



Volume and Issues Obtainable at the Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management- The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Bahawalpur, Pakistan 63100.

Journal of Tourism, Hospitality, and Services Industries Research

ISSN: 2958-5570 ; ISSN (E): 2958-5589

Volume 3, No.2, Dec 2023

Journal homepage: <https://journals.iub.edu.pk/index.php/jthsir>

DOI: 10.52461/jths.v3i02.2291

## Opportunities of Heritage Tourism in Neelum Valley, Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Pakistan

Dr. Rukhsana Khan, University of Azad Jammu & Kashmir, Muzaffarabad

Dr. Zafeer Hussain Kiani\*, University of Azad Jammu & Kashmir, Muzaffarabad

### ARTICLE DETAILS

### ABSTRACT

#### History

Revised format: Nov, 2023

Accepted: Dec, 2023

#### Keywords

*Heritage, Tourism, Neelum Valley, Archaeological Route, Historical Connectivity*

The present study is an attempt to explore the opportunities of heritage tourism in Neelum Valley. Being situated in the north of Muzaffarabad Neelum valley is capital of the state of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJ&K). The valley is enriched with natural beauty and a home to many archaeological sites. Since the ceasefire with India in 2004, the valley has attracted a vast majority of tourists and the number is increasing every year. The study, being exploratory in nature, aims to address the deprivation caused by the conflict in the valley and find out a way forward in order to utilize the potential heritage resources of Neelum Valley for its socio-economic development. The study concludes that there are many opportunities of heritage tourism in Neelum Valley. Being a gateway to China and having many sacred religious sites, the valley has a great potential for tourists.



© 2023 The authors, under a Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial 4.0

\*Corresponding author: [zafeer.kiani@ajku.edu.pk](mailto:zafeer.kiani@ajku.edu.pk)

### Introduction

The Neelum Valley is the largest district of Azad Jammu and Kashmir in terms of area. It is rich in both natural and cultural heritage resources. It is located at the juncture of north south corridor linking Gilgit Baltistan with rest of Pakistan and divided by the Line of Control in the east from the volatile valley of Indian administered Kashmir. The insecurity due to conflict in the Neelum Valley and cross LOC firing for the last three decades has caused socio-economic deprivation and stagnation which needs to be addressed through a conscious effort. In the last few years, the Governments of Pakistan and India have showed interest in starting heritage tourism across the Line of Control. Travel and trade initiative that began in 2005 and 2008 respectively is an example of agreement on both sides to devise mechanism for peace in this conflict torn area. The opportunity to explore heritage tourism as a tool to bring peace and harmony in the region is a viable option. The cultural heritage tourism initiative across divide will have a domino effect on safeguarding heritage sites and devising

conservation strategies to protect natural resources including forests, biodiversity and ecology in the Neelum Valley, Azad Jammu and Kashmir.

### **Understanding of Heritage Tourism**

Heritage encompasses landscape; environment, monuments and artifacts passed from one generation to the other and have the potential to be used as a tool to improve social and economic conditions. As discussed in 1972 UNESCO World Heritage Convention, the cultural heritage particularly archaeological sites, historical buildings, vernacular architecture and artistic expressions are portrayed as tourism products. Neelum Valley possess vast natural resources and cultural heritage sites which have never been identified and utilized for developing a vibrant and eco-friendly tourism industry in the area. This realization provides great opportunity to use these cultural heritage resources for socio-economic uplift of this area which remained underdeveloped for decades due to natural and manmade disasters. United Nation World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) underlines the significance of heritage tourism as follows:

Tourism involves movement of people among various cultures and civilizations often countries or places outside their usual environment. The movement of people across cultural and social spectrum fashions tolerance, social and economic improvement. The tourism industry is one of the most dynamic and fast-growing economic sector in the world.<sup>1</sup>Heritage tourism becomes pivotal in supporting communities in their quest for peace and sustainable development. It is important to ensure that heritage tourism sustains and benefits local community culturally, socially and economically. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council and World Tourism Organization (WTO), “Heritage tourism has the potential to bring people together and create opportunities for individuals to learn and understand each other, fostering mutual respect and tolerance”.

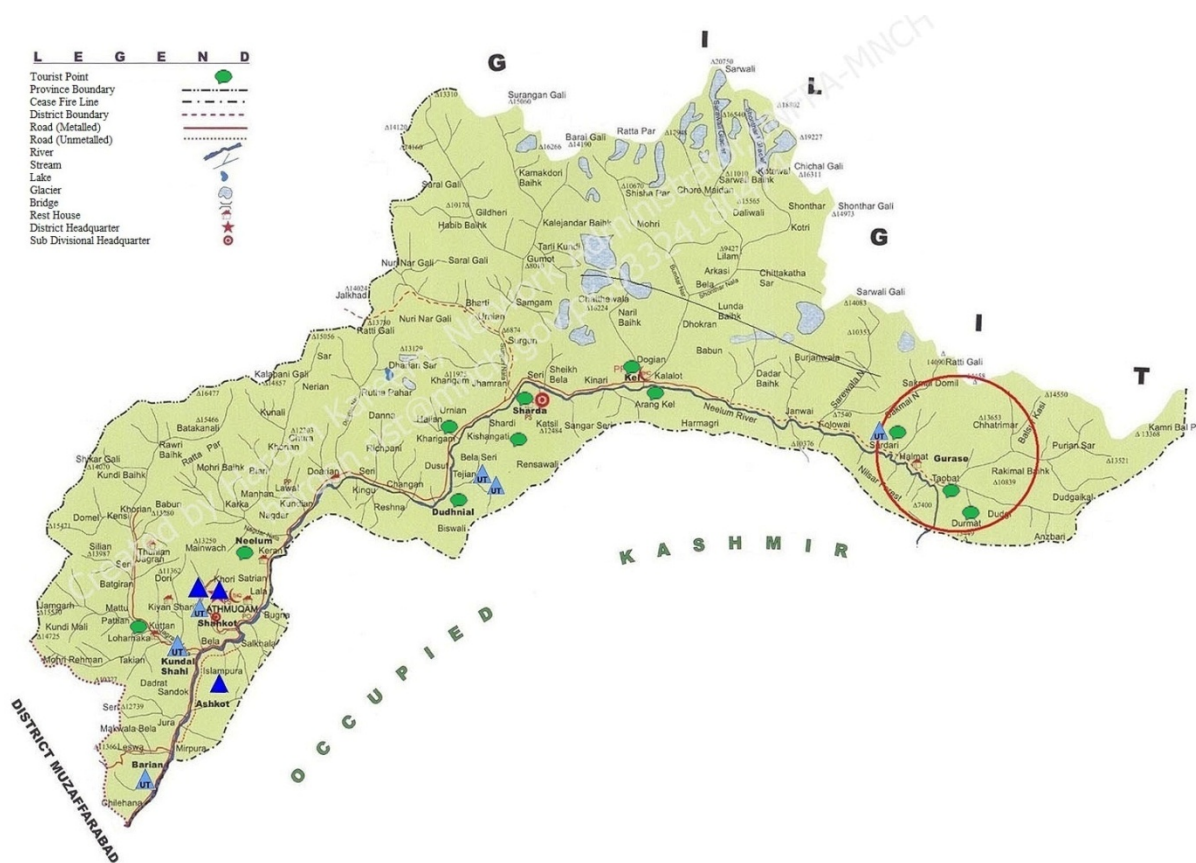
Heritage tourism plays an important role in cross cultural exchange bringing people closer from different cultures. It helps to learn about different languages, life style and traditions. Many areas on both sides of LOC in the Kashmir remain isolated for extended period of time every year due to inaccessibility in extreme weather and difficult terrain conditions. These areas are more prone to disasters and have limited access and underdeveloped infrastructure. Most of the families and tribes living along LOC in these isolated areas are divided. Traditions and mutual celebrations such as Eid, annual gatherings at shrines, marriage gatherings and other occasions of mutual festivities have been affected due to the divided social groups across LOC. Heritage tourism can revive and boost the cultural and traditional ways of life of people across divide in Kashmir.

### **Developing Neelum Valley for Tourism**

In January 2004, South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) conference was held at Islamabad. In this meeting, a number of confidences building measures CBMs were initiated between two parts of Kashmir to normalize the situation, create friendly relations and encourage the peace process. These dialogues (Vajpayee- Musharraf) include the cease fire on borders, opening of natural routes across the LOC via Rawalakot, Poonch

and Muzaffarabad to Uri-Srinagar, meeting of divided families and starting of trade and tourism ventures. After the implementation of these CBMs and the cease fire, socio-economic condition started improving in the area. Neelum Valley was given the status of a district with the administration infrastructure placed at Athmaqam where educational and health units were built. Communication infrastructure took place and Muzaffarabad to *Taobat* road was reconstructed. Hundreds of locals got jobs in construction projects. Travel time from Muzaffarabad to Athmaqam and Taobat shortened, and travellers could take personal vehicles up to Taobat. The following map shows the tourist spots in Neelum Valley which can be utilized as attractions for the tourists not only from Pakistan but also from other countries specifically from the other side of the LoC:

In 2005, a massive earthquake struck the state of Azad Jammu & Kashmir. It is estimated that more than 780,000 buildings were either destroyed or damaged beyond repair, and many more were rendered unusable for extended periods of time. After the earthquake, foreign NGOs and foreign experts were allowed in the valley for a short period for rehabilitation of projects which infused new hope among people. In December 2005, the then Prime Minister of Pakistan, Shaukat Aziz, while visiting Poonch, announced that AJ&K would be opened for tourism to exploit the area's full potential and to help generate economic opportunities for the people. The Neelum Valley was embracing the benefits of peace and normalcy and in a short span of time. Several government and private tourist resorts were established in the area to accommodate the tourists. The flourishing of tourism brought financial benefits to the local community who rented out their homes for the tourists. New construction of road and communication infrastructure in Neelum Valley brought the influx of tourism. The most affected areas of *Karen* and Neelum village were ideal for developing tourist resorts owing to the proximity, scenic beauty, site seeing and trekking opportunities.



***Fig. 1: Map of Neelum Valley***

## Potential of Heritage Tourism in Neelum Valley

The valley was located on the crossroads of connecting routes converging on the Silk Route from the east, south and southeast. Monks, pilgrims, travelers and traders from far and wide visited or passed through this valley. The scope of the heritage tourism is multi-dimensional which offers rich and diverse cultural heritage resources in both tangible and intangible forms. Traces of this broad cultural material from pre-history to present day have been catalogued. This narrative of remarkable cultural wealth is multi layered as various civilizations (i.e. Buddhist, Shiva, Sikh, Hindu, & Muslim) and many religions lived through various phases of history and left their marks. Ancient written records (e.g., Raj Tarangini) confirm the legacies from the layered history of this area which are entwined in natural tangible forms such as mountains, peaks, passes, ancient routes, lakes and archaeological remains. Ancient texts prove that the valley remained an important center of attraction for people of diverse religions, scholars, sages, mentors and cultural backgrounds.

In the backdrop of modern understanding that heritage can significantly contribute towards socio-economic development and create opportunities in conflict affected areas the potential aspect of natural and cultural resources in Neelum Valley are described below. In his speech in Pakistani parliament on April 21, 2015, the Chinese president emphasised the importance of peace in the region saying that peace, development and cooperation are the theme of our great times. He said that the vast and richly endowed South Asia has boundless potential for development. The hard-working and talented people of South Asia are making vigorous efforts to speed up development in the region and turn it into a new pole of growth for the world economy. Being social-economically advance neighbour, China is a key player on the

international stage. A peaceful and stable South Asia that enjoys development and prosperity serves China's interests. China is ready to pursue its development strategy with that of the South Asian countries in mind to realize mutually beneficial development and prosperity. Overall for conceptualizing this study, we have followed the guidelines provided in the previous research in the social science research (e.g., Ahmed, Nawaz, & Rasheed, 2019; Anser et al., 2022; Anser et al., 2020; Chang et al., 2022; Gulzar, Ahmad, Hassan, & Rasheed, 2022; Hameed et al., 2019; Hameed, Muhammad Naeem, Rasheed, & Moin, 2023; Iqbal et al., 2021; Kanwal, Pitafi, Rasheed, Pitafi, & Iqbal, 2022; Kanwal, Rasheed, Pitafi, Pitafi, & Ren, 2020; Khalid, Weng, Luqman, Rasheed, & Hina, 2022, 2023; Khan, Liu, Khan, Liu, & Rasheed, 2020; Khizar, Iqbal, & Rasheed, 2021; Rasheed, Pitafi, Mishra, & Chotia, 2023; Rasheed & Weng, 2019; Rasheed, Weng, Umrani, & Moin, 2021; Rasheed, Yousaf, & Noor, 2011).

### **Use of Natural Routes**

The natural resources which could be attractive for tourist are divided into four categories. The potential natural resources which can be exploited to promote cultural heritage tourism across the divide can be categorized as archaeological route, natural-based route, cultural route and agriculture route. A most recent example of such routes is the Kartapur Corridor which is a religious corridor that connects the Gurdwara Darbar Shaib in Pakis to the border with India. The following sections outline the connection of these routes to natural recourses.

### **Archaeological Route**

These routes connect Neelum Valley with Kashmir Valley from Kupwara, Indian administered Kashmir. Aurel Stein adopted this route when he visited the Neelum Valley in 1892 for documentation of Sharda Temple. There are significant archaeological ruins on these routes beside remnants of Pre-historic era. Nearly six kilometer descends from *Saran* mountain top, there is a village *Reshna*, situated on the left bank of the river Neelum. An ancient mound occupied with round standing burial and variety of pottery fragments scattered everywhere. Next is *Dudnial*, another well-known village that is situated on both sides of river. Aurel stein crossed the river Neelum from village *Dudnial* and camped at *Nagdar* village which is gateway to northwest regions. This route can be declared as archaeological route on either side of LOC and should be opened for the scholars, researchers and archaeologists to explore ancient history of the region.

### **Natural-based Route**

The natural routes connecting Neelum Valley with rest of regions have remained in use since 500 BC. These natural land routes were used by trade caravans, monks and travelers. The passes in the high mountain ranges such as Shounter, Burzal, Babusar, Tanghdar, Tootmar and Drass-Kargil facilitated the movement across the high mountain ranges. These passes are as important as the archaeological ruins and have been in use since the settlements began. In Rawota village where Kishenganga Valley is connected with Valley of Kashmir, the ruins of ancient watch tower on a mountain pass along with several winepresses lying in filed terraces. This shows the significance of the natural routes. These places provide attractive branding material for these tourist destinations. Similar routes and sites provide an

opportunity to be integrated in overall tourism destinations map of the valley so that every nook and corner of the area can benefit from diversifying tourist destinations.

### **Cultural Route**

*Mukhtaseri Hyhom* is mentioned as a sacred site where pilgrims performed rituals before starting their visit for Sharda Temple from different parts of Kashmir. In the Neelum Valley, this site is now identified as *Saran* Mountain range known as *Ladie* top. *Mukhtaseri Bheik* is woodland with vast stretches of grassy lands and a rock allied with lord *Ganesh*. On the other side of this mountain peak is situated Kupwara District of Indian held Kashmir, which was once known as Baramulla trade route. This place is known as *Band Hook* by native Muslims and *Ganesh Pal* by Kashmiri pundits (Pundit, Omkar, personal communication, March 2, 2015). During annual pilgrimage to Sharda Temple, the devotees stayed over there for night and perform ritual *Pooja*. One of the most famous rituals is to prepare sweetened fried bread and offer to *Ganesh* god. In the legendary work, archaeological site is important for devotees as *Sharda Mahatmya* mentioned that the place is associated where Goddess Sharda danced for an austere *Muni sandilya* who practiced hard to get sight of goddess. In summer, nomads stayed with their live stocks and performed rituals by tying animal hair on the trees surrounding to the *Ganesh* rock boulder. They believed that this practice enriched animal's stocks. *Ganesh Pal* is situated on pilgrimage trek which started from *Laderwan* to Sharda Temple which was at the distance of one day trek. This cultural route has great potential for reviving the traditional, pilgrimage route for the devotees of goddess Sharda. Moreover, it can have significant attraction for the general tourist across the divide.

### **Agricultural Route**

The Agricultural routes include the places which were used for rice cultivation and fruit plantation. One of the relatively unknown areas of Neelum valley with vast tourism potential is the Surgun Valley. The Surgun is at an altitude of 9,000 ft. above sea level and lies on the northern border of Gilgit Baltistan. It has houses, unique flora and medicinal herbs on the mountain top. In the south, the rugged areas *Chowkibal*, Karnah Gali and Leepa Valley, which are the best red rice producing areas, can be linked with surroundings areas. Similarly, a number of small hamlets in the valley grow rare vegetables and wild eatables. Knowledge from the locals can be shared across the areas divided by the LOC.

### **Benefits of Heritage Tourism in Neelum Valley**

Neelum Valley in Azad Kashmir had remained a significant hub of regional connectivity in the past. Due to conflict, this area became delinked from rest of the region. Cross-LOC heritage tourism will provide an opportunity for the Neelum Valley to materialize its potential in regional connectivity. Intra-regional cooperation can promote land connectivity for tourist destinations coupled with complementary location for tourists as it can attract more tourist arrivals to such connected and diverse destinations. It will contribute to build trust and confidence among the regional countries in promoting other fields of cooperation. Azad Kashmir, especially the Neelum Valley, offers great trans-regional complementary tourist destinations as it sits along major connecting routes linking north south and east west. More importantly, in the wake of revival of Silk Route, it could become a resourceful tourist

destination. The cross-LOC heritage tourism will further promote the already flourishing tourist industry and help to manage the heritage assets of the area. The heritage tourism across divide not only can help to protect and safeguard these resources but also help to establish sustainable peace in a conflict zone. The initiative of Indo-Pak cross border bus service through Chakotti is an instance of flourishing of tourism in conflict zone. Heritage tourism is a form of alternative tourism which has potential to bring sustainable and positive peace. The heritage tourism across divide in Kashmir can effectively address several other aspects in this conflict area. Tourism in the Kashmir across divide will ultimately support local communities. Integration of natural and cultural resources to achieve peace through cross LOC tourism will pronounce an opportunity for sustainable development on both sides of LOC filling the voids and denying space to uncertainty and violence. It will also empower the stakeholders and broaden the range of options. The option of cross LOC tourism in the Valley will give hope to the local population across divide and help reduce tensions in the region. The peaceful environment and normalcy would encourage people to adapt normal lives and continue their traditional ways of life based on agricultural farming and traditional craftsmanship which would revive, strengthen and promote local economy.

It would also help reforestation and conservation since local community will find it beneficial to protect its natural resources. The Line of control divided and isolated many remotes areas on both sides. Number of hamlets and villages along Neelum Valley remain inaccessible due to extreme weather condition or difficult terrain over a quarter of the year. These areas are more prone to disasters, have limited access and lack of communication infrastructure. These remote areas could be made accessible by constructing roads and providing them the basic means of communication. Furthermore, many of the families living along LOC are divided. This opportunity of cross LOC will not only help to reconnect the divided families but also promote the dividing shared traditions including linguistic links. These people have been sharing the same heritage, cultural and historical legacies for centuries.

In the absence of any industrial development and declining agricultural productivity, the mainstay of the AJK economy, the tourism industry, can play an important role in expanding livelihood opportunities especially in remote areas of the Neelum Valley. Unique historical, geographic importance and rich heritage makes Neelum Valley inviting for cultural heritage tourism. People of the Neelum Valley have suffered immensely due to conflict in the past. Cross LOC cultural and heritage tourism in the Neelum Valley will revive cultural connectivity and will open socio-economic development opportunities in this conflict affected area. It will also contribute in developing a counter narrative for promoting peace in the region. On May 18, 2017, Abdul Basit, Pakistan High Commissioner to India, while answering questions on opening of Sharda heritage site for the state subjects of Jammu & Kashmir replied, "Government of Pakistan is developing an infrastructure in the area and planning to restore the heritage sites for the tourism across divide." Cross-LOC cultural heritage tourism in Neelum valley will open avenues for political, social and economic boom to entire population of the valley. Measure to assimilate and brand cultural heritage sites promote diverse tourist destinations in the Valley. It is likely to give a boost to economic activities on either side and provide local population with economic incentive to establish services, auxiliary industries and revive the local art & crafts. The economic benefits of cross LOC tourism will positively influence political impasse. The tangible results cross LOC for

tourism will broaden the scope of peace initiatives and improve people-to-people contact between the two sides. Trade and travel initiative across LOC which began in 2005 and continues despite set back to the relations between Pakistan and India is a visible example of workable solutions through such initiatives. Tourism, as an industry, with its several ancillary branches, will be a major boom for the region. A number of emerging prospects in the region also call for exploring viable solutions to issues effecting socio-economic conditions in these conflict areas. Neelum Valley remained gateway to the ancient Silk Road which can be incorporated again as a tourist destination along the new Silk Route. The field study conducted by the researcher during 2012-16 reveals that the community played a pro-active role toward safeguarding its heritage. This fact strengthens the aspect of acceptability of tourism among local community and adaptation of archaeological and ancient heritage sites for branding the cross-LOC tourism destinations.

### **Reviving Composite Heritage**

Composite heritage is a peace building tool that is effective in developing harmony among the community members and creating a tolerant society. A number of heritage sites on both sides of LOC are revered by people across the divide. In Neelum Kishenganga Valley, Sharda *Peeth* and its associated sites have great reverence. Sharda attracted not only Kashmiri pundits: *Acharya*, *Gurus* and *Gautama*'s but also some renowned Muslim Sufi saints such as Syed Jamal-ud-Din and Baba Abdullah who came to the Valley to visit this site. A disciple of Syed Ali Hamdani by the name Syed Jamal-ul-Din came to the Neelum Kishenganga Valley in 1430 during the rule of King Zain-ul-Abidin Buddha Shah. He remained in this Valley till his death. His grave is on the left bank of Madhumati stream few kilometers south east of Sharda Temple.

Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin Bud Shah (1420-1470 AD), a revered king, visited Sharda Temple and also visited Syed Jamal-ul-Din's shrine. It is narrated that until late the pilgrims who visited Sharda also visited the tomb of Syed Jamal-ul-Din. The centuries old Banyan tree overshadowing the shrine of this Sufi saint is the only plant of its kind in the NeelumKishenganga Valley. It is said that this plant was brought from saint's native place, Uzbekistan. During Sharda Ashtami night (a ritualistic bath in Hindu religion) the visiting devotees and Sadhus used to visit Syed Jamal-ul-Din's tomb to seek blessings. Similarly, Muslims used to visit Sharda *Maiee* (elderly lady) shrine. This was a tradition which ensured syncretism and tolerance in a diverse religious and cultural environment.

There are saintly abodes which were visited by Muslim pilgrims from valley prior to divide until mid-80s. Visitors from Indian side of *Kernah* Valley were allowed to visit *Tharah Sharif* shrine located in AJK along LOC in Leepa Valley. Hindus are required to undertake pilgrimages once during their life time. It is believed that *Chard-ham* or four holy pilgrimage destinations (Badrinath, Kedarnath, Ganotri and Yamunotri) lead to moksha, the lead from samsara (cycle of rebirth). So, pundits living in Indian held Kashmir hope to visit these sites once in their lifetime to perform their religious duties. Mir Tariq, Journalist Daily newspaper in Indian held Kashmir, told the researcher during his visit to Islamabad, Pakistan that:

Kashmiri pundits and other civil society organizations of state of Jammu & Kashmir demand the opening of Sharda shrine in Neelum Valley for religious tourism so they could have *Darshan* of this old temple. In this way, the annual yatras of the shrine could be



revived. Sharda Temple and its associated sites received pilgrims from all over Kashmir. The annual visit or *yatra* was conducted before partition during the months of August and September. This place is still revered by locals as shrine of Sharda *Maiee* (elderly lady). Similarly, People of Neelum Valley have great reverence for shrine of *Hazrat Bal* in IHK. Even today, the people from west of LOC send offerings to *Hazrat Bal* through the relatives who visit other side of LOC via bus service. There are several such sites which are revered on both sides of LOC and through cultural heritage and religious tourism the people can get an opportunity to visit these religious places. It would help bringing peace and understanding across LOC. It would benefit local economy as well.

### **Historical Personalities**

There exist rich historical linkages between Neelum Valley and Kashmir Valley on the one hand and Central Asia on the other which can attract tourists from both sides. Major routes from Kashmir and Central Asia converged at Neelum Valley. The trade and transit movement created regional linkages through the Valley. Muslims undergo *ziyarat* which is a pilgrimage to sites associated with Sufi saints. Local pilgrimage traditions, under taken as a visit to local graves of *Sufis*, are also found throughout Muslim countries including Kashmir. Nagdar is the largest village of Neelum Valley. Recently, a number of archaeological sites were documented from this village. One of the several old sites is the shrine of ‘Three Sufi Syeds’ that occupies the eastern slopes facing LOC across the river. It is narrated that in 1398 CE, these Sufi Syeds were beheaded by King Timur Lane. People flock here and seek blessings. Couple of kilometers away, there exists grave of another saint Qalandar Baba. This shrine is revered on both sides of LOC by all communities. Prior to division, people from all communities from Kashmir visited this shrine but after divide a similar shrine of *Qalandar Baba* was built on east of LOC which is also visible from *Nagdar* village in Neelum Valley. Bukhari (*The Friday Times*, September, 2018) writes that the most significant connection, the Kashmiris have with this side of the world is Tajikistan where the most revered preacher and saint Mir Sayyid Ali Hamdani is buried in Kolab. Kashmiris have unflinching loyalty with him and a route like this, if opened, would connect them with a great civilization where their most admired saint is buried. He is also known as Ameer-e-Kabir. He travelled to Kashmir and converted majority of people to Islam. The Muslims across the divide can also visit these graves and holy shrines such as there are groups in divided Kashmir who are traditionally associated with Sufi shrines in Centre Asia. For writing the literature review of this paper, we have followed the guidelines provided in the previous research in the social science research (e.g., Luqman, Masood, Shahzad, Imran Rasheed, & Weng, 2020; Luqman, Masood, Weng, Ali, & Rasheed, 2020; Masood, Feng, Rasheed, Ali, & Gong, 2021; Moin, Omar, Ali, Rasheed, & Abdelmotaleb, 2022; Moin, Omar, Wei, Rasheed, & Hameed, 2021; Murtza & Rasheed, 2023; Naeem, Weng, Hameed, & Rasheed, 2020; Nand, Pitafi, Kanwal, Pitafi, & Rasheed, 2020; Nisar & Rasheed, 2020; Nisar, Rasheed, & Qiang, 2018; Rasheed, Malik, et al., 2020; Rasheed & Murtza, 2023; Rasheed, Okumus, Weng, Hameed, & Nawaz, 2020).

### **Bridging Linguistic Across Divide**

Being an important component of intangible cultural heritage, language strengthens social cohesion and peace through its folklores, poetry and stories. The division of state of Jammu

& Kashmir has affected the languages of the region. Professor Khawaja Rehman has elaborately dealt with this topic. Kashmiri is spoken amongst majority of Neelum Valley population and it is the second major language in this area which would connect with Kashmiri speaking tourists from across LOC. It has a potential to revive the linguistic bonds between two sides of Kashmir. Researchers on both sides of LOC are working on dying languages in this area. Access to this area to linguists and researchers would benefit the academia as well as documentation of intangible heritage. Tourism across LOC can revive linguistic connectivity between Neelum Valley and Kashmir Valley.

### **Celebrating Nowruz Together**

Neelum Valley has a legacy of being a cultural melting pot. An important festival Nowruz is celebrated since centuries. *Baisakhi*, a Hindu festival, has become synonymous with *Nowruz* in this region. It is celebrated to welcome the start of spring and cultivation season when snow melts and the flowers bloom. *Nilamata Puranas* mention customs and rituals of Kashmir along-with other sacrosanct places along the archaeological ruins of Sharda in Neelum Kishenganga Valley.

In March 2015 Pakistan along-with eleven other countries (Afghanistan, India, Iran, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan) has signed the multi-national nomination file of UNESCO's representative list of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) This would bridge cultural diversity beyond borders. India and Pakistan should consider relaxing travel restrictions so that members of these divided cultures could organize and join regional festivals and border *meals* (gatherings) along LOC. Mutual festivals like *Nowruz* can play an important role across divide in AJ&K and Gilgit Baltistan, northern areas of Pakistan.

### **Opportunity for Researchers**

Impact of 2012-2015, documentation will be significant and would definitely provide a solid base for creating interest in further researches in the area. The value and importance of the sites improve and enhance after its documentation and scientific study. However, the present research can be said to be the initial efforts and it can best be treated at the primary stage but again it would spark great interest for scholars and researchers across LOC and beyond. The salvage excavation, carried out in 2014 near Sharda Temple site, suggests that evidence of layered remains of various periods exist. These initial discoveries need further advanced and carried on till the entire cultural wealth of the valley has been properly and scientifically recorded.

### **Community Participation in Protecting of Heritage**

Local community in Neelum Kishenganga Valley is playing a proactive role in protecting its cultural heritage. The civil society from the Valley owns and takes pride in its heritage. Sharda Save Committee has been formed to protect and safeguard its heritage. The local community is quite supportive of the idea of cross LOC cultural heritage tourism.

## Way forward to Utilize Opportunity of Heritage Tourism

The religious places in the Valley such as Sharda archaeological sites & shrines and historical monuments and other sites of cultural significance revered on both sides by all communities have been surveyed and documented. As a first step, these archaeological and cultural places must be preserved and restored so that they can attract tourists. Initially, persons from pre-divide era who are still alive and desire to visit their birthplaces, ancestral places and ancient temple, shrines and natural sites can be given opportunity to fulfil their lifelong desire on humanitarian grounds. This would pave the way for expanding the religious tourism. A recent research conducted by University of Azad Jammu & Kashmir and University of Srinagar; Indian administered Kashmir shows that the frequent travel across LOC has facilitated communication and helped to maintain the endangered languages spoken in AJK.

Researchers and scholars from both sides can play an important role in conservation and safeguarding of shared history. They can also address the issues of climate change and its effect on cultural heritage, ways of life of people and the region including safeguarding the endangered biodiversity. Overall, our findings are aligned with the findings of the research published in the social sciences (e.g., Hong, Rasheed, Sigala, & Ahmad, 2023; Wang, Azam, Murtza, Shaikh, & Rasheed, 2023; Weng, Rasheed, & Yue, 2020; Yousaf, Humayon, Rasheed, Ahmed, & Danish, 2014; Yousaf, Rasheed, Hameed, & Luqman, 2020; Yousaf, Rasheed, Kaur, Islam, & Dhir, 2022; Zhang, Rasheed, & Luqman, 2020; Zhang, Wu, & Rasheed, 2020; Peng, Liang, Fatima, Wang, & Rasheed, 2023; Pitafi, Rasheed, Kanwal, & Ren, 2020; Rana, Gaur, Singh, Awan, & Rasheed, 2022; Rasheed, Aslam, & Sarwar, 2010; Rasheed, Hameed, Kaur, & Dhir, 2023; Rasheed, Humayon, Awan, & Ahmed, 2016; Rasheed, Jamad, Pitafi, & Iqbal, 2020; Saleem, Rasheed, Malik, & Okumus, 2021; Sarwar, Aslam, & Rasheed, 2010; Sarwar, Danyal Aslam, & Imran Rasheed, 2012; Umrani et al., 2022).

To convert the conflict sites into peace tourism, some villages and small towns that have been totally destroyed during conflict in 1990s can be converted into museums or peace parks. These villages include Parli, Lala and Lawat. In order to initiate the process, some important routes should be opened for local divided families and religious tourists to visit the shrines and places of worship across LOC for short durations. These routes may be opened on special occasions such as Eid, Nowruz, Urs (anniversaries at shrine). This can be facilitated through local arrangements without any help of the state or central governments. Opening Neelum Kishenganga Valley for cultural heritage tourism in the wake of revival of Silk Route is imperative of time. By opening these areas for tourism, the adjacent belts of the Silk Route will be integrated in the border peace and development initiatives which will strengthen the discourse of regional peace and harmony. In the absence of sustainable economic opportunities, utilization of indigenous cultural heritage resources is important for peace and development in the Kashmir region. The above-mentioned steps, if taken seriously, will transform the region into a model peace zone and it may become an excellent model for converting a conflict zone into a peace zone. The area may also attract international peace activists and encourage the international community to replicate the model in conflict ridden areas.

## References:

- Ahmed, H., Nawaz, S., & Rasheed, M. I. (2019). Self-efficacy, self-esteem, and career success: the role of perceived employability. *Journal of Management Sciences*, 6(2), 18-32.
- Anser, M. K., Yousaf, Z., Yasir, M., Sharif, M., Nasir, M. H., Rasheed, M. I., . . . Majid, A. (2022). How to unleash innovative work behavior of SMEs' workers through knowledge sharing? Accessing functional flexibility as a mediator. *European Journal of Innovation Management*, 25(1), 233-248.
- Anser, M. K., Zaigham, G. H. K., Imran Rasheed, M., Pitafi, A. H., Iqbal, J., & Luqman, A. (2020). Social media usage and individuals' intentions toward adopting Bitcoin: The role of the theory of planned behavior and perceived risk. *International journal of communication systems*, 33(17), e4590.
- Chang, Y.-S., Yue, Z., Qureshi, M., Rasheed, M. I., Wu, S., & Peng, M. Y.-P. (2022). Residents' waste mobile recycling planned behavior model: the role of environmental concern and risk perception. *International Journal of Emerging Markets*(ahead-of-print).
- Chheang, V. (2013). *Tourism and regional integration in Southeast Asia. (No Title)*.
- Chari, P. R., Chandran, D. S., & Akhtar, S. (2011). *Tourism and peacebuilding in Jammu and Kashmir*. US Institute of Peace.
- Chari, P. R., Chandran, D. S., & Akhtar, S. (2011). *Tourism and peacebuilding in Jammu and Kashmir*. US Institute of Peace
- Chheang, V. (2011). Angkor heritage tourism and tourist perceptions. *Tourismos*, 6(2), 213-240.
- Gulzar, M. A., Ahmad, M., Hassan, M., & Rasheed, M. I. (2022). How social media use is related to student engagement and creativity: investigating through the lens of intrinsic motivation. *Behaviour & Information Technology*, 41(11), 2283-2293.
- Hameed, Z., Khan, I. U., Sheikh, Z., Islam, T., Rasheed, M. I., & Naeem, R. M. (2019). Organizational justice and knowledge sharing behavior: The role of psychological ownership and perceived organizational support. *Personnel Review*, 48(3), 748-773.
- Hameed, Z., Muhammad Naeem, R., Rasheed, M. I., & Moin, F. (2023). *How does Leadership Transform Saudi SMEs Into Green Firms? The Role of Ethical Leadership, Green HRM*. Paper presented at the Academy of Management Proceedings.
- Hussain, S., Khan, F., & Ayaz, M. *FWU Journal of Social Sciences*, Winter 2021, Vol. 15, No. 4, 149-164.
- Hong, S., Rasheed, M. I., Sigala, M., & Ahmad, M. (2023). Is there a bright side of COVID-19? The influence of conscientiousness and extended TPB on the tourists' eco-friendly behaviour. *Current issues in Tourism*, 1-5.
- Iqbal, J., Yu, D., Zubair, M., Rasheed, M. I., Khizar, H. M. U., & Imran, M. (2021). Health consciousness, food safety concern, and consumer purchase intentions toward organic food: The role of consumer involvement and ecological motives. *Sage Open*, 11(2), 21582440211015727.
- Jomhuri-ye, S. E. M. Y., & Irān, E. Y. Motto. <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/28721-pakistan-signs-unesco-ich-list-nowruz>.
- Kanwal, S., Pitafi, A. H., Rasheed, M. I., Pitafi, A., & Iqbal, J. (2022). Assessment of residents' perceptions and support toward development projects: A study of the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor. *The Social Science Journal*, 59(1), 102-118.
- Kanwal, S., Rasheed, M. I., Pitafi, A. H., Pitafi, A., & Ren, M. (2020). Road and transport infrastructure development and community support for tourism: The role of perceived benefits, and community satisfaction. *Tourism Management*, 77, 104014.

- Kaneda, H., Nakata, T., Tsutsumi, H., Kondo, H., Sugito, N., Awata, Y., & Kausar, A. B. (2008). Surface rupture of the 2005 Kashmir, Pakistan, earthquake and its active tectonic implications. *Bulletin of the Seismological Society of America*, 98(2), 521-557.
- Khan, R. (2019). *Cultural Heritage Resources of Neelum Valley: Challenges and Opportunities* (Doctoral dissertation, PhD Dissertation, Taxila Institute of Asian Civilizations, Quaidi-Aza
- Khalid, J., Weng, Q. D., Luqman, A., Rasheed, M. I., & Hina, M. (2022). After-hours work-related technology use and individuals' deviance: the role of other-initiated versus self-initiated interruptions. *Information Technology & People*, 35(7), 1955-1979.
- Khalid, J., Weng, Q. D., Luqman, A., Rasheed, M. I., & Hina, M. (2023). After-hours work-related technology use and individuals' deviance: the role of interruption overload, psychological transition and task closure. *Kybernetes*, 52(1), 158-181.
- Khan, S. U., Liu, X., Khan, I. U., Liu, C., & Rasheed, M. I. (2020). Assessing the investors' acceptance of electronic stock trading in a developing country: the Mediating role of perceived risk dimensions. *Information Resources Management Journal (IRMJ)*, 33(1), 59-82.
- Khizar, H. M. U., Iqbal, M. J., & Rasheed, M. I. (2021). Business orientation and sustainable development: A systematic review of sustainability orientation literature and future research avenues. *Sustainable Development*, 29(5), 1001-1017.
- Khan, R. (2019). *Cultural Heritage Resources of Neelum Valley: Challenges and Opportunities* (Doctoral dissertation, PhD Dissertation, Taxila Institute of Asian Civilizations, Quaidi-Azam University Islamabad, Pakistan).
- Khan, R. (2019). *Cultural Heritage Resources of Neelum Valley: Challenges and Opportunities* (Doctoral dissertation, PhD Dissertation, Taxila Institute of Asian Civilizations, Quaidi-Azam University Islamabad, Pakistan).
- Laonayor, W. (2013). *The impact of tourism on Ban Ton Tan community and proposal for preservation of local heritage and tourism management*.
- Lyon, S. M., & Wells, E. C. (Eds.). (2012). *Global tourism: Cultural heritage and economic encounters*. Rowman Altamira.
- Luqman, A., Masood, A., Shahzad, F., Imran Rasheed, M., & Weng, Q. (2020). Enterprise social media and cyber-slacking: an integrated perspective. *International Journal of Human-Computer Interaction*, 36(15), 1426-1436.
- Luqman, A., Masood, A., Weng, Q., Ali, A., & Rasheed, M. I. (2020). Linking excessive SNS use, technological friction, strain, and discontinuance: the moderating role of guilt. *Information Systems Management*, 37(2), 94-112.
- Misra, A. (2010). *India-Pakistan: coming to terms*. Springer.
- Masood, A., Feng, Y., Rasheed, M. I., Ali, A., & Gong, M. (2021). Smartphone-based social networking sites and intention to quit: self-regulatory perspective. *Behaviour & Information Technology*, 40(11), 1055-1071.
- Moin, M. F., Omar, M. K., Ali, A., Rasheed, M. I., & Abdelmotaleb, M. (2022). A moderated mediation model of knowledge hiding. *The Service Industries Journal*, 1-13.
- Moin, M. F., Omar, M. K., Wei, F., Rasheed, M. I., & Hameed, Z. (2021). Green HRM and psychological safety: How transformational leadership drives follower's job satisfaction. *Current issues in Tourism*, 24(16), 2269-2277.
- Murtza, M. H., & Rasheed, M. I. (2023). The dark side of competitive psychological climate: exploring the role of workplace envy. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Insights*, 6(3), 1400-1418.
- Naeem, R. M., Weng, Q., Hameed, Z., & Rasheed, M. I. (2020). Ethical leadership and work engagement: A moderated mediation model. *Ethics & Behavior*, 30(1), 63-82.

- Nand, S., Pitafi, A. H., Kanwal, S., Pitafi, A., & Rasheed, M. I. (2020). Understanding the academic learning of university students using smartphone: Evidence from Pakistan. *Journal of Public Affairs*, 20(1), e1976.
- Nisar, S. K., & Rasheed, M. I. (2020). Stress and performance: Investigating relationship between occupational stress, career satisfaction, and job performance of police employees. *Journal of Public Affairs*, 20(1), e1986.
- Nisar, S. K., Rasheed, M. I., & Qiang, W. (2018). They can't safeguard you when they are under stress: An exploratory study on issues and problems of job stress in police. *International Journal of Police Science & Management*, 20(2), 124-133.
- Peng, M. Y. P., Liang, Z., Fatima, I., Wang, Q., & Rasheed, M. I. (2023). The nexus between empowering leadership, job engagement and employee creativity: role of creative self-efficacy in the hospitality industry. *Kybernetes*.
- Pitafi, A. H., Rasheed, M. I., Kanwal, S., & Ren, M. (2020). Employee agility and enterprise social media: The Role of IT proficiency and work expertise. *Technology in Society*, 63, 101333.
- Rana, J., Gaur, L., Singh, G., Awan, U., & Rasheed, M. I. (2022). Reinforcing customer journey through artificial intelligence: a review and research agenda. *International Journal of Emerging Markets*, 17(7), 1738-1758.
- Rasheed, M. I., Aslam, H. D., & Sarwar, S. (2010). Motivational issues for teachers in higher education: A critical case of IUB. *Journal of management research*, 2(2), 1.
- Rasheed, M. I., Hameed, Z., Kaur, P., & Dhir, A. (2023). Too sleepy to be innovative? Ethical leadership and employee service innovation behavior: A dual-path model moderated by sleep quality. *Human Relations*, 00187267231163040.
- Rasheed, M. I., Humayon, A. A., Awan, U., & Ahmed, A. u. D. (2016). Factors affecting teachers' motivation: An HRM challenge for public sector higher educational institutions of Pakistan (HEIs). *International Journal of Educational Management*, 30(1), 101-114.
- Rasheed, M. I., Jamad, W. N., Pitafi, A. H., & Iqbal, S. M. J. (2020). Perceived compensation fairness, job design, and employee motivation: The mediating role of working environment. *South Asian Journal of Management*, 14(2), 229-246.
- Rasheed, M. I., Malik, M. J., Pitafi, A. H., Iqbal, J., Anser, M. K., & Abbas, M. (2020). Usage of social media, student engagement, and creativity: The role of knowledge sharing behavior and cyberbullying. *Computers & Education*, 159, 104002.
- Rasheed, M. I., & Murtza, M. H. (2023). *Dark Side of Competitive Psychological Climate: The Role of Workplace Envy and Trait Self-Esteem*. Paper presented at the Academy of Management Proceedings.
- Rasheed, M. I., Okumus, F., Weng, Q., Hameed, Z., & Nawaz, M. S. (2020). Career adaptability and employee turnover intentions: The role of perceived career opportunities and orientation to happiness in the hospitality industry. *Journal of hospitality and tourism management*, 44, 98-107.
- Rasheed, M. I., Pitafi, A. H., Mishra, S., & Chotia, V. (2023). When and how ESM affects creativity: The role of communication visibility and employee agility in a cross-cultural setting. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 194, 122717.
- Rasheed, M. I., & Weng, Q. (2019). *How to maintain career adaptability under abusive supervisor? The role of coworker support*. Paper presented at the academy of management proceedings.
- Rasheed, M. I., Weng, Q., Umrani, W. A., & Moin, M. F. (2021). Abusive supervision and career adaptability: The role of self-efficacy and coworker support. *Human Performance*, 34(4), 239-256.
- Rasheed, M. I., Yousaf, H. D. A. S., & Noor, A. (2011). A critical analysis of performance appraisal system for teachers in public sector universities of Pakistan: A case study of

- the Islamia University of Bahawalpur (IUB). *African journal of business management*, 5(9), 3735.
- Rehman, K. (2011). Language Shift In the Neelam Valley: A Case Study of the Kundal Shahi Language. *Unpublished doctoral dissertation*. Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad.
- Sarkar, S. K., & George, B. P. (2010). Peace through alternative tourism: Case studies from Bengal, India. *The Journal of Tourism and Peace Research*, 1(1), 27-41.
- Scientific, U. E., & Organisation, C. (1972). Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage.
- Saleem, S., Rasheed, M. I., Malik, M., & Okumus, F. (2021). Employee-fit and turnover intentions: The role of job engagement and psychological contract violation in the hospitality industry. *Journal of hospitality and tourism management*, 49, 385-395.
- Sarwar, S., Aslam, H. D., & Rasheed, M. I. (2010). Hindering Factors of Beginning Teachers' High Performance in Higher Education Pakistan (Case Study of IUB-The Islamia University of Bahawalpur). *International Journal of Education*, 2(1), 1.
- Sarwar, S., Danyal Aslam, H., & Imran Rasheed, M. (2012). Hindering factors of beginning teachers' high performance in higher education Pakistan: Case study of IUB. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 26(1), 27-38.
- Setiawan, B., & Timothy, D. J. (2000). Existing urban management frameworks and heritage conservation in Indonesia. *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research*, 5(2), 76-79.
- Sohail, A., Rehman, K. A., & Kiani, Z. H. (2016). Language Divergence Caused by LoC: A Case Study of District Kupwara (Jammu & Kashmir) and District Neelum (Azad Jammu & Kashmir). *Kashmir Journal of Language Research*, 19(2).
- Sohail, A., Rehman, K. A., & Kiani, Z. H. (2016). Language Divergence Caused by LoC: A Case Study of District Kupwara (Jammu & Kashmir) and District Neelum (Azad Jammu & Kashmir). *Kashmir Journal of Language Research*, 19(2).
- Stein, M. A. (Ed.). (1979). *Kalhanas Rajatarngini (vol. 3)* (Vol. 3). Motilal Banarsidass Publ..
- Umrani, W. A., Ahmad, I., Rasheed, M. I., Ahmed, U., Pahi, M. H., Jhatial, A., & Abbsai, G. A. (2022). Managing intellectual capital: role of corporate entrepreneurship and absorptive capacity on firm performance. *Knowledge Management Research & Practice*, 20(5), 719-731.
- United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), Blomberg-Nygaard, A., & Anderson, C. K. (2016). United Nations world tourism organization study on online guest reviews and hotel classification systems: an integrated approach. *Service Science*, 8(2), 139-151.
- United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), Blomberg-Nygaard, A., & Anderson, C. K. (2016). United Nations world tourism organization study on online guest reviews and hotel classification systems: an integrated approach. *Service Science*, 8(2), 139-151.
- Wang, Q., Azam, S., Murtza, M. H., Shaikh, J. M., & Rasheed, M. I. (2023). Social media addiction and employee sleep: implications for performance and wellbeing in the hospitality industry. *Kybernetes*.
- Weng, Q., Rasheed, M. I., & Yue, Z. (2020). *Proactive Personality and Organizational Career Growth: When and Why Proactive Individuals Stand Out*. Paper presented at the Academy of Management Proceedings.
- Yamagata, T. (2009). Industrialization cum poverty reduction: The cases of Bangladesh and Cambodia. In *Poverty Reduction and Beyond: Development Strategies for Low-Income Countries* (pp. 93-111). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

- Yousaf, S., Humayon, A. A., Rasheed, M. I., Ahmed, H. M., & Danish, R. Q. (2014). Factors affecting retention of female employees in organizations. *Journal of Basic and Applied Scientific Research*, 4(7), 1-9.
- Yousaf, S., Rasheed, M. I., Hameed, Z., & Luqman, A. (2020). Occupational stress and its outcomes: the role of work-social support in the hospitality industry. *Personnel Review*, 49(3), 755-773.
- Yousaf, S., Rasheed, M. I., Kaur, P., Islam, N., & Dhir, A. (2022). The dark side of phubbing in the workplace: Investigating the role of intrinsic motivation and the use of enterprise social media (ESM) in a cross-cultural setting. *Journal of Business Research*, 143, 81-93.
- Zhang, Y., Rasheed, M. I., & Luqman, A. (2020). Work–family conflict and turnover intentions among Chinese nurses: The combined role of job and life satisfaction and perceived supervisor support. *Personnel Review*, 49(5), 1140-1156.
- Zhang, Y., Wu, S., & Rasheed, M. I. (2020). Conscientiousness and smartphone recycling intention: The moderating effect of risk perception. *Waste Management*, 101, 116-125.