizations like the European Coal and Steel Community emerged to promote economic cooperation among European nations, laying the groundwork for what would eventually become the European Union. In the late 1970s, the Camp David Accords, facilitated by U.S. President Jimmy Carter, brought together Egypt's President Anwar Sadat and Israel's Prime Minister Menachem Begin, exemplifying high-level diplomacy aimed at achieving peace in the Middle East, although challenges remain.

The transition of South Africa in the 1990s, marked by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission led by figures like Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu, focused on healing the nation post-apartheid through dialogue and restorative justice, promoting understanding among divided communities. Similarly, the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, which involved extensive dialogue between the British and Irish governments and various political parties in Northern Ireland, aimed to address decades of conflict by establishing frameworks for political cooperation and community engagement.

On the African continent, the African Union has facilitated numerous peace initiatives, emphasizing regional dialogue to address conflicts in nations like Sudan and South Sudan, often engaging grassroots efforts for reconciliation. The 2016 peace deal between the Colombian government and the FARC guerrilla group exemplified a comprehensive approach that included community-level dialogue to integrate former combatants and address root causes of conflict. Interfaith dialogues in the Middle East and South Asia have also sought to bridge divides between religious communities, promoting tolerance and collaboration through shared projects.

Furthermore, global initiatives such as Seeds of Peace have focused on youth exchanges, empowering young leaders from conflicting communities to foster peace through dialogue. Overall, these historical efforts underscore the critical role of sustained engagement and community involvement in building lasting peace, highlighting that empathy and collaboration are essential in resolving conflicts.

### **Impact of people interaction on building peace**

People interaction plays a crucial role in building peace by fostering understanding, empathy, and collaboration among diverse communities. As conflict resolution expert John Paul emphasizes, peace building is not merely about formal agreements but about relationships and social structures that support sustainable peace. Through dialogue and shared experiences, individuals can break down stereotypes and build trust, which is essential in overcoming the divides that often fuel conflict. Initiatives like interfaith dialogues and youth exchange programs create opportunities for participants to engage with different perspectives, allowing them to see the humanity in one another and recognize common goals.

Scholar Johan Galtung, known for his work on peace studies, underscores the importance of positive peace—where not only the absence of conflict exists but also the presence of social justice and equality. Such positive outcomes are often nurtured through personal interactions that encourage collaboration and understanding. Moreover, personal relationships formed during these exchanges can create lasting networks that promote ongoing dialogue and cooperation, reinforcing peaceful coexistence.

Additionally, peace activist Mary Robinson highlights how grassroots movements, rooted in personal connections and shared narratives, can drive significant societal change. By empowering individuals to take action within their communities, these interactions cultivate a culture of peace that resonates beyond individual connections. Ultimately, the impact of people interaction extends into the broader societal context, making communities more resilient against the forces of division and conflict.

### **Recent case of building peace through people exchange**

Recent cases of building peace demonstrate the effectiveness of grassroots initiatives in fostering understanding and cooperation across divided communities. One notable example is the Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland (1998), which not only established political frameworks but also emphasized community engagement through dialogue and cultural exchanges. Initiatives like the Seeds of Peace program have been instrumental in bringing together youth from conflict regions, particularly in the Middle East and South Asia, to engage in workshops and collaborative projects that foster friendships and conflict resolution skills.

In South Africa, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), established in the late 1990s, facilitated dialogue between victims and perpetrators of apartheid, allowing for personal storytelling that promoted healing and understanding. Similarly, the Gacaca courts in Rwanda, initiated in 2002, enabled community members to engage in discussions about the genocide, fostering reconciliation through shared narratives.

The Interfaith Dialogue initiatives, particularly prominent in the early 2000s, aimed to bridge divides between religious communities in conflict areas by promoting understanding through collaborative projects and discussions. These cases highlight how sustained people-to-people interactions can lead to meaningful connections, breaking down barriers and paving the way for lasting peace.

### **Voices of Resilience: Peace building in Jammu & Kashmir from a Visitor's Lens**

Pakistan Administered Jammu and Kashmir (PAJK) offer a unique perspective on peace building in the context of the broader Kashmir conflict. For visitors, the region is a blend of stunning natural beauty, rich culture, and complex socio-political dynamics. Engaging with local communities reveals a nuanced understanding of peace efforts and the challenges faced by the people.

Visitors often encounter a deep sense of resilience among the locals, who emphasize the importance of dialogue and cooperation in fostering peace. Community initiatives, such as interfaith dialogues and youth programs, aim to bridge divides and promote mutual understanding. Many locals express a desire for stability and development, highlighting how peace can enhance tourism and economic opportunities.

Cultural exchanges, such as traditional music and art festivals, also play a role in peacebuilding. These events not only celebrate local heritage but also serve as platforms for dialogue among different communities. Visitors often leave with a greater appreciation of the region's complexities and the importance of grassroots efforts in promoting harmony.

Overall, PAJK presents a compelling narrative of how local interactions, cultural expressions, and community-driven initiatives can contribute to peace building, emphasizing the need for empathy and collaboration in resolving long-standing conflicts.

As per Mr. Majid Khan, a young man in his 20's observed that the society (PAJK) has more restriction on female folk in particular and the society in general like fine on drinking alcohol etc. On the other side, it has also been observed that the Indian media/bollywood has substantial takers in PAJK. There seems to be a homogeneous society as he said, "I found almost all in Salwar Kameez and they are astonishingly looking at me having jeans with imperial on my chin". He also maintains that whatever they envisage before the visit turn wrong during their exposure to our area. When asked to specify, he answered "the way they found here the kind of inter-communal relation, religious freedom, freedom to have choices in term of dresses, security and freedom in term of females to get education, freedom even to maneuvered the spaces which otherwise restricted to Muslim".

Another visitor named Firdous Khan also portrayed the views of the people about the politics around the period of 1947 where he said, "Both the generation the post- partition generation and the their next generation have a grudge with the Kashmir's particularly of the Kashmiri politicians during the partition for relegating Poonch to margins, they expect Poonch to be much developed as sequence of its position during partition of the state. They had their vision to see Poonch as the centre point of the state. He also observed that the people there are fed up with the arms culture in AJK and in Mainland Pakistan.

The new generations of the divided families don't have similar kind of emotional attachment the way their elders have seemingly because they are not in their first relation. This very argument raises another question that whether this process can rebuild relationship from where it can be taken forward by the generation next. An matching response is manifested in the conversation with the host over the host –visitor's discussion during their stay over here on contesting kind of society and polity of their respective part. Through different words and expression, the visitors from AJK accept though subtly that the moors of the kind of society and polity here is certainly better as compare to AJK. As per some of the interviewee, this acceptance gave them a feeling of dejection and helplessness. As per the visitor's understanding, the geographical variation in term of development has also been witnessed as the south part (Mirpur, Bhimber) of the PAJK is better developed whereas the north part (Bagh, Rabalakote) is underdeveloped.

The perspective to militancy has also changed over the period of time as it was expressed by one of the visitors during his stay in PAJK. He expressed it with an incident occur in Kotli where the militants meddled into and taken over the role police administration while issuing their writ owing to some quarrel among the locals.

The relations and emotion attached to it are beyond the stricture of religion and seems difficult to drop down with the passage of time. The assee met with Mr. Girdhari Lal Sehgal (84) of Surankote who was the first one to visit to Chakoti (PAJK) in 1988. He met there with his childhood Muslim friends and relatives who have converted to Islam. His story explore the warmth the divided people have for each other which can be validated with his stay as he said, "I traveled to Pakistan with visa of 30 days but the people (my relatives and other friends) have swayed me to stay there for 6 months and I had to come back only as I received a letter informing that my sister- in- law died here in Surankote (J&K)."

### **Local Perspective ( J&K) to the Peace process:**

The intelligentsia of the area is in favor of more interaction among the Muslims of both side and considers this move (peace process) very effective in term of peace in the region. With some reservation, they have appreciation for India particularly due to the Idea of India. At the same time they also expect a bigger role from India at this moment of time. When asked about the kind of role state must play in this region, the answer was unclear, pointing toward taking some steps to address voices of the people of the state particularly of Kashmir hinting slightly toward some sort of demilitarization and delivery on issue of autonomy as well.

On the issue of permit the people are of the opinion to make it more people friendly which are not at this moment of time. There is strong urge to allow the people at least on the occasion of marriage and grief for the divided families. As an alternatives space/policy "Let's have a fixed meeting point on particular time and date for all at a particular point on Loc and will reduce the pressure both on the government and the those who have to act as host to their respective guests from each other side stated by Mr. Firdous Khan.

There is also an urge to make another CBM by opening the Noushera and Jajjar road to revive the original circuit of Mughal road. As per understanding of the local intelligentsia People-to-people and military-to-military ties need to be strengthened. It has also been strongly recommended that there is dire need to have intellectual exchange to cut the ideological moorings (Propaganda) which has jolted the relations between both the countries. In this regards, it has also by few that govt. of J&K and Govt. of India should try to send the local intelligentsia as their ambassador to the other part and will prove more productive for the people, for the government and for the peace in the region . It has also been realized that the SAARC is a source and has to be end of the process of peace in the region. They are also in favor of India to promote secular forces in the state of J&K. The other underlined sagacity has also been reflected by means of tone, words, expression, etc. among the Muslims of the region to value the security and aspiration of the minority in the area.

### **Trade and perspective of the people of J&K**

Trade in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) is deeply intertwined with the region's culture, economy, and sociopolitical landscape. For many residents, trade is not just a means of livelihood but also a vital way to connect with broader markets and cultures. Traditional handicrafts, such as pashmina shawls and papier-mâché items, are renowned globally, allowing artisans to showcase their skills while promoting local heritage. Additionally, agricultural products, particularly fruits like apples, form a significant part of the economy, with many farmers relying on their export for income.

However, the people of J&K often express frustration over barriers that hinder trade. Political instability, restricted access to certain markets, and the impact of conflict create challenges for local businesses and agricultural producers. Many locals believe that improved trade relations, both within India and across the

Line of Control, could enhance economic opportunities and stability in the region. They highlight the potential benefits of increased cross-border trade with neighboring areas, particularly with Pakistan-administered Kashmir, viewing this as a pathway to foster goodwill, create jobs, and stimulate economic development.

Tourism also plays a crucial role in the local economy, as visitors are drawn to the region's natural beauty and rich culture. The people of J&K see tourism as a means to share their heritage while generating income. However, they express concerns about the sustainability and management of tourism, emphasizing the need for responsible practices that protect their environment and culture. Overall, the people of J&K view trade as an essential element of their economic and cultural identity. While they recognize the challenges posed by political and economic barriers, there is a strong desire for greater cooperation and opportunities that trade can bring, fostering both economic growth and peace in the region.

### **Concerns of Jammu people for PAJK people**

As commented by some of them they have a sense of belonging which reflected through their concern about the kind of brain drain occurring in AJK. When asked why it is happening, it has been responded hesitantly that it may be because of the kind of situation and resultant suffocation in Pakistan and also due to the lack of clear guiding principle for the youth of the AJK. It has also been felt that life has become still in Pakistan. As Mr. Farooq said, "people in 1947 went with a notion from 'no Pakistan to a Pakistan' but in this short span, they have been fed up with kind of polity and society over there".

It has also been assessed and highlighted that the Wiring on LoC has divided not only the people but also the wildlife of the region as it is 97 mining areas (200km +1km) thus 200sq.km mining areas approximately. As per interaction with some of the respondents from the Shia community, who have recently visited to AJK., it is being observed that the Shias there are quite less in number and are fearful from others and also from the state. They are also backward and significantly behind vis-à-vis others on many developmental parameters.

### **Administration perspective and peoples exchange**

The administration's perspective on cross-Line of Control (LoC) people exchanges in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) is shaped by a complex interplay of security concerns, political dynamics, and aspirations for peace. While security remains a top priority due to the ongoing conflict and history of violence, authorities recognize the potential economic and social benefits that such exchanges can bring. By facilitating interactions through trade, cultural festivals, and educational programs, the administration sees opportunities to improve livelihoods and foster a sense of shared identity among communities on both sides of the border. Moreover, these exchanges are viewed as crucial for promoting dialogue and understanding, helping to break down stereotypes and build empathy between ordinary citizens. However, challenges such as bureaucratic hurdles, fluctuating political climates, and public sentiment can hinder progress. Ultimately, the administration aims to balance the desire for cooperation and economic development with the need for security, recognizing that a coordinated approach involving various stakeholders is essential for fostering meaningful interactions and lasting peace in the region.

It has been observed that the Militancy has drastically reduced in the area and the CBM particularly of the people- to- people contact has changed the mindset and as a consequent the food to militancy in PAJK. They also stated that people are also feeling exhausted sometime with the stretch of stay of the visitors. The reduction of Militancy has its positive impact on overall reduction crime rate in the area. It has also been informed that the all the militant are from Pakistan and there is no one from the local area.

### **Exchange and change in the sub-region**

Despite of all the odds, there is a significant change in the region. as per the perspective of the people from both side of the LoC, Both India and Pakistan must realize that building peace is a process and also an end in itself. The initiatives taken so far are certainly creating a space to nourish the nascent peace capital fostered by the opening of the cross-LoC routes for travel and trade. The sustenance of such people-to-people relations depends heavily on the blood ties of the divided families. Cross-LoC trade on the other hand is growing significantly with support from Jammu's core business constituency, primed for further expansion. Occasionally, however, negative Indo-Pak posturing and approach brings the trade to a standstill across the crossing points.

The cross-LoC exchange has also given rise to another practice concerning land and ownership rights of the migrants. Cases of monetary demands being made by migrants for their share of the land (they left behind) are not uncommon. Ashfaq Khan of Poonch says, "This is the negative impact of the people-to-people exchange. For instance, visitors from Hajira(PAJK) took more than 50 lakhs in exchange of their share of land here." Many have to compensate with a lot of gifts to the visitors, and this practice is now becoming a burden on the host families. This is further complicated by the fact that people on both sides are primarily agrarian and lower middleclass. Many in the sub-region have indicated and shared similar experiences.



Having said that, similar initiatives should also be encouraged in other areas, such as education, tourism, hydro-power and weather forecasting, since they are unlikely to erode the sovereignty of either state. The issues can be strategized, keeping the welfare of the people in mind, without aggravating fear in either of the state.

Such cross-LoC exchange have also led to the inclusion of Poonch and Rajouri in the peace process, and thereby, to some extent, highlighted their economic and socio-cultural concerns otherwise overshadowed by the larger context of the conflict. This has been articulated by many using a range of expressions. The breathing space generated by the Confidence-building Measures (CBMs) has drastically influenced the outlook of the locals, who are more aware now of the contemporary developments in society and politics both in mainland Pakistan and PAJK.

The civil society also recognizes now that any change here will have to be measured and in keeping with the requirements and sensitivities of India and Pakistan. The multilayered fencing with crossing points offers a mix of permeability and firmness along the LoC in J&K, somehow reinforcing the presence and management of the border (read LoC). This shift in perception over a decade or so in the sub-region has also helped locals desist from joining militant groups on either side of the divide. This has happened because of two key reasons. One, people on both sides are more aware of the ground realities and are able to see through the propaganda to a large extent; as many of the respondents pointed out, visitors from Pakistan or PAJK were surprised to see the plural life of the people in the sub-region. Second, the command and control of the military is almost entire and comprehensive, yet it has coincided with cross-border initiatives, thereby discouraging many from taking up arms against the states.

Cross-border trade has also evoked positivity, and prominent players who are benefitting from the trade are putting their weight behind it to keep it from stalling. The chambers of trade of both Jammu and Kashmir are also backing the trade CBM and its further growth.

As for the cumbersome and protracted system of securing permits to cross the LoC, it has been a common complaint that this system does not fulfil the most important purpose/requirement of the locals — that of crossing over at short notice in moments of sorrow or happiness. This should be addressed on a priority basis and the local District Magistrate should be authorised to issue 'emergency permits' in such cases.

### Conclusion

So far, the CBM of people-to-people exchange appears to be limited to the older generation. This is not because of restrictions by the state, but due to the lack of interest among the younger generations on both sides of the border. The urge to meet relatives across the LoC is higher among those who witnessed the Partition in 1947 and the wars of 1965 and 1971. The emotional bonds are weaker among those who were born later. Jahangir Mir of Rajouri says, "I have relatives and friends in Jammu with whom I meet regularly. However, I share little with my relatives in Pakistan; they are merely related to me." With the passing of the older generation on either side, the people-to-people exchange initiatives are bound to suffer. This is an imminent challenge that needs to be seriously considered by the states and the civil society of India and Pakistan. Both the countries must recognize and realize the purpose of pursuing CBMs. They need to address whether the cross-LoC initiatives are intended for a specific target population, or is it but a starting point and not an end in itself.

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