

# Religious Cultural Tourism in Pakistan: Significance, Opportunities and Its Role in the Socio-economic Development

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The concentrated efforts for proper safeguarding the cultural heritage of a country are about preserving knowledge, skills, and history. It's a way of transferring knowledge or communicating heritage from generation to generation to keep it alive. There is a risk lying that a certain element could die or disappear if the chain broke. Pakistan is home of the centuries-old civilizations like Mehrgarh, Indus Valley, and Gandhara. It hosts scores of archaeological sites dated back more than to 9,000 years. Many of them revered for not only the followers of the world's three major religions namely Buddhism, Sikhism, and Hinduism but also from some pre-historic religions such as Aryan, Barhaman, and ancient Iranian and Greek religions. The northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province of Pakistan hosts 70% of the sites in the country sacred to Sikhs and Buddhists religion. At present the ratio of visitors to religious archaeological sites and monuments is very low as compared to other developing countries, especially the neighboring countries. We can increase in number of tourists from abroad as our country has great potential to attract visitors from the world to visit Hindu Temples, Sikh Gurdwaras, Christians Churches, Buddhist Stupas & Monasteries, Jain Temples, Muslims religious shrines, tombs, and other establishments. The best practices of protection and its proper projection both at home and abroad will increase the volume of travel and religious tourism in our country. Further by adopting such proposed measures and steps will not only present a soft image of Pakistan to the world but can contribute at large for the socio-economic development in the country.

*Keywords:* culture heritage, religious sites and monuments, temples, Gurdwaras, Churches, stupas, monasteries

## Introduction

Pakistan is a melting pot of ancient cultures and civilizations. It is a land of many splendors; each conqueror, traveler, and erudite has left behind an imprint, adding a step to the cultural evolution of this region. The rich history and diversity of cultural and religious heritage of Pakistan is of great importance by cherishing the marvelous historical sites and religious monuments for different faiths such as: Hinduism, Sikhism, Zoroastrians, Jainism, Buddhism, and Muslims. The sovereign state was the newest among the comity of the Nations but had

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the oldest socio-political background going back to the old Stone Age whose existence has been estimated to the period of two million years from today. The distribution of the archaeological sites spread over almost the whole of today's Pakistan shows richness in archaeological sites and monuments.

The dawn of historic period in ancient Pakistan relates to the Achaemenian times. One of the important habits of this period was located at Taxila. Later, the Macedonian invasion led by Alexander the Great in 326 B.C.E. is likewise a great event which served as a catalyst in the process of cultural fusion of East and West in the north-western parts of the Subcontinent. The impetus given to Buddhists by the Mauryan Emperor, Asoka, and the artistic impulses emanating from the Bactrian Greeks in Central Asia led to the fruition of the Gandhara Art under the patronage of the Kushans and their successors. The period from 1st century C.E. to 4th century C.E. is a remarkable period in the history of Pakistan when the sculptural art becomes a hand maiden to spiritual zeal. Besides sculptures, the architecture of Gandhara also has a marked characteristic of its own composition in nature and scope lending towards Ionic and Doric style of Classical Greeks. The temples of the Salt Range areas, especially the Malot temple, are built in foursquare Kashmiri style. Similarly, a group of Hindu temples at Ketas. Southern and Northern Kafirkot at Bilot in Dera Ismail Khan District are noteworthy examples of this religious art. The temples in Southern Sindh, especially the Jaina temple at Gori, in the district of Tharparkar, are typical examples gaining the inspiration. The Hun invaders brought new changes, while the art and architecture were adversely affected when monumental buildings, both religious as well as secular, were put to fire. The period from the 6th to 9th centuries C.E. saw reigning dynasties which were over-thrown by foreign invaders one after the other. The period also witnessed a kind of revival of Hinduism and its religious-cultural activities. During this period, and a little later, Hindu temples were erected at many places of today's Pakistan. The beginning decades of the 16th century witnessed yet another political change in the Subcontinent and brought a new reigning power to the scene. The progenitor of this dynasty as called by modern historian the Moghul Empire was Zahir-ud-Din Muhammad Babur (1526-1530). The Imperial Moghuls introduced a much refined and sophisticated socio-cultural pattern in the society. The way of life so introduced was a happy assimilation of Iranian and local traits and traditions. In the last years of 18th century Sikh Dynasty under the leadership of Maharaja Ranjeet Singh emerged as a growing power in the Punjab and in a short span of time established their power up to the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province of the present-day Pakistan. Many religious and secular monuments of Sikh period are found at Nankana Sahib, Lahore, and Hasan Abdal. With the establishment of British rule, the socio-political set up again underwent a phenomenal change; new ideas and new concepts were brought in to be assimilated with local circumstances. The new concepts played a vital role in formulating an entirely new pattern of socio-political set up of the society (Khan, 1990, pp. 6-7).

The political, historical, archaeological, and cultural history of the land now comprising on present Pakistan testifies that this is the land where a number of religions emerged, evolved, flourished from pre-historic period to the British Colonial period. The land of Pakistan is thickly dotted with different religious sanctuaries such as: Hinduism, Sikhism, Jainism, Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam. The evidences in the shape of both secular and religious establishments of these religions are spread all over the territory. These religious archaeological sites, monuments, and other buildings are centre of their religious thoughts and are considered as holy places for the zealous devotees. As such there is a great attraction for the followers of different faiths and religions to visit their holy places located in the different corners of the country. Further, there is a great potential of religious tourism in Pakistan and the time has now come to give priority for promotion of religious tourism in the country.

### **Legislation and Administration of Religious Cultural Heritage in Pakistan**

The importance and preservation of cultural heritage were provided legal protection by enactment of the Bengal Regulation XIX of 1810 and Madras Regulation VII of 1817. These legislations make the British Government to intervene in case of risks or danger to the ancient monuments. In the year 1844 the Court of the Directors of the East India Company decided to compile the preliminary reports on each temple and building and to select specimens of buildings worthy of delineation. The British colonial legacy is manifested by archaeological explorations, excavations, conversations of ancient monuments and sites, study of epigraphy, establishments of museums including effective legislation on preservation of cultural properties in the Sub-Continent (Mughal, 2011, p. 123). The Ancient Monuments Preservation Act, 1904 was enacted which remained in force till 1964 when it was replaced by Ancient Monuments Preservation (Amendment) Ordinance. In 1968 the Antiquities Act was enacted to replace the 1904 law. But it was in 1975 that the first comprehensive Antiquities Act, 1975 came into force (Zaman, 2011, p. 94). A number of rules have been framed out under the Antiquities Act, 1975 by the Government of Pakistan relating the management, protection, preservation, and maintenance of movable and immovable antiquities in the country. The Antiquities Act, 1975 of the Federal Department of Archaeology and Museums provides guidance and procedure for proper protection of the cultural heritage of the country (Government of Pakistan, Department of Archaeology and Museums, 2010-2018, pp. 7-14). The Federal Government has enacted the National Fund for Cultural Heritage (NFCH) in 1994 with the prime objective of promoting the conservation and preservation of the archaeological, historical and cultural heritage (Zaman, 2011, pp. 96-97).

At provincial level, the Government of Punjab has promulgated the Punjab Special Premises (Preservation) Ordinance, 1985 and Antiquities Act, passed by the Punjab Assembly to regulate the activities of cultural heritage at provincial level. The Government of Sindh has also enacted the Sindh Heritage (Preservation) Act, 1994 for the same purposes as enunciated in the Antiquities Act, 1975 of the Federal Government. The Balochistan Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province has also enacted its Antiquities Act.

### **Protection and Promotion of Religious Archaeological Sites and Monuments in Pakistan**

The British explorers actually had long since started looking at the Indian colonies which were conquered by Britain. William Finch (1608-1611) was among those who first described the Ashoka pillars in Dehli and Allahabad and recorded observations about the architecture of Dehli, Agra, Lahore, and other cities. The first significant author on Indian historical geography was M. D'Anville (1753, 1775) who was concerned with the identification of historical sites that had been mentioned by the Classical authors on India, such as the Palibothra of the classical sources with Pataliputra. In the year 1899, Lord Curzon was appointed as Viceroy in the Sub-Continent. He brought fundamental changes in the policy of the British Government towards the maintenance and preservation of monuments. Due to his personal interest in the preservation of cultural heritage, Ancient Monuments Preservation Act, 1904 was enacted. It is widely presumed that the study of Buddhist archaeology in this region since the beginning of the 18th century started first with an antiquarian interest with no scientific methods or techniques. However, in the beginning of the 20th century, when the subject attracted the attention of the scholarly world, a more systematic and scientific approach was developed (Saeed, 2019).

After independence of Pakistan, Department of Archaeology & Museums (inherited from Archaeological Survey of India created in 1860) was established in 1947 to perform its activities as custodian of cultural heritage

of Pakistan. In early 19th century a large number of explorations, excavations, and conversations of ancient religious monuments and sites were carried out by Archaeological Survey of India such as at Taxila, Peshawar, Lahore, and other parts of the country (Saeed, 2022, p. 27). The Ancient Monuments Preservation Act, 1904 was enacted during the British Rule which remained in force till 1964 when it was replaced by Ancient Monuments Preservation (Amendment) Ordinance. In 1968 the Antiquities Act was enacted to replace the 1964 law. But it was in 1975 that the first comprehensive Antiquities Act, 1975 came into force. The archaeological excavations, explorations, and survey were also conducted regularly in collaboration with foreign archaeological missions from different countries in Pakistan (Mughal, 1996, p. 275).

### **International Practices and Conservation of Religious Archaeological Sites and Monuments**

Pakistan is signatory of several UNESCO conventions, charters, recommendations dealing with cultural heritage and in this capacity is responsible to follow internationally accepted principles of conservation, restoration, and maintenance of cultural properties. The documents deal with conservation of the cultural heritage stress upon respect and maintenance of original character of the monuments and sites. The following international conventions, charters, and recommendations are followed by federal and provincial departments of archaeology for proper protection and conservation of sites and monuments:

- UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, 1972.
- Nara Document on Authenticity, 1994.
- Athens Charter for the Restoration of Historic Monuments, 1932.
- The International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sties, Venice Charter, 1964.
- The European Charter of the Architectural Heritage, 1975.
- Conservation Manual by Sir John Marshall, 1928.
- Burra Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural significance, 1979.
- Florence Charter of the ICOMOS, 1981.
- Lahore Charter for Conservation of Islamic Architecture, 1980.
- Charter for Conservation of Historic Towns and Urban Areas (Washington Charter), 1987.

The management of religious archaeological sites and monuments is not an easy matter of simple administration of staff posting at a site or monument. It involves dealing with several interrelated administrative matters and overall supervision of the works of the entire field staff, engaged to ensure conservation of the remains, protection of sites, and their safety and security against human vandalism and natural disasters. The management plan, conservation plan, tourism plan all are integrated with adoption of appropriate measures for proper protection and conservation of ancient sites and monuments (Mughal, 2011, p. 120).

### **Religious Tourism in the Global Context**

The belief systems or religions of mankind have identified places and events which are linked to personalities, to concepts, values, happenings, and miracles. These all establishments are central to their beliefs. Besides, there are events and holy or religious places, shrines, or related places or establishments to which believers of a religion are required to visit. The visit to a holy river like Ganges for Hindu pilgrims, Kartarpur for Sikh pilgrims, Buddhist stupas or Monasteries for Buddhists, Hajj to Mecca for Muslims or the visits by Christians or Jews to their holy places such as those in the “Holy Land” in fact is a common interest for the people

of different faiths. These all are along lasting form of religious tourism and generate purpose related travels or sustainable forms of tourism (Anthony, 2011, p. 278). Therefore we need to understand and address the problems if we want to achieve the substantial results for the promotion of religious tourism in our country.

According to Moshe Kalia and Eliezer Witztum, modern pilgrimage is often indistinguishable from tourism and people who are traveling mostly look the same. Still by analyzing their motivation, we can see the differences between pilgrim-tourists who travel towards the religious or cultural centers of their spiritual life and travelers-tourists who travel away from them to the periphery of the world. According to the same author, tourism is principally a modern metamorphosis of pilgrimage yet secularization has destroyed their deep structural themes and much of their symbolic significance and mystical powers. This has transformed sacred loci to places of attraction or mere tourist destinations (Kalian & Witztum, 2017). All the people of different faiths such as: Hindu, Sikh, Jews, Jains, Christians, Muslims travel to visit their holy places spread in the different corners of the world. For example, the followers of Hinduism, Sikhism, Christianity, Buddhists etc. have great attraction to visit their holy places which are located in Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Gilgit-Baltistan, and even Azad Jammu & Kashmir. These religious sites and monuments for instance: Hindu Temples, Sikh Gurdwaras, Christians Churches, Buddhist Stupas & Monasteries, Muslim shrines all can flock to travel by millions of people from abroad. Therefore, all the religious sites and monuments belonging to different faiths have great potential for development of religious tourism in the country provided that facilities and arrangements are available for the travelers during their visit of holy places. In fact, faith and fascination with travel towards the religious places are as strong as ever and continue to move millions of people all over the world.

### **The Religious Tourism Market**

The demand for visits to religious places can be increased but so are the possibilities on offer, provided by a broad and varied range of operations. Indeed, there is now a whole universe of companies attuned to the latest developments in the international tourism market, many characterized by exceptional competitiveness and ability to form strategic alliances with the key players in the sector, both public and private. In line with the rules of the market, it efficiently organizes guides, travel reps, and promoters. It has to set up bodies that operate in the context of institutional relations using tools that make it possible to act in the national and internal tourism market. There are many good international examples which can be studied before implantation on a revised proposed policy for promotion of religious tourism in the country. In this context, an Italian example is the leading role played by the CEI (Italian Bishops Conference) whose national office, responsible for leisure, tourism and pilgrimage, operates on a regional level via the CER (Regional Bishops Conference) and on a local level via the dioceses and in some cases parishes, churches, oratories, and sanctuaries. Besides, there are many travel agencies and secular associations that cooperate with ecclesiastical bodies, from which they obtain operational and other indications enabling them to make sure that product reflects the requirements of the individual parishes. The billions of dollars' worth of business generated by the hundreds of millions of people who travel each year for religious motives benefits first and foremost hotels, which have shown great interest in a sector that is able to generate not only wealth but tourist flows even in the low season. In France, for instance the number of hotels in Lourdes is second only to the capital, Paris. In Italy where religious tourism has enjoyed growing success with a total of 5.6 million visits, there are more than 800 religious accommodations structures such as: hotels, religious institutions, monasteries, and convents. Another example is from Administrations of Sicily and Calabria, whose religious tourism in recent years goes to Euro 180 million. In fact, religious tourism favors the creation of the organizational

and communicative networks that are necessary if religious and cultural initiative, commercial and craft activities, places of local culture, museums are to be managed in a rational way. Similarly, religious places represent an important source of income for many institutions and organizations both secular and religious as it generates funding for the maintenance and restoration of the heritage sites (Trono, 2017, p. 125).

### **Management and Planning for Sustainable Development of Religious Tourism**

During 1950s tourism was seen by many countries as a cash cow and apparently little more than that. However, slowly at first but with gathering pace, the development of sustainable tourism and the effective marketing of the industry reached new and impressive levels of sophistication. People began to think of heritage, conservation, and tourism including religious tourism in the same breath, as it became clear that with careful planning, they could be interdependent for the greater good of the economy. There is plethora of examples as case studies as how countries, regions, and local areas have tackled the tourism challenges which they had faced. We can learn from our failures as well as from our successes. The needs and demands in tourism sector can be addressed by adopting proper management and planning system for achieving sustainable economic well-being through religious tourism in our country. Anthony S. Travis (2011, p. 24) has mentioned following four types of models to study and evaluate the performance as well as for obtaining progression in the tourism industry:

- Model A: Multiple stakeholder model, with maximum destination community benefit (MSM-CB).
- Model B: Tourism carrying capacity assessment models (TCCA).
- Model C: Sustainable tourism planning models (STP).
- Model D: Resource management and planning models (RMP).

Anthony S. Travis (2011, p. 293) mentions some forms of tourism which are very long life and these grow out of functions of destinations, for example:

- capital cities: which draw on official or governmental tourism.
- religious centers such as: Kandy, Rome, Mecca, Jerusalem.
- Industrial cities, such as: business tourists.
- Conference or festival cities/resort cities.
- Cities, for educational purposes.

If we consider the above accounts given by the author mentioned above, we can draw a road map for the improvement of our religious tourism in Pakistan. There is a huge scope and potential for the promotion of our religious establishments as we have experienced in the case of Kartarpur, as a stock taking. We need to adopt similar strategy for other religious establishments of Buddhists, Hindus, Christians, Jain, etc. A well-organized management plan with the provision of all necessary substances and infrastructure such as: visa facilitates, approach roads, hotels, shopping areas, and other related amenities is essential to attain and bring successful stories.

The revenue contribution from tourism sector of Pakistan is only 2%. According to the World Economic Forum's Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index, Pakistan is ranked 122nd in the list of 140 countries and the ratio of tourists in our country is lowest among the Asian countries (Tourism Industry in Pakistan, 2019). Travel & tourism is an important economic activity in most countries around the world. As well as its direct economic impact, the industry has significant indirect and induced impacts. According to the report of Country Rankings, the real growth during the year 2018 was 5.9 % as compare to India 7.6 % whereas for total contribution to GDP was 5.8 % as compare to India 7.5 % during the same year. Similarly, total contribution to employment was 2.6% as compare to India 3.0 % growth (WTTC, 2019).

### Comparative Analysis in the Global Context

Today, more than a billion people travel internationally, with around half these journeys destined for developing countries. Pakistan can take advantage of this trend as tourists are interested to experience the religious historical heritage of Pakistan which is home of one of the oldest civilizations in the world. However, despite this wealth of religious tourist attractions, Pakistan's tourism sector trails far behind that of India, Turkey, Sri Lanka, and the region in general<sup>1</sup>. The direct contribution of the travel and tourism sector to Pakistan's gross domestic product is just 2.8 per cent compared to the regional average of 3.5 pc. In terms of receipts from foreign tourists across South Asia (\$33.82 billion in 2016), Pakistan scrapes a share of less than 1 pc of this important source of foreign exchange compared to India's share of 69 pc, Sri Lanka's 10 pc, and Maldives' 7 pc. Moreover, in sharp contrast to the dramatic improvements in the share of travel and tourism to India's economy, in Pakistan, this share has remained fairly stagnant.

If Pakistan's international tourism sector contributed to the economy at similar rates as the rest of South Asia, the gains to GDP would be \$1.5 billion and if Pakistan surpasses South Asia and international tourism contributed at world average rates, the gains to GDP would be \$3.5 billion which is equivalent to the value of Pakistan's largest current export item, cotton. For instance, looking at just domestic tourism to heritage and religious sites in Punjab, the Tourism Development Corporation of Pakistan (TDCP) identifies 480 such sites across the province. Of these, 106 are of historical importance, 120 religious, and a further 26 of both religious and historical importance. Assuming a modest average spend of Rs200 per trip per person and using TDCP data on the number of visits to each site, revenue generation through these domestic visits is currently estimated at Rs54 billion per year which is two-thirds of what international tourists spend in Pakistan each year. With the right policies in place, Punjab alone can contribute a three- to four-fold increase in the revenue generated by domestic tourism.

Pakistan is an especially important for Hindus, Sikhs, and Buddhists tourists. At one point, Punjab was the centre of the only Sikh empire in history. Nankana Sahib, the birthplace of Baba Guru Nanak, is one of the holiest sites for Sikhs, with the potential to attract as many pilgrims as the Golden Temple in Amritsar. About 6,000 Indian Sikhs visit Pakistan, in contrast to over 50 million that visited the Golden Temple which is just 120 kilometers away from Nankana Sahab. The number of pilgrims coming to Pakistan each year and where they stay is controlled and managed for political and security reasons by the state, albeit with fewer restrictions on diaspora Sikhs as compared to Indian Sikhs. According to survey data, a whopping 83 pc of the eight million diaspora Sikhs living outside India have shown interest in visiting Pakistan. In addition, 79 pc of the 20 million Indian Sikhs expressed an interest in visiting Pakistan. In sharp contrast, just 10 pc had actually come to the country. As to compare, Nepal received 230,085 and 150,962 tourists in 2020 and 2021, respectively. In 2022, the number shot up to 614,869<sup>2</sup>. Tourism in India is 4.6% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP). Unlike other sectors, tourism is not a priority sector for the Government of India. The World Travel and Tourism Council calculated that tourism generated 13.2 lakh crore (US\$150 billion) or 5.8% of India's GDP and supported 32.1 million jobs in 2021. Even though, these numbers were lower than the per-pandemic figures; the country's economy witnessed a significant growth in 2021 after the massive downturn during 2020. The sector is predicted to grow at an annual rate of 7.8% to 33.8 lakh crore (US\$400 billion) by 2031 (7.2% of GDP). India has

<sup>1</sup> DAWN, May 2, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> [www.tourism.gov.np](http://www.tourism.gov.np) (accessed on 9-1-2025).

established itself as the 5th largest global travel healthcare destination with an estimated market size of around \$9 billion in 2019, out of the total global travel healthcare industry of \$44.8 billion (2019). In 2014, 184,298 foreign patients traveled to India to seek medical treatment. Similarly, according to the Ministry of Tourism, over 6.19 million and 1.52 million foreign tourists arrived in India in 2022 and 2021 respectively compared to 10.93 million in 2019, representing a -44% degrowth. This makes India the 22nd most visited nation in the world and 8th in Asia and Pacific. In 2022, Gujarat tops India in foreign tourism with 20.17% share in 2022. Gujarat which rose as a global tourism hot spot continues with over 15.40 lakh tourists visiting in 2023. In 2023, 2,509.63 million Domestic Tourist Visits (DTVs) were recorded compared to 1,731.01 million DTVs in 2022.

The World Economic Forum's Travel and Tourism Development Index 2021, which replaced its previous Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report, ranks India 54th out of 117 countries overall. The last edition of the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report, published in 2019, had ranked India 34th out of 140 countries overall. The report ranked the price competitiveness of India's tourism sector 13th out of 140 countries. It mentioned that India has quite good air transport infrastructure (ranked 33rd), particularly given the country's stage of development, and reasonable ground and port infrastructure (ranked 28th). The country also scored high on natural resources (ranked 14th), and cultural resources and business travel (ranked 8th). The World Tourism Organization reported that India's receipts from tourism during 2012 ranked 16th in the world, and 7th among Asian and Pacific countries. The Ministry of Tourism maintains the incredible India campaign focused on promoting tourism in India.<sup>3</sup>

The top 10 countries with the highest number of Buddhists who visited are given in the Table 1 (Pew Research 2020).

Table 1

*Top 10 Countries With the Highest Number of Buddhists (Pew Research 2020)*

S. No.	Country	Number of visitors
1.	China	254,700,000
2.	Thailand	66,120,000
3.	Myanmar	41,440,000
4.	Japan	41,380,000
5.	Cambodia	15,690,000
6.	Vietnam	15,560,000
7.	Sri Lanka	15,440,000
8.	South Korea	10,950,000
9.	India	10,140,000
10.	Malaysia	5,220,000

At present the figure of Buddhist Tourist Visiting Pakistan is less than 2,000 per year who are mainly from Thailand, South Korea, China, and Japan. Total estimated current review from the Buddhist tourists is \$6.0 million per year but if fact there is market of around 500 million people who practice Buddhism around the world who can be attracted to visit their religious places if international level facilities are provided. If we only attract 0.1% of Buddhist 500,000 Buddhist visitor's tourists each year, with potential spending \$3,500 per individual in 10 days, then there is untapped economic potential of \$1.75 billion per year. For instance, improvements in visa restrictions, security, and infrastructure can lead to an increase in tourist numbers and a change in the profile of

<sup>3</sup> <https://kathmandupost.com/money/2024/07/14/tourism-earnings-hit-record-high> (accessed on 9-1-2025).



existing Sikh tourists, which is currently heavily biased towards low-end visitors. Similarly, allowing one-day visas for day trips to Nankana Sahib, a mere two-hour drive from Wagah can boost visits from Indian pilgrims. It is conventional estimates of the economic impact of boosting Sikh tourism that keep the current expenditure profiles and mix of pilgrims as given and assume that a small fraction of the Sikhs that expressed an interest in visiting Pakistan do actually visit, which show an approximately 85-fold increase in Sikh tourists' expenditure on goods and services in Pakistan. The current spend of Rs208 million can reach almost Rs18 billion. This is assuming 44,000 annual visitors with most staying for two weeks, some single-day visits, and spending between Rs4,000 to Rs20,000 per day per person. The gains to the economy, however, are not restricted to these direct expenditures on hotels and transport. They create ripple effects through the economy via indirect and induced expenditures. Hotels purchase more goods and services from their suppliers and expand their facilities. When the region becomes more active as a tourist hub, it increased employment and economic activity spillover to higher spending on all goods and services in the area. Buddhist tourism has an estimated market of 500 million Buddhists across the world. Pakistan's Gandhara region comprising Mardan, Taxila, and Swat holds a special place for them. Korean Buddhists in particular trace their religious origin to the area that is now Pakistan, where Korean monk Hyecho travelled 1,300 years ago. Takht-i-Bahi in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the sites in northern Punjab alone have the potential to attract a major proportion of the 50 million Mahayana Buddhists in Korea, China, and Japan. A 2016 Gallup survey of the Buddhist population across a selected pool of countries identified 58 million "interested visitors" of which 5 pc (2.9 million) were "likely to visit" Pakistan. Poor security situation, lack of marketing and tourist facilities, and the absence of a functional Buddha stupa are currently preventing this potential from being realized. Facilitating these tourists and reaching just 1 pc realization for Pakistan would mean 29,000 visitors a year, with a revenue inflow of \$62.9 million in the near term. Buddhist tourism can contribute over Rs16 billion to GDP and provide employment to 30,772. Tourism remains a key area of cooperation under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, realizing the enormous potential of Chinese tourists and impact on international tourism of overall improvements in infrastructure. There are, however, some additional factors that remain unaddressed. A critical one is an appropriate institutional and regulatory structure that allows for conservation and regulation, provision of facilities, effective management, and data-driven planning to understand and attract tourists in a manner that is environmentally sustainable. The existing institutional and regulatory arrangements for the tourism sector remain weak, complex, and in need of serious reform. The other issues that arise from poor institutional arrangements include poor tourism infrastructure, low involvement of the private sector, inadequate marketing, and low enforcement of quality standards. For example, the Punjab Tourism for Economic Growth Report develops five strategic thrust areas to address these issues and unlock tourism's potential: tourism infrastructure, safety and security, branding, developing talent for tourism services and policies for sustainable tourism that involve and benefit local communities, as well as regulation that preserves heritage sites. With these arrangements in place, Pakistan can look forward to revamping its religious tourism industry to take its rightful place in the country's development (Shaikh & Afraz, 2019).

As mentioned by Shiwani Singh (Singh & Taruna, 2023), talent management (TM) refers to a systematic approach employed by organizations to identify, nurture, incentive, and deliberately deploy their top-performing individuals. TM has been explained as "Systematic identification of key positions, the development of talent pool of high potential and high performing incumbents and the development of a differentiated human resources architecture". It involves the holistic management of an organization's human capital, ensuring that the right individuals are identified, nurtured, and appropriately recognized for their contributions. This approach is crucial

for sustained organizational success, aligning individual skills and potential with business objectives, and fostering a culture of continuous development and strategic deployment of talent resources. Hence, in the case of religious tourism, it is important to explore the impact of talent management practices on sustainable organizational performance for promotion and sustainable religious tourism.

As per U.N. Report (1994) on “The Assessment of the Cultural Impact of Foreign Tourism: Micro Analysis, Cultural Impact of International Tourism in Pakistan”, an analysis of the cultural impact of foreign tourism at micro level has been monitored. This report presents the impact of hosts on guests by a number of forces. There are following indicators:

- Physical indicators.
- Economic indicators.
- Social indicators.
- Moral indicators.
- Cultural indicators.

The present condition of the protection and conservation problems of religious archaeological sites and monuments in Pakistan reveals that there is a great need of coordination and collaboration. Several national laws, rules, recommendations, UNESCO conventions, international charters provide guidelines for proper management and conservation of religious sites and monuments. However, there are still several areas where the implementation on these legislation and rules is weakened and not up to the desired standards. There is no training institute for imparting training in the field of archaeology and its allied subjects; therefore, training institutes may be established at provincial and federal levels for providing regular training facilities to staff engaged in the field of archaeology, museology, and conservation science which will help to overcome the shortage of human resource management in this field. The modern techniques and training equipped with scientific knowledge will provide a helping hand for protection and preservation of ancient sites and monuments in Pakistan. There is a need for the establishment of an active Forum of Association comprising representatives of federal and provincial departments of archaeology & museums, universities, civil societies, and allied organizations.

### **Conclusion**

There are thousands of religious archaeological monuments/sites spread all over the nook and corner of the country which need immediate steps for their study and preservation. Unfortunately, the provincial governments themselves have no arrangements for their record and preservation. Therefore, there is urgent need to create religious monuments & sites branches in all the provinces to carry out extensive surveys to record and document all the religious monuments and sites in their areas and to prepare their digital 3-D documentation. This will help to increase tourism in the country. Pakistani specialists and archaeologists should be encouraged to establish professional contacts with foreign experts, to enhance and up-dating the knowledge in the field of archaeology and tourism.

There is a great need of establishment of conservation laboratories and technical services for the purpose of research, documentation, and conservation of immovable properties at provincial and federal level to meet the requirements of protection and conservation issues. Pakistan is one of the few fortunate countries of the world which has great potential of religious cultural tourism. We can increase the number of visitors to our own country if basic facilities with infrastructure are provided. At first stage facilities like provision of approach path leading to the sites/ facilities of guides, provision of amenities and services should be provided at all World Heritage

Sites, including Taxila, Takh-i-Bahi, Makli Hill Monuments, Lahore Fort and Shalimar Gardens, Rohtas Fort which belongs to Buddhist and Muslims religious communities. This can help to develop and promote peace, religious harmony at international level.

At present the ratio of visitors to sites and monuments is very low compared to other developing countries, especially the neighboring countries. We can increase in number of tourists from abroad as our country has great potential to attract visitors from the world to visit Hindu Temples, Sikh Gurdwaras, Christians Churches, Buddhist Stupas & Monasteries, Jain Temples, Muslims religious shrines, tombs, and other establishments. Further, the conservation of religious archaeological sites and monuments is however, a challenging task which demands a lot of resources and expertise.

We should not ignore the active participation of the local community in the process of protection and preservation of our religious sites/monuments. If we take the task of protection and preservation of our heritage on war footing, then we can succeed in achieving the objective of protection and projection of religious sites and monuments. The best practices of protection and its proper projection both at home and abroad will increase the volume of travel and religious tourism in our country. Further by adopting such proposed measures and steps will present a soft image of Pakistan to the world and to bring boost the socioeconomic tourism in the country.

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