



Prospects for Indo-Pak confidence-building measures: The role of civil society

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Abstract

Indo-Pak relations, which are marked by several issues of contention, are getting worse with each passing day. Despite myriad attempts to resolve the conflict, including adoption of a number of CBMs, the promised respite has not been witnessed yet. Against the failure of the states to resolve the conflict and build peace in the region, this paper examines the efforts of civil society in bridging the trust deficit and promoting normalcy between India and Pakistan. In addition, the strengths, weaknesses and the efficacy of CBMs adopted by civil society has also been discussed. It is asserted that society-led CBMs facilitate meetings and interaction of the populace of two countries that help in evading negative perceptions about the other, thereby building confidence and peace.

Keywords: India-Pakistan relations, confidence building measures (CBMs), civil society, peace, conflict

Introduction

This paper attempts to analyse the role of civil society in building confidence and reducing suspicion between India and Pakistan through various Confidence Building Measures (CBMs). Civil society manifests itself at various levels such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs), research institutes, educational institutes, media and business houses and through various actors such as artists, pilgrims, traders and business men, peace activists, human rights activists and academicians. These distinct actors of society adopt CBMs at their own levels to build peace in the region. Against this background, the aim of the paper is to analyse the efficacy of CBMs adopted by civil society in terms of increasing trust and confidence and reducing suspicion and hostility between India and Pakistan.

Methodology

A qualitative research methodology has been adopted for this research including secondary as well as primary sources of data. Secondary sources are inclusive of books, journals, reports of NGOs and research institutes such as Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA), Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS), Observation Research Foundation (ORF), Jinnah Institute, Institute for Secular Studies and Peace (ISSP) among others.

Primary sources of data were extracted from interviews and interactions with various actors of civil society such as pilgrims, artists, academicians, NGOs, track 2 participants and traders. A non-probability sampling technique namely purposive sampling was used to determine respondents.

India-Pakistan Relations

India and Pakistan are arch rivals ever since their vivisection in 1947. The two countries have fought three wars, a conflict and have encountered various crises owing to several issues of contention between the two. Some of the crucial issues of contention are the Kashmir conflict, Siachen Glacier, Sir Creek, Wullar Barrage/Tulbul navigation project and terrorism.

Owing to such environment of tensions in the region, the two states have undertaken myriad CBMs. However, ease and normalcy in relations has not been witnessed as yet. CBMs are basically wide range of measures or agreements that aim to build confidence and reduce suspicion by increasing transparency in the action and intention of states. CBMs can be divided into military and non-military CBMs. Military CBMs can further be divided into conventional and nuclear CBMs. whereas, non-military CBMs can further be divided into political, economic, cultural, societal and environmental CBMs.

Furthermore, CBMs can be initiated by the governments as well as civil society. Initially, it was the two governments that were engaged in initiating CBMs to reduce hostility and suspicion. However, in the late 20th century, the civil society also became active and started initiating a number of CBMs.

Distinct actors and their efforts could be best described by a model known as 'Multi-Track diplomacy model. It has nine tracks- Track 1 -government; Track 2-nongovernment/professional; Track 3- Business/commerce; Track 4 – Private citizens; Track 5- research; training and education; Track 6 – activism/advocacy; Track 7- religion; Track 8-funding and Track 9- media and public opinion.

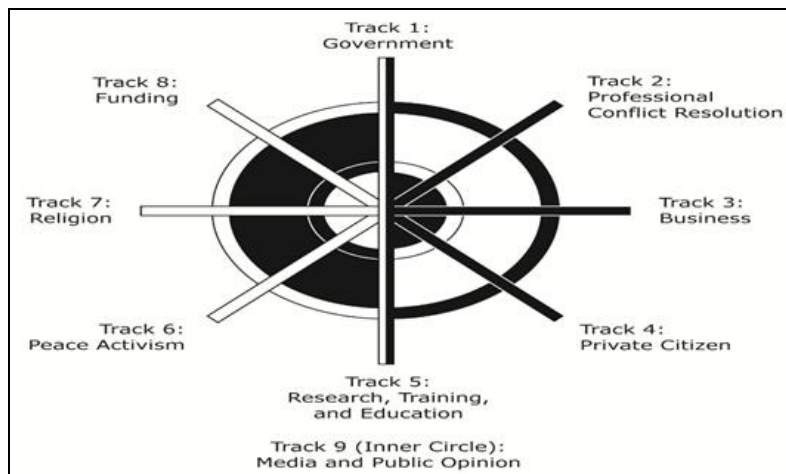


Fig. 1 Multi Track Diplomacy model

Source: <http://imtdeast.org/index.php/about-imtd-east/multi-track-diplomacy>

Except for Track 1, all the other tracks incorporate various actors of civil society. At each Track from Track 2-Track 9, civil society in India and Pakistan could be seen playing a role. In India-Pakistan context, Track 2 involves a number of dialogues such as Neemrana dialogue, Chaophraya dialogue, Pugwash dialogues, and Ottawa dialogues among others. Track 3 involves the efforts of chambers of commerce to promote trade and economic cooperation. Track 4 deals with private citizens in the form of various people-to-people contacts between populace of India and Pakistan such as Pakistan-India People's Forum for Peace and Democracy (PIPFDP), Pakistan Peace Coalition (PPC), Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament and Peace (CNDP), Aman Ki Asha (AKA) among others. Track 5 represents several Indian and Pakistani research institute and think tanks such as IDSA, IPCS, ISSP among others. Peace activists are covered under Track 6, and religion and inter-faith dialogues are covered under Track 7. Track 8 is funding, which involves funding of smaller organisations by bigger peacebuilding organisations of India and Pakistan. Finally, Track 9 is media, which is a powerful tool in shaping of public opinion about Indo-Pak peace process. Therefore, the Multi Track Diplomacy model is very useful to show the involvement of various actors of civil society in the conflict resolution of India and Pakistan.

Origins of the term 'civil society'

The usage of the term 'civil society' as an intellectual construct started in the 17th century. Initially, the concept of civil society was synonymous with political. Aristotle's study of civil society, for instance, associates it with politics. Similarly, for early social contract theorists, Hobbes and Locke, society was synonymous with the political. Around 18th century, this connotation of civil society came to be challenged by the likes of Herder and Burke, who started seeing civil society as a separate domain, to be seen independent and vis-à-vis state^[1].

Further in the 19th century, the conceptual growth of civil society established it as a separate domain from state as well as family. Hegel for instance, distinguished civil society from political i.e. state and personal i.e. family.

A further revision of the term is seen in the works of Marx and Gramsci. For Marx, 'civil society is different from state, but he finds its origins in class relations. However, for Gramsci, civil society can be distinguished from state as well as market'^[2]. The concept has been subject to revision repeatedly.

The contemporary understanding of the term makes civil society a separate realm from state manifesting at various levels such as that of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), research institutes or think tanks, trade unions, academicians, educational institutions, media, artists, professional associations etc. Therefore, civil society could be understood as a 'category of universal human society means that the development of intermediary forms of association, even institutions, between the family and state'^[3].

Indo-Pak civil society

Civil society started campaigning for Indo-Pak normal relations and peace during 1980s in the wake of several crises that made Indo-Pak relations susceptible and vulnerable. Such initiatives were marked majorly by Track 2 dialogues that incorporated a mix of officials, retired military and political leaders and retired diplomats and bureaucrats. Thus, the dialogues were semi-official in nature.

However, citizen diplomacy or activism also started on a full-fledged scale in 1990s. With the overt nuclearization of both states, civil society became more active and started campaigning against the tests. Back to back nuclear tests by India and Pakistan in May 1998, increased anxiety of the international community as well as that of civil society. The US placed many sanctions. Along with it, the civil society also pressurised the two countries for bringing back normalcy by embarking on CBMs. As a result of international and societal pressures, the two countries embarked on various social, cultural, political and economic CBMs.

Along with the states, civil society also initiated a number of CBMs in the form of people-to-people contacts, plays, dramas, conferences, workshops, student exchanges etc. Behera asserts that South Asia has witnessed an exponential growth of civil society organisations, networks and social movements in the past two decades. By and large, these have been in response to the national and global crisis which can no longer be understood, explained or resolved within a state-

centric paradigm^[4]. There are different actors and sectors involved in building peace between India and Pakistan.

1. People's initiatives

One of the first efforts of people of the two countries could be seen in the form of foundation of 'Hind-Pak Dosti Manch' in 1994 led by Kuldip Nayyar, a renowned Indian journalist and Hans Raj Hans, a popular Indian singer. It is a podium for Indian and Pakistanis to meet and interact. An annual 'mela' is also organised by the organisation, which is visited by Pakistani citizens^[5].

In the same year, another influential initiative was launched when some Indians went to meet their counterparts in Pakistan. As a result of the meeting, Pakistan-India People's Forum for Peace and Development (PIPFDP) was formed. Its focus areas are Jammu and Kashmir, strengthening democracy, religious tolerance and denuclearisation.

Another organisation, the Folklore Research Academy promotes peace between India and Pakistan through seminars, conferences, trade and tourism. It not just invites actors of civil society for its seminars, but also draw on politicians from both the states.

Some coalitions have also been formed to campaign against the nuclear tests and proliferation by the two states. Pakistan Peace Coalition (PPC), Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament and Peace (CNDP) are coalition of such organisations that campaign for nuclear disarmament. CNDP raises awareness at the levels of colleges and schools. CNDP and PPC jointly organised 'Pakistan-India people's Solidarity conference in 2001. It discussed issues such as democratisation, denuclearisation, people-to-people contacts etc.

A very popular people-to-people campaign is Aman Ki Asha (AKA), which was launched in January 2010 by two leading media houses of India and Pakistan. Times of India group and Jang group from India and Pakistan respectively initiated AKA campaign to build peace in the region by increasing people-to-people contacts. It has also been successful in organising business conferences drawing businessmen as well as politicians.

Aghaz-e-Dosti, another people-to-people campaign was started in 2012. The aim of the organisation is to initiate bonds of friendship through its prominent initiatives such as Aman Chaupals, peace workshops, letter exchanges, greeting card exchangers, virtual peacebuilding courses and peace calendars.

People-to-people contacts have been further strengthened by way of new media. People of both the countries are now interacting on social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter. There are also pages of organisations who promote peace between India and Pakistan. Aao Dosti Karein, for instance, is an initiative to promote peace in virtual space.

People-to-people initiatives also include women initiatives. Women's Initiative for Peace in South Asia (WIPSA) was formed in 1999 in the aftermath of Kargil conflict. Women under the auspices of WIPSA undertook a bus journey and travelled to Pakistan in the year 2000. The journey was undertaken to meet and spread the message of peace and love through discussions and meetings. There have been many such bus journeys undertaken by women from the two countries to increase cultural exchanges. These bus journeys were

popularly called 'bus for peace' missions.

Similarly, another women NGO, Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace (WISCOMP) is involved in working for bridging the gaps and differences between both sides by facilitating women exchanges and conflict transformation workshops.

Likewise, other women organisations such as South Asian Women's Network (SAWNET), Sangat, Jagori, Peace Women Across the globe, Women's Action Forum, Shirkat Gah among others are also involved in peacebuilding initiatives in the region.

Furthermore, women from either sides of Kashmir also meet, interact and share their pain, sufferings, sing songs and narrate stories. A prominent women organisation Azad Jammu and Kashmir Women for Peace (AJKWP) holds cross-LoC women conferences and meetings.

2. Trade and economic cooperation

Traders and businessmen promote and encourage trade by pressuring governments for increased trade as well as organising seminars and conferences on trade, promoting ease in visa restrictions, participation in trade fairs and exhibitions. Since political relations guide economic relations, traders and businessmen voice their concerns for decreasing trade between the two countries because of tensions in political relations. Economists and businessmen in both countries have coalesced to lobby their governments, enhance public interest, and develop cross-border linkages^[6].

Chambers of commerce are important business groupings and organisations that aim to improve trade between India and Pakistan. Some of the important chambers of commerce are Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), Federation of Pakistani Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI), Punjab, Haryana, Delhi Chamber of Commerce (PHDCCI), Karachi Chamber of Commerce (KCC), Lahore Chamber of Commerce (LCC), Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) etc.

3. Media

Media plays an important role in shaping and formulating public opinion in the two countries. However, both electronic media and print media has been playing a negative role by promoting discord and shaping enemy images of the other country. Prime time shows in both the states engage in debates where the other country is always criticised. Anchors are busy in speaking ill of the peace process and destroy whatever minimum confidence has been built by governments and societal actors. Seth emphasises that 'the debates are often offensive, so packed with self-righteousness inclination of anchors that the scope of reasoned debate gets limited. There are only superficial debates and issues of importance related to the conflict or the peace process are not discussed'^[7].

Print media also shapes public opinion to a large extent. Print media is more sensible and do factual covering of issues rather than blowing news out of proportion. However, there is a need for both print and electronic news media to cover peace processes upheld by governments and increase the confidence and not destroy it.

Mass media also covers cinema and television soaps. These are very popular among people of the two countries. In

Pakistan, Indian films, songs and actors are very famous. Similarly, Pakistani soaps when introduced by an Indian channel Zindagi were watched with great enthusiasm and were loved in India. However, these artists have to bear the brunt of the political relations of India and Pakistan. Recently, after a number of terror attacks on Indian soil such as Pathankot attack and Uri attack, Pakistani artists were forced to leave India by some right wing parties. Many people found this act as unnecessary and targeting of artists by political parties. After all, film actors, TV actors and singers unite populace of the two countries and build cultural bonds through their films, shows and concerts. There are cross-border collaborations, which are loved by the populace.

4. Theatre

Many theatre groups in both India and Pakistan promote peaceful relations between India and Pakistan such as Manch Rangmanch (India), Rangkarmee (India), Tehrik-e-Niswan (Pakistan) and Ajoka (Pakistan). All the four groups are popular in both the countries. These groups bring out plays and dramas that depict horrifying effects of war, and values of peace between the two nations. They visit and do plays in each other's country enhance and strengthen cultural bonds between populace. 'Theatre provides a unique opportunity for one-to-one dialogue between the artists and the audience which makes the case for 'theatre for peace' strong and significant and leads to the improvement of cultural relations between India and Pakistan'^[8].

5. Track 2 diplomacy

Track one has been the dominant form of diplomacy for ages, where state to state interaction is forged behind closed doors. However, since 1980s, a new form of diplomacy came to the fore and is known as Track 2 diplomacy. Montville defined it as "unofficial, informal interaction between members of adversary groups or nations that aim to develop strategies, influence public opinion, and organise human and material resources in ways that might help resolve their conflict"^[9].

Clearly, the definition suggests that contrary to Track 1 diplomacy where the interaction is strictly official and formal, Track 2 diplomacy is a non-official and informal interaction between members of adversary nations. Moreover, the aim of such interactions is to resolve a conflict through using various strategies. The tools and instruments that Track 2 participants employ are quite different from what Track 1 officials employ.

According to Mc Donald, problem-solving workshops enable parties to come together and analyse the conflict from the perspective of problem solving, facilitated by a panel of conflict resolution practitioners^[10]. It is further stressed that these meetings are held in seclusion, which allow participants to identify latent causes of conflict and explore options.

Indo-Pak Track 2 dialogues consist of retired military officials and political leaders as well as retired bureaucrats and diplomats. Such dialogues also include academicians, participants from various NGOs, media persons etc. Therefore, Track 2 is seen as a podium bringing together and synchronising the views of different actors. Their task is to meet with their adversary counterparts, exchange ideas and generate options to resolve the conflict. Track 2 dialogues

often involve academicians, members of NGOs etc., however, they are different from other societal initiatives.

Track 2 dialogues were initiated in the region in 1990s. The first such attempt was Neemrana dialogue. The dialogue was initiated under the auspices of WORLDNET dialogues by USIS. But, afterwards German nongovernmental organisations and American foundation took the charge. The first meeting of the dialogue was conducted at Neemrana fort, Rajasthan; therefore, the name of the dialogue, 'Neemrana dialogue'. The participants of the dialogue hailed from various backgrounds consisting of former military and diplomats as well as other societal actors such as journalists, academics, NGO workers etc. Some of the other important Track 2 dialogues between India and Pakistan are Chaophraya dialogue, Ottawa dialogue, Balusa dialogue, Pugwash conference among others.

Track Two dialogues are often encouraged by Track One officials before their discourse of conflict resolution starts. This is done in order to have various inputs, feedbacks and options in hand before starting the official discourse. This approach has many benefits. First, it makes the official discourse start on a positive note as it indicates the willingness of the adversary to resolve the conflict. Second, it enables both the sides to do their homework well as officials go through the feedback and options given by Track 2 participants beforehand and formulate strategies accordingly. Third, it saves time and energy of governments to go through issues and brainstorm solutions for the same at the meeting. Since they already have a list of options explored at Track 2 level, they can straightaway discuss the options, their viability and implementation. Therefore, governments use Track 2 participants as a CBM, who then helps in negotiating more CBMs that can be applied by the governments. In this sense, Track Two dialogues are a CBM in itself, who then negotiate more CBMs.

6. Academicians

Exchange of students, international conferences, seminars, workshops and literary festivals are effective tools of CBMs that are being initiated by academicians of the two countries. Indo-Pak Youth Forum for Peace is an initiative that undertakes various student exchange programs. Another organisation, Citizens Archive of Pakistan, has initiated an Exchange for Change project that facilitates student exchanges between students of India and Pakistan. These exchanges are an important tool of conflict prevention and confidence-building as they facilitate prevention by evading negative perceptions and build confidence increasing communication and interaction.

Apart from students' exchanges, there are literary festivals, joint exhibitions and galleries that increase the confidence of both the sides. All such steps lead to an era of 'education collaboration', which is a requisite for increased cooperation and peace.

Efficacy of society-led CBMs

The answer to the question that whether CBMs have been effective or not depends on what was expected of them. If society-led CBMs were expected to resolve the conflict between India and Pakistan by finding solutions to all the contentious issues, then certainly the CBMs have not been

effective. CBMs cannot do that because it is not in their nature to resolve the contentious issues. Their objective is simply to make the action and intention of states transparent so as to build confidence and reduce suspicion, thereby make the environment conducive for peace to prevail.

CBMs led by society have been successful in terms of making the people of the two sides meet, interact and evade the feeling of 'other', which has in turn helped in breaking the stereotypes and strengthening the cultural and societal bonds. The negative perception of Indians and Pakistanis about each other are so strong that there is always a feeling of 'otherness' for the belligerent country and its populace. Regular meetings and interactions evade this feeling and make the 'other' very much like the 'self'.

Furthermore, civil society has been successful in initiating CBMs even at the time of crisis when the official channels get blocked. Most of the times during crisis and tension, official channels get jammed. However, actors of civil society keep their channels open and their CBMs active. However, during crisis, these initiatives also suffer a setback and do not flourish the way they flourish when the official relations between the two countries are good.

Moreover, societal actors do homework for the states and prepare ground for their dialogues. Most of the contentious issues are discussed in the Track 2 dialogues and then the solutions are forwarded to the states. Therefore, such dialogues culminate into policy recommendations to the governments.

Additionally, society also addresses the issues related to trade. Chambers of commerce help in eliminating barriers between traders and consumers and lobby governments for increased economic cooperation.

However, there are many weaknesses of the society that reduces the efficacy of their CBMs. States generally consider the initiatives of societal actors as having no substantial effect on Indo-Pak conflict and peace. The assumption of governments is that by meeting, singing and dancing, the conflict between the two countries will not resolve. In addition, the recommendation given by societal actors are also in the hands of governments to implement. If governments do not want to implement recommendations, the research of societal actors is a waste. Moreover, Track 2 are understood to be guided by governments and it is assumed that they put across governments position and interest. Furthermore, Track 2 dialogues are mostly funded by foreign institutions and organisations, because of which they are looked down with suspicion.

Ahmar asserts that 'in the maximisation of gap in the concept of CBMs, society plays an important role. Since the society is more or less polarised, the task of building confidence is a huge challenge. He further asserts that the important question in such a scenario is that how confidence could be built when no source of information including media is playing a positive role in bridging the trust deficit. In such a situation the prospects of CBMs remain limited'^[11].

Nevertheless, society led CBMs make the environment conducive for a lasting peace because they include masses. Inclusion of masses represent the willingness of people to resolve the conflict. Therefore, a positive environment is witnessed, which not only helps in sustaining CBMs led by

society but also those led by governments.

Conclusion

To conclude, it is imperative to say that society, as discussed above, has its own share of successes and failures in terms of building peace between India and Pakistan. However, it is imperative to assert that despite weaknesses and failures, society is engaged in bridging the trust deficit by enabling interaction and communications between both the sides. The success of society could be seen in terms of intangible and immeasurable changes in the attitudes and perceptions of the societies of India and Pakistan towards each other.

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