

SYNOPSIS

THE POLITICS OF SPORTS: CRICKET AS A FACTOR IN INDIA-PAKISTAN RELATIONS

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INTRODUCTION

The sphere of the 'politics of sports' is vast but fascinating. By having closer attention to the growing nexus between sports and politics in the contemporary scenario, it can arguably be said that although sports and politics constitute separate and independent domains of their own, not belonging together, but the confluence between the two realms seems to be inevitable within the larger socio-political landscape. There is no dispute that sports has evolved as an extremely popular, global cultural element in the contemporary world which is no longer confined to the simple calculation of winning and losing in a competitive contest. The reach of sports has gone far beyond its traditional understanding due to its transnational mobility and tremendous attraction to millions of people throughout the globe. On the other hand, if we throw light on the broader aspect of international politics, it can be said that a holistic understanding of international politics cannot be made without taking into consideration the socio-cultural sphere of the society in which sports like everything else plays an influential role in daily life as the most captivating socio-cultural component as well as an institution. As Horne et al. holds:

Whilst there may still be some people who consider sport and politics to be completely separate entities, it is our view that it is not possible to sustain this belief for long when the historical and contemporary evidence is consulted. Sport (and play) involves rules and regulations which are derived in some way from the 'real world'; sport provides politically usable resources; sport can promote nation building and international image making; in fact, modern sport has seldom been free of politics.¹

In this context, it is imperative to note that throughout much of history the intersection between sports and politics has been apparent at the national and international levels. The bond between sports and politics has a long tradition since the time of ancient Roman and Greek society. The

¹ Horne, J., Tomlinson, A. and Whannel, G. (1999). *Understanding Sport: An Introduction to the Sociological and Cultural Analysis of Sport*. London : E & F N Spon, p. 194

Greek ruling classes and their official delegates were actively involved in athlete contests to exert their political influence. Sports has emerged as a lucrative political element for the states especially from the late eighteenth and nineteenth century because of its tremendous attraction that largely draws the government's attention. There is no doubt that sports has increasingly been manipulated by several political regimes, irrespective of their ideological orientation, as a flexible political tool to fulfil their different political and diplomatic interests. Notwithstanding, the phenomenon of politicisation of sports has dominantly been manifested in the international arena with the growing rise of politics of the Olympic Games. Fascist, Nazis, or Communist governments took control of the sporting institutions to assert their ideological superiority. Sports has become integrally connected with the diplomatic and soft power policy of the states in contemporary international politics. Following this analysis, it seems to be unrealistic to segregate sports from politics.

Given this backdrop concerning the politicisation of sports, my study also highlights the political significance of cricket within the context of India-Pakistan relations. In this background, it is imperative to note that cricket as the most captivating global game also matured a robust association with the geopolitical reality of the subcontinent due to the political sensitivity of the game. Cricket has become hugely popular among the common people in India and Pakistan due to its electrifying aura that binds its people with a common cultural bond and collective identity. Cricket is considered more than just a game both in India and Pakistan as the game turned into the most powerful tool for asserting post-colonial national pride and solidarity. Considering the socio-political significance of cricket in the background of the history of the subcontinent, it can be argued that cricket substantially mirrored the political trajectories and developments between the two nuclear neighbours, India and Pakistan. Since the time of partition, cricket has adequately drawn political attention due to its irresistible engagement with the wider social milieu at that time. Consequently, the socio-political changes

pertaining to colonialism, nationalism and communalism also affected cricket during the tumultuous period of undivided India. Most importantly, even after the 75 years of long-sought independence from the British Empire which coincided with the birth of two separate nations India and Pakistan, cricket continues to be a major stimulator in India-Pakistan relations. The India-Pakistan cricketing rivalry has often been judged as “war minus shooting” due to the hyper nationalistic connotations of the match. However, cricket has also acted as a diplomatic and confidence building tool in bridging the gaps between the nuclear neighbours. Looking back at the history of cricket diplomacy, it needs to be noted that this phenomenon can be traced back to the years before in February 1987 when the extreme tensions between India and Pakistan created a war like situation. General Zia-Ul-Haq, the president of Pakistan visited India to witness the Test match in Jaipur where General Zia coined the phrase ‘cricket diplomacy’ embracing cricket for peace initiative with the Rajiv Gandhi led government. Since then, state premiers of India & Pakistan have dealt with the card of cricket diplomacy intending to use cricket as an icebreaker when political tension ran high. For instance, when the dramatic escalation of the Kashmir conflict in the 1990s rattled India’s bonhomie with Pakistan and both nuclear powers were on the verge of nuclear war just the aftermath of the Pokhran nuclear blasts in 1998, both countries were signalling meaningful negotiations as a deterrence measure. Consequently, the Pakistan cricket team toured India for two match Test series in 1999 which brought fresh momentum to the efforts of their diplomatic settlement. Undoubtedly, the historic Test Match in Chennai which ended up in a standing ovation for the victorious Pakistan side became the harbinger of a new dawn in India-Pak ties being backed by the goodwill of common people setting aside their long mutual animosity after persistent conflict. India’s friendship tour of Pakistan in 2004 can be considered as a landmark moment in the history of India-Pakistan cricket as both the Vajpayee and Musharraf government attempted to use cricket in breaking the ice in their bilateral relations. India-Pakistan cricket match was further revived as a glimmer

of hope when Pakistani Prime Minister Yousuf Raja Gilani met his Indian counterpart Dr. Manmohan Singh on the sideline of the 2011 World Cup Semi Final in India to facilitate high-level diplomatic dialogue between New Delhi and Islamabad. In this case, the cricket ground has prepared the conversational space for the state premiers of both sides of the borders to resume diplomatic talks when political relations between them deteriorated after the Mumbai attacks in 2008. Hence, it can be argued that cricket as the most everlasting frenzy in sub-continental culture has been strategised several times as a diplomatic instrument in restoring the channels of communication between the two hostile nations beyond enduring conflict and mutual suspicion. It can also be argued that India-Pakistan relations have never been stable and predictable. Sometimes their relations suffered a major blow due to the enduring political stalemate and military stand-offs between them which had sparked a series of cross-border skirmishes and wars. Similarly, several impressive agreements and negotiations have also been observed between India and Pakistan to resume peace talks and cooperation as a ray of hope. Thus, India-Pakistan relations have always passed through high and low phases. The cricketing tussle between India and Pakistan also followed similar trends. To put it in a different way, cricket being the most significant politicised entity in the subcontinent has never liberated itself from the ever-changing equation of India-Pakistan relations. The India-Pakistan bilateral cricket series have been halted due to severe political constraints. Simultaneously, cricket matches have also been instrumentalised as Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) to settle differences and maintain a ceasefire between them when the traditional door of diplomacy lost its credibility.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

The following research questions are taken up in my study:

1. What is the relationship between sports and politics?

2. What is the political significance of sports in the case of statecraft, diplomacy and inter-state relations?
3. How has the locus of cricket as a global game shifted from an imperial cultural institution to a dominant game in South Asia?
4. How has cricket developed a political connection in the colonial period under British Raj in undivided India?
5. How has cricket become a national obsession in both India and Pakistan in the post-colonial period?
6. Has cricketing loyalty proved to be an important parameter in judging national loyalty in case of the India-Pakistan cricketing rivalry?
7. How far has cricket been successful to act as a diplomatic instrument and Confidence Building Measure (CBM) in India-Pakistan relations?
8. Does Media play any role in politicising India-Pakistan cricket?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of my study are as follows:

First, my study endeavours to explore the political implications of sports in the wider context of international politics.

Second, it wishes to trace the phenomenon of South Asianisation of cricket.

Third, it attempts to highlight the political root of cricket contextualizing the historical background of pre-independent India.

Fourth, my study wishes to examine the role of cricket in creating contested identities based on competing allegiance towards the national cricket team in the context of India-Pakistan cricketing encounters.

Fifth, my study examines the influence of cricket as a diplomatic tool in curbing tensions between India and Pakistan.

Sixth, it also tries to highlight the impact of media on the politicisation of India-Pakistan cricket.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Historical and Analytical research approaches have been adopted in the proposed research study which is essentially premised upon the qualitative genre of research as a whole. My study endeavours to develop a systematic, coherent and chronological understanding of the past record of events in different historical stages by identifying, synthesizing and assessing the data to arrive at a defensible conclusion. In this case, historical research approach is effective. In addition, analytical research is also suitable for my research study as it provides scopes for critical thinking and causal explanations to bring out small details in order to make the research findings more reliable. A systematic collection of primary sources such as government reports, parliamentary speeches, government press releases, souvenirs, autobiographies, biographies and memoirs, scorecards, interview documents as well as secondary sources such as books, journals, newspapers and other web-based resources have been collected to have an appropriate and holistic understanding while generating relevant observations on my research issue.

The Narrative Analysis research method has also been adopted in my research aiming at interpreting the personal experiences of my respondents. Since my research is mainly constructed upon subjective experiences, several interviews have been taken with unstructured

and open-ended questions to have an in-depth understanding of my selected research area. For this, personal experiences and narrations from different respondents such as cricketers, academicians, journalists, and Board administrators have been considered most valuable to gather detailed information about my research topic.

It was also a fundamental requirement for me to visit some libraries and archives, clubs for my data collection. The primary and secondary research materials are collected from Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (New Delhi), National Archives of India, Jawaharlal Nehru University Library, New Delhi, National Library, Kolkata, MAKAIAS Library, Kolkata, Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Cultural Library, Kolkata, Cricket Association of Bengal Library, Kolkata, Town Club, Kolkata, Fanatic Sports Museum, Kolkata, Mohun Bagan Club, Kolkata, Anandabazar Library, Kolkata, Scottish Church College Library, Kolkata, Presidency University Library, Kolkata, British Council, Kolkata, Bangiya Sahitya Parishat Library, Kolkata, Central Library, Jadavpur University, Kolkata, Departmental Library of International Relations, Jadavpur University, Kolkata, Tarak Nath Das Research Centre, Jadavpur University, Kolkata.

Research materials are also collected from different government and intuitional websites: Ministry of External Affairs, the Government of India, Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha Debates and Parliamentary speeches and Joint Statements, Parliament Digital Library, Ministry of Home Affairs, the Government of India, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Government of Pakistan. I have also met sports collectors to collect souvenirs and other historical documents. Personal Blogs, Twitter Statements, Advertisements, Web Based documentaries have also been followed for my research.

JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

Needless to say, the existing set of literature has enlightened me to recognise how sports influences politics and the opposite. These previous meticulously researched academic writings also helped me to understand the political significance of cricket as a global game and by what means it plays a significant role in conditioning India-Pakistan relations. However, they lack a coherent and comprehensive understanding of addressing a few fundamental questions concerning my research area. First, when the increasing role of transnational and non-state actors in the global society has arguably blurred the traditional role of states, how far sports has been channelised by the state mechanism in case of inter-state politics and diplomacy? Second, whether there has been a shift of the epicentre of cricket from West to South Asia. Third, what are the fundamental factors which made cricket the national obsession in India and Pakistan? Besides, contextualising the partition history, it is also imperative to address whether India-Pakistan cricketing tussle often proved to be a parameter in case of reaffirming national loyalty for the minorities. Fourth, how far cricket as a political and diplomatic element has been effective in persuading both the nuclear neighbours to facilitate composite dialogues in the time of thawing relations? My study strives to answer these questions which are mostly left unanswered in the previous writings within an organised, integrated and systematic framework.

CHAPTER ONE

THE POLITICS OF SPORTS: A THEORETICAL UNDERSTANDING

The first chapter of this research study entitled *The Politics of Sports: a Theoretical Understanding* throws light on the symbiosis between sports and politics in the larger socio-political scenario. At the outset, this chapter makes it clear that although, according to the idealistic perspective, sports needs to be considered as a form of social practice which should be practiced for its own sake and must be reckoned ‘above’ or ‘below’ the political considerations of society because of the noble spirits and ideals that sports upholds but it appears to be impossible to separate sports from the arena of politics. In the next section, my study focuses on the conceptual understanding of sports and politics. Following this point, this chapter throws light on the growing nexus between sports and politics in the wider socio-political context. In this part, it is made clear that sports has become an important political resource for governments. Sports has turned out to be an essential part of government policies. Besides, politics also resides within sporting institutions or bodies in which governments are not directly involved. However, the sole focus of my study concentrates upon the politics of sports rather than politics in sports. In other words, my study endeavours to explore the political salience of sports concerning the domain of statecraft, foreign policy and diplomacy. Given this background, the political feasibility of sports requires to be scrutinised through a systematic theoretical framework to clarify how sports matters to international relations. It is worth noticing that my study sheds light on three competing theories; Realism, Pluralism and Globalism to understand the sports-politics nexus in a holistic way. The comparative analysis of three schools of theoretical premises intends to explain the ever-changing contours of world politics through the lens of sports. Despite acknowledging the viability of pluralism and globalism to better understand the larger scenario of sport-politics nexus, my study proceeds

to follow the realist framework as it appears to be more befitting of my research area which aims at exploring the political significance of sports concerning the inter-state relations and diplomacy. Following this point, my study explores the credibility of sports as a nation-building tool and diplomatic and soft power instrument.

CHAPTER TWO

CRICKET AND POLITICS: UNCOVERING THE SHIFT OF CRICKET FROM AN IMPERIAL TOOL TO SOUTH ASIANIZATION OF CRICKET

Cricket and Politics: Uncovering the Shift of Cricket from an Imperial Tool to South Asianization of Cricket tracks down the political root of cricket by contextualising its fascinating historical background. This chapter throws light on the emergence of cricket as the most popular game in the world and the evolutionary growth of cricket from a traditionally rooted rural pastime to a modern global game. Following this backdrop, it critically analyses how cricket has politically been maneuvered as a cultural weapon of British rulers to solidify their hegemony in the colonies. The game of cricket, like the majority of other sports, has originated in England. From the early phase of the industrial revolution in the 18th century, cricket has become recognised as the most popular sports. The English perception of excellence and manliness was manifested in the British colonial endeavour in which “Cricket was considered the main vehicle for transferring the appropriate British moral code from the messengers of empire to the local populations”.² Cricket was promoted in colonies to keep the natives disciplined. Cricket began to disseminate in North America via English colonies in the 17th century. It was brought to the West Indies through the colonial expansion of British imperialism and to India by British East India Company mariners and by local upper classes. Cricket started spreading in Australia and New Zealand in the early 19th century. Cricket emerged in the Western Cape, South Africa during the first British occupation. The game was permanently rooted in the territorial soil of Rhodesia, Kenya, and Ceylon followed by imperial expansion and thereby, became an integral part of British colonial history. These former British

² Stoddart, B. (1988). Sport, cultural imperialism, and colonial response in the British Empire. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 30 (4) : 658, Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/178928> (Accessed on: August 2, 2022)

colonies such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, West Indies or Zimbabwe, all were constitutive part and full members of the International Cricket Council. In addition, this chapter also clarifies that although cricket came to the subcontinent through the colonial invaders, but the game has turned out to be the most watched sports in this region. Cricket has played a significant role in the countries of South Asia in asserting the post-colonial national identity. The game also has solidified the ground for South Asian solidarity. Cricket is also the game which helped the countries in this region to gain international prestige. Finally, my chapter points out the shift of the epicentre of the global game from West to South Asia arguably leading to the justification of the South-Asianization of cricket.

CHAPTER THREE

THE POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF CRICKET UNDER THE RAJ: A HISTORICAL BACKGROUND (1721-1947)

The third chapter of this research entitled *The Political Significance of Cricket under the Raj: A Historical Background (1721-1947)* traces the political development of cricket in India since the advent of colonial rule. In the first section, this chapter uncovers the dissemination of cricket across India as part of the conscious policy of Victorian imperialism. This chapter further discussed the Indianization of cricket where the game was no longer under the aegis of imperial authority. As Mihir Bose commented: “Nothing could be more English than cricket, yet nothing could be more Indian in the way the subcontinent has taken to the game and fashioned out of it something unique and very different to the English game”.³ Cricket was taken up by the Indian elites and princes as a ladder for upward social mobilization and to become the loyal feudatories of the imperial administration. Cricket became a significant part of their life as they were looking for avenues which would enable them to integrate with the colonial authority. However, due to the symbolic value of cricket, the Maharajas, Nawabs and the Princes also wanted to compete with the whites to utilize the platform of cricket to assert their identity. The formation of the Natore cricket team representing an indigenous brand of cricket, the emergence of C. K. Nayudu as the first Indian national hero in the arena of Indian cricket and many other vibrant events have been discussed in my analysis to explain how cricket contributed to the awakening of nationalism in India during the pre-independence period. This chapter also highlights that although cricket was introduced by the white settlers as an imperial tool, but the game was gradually imbibed by the Indian masses who later appropriated the game as a nationalistic weapon. In this sense, cricket was used by the

³ Bose, M. (2002). *A History of Indian Cricket*. London: Andre Deutsch, p. 16

indigenous population as a platform for challenging the colonist's superiority. In the final section, my chapter also discussed how cricket became entangled in the turbulent partition politics of undivided India which led to the birth of two separate nations, India and Pakistan.

CHAPTER FOUR

CRICKET AS A NATIONAL OBSESSION IN INDIA AND PAKISTAN: INDIA V PAKISTAN - A LITMUS TEST OF NATIONAL LOYALTY IN THE POST- COLONIAL PERIOD

The fourth chapter of this research study entitled *Cricket as a National Obsession in India and Pakistan: India v Pakistan – A Litmus Test of National Loyalty in the Post-Colonial Period* intends to explain why cricket has evolved as a nationalistic obsession in both India and Pakistan. Cricket's invincible role in terms of fostering collective psychology in the sub-continental scenario cannot be denied. Cricket came to be conflated with patriotic virtue in India or Pakistan where a good cricketer is admired to be a patriotic citizen of the country. My study also highlights that India-Pakistan cricketing duel has always been regarded as a way of finding and reinforcing their own identity. While ostensibly it was getting closer to each other and meeting one's long-lost friends, relatives and so on, it was also a way to find an identity by beating each other in sports. It somehow always carried more sentiment than any other sports when the two countries meet. This chapter throws light on the important factors that paved the way for the massive growth of cricket as the most popular culture in these two sub-continental nations. Further, their political conflict has spilled over into the cricket field. On one hand, just a victory against India satisfies Pakistan's aggressive sense of nationalism, a loss against Pakistan is national humiliation to an Indian. Hence, the playground also sometimes plays the drums of war, exposing the people of the two countries to a constant 'us' vs 'them' conflict. This chapter also addresses that the India-Pakistan cricketing rivalry has often been judged as an important parameter of proving national loyalty. This chapter also illustrates how contested identities have been formed based on sporting loyalty during the time of India-Pakistan cricketing encounters.

CHAPTER FIVE

INDIA-PAKISTAN RIVALRY AND THE ROLE OF CRICKET IN EASING TENSIONS AMIDST CONFLICT

My fifth chapter of this research study entitled *India-Pakistan Rivalry and the Role of Cricket in Easing Tensions Amidst Conflict* examines the role of cricket as a diplomatic tool and Confidence Building Measure (CBM) in India-Pakistan relations. In the first part, this chapter investigates whether sports contributes to the notion of positive peace building in a hostile environment aiming at rebuilding trust, people-to-people contact and rapprochement between the conflicting groups. In this background, my study stresses the point that sports provides a unifying platform, having the “power to bring people together, bridge differences, and promote communication and understanding”.⁴ Sports, if administered within a positive framework, can be channelised as a tool of reconciliation and integration in which the conflicting groups can come together towards common goals. The final section of this chapter illustrates the ability of cricket in bridging the gap between India and Pakistan to initiate diplomatic dialogues and negotiations amidst the atmosphere of prolonged mistrust between them due to their thorny political relations. This chapter also throws light on the role of media in shaping India-Pakistan cricketing relations.

⁴ United Nations, General Assembly (2006). *Sport for Development and Peace: the way forward: report of the UN Secretary General*. New York: UN. Retrieved from <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/584882?ln=en#record-files-collapse-header> (Accessed on: September 15, 2020)

CONCLUSION

Following the entire discussion, some important findings of this research study can be highlighted:

First, it seems to be unrealistic to separate sports and politics in the broader socio-political setting. Sports creates scopes for enormous social interactions in multifaceted ways to a considerable degree. On the other hand, politics resides in the socio-cultural arena within which sports is practiced. Hence, the correlation between the sphere of sports and politics is inevitable. Given this backdrop, my study makes it clear that although the political viability of sports as a plural and global actor is very much relevant in the contemporary interconnected world but the central role of states in case of politicising the arena of sports is dominantly evident. Sports has repeatedly been manipulated by the states for serving several political objectives ranging from nation building to projecting soft power in the international scene.

Second, having originated in South-East England in the late 16th century, the game called cricket has evolved from a rural pastime to the leading sports in the first half of the 18th century. The game has quintessentially become the epitome of the English national character since the time of industrial revolution. Cricket was exported across the globe as a unifying force connecting the culture of Victorian imperialists with its colonies. However, this situation had drastically changed. With the changing dynamics of colonial and post-colonial international politics, cricket has proved to be more than a mere entertainment in the South Asian region due to the socio-political significance of the game. There are several instances, cricket acted as diplomatic bridge between the South Asian countries. Cricket has always been promoted in this region as an effective soft power to connect the nations of the subcontinent. My study showed how cricket with its tremendous cultural influence also has deepened the diplomatic engagements of South Asian countries. Countries like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Maldives

or Afghanistan have consciously harnessed cricket as a diplomatic means to improve collaboration and communication between them.

The emergence of South Asian countries in world cricket, is firmly evident. It marked the shift of the nucleus of cricket from the traditional powers to the South Asian countries. Among the major cricket playing South Asian countries, India has emerged as the superpower in world cricket. It has become the most dominant force in global cricket, driving the ICC policy and decision-making. The dazzling commercial success of the IPL has revolutionised world cricket. The game is no more controlled by the traditional Anglo-Australian axis. Besides, the outstanding standard of the Pakistan Super League and Bangladesh Premier League and the increasing popularity of these leagues over the past decade revealed how cricket's centre of gravity has been shifted towards South Asia. The recent move of the International Cricket Council, the world governing body of cricket, from London to Dubai in 2005 exemplifies this phenomenon signalling the development of South Asianization of cricket.

Third, my study also uncovered how cricket had historically developed an association with the politics of nationalism and communalism under the British Raj. As previously discussed, cricket was imported by the British sailors and soldiers in the eighteenth century. The game was promoted by the British ruling elites as part of their civilizing mission to educate the locals with the agenda of "games ethic" for glorifying the Anglo-Saxon character of the Victorians. British administrators sought to create the bond between the coloniser and colonised through cricket. However, cricket was appropriated by the natives and turned into a significant weapon to challenge the colonists in their own game. Thus, undoubtedly, cricket had nationalistic implications in the history of the Indian national movement. The historical chronicles of C. K. Nayudu's cricketing aura, or the dominant rise of the Natore cricket team as an indigenous brand of a cricket team, reflected how cricket was used by the colonized people for their cultural regeneration and nationalist assertion. Finally, the last section of this chapter tried to

argue that with the pace of time, cricket as a microcosm of Indian society has inevitably hooked up with the fight between secular nationalism and separatist communalism during the partition period.

Fourth, my study also explored why cricket has become a national obsession for both India and Pakistan in the post-independence period. There is no denying the fact that cricket has turned into the leading sports in both India and Pakistan surpassing the popularity of other mass sports like football and hockey. Today, both India and Pakistan are internationally acknowledged as the greatest force in the world of cricket. People of both this South Asian countries started to view cricket as a symbolic venue to achieve their national aspirations. Besides, cricket becomes the binding tool for both the nations which unified their diverse population regardless of class, caste, ethnic, cultural or religious boundaries for the sake of a common national cause. The success of their national teams became synonymous with the collective pride of their nation setting aside the factional struggle within their countries. National cricketers are idealised as national heroes by millions of Indians and Pakistanis. When both the countries have been struggling hard to overcome numerous political and economic challenges, the national glory achieved thorough cricket gives their people a sigh of relief. The national team's achievement provides an occasion for the people of India and Pakistan to heal from their unfulfilled and broken dreams in their personal lives for the temporary time. It has also been observed that a series of emphatic victories, the gradual growth of cricketing infrastructures, financial reforms, the improvement of media communication, the impact of commercialism etc. have contributed to the rise of cricket in India and Pakistan. My study also highlights that the nationalistic expression goes extreme during the India-Pakistan cricketing rivalry as the game still lives under shadow of partition. The long-running rivalry and the profound dysfunctions in their relations after their acrimonious split also echoed in their cricketing relations. Sometimes, the India-Pakistan face-off invokes toxic nationalism and religious fanaticism when sports based

loyalty is judged as an important parameter to prove national loyalty from country's people. It is for this very reason, India-Pakistan competitive match often turns out to be a litmus test for the minorities to reaffirm their national allegiance. This phenomenon clearly reveals that the wound of partition has never been cured and very much existent in the India-Pakistan cricketing rivalry.

Finally, sports can undeniably contribute to the process of positive peace-building, transforming exchanges between societies and their people into trusted and sustained relationships. Cricket also manifests a similar phenomenon in the subcontinent. India and Pakistan often have politically utilised the arena of cricket to break the eyes in bilateral ties. India-Pakistan cricket matches have been used as events to facilitate communication between the two South Asian neighbours when the traditional door of diplomacy continues to remain frosty. However, despite the unifying capacity of cricket to act as a bridge between India and Pakistan, India-Pak cricketing ties have halted several times due to the enduring conflict between them. The endless hostilities between the two nations also rattled the collaborative ground of mutual trust and interdependence between the people of India and Pakistan which was developed through cricket diplomacy. Despite several disruptions, the credibility of cricket diplomacy cannot be ignored so far as India-Pakistan relations are concerned. Cricket has not only built the platform for the state leaders and diplomats of India and Pakistan to revive the unofficial backchannel talks through Track II diplomacy as a substitute for Track I diplomacy but also has assisted Track III diplomacy by providing the opportunity for cross-border interactions and friendly exchanges between the common people of the two countries. Thus, a policy shift could be an option for both the governments of India and Pakistan so that cricket could be channelised with long term planning to create a favourable atmosphere for lasting peace, stability and harmony. Finally, it can be stated that although cricket does not possess the high-capability to end hostilities between India and Pakistan single-handedly but the universal

aura of cricket can assist a process of negotiation between the governments of two countries by ensuring the atmosphere of positive peace if it is strategised within the long-term and well calculated policy framework. Last but no least to say that media has been playing a massive role in shaping the public opinion with respect to India-Pakistan relations. The mediated construction of cricket in the contemporary world cannot be overlooked in the backdrop of India-Pakistan cricketing encounters. Sometimes, media have dubbed India-Pakistan cricketing rivalry as mimic warfare with fabricated jingoistic reporting. With the increasing influence of social media, inflammation of nationalistic sentiments is widely evident centering around the India-Pakistan flagpole cricketing battle. Likewise, Indian and Pakistani media houses also positively shaped India-Pakistan relations by popularising the sentiments conducive to peace. They advocated the message for peace, trust-building and people-to-people interactions across the border. Social media also emerged as a viable mechanism through which the common people's perception can be moluded in a positive direction which can transform the mutual hatred of both countries into mutual love and friendship.

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- Abdul Majid Bhatti, senior sports journalist, author and cricket analyst at Pakistan's largest network Gio News
- Arunabha Sengupta, Cricket writer and historian.
- Asif Iqbal, former captain of the Pakistan national cricket team.
- Daljit Singh, Indian former first class cricketer and the Chairman of pitches and ground committee, BCCI
- Gautam Bhattacharya, Senior journalist, author, anchor, commentator
- Kausik Bandyopadhyay, Professor, West Bengal State University and Sports historian.
- Mr. Nirangshu pal, son of former Indian legendary footballer Gostho pal
- Mustaq Mohammad, former captain and coach of the Pakistan national cricket team.
- Pranab Roy, former Indian Test cricketer and son of legendary cricketer Pankaj Roy
- Salim Parvez, Cricket historian and writer, Pakistan.
- Sanjay jagdale, former Indian cricketer and former member of the Selection Committee, BCCI.
- Souvik Naha, Senior Lecturer at University of Glasgow, Sports historian.

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