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## **ROLE OF DIASPORA IN INDO-PAK**

### **PEACEBUILDING**

**Arsala Nizami**



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## Abstract

This paper throws light on the efforts of South Asian diaspora in the US in building peace between their home countries. Diasporas have always been considered as actors having an influence on the politics and economy of the hostland. However, this image of diasporas is getting blurred and what comes out as a clear picture is of the diasporas, who along with influencing host politics, affect policies at home as well. Not only do they affect policies, they also play a crucial role in conflicts back home. Therefore, the objective is to analyse the initiatives taken by Indian and Pakistani diasporas in promoting peace and reducing hostility in the region. Specific aims of the paper are:

- To examine the effect of political lobbying of diasporas on Indo-Pak relations.
- To understand the role of diasporas in inter-state conflicts and its resolution.
- To analyse the work and activities of diasporic peace building organisations

In order to accomplish the objectives, South Asian diaspora organisations, their activities and effects of political lobbying have been analysed through interactions with resource persons, content analysis of electronic news, analysis of their websites, news bulletins and discussion forums. Following organisations have been studied : USINPAC, PakPAC, GOPIO, NFIA, ACHA, INSAF, Erasing Borders, SAPAC, 1947 partition archives etc

The paper suggests that South Asian diaspora in the US is continuously engaged in promoting peace between the two belligerents through peaceful walks, campaigns, news bulletins, conferences, talks, workshops, student exchanges, discussion forums etc, which has yielded some degree of success. But, the fact remains that the process has not made a substantial impact perhaps because it is still in its nascent stage and require persistent and enduring efforts.

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**Statement: All the views expressed in the paper are of the author(s).**

# Role of Diaspora in Indo-Pak Peacebuilding

**Arsala Nizami**

## INTRODUCTION

Ever since partition of Indian sub continent, India and Pakistan are engaged in what seems to be an 'unending conflict'(The phrase was used by Sumit Ganguly(2001)) around various contentious issues. Despite myriad of efforts of track I to bring peace and resolve conflict between the two belligerents, hostility and suspicion still persist. On the other hand, track II is also toiling hard to normalise relations by negotiating and implementing various confidence building measures, but unable to impact much. Indisputably, positive peace is the result of the endeavours of all the stakeholders to the conflict and not just the inclusion of obvious ones. However, mainstream literature mostly documents and analyses the measures and steps taken by government only. Efforts of non state actors are also being documented and scrutinised these days, but are considered only as a farce and not as something concrete. Even within civil society, only local efforts are being documented, and the efforts of, what has emerged as a global civil society, have not been dealt with at all. Thus, this paper studies Indo-Pak peacebuilding in a broader sense by examining one of the important actors of global society i.e. diasporas.

The broad objective of the present paper is to analyse the initiatives taken by Indian and Pakistani diasporas in promoting peace between their home countries. Indian and Pakistani diaspora groups in the United States are studied in this paper.

Specific objectives are :

- To examine the effect of political lobbying of diasporas on Indo-Pak relations.
- To understand the role of diasporas in inter-state conflicts and its resolution.
- To analyse the work and activities of diasporic peacebuilding organisations

Diasporas are transnational actors playing important role in the politics of home as well as host land. Interestingly, they live far off from the home countries, still have a great effect on the home conflicts, sometimes even more than that of the stakeholders at home. For instance, Tamil diaspora played an effective role in aggravating the ethnic conflict back home between Tamils and Sinhala by supporting and funding LTTE. Another example could be Ethiopian diaspora in North America,

which represents all the factions of communities of home land. While One group supports the leadership in Ethiopia, the other group supports Oromo self-determination movement; therefore, shaping the conflict dynamics. Similarly, many other instances can be cited where diasporas have been playing important role in either resolving the home conflict or aggravating it.

Smith and Stares (2007) assert that diasporas play both constructive as well as destructive role in home conflicts. They contribute positively through lobbying, philanthropy, supporting post conflict reconstruction, investing and boosting trade and economy etc. While on the other hand, diasporas influence negatively by financing terrorist organisations, supporting wars and crimes etc. Therefore, Demmers (2002, pp-85-96) emphasises that the study of diasporic interventions in home countries becomes even more important with the rise of war refugees, increased speed of communication, mobility and production of cultural and political boundaries.

## Migration and Shaping up of Indian and Pakistan Diasporas

For centuries, South Asians have been migrating to various countries at various time periods. However, a wave of Indian and Pakistani emigrations mainly ushered during and after partition. Partition of Indian subcontinent was the worst event to happen in the histories of the two countries. Along with entailing largest human migrations on the face of earth, it also induced miseries, fatalities and human crimes. Peoples of India and Pakistan not only crossed each other's borders, but also flew to many other countries.

Indian emigrants mostly moved to UK as they could enter their freely due to commonwealth policy which gave relaxations to inhabitants of commonwealth countries. But in 1960's, this policy was withdrawn. However, in 1980s, in order to attract skilled labours, UK reinstated its relaxed immigration policies.

As far as the US is concerned, Indians migrated there in different phases. Indian immigration to US had started in the 19th century, but bulk of population came in period from 1960's to 1990's. During these years, migrants mostly comprised of professionals like doctors and engineers, which were from upper middle class and constituted the influential upper strata of society back home. Similarly, they have been occupying influential positions in political, economic and professional arena

and are considered one of the successful communities in USA. The role of USA in global political economy further enhanced the status of Indian diaspora not only in USA but also in India and elsewhere. Therefore, it is politically influential and lobbies well on important issues.

The history of Pakistani emigrations is similar to that of India's. After partition, migrants moved in bulk to UK because of friendly policies there. But, there were very less emigrations to the US due to restrictive policies till 1965. 'But, in 1965, the immigration and nationality act was adopted favouring immigrations. As a result, Pakistani immigrations to the US increased suddenly' (Oda 2009,p-2)

Another act, the immigration reform and control act (IRCA) in 1986 was upheld and favoured agrarian and unskilled workers from both the countries, specifically from Pakistan(Barkan, 2013).

### **Diaspora Associations and Organisations**

Since 1960's, both Indians as well as Pakistanis have been forming many religion, ethnicity, profession and region based organisations serving different purposes of the groups. These organisations promote cultural and religious practices, festivals and sometimes interfaith dialogues as well. Example of such Indian and Pakistani organisations are Telugu association of North America, Bengali association of Greater Rochester, Sikh religious society of Arizona, Federation of Indian American Christian organisation, , the Pakistani American association of Chicago, Islamic circle of North America etc.

However, from 1980s onwards, these trends started changing. Now, pan Indian and pan Pakistani identity organizations were being formed to promote intra community unity and to make them apparent in the social and political affairs of the US. These organizations were concerned for the rights of diaspora groups and were more politically active, having an impact on the policies of both home as well as host countries. Examples of Pan national organisations would be Global Organisation of people of India Origins(GOPIO), Federation of Indian associations (FIA), National federation of Indian American Associations ( NFIA), US PAK foundation, the Association of Physicians of Pakistani Origins(APPNA), Pakistani society of Atlanta, Association of Pakistani physicians, the Council of Pakistan American affairs (COPAA) etc

Diaspora organisations can be further segregated into political and economic organisations. Basically, economic organisations are formed for the purpose of boosting

trade within the US as well as with India or Pakistan, increasing FDIs etc. On the contrary, political organisations are formed to mobilise and stimulate policies of homeland and hostland. The Association of parliamentarians of Indian origin, for instance, play active role in local politics back home and influence state policies. Similarly, the Pakistani American Political Action Committee (PakPAC) promotes civil rights in the US and good governance and education in Pakistan.

### **Political influence of South Asian Americans**

The South Asian diasporic community became active in politics in 1980s. They effectively mobilised on issues like nuclear tests in 1998, Kargil conflict, Indo-US nuclear deal 2008 etc.

According to the report on the high level committee on Indian diaspora, the Indian Americans have emerged as a powerful and politically well connected diaspora, who effectively mobilize on important policy issues. For instance, The National Federation of Indian Americans (NFIA) campaigned in the United States to stop military aid to Pakistan. Indian Americans also helped in defeating anti-India bills and amendments introduced in the United States Congress.

Similarly, Pakistani Americans have also been politically active. "They opposed stopping of military aid which was being given to Pakistan in 1990 and also targeted the chief architect of the measure, Senator Larry Pressler (R-SD), for defeat in 1996"(Paul & Paul 2009, p-19).

In the wake of nuclear tests of May 1998, Pakistani groups started lobbying extensively. The Ohio-based Pakistani American Council, for instance, "lobbied regarding nuclear issue and made 26 US Congressmen to publicly support that country's point of view. The Congressmen came out openly in support of Pakistan, holding to the line that its nuclear tests were a "defensive action", while placing the blame for the nuclear arms race squarely on India"(Honawar,1998).

Indian Americans played a significant role in Indo-US nuclear deal in the year 2008. GOPIO (Global Organisation of People of Indian Origin) successfully lobbied for Indo-US nuclear deal. They mobilized opinions in favour of the deal at the grass root level as well as at the middle level. They assembled and held many rounds of town house meetings. 'The issue galvanized community organizations as never before and brought groups with both democratic and republican leanings to the same platform. The US-India political action committee (USINPAC), the Indian American security leadership council, the US India friendship council, the US India business council, and other smaller groups and

individuals worked together on this issue. At the end of April 2006, just before congress was reconvened to start considering the Henry Hyde Act dealing with the nuclear deal, about 200 Indian American community leaders from across the country gathered in Washington to lobby their Senate and House members to approve the deal. Indian Americans also had a strategy meeting with senior staff members at the White House led by Karl Rove. The Indian American groups active on this issue were turning out to be important allies for the Bush administration, which was struggling to get the bill passed. (Christian, 2009).

Therefore, South Asians not only influence policies in India but also sway the foreign policies of the government of the US.

### **Peacebuilding between India and Pakistan**

Along with lobbying, diasporas are also trying to promote peace between India and Pakistan by using different tools of confidence-building measures, of which building people to people contact is the most used tool. Apart from general political organisations, some political organisations have been formed specifically to build peace back home. Some of the organisations have been formed just to increase awareness about this persisting conflict through its news bulletins, some organisations have been formed to seek solutions to the conflict by forming discussion forums and organising workshops, while many others visit India and meet with resource persons to mitigate the conflict.

One of the first non government organisations was Association for communal harmony in Asia (ACHA) formed in 1993 in the US with the aim of promoting peace and tranquillity among South Asian countries especially between India and Pakistan. Its present activities involve two electronic discussion forums, Asia peace forum and Kashmir solutions forum. It also publishes e-bulletin, which deals with current issues concerning Indo-Pak peace and conflict.

ACHA started Asia peace in 2001 to promote worldwide electronic network of individuals and organisations. Asia peace promotes peace and justice in the world generally and between India and Pakistan specifically.

Another forum of ACHA, Kashmir solutions forum is devoted to search for means to seek solution to the conflict and to share information about the current developments in the region.

ACHA organizes peace missions also. Two crucial missions in India and Pakistan were conducted in 2011 and 2013 with the themes 'youth peace camps in India and Pakistan' and 'promoting peace in India and Pakistan' respectively.

In 2011, ACHA conducted 5 two-day workshops in Indian and Pakistani cities, which involved both men and women as participants. These workshops were intended to bring peace within India and Pakistan through instigating interpersonal and universal peace. Again in 2013, 6 two-day peace camps were set up with the help of local partners in the cities of the two countries. Many diverse and interesting issues were dealt with.

Likewise, in 2011 in New Jersey, another not for profit group was formed, named Erasing borders, to support peace initiatives back in Afghanistan, India and Pakistan. Along with supporting local peace building activities, this group also supports those people who yearn for building peace between the two countries across the globe. Around 2500 professionals have signed up for this peace movement.

Three primary objectives of this organisation are: Firstly, they support local peace activities and initiatives through inclusive dialogue, further people to people talks and exchange ideas. Secondly, it focuses on providing better job opportunities in both the countries. It engages the diaspora in joint ventures, technology transfer arrangements and capital investments in their respective countries of origin. Thirdly, it promotes educational opportunities and training in IT in both the regions. Their motto is 'better education means jobs, more jobs mean less violence and insecurity in the region'.

The resolution of Kashmir conflict has also gained prominence among South Asian diaspora which is addressed through talks, meetings, conferences, workshops, street plays etc. One such "two day conference was held in New York including scholars from South Asian

diaspora community as well as from India and Pakistan. It was organised by US based International Educational development and the American Kashmiri council. The sole intent of the conference was to explore options for Kashmir issue”(Shahin, 2005). The conference was a success in many ways. Firstly, it made scholars travel to New York all the way from India and Pakistan only to attend the conference. Secondly, it was able to achieve what it was meant to i.e. generation of options for resolution of Kashmir conflict. However, how successful it has been in implementing the ‘options’ is yet to be seen. Nevertheless, dialogues, more than being means, are an end in itself. At best, they yield good results. At worst, they bring adversaries and stakeholders of the conflict on a negotiating table, which is appreciable, given the nature of the conflict.

Organisations have also been formed jointly by Indian and Pakistani diasporas. International South Asia Forum (INSAF) in North America and Europe was founded by delegates from India and Pakistan along with other South Asian delegates of Bangladeshi, Nepali and Sri Lankan origin in 1999. Along with expressing concerns over increasing hostility between India and Pakistan, it also raises concerns over growing militarisation and violation of human rights across South Asia. It fulfils its objectives through publication of a newsletter, organising seminars, talks by speakers from South Asia, sponsoring cultural events and developing problem solving workshops and programs.

Some organisations have also been formed for combating communal violence in South Asian region, for example, “South Asian progressive action collective (SAPAC) was formed by members from India, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh to combat communalism and inter religious or inter cultural conflict within South Asia, impacts of globalisation and other related issues”(sapac.org). It doesn’t deal with Indo-Pak conflict specifically, but touches upon it indirectly while addressing inter-religion issues. It basically uses art, music and literature as its tools to address the core issues.

Another organisation, 1947 Partition archives, which doesn’t deal with promoting peace between the two countries directly, but creates awareness among people by documenting and sharing stories and first hand ex-

periences of witnesses of partition by interviewing them and recording their oral histories.

With headquarter in California and offices spread across India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and UK, the organisation has an extensive reach and is increasingly attracting people to volunteer to conduct interviews. They aim to arouse public consciousness about vagaries of partition so that ‘South Asia can have an enlightened future (partitionarchives.org). Along with recording events of partition, this organisation also documents post partition changes in life, migrations and rehabilitation.

Increasing knowledge, about an event such as Partition, is the first step of conflict resolution, which could act as a catalyst, or at least have some role, in promoting a desire for peace as it gives negative connotations about wars, that must be avoided. In this sense, it becomes a measure of conflict prevention also.

A people to people movement was started in the region from 27th December 2004 to 8th January 2005 to analyse the conflict clearly. It was known as ‘the joint peace and goodwill mission of overseas Indians and Pakistanis. People of Indian and Pakistani origin were selected from US, UK and Canada as delegates.

People to people diplomacy was pursued by organising a joint trip to India and Pakistan. It happened for the first time in the histories of the two nations that their diaspora is coming in order to build and promote peace between them.

Along with meeting local peace activists, they also met with then Prime Ministers and officials of the two countries. The main purpose of meeting with bureaucrats was to pursue them to develop initiatives that help in strengthening citizen to citizen diplomacy and emphasised that people from the two countries should be the beneficiary, not the sufferer of the conflict.

### **Successes and Failures**

South Asian diaspora is continuously engaged in promoting peace between the two belligerents through peaceful walks, campaigns, news bulletins, conferences, talks, workshops, student exchanges, discussion forums

etc in the US. However, these efforts will only be successful if they are able to make change on ground. The attempts by diasporas are successful in terms of attracting more people to join in and widen the contours of the campaign, which can help in pressurizing their homelands' governments to resolve the conflict. Their mobilisation is also effective in brainstorming and generating options for resolving conflict, which can serve as feedback to the governments. Thirdly, through conferences and seminars, scholars of the two countries meet and have a dialogue, which helps in eradicating evil perceptions about the other and pave in the way for more such non official confidence-building measures.

Despite the successes, the fact remains that the process is still in its nascent stage, as there are very less organisations devoted towards the resolution of this conflict. Although the number of such organisations and missions is increasing in the US, there is a need to incorporate South Asian diaspora groups from across the globe to make the lobby strong enough to increase the efficacy of such efforts. Also, there is a need for efforts that are persistent and enduring, not momentary and feeble. Furthermore, the kind of work they are doing through news bulletins and discussion forums is only good at building theoretical connotations of conflict resolution. Whereas, the need of the hour is practical execution and not just theory building. Having said that, building a sound theoretical foundation is equally important as it is the first step of the process. Therefore, along with theoretical discourses, there is a need to take substantial actions.

### **Prospects for Peace vis a vis potentialities of diasporas**

South Asian diaspora offers a deep potential in mitigation of Indo-Pak conflict. They initiate various non official confidence-building measures (CBMs) and other tools of Conflict Resolution to stabilise relations. But, as discussed earlier, the process is still in its initial stages and by far peace is elusive. Following are some of the proposals to make the process widespread and effective:

- Increasing awareness of the conflict and its consequences through talks, campaigns, social media, street plays within US as well as within India and Pakistan.
- Conducting events such as brainstorming sessions, simulations, workshops, seminars etc on

different dimensions of conflict regularly. Publishing reports of the sessions as feedback to governments.

- Holding interfaith dialogues in their home countries to promote religious tolerance.
- Connecting to the local civil society organisations in India and Pakistan in their efforts to promote peace. Various actors of civil society such as educational institutions, think tanks, social movements etc could also be contacted for student exchanges, trader exchanges, meetings of delegations etc.
- Connecting people of the two countries by focusing on common problems of health, education, poverty, corruption etc.
- Promoting people to people understanding by emphasising on shared history, culture, language, traditions and ethnicity through theatres, music, art etc.
- Lobbying and pressurising governments of India and Pakistan to adopt neighbour friendly policies, to make visits to culturally and religiously important sites viable, to ease visa restrictions especially for the trading community etc.
- Making the movement global by connecting to South Asian diasporas spread worldwide.

### **CONCLUSION**

Indo-Pak relations are marred with suspicion, hostility and a trust deficit. This affects the efficacy of the peace process, which is already fragile and has a tendency to break at the times of crisis. To make a peace process irreversible, along with the inclusion of civil society actors, there is a need for inclusion of extended civil societies of India and Pakistan, i.e. their diasporas. Distance and mobility help diasporas to see conflict clearly, which in turn enables them to carve out avenues for peace. Thus, they are seen as agents bringing change.

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Reference cited in the text should follow the author-date system (e.g., Cohen, 1997) and should be properly referred to at the end of the text in the following style.

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The GRFDT works as an academic and policy think tank by engaging national and international experts from academics, practitioners and policy makers in a broad range of areas such as migration policies, transnational linkages of development, human rights, culture, gender to mention a few. In the changing global environment of academic research and policy making, the role of GRFDT will be of immense help to the various stakeholders. Many developing countries cannot afford to miss the opportunity to harness the knowledge revolution of the present era. The engagement of diaspora with various platform need to be reassessed in the present context to engage them in the best possible manner for the development human societies by providing policy in-put at the national and global context.