

# A new appetite for change

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Dr. Zulfiqar Ali Kalhoro | 20<sup>th</sup> July, 2025

Investors are turning to fast food, giving small towns like Habib Chowk a new urban rhythm



*GK Pizza Hut in Habib Chowk. — Photos by the author*

Fast food restaurants are becoming increasingly popular in various tehsils of the Rawalpindi district, similar to other districts in the Punjab. In recent years, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of new fast food restaurants opening in both the rural and urban areas of the Gujar Khan tehsil. This has reshaped the job market in the Gujar Khan tehsil. A significant factor influencing this trend is a decline in real estate

investments, which has led investors to prioritise establishing the fast food industry due to the high demand.

I frequently travel to Gujar Khan for my ethnographic research on various topics. During these visits, I have seen numerous fast food outlets opening in nearly every small town and large village in the area. Through interviews with both restaurant owners and their customers, I have learned that a majority of the owners are not from the local community. My interest was in understanding how local people find employment in these fast food establishments. I discovered that most of these restaurants are owned by individuals from outside the community.



*A view of Habib Chowk Bazaar.*

While travelling on the GT Road from Mandra to Gujar Khan, one comes across several restaurants owned by both local and non-local entrepreneurs. In other towns, particularly Daultala, most fast food restaurants are operated by non-locals. In Sukhno town, at SukhnoMor, and even beyond Sukho towards SayyedAdda, one can find fast food

outlets everywhere. However, employment generation remains a challenge. If the owner of a fast food business is local, they tend to hire members of the local community. Conversely, if the owner is from outside Gujar Khan, such as someone from Sargodha or Sialkot, they often prefer to employ people from their own areas. The restaurant industry, especially fast food outlets, are still in the hands of business communities originating outside the Gujar Khan tehsil.

In a few places in the Gujar Khan tehsil local employment is higher than in other areas of the tehsil. One such place is Habib Chowk, which is emerging as a food hub. It was a small village, named after the Sufi adept Habib Qadiri. Habib Chowk has become a key market due to its strategic location. Three main factors have driven the growth of the fast food restaurants in Habib Chowk.

First, the location; Habib Chowk is connected to Beval and Kallar Syedan on one side and Gujar Khan and Islampura Jabbar on the other. This makes it accessible to several important towns in the Rawalpindi district. Second, investments from the Pakistani diaspora in fast food restaurants have not only revitalised Habib Chowk but also benefited neighbouring villages and towns in the Gujar Khan tehsil.

The recent establishment of the Ch (Chaudhry) Azam Theme Park and Entertainment Complex has played a pivotal role in transforming Habib Chowk into a vibrant commercial hub. This development has significantly increased the area's appeal as a marketplace, attracting both local and non-local investors, particularly in the restaurant sector. The influx of visitors from across the Gujar Khan tehsil and various parts of the Rawalpindi district has created new economic opportunities, stimulating growth in hospitality and service-related businesses. I will discuss how emerging entertainment infrastructure has contributed to local

employment generation and broader socio-economic impacts in another article. Here, I will focus solely on fast food restaurants in Habib Chowk.



*Jojo's Pizza and Grill in Habib Chowk.*

***This has created job opportunities for locals, albeit on a small scale. However, it is a good opportunity, especially as other jobs are not available.***

There are three prominent fast food restaurants in Habib Chowk. All of these opened after the ChAzam Theme Park and Entertainment Complex was inaugurated for the public in 2021. The park's opening sparked a wave of restaurant openings, including fast food outlets.

Jojo's Pizza and Grill was the first restaurant to open, beginning operations in 2021, probably before the opening of the ChAzam Theme Park and Entertainment Complex. For those who have previously travelled to Rawalpindi, Islamabad and Gujar Khan for fast food, Jojo's Pizza and Grill brought a variety of dining options closer to the residents

of Habib Chowk and several nearby villages. Efficient service at the restaurant has significantly boosted its sales. The owner of the Jojo brand is UK-based Chaudhry Safdar Hussain. He is originally from Beval town in Gujar Khan.

Chaudhry Safdar Hussain has opened branches of Jojo's Pizza and Grill in Beval, Kallar Syedan, Islampur Jabbar and Gujar Khan towns. The outlet in Habib Chowk has become the most popular fast food restaurant in the area. The restaurant mainly employs local people. From delivery riders to waiter, Jojo's Pizza and Grill has created numerous job opportunities for the community. This fast food establishment has also influenced the local community's business preferences, which had previously focused primarily on real estate investments. Amid the ongoing downturn in the real estate market in Gujar Khan, local investors are increasingly redirecting their investments toward the fast food industry and the wider food sector.

The second pizza outlet is GK Pizza Hut, located within the Ch Azam Theme Park and Entertainment Complex. The owner is from Chakwal. Like Jojo's, a majority of the riders and waiters hail from Habib Chowk and surrounding villages.





*MG Pizza outlet in Habib Chowk.*

The third major pizza outlet at Habib Chowk is Miran G, popularly known as MG Pizza, which began operations in 2024. It is owned by MirzaKhawar. His brother, MirzaYasir, also runs the MG ShinwariRestaurant, located directly opposite MG Pizza, which has quickly gained popularity among local food lovers. Together, the brothers have introduced a distinct blend of flavours and dining experiences, bringing fresh energy and variety to Habib Chowk's diverse culinary offerings.

Fast food outlets in Habib Chowk offer free delivery in a 6 kilometre radius. Beyond that, an additional fee is charged per kilometre. They receive a significant number of orders from ChangaBangial, BorgiBains, Rukhia Sharif, Bhadana, Qazian, NaraliKaswal and other nearby villages, where families of the Pakistani diaspora reside. Land prices have surged since the theme park opened. This has created job opportunities for

locals, albeit on a small scale. However, it is a good opportunity, especially as other jobs are not available.

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