

Beyond the Boundaries : Aiming For A Six

CRICKET DIPLOMACY AND INDO PAK RELATIONS

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Introduction

Sports always have worked in bringing nations together. The democracies, authoritarian states, monarchies or the communist states have all had a keen interest in sports and the laurels and glory sports persons bring along. The sports bodies and councils in non-democratic nations, in fact out as bodies, that gives a taste of democracy and electoral process. The political nature of sports is thus well evident – ‘a vehicle for state diplomacy and control’ (Holt, 2014)

National prestige, pride and honour have become elements associated with sports. The 1916 Berlin Games in the backdrop of World War I, 1924 Paris Olympics, Antwerp Olympics (where German participation was blocked and minimized by the British initiative), Berlin Olympics of 1936 (where Britain contrary to its initial stand decided to support the idea of non-intervention, disengaging nations from boycotting the Games held in Germany as there were no lobbyists for Jews in London), 1934 Rome World Cup (where Mussolini’s patronage over the game became a matter of deliberation in the international community), Los Angeles Olympics of 1932 (where Mussolini wanted to gain goodwill for Italy), Indo Pak Friendship Games (1960) and the Indo Pak Cricket matches all stand as touchstones to the above statement. Sports nationalism, at times of tension, between nations could get violent and attains jingoist fervor. John Hoberman in, his *‘Towards a Theory of Olympic Internationalism’* initiates the idea of sports and games as ‘fin de siècle’ of ancient modes of engagements in international relations; bringing new dimensions of diplomatic engagements into foreign policy. The idea of a soldier fighting to preserve and expand his nation’s honour and power is the basic axiom that forms the base of his theory. National

sentiments and patriotism become intertwined with sports, unmasking the political nature of games, but the kith and kin of the soldiers find it too intransient compared to the other civilians, to let go off the trauma and loss they had to overcome while the nation was at war.

Nations see sports and games as a platform to showcase their talent, power, skill and hegemony. “The fascist party identified the Olympics as a major forum to display the new energy of the fascist state.” (Holt, 2014)

The sports persons become representatives of cultural and political designs of their country. “States have, in effect, the obligation of preserving and reinforcing their international cohesion, and retaining their external prestige. And sports plays this role for the majority of great political powers” (Arnaud, 2014). The athletes and players are comprehended in the new era as the unofficial ambassadors of a nation with the task of winning honours for the country they represent. Many nations commit themselves to a sports policy to further evolve such individuals.

This article explores the possibilities of Indo Pak engagements through cricket, a passion in both the states.

Indo Pak Relations

Pakistan has had troubles framing an identity for itself, as no identity could be possibly approved without having to have legitimate proofs and facts tracing the Indian roots of Pakistan, which as an individual independent state hurt the national sentiments of Pakistan. Though Pakistan was created on the ground of religion, yet ‘...all the major strands of Pakistani islam — Deobandi, Bareilvi and Ahle- Hadees— have their roots in Indian islam and mirror the divisions witnessed among Muslims in India, both before and after Partition’ (Ayoob, 2019).

What was exposed in the 1948 Indo Pak War, 1965 Indo Pak War, Tashkent agreement of 1966, Indo Pak War of 1971, Kargil War of 1991, Parliament attacks of December 2001, Mumbai attacks of 26/11 with no added conscientious endeavors was the Indian strategic culture of defying redundant use of power, might and force. This clearly gave India a moral victory and a privileged position in world affairs. Taking the Kashmir issue to the UN without completing the integration of Jammu and Kashmir when India had a

beneficial standpoint, agreeing to a ceasefire in the 1965 Indo Pak War which India was winning, willingness to return the captured territories during the Tashkent Conference, not taking the 1971 war to West Pakistan, respecting the Line of Control during the 1991 Kargil War, not using the terror attacks of 2001 and 2011 as casus belli to wage a war on Pakistan, proved to be highly conducive for India in the international setting. This has been a reason why Indian stance is usually favored in world order while deliberating on Indo Pak relations. The surgical strikes, Indian interventions in Kashmir, Indian army's presence and activities in Kashmir were thus justified as unavoidable measures to ensure stability in the region.

Nehru never acknowledged Pakistan as a natural state, but an artificial state, the formation of which robbed Indians of the sense of fulfillment and celebrations of a hard earned freedom from imperialism, exposing the vulnerability of the newly independent India towards religion and partition. Constructing an appealing picture of India before the international audience, and preserving the country against the discredits and dangers that its immediate neighbour brought, India had framed a clear approach towards Pakistan since the formative years of the Indian foreign policy. Pakistan was seen as a defector of the terms and values of democracy. Nehru was dreaming of establishing a secure and stable neighbourhood for India. Towards this end, and to mend the ways of Pakistan he disregarded highly, he focused on a dual approach — first, to portray Pakistan in an unappealing manner, showcasing its faults wrecking its international reputation, second, to establish contact with Pakistani administration and population in a multi lateral dimension through culture, exchanges and any form of Track II diplomacy that could be applied.

Indo – Pak tensions should be comprehended along with the concept of 'embedded conflicts'. The major areas of contention in these case would be grounded on '...issues relating to survival, identity and power position become embedded at both interstate and societal levels' (Paul, 2013). The lack of enterprising and accommodating leadership with limited opportunities of economic engagements with the conflicting states, failure to develop a distinguished national identity, inability to frame a solution to overcome the religious differences, boundary disputes and national ideologies can aggravate the rivalry (Paul R Hensel, November 2004). In such an atmosphere the countries would view each other potential threats, accumulating military and technological competence to intimidate

the other. The balance of power theory fails in the case of India and Pakistan, where in spite of the difference in power equation, the weaker state begins to stir tensions, which further delay any possible attempt at deliberations to reach a settlement. This is possible as India was placed in an unfriendly neighborhood with Pakistan maintaining cordial relations with a major power in South Asia— China, by solving the border tensions and engaging in trade relations. This is why after every war Pakistan ‘convince themselves that the next time they just have to try harder in order to win’ (Paul, 2013). India is determined to not lose the power equation it has gained and under various Prime Ministers has attempted to draw closer to the neighbourhood and maintain the international affinity garnered through trade, commerce, scientific and technological exchanges and the diaspora. A scenario like this further gets worse, when the citizens in these countries, perceive their state’s military strength to be at an advantage and provide support for the countries to wage wars against one another.

All these along with the deficit of certitude and reliability, has never allowed the Indo Pak relations to reach a comforting juncture. This ‘trust deficit’ could be seen as the major reason for unsuccessful peace processes initiated between the countries (Gul, 2007). This has been the reason why neither the Confidence Building Measures nor the welcoming steps by the leaders of either sides could ease the tension. Positive peace processes in Indo Pak relations are therefore inconceivable.

Cricket diplomacy and Indo Pak Relations

Cricket is not a sport for many South Asian Nations. Cricket for South Asia, is what football is for Latin America. This sport is an emotion and has ardent, dedicated followers like in a religion or a movement. The 1983 victory in World Cup took the passion for cricket in India to an alleviated degree. Football and hockey though loved became secondary to cricket.

Let the discussion begin with the example of magic of cricket in bringing estranged communities together. The Kashmir Super League (KSL) held in Dubai saw the victory of Razey¹ Kadal Falcons (RKF) from the fourteen teams named after various places in Kashmir, which had registered for KSL. RKF won against Safakadal Stars as a result of a

¹ Razey, an area in Srinagar, where Muslims and Pandits lived together in good numbers before the displacement of Pandits from Kashmir initiated in 1990.

high yielding partnership between a Pandit and Muslim — Sandeep Bhan and Rajab Abid. Sandeep and his family never returned to Kashmir after 1990. This is the first time that Kashmiri Pandits are participating in KSL (Ashiq, 2019). Cricket has tried to reduce the tensions between the two communities, which had to suffer the aftermath of the Partition in 1947. Cricket was able to perform this marvel as the match was held away from the states — the areas of contention and tensions.

Cricket matches between India and Pakistan at times of wars and high tensions in the Indo Pak relations are often viewed as matter of war in a different battlefield, a major reason why cries of ‘Pakistan Murdabad’² echo when India wins the cricket match.

“When I played my first series against Pakistan, it did look like a war, in our time, we were expected more to harm the Pakistani players than win a match.”

- Kapil Dev as quoted in India, Pakistan start new innings of "cricket diplomacy" (Chakraborty, 2012)

‘In the context of World Test cricket then, the value of team rivalry, team psyche and competitive history is vital in establishing value to the sport’ (Jayaram, 2018). It is indeed disheartening to note that these countries of cricket enthusiasts have not seen a test series between India and Pakistan for over a decade and ‘the world of sport is all the poorer for it’ (Jayaram, 2018) for not attempting for reconciliation through this sport.

Cricket, as a major instrument to bring about a breakthrough in Indo Pak relations, thus at times fail to meet the purpose of engaging the nations in a positive relationship, while at few instances having a negative impact on the interstate relations. The current situations after the Pulwama³ and Balakot⁴ episodes have definitely adversely affected the

² A Hindi slogan that translates to ‘Down with Pakistan’.

³ A place in Kashmir. It was in the news for the terror attacks on 14th February, 2019 where nearly 40 Indian CRPF soldiers died.

⁴ A place in Pakistan. It was in the news for the airstrikes by Indian Air Force in the region on 26th February, 2019.

relations between the neighbouring states. The situation has aggravated and taken a nasty turn when the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) received demands and requests on banning the Pakistan team from performing in the 2019 World Cup. Indo Pak match on June 16th, 2019 in Manchester has received '4,00,000 applications for tickets of the game, while the stadium can only accommodate 25,000 people' (BCCI can be banned if India boycott Pakistan match at ICC 2019 World Cup - Report, 2019). BCCI has to be really cautious while taking any decision as it has to effectively balance the national sentiments and the spirit of the game.

It has been noted that cricket has always played a crucial role in cooling down the tensions simmering in the Indo Pak relations.

'...way back in 1978, when the government of India, under the leadership of late Morarji Desai, decided to mend/renew relations, it was us cricketers he chose to send to Pakistan on a goodwill tour. Yes, it was earnestly a goodwill tour on which Indian cricketers were expected to do what politicians would not dream of doing – create goodwill that is.'

(Bedi, 2016)

“Politically, cricket has always been there to break the ice,” according to Aamer Naseer, a sports reporter of a Pakistan television channel. The sport is believed to be a ‘powerful political symbol, a litmus test of relations between countries of the region’ (Tempest, 1987). It should be noted that after the war in 1971 the Indo Pak relations were strained and the game of cricket had proved effective in easing the tensions. The diplomats ensured the opportunity was utilized for dialogues when the teams were to face one another in 1987. The then President of Pakistan Zia ul Haq developed the circumstance into a cordial visit to India, behaving as the head of the delegation that had come to engage in the game of cricket. Indicating his visit was ‘to see a good game of cricket’ adding that he wanted to utilize the game for the ensuring peace (Tempest, 1987). He made it evident that the visit did not prove India and Pakistan to be allies but was an experiment in originating processes to understand, explain and frame possible solutions involving a neighbouring country with whom the troubled relations were not being pacified. Cricket was used as a tool towards this end.

"But for two neighbors, it is important that we meet each other more often and discuss things. My sole purpose was to come and watch good cricket and in the process meet with the prime minister and see how we could solve our problems."

- Zia ul Haq as quoted in War Talk
Evaporates on First Pitch : Zia's Cricket
Diplomacy Gets High Score in India
(Tempest, 1987)

It was during this series that Mohammed Azharuddin emerged as one of the finest performers. He was able to score a century from the balls of Pakistani bowlers. This was viewed as the century of the Indian muslim against the balls of Pakistani muslims. The theory for the formation of Pakistan (a better and safe place for muslims that ensured their development and prosperity) was being shown to be of little credibility through cricket. The idea of India as Islam phobic state was scrutinized. Pakistani media which was present to cover the visit of the Pakistan President to the Jaipur stadium had to report the same and India was shown to be a country that practiced the secularism it preached. The differences in opinions and the misunderstandings of the natives of Pakistan regarding India, were being addressed closely through this. Though the first educational minister of India was a muslim — Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad, the muslim fraternity in Pakistan were not convinced of the Indian government and society to have a progressive outlook towards Muslims. Cricket, a passion in both countries was able to create a deliberation on the secular nature of the India. Similarly, Pakistan had Hindu players in the team. Anil Daplat, the first Hindu to play in the Pakistan team, had made his cricket debut in 1984 and his skills at wicket keeping were admired by the Indians.

The story of Shuja Uddin, who was a colonel in Pakistan Army and had played for the Pakistan cricket team, proves how cricket can be a medium of human interaction and understanding. Though a prisoner of war in the 1971 war, yet Shuja received the honour of a good cricket player and mentored the Indian Army in the sport. There were times when angered Kashmiris would cheer and support Pakistan during an Indo Pak cricket match. Many at times such incidents have given rise to brawls within the Indian citizens in the

region. Cricket matches often thus serve as setting the pitch ready for composite dialogues and arms control (Croft, 2005).

The mauka mauka advertisement produced by Star Sports was a result of the efforts to bring maximum viewership for the World Cup 2015. The series started with the Indo Pak match and the advertisement was an instant hit in India. In the words of Star Channel —

“It depicted the labours of a Pakistani cricket fan and the box of firecrackers he’d been lugging around for 20 years, waiting for an opportunity to celebrate a World Cup win over India. The accompanying song, a Sufi tune with the chorus Mauka Mauka, poked gentle fun at Pakistan’s unfortunate record against India. The promo was meant to be a one-off take on the rivalry – a bit of friendly banter in anticipation of what was sure to be a special match” (We create Mauka Mauka).

There were other mauka advertisements launched before Indian matches against other countries. The ones released before the match against South Africa took a gig at how India was not able to win matches against the country during the previous three World Cup matches against South Africa. These ads stand testimony to the passion of cricket among Indians. Amidst these mauka mauka advertisements, the one that received the popular Indian support was involving Pakistan. This happened because it was a ‘perfect blend of sentiment towards the sport plus humor’ (Ramkumar, 2016). The Pakistan netizens found it to be relevant and enjoyed the jibe according to the Mauka ad maker Suresh Triveni. The popularity of the mauka mauka advertisements around the Indo Pak matches, impelled Star Sports to come up with a mauka mauka ad for the 20- 20 World Cup in 2016. The 2016 ad featured, ‘an emotional appeal by a Pakistani fan, to Shahid Afridi urging the team to win this World Cup’ and drawing from its earlier campaigns ‘captures the classic rivalry of the India-Pak cricket clash’ (Neogy, 2016).

‘Cricket, sports is not as important. We stand with every member of the defence force. Their sacrifices should not go to waste’ (India shouldn't play Pakistan in World Cup, says Harbhajan Singh, 2019). Saurav Ganguly has been against the move to remove the portraits of Pakistani crickets from the clubhouse of Eden Garden. The portraits also include

the one of present Pakistan's current Prime Minister Imran Khan. The clubhouses of Bangalore, Mohali and Jaipur stadiums had already removed the portraits of Pakistani cricket as an expression of protest and anger over the Pulwama attacks. Doing this to objects that were 'installed to exhibit or relate to heroic stories – which encompasses humanity – doesn't always end with mere symbolism. It more often than not propagates hatred' (Oinamos, 2019). Saurav Ganguly had raised objection in playing against Pakistan in the coming months, but has been against the move to remove the portraits of Pakistani crickets from the clubhouse of Eden Garden. The portraits also include the one of present Pakistan's current Prime Minister Imran Khan. The clubhouses of Bangalore, Mohali and Jaipur stadiums had already removed the portraits of Pakistani cricket as an expression of protest and anger over the Pulwama attacks. Doing this to objects that were 'installed to exhibit or relate to heroic stories – which encompasses humanity – doesn't always end with mere symbolism. It more often than not propagates hatred' (Oinamos, 2019). Ganguly's autobiography '*A Century Is Not Enough*', has incidents that has shaped his outlook towards Imran. The two individuals share an admiration for one another because of the sport and Ganguly's refusal to remove the portrait might be a win for the Indian appreciation of the sport of cricket and eventually be used as many of the initial bargaining tools to draw Pakistan to a negotiating table. While Indian side has Ganguly's efforts to ease tension between the neighbouring states, from Pakistan it is Shohaib Akhtar. He favoured the Indian decision of calling off the world cup match against Pakistan while recording his contempt on the Pulwama episode. "They have a right to pull out. Their country was attacked and hence the decision. You cannot argue on that?" (Shoab Akhtar condemns Pulwama attack; says India have every right to pull out of ICC World Cup 2019, 2019)

Conclusion

The game of cricket for Pakistan and India is an opportunity to showcase aptitude and fortitude, by winning matches against the countries which once ruled them — England. Winning a match against Britain would enhance the morale of both these nations as the minds of Indians and Pakistanis would be beaming with pride as the win would be considered as vengeance for the colonial atrocities, that they had faced under the British Raj. Winning a match against Australia would instill a pride in the citizens of the country for having been able to defeat a country that had made itself the perfect example of hardwork,

development and dedication. Without a doubt, cricket has shown to have ‘cast a spell on the masses’, transforming as ‘the embodiment of national self esteem’ and allotting the cricket players with the status of ‘icons and celebrities’ (Bharucha, 2004). Thus cricket enjoys a superior position among the common interests and passions of India and Pakistan, others being Bollywood and Kashmir. It could be conceived that the performance in a cricket match between India and Pakistan would even exert a good amount of influence on the performance of the ruling party in the coming elections — state and national level. Cricket needs to be viewed as a constructive player in Indo Pak relations. The glory and honour associated with the game should not be allowed to be penetrating into the political discourses and interstate affairs of the country, but rather used as a bridge to communicate the concerns and difficulties while dealing with the border disputes and aligned differences.

The trust deficit in the balance sheet of Indo Pak relations needs to be addressed. The skeptical outlook India and Pakistan possess against one another cannot be tackled easily. It were cricket matches that gave these countries an opportunity to measure and analyse one another’s hospitality and maintain any cord of amiability in the relations. The cricket players are readily willing to provide diplomatic services through talks and press meets when the relations turn sour. Bollywood actors from India, and hailing from Pakistan and Pakistani artists are seen to be of little help in such instances. A ban on Bollywood in Pakistan, a ban on Pakistani artists is what the countries receive in such circumstances, further infuriating the uneasiness in the relations. It is cricket that has proved to be a savior in such hard times. Indo Pak matches in early 2000s had created a platform for talks after the 1998 Indian Parliament blasts, in which India had alleged Pakistan favours to the terrorists. After the unsuccessful attempts to reach peace in the Agra Talks of the first half of 2000, India and Pakistan have never played a test series against one another. As mentioned in the beginning of the paragraph, test matches which require elongated stays and interactions with the native atmosphere, would allow the cricket players to act as harbingers of negative peace processes attempting at positive peace processes in the future.

Though this could be comprehended as a utopian plan, yet, cricket should be the only way these countries should be allowed to fight, providing both entertainment and peace in the region. The British have not only created the Indo Pak rivalry but also provided with a

possible solution for it — Cricket. Thus it is high time that the history and colonial baggage is left behind and the prospects of engaging in constructive relationship are encouraged.

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