

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Seventy-five Years of Partition: Rupture and Connectivity: India-Pakistan Cricketing Relations

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Abstract

Pakistan and India were born of conflict and have endured over seventy-five years of rivalry since their birth in 1947. This has led to South Asia being one of the least integrated regions in the world, constraining its economic potential and human development. Yet the relationship has not been one of unending conflict; there have been periods of calm and even hope. Cricket, a common heritage and passion for both, has often delivered episodes of optimism, providing glimpses of what India-Pakistan cooperation could achieve were a conducive environment provided. On several occasions cricket has succeeded in uniting people of the estranged nations, allowing the nascent cultural ties that have existed for centuries to flourish. This article looks at how periods of connectivity and rupture between India and Pakistan have been reflected in the cricketing ties between the two nations and how these ties have been impacted by the wider political environment.

Keywords: India; Pakistan; Cricket; Politics; Culture

South Asia has seen one of the biggest mass migrations in human history when up to 20 million people moved between the newly established countries of India and Pakistan following the partition of the Indian Subcontinent in 1947.¹ What followed in the seventy-five years since were severe ruptures interspersed with periods of linkages. This has meant that, according to the World Bank and the World Economic Forum,² South Asia is one of the least integrated regions in the world in terms of trade and people-to-people contact. Developing cross-border solutions to shared issues,

¹ Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali Zamindar, *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia: Refugees, Boundaries, Histories* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

² World Bank, “Why OneSouthAsia?” *World Bank Group*, [h /en/programs/south-asia-regional-integration/overview](https://www.worldbank.org/en/programs/south-asia-regional-integration/overview); Viraj Mehta, “The Economic case for South Asian regionalism,” WEF, Jan. 31, 2020, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/01/the-economic-case-for-south-asian-regionalism/>.

strengthening regional institutions, improving infrastructure and connectivity, and advancing trade policy would pay out enormous dividends to the countries in the region. As Christopher Clary points out, even a temporary normalization (i.e., a period when linkages increased) has in the past meant meaningful improvements in the lives of Indians and Pakistanis, especially those who live near the contested border.³ And yet, despite the advantages of proximity, structural and cultural familiarities, and shared developmental priorities, South Asia has failed to integrate and has, in the case of Pakistan and India, seen increasing periods of rupture and falling connectivity.

Interaction between nations is facilitated via people-to-people contacts through the mediums of tourism, education, sport, theater, cinema, literature, and music. Taken together, these mediums promote integration, cohesion, and stability. This chapter looks at how periods of connectivity and rupture between India and Pakistan have been reflected in the cricketing ties between the two nations.

India and Pakistan – Seventy-Five Years of Cricketing Ruptures and Linkages

In the seventy-five years since Pakistan’s and India’s independence, there are broadly speaking three periods of cricketing connectivity, totaling about thirty years divided up by an equal number of blocks of rupture, totaling forty years.

1952–1961 (9 years)	Connectivity – Surprising Amity
1961–1978 (17 years)	Rupture – 1965 war, 1971 war
1978–1990 (12 years)	Connectivity – “Peace Theater”
1990–2003 (13 years)*	Rupture – Multiple points of tension
2003–2012 (9 years)	Connectivity – Sustained and resilient growth
2012–Present	Rupture – Precipitously declining relations with no end in sight

*One short Pakistan tour to India in 1999 was the only break.

1952–1961: Surprising Amity

The most unanticipated period of connectivity was the earliest one from 1952 to 1961. Surprising because within five years of Partition – a time when 15–20 million people moved and up to a million lost their lives in terrible violence – India supported Pakistan’s entry into the International Cricket Council⁴ and was the first country to play a Test Match against Pakistan. In contrast, England and Germany would not play football against each other for nine years after the end of the Second World War – sixteen years in total if the period of the war is considered. Furthermore, while some of the initial tensions between India and Pakistan had eased, they had already fought a war over Kashmir in 1948, and skirmishes continued periodically along an increasingly militarized border.⁵ The relationship remained tense with the threat of war never far away. But there was also significant bilateral dialogue occurring – ministerial summits and conferences; frequent communication between the prime ministers; and intense

³ Christopher Clary, *The Difficult Politics of Peace* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), 2.
⁴ Minutes of the MCC Committee Meeting (Mar. 10, 1952).
⁵ See, for example, Srinath Raghavan, *War and Peace in Modern India* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Ayesha Jalal, *The Struggle for Pakistan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017).

engagement between cabinet ministers, diplomats, and bureaucrats on a variety of issues.⁶ Moreover, Pallavi Raghavan, in her book on the early contours of the Indo-Pak relationship, refers to a quote by the Indian deputy high commissioner in Pakistan, M. K. K. Kripalani, in which he highlights the bewilderingly manifold nature of the tasks that the Indian High Commission in Pakistan faced. These related not only to security and intelligence gathering but also to “who lived where, who could marry whom, where they could travel, what they could own and how they could meet with parents.”⁷ And while there is no denying the multifarious nature of administrative challenges that the Indian High Commission faced, it also indicates the diversity of ties that did exist between the two newly formed countries. Into that environment lands Pakistan’s first cricket tour to India in 1952 and India’s return tour to Pakistan in 1954. Both tours led to what Kausik Bandyopadhyay⁸ terms a “spontaneous albeit tense response.” They also represented the first real opportunity for people-to-people contact following the geographical and violent rupture of Partition.

The barometer of relations between the people of the new states would fall on the way that the Pakistan team was received during the 1952 tour. While hostility may have been the more likely expectation, it was the warmth of the Indian public’s welcome to the Pakistan cricketers that was commented upon by the captain Abdul Hafeez Kardar⁹ as well as players Hanif Mohammad¹⁰ and Waqar Hasan.¹¹ Hasan went on to state that “the hospitality and the care for the visiting team was such that it seemed to us all the enmity that existed during the partition of India and in the creation of Pakistan between the two nations had fizzled out in the air.”¹² Lala Amarnath’s biography notes that for a majority of the Pakistanis, the tour was an opportunity to meet their old friends, cricketers, and relatives who had stayed back in India – a kind of homecoming.¹³

While political tensions remained mainly over Kashmir, India made a return tour to Pakistan in 1954. Despite the political temperature, the Wagah border crossing was left open and “10,000 Indian fans travelled to watch the Lahore Test match; those that lived in Amritsar were allowed to cross back each night to their homes.”¹⁴ The borders remained porous and the home crowds welcomed their Indian counterparts and the team.¹⁵ At the end of the tour the Maharaja of Vizianagaram, speaking for the Indian board, would state proudly that “where politicians had failed, we [cricketers] succeeded by coming nearer to each other.”¹⁶

⁶ Pallavi Raghavan, *Animosity at Bay* (London: Hurst and Company, 2020), 8.

⁷ Raghavan, *Animosity*, 1.

⁸ Kausik Bandyopadhyay, *Sport, Culture and Nation: Perspectives from Indian Football and South Asian Cricket* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2015), 101.

⁹ Shashi Tharoor, “Fantasies and realities,” in Shashi Tharoor and Shahryar Khan, eds., *Shadows across a Playing Field* (New Delhi: Roli Books, 2009), 25.

¹⁰ Hanif Mohammad, *Playing for Pakistan* (Karachi: Hamdard Press, 1999).

¹¹ Waqar Hasan and Qamar Ahmed, *For Cricket and Country* (Karachi: CricketPrint Publication, 2002).

¹² Waqar and Ahmed, *For Cricket and Country*, 16.

¹³ Rajendra Amarnath, *Lala Amarnath Life and Times: The Making of a Legend* (York: Sportsbooks Ltd., 2007), 170.

¹⁴ Ramachandra Guha, *A Corner of a Foreign Field: The Indian History of a British Sport* (London: Picador, 2002), 384.

¹⁵ Fazal Mahmood (w/ Asif Sohail), *From Dusk to Dawn* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 57.

¹⁶ Guha, *A Corner of a Foreign Field*, 385.

By the time that Pakistan made its second trip to India, tensions between the two countries had risen further, following the coming to power in Pakistan of Ayub Khan – the first of several military strongmen. Qamaruddin Butt claims that the tour was in fact sought to ease the growing tension between the two countries.¹⁷ It is apparent that the success of the earlier tours had opened up cricket as an early possible icebreaker in terms of political relations.

The three tours that occurred prior to the 1965 war highlighted the continued existence of cultural capital and a desire for reconciliation after the horrors of Partition. The violence unleashed during Partition existed alongside longer memories of togetherness and familiarity. Many of the cricketers had played together in the past. Some had lived in close proximity to one another. Pakistan's fast bowler Fazal Mahmood was saved from extremists by the Indian cricketer C. K. Nayadu brandishing his bat at the assailants.¹⁸ The crowds too continued to patronize the matches in large numbers and in generally good spirits. Old connections were rekindled before attitudes and stereotypes hardened subsequently as a result of both states reducing people-to-people contacts and erecting barriers to communication.

At this point, bilateral communication at the state level was open and regular,¹⁹ but little headway had been made in the main area of conflict, Kashmir – and despite allowing some people-to-people contact through the cricket series, strict visa regimes were instituted with emphasis on the preservation of sovereignty and territorial integrity through securing national boundaries. Proposals regarding open borders and exemption of visas and passports were forwarded but always remained pending for consideration. There was no provision for tourist or work visas, allowing only a much more constrained category of visas (diplomatic, business, pilgrim, official), most of which were not applicable to the wider population. The visitor visa category was open to nationals with relatives in India or Pakistan. Moreover, visas, when issued, were restricted to single entries and particular cities and included mandatory police reporting, which required a visitor to register himself/herself at a police station within twenty-four hours of arrival and intended departure. The success of people-to-people contacts in the arena of cricket series however did not allow the two states to overcome mutual suspicion and increase greater connectivity outside the contained realm of cricket. This continued to be the pattern in later years as well.

Nevertheless, it was remarkable that the first tour produced such warmth between the players and the crowds. The existence of pre-Partition linkages, frayed at Partition but resilient enough to survive, allowed the facilitation of communication and connectivity so that even following serious ruptures, shared histories, legacies, and cultures promoted reconnection and healing. This occurs every time a connection is remade. The cricket tours provided a glimpse of how things could be if tensions were reduced and greater connectivity allowed. The atmosphere of the tours also contrasted sharply with the political rhetoric and hostility that existed at state level.

¹⁷ Qamaruddin Butt, *Playing for a Draw: Covering Pakistan's Tour of India 1960–61* (Karachi: Jahaniasons, 1962), 252.

¹⁸ Rahul Bhattacharya, "Hope and fear," *ESPN Cricinfo*, Mar. 27, 2004, <https://www.espnecricinfo.com/story/hope-and-fear-140425>.

¹⁹ See Clary, *The Difficult Politics of Peace*.

The cricketing encounters become an example of what Raghavan²⁰ uses in her work and what the legal scholar Gabriella Blum²¹ refers to as “Islands of Agreement” – mechanisms for managing conflict that continue to operate simultaneous to the conflict.

1961–1978: The First Rupture

The least surprising of these breaks in cricketing relations was the first rupture that occurred between 1961 and 1978. Two wars – in 1965 and in 1971 – meant that this was a period when there was a much broader breach in connectivity beyond cricket. Trade, travel, and postal links were broken, and diplomatic relations downgraded. Visa regimes became stricter, and the previously porous borders were increasingly difficult to navigate.²² It was a period of “intense rivalry” in which the two countries resorted to a large number of armed disputes.²³

In Pakistan, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and in India, Indira Gandhi held the reins of power for much of the 1970s. Rebuilding relations following the two wars was a slow process, particularly for two leaders who had both been closely associated with the events that led to East Pakistan’s secession in 1971. Cricketing ties were almost completely severed and only continued in very limited capacity through the development of “offshore” areas for linkages wherein Pakistani and Indian cricketers (and their diasporic fans) would interact mainly in the English county season. In 1965, when the two countries went to war for the second time, Mansur Ali Khan Pataudi, the Indian captain, and Hanif Mohammad, the Pakistani captain, were both playing for a Rest of the World side against England. They sent a joint telegram to their respective governments:

We wish to express deep regrets at the war between India and Pakistan. We find unity on the cricket field by reaching for a common objective. We fervently hope both countries can meet and find an amicable solution.²⁴

By a strange coincidence, when the 1971 war broke out, Sunil Gavaskar and Zaheer Abbas were playing again for a Rest of the World team in Australia and would share a room – “they shared the tension while consoling each other.”²⁵

1978–1990: A Decade of Ties

While Zulfikar Ali Bhutto’s connection with the events that led to the loss of East Pakistan meant that relations with India when he was at the helm were stymied, it is

²⁰ See Clary, *The Difficult Politics of Peace*.

²¹ Gabriella Blum, *Islands of Agreement: Managing Enduring Armed Rivalries* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

²² Zamindar, *The Long Partition*, 235.

²³ Surinder Mohan, *Complex Rivalry: The Dynamics of India-Pakistan Conflict* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2022), 165.

²⁴ Mike Marqusee, “Symbolic stakes raised as rivals meet,” Jun. 3, 1999, <https://www.mikemarqusee.co.uk/74-symbolic-stakes-raised-as-rivals-meet/>.

²⁵ Ajit Wadekar, “My tour of Pakistan,” *IWI*, Jan. 1977, in Ramachandra Guha, *A Corner of a Foreign Field: The Indian History of a British Sport* (London: Picador, 2002), 394.

still surprising that contacts increased significantly under General Zia-ul-Haq, who had led the military coup against Bhutto in 1977 and whose decade of Islamization in Pakistan was accompanied by increasingly hostile anti-Indian rhetoric and policy. Zia was pushed by the United States and aided by the fact that in India too a new party, the Janata Party led by Morarji Desai, which was not associated with the 1971 war, had come to power by defeating Indira Gandhi and her Congress Party in the 1977 elections.²⁶

What followed was the longest period of sustained interaction between Pakistan and India. Yet despite the length of the linkage, it was a period described as “atmospherically positive but substantively stagnant.”²⁷ While there was nothing of substance achieved in terms of realpolitik, the two countries maintained good intentions toward one another. Both sides permitted people-to-people contact but avoided any direct bilateral discussions on the main contentious issues – leading to a kind of “peace theater.”

The push by Zia-ul-Haq and Morarji Desai for renewed relations between India and Pakistan meant that the 1978 Indian cricket tour to Pakistan took on a renewed diplomatic importance, and both sides made it a point to brief their teams about the sensitivities involved in the first meeting for almost two decades. This was helped by the fact that unlike the larger populations of the two nations, some prominent cricketers were able to meet and interact while playing in the English county season. For example, the two captains Bishan Singh Bedi and Mushtaq Mohammad were friends and colleagues who had played together for years for the English county Northamptonshire. In fact, in 2022 Bedi made an emotional journey across the border to the Sikh Gurdwara in Kartarpur, Pakistan, where he was greeted by his friend of fifty years, the former Pakistan cricketer, Intikhab Alam, with whom he had played in England in the 1970s.²⁸

As the 1978 tour kicked off, the Indian players were warmly received at the Karachi airport. Despite the prolonged break in relations, two wars in the interim, and a further partition of Pakistan, there still appeared a bank of cultural commonality for fans and players to signal their happiness at the resumption of cricket relations and perhaps the desire for peaceful relations with India, something that the *Wisden Cricketers' Almanack* commented on: “The warmth and enthusiasm with which the Indians were received, plus the cordial relations between the players, made it plain enough that the renewal of cricketing rivalry between the two neighbouring countries was long overdue.”²⁹ There was less traffic from across the border but Rahul Bhattacharya states that as many as 2,000 Indians still crossed over for the series.³⁰

Pakistan's return tour to India in 1979–1980 followed a similar script. The public interest in both tours had been massive. Imran Khan wrote in his autobiography of

²⁶ Tharoor, “Fantasies and realities,” 39.

²⁷ Clary, *The Difficult Politics of Peace*, 209.

²⁸ Sriram Veera and Sandeep Dwivedi, “India-Pakistan border . . .,” *Indian Express*, Oct. 7, 2022, <https://indianexpress.com/article/sports/cricket/borders-blur-in-kartarpur-as-bedi-intikhab-catch-up-over-so-me-jazz-8192135/>; “Bishan Singh Bedi and Intikhab Alam . . .,” *Indian Express*, Oct. 6, 2022, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/sports/cricket/news/bishan-singh-bedi-and-intikhab-alam-relive-old-times-at-kartarpur/articleshow/94684091.cms>.

²⁹ *Wisden Cricketers' Almanack* (1980), 963.

³⁰ Rahul Bhattacharya, *Pundits from Pakistan* (London: Picador, 2005), 308.

the yearning among his Pakistani teammates for a resumption of cricket between India and Pakistan because of the passion and intensity involved in the contest.³¹ He would go on to describe remarkable scenes at the airport when Pakistan's cricket team arrived – “the whole country seemed to be on the verge of cricketing hysteria. Wherever we went, cricket was the sole subject of conversation.”³² The Pakistani and Indian boards, eager to build on the rivalry following the resumption of cricketing ties and encouraged by the generally warm reception given to the tourists on either side of the border, decided to start an annual exchange of cricketing visits that lasted throughout the 1980s.

During the 1980s, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) and the Board of Control for Cricket in Pakistan (BCCP) forged a strong working relationship. Together they formed the first Asian Cricket Conference in 1983, a key moment in the rise of the Asian bloc to dominance a decade later. The spur for the Asian bloc had been India's and Pakistan's joint bid to host the 1987 World Cup. The Indo-Pak bid far outstripped England's – and, despite misgivings (mainly from the English press), the World Cup was successfully held jointly for the first time in the Subcontinent.³³

Despite the burgeoning cricketing relations in the 1980s, politically, tensions had remained high throughout the decade. Pakistan lent covert support to the Sikh insurgency that was raging in Indian Punjab, and Pakistan accused India of fomenting violence in the province of Sindh. In 1984, the two countries also posted troops on the Siachen glacier, creating a new point of confrontation. Across the decade there was a progression of the nuclear capabilities of both India and Pakistan.³⁴ Yet cricket tours continued in 1982–83, 1983–84, 1984–85, and 1986–87. Tensions did not spill over into the cricket field, and relations between the teams remained cordial and warm. The crowds were generally favorable as well though the nationalist fervor fanned by the two wars had worked to crystalize unanimous support for the respective national teams. Cricket, as Bandyopadhyay³⁵ argues, had become the ultimate test of patriotic zeal and loyalty.

The two leaders at this time, General Zia and Rajiv Gandhi, had developed a personal rapport – and when relations became particularly tense, they were able to defuse these conflicts through regular communication. Zia in particular used cricket as a means of calming conflicts and keeping open channels of communication at an official level. The best example of this “cricket diplomacy”³⁶ was in August 1986, when a series of Indian military exercises, dubbed “Brasstacks,” began a spiral of competitive troop mobilization, which, by January 1987, led to both countries' military forces being on alert, with Indian and Pakistani armored

³¹ Imran Khan (w/ Ivo Tennant), *Imran Khan* (London: Gollancz/Witherby, 1995).

³² Imran Khan (w/ Patrick Murphy), *The Autobiography of Imran Khan* (London: Pelham Books, 1983), 94.

³³ See Guha, *A Corner of a Foreign Field*, 330; Mike Marqusee, *War Minus the Shooting* (London: Heinemann, 1996), 79; Osman Samiuddin, *The Unquiet Ones: A History of Pakistan Cricket* (Gurugram, India: Harper Collins India, 2014), 301–302.

³⁴ Devin T. Hagerty and Herbert G. Hagerty, “India's foreign relations,” in D. Hagerty, ed., *South Asia in World Politics* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), 30–31.

³⁵ Bandyopadhyay, *Sport, Culture and Nation*, 101.

³⁶ Stuart Croft, “South Asia's arms control process: Cricket diplomacy and the composite dialogue,” *International Affairs* 81, no. 5 (2005), 1039–60.

formations poised along the international frontier.³⁷ At the height of the tension, President Zia-ul-Haq made a trip to Delhi and then on to Jaipur to watch the third Test match with Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. What followed was a dramatic reduction in hostilities.

Cricket during this decade was part of a period of greater connectivity for India and Pakistan. There were regular flights between the cities of Karachi and Lahore and Delhi and Bombay, and frequent cultural and sporting exchanges occurred. In 1984–85, the Indian and Pakistani governments took some steps to ease the travel procedures between the two countries, which were further enhanced in 1989. These steps included an increased number of places that could be visited by citizens, the granting of multi-entry visas to businessmen for longer durations, and relaxed conditions relating to police reporting.

Cricket as a “bridge” was particularly prominent because of the importance it had taken on as a tool of diplomacy and because of the flourishing relationship between the cricket boards, which showed a glimpse of what India-Pakistan cooperation could achieve in the right circumstances. However, despite more people-to-people contacts, there were no substantive political breakthroughs, though greater connectivity could be seen as an important confidence-building measure.

1990–2003: A Second Rupture

Following a decade of uninterrupted connectivity, a series of events led to a sharp decline in relations and a break of more than a decade save for one false spring in 1999. The changing economic, political, and social environment from the 1990s in India and Pakistan affected their cricketing relations. Pakistan had entered a decade of democracy, but democratization did not lead to improved relations. Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif, Pakistan’s two democratic leaders during the 1990s, vied with each other for power by using more and more hostile language against India.³⁸ The two countries mounted an arms race involving the deployment of medium- and short-range missiles³⁹ – and, in 1990, nearly went to war over Kashmir as the insurgency raged. Relations continued to deteriorate with the destruction of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya in 1992; the Mumbai riots, described by Barbara Metcalf as an anti-Muslim pogrom; and the retaliatory bombings that followed.⁴⁰ These communal incidents exacerbated tensions between Muslims and Hindus in India and further strained India-Pakistan relations. Communication between the states halted, and by 1994 even talks at foreign secretary level were in abeyance. While the two cricketing boards maintained cordial relations and attempted to restore cricketing ties,⁴¹ threats from Hindu extremists led to Pakistan canceling tours to India in 1991, 1993, and 1994. By 1998, deteriorating Indo-Pak relations would be pushed to the brink. Both countries

³⁷ Hagerty and Hagerty, “India’s foreign relations,” 33.

³⁸ Stephen P. Cohen, “India, Pakistan and Kashmir,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 24, no. 4 (2002), 32–60; 43.

³⁹ Ian Talbot, *Pakistan: A Modern History* (London: Hurst and Company, 2005), 288.

⁴⁰ Barbara Metcalf, “Madrasas and minorities in Secular India,” in Robert W. Hefner and Muhammad Qasim Zaman, eds., *Schooling Islam: The Culture and Politics of Modern Muslim Education* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

⁴¹ Bandyopadhyay, *Sport, Culture and Nation*.

conducted tit-for-tat nuclear tests all the while exchanging fire across the border, leading to both the United States and China having to urge restraint.⁴²

There was a false spring that occurred in early 1999 when Prime Ministers Nawaz Sharif and Atal Bihari Vajpayee, against the run of play, managed to reverse a declining relationship and instead announced a raft of confidence-building measures. It was decided that foreign secretary-level talks would be held between India and Pakistan, and a direct bus service between Lahore and Delhi was proposed.⁴³ Nawaz Sharif pushed for the Pakistan cricket team to tour India in January and February of 1999 – a decade after the last Test series that they had played.⁴⁴

The tour was an enormous success in terms of cricket and public relations. The standing ovation given to the victorious Pakistan team in Chennai, Indian fans lined deep in Gwalior to wave the team off, the remarkable warmth shown to Pakistani visitors in Mohali, and the spontaneous chants of “Pakistan-Hindustan dosti Zindabad” by the Pakistani element of the crowd were images that seemed unbelievable when seen against the backdrop of the Shiv Sena’s threat to the team before the tour began and the daily vitriol exchanged between the two governments. The emotional power of sport appeared to rekindle the bonds that exist between Indians and Pakistanis, and the parallel political rapprochement threw up the possibility of enduring peace. Sadly, forces that were opposed to enhanced interactions between India and Pakistan conspired to bring relations – cricketing and otherwise – to an abrupt halt. In the spring of 1999, Pakistan’s army instigated a limited war in Kargil,⁴⁵ and only after intense US diplomatic pressure was the conflict called off. From the Kargil war in 1999 to late in 2002, Indo-Pak relations remained fraught. The government of India reverted to the position that until Pakistan refrained from engaging in military adventures in Kashmir and promoting cross-border terrorism, India should stop playing Pakistan in bilateral encounters.

2003–2012: Cricket, A Bridge of Peace (Nine Years of Sustained Connectivity)

Apart from a few bilateral matches on neutral venues, Pakistan and India did not meet after the short 1999 tour for almost five years. In total, one short series was played in fifteen years, and the political atmosphere had soured significantly during that time. Whatever South Asian trust had existed up until the 1990s seemed to have been destroyed by Kargil. The atmosphere in matches in international tournaments became antagonistic and hostile. Jayanta Sengupta,⁴⁶ Kingshuk Chatterjee,⁴⁷ and Kausik Bandyopadhyay⁴⁸ all refer to the India-Pakistan encounter in the 2003 World

⁴² Nicholas J. Wheeler, *Trusting Enemies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 198.

⁴³ Nabiha Gul, “Pakistan-India peace process 1990–2007: An Appraisal,” *Pakistan Horizon* 60, no. 2 (2007), 47–64.

⁴⁴ Shahryar M. Khan, *Cricket: A Bridge of Peace* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2005), 5.

⁴⁵ Talbot, *Pakistan*.

⁴⁶ Jayanta Sengupta, “2003 World Cup: Globalizing patriotism,” in Boria Majumdar and J. A. Mangan, eds., *Sport in South Asian Society* (Oxfordshire, UK: Routledge, 2005).

⁴⁷ Kingshuk Chatterjee, “To Play or not to play: Fabricating consent over the Indo-Pak cricket series,” in Boria Majumdar and J. A. Mangan, eds., *Sport in South Asian Society* (Oxfordshire, UK: Routledge, 2005).

⁴⁸ Kausik Bandyopadhyay, “Pakistani cricket at crossroads: An Outsider’s perspective,” in Jon Gemmell and Boria Majumdar, eds., *Cricket, Race and the 2007 World Cup* (London: Routledge, 2008).

Cup played in South Africa as indicative of a changed relationship. It was apparent that by 2003 the nuclear rivalry, the Kargil war, and the skirmishes that nearly led to a war in 2002 had increased antagonisms between the two countries. The partisanship of the crowds made for an uglier, more confrontational atmosphere on the ground, and when India defeated Pakistan, it was followed by a deluge of nationalistic triumphalism as top Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders such as Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Deputy Prime Minister Lal Krishna Advani promptly sent their congratulations. The defeat sent Pakistan crashing out of the World Cup, which appeared to make it all the sweeter. Poor relations between the states had also begun to filter down to fans.⁴⁹ Chatterjee⁵⁰ quotes a middle-aged Indian waving a tricolor following India's win, "That's it. I don't care if India loses every single match from here on. The World Cup is over for me. We have won. We have thrashed the Pakis." And then in the kind of turnaround that had been seen in the past, relations unexpectedly took a turn for the better.

Vajpayee, encouraged by Pakistan's new military leader Pervez Musharraf's commitment to clamp down on cross-border infiltration, offered a raft of confidence-building measures to foster a conducive atmosphere for the resolution of outstanding issues. This led to significant subsequent steps such as restoration of relations at the level of high commissioners and an increase in the strength of respective High Commissions; resumption of the Lahore-Delhi bus service and rail links; high-level exchanges at the level of parliamentarians, businesspeople, media, artists, writers, judges, peace activists, and others; permission to senior citizens (sixty-five years and above) to cross at Wagah on foot; free medical treatment to twenty Pakistani children; release of prisoners and fishermen on both sides; and the commencement of bus service between Srinagar and Muzaffarabad, starting a bus or rail link between Munabao in India and Khokrapur in Pakistan.⁵¹ In this dramatically improved atmosphere, the resumption of cricketing relations was announced with the India tour of Pakistan scheduled for March 2004. In fact, the tour was an unprecedented success in terms of bilateral relations, the consequences of which would be felt for years.

The fifteen years of rupture had meant a generation of Indians and Pakistanis had not interacted directly. In fact, this time the distortions of history and the school curriculums and negative narratives spewed by successive governments were fraying the ties that had existed and were leading to Pakistan and India viewing themselves as enemies that were ill-disposed toward each another rather than mere archrivals. The previous generation of Indians and Pakistanis at least had the experience and interaction of having lived together. The cultural capital that existed through memory and occasional people-to-people contact was fading. In its place the nuclear rivalry, the Kargil war, and the skirmishes that nearly led to a war in 2002 were feeding new stereotypes of one another. Mohammad Hanif, the celebrated Pakistani author, wrote the following:

⁴⁹ Sengupta, "2003 World Cup," 270.

⁵⁰ Chatterjee, "To Play or not to play," 290.

⁵¹ M. Layaslu, "Vajpayee government: Golden years of non-military confidence building measures between India and Pakistan," *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 22, no. 4, ver. 5 (2017), 31–39.

Like many Pakistanis I saw my first Indians in London and was surprised that they were a bit like us. Most Indians and Pakistanis have the same reaction when they meet. It seems as if they are brought up to believe that a community of ferals lives across the border.⁵²

Yet the efforts of the two cricket boards, the media, and an improved political environment paid dividends. The spirit of bonhomie and bridge building had been taken to heart, and it was the response from the Pakistani public that set the optimistic tone for the tour. In the very first match in Karachi, which India won narrowly, the crowd erupted in spontaneous applause for the Indian team.

The mind went back to the beautiful occasion in Chennai in 1999, when Wasim Akram led his team for a victory lap to a standing ovation after a startling win in a stunning test. The Indians did not make the lap at Karachi. Indeed, the applause at Karachi had been far more spontaneous than at Chennai.⁵³

During the match Rahul and Priyanka Gandhi, among the tour's highest profile guests from India, left the Chairman's box and mingled with fans in the public stands, where they were warmly received.⁵⁴ The outstanding success of the Karachi match set the tenor for the remaining series. Everywhere the Indian team went, they were welcomed with immense enthusiasm.

The success in Karachi led to a rush of Indian fans seeking visas for the Lahore leg of the tour, which also saw Dina Wadia, Jinnah's daughter, visit Pakistan for the first time. Many others came not for the cricket but to visit places that their families had once lived in prior to Partition.

For the Indians poured in. They came in numbers that they had never been permitted to come in before; they came by air, they came by foot, they came by road, they came by rail using all the channels that had been opened up since Vajpayee's January visit. Larger flights, special flights, extra busses, thousands came on foot, with banners saying "Friends Forever."⁵⁵

Well over 8,000 visas – more than the quota that was set aside for the series – were issued. Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) Chairman Shaharyar Khan estimated 20,000 Indians from India and the diaspora came to Lahore.⁵⁶ Bhattacharya puts the figure closer to 11,000.⁵⁷

Pakistanis, and Lahoris in particular, opened their doors and hearts to their Indian guests. The Indian visitors returned home overwhelmed by Pakistani hospitality and

⁵² M. Hanif, "The Partition goes on: A Pakistani perspective," *Aljazeera*, Aug. 15, 2017, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/08/partition-pakistani-perspective-170807064330685.html>.

⁵³ Bhattacharya, *Pundits*, 71.

⁵⁴ Shashi Tharoor and Shaharyar Khan, *Shadows across a Playing Field* (New Delhi: Roli Books, 2009), 135.

⁵⁵ Bhattacharya, *Pundits*, 128–29.

⁵⁶ Shaharyar M. Khan and Ali Khan, *Cricket Cauldron: The Turbulent Politics of Sport in Pakistan* (Gurugram, India: HarperSport, 2013), 70.

⁵⁷ Bhattacharya, *Pundits*, 308.

many stereotypes shattered.⁵⁸ In a memorable phrase Indian High Commissioner to Pakistan Shiv Shankar Menon remarked to Shaharyar Khan in Lahore, “Shaharyar Saheb 20,000 Indian cricket fans visited Pakistan. You have sent back 20,000 Pakistan Ambassadors to India. Thank you for your hospitality.”⁵⁹

While the heights of the first tour were never achieved again, the subsequent series of 2004, 2005, 2006, and 2007 continued to stimulate goodwill between the countries.

This indicates that the longer India and Pakistan play each other at cricket, the more the chances that the people-to-people contact instigated by such matches could have an impact on breaking down the stereotypes that reinforce the negative relationship. The more the two teams play each other, the less “mythic” the differences become.⁶⁰

There was a definite change in the way that Indians and Pakistanis viewed each other with cricket being used as an important vehicle for this change in perceptions. Bob Woolmer, Pakistan’s English coach, would tell Emily Crick in a personal interview in 2005: “The way you warm to the people, you warm to the society, you warm to the country because of their hospitality and that’s all because of cricket really – it’s all cricket related.”⁶¹ This same sentiment was to be seen in the earliest tours as well. Ramachandra Guha states that spot interviews by a Lahore journalist during India’s tour of Pakistan in 1960 revealed what the reporter dubbed was a “distinct change in mental outlook”:

A young Sikh of a Western Punjab family told the reporter: I was a fool to imagine all these years that Pakistan is unsafe for Non-Muslims. I have been here four days now and wherever I went I have nothing but goodwill and friendship. A white haired Hindu, who lived in Lahore before partition said that he felt “as I have returned to my old home.” Lahore has not changed much. Nobody here asks whether you are a Hindu or a Muslim or Indian or Pakistani . . . it is so different from what many fanatics in East Punjab want us to imagine.⁶²

Mike Marqusee, who watched the 1996 World Cup on the Subcontinent and returned to watch Pakistan’s tour of India in 2005, also remarks on how the ambience had totally changed. Marqusee, who had castigated the Bangalore crowd of 1996 for its jingoistic nationalism,⁶³ found in Bangalore in 2005 handwritten signs welcoming the tourists, praising Indo-Pak friendship and declaring that cricket is the path to peace.⁶⁴ On the same tour he states that at Mohali, the change in atmosphere was palpable:

⁵⁸ Bhattacharya, *Pundits*.

⁵⁹ Khan and Khan, *Cricket Cauldron*, 70.

⁶⁰ Emily Crick, “Contact sport: Cricket in India-Pakistan relations since 1999,” *South Asian Survey* 16, no. 1 (2009), 59–79, 77.

⁶¹ Crick, “Contact sport,” 73.

⁶² Guha, *A Corner of a Foreign Field*, 385.

⁶³ Marqusee, *War*.

⁶⁴ Mike Marqusee, “The Ambush clause: Globalisation, corporate power and the governance of world cricket,” in Stephen Wagg, ed., *Following On: Cricket and National Identity in the Postcolonial Age* (Oxfordshire, UK: Routledge, 2005).

"And it cannot be credited to either politicians or the media – they have merely followed the lead from below, from the bases of both societies, where the desire for South Asian peace has overcome decades of fearful mythologies."⁶⁵ Marqusee argues that South Asian cricket remains this kind of "a reliable barometer of the society in which it is played."⁶⁶ In the Indo-Pak series, it has provided a vehicle for the expression of a hunger for South Asian harmony that had been gestating for years. Cricket has thus provided for the most effective form of people-to-people contact touted so long through various types of track-two diplomacy, and in addition it has backed up the efforts at the state level. In short, the cricket tours between 2004 and 2007 exemplified the claim that sport bridges distances between people and nations by creating a shared cultural and emotional experience.

In 2007, there was a more significant diplomatic role to the tour as President Musharraf expressed his wish to travel to India, much like President Zia-ul-Haq had done in 1987, virtually inviting himself ostensibly to watch cricket in Delhi but mainly to discuss political issues. Musharraf and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh watched the match in Delhi side by side, and pictures of the two leaders were broadcast throughout the world.⁶⁷ Furthermore, in a joint press conference after their talks, they announced that now "the peace process was irreversible."⁶⁸

Between 2004 and 2007, cricket provided a multilevel tool for improving relations between India and Pakistan. It provided conversational space for Indian and Pakistani leaders to meet and discuss areas of political conflict. It also provided the largest opportunity for people-to-people contact during that period. The improvement in relations led to a raft of cultural exchanges. In 2005, the first passengers from either side of the border crossed divided Kashmir as the landmark bus service across the ceasefire line dividing Indian- and Pakistani-controlled Kashmir got underway.⁶⁹ The ban on Indian films was lifted in 2008⁷⁰ in Pakistan after a period of over forty years, and a number of Pakistani artists began working in Bollywood and some Indian actors appeared in Pakistani films.⁷¹ Indian and Pakistani negotiators hoped to develop a new regime of free trade and political cooperation in the region, from Central Asia to Bangladesh. On January 8, 2007, at the height of this optimistic interval, Manmohan Singh remarked in public, "I dream of a day, while retaining our respective national identities, one can have breakfast in Amritsar, lunch in Lahore, and dinner in Kabul."⁷²

⁶⁵ Mike Marqusee, "The Lovable marquee," *Outlook India*, Mar. 21, 2005, <https://www.outlookindia.com/magazine/story/this-lovable-marquee/226831>.

⁶⁶ Mike Marqusee, "A Committed neutral speaks," *Outlook India*, Mar. 17, 2005.

⁶⁷ Emily Crick, "Can cricket be used as multi-track diplomacy in the context of Indo-Pakistani relations? With particular reference to the period between 1999 and 2005," M.Sc. thesis, University of Bristol, 2006, 46.

⁶⁸ Croft, "South Asia's arms," 1041.

⁶⁹ "Reunited Kashmiris' tears of joy," *BBC News*, Apr. 7, 2005, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/4419109.stm.

⁷⁰ "Indian films breathe life into Pakistani cinemas," *Reuters*, Apr. 25, 2008, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-pakistan-bollywood/indian-films-breathe-life-into-pakistani-cinemas-idUSISL17078720080425>.

⁷¹ Nandini Ramnath, "A Brief history of Pakistan-India cultural ties," *Dawn*, Sep. 27, 2016, <https://images.dawn.com/news/1176320>.

⁷² Steve Coll, "The Back channel: India and Pakistan secret Kashmir talks," *The New Yorker*, Mar. 2, 2009.

Unfortunately, the Mumbai attacks in November 2008 – when ten members of Lashkar-e-Taiba, a terrorist organization based in Pakistan, carried out twelve coordinated shooting and bombing attacks lasting four days across Mumbai, which took the lives of 165 people⁷³ – caused Indo-Pak relations to plunge. Pakistan's own declining security situation had already put India's proposed tour of Pakistan in 2008 in doubt. The Mumbai attacks halted the tour definitively. Four months later, twelve gunmen attacked a bus carrying the Sri Lankan cricket team to the Qaddafi stadium in Lahore. Pakistan and its cricket fell into exile as the country struggled with a rapidly deteriorating security environment. Yet the strength of the peace process over the last five years saw a restrained Indian response to Mumbai. There was no major military mobilization nor any retaliatory strikes against Pakistan.⁷⁴ Dialogue was restarted in 2010 and both countries focused on increasing trade, energy, and connectivity⁷⁵ and relations improved considerably. Pakistan traveled to India again in 2011 for the World Cup, where Manmohan Singh and his Pakistani counterpart, Yousuf Raza Gilani, met each other for the semifinal clash between India and Pakistan in Mohali, India. Gilani subsequently invited Singh to visit Pakistan. Peace talks started again and Pakistan toured India in December 2012 for a Twenty20 (T20) and three One Day Internationals (ODIs).

2012–Present: An Unending Break

In 2014, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) led by Narendra Modi, the hard-line Hindu leader, won the Indian national elections. Almost immediately, he began implementing a new vision for India, one that revolved around the idea of Hindutva. As Dexter Filkins points out:

Ever since Modi was first elected Prime Minister, in 2014, he has been recasting the story of India, from that of a secular democracy accommodating a uniquely diverse population to that of a Hindu nation that dominates its minorities, especially the country's two hundred million Muslims. Modi and his allies have squeezed, bullied, and smothered the press into endorsing what they call the "New India."⁷⁶

Alongside the effect of the Mumbai attacks, a burgeoning and increasingly nationalistic media, and rampant commercialization, Hindutva created an environment that was progressively hostile to any improvement in Indo-Pak relations. Attacks in Indian-administered Kashmir by terrorists allegedly based in Pakistan and the killing in 2016 of the pro-separatist Kashmiri leader Burhan Wani⁷⁷ in a gunfight

⁷³ Prem Mahadevan, *A Decade on from the 2008 Mumbai Attack: Reviewing the Question of State Sponsorship* (The Hague: International Centre for Counter Terrorism Publications, 2019); Somini Sengupta, "Dossier gives details of Mumbai attacks," *The New York Times*, Jan. 6, 2009.

⁷⁴ Moed Yusuf, "Difficult equation," *Dawn*, Oct. 9, 2018.

⁷⁵ Moed Yusuf, "India-Pakistan equation," *Dawn*, Sep. 10, 2012.

⁷⁶ Dexter Filkins, "Blood and soil in Narendra Modi's India," *The New Yorker*, Dec. 2, 2019, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/12/09/blood-and-soil-in-narendra-modis-india>

⁷⁷ Burhan Wani was a commander of the pro-Pakistani militant group Hizbul Mujahideen. Wani was popular on social media for his advocacy against Indian rule in Kashmir and his calls suggesting violent

with the Indian army led to days of deadly violence in Kashmir⁷⁸ and a sharp deterioration in Indo-Pak relations.⁷⁹ There were also limited cross-border retaliatory strikes by India, which the Indian army described as “surgical strikes,”⁸⁰ and significant escalations particularly along the Line of Control.

People-to-people contacts suffered immediately. The Indian Motion Picture Producers Association (IMPPA) banned all Pakistani actors, actresses, and technicians working in India.⁸¹ The Pakistani government responded with a blanket ban on all Indian television and radio programming in Pakistan. In cricketing terms, the BCCI ruled out the possibility of reviving bilateral cricket ties with Pakistan in the near future,⁸² increasingly using the refusal to play cricket with Pakistan as a political tool in their wider policy to isolate Pakistan. The BCCI also asked the International Cricket Council (ICC) not to group Indian and Pakistan cricket teams together in international tournaments, keeping in mind border tensions between the two countries.

In 2019, relations deteriorated further. In August of that year, following a deployment of tens of thousands of additional troops and paramilitary forces to the region, the Indian government revoked Article 370⁸³ of the Indian constitution, removing the special status⁸⁴ of Indian-administered Kashmir. Since then, Kashmir has been through lockdowns, with internet and phone services intermittently cut off, thousands of people detained, and an unprecedented clampdown on communication and restriction of movement.⁸⁵ This further inflamed relations with Pakistan, leading it to downgrade diplomatic ties, expel the Indian ambassador, and suspend bilateral trade.⁸⁶ In an environment of fear and intolerance, signs of dissent against the government’s policies have become increasingly rare. The Indian police have truncheoned, detained, and shot protesters dead. Many more are intimidated and

insurrection against the Indian state and has been credited for reinvigorating the Kashmiri uprising. He was twenty-two when he was killed, with reports suggesting that his funeral was attended by so many supporters that there was no space for funeral prayers. See Shujaat Bukhari, “Why the death of militant Burhan Wani . . .,” *BBC News*, Jul. 11, 2016, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-36762043>.

⁷⁸ Bukhari, “Why the death of militant Burhan Wani.”

⁷⁹ Vijayta Lalwani, “Data check: Ceasefire violations . . .,” *Scroll India*, Aug. 7, 2018, <https://scroll.in/article/888719/data-check-already-more-ceasefire-violations-along-line-of-control-this-year-than-all-of-2017>.

⁸⁰ Sameer Lalwani and Hannah Haegeland, “Anatomy of a crisis: Explaining crisis onset in India-Pakistan relations,” Stimson Centre, 2018, <https://www.stimson.org/wp-content/files/InvestigatingCrisisOnset.pdf>.

⁸¹ Suparno Sarkar, “IMPPA passes resolution . . .,” *IBTimes*, Sep. 29, 2016, <https://www.ibtimes.co.in/imppa-passes-resolution-temporarily-ban-pakistani-artists-india-twitter-reacts-695956>.

⁸² Press Trust of India, “Uri attack aftermath,” *Firstpost*, Sep. 23, 2016, <http://www.firstpost.com/sports/bcci-chief-anurag-thakur-says-no-question-of-playing-cricket-with-pakistan-after-uri-attack-3018372.html>.

⁸³ “Kashmir under lockdown,” *Aljazeera*, Oct. 27, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/08/india-revokes-kashmir-special-status-latest-updates-190806134011673.html>.

⁸⁴ Lindsay Maizland, “Kashmir: What to know about the disputed region,” *Council of Foreign Relations*, Aug. 7, 2019, <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/kashmir-what-know-about-disputed-region>.

⁸⁵ Hannah Ellis-Petersen, “‘Many lives have been lost’: Five month internet blackout plunges Kashmir into crisis,” *The Guardian*, Jan. 5, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jan/05/the-personal-and-economic-cost-of-kashmirs-internet-ban>.

⁸⁶ “Pakistan to downgrade ties with India over Kashmir move,” *Aljazeera*, Aug. 7, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/08/pakistan-downgrade-ties-india-kashmir-move-190807134255247.html>.

threatened by BJP ministers and their extremist allies.⁸⁷ Sharda Ugra writes of the lack of opposition against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) among sporting celebrities in India but reminds the reader that while there is very little government influence in funding or operations of the BCCI, there is “far too much of it in its centers of power.”⁸⁸ In 2019, the BCCI appointed Jay Shah, the son of Home Minister Amit Shah, the man at the center of the controversial citizenship laws and in public opposition to the protesters, to the post of secretary of the BCCI. In 2022 he was reelected secretary. Other key office bearers are the treasurer Asish Shelar, a BJP politician from Mumbai; and the IPL chair Arun Dhumal, the brother of a serving minister in Narendra Modi’s cabinet. Given the enormous social prestige that cricket and cricketers command in India, the BJP hopes to consolidate its power and political influence through its control of the BCCI. This makes it extremely unlikely that there would be any opposition from existing cricketers to the government’s policies. In 2024 Jay Shah became the chairman of the International Cricket Council, giving India ever greater clout on the cricketing world stage.

While bilateral cricketing relations remain suspended, India and Pakistan have met in ICC tournaments. Those held on “neutral” territory have generated much interest from Indian and Pakistani supporters, and the atmosphere between teams and fans has been positive and largely collegial. Unfortunately, ICC tournaments held in India or Pakistan have fallen foul of the rupture between the two countries. Two tournaments stand out as recent examples of this – the 2023 One Day International (ODI) World Cup in India and the 2025 Champions Trophy in Pakistan.

After considerable uncertainty, Pakistan’s government allowed their cricket team to travel to India for the 2023 One Day International World Cup. Pakistan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement that “Pakistan has consistently maintained that sports should not be mixed with politics. It has, therefore, decided to send its cricket team to India to participate in the upcoming ICC Cricket World Cup 2023. Pakistan believes that the state of bilateral relations with India should not stand in the way of fulfilling its international sports-related obligations.”⁸⁹ Pakistan also eventually agreed to playing the tournament’s headline encounter with India in Ahmedabad’s Narendra Modi stadium, a politically sensitive venue for Pakistan since 2002, when anti-Muslim riots occurred in Gujarat, under then Chief Minister Modi. It is widely believed that Pakistan acceded to these demands in the hope that India would make a reciprocal visit to Pakistan for the 2025 Champions Trophy. Unfortunately, the Ahmedabad game, unlike most encounters in the past, was marred by an atmosphere of nationalistic bellicosity, aggression, and acrimony, reflective of the damage that decades of a poisoned atmosphere and rupture have engendered.

⁸⁷ Supriya Sharma, “We knew Adityanath was hostile to Muslims. But did we expect his regime to be so savage?” *Scroll.In*, Dec. 30, 2019, https://scroll.in/article/948194/we-knew-adityanath-was-hostile-to-muslims-but-did-we-expect-his-regime-to-be-so-savage?fbclid=IwAR1-jHJ6sZHPuQnIrbvZpNnxql_agi9RtZO4eBRLlCAVNi5P_BJ_lfvAw_M.

⁸⁸ Sharda Ugra, “Why aren’t our sports celebrities speaking out?” *The India Forum*, Mar. 6, 2020, <https://www.theindiaforum.in/article/why-aren-t-sports-celebrities-speaking-about-caanrc-protests>.

⁸⁹ Danyal Rasool, “Pakistan get government clearance to travel to India for 2023 ODI World Cup,” *ESPNCricinfo*, Aug. 6, 2023, <https://www.espncricinfo.com/story/pakistan-get-government-clearance-to-travel-to-india-for-2023-odi-world-cup-1391135>.

Even the lead-up to arguably the tournament's highest profile match was unsavory. The Indian government delayed issuing visas to Pakistani fans and journalists so that only a handful of accredited journalists and no Pakistani supporters were present at the ground. For an international tournament, this rankled even neutral enthusiasts. In contrast, in 2011, the Indian government issued 6,500 visas for the India-Pakistan semifinal in Mohali. In 2023 even the Pakistan team did not receive their visas until a day before they were due to travel.⁹⁰ Just months earlier Pakistani and Indian fans mingled good-naturedly in a similar encounter in Melbourne. In Ahmedabad, amidst over 130,000 Indian fans, a sporting encounter was reduced to a deeply unpleasant outpouring of hypernationalism. Babar Azam, the Pakistan captain was booed at the toss and when dismissed, Muhammad Rizwan and Babar Azam were subjected to chants of "Jai Shri Ram," a militant religious slogan that sometimes serves as a Hindu war cry. Bandyopadhyay,⁹¹ Shaharyar Khan,⁹² and others have all spoken of cricket's power to bring people together. For the first time, the Ahmedabad encounter appeared to offer a very different stage, becoming instead a spectacle for the humiliation of the neighboring country and a vindication of Modi's Indian superiority – a political event more than a sporting one.

And yet, India is not defined by the events of Ahmedabad nor solely by Modi and the BJP despite the enormous influence that the charismatic hard-line leader has had on the Indian population. In the same World Cup, Pakistan found love and support from Indian supporters when the team played in Hyderabad. The Pakistani cricketers spoke of feeling at home and of the *mohabbat*⁹³ (love/adulation) that they received during their stay in the city. Cricket still had the ability to engender connections despite the overall hostile atmosphere.

The continued ruptures in the India-Pakistan relationship were again highlighted in the 2025 Champions Trophy, which was held in Pakistan. After months of uncertainty over its participation, three months before Pakistan hosted an international tournament for the first time since 1996, India refused to tour, instead insisting on playing all its games in Dubai, citing security and political tensions. India was the only team not to come to Pakistan. It is worth remembering that the ICC had awarded the tournament to Pakistan in November 2021. The late refusal by India threw the entire tournament into doubt and delayed the announcement of the final schedule to the end of 2024, making logistics for travel from abroad almost impossible. India's commercial clout meant that a tournament without it would have been unviable for broadcasters, forcing the implementation of the alternate "compromise" hybrid model. India's nonparticipation mired Pakistan's first international tournament as hosts in controversy with one semifinal and the final, both featuring India, being played in Dubai rather than Pakistan. The Champions Trophy fiasco has meant that India and Pakistan have now agreed that neither

⁹⁰ Sambit Bal, "An Atmosphere like never before, but it could have been so much more," *ESPNCricinfo*, Oct. 14, 2023, <https://www.espncricinfo.com/story/india-vs-pakistan-an-atmosphere-like-never-before-but-it-could-have-been-so-much-more-1403343>.

⁹¹ Bal, "An Atmosphere like never before."

⁹² Khan, *Cricket*.

⁹³ Shahshank Kishore, "When Hyderabad loved Rizwan (and Pakistan) back," *ESPNCricinfo*, Oct. 10, 2023, <https://www.espncricinfo.com/story/icc-cricket-world-cup-2023-mohammad-rizwan-pakistan-fee-l-the-love-in-hyderabad-1402413>.

country will play on the other's soil and that for ICC events there will have to be hybrid arrangements that will involve playing at neutral venues such as Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, or the United Arab Emirates. There had been much local anticipation at India playing in Pakistan, and it is unfortunate that politics prevented Pakistani fans from seeing the wonderfully skilled and talented Indian cricketers play in Pakistan. This represented an opportunity, an "island of agreement" that could have led to the start of a reestablishing of relations. Instead, connectivity remains dismal.

By 2021, the issuance of visas has collapsed to its lowest levels. In 2012, Pakistan and India had signed a new, more flexible visa agreement that exempted travelers over sixty-five, children under twelve, and businesspeople from reporting to the police during their travels.⁹⁴ But the downturn in relations meant that by 2017, India was issuing 18,000 fewer visas than the previous year, down from 52,000 to 34,000. Even medical visas were severely constrained and, in several cases, required the involvement of External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj after requests were made to her on Twitter. As a point of reference, Indian visas to Bangladesh reached 1.2 million in 2017.⁹⁵ Following the 2019 Balakot airstrikes and the Pulwama attack, cross-border visa services were completely halted. According to the *Hindustan Times*,⁹⁶ Indian visas granted to Pakistani nationals have dropped from hundreds of thousands a year to their lowest levels – 200 or so in 2021. In Pakistan, the vast majority of Indian nationals visiting Pakistan are religious pilgrims. But even there the figures are approximately 17,000 in the last five years.⁹⁷ Moreover, despite the initial success of the Kartarpur corridor that allowed visa-free entry to Pakistan for Sikh pilgrims, it is to be noted that entry is limited to the site, and pilgrims have been told not to interact with the public.⁹⁸

In April 2025, following the killing of twenty-six Indian tourists in Indian Kashmir, relations were all but completely severed. In response to the attacks, the Indian government took a raft of immediate sanctions, including the suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT); the expulsion of the Pakistan high commission's defense, navy, and air advisers; the closure of the main border crossing between the two countries; a cancellation of visas to Pakistani nationals under the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Visa Exemption Scheme with a forty-eight-hour window for Pakistanis to leave India; and a further scaling back of its already minimal diplomatic presence in Islamabad.⁹⁹ The suspension of the IWT, long regarded as a

⁹⁴ "Visa for Pakistani nationals," Ministry of Home Affairs India, https://www.mha.gov.in/PDF_Other/AnnexV_01022018.pdf.

⁹⁵ Vijaya Singh, "Fewer visas to Pakistanis in 2017," *The Hindu*, Dec. 19, 2017, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/pakistan-issued-more-visas/article21939216.ece>.

⁹⁶ Umar Sofi, "Govt received 732 visa applications from Pak nationals this year, granted 280," *Hindustan Times*, Aug. 5, 2021, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/govt-received-732-visa-applications-from-pak-nationals-this-year-granted-280-101628140851555.html>.

⁹⁷ Isha S. Bhatnagar, "Nearly 17,000 Indian pilgrims visited Pakistan in last 5 years: Centre," *Hindustan Times*, Apr. 1, 2022, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/nearly-17-000-indian-pilgrims-visited-pakistan-in-last-5-years-centre-101648780917532.html>.

⁹⁸ Asif Mehmood, "India warns Sikh pilgrims against accepting Pakistani hospitality," *The Express Tribune*, Jun. 25, 2022, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2363245/india-warns-sikh-pilgrims-against-accepting-pakistani-hospitality>.

⁹⁹ Penelope MacRae, "Kashmir attack sparks fear of fresh conflict between India and Pakistan," *The Guardian*, Apr. 23, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/apr/23/kashmir-attack-sparks-fear-of-fresh-conflict-between-india-and-pakistan>.

rare thread of cooperation in an otherwise fractious relationship, and one that endured even during war times, represents an unprecedented move signaling the escalation of an already intensely hostile atmosphere. The Pakistan government reciprocated by also downgrading ties, canceling visas, ending trade and imports, and closing Pakistani airspace to all Indian-owned or Indian-operated airlines.¹⁰⁰ A month later a limited but intense war broke out, with India and Pakistan both targeting sites within each other's geographical boundaries. Missiles were launched, drones menaced both sides of the border, and dogfights occurred in airspace. On May 10, a tenuous ceasefire was agreed upon as both nuclear armed sides stepped back from the brink.

Partition succeeded in polarizing identities into Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs, prioritizing the religious aspect over all others. But those other parts of identities, those bonds that existed, are not so easily forgotten. They have a resilience and emotional resonance that cannot be denied. Despite both nations trying to revise their history and identities through changing national discourses – rising Hindutva in India¹⁰¹ and Islamization in Pakistan¹⁰² – it is increasingly overlooked and forgotten that the areas that today constitute the independent nations of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh shared a common cultural and historical heritage, including a legacy of colonialism: “We have all been born of Partition: we were one, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, up till the third quarter of 1947, now we are three separated entities, but are we truly all that different?”¹⁰³ The revisionary exercise is relatively new, spanning decades, in comparison to the shared legacy of hundreds of years.

Indians and Pakistanis have a shared history, particularly if we consider Pakistan and the large swathe of north India. In Pakistan's case, Mohammad Waseem states that in 1947, Pakistan got out of India. But India did not get out of Pakistan.

Apart from Pashtu and the languages of the northern areas, the languages of Pakistan are essentially Indian languages, including the national language, Urdu, along with Punjabi, Sindhi and some minor linguistic varieties. The Indian calendar, Indian dress, Indian cuisine, Indian medicine, Indian wedding rituals and Indian customary laws have continued to operate in large parts of what became Pakistan.¹⁰⁴

In their article on cultural diplomacy and Pakistan-India relations, Yaqoob Khan Bangash and Salima Hashmi also emphasize the common literary, cinematic, and musical heritage of Pakistan and northern India, citing poets, artists, singers, writers, and musicians from both sides of the border who have been recognized, feted, and idolized for their talent and expertise.¹⁰⁵ Most significantly there was cricket. Like

¹⁰⁰ Kamran Yousuf “India's reckless ‘act of war’,” *The Tribune*, Apr. 25, 2025, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2542134/indias-reckless-act-of-war>.

¹⁰¹ Audrey Truschke, “Hindutva's dangerous rewriting of history,” *South Asian Multidisciplinary Academic Journal* 24/25 (2020).

¹⁰² Mohammad Waseem, *Political Conflict in Pakistan* (London: Hurst, 2022).

¹⁰³ Jaswant Singh, *Jinnah: India, Partition, Independence* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 413.

¹⁰⁴ Waseem, *Political Conflict in Pakistan*, 23.

¹⁰⁵ Yaqoob Khan Bangash and Salima Hashmi, “Cultural diplomacy and Pakistan-India relations,” *Journal of Indian Studies* 4, no. 1 (2018), 115–28.

cinema in the Subcontinent, cricket was a shared colonial inheritance that gained enormous local appeal and significance in Pakistan and India, becoming “an Indian game that was accidentally discovered by the British.”¹⁰⁶

Thus, prior to Partition and for decades after, there existed dense linkages and webs of cultural familiarity, especially between Pakistan and northern India. Pakistan, in particular under General Zia, tried to loosen those connections and “de-Indianize,” turning increasingly away from its South Asian heritage and looking toward the Middle East in an effort to create an identity that was distinct from its shared South Asian past. This led to a conflict between deep-rooted social attitudes, cultural mores, and linguistic and behavioral patterns at one end, and the new national identity that subsumed the post-Partition ideological context at the other.¹⁰⁷ But cultural capital is difficult to annihilate completely, and generations of commonality continued to facilitate communication and connectivity so that, following even serious ruptures, shared histories, legacies, and cultures promoted reconnection and healing. A movement of millions of people between the two nations meant not only divided families with obvious ties but also the memories, attachments, and nostalgia of those who did move physically but remain connected through their imaginary. These physical and transcendental ties continue to bind populations and were often passed down from generation to generation. The India-Pakistan relationship, born of a violent rupture, has produced at least ten subsequent serious crises and four wars.¹⁰⁸ But as Clary points out, despite the frequent conflict and tensions, the rivalry is not one of unbroken hostility so that alongside periods of intense hostility, there are interludes of quiet and even moments of hope. Cricket interactions provide many of those moments of optimism.

However, undoubtedly these ties need to be nurtured and given an opportunity to flourish. Experience shows that given even a small opportunity, ruptures can be replaced by linkages. But this requires that state-level hostility be reduced at the very least so that an opportunity to reconnect is provided. Currently, linkages are at their lowest ebb outside of actual war time. Travel, trade, and academic and cultural linkages barely exist. State-level contacts elicit shrill condemnations by nationalistic media on both sides of the border so much so that political leaders and diplomats must assiduously avoid one another at international meetings. Whatever contacts occur, happen under the guise of back-channel communications. There is an acute need for a more conducive political atmosphere.

Sport has enormous emotional appeal. It has the ability to transcend boundaries and overcome prejudice and break stereotypes. Images of Pakistani and Indian cricketers fraternizing together often lead to an outpouring of positive sentiment from fans on both sides of the border. The present rupture has entered into its second decade, and there is little doubt that the longer the break, the more time adverse elements in both countries have to poison the minds of their populations, making reconnection all the more difficult. The irony of the situation is that Pakistanis and Indians have never appeared so distant from each other, and yet at no time have they

¹⁰⁶ Ashish Nandy, *A Very Popular Exile: An Omnibus, comprising the Tao of Cricket; An Ambiguous Journey to the City; Traditions, Tyranny, and Utopias* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 1.

¹⁰⁷ Waseem, *Political Conflict in Pakistan*, 24.

¹⁰⁸ Clary, *The Difficult Politics of Peace*, 1.

been more alike, bound by, on the one hand, culture and history and similar global aspirations, and on the other, by global challenges such as climate change, poverty, and extremist ideologies. The unfortunate realization though revolves around the fact that to reverse the current long estrangement will require leaders of extraordinary courage, commitment, and foresight, the likes of which appear in short supply in the Subcontinent.

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