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From Conflict to Reconciliation: Sport as a Diplomatic tool between Pakistan and India

Muhammed Asad Raza
M.Phil. Scholar, Department of IR, Government College University Faisalabad.

Dr. Ghulam Mustafa
Associate Professor, Department of IR, Government College University Faisalabad
Email: ghulammustafa@gcuf.edu.pk

Abstract:

The relationship between Pakistan and India has been marked by chronic events, jurisdictional disagreements and geopolitical tensions leading to never ending hostility. Sports diplomacy somehow worked as a diplomatic bridge in easing tensions and fostering confidence building measures. This research work aims to explore the achievements, limitations and capability of sports diplomacy between Pakistan and India as a tool in conflict resolution. The study aims to analyze sports diplomacy at broader International Relations, highlighting its potential as a soft power tool and cultural connectivity. Study also explores key historical events where cricket diplomacy proved to be an effective tool like in 1987 Zia's visit to India to watch a cricket match, resulting in easing military standoffs at the border. Other events like 2004-2005 cricket tours and 2011 semi-final served as backdoor channels in initiating political dialogues between Pakistan and India. This shows the potential of cricket in mitigating tensions, promoting dialogues and people to people connectivity. However research work also critically analyzes the limitations of sports diplomacy, examining how events like Mumbai attack in 2008 and Pulwama attack in 2019 led to suspension of diplomatic and sporting ties between them. Where the sports diplomacy between Pakistan and India stands is uncertain due to political reasons but still potential of sports cannot be ignored. Sports will certainly help both sides in improving bilateral relations if they resume cricket and other sports in future.

Keywords: Sports diplomacy, India, Pakistan, Tensions, Dialogues

Introduction

The sports like hockey and cricket played crucial part in strengthening cultural links of both neighborly states, Pakistan and India. Whenever cricket teams of both nations contest with each other on grounds, it is considered as the greatest rivalry on this planet. Losing is part of game but in case of this rivalry, it is highly indigestible. Winning is highly appreciated and pays double rewards while failure brings ignominy and accusations of fixing and betrayal. These cricket matches are not less than national wars in playgrounds. For both nations, cricket represents their distinctiveness, dignity and leverage. Yet cricket is a source and greatest opportunity for both nations to sit together, close to each other in stadiums and to cheer for their respective teams. Sports where it brings both nations together in stadiums, sometimes due to high intensity of matches, fans show no respect to each other and start chanting politically motivated slogans to make each other exasperate. Whenever there are political tensions between them, India refuse to play all kinds of sports with Pakistan. Even India refuses to play with Pakistan in

international events. Relations cannot be kept permanently friendly via use of cricket diplomacy. In 1978 cricket series was held between Pakistan and India by Zia and Desai governments respectively to restore peace after 1971 war. On political front, Desai ordered the RAW to abandon cloak and dagger activities in Pakistan. This gesture was highly appreciated by Pakistanis and in 1990, he was awarded with Nishan e Pakistan, the highest civilian award in Pakistan.

In 1987 tensions were high with armed forces on borders. During these intense circumstances Zia went to neighborhood India and watched a cricket match and introduced the idea of "cricket for peace". Some reports suggested that Zia also whispered to Rajiv Gandhi that we have a nuclear bomb. After talks with Rajiv, tensions were somehow diffused and both leaders were agreed for more cricket matches in order to shape public's point of view. In 2004 Indian team toured Pakistan as a gesture of goodwill. In 2011 Cricket World cup semifinal, Indian PM Manmohan Singh invited Yousef Raza Gilani to watch Pakistan and India match. It was an initiative taken towards peace process between two neighbors. On ground Pakistan lost the match but still there was chance that Pakistan might play well on table talks. While delivering a speech, Manmohan Singh said, "There is need to cooperate with each for long lasting solutions of all problems so we can live with honor and self-esteem".

Pakistan and India both gained independence from their British masters in 1947. The newly independent states failed to protect the lives and properties of their people during partition. The partition led to killings and displacements of thousands across the borders. Soon after the partition, they started to fight against each other, resulting in multiple wars on Kashmir issue. The political, religious and ethnic differences also affected their sports. Sporting boycotts, cancellation of matches and issuing visas are quite usual in their sport interactions. Before discussing their sports relations, one must know their political relations based on hatred, enmity and mistrust. The roots of disparity and conflict among the neighbors lies in the legacy of division which led to disputes over minorities in Kashmir, Sir Greek, Siachen and water (Pande, 2023).

Statement of the Problem

In International Relations, sports are being used to promote peace and cooperation. The Pakistan and India is a fascinating case of how sports diplomacy can ease tensions, resume bilateral talks and enhance people to people interaction. The bilateral relations between Pakistan and India continue to face mutual hostility and territorial disputes since their independence in 1947 from British. On several occasions efforts were made to secure peace between neighbors but a long lasting peace seems to be dream to achieve. Sport diplomacy has eased their tensions several times but its durability is temporal and uncertain due to complex nature of their political environment. So it is important to understand that to what extent sport diplomacy contributed to détente or conflict resolution between Pakistan and India.

Research Questions

Q1.How sports diplomacy can lead to confidence building measures and conflict resolution between states?

Q2. What role sports especially cricket diplomacy has played between India and Pakistan relations and what are the key challenges hindering effective sports diplomacy between them?

Research Methodology

In this study, qualitative research approach is used in examining the role of sports in shaping, influencing and redefining relations between two nuclear nations, Pakistan and India. As the political relations between them are complex and complicated, qualitative approach proved to be effective in analyzing historical events, public perceptions and diplomatic engagements characterized by sports diplomacy.

Research design for the study is based on comparative and case study approach in order to elaborate periods of tensions and détente between them and a case study of key sports like cricket, hockey, kabaddi and javelin and other sports events are thoroughly analyzed to see what impact these sports carry on the at diplomatic and public spheres. Historical events are also studied to make the research work more comprehensive and convincing.

Collection of Data

The secondary data is used in the research work as primary data is challenging to collect due to geopolitical sensitivities. In scholarly work, data is collected through analyzing various journal articles, research reports, books, diplomatic documents and government reports. News sites like Dawn, The Express and The Hindu are also examined to check what kind of information media is sharing about sports and how their ideas are influential in shaping public perceptions.

The methodology has utilized structural approach to understand how prominent sports like cricket, hockey and other sports have influenced the minds of general public and decision makers in shaping India and Pakistan relations. By examining secondary data comprehensively, the research aims to present an effective way of understanding the most contentious bilateral relations of Pakistan and India.

Research Objectives

- To examine the historical evolution of sports between Pakistan and India
- To thoroughly explain key sporting events since their independence in 1947.
- To explore how sports like cricket played a crucial role in strengthening confidence building measures.
- To understand the importance of high profile matches whether bilateral or during international events in creating back door diplomatic channels
- To examine the role of political leaders using sports for diplomatic gains
- To analyze the impact of sports on public perceptions, analyzing credibility of sports in fostering good will or nationalistic elements
- To highlight the key hurdles and limitations faced by sports in shaping bilateral relationships between Pakistan and India
- To suggest methods to reduce limitations by institutionalizing the sports

Research Limitations

Though the research work is aimed to analyze sports diplomacy between Pakistan and India comprehensively, yet there are limitations which are affecting the general findings in depth. Access to data collection from classified diplomatic records is limited and challenging to understand the background of scene and negotiations through back door diplomatic channels or often undisclosed. Role of media is also controversial and biased from both sides as they promote national sentiments during high profile cricket and other sport interactions. It is also

hard to separate the influence of sports on bilateral relations on India and Pakistan relations as other factors like economic, political and social are also affecting bilateral relations. So attributions of sports solely are difficult to analyze. As sports proved to be effective for temporal time period, long lasting solutions are also difficult to propose. The access to data collection is limited as primary sources and relevant documents are hard to find. It is also difficult to gain data from key sporting personalities. The shifting political landscape is rendering key findings as outdated. These research limitations do not invalidate this study but somehow undermine the complexities of examining sports diplomacy in highly contested political context

Literature Review

In an article, "Pakistan-India Relations: Using Sports AsTool of Diplomacy" (2021) the scholar Hammad ud Din explained the partition of subcontinent and also highlighted the effects post partition on the lives of common people. Cricket was introduced by imperial Britain in subcontinent on communal basis. Relations remains uncertain between Pakistan and India as they share history of animosity and both have several disputes and Kashmir is considered to be bone of contention. The issue is discussed several times in UN but not solved yet. Tensions on borders remain all time high with chances of breaking into war at any time. Cricket among Pakistanis and Indians is greatly watched and at that time appears to be a glimmer of hope, peace and progress. As a result of cricket matches, the tensions are diffusing and little progress is being observed in their bilateral relations. Cricket is fostering understandings among the public and as a result of such understanding several Pakistanis have tie the knots with Indians. Suspicions and enmity at national levels is also declining (Hammaduddin, Khan, & Iqbal, 2021).

In the article,'Cricket Diplomacy: a Lost Opportunity in India-Pakistan Relations' (2023), Naveed Hussain has critically examined the role cricket could have played if there was no politics in sports. In an ideal world sports and politics are two different things but in reality both are interlinked. Diplomatic efforts were made between India and Pakistan several times to normalize relations. Zia and Musharraf regimes repeatedly use cricket diplomacy to solve all outstanding issues including Kashmir. But due to some extremists groups in both states cricket diplomacy could bore the fruits it was expected to do. The uncertain political relations also created uncertainty in sporting grounds like abandoning matches, delay in visas over security concerns. Pakistan was planned to host Asia Cup in 2023 but as Jay Shah was the president of Asian Cricket Council, cricket matches of team India were shifted to Sri Lanka and playoffs as well. Pakistan team visited India in 2023 during World cup matches and is expecting team India to visit Pakistan in 2025 for Champions Trophy. But still it is not cleared that whether India would come or not as BCCI needs governmental approval (Hussain N. , 2023).

In the article "Five Times The Super Bowl: Why India Vs Pakistan Is A Sporting Rivalry Like No Other" (2023) the writers Sophia and Mogul have stated the importance of cricket between in India and Pakistan and why it is among the biggest rivalries around the world. Pakistan and India both got their independence from British in 1947 and both sides met on sporting grounds in 1952. Due to painful memories of the partition, intensity, hostility and malice can be observed in sporting games. Both neighbors have fought several wars since their independence and as a result restrictions on goods and people can be seen in their relations. Pakistan and India cricket match is termed as the greatest rivalry on this planet. Cricket has the ability to unite people through the continent. The last time Pakistani cricket team visited India

was during 2023 World cup. They were welcomed by Indian fans. When Pakistani captain Babar gave his kit to a grounds man, it was termed as a terrific gesture. Although such gestures from Pakistani team, there were still political fault lines when majority of Pakistani fans were not allowed to visit India (Mogul & Saifi, 2023).

Theoretical Framework

In International Relations, soft power theory generally refers to tactics in a nation's arsenal which doesn't penalize, compensate or loom others into chosen behavior (Seymour, 2020). Soft power is simply opposite to hard power with no direct military or economic threats. Hard power serves sticks and carrots in IR. Soft power consists of interaction of cultures and public diplomacy, which contours the behavior. It is a multifarious idea running across many actors and institutes and has been criticized for uncertainty and over reach (Durrani, 2023). The approaches to soft power are directly directed towards humanity with complete peculiar convolution.

The perception of soft power is fresh to South Asian states (Kayani, Karim, & Qaiser, 2017). Since its independence, Pakistan is facing internal and external threats, so military preparedness of Pakistan cannot be ignored. As India and Afghanistan pose significant existential threats, Pakistan paid very low approach to soft power in past. But now the world is changing and South Asians are also focusing to enhance soft power in their arsenals as well. The two atomic giants in South Asia have a history of hatred, animosity and lack of trust between them. The hostile relations started soon after their partition in 1947. As a result of partition, the communal riots led to mass killings of civilians on both sides (Jha M. , 2017). These severe memories were printed in the minds of masses and as a result still both nations failed to overcome their harsh past. Both nations have crazy fan base for cricket and losing a match to rival is something unforgivable. Sports are on the diplomatic agenda of states to improve ties with each other.

Historical Background of Indo Pak Relations

Pakistan and India were arisen as the descendants of Britain in 1947 along difference of identity. India adopted secularism with majority of Hindu population while Pakistan went under the umbrella of Islamization (Hussain E., 2019). As a result of such incompatible ideologies, both fought war over Kashmir soon after gaining independence. In International Relations, a state can choose friends but cannot choose neighbors. Pakistan and India as neighbors have several complex problems with each other (Sugunakararaju & Akhtar, 2015). The partition resulted in blood and both sides found each other on the opposite sides.

The political rivalry among them can be termed as zero sum game, with one's victory is another's loss (Malik, 2019). The conflict over Kashmir has had international implications with both entering into nuclear race (Jauhari, 2013). Instead of cooperating, negotiating and improving bilateral relations, both nations are busy in leg pulling. One's prosperity or wellbeing is hardly digestible by other. Both states are involved in promoting extreme ideologies in the region.

The ideologies shaped the identity of both nations and as a result both nations still cannot get rid of their past (Ahmad, 2019). Although among them is severe distrust and animosity, still there is hope of reconciliation and re-imagination. Both nations started composite dialogue to

ensure peaceful relations (Mukherjee, 2009). As a result trade volume and people to people interaction was increased but the main issues were yet to be settled down.

Kashmir Issue

Kashmir dispute is multifaceted issue between India-Pakistan. It is not only territorial or national contestation of both states but there are also voices from Kashmir not to accede with India or Pakistan (Behera, 2016). Kashmir conflict is radically transforming since its inception in 1947. Kashmir is considered as heaven on earth due the beauty of its mountains and valleys and is also long standing issue between two hostile nuclear powers India and Pakistan (Ahmed & Chakma, 2012).

Kashmir is considered to be the longest unsettled dispute in the world history and being a major nuclear flash point between Pakistan and India (Sehgal, 2011).The nuclear race is severally affecting not only India and Pakistan but also the region. There will no improvement in Islamabad-Delhi relations until peaceful resolution of Kashmir dispute (Ahmar, 2006). It is obvious for both that Kashmir is quite badly hurting their diplomatic relations and as a result efforts towards peace can be seen in shape of composite dialogues.

Decades have been passed since partition and both India and Pakistan are still unable to resolve Kashmir resulting in wars and worsening of bilateral relations (Zulfqar, 2016). Both states are still blaming each other for fueling the issue. Kashmiris are the victims of Indian brutality and as a result inter-state clashes erupted several times. Kashmir led to conflicts in 1947, 1948, 1965 and 1998 between Indian and Pakistan's armed forces(Khan R. A., Khan, Ali, & Naeem, 2019).

International Law and Kashmir Dispute

India put the Kashmir issue before the world through the platform of United Nations in 1948. Both were agreed on conducting plebiscite in the region giving free hand to people to determine their future following the UN principles and resolutions 1948 and 1951(Baba, 2014). In order to resolve the issue and to satisfy both sides, UNCIP was made visited the area three times between 1948 and 1951 to consult all sides (Sultan & Mohsin, 2024). Pakistani forces were withdrawn from the region, Indian forces at small numbers were present there to maintain rule and law and both were agreed upon plebiscite which failed to take place due to India's dogmatic approach.

The UN failed to settle the Kashmir cause due to its inability was exposed during cold war politics and non-binding nature of its decisions (Farrell, 2003). The UN participation although was intentional but unfortunately its resolutions were proved to be ineffective. Kashmir remained a legal perspective under the international law from very beginning till now (Khan & Khan, 2019). Kashmir is an international problem and it must be dealt with international provisions. All participants must be gathered under the umbrella of international law.

Wars and Disputes

Four times both states faced each other in battlegrounds in last 52 years of their neighboring hood. Media from both sides instead of showing professionalism, is busy in projecting nationalistic feelings in the society (Iqbal & Hussain, 2018). Both nations failed to resolve their root issues like Kashmir and as a result of these wars and conflicts thousands of

people lost their lives. Efforts were made in 1950 when Nehru wrote Liaquat Ali to jointly denounce war and declaration of No War Pact (Raghavan, 2016).

Pakistan and India were emerged as political entities in 1947 with bloody and bitter circumstances throughout in their relations (Mirza, 2008). The bitterness of their pre independence and post partition experiences has shaped the political scenario between them. Pakistan and India have unstable diplomatic relations with lack of cooperation and excess of militarized conflicts since the first day of their separation as independent states in 1947 (Tandon & Slobodchikoff, 2019).

First War over Kashmir

Pakistan and India soon after their independence met on the battlefields in October 1947 to January 1948 over the possession of Jammu and Kashmir (Pramanik & Roy, 2013). Political and religious differences can be seen in their overall relations. When the 1st war was fought between India and Pakistan, 77% of population was Muslims but Hindu Pundits were in majority in administration offices (Gates & Roy, 2017).

The political prospect of Kashmir is still an illusion as people wanted right of self-determination promised by Pakistan, India and UN (Wani & Suwirta, 2013). The Indian response to forceful compliance of Junagarh and Hyderabad compel Pakistan to have stronger ideological linkages with Kashmir (Vaish, 2011). International actors also failed to stop India manufacturing adventures in Jammu and Kashmir so Pakistan finds its own ways to deal the issue.

1965 War

The 1965 war was a result of skirmishes between Pakistani and Indian forces on site of Rann 0f Kutch. It was a limited war with the objective of militarily solution of ongoing Kashmir dispute (Chaudhuri, 2019). The Muslim population of Kashmir felt antipathy under Indian administration and Ayoub Khan took this occasion to deal Indian administration with force and sectarian conflicts. Guerilla personals from Pakistan's held Kashmir were sent to Indian held Kashmir under the Operation Gibraltar to revolt in Kashmir against India. The objective was to force India out of Kashmir with the help of local population (Shaikh, Iqbal, & Dashti, 2019).

Indian Military was badly defeated by the Chinese forces in 1962 and morale of their forces was low at that time. Pakistan saw it a great opportunity to launch sectarian skirmishes in Kashmir (Sil, 2009). Indian response during Rann of Kutch was slow and weak which encouraged Pakistani forces to decide Kashmir issue at battlefield.

1971 War

1971 war was a nine month long conflict with Pakistan's brutal treatment of Bengali politician, people and resources, eventually leading to direct intervention with India and resulted in creation of Bangladesh (Rahman, 2017). There were several factors contributed to creation of Bangladesh as an independent nation among them were lack of leadership, Army's miscalculations and brutalities, civil unrest and India's intervention. The 1971 war was not merely a war between East and West Pakistan but there were also ethnic disputes among Bengalis and non-Bengalis over the separation of East Pakistan (Bose, 2005). Civil war inside East wing led to further division among the population.

Kargil War

Kargil war started when armed persons from Pakistan annexed the Indian part of territory in 1999. The conflict changed the traditional concept of deterrence that states with nuclear cannot afford warfare (Panday, 2011). The traditional concept of nuclear deterrence was ignored by the Indian and Pakistani sides during the crisis. War started when militants crossed the other side of LOC and Pakistani side pretended not to be involved saying the incursion was carried by Kashmiri freedom fighters, but this perspective failed at international level (Khan & Bhukhari, 2014). Under immense international pressure, Nawaz Sharif announced withdrawal of forces during his meeting with US President Bill Clinton to avoid full scale war with India.

Cooperation and Agreements

There is need for both Pakistan and India to mend their ties, improve the tactics which could help in attaining peace and make frequent interactions of state members to civil society persons (Desai & Basit, 2012). Years have been passed and still Pakistan and India could not get out of their past history to regulate their bilateral relations and maintain peace (Waqar-un-Nisa, 2017).

South Asia is the only region where two neighbors are nuclear powers with conflicting ideologies and disputes, risking the security of the entire region (Fair, 2005). Both Pakistan and India have a colonial past and set their own strategic directions which are conflicting and source of enmity among them (Abbasi, 2015).

Indus Basin Water Treaty

The partition not only divided hearts and territories but also the waters of Indus River Basin between Pakistan and India. Subcontinent faced shortage of water due to uneven distribution of water leading to economic difficulties, social problems and political disparities (Mumtaz, Bilal, & Younas, 2023). With Pakistan's emergence, Indus water boundary became international with India being the upstream country controlling the water (Bashir, 2024). Water basically originates from Indian territories essential for Pakistan's agricultural industry. Due to Indian monopoly and changing natural routes of water, conflict arose between Pakistan and India.

In May 1948, India halted the passage of water to enter into Pakistan's territories which resulted in tensions between them. With the help of World Bank and western nations, Pakistan and India agreed to resolve their Indus River Basin issue (Ahmed N., 2024). Both Pakistan and India agreed on a formula of water apportionment called the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) under the supervision of the World Bank as a mediator. Indus Basin Waters Treaty was signed in Karachi on September 19, 1960 (Bhatti, Mustafa, & Awan, 2019).

Tashkent Agreement 1966

Tashkent agreement was signed between Pakistan and India in 1966 with Soviet mediation. Ayoub Khan and Lal Bahadur agreed to negotiate after war of 1965 to strengthen their relations (Javaid & Ejaz, 2017). The main objectives of this accord were to reestablish economic and diplomatic relations, exchange POWs, restoring pre-war positions and not to interfere in domestic affairs of each country (Piyush, 2024).

Shimla Agreement 1972

Pakistan and India signed Shimla agreement in 1972 after disastrous war of 1971 which led to creation of Bangladesh to avoid further confrontation in the region (Dr.K.Barathiraja, 2019). This pact between two neighbors was to ensure territorial integrity, mutual respect of sovereignty and political independence. The national governments of these two peripheral states were agreed upon end of dispute and use their resources for the welfare of their people (Ganguly S., 2016).

Indian motive was a lasting solution of Kashmir issue, to convince Pakistan not to invite any third party to mediate to keep issue bilateral (Ayoob, 2022). There were concerns among the people of Pakistan for safe return of prisoners of war. Political enthusiasts advocated the POWs return immediately and they did not care the land they lost while government was seemed frustrated and confused at that moment (Athale, 2016).

Agra Summit 2001

The Agra summit was of not a new kind to people of subcontinent as in past, political leadership from both sides discussed their bilateral issues especially Kashmir, but it was of new experience to people as no joint conference of the summit took place (Bahadur, 2001). South Asia became victim of media after nuclearization of India and Pakistan. At that time Agra summit proved to be a beacon of light for peace and stability (Hussain D. N., 2009).

It was the first time in history when Indian government Kashmir as a dispute rather than repeating the same rhetoric of Kashmir as an internal matter (Said, et al., 2020). Vajpayee invited Musharraf to discuss Kashmir cause because India wanted its economic growth and conflicts with Pakistan were hindering a peaceful environment in the region.

Evolution of Sports between India and Pakistan

Sports are important tool of enhancing good ties and cooperation among states. Sports can avert psyche of masses and statesmen from polemics and conflicts to cooperation and mutual understanding (Ali, Arif, & Munir, 2019). Sports diplomacy is part of public diplomacy and it has evolved more effectively in recent times with more positive results (Mazahir, 2021).

The rivalry in sports greatly affects the fans and players. Being victorious or being defeated is usually part of sports but in case of India and Pakistan rivalry, losing is highly indigestible (Asim, Ahmed, Asif, & Afridi, 2021). Sports diplomacy is quite complicated between India and Pakistan. Although sports role is important in connecting the people but due to unwanted political history, sports became a source of degrading and mocking each other (Misra, 2020).

Sports should not be linked with politics because it might become a political tool and further sabotage the relations. Unfortunately due to involvement of politics in Indo-Pak games, the people further moved away from each other instead of reconnecting (Hussain N. , 2023).

Cricket

The subcontinent nations especially Pakistan and India are cricket obsessed nations with huge fan following on both sides. On multiple occasions when both India and Pakistan went

through intense political tensions, cricket provided an environment for reconciliation (Hammaduddin, Khan, & Iqbal, 2021). Overall relations between Pakistan and India remained intense through their history but somehow sports like cricket provided a window for peace and reconciliation. Cricket has a massive fan following with a great potential to compel policy makers to rethink and reestablish diplomatic relations but frequent sports interactions are required to build confidence (Sattar, 2021).

General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq and Cricket Diplomacy

The term 'cricket diplomacy' was first used by President Zia of Pakistan when he surprised the Indian officials with his unexpected trip to watch cricket match (Shahid, 2015). India was carrying military drills near Pakistan's borders and tensions were all time high but Zia's visit somehow lower the temperature. Since then cricket is being used as a diplomatic tool engage each other on diplomatic forums to ease relations (Næss-Holm, 2007). The unexpected visit of Zia in 1987 led to talks between Indian PM and Zia to disengage militarily at borders.

Zia's approach to watch cricket match and coining the term cricket diplomacy was not unintentional as everyone knew in South Asia that how popular cricket is and its role in shaping the ideas of society (Mazahir, Muhammad, & Yaseen, 2020). The Indian military exercise near Pakistan borders was threatening war between two neighbors but the least expected Zia's visit and cricket diplomacy threw them out of war zone for a time being.

2004-2005 Cricket Tours as Goodwill Gestures

When it comes to cricket between India and Pakistan, it serves at several points like a governmental tool to spawn balloting assurance, diplomatic instrument in serving peace, as an economic tool to generate revenue and as an emotional mean to mollify traditional hatred (Bandyopadhyay, 2008). Cricketing ties with Pakistan were completely abandoned in 1999 after an Indian plane was hijacked and was forced to land in Pakistan. But somehow relations were set on discourse in 2004 when Vajpayee attended a SAARC meeting in Pakistan and after that cricket matches were scheduled (Chakrabarti, 2022). These tours were termed as goodwill gestures in building trust and peace. The message from Vajpayee's administration to Indian cricket team was not simply win matches but also the hearts of Pakistani spectators.

Pakistan Cricket Team in India in 2011-12

The cricket world cup was organized in India in 2011 and Pakistan and India were to face each other in do and die semifinal match. The match was also important in political context and as a result PM Manmohan Singh of India requested Yousef Raza to see the match (Ganguly & Chakraborty, 2011). Cricket diplomacy at that time was seemed to be reviving peace process between two neighbors. Yousuf Raza was invited by Indian PM Manmohan Singh to attend the match and at the end of that match which unfortunately Pakistan lost but brief discussion between two leaders led to announce that both states would discuss and negotiate all the matters (Abbas, 2011). Cricket diplomacy was at its best at that time and people of subcontinent should thank cricket for its services towards reconciliation.

Pakistan visited India in 2012 for T20s and Odis series as a result of confidence build through 2011 games and interaction of leaders (Aslam, Hussain, & Ali, 2020). It was the first bilateral series after 2008 Mumbai attacks which led to deterioration of relations between them.

Although groups like RSS opposed such matches but Indian government defended its decision to host Pakistan.

ICC Champion Trophy 2025

Pakistan is set to embrace the champion trophy at home but BCCI refused to send its team to Pakistan shifting its matches to UAE. The opportunity to strengthen ties between these cricket passionate countries was lost (Venkatachalam, 2024). The political pressure was so dominating that Pakistan was deprived of hosting all matches to its soil. BCCI told ICC officials of its unavailability to play its matches in Pakistan instead they insisted on hybrid model. Eventually ICC has to force Pakistan to host Champions Trophy with hybrid model (Waris, 2024). India played all its matches in a single ground giving it an edge over all teams. PCB chairman Raza Naqvi retaliated with refusal to play upcoming World cup matches in India. Indian refusal to send its team in Pakistan shows its lack of cooperation and relaying on consistent security concerns especially playing against Pakistan. As it was being expected India won the Champions Trophy beating New Zealand in the final.

Hockey

The game of hockey was introduced in 1948 soon after independence of Pakistan with PHF as a regulatory body (Nosheen & Aslam, 2022). Hockey was declared as the national game of Pakistan. Hockey is an ancient game and was introduced in subcontinent by British. The game was popular among the soldiers which gradually familiarized in the civil sector as well (Krishnan, 2020). Both countries had glorious past in hockey and as a result hockey is considered as the national sport of both nations. Somehow hockey remains a vital source of connectivity and confidence building at public and political spheres. Pakistan won three Olympic gold medals (1960, 1968 and 1984), four Hockey World cups (1971, 1978, 1982 and 1994) and multiple Champion trophy titles while India had eight gold medals and remained world champion in 1975.

Sports are source of entertainment in our society and have a massive impact on shaping social relations, economic trends and cultural patterns. India has a glorious past in field of hockey but it is negatively portrayed by Indian media and cinema igniting nationalism, superiority and pride in societal spheres (Raj & Suresh, 2024). The narratives build by media and cinema and sometimes on field confrontation among players such as during a semifinal match in 2014 lead to further distrust at public and administrative level. Pakistan and India are arch rivals in hockey and any tournament and without their presence seemed to be incomplete but due to decline in progress of Pakistan's hockey, hockey competitions at global levels like Olympics and world cups held without Pakistan as team could not qualify for competitions (Paracha, 2015).

Trackside Diplomacy: Neeraj and Arshad's Javelin Journey

The world is full of rivalries and anarchy, the friendship of Arshad Nadeem of Pakistan and Neeraj Chopra of India stood as testimony that how sports can bridge gaps between the vicious rivals (Sharma, 2024). Both athletes competed against each started several times. They first faced each other in 2016 in Guwahati where Neeraj claimed Gold and Arshad won Bronze. They interacted and showed respect to each other.

Arshad entered the Paris Olympics as the underdog with less fame and recognition as compared to his arch rival Neeraj, but his throw of 92.97 meters not only written his name in longest throw of Olympic history but his throw won first ever gold for Pakistan in javelin(Topping, 2024). Neeraj came second but both showed great respect and love for each other. They not only congratulated each other, their interaction became the main headline in Indo-Pak mainstream media. They won the hearts across borders sending a message of peace and friendship with people appreciating their gestures.

The historical misadventures still haunt Indo-Pakistan relations. Due to harsh memories, both nations failed to cooperate and redefine their future ties (Raza & Noreen, 2024). The social and ideological differences between Pakistan and India are quite dominant factors due to which they show lack of cooperation but excess of blaming and fighting against each other. The love and affection showed by mothers of both athletes, Arshad and Neeraj recalling the other as their son was a heartwarming gesture appreciated by other parts of the society, over helming entrenched fierce rivalry and hatred between two nations (Hassan, 2024). Such gestures for a time period spread harmony and peace and are important for better understanding and trust at public level.

Conclusion

In the modern day world politics, sport has role of bridge in connecting nations with strained political relations through doors other than traditional channels of diplomacy. As the research is based on case study of India and Pakistan, sports between them have been demonstrated in order to find out their impact and influence on bilateral relations between them. Sports like cricket has acted as a barometer for political climate while also creating opportunities for dialogues and people to people integration. Throughout the history, Pakistan and India had sports encounters deescalated the moments of heightened political atmosphere. Bilateral matches or international events proved to be confidence building between India and Pakistan as public from both sides finally get opportunity to interact and observe each other deeply. The revival of cricket between them in 2004 paved the way for peaceful dialogues and diffused the tensions. It demonstrated how effectively sports diplomacy particularly cricket worked for them in needs of time when conventional channels seemed to be closed or impossible to open.

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