
The Origin and Development of People-to-People Contacts between India and Pakistan



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Introduction

People-to-people contacts between adversarial groups, using the contact hypothesis¹ premise, have been employed over the years to promote peace-building in different conflict regions throughout the world. Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cyprus, Georgia-Abkhazia, Israel-Palestine, Northern Ireland, Somalia, South Africa, and Sri Lanka are a few major examples. Scholarly research shows that in some conflict regions people-to-people contacts have been very helpful in promoting peace and understanding between adversarial groups, while in other regions such steps have achieved limited success.

In the case of India-Pakistan conflict, the term people-to-people contacts became famous only after the establishment of Pakistan India Peoples' Forum for Peace and Democracy (PIPFPD) in 1994. But from the name of PIPFPD it is obvious that it was formed as a forum or an umbrella platform for promotion of peace between India and Pakistan. This indicates that certain people-to-people contact groups existed before the formation of PIPFPD in 1994.

According to Yunas Samad, the origin of people-to-people contact initiatives dates back to the 1960s when H.T. Parekh organized 'small seminars' and lobbied the authorities for a 'common South Asia economic area'.² But that was just a lone attempt, which could never take off because the 1960s were too turbulent for the success of any such attempt. People-to-people contact initiatives took an organized shape only in the 1980s when several alumni, workers, trade, track-two, and cultural links were formalized by like-minded groups in the two countries.

This research is an attempt to document the work of those institutions, organizations, and individuals who were instrumental in building people-to-

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people contacts between the people of India and Pakistan in that early stage. The web approach model for people-to-people contacts is used to identify eight 'anchor points' that were established before the launching of PIPFPD. The eight anchor points identified in this study are alumni, trade, track-two, research, women, art and culture, workers, and intelligentsia networks.

Literature on India-Pakistan people-to-people contacts

People-to-people contact initiatives have existed between India and Pakistan since the 1980s, but very limited scholarly research was done on this aspect in both countries before 2010. Among international scholars, Behera³ was the most prolific scholar on people-to-people contacts between India and Pakistan in this early phase. Through her work, Behera helped in mapping and understanding the structure of people-to-people contacts between India and Pakistan. Apart from her, Sewak⁴ and Faiz⁵ attempted to connect India-Pakistan people-to-people contacts through the theory of peacebuilding.

Since 2010, people-to-people contacts are gaining more attention of journalists and scholars, as more and more literature is pouring in on the topic now. Kothari and Mian⁶ edited a book containing accounts of peace activists, directly involved in people-to-people related activities on both sides of the border. Then Akhtar,⁷ Khan,⁸ and Shahid et.al.⁹ made India-Pakistan people-to-people contacts a topic of their research. However, despite all this literature on people-to-people contacts, no attempt has been made to trace the origins of the contact initiatives and consolidation work done by different peace groups in the 1980s. Behera provides a brief introduction to some of the peace groups working in the 1980s and a few others also talk about some of the initiatives in that phase, but no proper research is available on the origin and development of people-to-people contacts in the 1980s. This paper is an attempt to fill that gap in the academic literature.

The web approach model for people-to-people contacts and eight anchor points

The web approach model for people-to-people contacts was adopted by the author¹⁰ in his unpublished doctoral thesis using Lederach's 'pyramid of approaches to peacebuilding'—formulated in his seminal work *Building Peace*¹¹ and later improved in *The Moral Imagination*¹²—to assess the impact of people-to-people contacts on overall peacebuilding between conflicting parties. The web approach model provides a theoretical framework for creating a comprehensive network of people-to-people contacts integrating all the three levels (top, middle range, and grassroots) among the conflicting parties.¹³ This complex network of people-to-people contacts is created with the support of the anchor points (cross-cultural networks) established by civil society groups among the conflicting communities.

Hence, to achieve peacebuilding at all three levels, it is important to identify and connect anchor points that may link not so like-minded but

necessarily interdependent sections of the society.¹⁴ The inter-group linkages amongst journalists, traders, artists, scholars, academics, students, sportsmen, and women activists are considered inter-dependent because they share their professional and other interests but may not be so like-minded because they all have their own opinions, ideological leanings, and political affiliations. Once stronger links between anchor points are established, they have the responsibility to take peacebuilding to other sections of the society and sustain the peace movement.

In this study, people-to-people contacts based anchor points between Indian and Pakistani communities that had emerged before the formation of PIPFPD are explored. The eight people-to-people networks or anchor points, which emerged before the formation of PIPFPD were alumni, trade, track-two, research, women, art and culture, workers, and intelligentsia links. It is important to study these anchor points in detail, as they provide the base on which people-to-people contacts based peace movement later emerged in both India and Pakistan.

The alumni anchor point

As a result of the partition of the sub-continent in 1947, the alumni of several prime institutions of British India were divided between India and Pakistan, as people from far-flung areas used to study in those high-profile institutions. The Indian and Pakistani alumni later rose to higher positions in their respective countries and kept in touch despite their countries often at odds with each other. In the 1980s alumni links were revived, and frequent alumni visits to each other's country were arranged. These alumni links are important because they were the first organized people-to-people contact initiatives between India and Pakistan.

Royal Indian Military College (RIMC) Dehradun

After the partition of the sub-continent, the Indian alumni of Royal Indian Military College (RIMC) were the first to establish an alumni link with their Pakistani counterparts. The RIMC Old Boys Association was formally established in Delhi in 1949 and its counterpart in Pakistan was founded by 12 Pakistani RIMC alumni in Lahore on 20 February 1954.¹⁵ Delegations' visits to each other's countries were not reported until the 1980s though. Mehta¹⁶ reports two visits of Pakistani alumni in 1983 and 1989. Kanwar¹⁷ reports a delegation's visit in 1990 as well. Nothing substantive came out of those meetings vis-à-vis India-Pakistan relations, but still they were important as the first people-to-people initiatives.

Doon School Old Boys Society

Like the RIMC alumni association, since the late 1950s Doon School Old Boys Society (DSOBS) in India had contacts with Descos (pupils of Doon) in Pakistan, but a trip of Pakistani Old Boys could not be arranged until the golden jubilee celebrations of the school in 1985. On a special invitation of the then prime minister of India Rajiv Gandhi, himself a Doon alumnus, about 50 Pakistani Descos visited India to attend the golden jubilee celebrations of the

school.¹⁸ On their return to Pakistan, they decided to build Doon School in Pakistan. They inaugurated the 'Chand Bagh School' in Muridke on the outskirts of Lahore in 1998 on the Doon model. The Indian delegation had participated in the inauguration of the Chand Bagh School. The contacts of Doon and Chand Bagh schools and Doon Old Boys Society in Pakistan and India have remained intact, and they have visited each other on a regular basis.

Kinnaird College OAKS

The Indian alumni of Kinnaird College formed the Indian Kinnaird Society under the banner of Old Associates of Kinnaird Society (OAKS), and established a strong link with Kinnaird College administration in Lahore, Pakistan.¹⁹ In the mid-1980s, Indian OAKS visited Kinnaird for the first time on a special invitation of the then principal Mira Phailbus to participate in the Old Students' Day celebrations. Later on, more OAKS came to visit Kinnaird in 1986 and even more attended the 75th anniversary of Kinnaird in 1988.²⁰ In February 1989, OAKS from Pakistan visited India. These visits have continued over the years and, as a result, OAKS links have strengthened.

Alumni links were important international people-to-people contact initiatives, considering that they were the first people-to-people initiatives between India and Pakistan. They established their initial contacts across borders in the 1950s when wounds of partition were still fresh. However, they could only cross borders in the 1980s, which shows that the time was not ripe for such initiatives until then.

The trade anchor point

The basic purpose of this section is to study the linkages that emerged between the trading communities of India and Pakistan. However, it will also look briefly at the history of trade relations between India and Pakistan to understand the historic scope and evolution of their bilateral trade. According to Kumar and Desai,²¹ before partition, trade between areas that became India and Pakistan was immense, as Indian territories heavily relied on Pakistani territories for agricultural products, and Pakistani areas on Indian territories for consumer goods. Sangani and Schaffer²² have reported that at the time of independence three-fifths of Pakistan's exports went to and one-third of its imports came from India. This trend continued for some time even after the independence. According to one estimate, 70 per cent of Pakistan's trade during the year 1948-49 was with India.²³

The situation drastically changed when Pakistan declined to devalue its currency in 1949 after the devaluation of the Indian currency, and imposed import restrictions on India.²⁴ Bilateral trade declined sharply after the devaluation crisis in 1949, and further dipped in 1954-55 when Pakistan joined Western alliances, and India became the ally of former Soviet Union. Moreover, after India-Pakistan war in 1965, bilateral trade between India and Pakistan almost ceased to exist up to 1976.²⁵ India-Pakistan bilateral trade started again in the late 1970s. It picked up only a little after formation of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in 1985. Despite possessing

immense potential, trade between India and Pakistan has remained minimal over the years because of their conflict.

Some private trade links started to develop between the two countries in the early 1980s. In 1981, the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) and the Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) visited India. During the visit, they signed an agreement with India's Peace, Harmony, and Development (PHD) Chambers of Commerce and Industry, and the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) to promote trade between them.²⁶ Then in 1982, PHD Chambers' delegation from India visited Pakistan for the first time, wherein the Indo-Pak Joint Business Commission was set up. In 1982, PHD Chambers of Commerce and Industry also established a separate India-Pakistan desk in New Delhi to promote trade between the two countries. Subsequently, the Indo-Pak Joint Business Commission commenced its regular meetings in both Islamabad and New Delhi. Those contacts ultimately led to a trade agreement between India and Pakistan in January 1986, in which a limited number of listed items were allowed to be imported in Pakistan. However, despite all those efforts and the trade agreement, business activity between the two countries could not flourish. Bhatia termed India and Pakistan 'residual trading partners', as exports from India in 1988-89 accounted for 0.179 per cent of the total imports into Pakistan, and the exports from Pakistan accounted for 0.257 per cent of the total imports into India during the same year.²⁷

Hence, by the time PIPFPD was created in 1994, trade relations between India and Pakistan, and links between trading communities in the two countries, were still in their embryonic phase. Nevertheless, initial links between leading chambers of commerce and industry of the two countries were developed. In terms of promoting horizontal integration between trade and business communities of India and Pakistan, initial links were established, but these links were not strong enough to create any meaningful impact on the overall situation.

India and Pakistan, despite being natural trade partners, could not develop stronger trade relations. The first step towards a free trade agreement between South Asian countries was taken from the SAARC platform with the signing of the SAARC Preferential Trading Agreement (SAPTA) in April 1993. But because of the India-Pakistan conflict, SAARC could not attain the level of intra-regional trade achieved by the European Union (EU), the Association of South East Asian (ASEAN), and other regional organizations.

The track-two conferences/dialogues anchor point

The term track-two diplomacy means different things to different people. Some include all kinds of unofficial contacts in track-two, whereas some others, like Diamond and Macdonald,²⁸ consider track-two just one track in the multi-track diplomacy. For the purpose of this study, the author has used the latter definition of track-two, which only includes conferences/dialogues among professionals/experts aiming at providing an unofficial platform to analyze,

discuss, and formulate recommendations for conflict management or conflict resolution.

A problem-solving workshop organized by third-party scholar practitioners Herbert Kelman and Stephen Cohen in 1972—involving citizens of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh—was the first unofficial track-two initiative involving Indians and Pakistanis.²⁹ This workshop was organized in the backdrop of the 1971 Indo-Pakistan war, and the separation of East Pakistan to become Bangladesh. Then in 1976, Ronald Fisher organized a pilot problem-solving workshop on India-Pakistan conflict.³⁰ These two one-off events failed to create any impetus for more track-two activities between India and Pakistan. Similarly, India-Pakistan Friendship Society—which was launched in New Delhi in 1987 by Kewel Singh, a former Indian foreign secretary—proved to be a non-starter.

Finally, it was the drought at the top level and the danger of a nuclear war in South Asia that pushed the introduction of a series of track-two dialogues between the two countries. But the real impetus came from outside, especially from the United States. In 1990, the United States Information Service (USIS) arranged a series of WORLDNET dialogues between Indian and Pakistani experts, in which issues like nuclear non-proliferation, confidence-building measures (CBMs), and regional economic cooperation were discussed.³¹ WORLDNET dialogues proved to be the precursor of Neemrana dialogue, which is the only track-two initiative between India and Pakistan surviving to-date since its inception in 1991.

Neemrana dialogue got its name from Neemrana Fort in Rajasthan, India, where the first meeting of the dialogue series took place in 1991. Like WORLDNET dialogues, initial meetings of Neemrana were supported by the USIS, and the focus also remained on nuclear and non-nuclear CBMs. Later on, Kashmir, nuclear proliferation, arms race, and economic cooperation topped the agenda, while some other issues, like visa regime, cultural exchanges, trade, and media and industrial cooperation were also discussed.³²

To a large extent, Neemrana followed interactive conflict resolution (ICR) approach or problem-solving approach. Like ICR, the participants were selected for their expertise and their access to the top level so that the input from track-two could easily reach the official track-one. The talks were kept secret from the glare of the media to facilitate open and candid discussion. Moreover, the participants were instructed not to refer to any aspect of Indo-Pakistan relations in terms of its history because they feared that discussing the controversial history of the sub-continent could hamper progress.³³

In Neemrana, one of the most important characteristics of problem-solving workshops was missing. Unlike ICR, where third-party scholar practitioners had facilitated the dialogue, in the case of Neemrana, two seasoned diplomats—one each from India (M.K. Rasgotra) and Pakistan (Niaz A. Naik)—had co-chaired the meetings. Therefore, on the whole, problem-solving approach techniques were not followed despite having a similar kind of structure.

Nonetheless, Neemrana provided a much needed unofficial platform that could operate even when the official track-one channels were closed

because of the ups and downs in the relationship between the two countries. Since their first meeting in 1991, the Neemrana dialogues have been arranged without a major break over the years. Blum³⁴ points out that at times it was the only channel of communication available to the Indian and Pakistani governments. Although the USIS had helped in launching Neemrana, over the years it has grown as an independent forum.³⁵

Apart from Neemrana, in the early 1990s quite a few other seminars and conferences were arranged between Indians and Pakistanis. *Time Magazine* and the Lahore office of the *Frontier Post* organized a conference on security and strategic issues in South Asia. The US Institute of Peace (USIP) organized two well-structured track-two workshops in Washington D.C. on Kashmir titled, 'Conflict Resolution in South Asia: Creative Approaches to Kashmir', involving Kashmiris from both sides of the border and some American conflict resolution experts.³⁶ Rajiv Gandhi Institute for Contemporary Studies also organized a seminar on bilateral relations between India and Pakistan in April 1994 to develop a better mutual understanding of issues of common concern.

Track-two forms an important part of the web approach. It connects the middle-range leadership to the top-level leadership because it is far closer to the track-one official negotiations. The track-two in India and Pakistan developed different ideas and dialogues over nuclear and non-nuclear CBMs, which were later negotiated and adopted as policies by the two governments.

If we look at the composition of track-two between India and Pakistan, however, it was far too elitist. Most of the participants were very close to the track-one, in fact, retired track-one practitioners. Moreover, all proceedings were kept away from the media, shared only with the two governments. But this is a problem with track-two everywhere in the world; it is generally far too elitist for being useful in the web approach. Despite being unofficial, track-two is basically an extension of track-one, as most of its participants despite being unofficial are essentially top level actors having little or no connection with the larger middle range. Track-two initiatives must be open to the larger middle range so that they can help in integrating middle range leadership with the top-level leadership.

The academic and research anchor point

Research and academic side has remained a weak link in South Asia in general, and Pakistan in particular. Zaidi³⁷ reported 'a conspicuous silence' on India in Pakistan's institutions of research and teaching in his detailed survey of social science research and teaching on India in Pakistan. Perhaps, understanding the significance of knowing the adversarial neighbour well and realizing the huge gap in this regard, in March 1982, the Institute of Regional Studies (IRS) was established on special instructions of the then president of Pakistan General Zia-ul-Haq to study South Asia with a special emphasis on India. Over the years, IRS has produced several reports and research papers on Indian elections, Indian internal affairs, Indian foreign policy, and India-Pakistan peace process. IRS also produces a fortnightly publication *Selections from Regional Press* based on clippings, mainly from the Indian newspapers and

periodicals. Apart from IRS, by 1994, the Pakistan Institute of International Affairs (PIIA), established in 1948, was the only other institution in Pakistan doing research on international affairs including India and Pakistan.

The Indian case was not much different either. Relatively speaking, however, India had more research institutions involved in conducting research on Pakistan. The Centre for Policy Research (CPR), established in 1973, the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) inaugurated in 1963, and the Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis (IDSA), registered in 1965, were involved in conducting research on Pakistan. However, there was little collaborative research produced by the Indian and Pakistani research institutions then, and most of the research institutions, except CPR and CSDS in India, were closely associated with the governments in Islamabad and New Delhi. Only noteworthy institutional academic collaboration in that period was the 'working relationship' between CPR and Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) on promoting regional cooperation.³⁸

However, as far as promotion of new researchers, networking, and collaborative research in South Asia is concerned, the inception of Regional Centre for Strategic Studies (RCSS) in Colombo, Sri Lanka, in 1993, was a major development. Prof. Shelton U. Kodikara was the founding Executive Director and the spirit behind the establishment of RCSS. Since 1993, RCSS has facilitated several dialogues between Indian and Pakistani researchers, and has produced several well-researched individual and collaborative research monographs on India-Pakistan conflict.

Moreover, on the research side, two new South Asian journals came out in the early 1990s. An influential Congress leader, Dinesh Singh, established the Indian Council for South Asian Cooperation, which led to the publication of *South Asia Journal* in the early 1990s that was renamed *South Asian Survey* in 1994.³⁹ On the other hand, Gowher Rizvi, then an Oxford-based Bangladeshi scholar, launched *Contemporary South Asia* in 1992.

Outside South Asia, especially in the United States, several research initiatives were launched on peace and security in South Asia in the 1980s and early 1990s. In 1982, in the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, US, the South Asian leg of its famous programme Arms Control, Disarmament, and International Security (ACDIS), was launched.⁴⁰ Several Indian and Pakistani scholars, journalists, and academics received training under this programme and their research was published under the ACDIS occasional paper series. Moreover, Chris Smith, George Perkovich, and Stephen P. Cohen, organized three summer school workshops on arms control and conflict resolution in both India (one) and Pakistan (two) in the early 1990s.⁴¹

Hence, academic and research collaboration between Indian and Pakistani scholars was minimal by the 1990s. Research was taking place on issues concerning peace in South Asia, but there was little collaboration between the researchers of the two countries. Especially research on people-to-people contacts was completely missing. The whole focus of research was on addressing nuclear deterrence issues, pushing for CBMs at official level, and promoting disarmament. At the most, Kashmir conflict sometimes came into the

picture, but people of India and Pakistan, civil society, and research collaboration was a missing link.

The women activists anchor point

Women have been at the forefront of the peace movement in both India and Pakistan. Women are visible on prominent positions in most of the peace groups and peacebuilding organizations. Their role in peacebuilding, most of the times, is not gender-based. Gender, however, surely influences their actions, and shapes their choices. Since the 1980s, Indian and Pakistani women have been establishing contacts and sustaining working relationships with each other in different fields like art, theatre, music, film, academia, and human rights. This section, however, focuses on links between women-only organizations on the basis of gender.

In reaction to General Zia-ul-Haq's Islamization and discriminatory laws against women promulgated in 1979, urbanized professional women and feminist women groups in Pakistan jointly launched the mass-based Women's Action Forum (WAF) in 1981. WAF established its chapters in Islamabad, Karachi, and Lahore, and organized public protests, symposiums, and debates against the discriminatory laws of the military government.⁴² Later on, in the 1990s, WAF associated itself with the peace movement, especially peace with India, based on demilitarization and denuclearization of India and Pakistan. The founding members of WAF included Asma Jahangir, Hina Jilani, Nighat Said Khan, Anis Haroon, and Madeeha Gauhar, who were later at the forefront of the PIPFPD and other peace links with India.

Indian human rights activist Kamla Bhasin was the first Indian peace activist who was invited as a family planning trainer by Ferida Sher of Family Planning Association of Pakistan in 1984. In 1985, Ferida Sher also brought another Indian trainer Madhu Sarin to Pakistan. However, the major initial links between Indian and Pakistani women were established during the International Women's Conference at Nairobi in 1985.⁴³ From there onwards, they started developing their links on offshore venues, especially Kathmandu and Colombo.

In 1988, *Shirkat Gah*—a women's resource centre based in Karachi, Lahore, and Peshawar—sent a women delegation from Pakistan to India to study the environment-friendly *Chipko* (hug the trees) movement. These contacts led to the first India-Pakistan conference on environment, jointly organized by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Pakistan, and the Centre for Science and Environment, India.⁴⁴ This conference provided a good opportunity to NGOs, and community and media groups from India and Pakistan to interact. They continued their deliberations in a month-long video training workshop in Bangalore in August 1989, and then in a similar workshop in Lahore.⁴⁵ However, despite a strong desire on both sides, these contacts could not become a regular feature because of the draconian visa regime between India and Pakistan.

As opposed to the alumni, trade, track-two, and research links, middle range leadership was far more visible in women links because women groups were not restricted to the horizontal integration of the elite in the two countries.

Women groups represented the civil society in both India and Pakistan. Therefore, they had more access to the larger middle class and the grassroots. The same women later emerged as leaders of peace movements in both the countries.

The drama, music, art, and cultural anchor point

Hindi and Urdu, the official languages of India and Pakistan, respectively, are so similar in spoken form that even for the native speakers, sometimes it becomes difficult to differentiate between them. According to Gumperz,⁴⁶ Hindi and Urdu are in fact two styles of the same language. They were constructed as two different languages during the Hindi-Urdu controversy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when politics led to more Persianized Urdu and more Sanskritized Hindi.⁴⁷ This similarity of Hindi and Urdu is more evident in drama, music, art, film, and culture of the two countries, as both nations enjoy the same music, theatre, art, and culture. Considering this, it can be said that music, art, and culture have the potential of being used as a powerful catalyst for peace promotion between the two countries. In this section those initiatives are discussed which had established their professional links across the border.

Sheema Kermani's Tehrik-i-Niswan

Sheema Kermani's *Tehrik-i-Niswan* (women's movement), established in 1980, was the first group in Pakistan that started using theatre for raising gender issues, and the peace movement between India and Pakistan. Kermani—a professional classical dancer with a graduate degree in Fine Arts from the UK, and a left-oriented political activist—used dance, music, and performing arts to raise awareness among masses, especially the neglected working class labour women of Pakistan.⁴⁸ Since its creation in 1980, *Tehrik-i-Niswan* has been performing all over Pakistan to raise voice for working-class women and the neglected classes.

Tehrik-i-Niswan's first performance was an adaptation of India's famous theatre artist Safdar Hashmi's *Aurat* (woman) in 1980. Then in 1981, Kermani dramatized another Indian writer Amrita Pritam's short story titled *Dard key Fasley*.⁴⁹ Kermani told the author that the selection of stories of Indian authors was intended to bring the people of India and Pakistan closer by showing them cultural similarities between the two countries.⁵⁰ Finally in 1989, Kermani was able to take her play *Raaz-o-Niaz* (secret talk), set in a houseboat in Kashmir, to the India International Centre in Delhi. Since that time, Kermani has been a regular performer in India.

Ajoka: theatre for social change

Famous TV artist Madeeha Gauhar and her playwright husband Shahid Nadeem launched *Ajoka* in 1984 as what they termed as 'theatre for social change'.⁵¹ *Ajoka's* first play, *Jaloos* (the procession) was an adaptation of the famous Indian playwright Badal Sircar's *Panjwan Chiragh* (the fifth lamp). Initially *Ajoka* had performed its plays on private house lawns because theatre

hall owners were scared of the military government. Later on, however, they were able to get a permanent base in Goethe Institute, Lahore.⁵²

Ajoka's first Indian trip came in 1989, when a very influential voice in political theatre in India Safdar Hashmi was murdered in Delhi while he was performing in his street play *Halla Bol* (raise your voice). On a special invitation of Safdar Hashmi's theatre group *Jana Natya Manch*, *Ajoka* attended the theatre festival, organized to pay tribute to Hashmi, and performed its play on bonded labour called *Itt* in Delhi's Mandi House.⁵³ The next day, *The Times of India* declared on its front page that India-Pakistan theatre collaboration had arrived.⁵⁴

Ajoka has produced several plays on the partition and peace themes. In 1992, *Ajoka* adapted Sadat Hassan Manto's *Toba Tek Singh*, which depicted the pain, misery, and agony of the people of the sub-continent at the time of the partition in 1947. In 1993, Shahid Nadeem wrote *Aik thi Nani* (once there was a grandmother) for *Ajoka*, which was based on a real life story of the acting careers of two sisters Zohra Sehgal (famous Indian actress) and Uzra Butt (Pakistani theatre artist) who were separated because of the partition. *Ajoka* has regularly staged plays in all major cities of India and Pakistan.

The ASR and Punjab Lok Raqs

Nighat Said Khan established the Applied Socio-economic Research Resource Centre (ASR) in 1983 in Lahore to provide training and research resource to women organizations, theatre groups, peasants, and trade unions. In 1988, ASR brought six famous theatre personalities from India to conduct a ten-day theatre skills workshop in Lahore. The *Punjab Lok Raqs* (established in 1986) and *Ajoka* were the Pakistani participants. These initial contacts led to a theatre festival in February 1989 in Pakistan where four theatre groups from India performed—the first Indian theatre performance in Pakistan since 1947.⁵⁵ Later in the same year, four members of the *Punjab Lok Raqs* participated in the National Theatre Festival in Delhi.⁵⁶ This helped it to further develop its contacts with theatre groups in India.

Music and art have tremendous transformative power to heal wounds, build peace, and bridge differences across communities. The theatre of *Tehrik-i-Niswan* and *Ajoka* brought people in the peace discourse, as it was the theatre of the masses. Both theatre groups not only took up issues of the common man, but also tried to reach the grassroots by performing in the localities of the neglected classes. More importantly, these initial linkages between theatre groups proved to be long-lasting relationships that continue to the present day.

The worker, labour, and trade union anchor point

Worker, labour, and trade unions were active in India and Pakistan since partition, but links between the two only became active in the 1980s. Initial links between the labour and trade union leaders of the two countries were established outside the sub-continent. Karamat Ali, a prominent labour activist of Pakistan, told the author that they had formed Pakistani Workers' Association in England in 1980, and had established close links with the Indian Workers' Association in the UK.⁵⁷ Direct contact between trade unionists of

India and Pakistan were established in 1987 when Ali led a labour delegation to India on the special invitation of his London and Hague colleagues.⁵⁸

Ali, with the support of his comrades from trade unions and labour movements, founded Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research (PILER) on 1 May 1982 with a goal “to equip the working class with proper awareness of their rights and ways to promote and protect them, through education and training.”⁵⁹ PILER was launched with a modest funding from the United Workers Association in a two-room residential-cum-office apartment in Karachi, but over the years it grew as “Pakistan’s premier labour research (and training) centre.”⁶⁰

Over the last three decades PILER has remained at the forefront of the peace movement with India and the anti-nuclear movement in Pakistan. In March 1992, PILER, in collaboration with the New Delhi-based Forum for Workers Solidarity, organized a meeting of plant-level workers and trade unionists in Delhi. The trade unionists from multi-national companies like Unilever, Siemens, Parke Davis, Philips etc. in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka participated along with a large number of labour researchers and labour activists in this conference.⁶¹ PILER gradually strengthened its linkages with the labour and worker organizations in India.

Apart from PILER, South Asia Partnership (SAP) Pakistan was the other labour-based organization which had links with Indian NGOs working on labour. SAP existed in India since 1981, while SAP Pakistan was launched in 1987 with the help of SAP Canada under its Pakistan NGO Support Programme (PNSP). The Deputy Director of SAP Pakistan Irfan Mufti told the author that SAP Pakistan was in touch with SAP India since its inception in 1987, and that they were working on the common agenda of creating a South Asian community by working on people’s rights specially the marginalized poor people.⁶²

These initial labour contacts across the border were important in the context of building the web process, as they were the only horizontal grassroots inter-group interventions then. These links were important from vertical integration perspective as well because both PILER and SAP Pakistan worked with workers in Pakistan at the grassroots, connecting grassroots labour communities to the leadership at the top. These worker and labourer contacts later played a key role in the peace movement using both PIPFPD and other platforms.

The intelligentsia anchor point

The intelligentsia links are different from academic, research, and track-two ones, even though some of the members involved in those links can be part of the intelligentsia links as well. Academic and research links focus on connecting researchers and producing collaborative research, while track-two links try to facilitate the work of negotiators by providing neutral forums to former diplomats and other experts for discussing contentious issues. On the other hand, intelligentsia links try to connect the educated and intellectual elite of India and Pakistan on one platform. They are involved in peace advocacy and try to create pressure on governments to show restraint and talk peace.

Intelligentsia groups are rooted in the middle range, and they have far stronger links with the grassroots workers and researchers in their respective fields.

The Indian and Pakistani intelligentsia—including former judges, technocrats, journalists, writers, and some politicians—had started developing their own sphere of influence by the late 1980s, and started pushing for peace. This all started with a conference in April 1984 organized by the Pakistani English-language newspaper *The Muslim*. *The Muslim* invited a good number of Indian journalists, writers, politicians, and retired civil and military bureaucrats to Islamabad for a frank dialogue on India-Pakistan relations. Then in September 1987, the writers of the two countries also met in New Delhi on the initiative of the Academy of Fine Arts and Literature.

In 1989, when a full-blown insurgency broke out in Kashmir and relations between India and Pakistan deteriorated to a level where many feared the outbreak of a war, a campaign based on joint statements of ‘eminent’ (the term they used for themselves) Indians and Pakistanis was started to pressurize governments on both sides of the border to show restraint. The first of this kind of statements was issued by Indian intelligentsia on 9 April 1990 in India, urging pro-peace groups in India and Pakistan to form a ‘united front’ and push for an amicable resolution of all conflicts, including Kashmir, following the spirit of the Simla Agreement.⁶³ This followed two more joint statements from India: one was published in the *Hindustan Times* on 16 April 1990, and the other was issued on 25 April 1990 containing signatures of seventy-eight Indian intellectuals along with the signature of Eqbal Ahmed, the famous Pakistani scholar.

After these three joint statements emanating from the Indian intelligentsia in a span of just one month, Pakistani scholars and intellectuals also decided to be counted. On 13 May 1990, as many as fifty ‘eminent’ Pakistanis issued a joint statement seeking restraint from the two governments and calling for a negotiated settlement of the Kashmir dispute. Later on, by the end of May, some of the signatories—which included Eqbal Ahmed, Mubashir Hassan, Nisar Osmani, Asma Jahangir, and Nasim Zehra—embarked on a private trip to India. During their four-day trip, they had fifteen sessions with top-level organizations in Delhi. They also met with former Indian prime minister Rajiv Gandhi and even addressed a public meeting.⁶⁴

The most tangible outcome of this trip was the first ever joint statement by 54 Indian and Pakistani intellectuals, together urging their two governments to move towards peace. The statement was widely published simultaneously in Indian and Pakistani press on 27 June 1990. Daily *The Statesman* in India termed this statement a “plea to avoid Indo-Pak conflict.”⁶⁵ Mubashir Hassan, and V.A. Pai Panandiker, then director of the CPR in New Delhi, had collaborated for several days to secure the signatures of 25 Pakistani and 29 Indian eminent citizens.⁶⁶

Mubashir Hassan and Panandiker kept up their links intact and collaborated with their colleagues to produce the second joint statement of the Indian and Pakistani eminent citizens on 2 August 1992. The second joint statement was not a major achievement from the point of view of the numbers of

signatures, as the number just increased from 54 to 59 and most of the signatories were the same. But it was surely a great achievement from the perspective of the content of the statement they agreed upon. The second statement centred more on promoting people-to-people contacts and called for removing restrictions on the movement of people, goods, ideas, and communication links between India and Pakistan.

In September 1990, encouraged by the success of the joint statements, a series of South Asian dialogues was conceived in a seminar at Goa. It was decided that for the next five years, a South Asian conference will be held once a year to discuss the issues of 'peace, development, and cooperation' amongst South Asian countries.⁶⁷ These dialogues helped in bringing Indian and Pakistani peace activists much closer to each other, as they recognized that people's concerns, interests, and agendas had much more points of similarity than points of difference.⁶⁸

The intelligentsia links proved to be the precursors of the PIPFPD, as for the first time a need to unite all pro-peace people of both the countries on one platform was realized during those interactions. The joint statements were the first serious effort to influence decision-making at the top by building pressure from the bottom. These intelligentsia links were very important for middle range horizontal integration because they were, to some extent, representative of their respective professional groups, as all 'eminent' signatories enjoyed good reputation among their peers and colleagues.

Conclusion

By the 1980s, it was evident to the concerned citizens on both sides of the border that their governments might not be capable of resolving their disputes amicably on their own. This pushed them to do something to build peace and harmony between their warring nations. By the early 1990s, the belief that the two governments were incapable of resolving their disputes on their own became far stronger, which explains the increase in people-to-people contact interventions in this phase.

The people-to-people contact initiatives launched in this phase were not big enough to make any visible impact on their own, but they certainly laid the foundations for future interventions. They all contributed towards building new anchor points for the people-to-people contacts based peacebuilding between India and Pakistan. They deserve credit for slowly developing the workforce or the peace lobby, which was essential for the launching of major initiatives like PIPFPD. These initiatives did the necessary groundwork without which peace movement and peace discourse could not be conceived in India and Pakistan. In fact, the bulk of the workforce and the leadership of PIPFPD came from these initiatives. The birth of PIPFPD should be seen as a by-product of the process started by those early initiatives.

Notes and References

- ¹ The contact hypothesis works on the basic premise that a prolonged conflict creates stereotypes and prejudices, and dehumanizes the other because of the communication gap and ignorance between people in conflict. It is also premised in the argument that contact between members of parties in conflict will improve the relations between them by reducing prejudices and stereotypes and humanizing the other. During the 1940s to the 1960s many in the social psychology field saw contact hypothesis as a recipe for prejudice reduction in inter-ethnic conflict situations.
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