



## From Line of Control to Line of Connectivity: Analysing Socio-Economic Developments in AJ&K

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# **From Line of Control to Line of Connectivity: Analysing Socio-Economic Development in AJ&K**

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## **Abstract**

*Line of Control, the ceasefire line across the divided State of Jammu and Kashmir established under the resolutions of United Nations, has witnessed many episodes of small wars and exchange of fire over the years. There has also been some cooperation across this blood-spattered line, such as the facilitation provided for divided families to travel on cross-border bus service and another initiative to start truck-transported trade on both sides of LoC from two entry points: Chakothi and Tetrinote. These initiatives were relief measures for internally displaced persons of Jammu and Kashmir. These buses and trucks had significant influence on lives, culture, socio-economic development, and infrastructural upgradation. After*

*the abrogation of Article 370 and Article 35-A, these facilities for Kashmiris were terminated. This paper explores the importance of cooperative initiatives for reuniting the divided Kashmiri families and other socioeconomic benefits in Azad Jammu and Kashmir.*

**Keywords:** *Jammu and Kashmir, Socioeconomic, Development, LoC.*

The State of Jammu and Kashmir is separated into two parts as “Azad Jammu and Kashmir” and “Jammu and Kashmir State” respectively under the administration of Pakistan and India.<sup>1</sup> It was British liability under the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June Plan for the division of subcontinent<sup>2</sup> which turned into a perpetual conflict between India and Pakistan. The conflict of Kashmir was triggered after landing of Indian paramilitary forces at Srinagar Airport on October 27, 1947<sup>3</sup> and a rift created between two nascent states, resulting in first limited war and India requested United Nations to intervene on December 31, 1947. United Nations registered as India-Pakistan question<sup>4</sup> and forced opponents to stop hostility and made a temporary line using the term ‘Ceasefire line’.<sup>5</sup> The Line of Control (LoC) which is basically an extension of ceasefire line, somehow works as a de facto border between Pakistan and India.<sup>6</sup>

The LoC was established under the Simla agreement between Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (Pakistan) and Indra Gandhi (India) with not having any legal and international recognition as a boundary. It is

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<sup>1</sup> Snedden Christopher, *Understanding the Kashmir and Kashmiris* (London: Hurst & Company, 2015), 08.

<sup>2</sup> Tarar M. Rafique, (Former President of Pakistan) *PTV News*, 21:00, October 13, 1998.

<sup>3</sup> Aziz Qutubuddin, *Jinnah and Pakistan* (Pakistan: Islamic Media Corporation, 2001), 129.

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Security Council Resolution 38 adopted January 17, 1948.

<sup>5</sup> <https://peacemaker.un.org/indiapakistan-karachiagreement49>. Seen on March 15, 2021.

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.ipcs.org/comm\\_select.php?articleNo=209](http://www.ipcs.org/comm_select.php?articleNo=209) seen on March 20, 2021.

740 kms long and starts from Dhalan to NJ9842 with an imaginary line towards Karakorum pass<sup>7</sup> and separates the state into two main parts: Jammu and Kashmir State and Azad Jammu and Kashmir State. Former US President Bill Clinton referred to Kashmir Line of Control as one of the most dangerous places in the world.<sup>8</sup>

Over decades, both the disputants India and Pakistan tried to normalize their bilateral relationship and revisit their Kashmir policies especially in post nuclear testing era, at the insistence by international community after the Kargil War. The softening border theory was accepted by both to develop peace process in Kashmir with the help of confidence building measures (CBMs).<sup>9</sup> This proposal remained under discussion of both countries from 1999-2000 and matured in 2003 which was supported by ceasefire and talks for peace between India and Kashmiri leadership along with militant groups.<sup>10</sup> The official announcement of the agreement was held on February 16, 2005 by General Musharraf (President of Pakistan) and Natwar Sing (Minister of External Affairs of India) with other multiple agreements like Lahore-Amritsar bus service, Thar Express train service and opening of consulates in Karachi and Mumbai. It was further stated that Srinagar-Muzaffarabad Bus Service can be used to facilitate all the Kashmiris across the divided state who wish to travel anywhere across the LoC.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Sing Jasjit, *Defence form the Skies, Indian Air force Through 80 Years*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. (India: KW Publishers,2017), 221-245

<sup>8</sup> "BBC News, South Asia, Analysis: The World's Most Dangerous Place?," News.BBC.Co.UK.

<sup>9</sup> Ajay Gandhi, et. al., *Rethinking Markets in Modern India, Embedded Exchange, and Contested Jurisdiction* (Cambridge Printing House, 2020), 209.

<sup>10</sup> "India, Pakistan Seal Deal on Srinagar-Muzaffarabad Bus link," *The Hindu*, February 17, 2005.

<sup>11</sup> "Pakistan Foreign Policy and its Impacts," *Selection from Regional Press*, Vol. 24 (Pakistan: Institute of Regional Studies, 2005), 02.

In the result of a long phase of negotiations between India and Pakistan in post 9/11 scenario, the agreement on the CBMs was considered as a great initiative of facilitation of Kashmiris across the divided line through “Bus and Truck service” aiming towards reunion of separated families and restoration of mutual trade April 7, 2005, and October 2008<sup>12</sup>, respectively. Old Pindi-Srinagar route was the pioneer link in joining the divided families of Kashmiris after multiple decades from Muzaffarabad to Srinagar via Chakothi and Uri. After one year and couple of months, a new route also opened from Tetrinote, Poonch District across the LoC during June 2006 with the proposal of opening three more routes from Sharda, Tethwal and from Mirpur to Rajouri, which still is waiting for a decision.<sup>13</sup>

The transformation of the Line of Control (LoC) into Line of connectivity in April 2004 and October 2008 was carried out in the light of CBMs which is, indeed, a serious effort from the international community, local public of India and Pakistan, Kashmiris and many organizations who are working on peace making and peace building in the conflicted areas. This happened to mitigate the alarming situation when two nuclear-armed nations went to a limited war in Kargil, which was seen as a serious threat to the region and even the entire globe by the organizations involved in peacemaking and building security regimes; these entities demanded that both the countries gave serious thought to resolve the issue of Kashmir and designed CBMs to reduce the conflict through easing the Line of Control. The crossline trade initiative enjoyed support and encouragement by the locals and business communities across the LoC despite frequent and multiple hurdles emerging from the Indian side. The main motive behind this was to bring together all

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<sup>12</sup> Hafeez Mahwish, “The Line of Control (LoC) Trade: A Ray of Hope,” *Pakistan: Strategic Studies*, 34, no.1 (2014): 74-93.

<sup>13</sup> Taneja Nisha & Samridhi Bimal, “Revisiting India Pakistan Cross-LoC Trade,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, 50, no. 6 (2015): 21–23.

the Kashmiris, to give a soft gesture to international community and leading this LoC further to a soft international border between Indo-Pak. It is also a platform to establish a ground for people on both sides to feel the importance of a peaceful resolution of this decades old conflict by putting pressure on their respective governments. However, positive results of the trade initiative had been doubted when a group of scholars argued that the India was using it as a delaying tactic and will gradually merge the Jammu and Kashmir State into the Indian territories.<sup>14</sup> Another aspect of these measures considered as the divergence of the international media upon the human rights violation in Jammu and Kashmir. These both narratives are somehow meaningful in the context of international politics and Indo-Pak traditional rivalry, but it is also a reality that the transportation across LoC was more than a blessing in the region.

This initiative got acceptance from the locals and the Kashmiri diaspora due to the following factors:

- Pakistan, as well as international community, predicted reduction in Indo-Pak conflict
- Analysts comprehended it as a peaceful resolution of Kashmir dispute although its barter-based model as exchanging of goods left a gap of intercommunication.
- No foreign aid was involved and there were limited chances of financial litigation
- A limited quantity of trade items made smuggling monitoring and enforcement easy

Pakistan established two entry points at Chakothi in the Jhelum Valley, which linked with Uri in pre partition era on the Pindi-Srinagar Road, and another point was Tetrinote (Rawalakot), followed through Pindi-Rawalakot Road. Each point monitored, supervised, assisted, and controlled through a center named as Trade

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<sup>14</sup> Mahwish, "The Line of Control (LoC) Trade," 74-93.

Facilitation Center while the Indian government followed same pattern and established an entry point to cross from Chakothi entry point named Salman Abad which links with Srinagar through Baramulla and Uri. At Tetrinote, an entry point was launched at Chakan-Da-Bagh, Poonch from Indian side. On both Salman Abad and Chakan-Da-Bagh trade facilitation centers were also established to unload the trade goods or wait and rest center from the travelers and drivers.<sup>15</sup> These centers were working as a market as well where traders met and deliberated about dealings.

Some other points on LoC also introduced, both formal and informal, at which Kashmiris crossed the line to meet or talk to each other in Neelum Valley at Tethwal-Pahalian, Keren from both sides, Sharda from both sides, Haji Peer Pass and Tatta Pani regions. LoC cross trade is initiated following especial mechanism of standard operating SOPs accepted by both India and Pakistan which comprised upon undue modalities and restrictions on the movement of buses and trucks, TORs for the drivers and their permits, security and scrutiny, time schedule, prescribed items, and route safety measures while trade implemented through procedures.<sup>16</sup> The LoC trade has noteworthy impact upon the revenue generation and labor-based project.

The figures which are generated by independent press of Jammu and Kashmir shows, in cross Line of Control trade which conducted four days in a week comprised upon exchange of 70 trucks per day which earned an awesome amount about 7500 crore Indian Rupees during 2008-2019 with production of 170000 job days for the labors and the transportation sector got the revenue of 66 crore, while it is only a miniature project but it is the beneficiary of many local businessmen, traders, transport related persons are earning in this sector. Amid

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<sup>15</sup> Z. I. Dar & S. K. Bathia, "Indo-Pak Cross-LoC Trade Hitches: Tweaking through Trade Facilitation," *India: International Journal of Research Culture Society*, 01 no. 06 (August 2017): 72.

<sup>16</sup> Akhtar Shaheen, "Expanding Cross-LoC Interactions: A Conflict Transformation Approach to Kashmir," *Spotlight on Regional Affairs* 31, nos. 1-2 (2012): 15.

questions over economic viability, sustainability and national security implications, cross-LoC trade survived more than a decade, until this trade was suspended in April 2019.<sup>17</sup>

The euphoria of the locals and traders on both sides of LoC died down post-5<sup>th</sup> August measures of Indian Government taken to revoke the status of Jammu & Kashmir State. In common perception the truck across the Srinagar Road from Azad Jammu & Kashmir are not only luggage shifting one side to the other side, but also indeed a livelihood for people and more than that they were enjoying the fragrance of their soil by exchanging items on Chakothi and Tetrinote.<sup>18</sup> Hence, one constitutional decision by India has had profound socioeconomic implications for the valley-dwellers. The fruit and vegetable merchants in Jammu and Kashmir protested for weeks demanding the Muzaffarabad-Lahore route to be opened for their trade in India and Pakistan.<sup>19</sup> Hence, this service was a fruitful source of employment and trade on the both sides of LoC for the Kashmiris although its trade status is only barter system but the calculation in Azad Kashmir side, announced by traders in a press conference during the suspension of this service, is about ten thousand Kashmiris who are associated in this trade and have lost their livelihood. The business of silk and carpet houses in Srinagar encouraged the public in Azad Kashmir towards trading in Gabba, rig (Namda), Kashmiri embroidery, Shawl weaving, Kashmiri Pheran for male and for females. Kashmiri dress is unique and splendid in entire world and this Pheran is a sign of our solidarity and unity with the people of Jammu & Kashmir, Hence, it is not only a piece of dress but upcoming days it could be converted into strong influential local industry in Kashmir which can be one

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<sup>17</sup> <https://thewire.in/south-asia/why-cross-loc-trade-must-resume-after-the-covid-19-crisis>

<sup>18</sup> Chandran D. Suba, *Cross-LoC Trade: Challenges and Opportunities in J&K* (India: Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, 2008), 208.

<sup>19</sup> "The Greater Kashmir," June 25, 2016, 3.



impressive point of attraction for the visitors in Azad Kashmir on ‘Pheran Day’.<sup>20</sup>

These arrangements, although look temporary but they have great contribution to socio-economic awareness and boost up local industry in a highly conflicted zone. A multidimensional prediction by a senior bureaucrat, Secretary Law and Parliamentary Affairs of the Government of Azad Jammu & Kashmir, Mr. Irshaad Ahmed Qureshi, informed during an interview that, in Medina Market Muzaffarabad, more than 30 traders engaged with Kashmiri cultural dresses and embroidery centers were being inaugurated every other day, focusing specifically on Kashmiri shawls. He further reiterated,

It appears to me that this travel and trade facility has brought us in pre-partition era and it is also a fair but surprising change in Azad Kashmir markets, which are now turning into tourism industry, and these cultural products and handicrafts will likely bring implications on the promotion of tourism in Azad Kashmir. it’s a great opportunity for the citizens of AJK that they promote this industry to enhance their per capita income in such a zone where 98% public relies on and struggles for government jobs and services.<sup>21</sup>

A huge problem, from 1947 to 2004, in Azad Jammu and Kashmir was that of infrastructure, especially the damaged roads. The Pindi-Srinagar Road which was constructed during 1890-1910 under the supervision of Sir Walter Lawrence had been turned into a seasonal road. In the winter season, the main highway from Kohala to Chakothi and Kohala to Dhirkot Road used to be terminated and damaged, although reconstructed and remained under maintenance throughout the year. For the Muzaffarabad-Srinagar Bus service, this road was handed over to Frontier Works Organization (FWO) and later to National Highways Authority (NHA) which invested and controlled the land sliding and erosions through the construction

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<sup>20</sup> Minhas Mushtaq, Interviewed on “*Kashmiri Pheran Day*” on February 13, 2020, to Geo News.

<sup>21</sup> Irshaad Ahmed Qureshi, Interviewed in the Office of Law Secretary govt. of AJ&K Muzaffarabad dated. September 02, 2020, at 14:00.

of protection walls on both sides of the road especially in the damaged areas. The betterment of Jhelum Valley Road (Pindi-Srinagar Road: from Domel to Chakothe known as Jhelum Valley Road) brought positive changes in the region, especially in trade. New markets, food corners, food points, bazars were established. The businessmen from AJK and Pakistan invested in this region especially on tourism and micro businesses.

The impacts of this suspended initiative can be described as,

- The most significant contribution of Buses and Trucks is reunion of the divided families across the LoC which had been separated from the last 57 years;
- the trade and travel service had a great importance for internally displaced persons;
- the bus route from Srinagar to Muzaffarabad was the only practical step taken towards socioeconomic development.<sup>22</sup>

According to one local interviewed for this study,

It is more than heavenly blessing for us because we could not expect that we can meet with my mother, sisters, brothers and other family members. These buses are trucks are really brought magical changes for us that we are finding realization of our dreams by reuniting our families once in a year after scattering in post partition incidents.<sup>23</sup>

Exchange of people, ideas and culture are very important for resolution of political conflicts in postcolonial states, and AJ&K is

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<sup>22</sup> Lalwani Sameer P. and Gillian Gayner, *India's Kashmir Conundrum: Before and After the Abrogation of Article 370* (Washington: US Institute of Peace, 2020), 46.

<sup>23</sup> Khan Sardar Attique, *Interview to Press and Electronic Media about LoC trade* in Prime Minister House AJ&K Muzaffarabad dated. January 02, 2007 at 14:00. (Sardar Attique Ahmed Khan is the Son of Sardar Muhammad Abdul Qayyum Khan who was legendary politician of Kashmir and contributed to freedom Movement and was also elected Prime Minister of Azad Jammu and Kashmir twice during 2006 and 2011 respectively. He was when LoC trade was initiated, he was Prime Minister of AJ&K).

no exception.<sup>24</sup> The trade across LOC was indeed a step in the right direction. In the words of Sardar Zulfiqar Ali, manager of trade facilitation centers,

‘Goshtaba’ is becoming very common food dish on hotels in wedding functions and public parties, as well as, Kashmiri Shawls, Stallers, Kurtas, dresses are very common in markets which are imported from Srinagar. Now we are moving back to our originality and roots through acquiring our own culture heritage which is unique around the globe.<sup>25</sup>

In addition to the social merits, the tourism industry saw rise. The minister of Information, Cultural Heritage and Youth Affairs in AJ&K elaborates it as,

After the Kashmiri Sikhs arrival in Muzaffarabad, now, old temples in city and historical bridge on Jhelum (Vatista) River at Domel is decorated again and again because it was the “Baradari” in pre partition era, now our government is serious to make a comprehensive plan for maintenance, conservation, and fabrication of these points because these are our cultural assets. I can mention some more places in Azad Jammu and Kashmir where non-Muslims were inhabited in pre-partitioned era and it is suggested, and I will propose to the Prime Minister to construct an archaeological museum in Muzaffarabad but due to lack of funds this proposal delayed presenting date.<sup>26</sup>

The most significant feature of the truck and bus service is a revival of old relationships and solidarities across the LoC with strengthening personal interaction and social communication which

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<sup>24</sup> The land of Kashmir is indeed rich in terms of culture, especially handicrafts, wood carving, shawl weaving and carpet making which following by hundreds of years old tradition and spectacular heritage. But after the partition most of these assets were limited to the valley of Kashmir, even not flourished in Indian major states due to moisty condition and conflicted atmosphere had throttled this historical asset.

<sup>25</sup> Tremblay Reeta Chowdhari, “Kashmir’s Secessionist Movement Resurfaces: Ethnic Identity, Community Competition and the State,” *Asian Survey*, 49, no. 6 (USA: University of California Press, 2009): 924–50.

<sup>26</sup> Chandran D. Suba, *Expanding Cross-LoC Interactions: Perspectives from India* (India: Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, 2009), 87.

resulted in cross border marriages and economic partnership. One factor which cannot be ignored is that India did not want to make this arrangement sustainable, durable, and permanently functional and indulged again in aggression, suppression and blackmail of all Kashmiri parties' conditions and regulations related to security clearance.

After the abrogation of Article 370, the travel and trade were suspended and have not been restored. Nisar Ahmed Rather, an expert on Indo-Pak relations, mentioned that it is assumed that the restoration of trade and travel will be on Indian terms and conditions and for this purpose Wahga border trade module will be adopted just for the induction of visa and passport regimen and not for any significant and comprehensive exchange.<sup>27</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The trade and travel across the LoC had been launched in the result of CBMs between India and Pakistan for softening the line of control on both sides to reduce the political tension and to introduce several measures for the much-needed socioeconomic development in this war-torn region; however, India suspended this program of healthy exchange for political reasons. For peace efforts to be sustainable in the region, it is imperative that the international community impartially asks for the restoration of fundamental rights in Jammu & Kashmir State and cross-border trade is an important step in this regard.

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<sup>27</sup> Nisar Ahmed Rathar, *Oral Discussion* in his office, *Daily Siasat*, Muzaffarabad. Dated: August 09, 2020, at 16:00. (Nisar Ahmed Rather was among those passengers who travelled in pioneer convoy of Muzaffarabad-Srinagar Bus Service).