new mandala

Alternative Narratives in the India-Pakistan Bilateral Context

A Chaophraya Dialogue
Task Force Report

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Jinnah Institute (JI) is a non-profit public policy organisation based in Pakistan. It functions as a think-tank, advocacy group, and public outreach organisation independent of the government. JI seeks to promote knowledge-based policy making for strengthening democratic institutions and to build public stakes in human and national security discourse. It remains committed to investing in policies that promote fundamental rights, tolerance, and pluralism. To meet these objectives, JI engages with policy-makers, government, media, civil society, state institutions and academia. The Institute actively seeks to articulate independent national security strategies for Pakistan that incorporate the country's strategic imperatives while providing room for constructive engagement with the international community as well as policy and opinion makers. Within this framework, the two overarching program areas under which the Institute undertakes a variety of projects and interventions are the Open Democracy Initiative and the Strategic Security Initiative. Under these operational streams, Jinnah Institute seeks to accomplish a series of multi-disciplinary objectives that work towards achieving the Institute's overarching goal of establishing a more democratic, transparent and inclusive environment for policymaking and a more tolerant society for the harmonious coexistence of diverse cultural, religious and ethnic groups in Pakistan.

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The Australia India Institute (AII) is a leading centre for the study of India. Through its teaching, research, public policy, and outreach programmes, it is building Australia's capacity to understand India. AII is also a hub for dialogue, research, and partnerships between India and Australia. Based at the University of Melbourne, the Institute hosts a growing range of programmes that are deepening and enriching the relationship between the two countries. The University of Melbourne established the Australia India Institute in October 2008. In 2009, funding for the Institute was provided by the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment, and Workplace Relations. The University of New South Wales and La Trobe University were also founding partners. In 2012 the Department of Industrial Innovation, Science, Research, and Tertiary Education and the State Government of Victoria provided additional core funding. The Ministry of Culture, Government of India, is funding a Tagore Centre for Global Thought at AII - one of three Centres globally that are being funded by the Government of India. AII will host a Chair in Indian Studies, funded by the State Government of Victoria and the University of Melbourne and a Visiting Chair in Indian Studies sponsored by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations.

PREFACE

New media is fast reshaping the contours of how South Asians understand and interact with the state, their societies and with each other. With high internet penetration, growing youth demographics and burgeoning urban centers, new media is creating platforms for interaction between Pakistanis and Indians that are free of traditional censorship and control. While these platforms have provided exciting new opportunities to develop progressive alternative narratives, they have also contributed towards strengthening regressive discourse.

New media, in other words, has added another layer of complexity to the already multi-layered and complex India-Pakistan relations. If until recently, foreign and security policy making was the sole preserve of secretive foreign policy establishments and 'discreet' traditional media, internet and the new media has thrown open the floodgates of information, interpretation and opinion to the general public.

Foreign policy making in general and the highly contested bilateral relationship between traditional rivals such as India and Pakistan in particular, then can hardly be comprehensively understood or influenced without a nuanced grasp on the manner and ways in which new media impacts on the workings of the India Pakistan bilateral equation.

Even though tens of millions of Indians and Pakistanis use new media on a daily basis, our understanding of how these non-traditional platforms impact India-Pakistan relations – both domestically on either side and across the divide - is very limited. That is, we have not made many serious attempts at analysing something that is making an undeniable impact on the Indo-Pak bilateral equation.

The Chaophraya Dialogue, being cognizant of this challenge over the past several years, is currently exploring ways and means to deal with it effectively. The Chaophraya Task Force on new media was therefore an attempt to analyse the challenge in all its dimensions. The ten essays in this report are a result of an exchange of ideas and research undertaken by the Chaophraya Dialogue Task Force earlier this year. They bring to light new and under researched trends in how new media is shaping not just South Asia's societies but also the interactions between its people and states.

The twenty first session of the Chaophraya Dialogue was accompanied by a Task Force on the theme Alternative Narratives to discuss new media and its role in shaping alternative narratives in South Asia and their relevance in the Indo-Pak bilateral equation in particular. Over two days, experts in new media technologies, their legislation and their social impact discussed millennial usage of emerging media platforms and their growing import in the bilateral context. In addition, the Task Force focused on the usage of social media platforms as incubators for bold and progressive narratives on foreign policy, recognizing that sometimes these very forums generate disruptive discourses with a capacity to reshape Track I-level engagement.

The Chaophraya Dialogue is a joint India-Pakistan Track II initiative undertaken by the Islamabad-based Jinnah Institute (JI) and Melbourne-based Australia India Institute (AII), to encourage informed dialogue on relations between Pakistan and India. The process has so far led to twenty one rounds of dialogue and is now in its ninth year.

We hope that this report will kick-start the much-needed discussion and debate on the impact of the new media on the various aspects of India-Pakistan relations.

Happymon Jacob
Syed Hassan Akbar

POLICY, DIPLOMACY & THE STATE

1

NEW MEDIA SPACES
THE INDIA-PAKISTAN BILATERAL EQUATION

Saroop Ijaz

On December 25, 2016, Indian Prime Minister Narendera Modi tweeted, 'Birthday wishes to Pakistan PM Mr. Nawaz Sharif. I pray for his long and healthy life.' A few hours later, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's daughter Maryam Nawaz, replied to Prime Minister Modi tweeting, 'Thank you for your kind prayers. Shared your tweet with my father who deeply appreciates the gesture and conveys his best.' This ordinarily customary and unremarkable exchange sent the mainstream and social media in both countries into a frenzy for the next few days.

In India, there were those who were appalled that Prime Minister Modi would extend birthday greetings to Prime Minister Sharif; and in Pakistan those who viewed the exchange as evidence of Prime Minister Sharif's "soft stance" on India. It is unknown whether the tweets were vetted and cleared by the respective countries ministries of Foreign Affairs and communication managers; however, this was received as a human exchange between the two leaderships.

Along with those who were outraged by the brief exchange was an online population who welcomed this as basic decency and evidence that meaningful, civil bilateral exchange was possible between Pakistan and India, and the need of the hour. Television hosts on both sides of the Wagah dissected the less-than-280-characters with analysts commenting on the text, tone and tenor of the relay. All camps of observers were perhaps reading too much into it, however it did point to one seminal truth; social media has the reach and maneuverability that traditional media or even traditional diplomatic channels do not. Former Italian Foreign Minister Giulio Terzi also notes in his preface to the book Twitter for Diplomacy 'Twitter has two big positive effects on foreign policy: It fosters a beneficial exchange of ideas between policymakers and civil society and enhances diplomats' ability to gather information and to anticipate, analyze, manage, and react to events.'

New media or digital space allows for and provides the space for the populations of Pakistan and India to interact with each other without the attached stereotypes and information gatekeeping by the state that by default is part of the package with traditional media outlets. These interactions albeit only a small fraction of the two states' populations, at some level mirror the resultant challenges and tensions that arise from the sentiments and opinions of the majority that each side holds for the other. It is however increasingly noted that the realisation and acknowledgement of common ground, shared history and sociology, and most significantly common challenges is visible in these interactions. Among these challenges is that of modernity, confronting the rise of the right wing and hyper nationalism. Two recent examples include the election of Yogi Adityanath as the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, and the instances of violence associated with "gau rakhsaks." The subsequent reactions observed in the Pakistani digital space were not only of gloating, finger pointing and reaffirmation of nationalistic beliefs; there was also a large reflection of what was seen as genuine empathy guised in self-reflection, recounting Pakistan's historic and ongoing struggle with religious extremism, and some of the lessons learnt from its experience in trying to counter the rise of what is a seemingly right wing religious brand of nationalism in India.

Like all media spaces, the new media space is a collection of diverse voices, however in the Pakistan-India bilateral context, the principal desire is to learn about the other country and the dominant narrative for

each other that lies therein. Many attempts to do it to find affirmation for their views, often molded by the narrative presented in state textbooks. Others are genuinely curious; the Pakistan-India citizen interaction in particular has the lure of access to the forbidden. Even those who firmly hold on to their beliefs of the other country and its people are forced to reconsider their opinions often, primarily because of the nature of the exchange and viewing the "other" as real people with real lives and challenges.

One fundamental aspect of this engagement on new media is the interactions it enables outside the usual realm of national security and nationalism, and onto culture, arts, heritage and music. These interactions in themselves make reductionist jingoistic positions untenable. Admittedly, the non-nationalistic interactions are a minority in a space often dominated by polemics, yet in many ways are becoming equally important in setting the tone of these exchanges. The space created by new media has also democratised information in an unprecedented manner whereby information from across the border is no longer out of bounds nor difficult to access. In the Pakistan-India bilateral context, the mainstream media particularly broadcast media have traditionally acted as echo chambers that reproduce and often amplify the state narrative uncritically.

Not only does new media create a space for dialogue between the citizens of Pakistan and India, it also significantly enables direct communication between the citizens and their governments, as well as with each other's governments. The state, too, capitalises on this virtual area of engagement, with each government having invested significant resources in dominating the space. However, the dialectical relationship between the state and its people cannot be eluded, and is reaffirmed due to the nature of new media wherein governments not only shape the demand for, but also cater and respond to this demand of a particular narrative on a said discourse.

The hyper-nationalist, ultra-right have on average better organisational capacity and tend to flood the new media space, however precisely for this reason, critical and intelligent dissenting voices become more important and oftentimes more prominent among others. The alleged surgical strikes following the Uri attacks is one example, whereby mainstream media and public voices on both sides were dominated by aggression and passionate hostility for each other, however many also took to Facebook and Twitter to poke holes in the narrative, often by employing the non-confrontational use of humour against their home government and the opposing government. This real time, unfiltered interaction means that official diplomatic statements issued will be subject to uninhibited public critique, and the comments and criticisms often will be as accessible and visible to the public for consumption as the statements themselves.

Another recurring example is the persecution of religious minorities in both countries and zealous individuals and groups from across borders that use these examples to justify particular political and historical positions as a means to an end. What is notable though is the concurrent presence of a large social media brigade observing and demanding the introspection and inventory of one's own country's record before pointing fingers at the other.

None of this is to suggest that new media dominates the complex web that forms the bilateral relationship between Pakistan and India having longstanding partially unresolved historical, geostrategic and nationalist issues. However, a gradual shift in the paradigm has been observed for two reasons; firstly, new media has exponentially increased the number of interactions across borders and widened the knowledge base about the "other", drastically reducing the space to almost nil for official messaging to follow boilerplate templates due to the unavoidable fallout and unforgiving nature of immediate public accountability. Secondly, government presence on and receptiveness to new media platforms means that state representatives can no longer ignore what the dominant discourse is as reflected by the trending narrative on popular social media handles such as Facebook and Twitter. The question to ask here is: does that always or even in most cases result in a policy change? It does not. However, it does mean that serious deliberation on some of the critiques made is necessary to keep up with domestic sentiments and demands.

Theoretically, the new media space is a neutral instrument, a conduit to disseminate information and reactions from the people and the governments, with a quicker turnaround and in some instances with wider outreach than traditional media channels. However, in the bilateral context of Pakistan and India relations, the real-time

nature, the ease in communication and the additional outreach of the new media space tilts the balance towards a semblance of normalcy in the long run. New media tools and interactions allow people in both Pakistan and India to make a distinction between the other's "state" and "society", and that in itself in this particular relationship can prove to be a game changer in bilateral ties.

2

VIRTUAL RELATIONS:
WHY INDIA'S SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY WITH PAKISTAN IS A ONE-WAY STREET

Devirupa Mitra

When Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif stood before the United Nations General Assembly on September 30, 2015, it was expected that he would bring up the issue of Kashmir rather forcefully. The cancellation of the NSA-level talks a month before and the continuing barrage of cross-border firing had already put bilateral relations with India on a knife-edge.

Prime Minister Sharif proposed a four-point formula[1], which included the demilitarisation of Kashmir and expanding UNMOGIP's monitoring role along the border. Immediately after Prime Minister Sharif ended his speech, the Indian diplomatic team started crafting a reply. India's Foreign Secretary S. Jaishankar and official spokesperson Vikas Swarup were already in New York, accompanying External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj.

Prime Minister Sharif's speech ended a little after midnight in India, so the printing deadline for most newspapers had passed. Indian television channels had carried Prime Minister Sharif's speech live, but the Foreign Office could have plausibly held off till dawn to blast off the Right to Reply statement.

Instead, about 90 minutes after Prime Minister Sharif ended his speech, the Indian spokesperson sent out four tweets with an uncompromising message. The first one read: "Sharif UNGA speech: Pak PM gets foreign occupation right, occupier wrong. We urge early vacation of Pak occupied Kashmir".

It was, perhaps, the best example of how the Indian government views new media tools vis-à-vis Pakistan – mainly as an instrument for perception management. "We responded almost in real time. What we said about de-terrorize, rather than de-militarise, became more important in shaping the narrative than what the Pakistan PM said," claimed a Ministry of External Affairs official.

While shaping narratives was also the job of public diplomacy using traditional media, the speed that digital media such as Twitter or Facebook offers is far more alluring. Sending out unfiltered messages to millions not only cuts out the journalistic intermediary but also puts the message and the image, literally and figuratively, together in a way simply not possible with print newspapers.

Digital diplomacy is especially helpful given that the Indian Ministry of External Affairs has had a first-mover advantage – being much quicker to adopt and therefore, effectively dominate the digital diplomacy space in South Asia.

Not many could have predicted the ease with which India's Ministry of External Affairs took to social media. In 2010, Twitter emerged as a tool of international diplomacy, vastly different from anything normally associated with the cloistered and rarefied club of international diplomacy, after it played a featuring role in Iran's green revolution. The US State Department reportedly told Silicon Valley firmly to postpone a scheduled outage that would have coincided with the dates of the protest in Iran.

However, in India, at the same time, Facebook and Twitter were officially blocked in South Block's offices. Observers say that this was, in part, the reason why the foreign ministry's Twitter handle was called 'IndianDiplomacy', rather than the more straightforward 'Ministry of External Affairs (MEA)'. This was to

give it a more "semi-official" flavour, acknowledging the ban on social media at the headquarters of Indian diplomacy. Incidentally, the MEA was the second Indian government entity to open a Twitter account – after the country's national postal department. Shortly after that, the ball started rolling. Champions of digital diplomacy within the Ministry realised that if the ban had to be removed, the move had to come from the top. In February 2011, Indian Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao joined Twitter, which she admitted was seen as an "almost iconoclastic" move. A month later, the Ministry's spokesperson, Vishnu Prakash, opened his personal account.

Since then, the Ministry's main account has been institutionalised at 'MEA India' (1.29 million followers) for mainly old-fashioned diplomatic missives, while 'Indian Diplomacy' is maintained for soft power projection.

With social media now a training module for Indian diplomats both at the entry and mid-career level, a large number of MEA officials have hopped onto the bandwagon. However not surprisingly, it is still largely skewed towards younger government employees. According to one bureaucrat, most IFS (Indian Foreign Service) officials with director rank and below are definitely on social media, while the numbers drop off at the joint secretary level. However, once they go on postings as heads of missions, they generally have to become more visible on Twitter. This is especially true when it comes to External Affairs Minister Swaraj – an active Twitter user with 7.57 million followers – tagging and directing ambassadors and embassies towards specific complaints, and expecting feedback on the same platform.

While Twitter, Facebook and YouTube have been harnessed to a certain extent, Indian diplomats who have been active users of these platforms for dissemination of information cannot view them as more than instruments for perception management. "This will become more and more a tool for grievance redressal – passport problems, consular issues, rather than actual diplomacy," he said.

Public diplomacy is sometimes defined as the promotion of national interests to inform and influence foreign populations. In the Indian context of digital public diplomacy, the Indian ministry – and the political leadership – is largely interested in the domestic audience.

Indian ambassadors posted in South Asia particularly in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Maldives and Myanmar all carry active Twitter accounts. However, the Indian High Commissioner in Pakistan does not have an official presence online, while the mission itself was a relatively latecomer to the social media scene. On Facebook, 172 Indian missions and outposts run their own active pages – the Indian High Commission in Islamabad is not in the list. "We had to close down the Facebook page due to the barrage of negative comments to any posts. On Twitter, there are trolls, but those messages are not seen by an average user at first glance unlike on a Facebook page," said a MEA official.

Therefore, it is left to the MEA spokesperson and on momentous occasions, to Prime Minister Modi, to be the first purveyor of news related to Pakistan. "Looking forward to meeting Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in Lahore today afternoon, where I will drop by on my way back to Delhi," Prime Minister Modi's personal account tweeted on December 26, 2015, taking everyone by surprise.

This level of activity actually aligns itself with the hierarchy of decision-making authority on relations with Pakistan within the Indian government – where the Indian mission actually has a much smaller footprint role in policy, compared to other less-sensitive diplomatic outposts.

Even during periods of relative warmth in relationship, there have not been any calibrated 'conversations' on social media, as Prime Minister Modi and President Barack Obama had in 2014 to announce his January 2015 visit, or more recently with Kensington Palace on the Prince and Princess of

Wales' visit to India.

According to Indian officials, this was partly due to the lack of any presence by the Pakistan Prime Minister on Twitter. So, when Prime Minister Modi sends good wishes to Prime Minister Sharif on his birthday and national days through social media channels, it is usually left to his daughter, Maryam Nawaz Sharif to acknowledge it on Twitter. However, there were no tweets from the Indian Prime Minister to Maryam Sharif, perhaps for protocol-related reasons.

While India has used Twitter and Facebook for crisis management, such as evacuations from conflict zones, conflict resolution in the India-Pakistan context is hardly taken seriously. "It is not a normal relationship in the first place. Secondly, diplomacy only works if it is behind closed doors. The meeting of two NSAs in Bangkok took place only due to complete secrecy," said a senior MEA official. With both countries involved in one-upmanship during these strained periods, the preferred mode of messaging is not the open platform of Twitter, but through selective background briefings to media. "There is no plausible deniability of a post on Twitter".

Therefore, in times of conflict, India uses social media as a megaphone, amplifying statements for fastest reach. In September 2016, the MEA Facebook page (that has more followers than the US state department page) began to experiment with live telecasts of weekly media briefings. The views averaged between 12,000 and 15,000. On September 29, the Director General of Military Operations made the first official statement on the 'surgical strike' in a MEA-organised briefing. The 12-minute long video was streamed both on YouTube and Facebook. So far, it has garnered 1.8 million views on Facebook – the highest for any video published by the MEA.

In conclusion, social media has yet to become a disruptive force that can throw up a new paradigm in Indo-Pak Track-1 diplomacy. This is a reflection of the general trend of social media diplomacy, mainly as nation branding or influencing perceptions by getting the message out at the earliest. For the Indian government, restarting talks are not yet on the horizon, so social media is about shaping the narrative on Pakistan for the domestic media circus, with its message being given an extra push through a largely 'nationalist' social media.

NEW MEDIA, NEW NARRATIVES IN SOUTH ASIA

3

NARRATIVES ONLINE:
NEW GATEKEEPERS AND NEW LANDSCAPES

Jahanzaib Haque

When cross-border firing occurs between Pakistan and India, how does news spread from word-of-mouth and traditional media to online, and how does it move from the 'facts' to shaping narratives about Pak-India ties that are playing out in cyberspace? Importantly, does this spread of real-time information and opinion have an impact on what is occurring in the real world?

These are just two critical questions that new media presents both as a challenge and as an opportunity in shaping perceptions on either side of the border.

In order to answer such questions, the first step is to understand what is meant by the term 'new media' and the Internet landscape.

New media is a broad term that is often used interchangeably with social media. This can be problematic; while all content available through the Internet and the products and services behind its creation, publication and dissemination constitute new media, the subset, and social media, is primarily defined by the network of connections that allow for the sharing of digital content. In this respect it is more useful to use the term 'social network' for the interconnectivity that allows for content – that may or may not be created inside the network – to be broadcast, shared and interacted with.

With these definitions in place, this paper focuses on two key aspects of cyberspace that directly impact all narratives and all actors trying to control the dynamic schema of Pak-India ties online: the audience (who is influencing, and being influenced), and the social networks (the means of communication, the companies behind them) that form this new landscape.

The Audience

Why are the tweets for #KashmirBlackDay[1] overwhelmingly in English rather than Urdu? To what extent is this a campaign by real Pakistani Twitter users? When India alleged to have conducted 'surgical strikes' in Pakistan in September 2016, were the hashtags #surgicalstrike, #ModipunishesPak, which generated 82 million and 20 million impressions on Twitter in a matter of a few hours[2] organic in nature?

Answering such questions requires an understanding of the online audience. To build on an existing narrative, or create an alternative, it is vital to know who is being targeted.

In the Pakistan-India context, the differences between Internet users in the two countries from the general population are significant, and these differences, while constantly being impacted by increasing Internet penetration, are what determine why certain online narratives exist, and why attempts to influence them succeed or fail.

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1 (#kashmirblackday - Twitter Search, 2017)
2 (Chaturvedi, 2016)
3 (Population, Labour Force and Employment, 2015)
4 (Pakistan Internet Usage and Telecommunications Reports, 2017)
5 (World Population Prospects: The 2015 Revision, 2015)

Pakistan's total population stands at 191.71 million[3], while total Internet users in 2016 stood at 34.3 million – 17.8 per cent of the population[4]. India's population is 1.326 billion[5], and while better than Pakistan, Internet penetration is around 36.5 per cent of the total[6]. For perspective, the Middle East region has 56.5 per cent penetration; the European Union has an average 80.1 per cent of the population connected to the Internet[7].

Further insight can be gauged by examining Facebook statistics for the two countries. According to data obtained from Facebook's Ads Manager, Pakistan's Facebook population in March is 27 million, out of which 24 million (89 per cent) are aged 13-30. In terms of gender, 21 million (78 per cent) are male. India's Facebook population is 168 million, out of which 137 million (82 per cent) are aged 13-30, while 127 million (76 per cent) are male. Even accounting for differences in population based on who signs up for Facebook, the numbers for the largest social network in both countries is telling. The gender divide while high is in line with the global trend in which "internet penetration rates are higher for men than for women"[8].

Factor in an urban-rural divide, poverty, language and cultural barriers in terms of access along with the issue of meaningful use of the Internet and the Pak-India online audience further narrows. As noted in a 2016 Special Session of the UN Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development, "meaningful Internet access requires relevant, affordable content, available in the right language and offering the capability to transform information into actionable knowledge. Only about 5 per cent of existing languages are accessible online; in addition, the estimated 781 million illiterate adults and almost 100 million children without complete primary education are not able to effectively navigate today's complex websites." [9]

Broadly speaking, the profile of the average Internet user in the two countries is weighted towards young males located in urban areas and more affluent than the average population.

It is this segment that most directly influences, and is influenced by online narratives about Pakistan and India.

The Networks

The question of who controls the message across new media generally focuses on the different individuals, groups, media or state apparatus that push agendas online. However, at the base level, the new gatekeepers are the companies that build and host the networks that allow access and sharing of information.

What agenda do these companies set – intentionally or unintentionally – when it comes to complex issues like the Kashmir conflict? What is their ideological stance on militancy? What could motivate them to influence narratives across an entire platform through policies or algorithmic changes?

The questions above came into sharp focus in 2016 following the killing of a young militant Burhan Wani by Indian security forces in Indian-administered Kashmir. A BBC article noted: "Wani was extremely active on social media, and unlike militants in the past, did not hide his identity behind a mask. His video messages, which would often go viral in Kashmir, were on the topics of Indian injustice and the need for young people to stand up to oppression."[10]

In the violent aftermath of Wani's killing, a side story focused on social media emerged: Facebook deleted posts and suspended/deleted user accounts of those posting in support of Wani and criticizing Indian

[6] (India Internet Usage and Telecommunications Reports, 2017)
[7] (Internet Usage Statistics, 2017)
[8] (ICT Facts and Figures 2016, 2016)
[9] (Special Session of the UN Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development - Joint Statement, 2016)
[10] (Bukhari, 2016)

forces' action against civilians.[11] The suspensions and deletions included renowned journalists, academics and rights activists.[12] Facebook issued a response terming the company's response a policy issue: "There is no place on Facebook for content that praises or supports terrorists, terrorist organisations or terrorism. We welcome discussion on these subjects but any terrorist content has to be clearly put in context which condemns these organisations and or their violent activities. Therefore, profiles and content supporting or praising Hizbul Mujahideen and Burhan Wani are removed as soon as they are reported to us. In this instance, some content was removed in error, but this has now been restored."

Facebook and Google

The event above highlights how platforms can directly influence debate, and in a Pak-India context, the monopoly of Facebook and Google in both countries makes this critical in any discussion of narrative building.

According to web traffic data and analytics company Alexa, the top five sites visited by users in Pakistan[13] include Google.com.pk, YouTube.com, Google.com and Facebook.com. Blogspot – Google's blogging platform – ranks at 13 in the top sites. In India[14] the landscape is nearly identical with Google.co.in, YouTube.com, Google.com and Facebook.com featuring in the top five, with Blogspot at 13. While news sites also rank high in both countries, a major chunk of traffic to the sites comes from Facebook and referrals from Google search; the influence potential of the two companies is far greater than that of the others sites.

The Facebook-Google monopoly over the online space does not end there. Whatsapp, the messaging app owned by Facebook, is the number one free Android app downloaded in Pakistan, followed by Facebook Messenger, and Facebook. In India, WhatsApp has over 200 million monthly active users. India is the biggest market for WhatsApp globally.[15] Factor in other popular services like Gmail and Instagram and the power of Facebook and Google is clear: the two companies set the stage, and can set the agenda, for online debate.

Twitter, while often considered of primary importance, has far less influence over Pak-India narratives than the two giants. In Pakistan, Twitter ranks much further down at 30 in top sites visited.* The Twitter app is ranked at 71 on the Google Playstore list of top free apps in Pakistan.** This large difference in influence exists in India as well. Compared to Facebook's 168 million Indian users, Twitter has a much smaller user base of 41.19 million. [16]

US Elections: How Narratives Are Influenced

In a study of the 2016 US elections it was found that Google search reinforced existing political views.[17] "Bias was most prominent in results displayed to people who had already made up their minds about how to vote…results in Democratic-leaning states were also more biased," the study found, indicating that dominant narratives can be cemented through what comes first in Google search. Facebook was also accused of personalising the news feed of its American users to filter political content that reinforced their biases.[18]

The issue is further compounded when Google is found to be active in politics. As noted in a recent report,

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11 (Doshi, 2016)
12 (Geelani, 2016)
13 (Top Sites in Pakistan, 2017)
14 (Top Sites in India, 2017)
15 (Singh, 2017)
16 (Number of active Twitter users in leading markets as of May 2016 , 2016)
17 (Timberg, 2017)
18 (Solon, 2016)

"Google has built significant relationships with the US government – directly through the revolving door of personnel, traditional lobbying, political contributions; and indirectly through trade associations and other advocacy groups." Specific to the company's hiring of those in government/politics, the Google Transparency Project documented 251 moves from 2009-2016 between Google and the US government.[19] The New York Times has reported that, "Eric Schmidt, the chairman of Alphabet, Google's parent company, advised the Obama White House," however, the company is now trying to "woo" the Trump administration.[20]

Facebook is no different in inadvertently or actively influencing narratives. A case in point that has had not only an impact on narratives, but real world change is the issue of fake news circulating on Facebook during the US elections, and its influence in helping Trump win. "Facebook will need to change its business model if it does want to address these editorial challenges. Currently, the truth of a piece of content is less important than whether it is shared, liked and monetized. These "engagement" metrics distort the media landscape, allowing clickbait, hyperbole and misinformation to proliferate," a report in The Guardian highlights.[21]

The US elections are a key example that has mainstreamed debate about the influence of platforms on its users' views and consequent action. Further study will inevitably reveal that the influence on users based in Pakistan and India is no different; alternative narratives will find little room for exposure, greater polarization is likely, and active involvement in politics by the two companies may directly influence issues and crises surrounding the two states.

[19] (Google's Revolving Door (US), 2016)
[20] (Kang, 2017)
[21] (Solon, 2016)

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4

NATIONALISM AND NEW MEDIA:
WHAT HAPPENS WHEN MILLENNIALS PRODUCE ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVES

G Sampath

As with other parts of the world, right-wing nationalism is on the rise in India too. Today, it is a significant factor in the bilateral engagement between India and Pakistan. The reason: this breed of nationalism defines itself through the idea of Pakistan. And the primary channel through which it disseminates itself in the public sphere, displacing other, more pressing subjects of national debate, is social media.

In this essay, I shall attempt, via two case studies, to illustrate the dynamic between the state and social media, and how a virulent form of Indian nationalism constructed around a hatred of Pakistan has begun to play an important part in shrinking the realm of possibilities – especially on occasions when attempts are made to widen them – in bilateral engagement.

The State and New Media

The Hindu rightwing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) swept to power in 2014 on a campaign that made extensive use of social media. One of the themes of their social media campaign was that the mainstream media was 'paid media' – it was perceived to be hostile to their leader, Narendra Modi -- and not to be trusted. Therefore, social media, or new media, was a more reliable source of true information.

The thinking behind this approach that bypassed traditional media was that whichever entity dominated social media – in terms of both numbers and decibel-level if nothing else – would eventually end up wielding a disproportionate influence on the national public discourse. From early-2013 onwards – in the run-up to the landmark 2014 elections – social media in India has seen a steady rise in dominance of what some media theorists have termed 'nation-talk'. This is essentially discourse marked by extreme chauvinism and brutal silencing through a troll army of anyone who questions the mythology of the Indian nation peddled by ultra-nationalists.

The leading purveyors of this nation-centric or nationalistic-discourse are directly or indirectly aligned with the majoritarian political agenda of the Hindu nationalist party. It is also well documented that many of the Twitter handles that spout Hindutva-flavoured hyper-nationalism are followed by the Twitter handle of the Prime Minister of India, and vice versa.

In other words, a vast number of Twitter handles and Facebook profiles that make up the nationalistic troll army on social media function as proxies of the Indian state, allied with yet distinct from, the various wings and representatives of the state that are active on social media in their own capacity. These linkages between Hindi nationalist trolls and the ruling party have been documented in a recent book, *I Am a Troll,* by the journalist Swati Chaturvedi.

Three clear trends can be discerned in the state's engagement with social media: an attempt to control what can be said; the use of social media for propaganda; and the use of social media to promote a virulent form of nationalism centered on Pakistan. All three are inter-related, and reinforce each other. We can find a rather vivid illustration of this dynamic in the following two case studies, which have a few things in common: they are both instances of 'alternative narratives' about India and Pakistan, both produced by millennial Indians for new media, and both went viral on social media, sparking another round of debate over nationalism and Pakistan.

'Pakistan Did Not Kill My Dad, War Killed Him'

On April 28, 2016, a video went up on Facebook, featuring a 20-year-old Delhi University student named Gurmehar Kaur.[22] It is a 'silent' video, where Kaur communicates by holding up a series of placards. The video has been viewed by more than 3 million people in less than a year. Not only does it offer an 'alternative' narrative about India and Pakistan, it does so perched on the shoulders of nationalism, as it were, making it very hard for those who seem to 'own' nationalism in India to dismiss or neutralise Kaur's message.

The first few placards are fairly innocuous: "Hi. My name is Gurmehar Kaur. I am from Jalandhar, India. This is my Dad, Capt Mandeep Singh." The only sound you hear is the rustling of paper as she picks up, displays, and sets aside the placards.

Then comes a singular piece of information about her father that would cast a completely different light on what follows: "He was killed in the 1999 Kargil War." We also learn that Kaur was two-years-old when her father died, and therefore has few memories of him.

And then this: "I also remember how much I used to hate Pakistan and Pakistanis because they killed my Dad", followed by, "I used to hate Muslims too because I thought all Muslims are Pakistanis." Kaur confesses that as a six-year-old she was so filled with hatred that she even tried to stab a woman in a burqa, "because for some strange reason I thought she was responsible for my father's death."

It is quite clear by now that the girl in the 'peace video' is no garden variety 'left-liberal' – someone who could easily be silenced by asking her to consider the brave Indian jawans risking their lives at the border. She is someone who has already made the ultimate sacrifice for the cause of the Indian nation – her father's life in a war with Pakistan. How many ultra-nationalists spewing venom on social media can match her claim to patriotic distinction?

Besides, she has alluded to her own past as a Pakistan-hater, a past where she had bought into the strange narrative that considered Indian Muslims as proxies for Pakistanis, and had even attempted to stab a Muslim woman.

But, miraculously, she had out-grown the hate narrative. When she wanted to stab the burqa-clad woman, her mother held her back and made her understand that "Pakistan did not kill my dad, war did." For the militant nationalist, it is inconceivable that a one-time Pakistan-hater, someone who had lost a family member to a war with Pakistan, could go around telling the whole world that 'Pakistan did not kill her dad.'

But Kaur does not stop there. She goes on to say many more things that any chauvinist would find unpalatable: "Majority of regular Indians and Pakistanis want peace, not war. I am questioning the caliber of leadership of both nations. We cannot dream of becoming a first world country with third world leadership." The comment on the quality of national leadership was bound to be a red flag for the army of social media trolls known as 'bhakts', and it was.

This viral video is remarkable also for its acute understanding of the Indo-Pak dynamic – and especially the lack of political will on the part of the decision-makers on either side. A video that begins by addressing the average citizen in both countries ends with a call to the two governments: "Please pull your socks up," she says, "Talk to each other and get the job done."

While this video, doubtless, resonated with thousands on either side of the border – as the 69,000-odd shares indicate – it extracted a steep price from the 20-year-old. It provoked a tsunami of hate from

[22] https://www.facebook.com/voiceoframdotcom/videos/1280502295312412/ [Accessed on March 27, 2017.]

rightwing nationalists, culminating in threats of rape and murder. The biggest provocation was her statement that "Pakistan did not kill my dad, war did." It even prompted the Union Minister of State for Home to Tweet, "Who is polluting this young girl's mind?" And Kaur replied, "I have my own mind. Nobody is polluting my mind. I am not anti-national."

But the threats of rape and worse proved too much for the young student, and she eventually withdrew temporarily from the social media campaign she had been leading. The unexpected voicing of an alternative narrative on social media thus ended in its brutal suppression, though not without a fight, as many rallied to express their solidarity with Kaur and pitch for peace. As for those who threatened her with sexual assault, though an FIR has been lodged, it is far from likely that anyone would be punished for such criminal intimidation. But who are these entities with such a severe allergy to any talk of peace that they are prepared to go to the extent of issuing rape threats?

'Pakistan' - an Alibi for Poor Governance

A plausible and entertaining answer to this question is offered by another video, a more recent one, made by another millennial Indian, and posted on March 1, 2017.

Titled 'Governance and Patriotism', it is an eight-minute stand-up routine by a young comedian named Kunal Kamra.[23] In this hilarious sketch, Kamra not only pokes fun at the militant Hindu nationalism that dominates public discourse in India today, he also drives home the point that it is little more than an excuse for poor governance. It is interesting how Kamra, perhaps unconsciously, sets up a binary between the 'millennial' and his easy-going attitude, and the 'elderly uncle' and his pompous claim to being a holier-than-thou patriot. This mindset difference between generations probably holds a message somewhere for those following the progress of Indo-Pak dialogues over the decades.

Early on in his show, Kamra enacts an imaginary conversation between two millennials, where one of them asks, "Agar Pakistan nahi hota, toh tu patriotic hota kya?" (If there was no Pakistan, would you still be patriotic?). The other replies that he hadn't really thought about it. That's when a patriotic uncle butts in to say, "Our boys are fighting in Siachen," and Kamra's instant response, "Oh, in that case, patriotism is necessary."

Kamra's comedy tears into the cynical use of Pakistan to drive nationalism to a fever pitch, which then helps to steer public discourse clear of all questions concerning daily problems of governance. Kamra's preferred example is the municipality's failure to clear the garbage piled up in front of his house. When he asks why the garbage hasn't been cleared, the answer from the state: 'Where is your patriotism, boy? Soldiers are dying in the border fighting Pakistan, and you are worried about garbage?" Kamra concludes by suggesting that if it weren't for Pakistan, people would actually start holding the Indian government to account over its many unfulfilled election promises. But thanks to Pakistan, people are too busy hating, too busy being proud nationalists, to ask questions about things like garbage disposal, good roads, and water supply.

For this stand-up routine puncturing Pakistan-centric patriotism, Kamra received death threats. Again, the issuer of these threats has neither been identified nor arrested. If the state is happy for voices critical of ultra-nationalism to be intimidated, as one might justifiably conclude, then a major casualty is the scope for normalization of relations between India and Pakistan.

As Kamra put it, once 'the Pakistan problem' is solved, the Indian government, when confronted by angry, tax-paying citizens over its poor governance (another example he gives is of long ATM lines caused by demonetisation), can no longer point to the jawans dying for the nation on the border.

[23] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qBbpFGGAkmo [Accessed on March 27, 2017]

Conclusion

Pakistan, then, is a principal element of the ultra-nationalism that has empowered offline and online storm troopers to go around labeling anyone who challenges the incumbent government (or its proxies), as 'anti-national'. As such, the 'trope' of Pakistan serves several functions in this nationalist discourse: firstly, as Kaur's video also suggests, it is a stand-in for messaging to the Muslim minorities in India; second, as illustrated by Kamra's jokes, it is an invaluable diversionary resource; three, it is at the heart of Hindutva-based national cultural identity; and finally, it is a readily available paint of infamy that one could use to tar any opponent in a debate, as exemplified in the notorious exhortation to 'Go to Pakistan!' that Indians fling at each other.

One may conclude from all of this that it would be difficult for dialogue between India and Pakistan to make headway unless the ultra-nationalistic rhetoric -- in particular, on the Indian side -- is toned down.

So long as Pakistan is the dominant idea that shapes the narrative of Indian nationalism, could one ever expect an Indian government to risk being cast by its domestic political adversaries as 'anti-national' – as it is likely to happen were it to 'go soft' on Pakistan? For the ultra-nationalist hawks on social and mass media, anything short of open hostility is equivalent to 'going soft' on Pakistan, with attendant implications of weakness on the part of the Indian state. Far safer politically, then, to respond to an Uri attack with a 'surgical strike' than, say, with a reiteration of one's commitment to the Simla Accord.

Much of this choleric nationalistic obsession with Pakistan, of course, has to do with the baggage of the past, going all the way back to the Partition in 1947, and the wars in 1965 and 1971, not to forget the Kargil war in 1999.

This perhaps is why a lot depends on a fresh approach and mindset toward bilateral issues. On available evidence in new media, this seems more likely to come from millennials who have less of a legacy from the past. Perhaps this is another reason why new media, where conversations and cultural interactions between Indians and Pakistanis can take place without the constraints of perception-management that Track I diplomacy imposes, holds more promise in terms of generating alternative narratives.

The biggest hurdle to mainstreaming alternative narratives continues to be those controlling the levers of power on either side of the border. So long as the political incentives for hostility continue to outweigh those for normalisation of relations, the utmost, as well as the very least, that could be done by non-state actors and the average citizens on either side is to keep the conversation going. To puncture inflated nationalistic egos from time to time. And to challenge the hegemony of hate-based nationalisms. On this front, one might reasonably expect millennials active on new media to play a leading role.

CITIZENS & NEW MEDIA: REASON TO HOPE

5

NETISTAN:
AN OPPORTUNITY FOR INDIA-PAKISTAN RELATIONS

Shivam Vij

Even a cursory look at the history of the visa-passport system between India and Pakistan shows the matter isn't just one of sovereignty or security. India and Pakistan have the world's most difficult visa mechanism because they don't want their people to meet each other and see each other's countries.

This became especially difficult after the 1965 war. Through 70 odd years of troubled engagement, the two governments have tried to police domestic narratives about the other government. This was easy in the days of state-controlled media. Magazines, newspapers and news channels could be prevented from crossing the border.

Delicious stories of Indians watching Pakistan TV near the border, or Doordarshan on the other side, only serve to establish how difficult this used to be. To this day, the Indian government doesn't allow the telecast of Pakistani channels in India, and Pakistan's policy about Indian channels changed recently with heightened tensions.

It is easier to produce monolithic narratives with the luxury of distance. Lahore may be closer to New Delhi than Karachi, but the iron curtain of the visa regime and communication blackouts has been so strong that the psychological distance between India and Pakistan is worlds apart.

There was a time when relatives and friends exchanged physical letters that used to come opened. The surveillance regimes would police what you were writing to whom, which books could be read and which couldn't.

How do you imagine a country you have not visited? How do you imagine a country whose news you can't watch, whose people you can't meet? This was easy to solve for those who studied and worked outside South Asia but most Indians have been trapped in an Indian image of Pakistan, and most Pakistanis are trapped in a Pakistani image of India.

For the people of India and Pakistan, the other country is a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma. When you can't visit a country or even watch its TV channels, you are left to imagine that place with what your government tells you about it, what your own newspapers say. Growing up in a Partition-displaced family, Pakistan for me was a flag, a country where my roots were, it was the place news told me terrorists came from after it lost wars to my country.

Then Came the Internet

The first website India ever blocked was Dawn.com, during the Kargil war in 1999. Pakistani news sites have since then never been blocked in India, to the best of my knowledge. The order on Dawn was lifted soon thereafter. The act of blocking Dawn.com during the Kargil war is an example of how difficult it was for governments to adapt to the new reality of the Internet. The Internet suddenly made so much of what nation-states do absolutely redundant and ridiculous. There is no point banning movies or books or news channels or journals for the governments of India and Pakistan. When they do it, they look silly; like someone forgot to tell them it was already the twenty first century.

The Internet has provided Indians and Pakistanis a window into each other, to the extent they want to peep. Social media has brought a life-like experience of the other. With the Internet, we are no longer limited to seeing the other through the eyes of the state or big media.

Around the year 2000, a friend was visiting Pakistan. I asked him to bring me a copy of Dawn. Today, some of Dawn's journalists are friends just a Whatsapp message away. This reduction of psychological distance completely changes how a lot of people see the other country.

Long before the age of social media, there used to be an India-Pakistan chat room in some abyss of the Internet. I remember this conversation from that age where a Pakistani asked me: "Are you Hindu?" Indeed, I replied. "Never mind," he said, "We can still be friends."

Such a conversation would perhaps not happen today, because many Indians and Pakistanis are exposed to ordinary individuals from the other country over the Internet. They may not be friends, they may abuse each other often, or they just watch each other's content on YouTube – but they can see the other as real people. That itself has been a huge change from how things used to be.

The psychological distance is still enormous. That's why there are people on both sides of the border who have ridiculous notions of the other. For example, I have cringed too often to see Indians ask visiting Pakistanis if all women in Pakistan wear burqas. It is not necessarily a question born out of spite, but genuine curiosity! The most important contribution of the Internet to India-Pakistan relations has been to provide a common platform, a no man's land where they can see each other and talk. I call this space "Netistan". Social media, with Instagram and YouTube, with the live documentation of the daily lives of people, lets one in on a country's living experience. It allows you to discover whether all women in Pakistan wear burqa, or whether Hindus have horns on their heads.

Putting a Face to a Country

The Pakistani physicist-peacenik Pervez Hoodbhoy realised, many years ago, that most Indians had never met a Pakistani. For an Indian, just meeting a Pakistani the first time, or vice versa, is an event. The abstraction of the other suddenly becomes a human being.

It was February 2005. The Pakistani poet Harris Khalique, whom I had been in touch with over the Internet, had sent me copies of a book of his poems through someone. The carrier of poems was visiting Delhi to attend the seventh convention of the Pakistan India People's Forum for Peace and Democracy (PIPFPD).

I don't know why I always felt the need to meet a Pakistani or two. To answer the question 'Who am I?' politically and personally, I had to meet Pakistanis. Perhaps, it had something to do with being a second-generation Partition refugee. Even today, Punjabis will tell you they are 'from' a place now forbidden to them. But it wasn't just that. Our Indian-ness is also defined by the other; by who we are not; by which side of the border we didn't end up. I wanted to meet people from the other side. I wanted to meet Pakistanis to understand Pakistan.

I entered the PIPFPD convention only to find it full of people who looked alike. It was impossible to tell a Pakistani from an Indian! I asked one if he had come from Pakistan, but he replied he was from Delhi. I didn't know where to hide my embarrassment. Imagine asking an Indian if he's a Pakistani! I quickly asked around for the carrier of poems and returned to my college hostel with the books.

I have never been to Pakistan but I feel I know Pakistan intimately through the visiting Pakistanis I have met since that disaster of 2005. Social media has helped make dear friends of absolute strangers. I love to take

visiting Pakistanis around Delhi. In the things they notice and those they don't, in the questions they ask and the ones they answer, I get to see my city and country through their eyes. It's a fascinating exercise.

If it's their first visit, many Pakistanis want to visit old Delhi to see if people there still speak Ghalib-like Urdu. They soon give up on that. Only those mad about shopping like to visit Dilli Haat. Mostly, Pakistanis like to visit two holy shrines, Dargah Nizamuddin and Khan Market. They miss the plaque with Allama Iqbal's couplet in Nizamuddin and don't realise that Khan Market, established in 1952, is named after Khan Abdul Jabbar Khan, Badshah Khan's elder brother and West Pakistan's first chief minister.

It is in their unsaid and unspoken bewilderment that Pakistani visitors speak the most. This place that feels familiar and yet isn't home, this place where people speak the same language and yet a different one, this city that feels like Lahore, yet no one knows the word faarigh for unoccupied (we say vela instead), this city of Hazrat Nizamuddin Aulia's and Humayun's tombs, where most people have names previously heard only in Bollywood and TV. It leaves them a bit dazed and disoriented.

I met the atheist Pakistani, who felt blessed offering Eid prayers at Delhi's Jama Masjid, and I met the religious Pakistani, who stopped to see a Hindu temple, one that wasn't a relic.

I met the Pakistani who was surprised to hear the azaan from the mosques in a Hindu majority country, and I met the Pakistani who complained Indian Muslims looked visibly poorer.

I met the Urdu writer, who wanted to know if Indian Muslims cheer for Pakistan in cricket and war, and I met the Lahori Communist who didn't want his notion of secular India shattered.

I met the Pakistani who drank like a fish in a Paharganj bar and told me how India felt free. I met the Pakistani who felt afraid of going out on his own. What if someone found out he was Pakistani?

I met the Pakistani hungry to learn about India and the Pakistani who didn't want his pre-existing notions of India to be challenged.

I met the Pakistani who wanted Indian citizenship and I met the Pakistani who wanted Kashmir. Between such extremes, most Pakistanis I met just wanted to have a good time, watch a movie, shop till they dropped, visit the Taj Mahal.

They insist Pakistanis are better looking, but some fantasize about a Veer-Zaara story of their own.

I met the qawwals who were the greatest ambassadors for peace, and I met the elite businessmen who got visas so easily they could use Delhi as transit for Southeast Asia.

I met the divided Muslim families who cried upon getting visa after months of trying, and the poor Pakistani Hindu refugees who got visas easily but now languished without education, jobs, citizenship or any social support.

I met the paranoid activist who wanted political asylum and I met the Pakistani Hindu who felt his people were better off than Indian Muslims[24].

They are surprised to see women driving scooties. They are disappointed by Delhi food but return with kaju katli they must.

[24] http://www.huffingtonpost.in/2016/07/25/when-a-pakistani-hindu-visited-delhis-jama-masjid/

One regular visitor told me about the exasperation of Pakistani customs confiscating Filmfare. She eventually found a solution: she started buying two copies every time, asking the customs chap to keep one and let her take the other.

They also love to roam the streets with the freedom that comes with being away from home, except this foreign country feels a lot like home. Alas, hanging out with visiting Pakistanis made me none the wiser about Pakistan. I did learn about the Himalayan divide between Karachi and Lahore, Urdu speakers and Punjabis, but I still wondered, what do I make of Pakistan through a very diverse set of people.

The experience taught me that every human being, Indian or Pakistani, is a different entity. The colour of our passports is just one of many things that define us. This valuable learning was made possible by the Internet.

Those who are against people to people contact don't want the people to realise exactly that we are all different people. It's difficult to hate someone when you know him or her as more than just Pakistani, more than just a compatriot of Hafiz Saeed. When you meet a Pakistani who is a guitarist, economist, poet, free speech activist, archivist, chef and so on, you realise what nationalism doesn't let us see. It doesn't let us see humanity.

Peace.Facebook

This experience hasn't been mine alone. Through the Aman Ki Asha Facebook group, I met a fellow Delhite who told me he used to be a Pakistan-hater in his college days. He went to an engineering college in the state of Gujarat. So strong was his hatred for Pakistan he started looking up Pakistan on the Internet. He started reading liberal Pakistani writers like Raza Rumi, Beena Sarwar and Pervez Hoodbhoy. Worrying about minorities and freedom and religious fundamentalism in Pakistan made him question his own politics about India. Today he's found on the Aman Ki Asha group.

I'd like to think there are a lot more people like that than we'd care to imagine. The page (www.peace.facebook.com) records daily interactions between Indians and Pakistanis, which have exploded over the years, currently at around 2.8 million. I'd like to think not all of these 2.8 million conversations, comments, likes and chats are full of hate and abuse.

A lot of people dismiss the potential of the Internet in affecting India-Pakistan relations for two reasons. Firstly, they argue that bilateral relations have to change between the two governments and online friendships don't affect that. Secondly, they say the Internet itself is so full of hate and ultra-nationalism, the trolls from either side outnumber the peaceniks. Governments, intelligence agencies, political parties, non-state interest groups, religious fundamentalists and even terrorists all unite for the cause of hate. It is therefore also argued the Internet actually contributes to increasing the distance between India and Pakistan, worsening bilateral relations and making any rapprochement all the more difficult.

I'd like to see online nationalist hate a little differently. The Internet didn't produce ultra-nationalism or bilateral disputes. The Internet is at the end of the day a tool; it is as good as you do with it.

The hate, trolling, abuse, even the fake news, are not all that negative. What we are seeing here is a large-scale conversation taking place between the people of the two countries. Such conversations do not necessarily lead to peace, but they can contribute to complicating one's image of the other.

Importantly, the Internet provides an opportunity for peace-builders to easily produce counter-narratives and help shape the conversation. In its own small way, the Aman Ki Asha initiative did that for a while. A collaboration between prominent media houses in India and Pakistan, it died long ago, but its Internet

avatar has a life of its own. The Facebook group's archives are a testament to what online peace building can achieve.

The group brought together many like-minded individuals who wanted to engage in cross-border dialogue, who have critical questions to ask or valuable time to give to peace-building. It sparked many friendships. I have personally witnessed people young and old use it as a platform of engagement of the kind that only needs encouragement.

An Opportunity in Netistan

So emotional is the India-Pakistan dispute for many of its people that governments on both sides have to take every step in bilateral relations keeping public approval in mind. Domestic politics and electoral prospects can be affected by how New Delhi or Islamabad look at each other.

It is thus of great importance to work on public opinion, helping tilt it in favour of peace building. That trolls and haters are dominating online conversations only increases our responsibility to use the Internet for peace building.

As Aman Ki Asha and the Pakistan-India People's Forum For Peace And Democracy Fade Away, there is a great need for newer initiatives to replace them. With the difficulty of visa regimes and lack of resources in promoting large-scale people-to-people interactions, the Internet can be easily used as a better replacement. In that direction, here are a few suggestions.

Firstly, there is an urgent need for an organised, funded online initiative for peace building between India and Pakistan. Such an initiative should bring together online, people on both sides, especially young people, who want to do something to bring about India-Pakistan peace.

This should be seen as Track 3, the India-Pakistan online conversation between ordinary people who are not necessarily experts on bilateral relations. Such a group should also work to evolve ideas, narratives, solutions, questions, and fact-checking mechanisms to counter the online narrative of ultra-nationalist hate. The idea of Netistan needs a new, formal platform. The power of video, that needs special initiative and funding, should especially be exploited by such an initiative.

Secondly, there is a need to physically bring together people who are already engaged in online peace building. This should ideally take place on an annual basis. Such offline interaction could tie-in with the online initiative mentioned above. This could happen in a neutral location like the Chaophraya Track II Dialogue.

Thirdly, short of the above initiatives, it always helps if all of us look at the Internet as an opportunity and not always a threat to peace building. Whenever India and Pakistan are to stop fighting, tomorrow morning or fifty years from now, it won't happen without the backing of public opinion. And public opinion is increasingly affected by what's trending online.

6

POSITIVE RE-INFORCERS
IN THE INDIA-PAKISTAN ONLINE SPACE

Amal Khan

There stands a dignified old house in Bangladesh, and in it an old Muslim woman who fell in love with a Hindu man when they were both children until the Partition separated them. In Amritsar, a restaurant called Crystal once opened its doors to a doctor and his fourteen sick patients escaping the 1947 Lahore riots. A Hindu schoolteacher from Quetta befriended a man called Ali, and would spend her holidays playing the violin and harmonium at his magnificent family home in Rawalpindi. All these stories now exist as a series of captioned photographs on an Instagram page, and are hash-tagged #remnantsofapartition.

Through the Instagram page Aanchal Malhotra curates, she is kickstarting a unique nature of conversations between young Indians and Pakistanis. She describes herself as an oral historian, and by penning down the stories of a generation directly affected by the Partition - those who left their homes, their families and belongings behind - she has succeeded in humanising the narratives of violence and the historic structures of hate that predominantly influence the perceptions of ordinary people on both sides of the border.

Beneath each photograph and accompanying story, there are dozens of comments, mostly from third generation Indians and Pakistanis. “I wonder who creates these differences?” commenter Aayushi Sinha, a young woman from Allahabad in Uttar Pradesh asks.

“Lahore will always be etched into my heart. We might be separated by borders but our hearts will forever be one,” comments Sayesha Sachdev beneath another post. She is an art director from Bangalore.

“Shared history is so important,” Malhotra explains. “And slowly, gradually, we are understanding that.”

The use of nostalgia, striking photographs and prose has led to a fast growing follower base for Malhotra, which in her words has “started a conversation between regular people, mostly third generation from India and Pakistan. Essentially, grandkids who feel the same things about the divide and its repercussions.”

“Your posts make me want to run to India,” writes one of Malhotra’s Pakistani followers. “The India of my ancestors.”

A book on her project is due for release this summer.

It would seem that the hashtag is fast rising to become a most efficient archiver of political sentiment, immediate events, national conversations, and naturally, of history. Washington Post President and Publisher Philip Graham’s famous words, “Journalism is the first rough draft of history,” might quite relevantly be tweaked to credit the hashtag as a historian’s newest tool and toy. For Aanchal Malhotra’s posts, a quick search for the hashtag “remnantsofapartition” will pull up the hundreds of posts she’s written and curated for her thirteen thousand (and growing) follower base in both India and Pakistan over the last four years, alongside the heart-warming conversations she has influenced.

In the same way, Indian educator Chintan Girish Modi founded an initiative called “Friendships Across Borders: Ao Dosti Kerain,” which went live on Facebook and Twitter on February 14th, 2014. Since then, it has

archived stories of cross-border friendships with the hashtag #AoDostiKarein. Like Malhotra, Modi's idea is to make an impact on the living-room narratives, the perceptions of ordinary people, the views of those who might never meet an Indian or a Pakistani in the flesh but whose opinions are part of a greater narrative that may one day create real policy change. With enlightened opinions following shared, cultural conversations, there comes the creation of new narrative architectures: new spaces for peaceful initiatives among a curious Indian and Pakistani youth.

Interactions on the Friendships Across Borders Facebook page express a desire for primarily the same things from both sides of the divide: easing visa requirements, meeting each other face to face one day and focusing on a shared culture and history.

One commenter on the page, Niketan Mhatre from Mumbai wrote, "Governments don't want us to know each other, (therefore) such stringent restrictions. But social media is thwarting their efforts... hopefully one day they will have to give in, else technology will compel them."

One of the stories is by Kirthi Jayakumar, founder of the Building Peace Project, who writes about her deep friendship with Mariam in Pakistan. They "met" on Facebook (and have still to meet in real life), and Kirthi calls her "easily one of the most important people in my life."

Some of the most impactful and certainly most visible influencers of bilateral narratives outside of the policy space seem to be coming from music collaborations between artists from India and Pakistan. The resounding success of Pakistan's Coke Studio in India, as well as the popularity of cultural partnerships like that of the Mekaal Hasan Band (MHB), play an important part in perception shaping among music fans and young people on both sides.

"No one knows the ground reality of physically playing in the other country," says Mekaal Hasan who set up the band in 2014 with three Pakistani members and two Indian members. "The visa span is far too short, and these policies hurt us (Pakistani artists) more than Indian artists because we venture there. For the band's third record, I was in Mumbai, but the Indian press and small political parties made it a contentious issue. We were told we couldn't play in Mumbai, and promoters backed out of booking us."

With a wave of recent controversies around India-Pakistan music and film collaborations, the only accessible mediums have primarily been the online space for audiences from both sides to engage with artistic expressions emerging from their countries.

"Music is the only thing that shouldn't be politicised," Hasan says, "But we can't escape it. It's crazy that we cannot create these creative collaborations. You are starving people of vital information. You can humanise the relationship through music and through art. It's a separate nation but still a nation that is similar to us." MHB continues to be the only band with its members living in both India and Pakistan.

One of Hasan's bandmates, Sharmistha Chatterjee, speaks of her experience with the online space, as well as using social media platforms to spread the message of music and peace between the two countries.

"We found each other primarily on Facebook," she says of Hasan and herself. "My entire grooming for the band has been on social media. I learnt the songs on Skype! Since Punjabi is not my mother tongue, I had to work a lot on diction which again we did on Skype over many months."

After a live recording of one of their concerts in Baroda, India, was released on Facebook in 2014, MHB became a trending topic with thousands of likes, shares and comments in India and Pakistan. Their performances for Coke Studio received similar, wide-ranging appreciation on social media.

"Coke Studio is extremely popular in India," Chatterjee says. "It has enormous reach and with social media, a lot of impossibles have now become possible."

"The Coke Studio videos and the (MHB) band videos have become so popular in Mumbai that it has contributed in accelerating my professional career in music and film," she continues. "I am now collaborating with other artists in Pakistan."

Hundreds of initiatives now exist on and through social media platforms that make a re-telling of history and re-engineering of perception possible. The sentimental story-telling of citizenship, soil and land come together seamlessly with the modern, tech savvy third generation of Indians and Pakistanis and are leading to new spaces for dialogue and eventually, policy change. At least, that is the hope.

To refute entirely, that public sentiment has an impact on policy level change is problematic because it challenges the core ethos of democracy. As illustrated by, most recently, the Arab Spring, public discourse (specifically online discourse) is undeniably a very potent tool for change. Because discourse is not always quantifiable, it is not considered "concrete," but it is potentially very consequential because real change has ultimately always been about ideas that form at the micro-level.

Though the online spaces for these initiatives are often times carefully curated, these are not spaces "safe" from the vitriol and hate that social media spreads in times of diplomatic conflict. At those times, it is these initiatives that present a still small but resilient counter-narrative to embedded structures of hate and violence online. For that, if for no other reason, they are desperately required.

It is easy to forget that the rise of social media is a very recent phenomenon, (Facebook became open to all users only eleven years ago), and that narrative building will take time to gather speed. What it's showing now is an encouraging, imaginative form of narrative creation, and a sign for more to come.

THE DARK SIDE OF NEW MEDIA

7

EXTREME SPEECH ONLINE:
OFFLINE SPILLOVER AND BILATERAL TIES

Sahana Udupa

The enormous spread of vitriolic speech on online media has emerged as a key concern in recent times for state regulators and civil society in India and Pakistan. In the wake of several recent instances of hate mongering on online media, the discussion has tilted toward the "dark side" of the Internet and what dangers online aggressive behavior can pose to civic dialogue and social harmony. Online conflagrations generate a vitiated atmosphere, which help neither domestic peace in both the countries nor indeed the bilateral relations. Struggling to grapple with the spread of hatred on online media, regulators are blaming the Internet media's affordances of anonymity and geography-agnostic architecture as enabling features for individuals and groups to spew stereotypes, spread rumor, and provoke aggression.

The phenomenon is not by any measure restricted to Pakistan and India. In many parts of the world, a shared global culture of online invectives is influencing a political climate of hostility, flaring up alt-right and right wing populism in the global North. While President Trump's victory in the US is seen as symptomatic of the times, many other regions – from Europe to Australia – are witnessing hostile online cultures which challenge the liberal policies of open borders and pluralism. These trends have prompted the European Commission to raise concern over the spread of xenophobic hate speech on online media.

Rapidly expanding digital landscapes of South Asia warrant similar attention. With 350 million Internet users in India and 20 million users in Pakistan, diplomatic efforts can no longer give the online media a passing glance. As new media become an increasingly important vehicle for millennials to discuss and grasp realities around them – offering for the most part the first brush of public dialogue – it is important to address online speech if the two countries have to foster a climate of peace and understanding.

Online Vitriol in India and Pakistan

A common Internet architecture defines the hostile speech practices in both the countries, with Facebook, YouTube and Twitter as some of the largest social media platforms. Contempt for the mainstream media and the political class is seen both in Pakistan and India, which reflects globally, shared anti-establishment sensibility gaining momentum with online media. However, there are specific elements of online vitriol concerning India-Pakistan relations, and the distinct historical trajectories that underlie them.

The Gurmehar Kaur case in India is one of the latest episodes of online vitriol that holds a mirror to online cultures of posing Pakistan as an enemy. The case is intriguing for many reasons. First, the very status of this video signals the way millennials are using new media to create new platforms to foster peace between the nations. Titled, "Soldier for Peace", the team invited the daughter of a slain soldier to declare, with punching new media aesthetics of a card holding protagonist, that the war killed her father and not Pakistan. The video triggered instant and massive reaction on online media. While many applauded the message of peace and the trenchant critique of state conceit that keeps alive the animosity, reactions turned hostile as the video hit the screens of thousands of online users. On Twitter, the debate descended to abuse in quick time. Allegations of *gaddari* (treachery) and direct threats to the key protagonist became so severe that Kaur sought retreat from new media altogether. This episode is one among the several instances of online aggression aimed at ridiculing the efforts to suture the wounds and tie the bonds between the two nations. Pakistani film actors became the target of online vituperation whenever there were media reports of cross-border firings.

Volunteers of nationalism, hitherto confined to street agitations and maverick politics, have found the Internet as a convenient and effective medium to relay and articulate aggressive posturing. Although online nationalism is a far more complex affinity space involving also the aspiration of New India as a global power with little or no reference to Pakistan, the negative messaging of nationalism invariably invokes Pakistan as the "other". The usual stereotype of associating Indian Muslims with Pakistan has continued apace on online media[25]. In the digital age too, marking Pakistan as an enemy hinges on the delicate politics of religious difference in India. According to the Online Hate Prevention Institute, Internet users in India were the second largest group after the US to support one of the largest online hate pages, "The Islamic Threat"[26]. At the same time, masculinist imaginations of India as a military power that can dominate and defeat Pakistan go hand in hand with the glorification of soldier valiance and martyrdom. While individual middle class users are drawn increasingly into an emergent collective consciousness of right-wing nationalism online[27], allegations of organized hate mongering and systematic manufacture of rumor are grave concerns for domestic harmony and bilateral ties.

In Pakistan, online media have enthused millennials to participate in political discussions through creative new media productions[28], but negative and offensive speech is also expanding by leaps[29]. In a pioneering study, Haque et al. (2014) draw attention to "an increasing number of instances of radicalized, xeno-phobic, racist and sexist discourse with threats of harassment and/ or violence have been seen in local cyberspace, with targets ranging from religious groups and minorities such as Shias, Ahmadis, Hindus and Christians, to local ethnic groups, women, homosexuals, hatred of Americans, Jews, Indians, and Afghans among others."[30] No doubt these trends are worrying for national stability, but it also instigates instability in Indo-Pak relations in related ways by drawing direct references to India and normalizing aggressive cultures of online media. The study points out that "India has remained a principle focus of hate in Pakistan", adding that offensive messaging draws on religious identities. Thus, "terms such as kaafir and hindu are often used as abuse".[31]

Can the existing regulatory and legal frameworks address this worrying phenomenon? Substantive legal corpus is available in both the countries to restrict speech that dates back to the colonial regime. The rationale of public order restriction on speech is making its way into the online domain but not without contestations[32]. The question however remains whether current regulatory repertoire and infrastructure are imaginative enough to open up productive interventions rather than reproducing mere restrictive logics. A fundamental rethinking is called for in the digital age, including the very terminology of "hate speech".

Why Should We Call it "Extreme Speech" and Not (Always) "Hate Speech"?

Any grasp of online vitriol should reckon with the temptation to label all manner of vitriol as "hate speech". If online abuse were just "hate speech", a regulatory approach would be easy to imagine, but it is hardly the case. To understand online abuse, it is important to first recognize the necessary ambiguity of public speech

[25] Examples include the Azad Maidan protests in Mumbai in 2012, Muzzafarnagar riots in 2013 and the 'Snapdeal' controversy in 2015.
[26] Oboler A. (2013). Islamophobia on the internet: The growth of online hate targeting Muslims. http://ohpi.org.au/islamophobia-on-the-internet-the-growth-of-online-hate-targeting-muslims
[27] Udupa, S. (2015). Internet Hindus: New India's Ideological Warriors. In P. van der Veer (ed.) Religion in Asian Cities. Berkeley: University of California Press.
[28] Gill-Khan, C. (2017) Envisioning Pakistan: Urban "Awami" Space, Travel and the Media. In S. Udupa and M. McDowell (eds.) Media as Politics in South Asia. London: Routledge.
[29] http://jinnah-institute.org/hate-seech-and-social-media-in-pakistan-2/
[30] Haque et al. (2014). Hate speech: A study of Pakistan's cyberspace. Bytes for All, p 1.
[31] Haque et al. (2014), p 13
[32] In 2015, the Supreme Court of India struck down Section 66A of the Information Technology Act 2000 (IT Act) which criminalized offensive online content, hearing a writ petition that said the provisions violated Article 19 of the Constitution which guarantees freedom of expression. While yet to evolve cyber laws to address the expanding range of online vitriol and the institutional capacity for implementing existing laws to address online "extremism, intolerance and hate", restrictions imposed by the Pakistan Telecommunication (Re-organization) Act, 1996, have come under criticism for "misinterpretation and abuse" (Haque et al., 2014).

forms. Online vitriol has democratized public debate to a certain extent, allowing new actors to challenge dominant narratives of the political class, legacy critics and mainstream media. It has opened up new lines of political participation. Elsewhere, I have argued that online abuse in India could be best captured as "gaali" which signals the blurred boundaries between comedy, insult, shame and abuse emerging on online media with divergent consequences[33].

Second, hate speech as a regulatory value is conveniently used by the authorities to restrict all manner of speech. Confusing speech with action can lead to regulatory excess and political witch-hunting. Even well-intentioned efforts could backfire. Groups that are negatively impacted by online hate content may begin to have "veto power" over what online users can access[34].

The subversive counterculture of the Internet media should not be erased by whipping up the discourse of "hate speech". In India-Pak relations, this relates to efforts by creative new media groups to challenge politically expedient moves to escalate tensions and prevailing narratives that pitch the countries as enemies.

Anchored to grounded analyses of socio-cultural practices that define online vitriol and cautious of the regulatory excess that "hate speech" can enable, one might approach online abuse as "extreme speech" representing a spectrum of online practices rather than the culturally flat antonymous conception of uncivil speech versus acceptable speech[35]. The diversity of online vitriolic cultures calls for analytical clarity on certain forms of speech that require the labeling of offensive content, and thereby, regulatory action. Studies that have developed the metrics and evaluation criteria for "dangerous speech"[36] and freedom of expression[37] are helpful in locating online speech that have a high propensity to instigate and escalate physical violence. Many other forms of speech navigate in the slippery and ambiguous terrain of extreme speech. The task is to draw a typology of such extreme speech forms online (for eg, messages that target women, those that are insult comedy, stereotypes about dominant groups versus vulnerable groups etc.). These forms need civil society interventions and counterspeech strategies rather than the legal heavy hand or state interventions.

Counterspeech Initiatives and Civil-Society

Two possibilities are flagged here that have a direct bearing on the India-Pakistan relations, although there are many more new media spaces that need attention and traction.

First is the restrictive side of regulating extreme speech. As with any other online phenomena, online vitriol expands in a polymedia environment and therefore any solution to abuse should be multimodal. This means large media organizations should collaborate with Internet intermediaries and service providers so that online users and companies could together provide alternative narratives, publish abuse report cases and mount collective pressure on online actors to retract from offensive messaging. Multinational companies such as Facebook and Twitter with mammoth user bases often point out that they have to deal with diverse national regulatory systems and also a variety of extra-legal pressure tactics from governments and non-governmental actors. Added to this is the search for market incentives to build resources that can sift and block offensive content, or respond to abuse reports. In such a scenario, collaborative measures need investments of time and resources. A key finding of the hate speech report in Pakistan is that a large part of hate speech is delivered in Roman Urdu and Urdu script[38]. In India, use of Hindi and other regional languages is becoming more common. Blocking and take-down practices should develop language sensitive tools. Companies have a lot to deliver, but this would be most effective if civil society groups collaborate, mediate and build up pressure. Creative subversion of hate speech needs innovative strategies. One such experiment is seen in Germany. Inspired by the US website "Monetizing the Hate", German startup hatr.org has developed a business model to monetize online abusive comments. The site sells advertisements by placing them beneath offensive comments. Users who receive abusive messages

may pass them on to the site. The website in turn publishes them and sells ads to place them beneath the messages. Users, on their part, may feel relieved for having passed the offensive content to a site where the "trash" gets converted into "cash"[39]. Money collected thus is donated to "feminist and gender projects", according to the owner of the startup.

The second area that needs urgent attention is gendered abuse. Using the tropes of masculinity and femininity as political tropes as well as in a direct sense of targeting liberal female voices online, gendered abuse is fanning hypervocality to nationalism, thereby undermining the efforts to normalize India-Pakistan relations. This form of abuse involves shaming critical female online actors and making allegations of sexual promiscuity through tactics of trolling and doxing. Regressive gender norms at times turn into direct threat and intimidation. The case of Gurmehar Kaur cited earlier is the latest in the list. Several international agencies including the United Nations have emphasized that gender based violence on digital platforms is a reflection of systemic forms of discrimination that exist in broader society. There is no doubt resilience among online actors, but gendered abuse needs non-legal measures so that online debating cultures remain free from fear of reprisal, shaming and threat. Counterspeech as a digital capacity is important in this regard.

In North America, social media companies such as Facebook have responded to feminist advocacy by reevaluating their policies, offering updated training for the teams that review hateful speech, increased "accountability of creators" and greater collaboration with women advocacy groups[40]. Microblogging site Twitter teamed up with the organization "Women, Action and the Media" in 2014 to develop a "comprehensive but easy-to-use form, through which users can report harassments and threats that will then be escalated to Twitter"[41]. Center for Solutions to Online Violence, a virtual collaborative hub at Femtechnet, is another initiative that provides resources for troll busting and prevention of online abuse. Aside from collaborating for these measures, a key tactic would be to invert the experiential context of online abuse by publicizing, ridiculing and edging away the shaming aspect of abuse. Efforts to team up with humor and parody sites already active in India and Pakistan, and building resources to augment public visibility to such online collaborations of resilience and combat would be an urgent need.

If India-Pakistan relations are approached as substantive social solidarity, it is important to move beyond the constricted conception of "strategic thinking" steered by "high-level" actors inhabiting a largely male-dominated space. Moving into socio-cultural domains means that necessary measures are put in place to address online extreme speech in the full range of evolving vocabulary and cultural practices. A gender-sensitive perspective is a vital step in that direction, and so is civil society alliance conceived capaciously.

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8

NEW MEDIA AND IRREGULAR WARFARE: TRAFFICKING TERROR IN SOUTH ASIA

Fahd Humayun

Irregular warfare, backed by a host of advances in terrorist communication infrastructure, has been an unwelcome but indisputable feature of the South Asian landscape over the past decade. Non-state actors in Afghanistan, Pakistan and India today are investing greater time and energy tweeting, texting and live streaming. Speaking at the World Economic Forum in Davos in 2017, ex-Army Chief Raheel Sharif noted that terrorists were increasingly relying on social media to recruit and promote their activities, and taking advantage of digital means of communication to further their aims[42].

Across the subcontinent, two concurrent trends have impacted the digital marketplace for terror networks in a profound way: namely, a proliferation of new media platforms, and a boom in the total number of Internet subscribers active on social media. Exposed to this live network of online spaces is a thronging, and often vulnerable, audience: compared to the Internet's advent in Pakistan in 1992, over 30 million Pakistanis roam online today, and an estimated 8 million are actively engaged on social media sites. India has an estimated 450 million Internet users, 200 million of who use South Asia's top cross-platform mobile messaging app WhatsApp. For Pakistan in particular, this digital explosion and the opportunities it affords to terrorists is a matter of concern. The country has paid an enormous price fighting terrorism since 2001: according to one estimate, Pakistan has suffered 60,000 lives and an estimated $118 billion in direct and indirect losses. In January 2017, the TTP offshoot Jamat-ul-Ahrar (JuA) outlined targets for its new military campaign, dubbed Operation Ghazi, in an 18 minute-long video released on its YouTube channel[43, 44], as well as through two subsequent communiqués. This isn't unprecedented. Since 2001, non-state groups in South Asia have attained potent fluency in their use of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr, Internet memes and other social media conduits, allowing for updates to a hitherto conventional toolkit that has made carrying out (and then advertising) deadly acts of violence targeting both state and society that much easier. In addition to serving as a powerful recruitment tool, the migration of terrorist networks into the online domain has also enabled a structural transformation of terrorist groups, from tightly-knit cells to loosely-held networks capable of breaching geographic and political divides, stretching from Kabul to Dhaka. By overcoming conventional chain-of-command and cell structure constraints, terror outfits have also graduated from infancy to serious national security threats that now warrant effective state responses.

Bombs to Bytes: An Evolving Terrorist Toolkit

New technologies have not only made it possible to produce propaganda with astonishing ease – they have also made it far easier to radicalize, mobilise and terrorize vulnerable populations. The evolution of new media against a backdrop of irregular warfare in South Asia means that terrorist groups in both India and Pakistan have, in recent years, been able to effectively leverage powerful tools such as voice over Internet telecom (VoIP), social media platforms and sophisticated encryption techniques, thus making online spaces an efficient and relatively secure means of communication and propaganda. New media tactics employed by terror networks include steganography, a technique used to hide messages in graphic files, and "dead dropping", i.e. transmitting information through saved email drafts in an online email account accessible to anyone with the password[45]. The overlap with social media means that terrorist groups now have novel

[42] https://www.samaa.tv/pakistan/2017/01/terrorists-use-social-media-for-recruitment-purpose-raheel-sharif/
[43] ihyae khilafat TV,
[44] At the time of writing, the Youtube channel is still running.
[45] http://www.cfr.org/terrorism-and-technology/terrorists-internet/p10005

ways at their disposal to bypass conventional praetorian responses to terrorism, more often than not by resorting to virtual spaces to ensure brand protection: in 2015 the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) spokesperson Ehsanullah Ehsan had 69 connections on LinkedIn, indicating a sizeable network, and was using the business networking site in an apparent attempt to recruit terrorists[46]. His LinkedIn page not only listed his skills as "jihad and journalism" but also provided details of school, employment history and language training. New media and computer-assisted warfare has also helped in the choreographing and execution of complex terror attacks transcending state boundaries: Zarrar Shah, the Laskar-e-Taiba (LeT)'s technology chief, used VoIP Internet services, routed through a New Jersey-based front, to disguise the origins of the calls being made to ground operatives in Mumbai during the execution of the 26/11 attacks. In the testimony from the Mumbai terror case, witnesses also confessed to having received training sessions focused on Google Earth and associated Internet-satellite imagery.

Globally speaking, the number of terrorist websites has risen from 150 in 1995 to over 10,000 today, offering terrorist outfits with a wide variety of recruitment platforms, virtual training grounds, and online propaganda hubs. And the centrality of new media and communication technology to 21st century terrorism successes has encouraged terror networks in South Asia to digitize accordingly. When Al-Qaeda announced the launch of its South Asian chapter, Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), in September 2014, it took to social media to do so. AQIS's appointment of Asim Umar – a lieutenant who had notably risen in Al-Qaeda's ranks as an "Internet propagandist"[47] – as the chapter's regional commander, speaks to a strategic vision that seeks to salvage Al-Qaeda's frayed global brand, while employing social media to bridge the local and global jihadist movements. In the summer of 2016, AQIS released a 26-minute Urdu language video (complete with Arabic and English subtitles) featuring Asim Umar entitled "Without Shariah, War is Mere Strife" produced by Al-Qaeda's Sahab Media Foundation[48]. The group also released Arabic, English and Bengali versions (and accompanying transcripts) within days of the original release. A month earlier AQIS had already proved its digital prowess and cyber-reach by successfully hacking a microsite of the Indian Railways, leaving behind an 11-page document of propaganda and a message addressed to the "Muslims of India"[49].

With relatively low barriers to entry and near universal online access, the advent of new media platforms has also afforded terrorist groups with a solution to their need to vie for publicity, combined with the opportunity to exploit instant, far-reaching information highways with violent imagery. Social media platforms also act as accelerators and multipliers, enabling short- and longer-term follow-through after the execution of terrorist incidents. Non-state actors across the India-Pakistan divide, with their motley mix of transnational militant networks and global franchise offshoots, have benefited from the downstream effects of this phenomenon. While Al-Qaeda has an Internet presence spanning nearly two decades, the TTP has been active on Twitter since May 2011, and has at any one given time enjoyed several thousand followers. Before the last suspension of their Twitter account, the TTP was tweeting under their handle (@alemarahweb) frequently, and on some days nearly hourly[50]. Indeed, between 2011 and 2014 the TTP found considerable online traction and social media play through their media branch, Umar Media. Umar Media offered a unique "behind the scenes" look at Taliban attacks, both in terms of preparation and execution, with video clips featuring Urdu and Pushto subtitles for an amplified audience. In 2013, the TTP was using Umar Media's Facebook page to regularly announce online job opportunities, as well as video editing, translations, sharing, uploading, downloading and data collection. The group also floated an email address on which the TTP could be contacted in case the Facebook page was deleted[51].

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[46] http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/terrorism-in-the-uk/11323599/Taliban-commander-caught-networking-on-LinkedIn.html
[47] https://www.icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/ICCT-Reed-Al-Qaeda-in-the-Indian-Subcontinent-May2016.pdf
[48] http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/articleshow/52544561.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst
[49] http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/transportation/railways/al-qaeda-hacks-indian-railways-website/articleshow/51214176.cms
[50] http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/islamic-state/11207681/How-terrorists-are-using-social-media.html

AQIS has relied on a similar stream of audio messages from Al-Qaeda's global chief Ayman al-Zawahiri to mobilise support against the governments of Pakistan, India and Bangladesh. Responsibility for attacks by AQIS against Pakistani army officer Brigadier Fazal Zahoor in Sargodha, and on PNS Zulfiqar in Karachi's Naval Dockyard in September 2014, was claimed by AQIS spokesperson Usama Mahmoud via Twitter. The original aim of the attack on PNS Zulfiqar was to hijack two Pakistani navy frigates and subsequently use these to attack the American and Indian navies. While the plan ultimately failed, this was the closest AQIS has come to pulling off a major terrorist attack in South Asia. This, even as Pakistan launched Operation Zarb-e-Azb in the restive tribal belt of North Waziristan to eliminate terrorist groups in the summer of 2014. But with non-state actors looking to offset battlefield setbacks while continuing to cultivate and curate transnational outreach, social media has become a powerful new tool in the South Asian terrorist toolkit. Indeed, one major challenge for the Pakistani state in the aftermath of the promulgation of its 2014 National Action Plan (NAP) has been finding ways to prevent digitised terror groups from misappropriating cellular networks and far-reaching lines of telecommunication, including cross-platform mobile messaging apps such as WhatsApp.

A Digitised Recruitment Marketplace

Today India has an estimated 450 million Internet users. While this greatly outstrips the 32 million Pakistanis that surf the Internet each day, a common feature of both sub-populations is their collective frequenting of social media platforms. Particularly problematic is the presence of prominent terror groups on social media platforms such as Facebook: Facebook is adding new users in Pakistan at a rate of one every 12 seconds, and an estimated 28 percent of social media users in India and Pakistan are said to be using two or more platforms on any given day[52]. While most Internet usage in Pakistan is still in English, the use of Roman Urdu has been identified as a staple trend-line on regional terrorist discussion forums.

Social networking sites are attractive to terrorist groups because of the flexibility in their features to control (and restrict) audience access, in addition to functioning as a veritable platform for early recruitment. Instead of being open to the public, page owners can set their pages to private; owners must then approve third party requests for access or invite them to join the page. Social media also provides a highly useful cover of anonymity for propagation of ideologies. With messaging apps and communication platforms increasingly employing end-to-end encryption, there is no practical way for intelligence agencies to decrypt this communication in real time. For terrorist groups, this makes it much easier to decentralize planning and execute attacks across borders. Indeed, a major problem for Pakistan has been terrorist attacks carried out by the Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (JuA) in Pakistan, but handled remotely by TTP operatives in eastern Afghanistan. The attack on Sehwan Sharif in February 2017, which killed 88 civilians, is just one recent example of how digitised communication has revolutionised the way terrorists operate in South Asia.

The advent of Daesh's Khorasan chapter has also created serious problems for state agencies looking to curtail the size and scope of the organization's recruitment dragnet. According to Indian news reports, Daesh recruitment in South Asia involves handlers as well as secure app-based messenger sites such as Telegram to solicit potential recruits, while concealing telephone numbers. Nasir Chaus, an alleged Daesh recruit who was the leader of the Daesh-Parbhani module in Maharashtra in 2016 told India's National Investigation Agency (NIA) he had been approached through an online channel, the administrator of which could broadcast and delete messages, alter the channel's name, profile image and link, as well as delete the channel completely[53]. While Daesh is yet to claim responsibility for an attack on Indian soil, security forces have in recent months rounded up a number of suspects believed to have been radicalised by digital content. Intelligence officials tracking the growth of the Bangladeshi Al-Qaeda affiliate Ansarullah Bangla, behind the 2016 Dhaka café attack, meanwhile, discovered to their chagrin a host of tech-savvy cadre of young, educated and highly motivated recruits with foreign linkages and active social media accounts.[54]

[51] http://www.newstatesman.com/asia/2013/08/twitter-jihadis-how-terror-groups-have-turned-social-media
[52] https://sites.stedwards.edu/apsmg434701-group2/history-of-social-media-in-pakistan/

State Responses: Go-It-Alone or Regional Cooperation?

Online spaces available to terrorist networks remain a vulnerable chink in state security apparatuses across South Asia. Social media service providers such as Facebook and Twitter have established policies that prohibit the use of their platforms by terrorists and prohibit the promotion and indeed production of terrorist violence. By 2016 Twitter had closed 125,000 ISIL-affiliated accounts[55]. However, gaps remain. Technically there are no algorithms, neural networks or artificial intelligence mechanisms with which social platforms can put a check on the bulk of posts being made every day[56]. Analysts in Pakistan have also pointed to hoax sites that prove to be troublesome red herrings in the monitoring of online terrorist traffic. In recent years, the number of sites sympathetic to the TTP has spiked. Frequent site outages also make it exceedingly difficult to track online content and sentiment. In the West, states have begun creating their own encryption policies, but these have often hit parliamentary snags. India is presently in the process of devising an indigenous national encryption policy based on a multi-stakeholder model that can integrate government, industry, academia and civil society opinion to ensure a safe balance between security and the smooth flow of data[57].

Following the launch of its National Action Plan (NAP) in December 2014, the Pakistani government ordered the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) to take action against a string of social media pages and online videos posted by terrorist groups. The Twitter account of JUD chief Hafiz Saeed was suspended thereafter, but the organisation's website can still be accessed and Twitter accounts under his name still exist. The same holds true for pages run by the TTP, which quickly replicate if censored. Similarly, in 2016 the Al Rahma Welfare Organization (RWO) was banned for relying on social media to carry out fundraising activities from Pakistan, by posting instructions for donors on how to transfer funds to bank accounts for the organisation in Pakistan and the UK. However, the Facebook and Twitter accounts for the RWO remain active, soliciting donations as of early April 2016[58].

Common to Pakistan and India is another challenge: the line between the need to crack down on terrorist propaganda in new media spaces on the one hand, and censorship of free speech on the other, can be hard to distinguish. In Pakistan, the Cyber Crime Act of 2009 sought the elimination of cyber terrorism through monitoring of Internet activities and systematic arrests of those deemed by the Bill to be cyber terrorists. Pakistan's subsequent Prevention of Electronic Crimes Bill 2016 mandates harsher penalties for offences, and goes one step further to criminalise acts that are not considered unlawful in comparable nation-states. Clauses aiming to restrict Internet freedoms, curb freedom of speech, access to information and the right to privacy still continue to be opposed given their infringement on civic freedoms.

A fraught history of bilateral India-Pakistan tensions has also prevented meaningful engagement between the two countries, and in particular their intelligence agencies, on the subject of counterterrorism. In January 2004, both Pakistan and India agreed in principle to set up a Joint Anti-Terror Mechanism (JATM). The JATM was conceived as a joint institutional mechanism that could identify and implement counterterrorism initiatives and investigations. But ultimately, JATM never moved beyond limited information sharing. There are also few instances of multilateral regional counterterror cooperation in South Asia. In contrast to Central and Southeast Asia, South Asia has yet to develop a regional organisation based on security cooperation. The SAARC Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism's Article VIII calls for member states to exchange

[53] http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-another-is-sympathiser-held-from-parbhani-2242379
[54] https://qz.com/722901/the-young-and-educated-home-grown-bangladeshi-terrorists-behind-the-dhaka-attacks/
[55] http://www.nationaldefensemagazine.org/archive/2016/may/pages/specialoperatorsseeknewsocialmediatools.aspx
[56] http://www.insightsonindia.com/2016/09/02/indias-world-social-media-globalizing-terrorism/
[57] http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/articleshow/54601987.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst
[58] https://www.camstoll.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Social-Media-Report-4.22.16.pdf
[59] http://jinnah-institute.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Policing-Cybercrime-A-Comparative-Analysis-of-the-Prevention-of-Electronic-Crimes-Bill.pdf

information, intelligence, and expertise to prevent terrorism. A Terrorist Offences Monitoring Desk was established in 1995 in Colombo to help collect, assess and disseminate information on terrorist offences, tactics, strategies and methods. An Additional Protocol to the SAARC Regional Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism was signed in 2002, and adopted in 2004, with all the seven member states ratifying it to "wage a joint war against terrorism". But for this to happen, changes will be have to be made in the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) of individual member countries for the Convention to be implemented. Greater transnational cooperation will also be required if actions by groups such as the JuA, which has quickly morphed into a deadly new Taliban progenitor operating out of Afghanistan, are to be curtailed.

Conclusion

Through the arrest of dozens of high-ranking Al-Qaeda operatives in Pakistan since 2001, the recovery of computer hard-drives has revealed that terrorist networks in South Asia continue to rely heavily on site maps, anti-surveillance methods, and other digital communication tools. On social media, terrorists groups continue to leverage new media spaces to their advantage. To curb their effectiveness, the government of Pakistan will need to update its proscribed list of terrorist organisations, corresponding where possible with UN sanctions lists to block accounts held by individuals and entities subject to these authorities. This will help in identifying and blocking the accounts of co-facilitators that are associated with fundraising activities of designated terrorists. However, a challenge will continue to be balancing the privacy rights of citizens using social media with the technology and security capabilities available to law-enforcement. To reverse the tide of militancy there is also a need to take a holistic approach that includes the political mobilisation to combat terrorism and violent extremism. Under it's National Action Plan, Pakistan must also ensure that designated terrorist financiers and their fundraising co-facilitators whose accounts are suspended remain blocked from establishing new accounts. Beyond this, states will have to be prepared to share real time information (such as the accounts of terrorist financiers, fundraisers and co-facilitators that have been blocked) with social media service providers. Intelligence agencies, meanwhile, need to ask whether social media, and especially platforms such as Twitter, can allow for a more sophisticated scope for analysis of terrorist methods. Ultimately, states across South Asia confronting terrorist threats cannot afford to be sanguine about old-school policy dragnets that are highly unsuited to a rapidly evolving, media-savvy, terrorist threat matrix.

CULTURE & CO-PRODUCTION

9

CULTURAL EXCHANGE
CREATING OPPORTUNITIES IN DIGITAL SPACES

Ammara Durrani

"Partly because of empire, all cultures are involved in one another; none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, differentiated and un-monolithic."

Dr. Edward W. Said, Culture and Imperialism

Legacy of Shared Heritage

If arts and culture could be the sole indicator of judging a political system's legacy, then 'empire' could arguably be the biggest contributor to South Asia's collective human good. Carved out of the sub-continent's last (British) imperial order, the two nuclear armed nation-states of Pakistan and India stand richer through their individualistic territorial claims to shared ancient cultural heritage. Yet, they have not done well on the index of post-Independence cultural exchange and co-creation that pales in historical comparison.

Physically conjoined, the countries' protracted conflict has created seemingly unsurmountable distances between the hearts and minds of their societies, of which culture producers and intermediaries are but only small moving parts. What each country has inherited as heritage through Partition of the empire has become its alone, excluding the other. The current state-level dispute, as to which country can keep the Harappan Dancing Girl (excavated by the British in the 1920s from the ruins of Moen Jo Daro of the Indus Valley Civilization in Sindh), is a case in point[60].

Despite the conflict, there is a continuing but modest legacy of cultural and people-to-people exchanges and trade between both countries. Though it has declined over time, bilateral trade was estimated to be around $2.61 billion for the fiscal year 2015-16[61]. This trade of goods also includes books – both English and Urdu –with Indian Urdu books widely sold in Pakistan[62].

Interrupted and unsteady decades of cultural exchange -- primarily sports diplomacy; art exhibitions; theatre plays; musical concerts; literary, media and professional conferences; student, youth, journalists and elected leaders' visits -- have finally, and more recently, created a space for actual cultural co-production and co-creation. We are seeing it predominantly in Bollywood, which – being a bigger regional industry -- has roped in Pakistani actors and musicians for film productions generating profits. Despite political tensions, Bollywood film Raees (2017) starring India's Shahrukh Khan and Pakistan's Mahira Khan has been a great success in both domestic and international markets, with a total domestic collection of roughly $2 million, surpassing the lifetime collections of Shah Rukh Khan's estimated $1.5 million grosser Jab Tak Hai Jaan (2012)[63].

For its part, Pakistan's strong music industry has often attracted collaborations with Indian musicians. It continues so through new global corporate-sponsored music production platforms like the Coke Studios,

[60] For two versions, see "Now, Pakistan to demand 'Dancing Girl from' India", Times of India, October 9, 2016, http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/-Now-Pakistan-to-demand-Dancing-Girl-from-India/articleshow/54764663.cms; and Bashir, Muhammad Majid, "The dancing girl in distress", Pakistan Today, January 29, 2017, http://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2017/01/29/the-dancing-girl-in-distress/.

[61] For a contemporary and excellent analysis, see Hughes, Lyndsay, "India-Pakistan Relations: Part Thee – Economic and Cultural Aspects", Future Directions International, Strategic Analysis Paper, October 27, 2016, http://www.futuredirections.org.au/publication/india-pakistan-relations-part-three-economic-cultural-aspects/.

[62] "Publishers need to import more Indian Urdu books", Dawn, December 1, 2015, https://www.dawn.com/news/1223381.

which not only has a loyal domestic fan following but has drawn a big appeal across the border in India also, despite the latter having its own version. Award-winning Bollywood playback singer Shilpa Rao, who debut in Pakistan's Coke Studio in season 9 as the first Indian artist to perform in the show, said about her first experience across the border:

"I met [Pakistani music band] Noori in Delhi for lunch at a common friends' gathering…We hung out, sang songs together and that is when they asked me to come to Pakistan and sing for Coke Studio. I agreed – Ali took it very seriously and actually got me here to record the song. It's basically musicians bonding with each other. One song can make you friends for life – that is the power of music.[64]"

Both countries also made history in 2015 when their acclaimed artists, Rashid Rana (Pakistan) and Shilpa Gupta (India) jointly presented their works as an exhibition entitled My East is Your West, at the prestigious Venice Biennale in the absence of official pavilions from either country[65]. There are increasing exchanges between Pakistani and Indian fashion industries also[66].

From Mass Media to Digital Spaces

Arguably, the biggest shift in the 70-year India-Pakistan conflict has occurred not in political-public attitudes or the state power balance, but in our countries' use of media and communications platforms for conducting political, social and economic relations. Both are experiencing a successful transition from a mass media (print, radio and television) monopoly to a digital-new media revolution.

Does this technological transition impact our shared cultural heritage and respective cultural capital? Has it changed attitudes and behaviors for the better, towards peaceful co-existence and cultural co-production?

In the new media era, these questions are very important to consider the scale and effectiveness that is necessary to propel phenomenal growth, innovation and optimal impact of South Asian arts and culture in a globalised world.

Bollywood (India) and Coke Studio (Pakistan) are remarkable and they are created in real time and space. At the same time, their successes have been amplified by major responses from audiences and consumers that are also engaged on social media and represent a rising new generation of 'millennial netizens'. Though examples cited above have elements of cross-border influence, exchange and co-production, the net effect remains that of Indian and Pakistani cultures living within national silos and boundaries, not least because of legal restrictions and political pressures.

They largely remain national success stories.

In fact, the Pakistan-India digital space is currently more a sounding board where netizens talk – often with animosity -- about Pakistani and Indian cultures as distinct, separable and comparable. For instance, passions on both sides of the border rose in 2016 when Pakistani actors were threatened away and barred from India by Hindutva groups, who also threatened Indian filmmakers and actors against working with Pakistani talent[67]. This divisiveness played out most in digital and social media spheres – primarily Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and

[63] "'Raees' box-office collection Day 10: Shah Rukh Khan's film earns Rs 128.96 crore", Times of India, February 20, 2017, http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/entertainment/hindi/bollywood/box-office/raees-box-office-collection-day-10-shah-rukh-khans-film-earns-rs-128-96-crore/articleshow/56968783.cms.
[64] "Here's what Bollywood singer Shilpa Rao has to say about being part of Coke Studio", Express Tribune, June 24, 2016, https://tribune.com.pk/story/1129354/heres-bollywood-singer-shilpa-rao-say-part-coke-studio/.
[65] 'India and Pakistan's historic Biennale collaboration, The Art Newspaper, May 6, 2015, http://theartnewspaper.com/news/india-and-pakistan-s-historic-biennale-collaboration/
[66] "4 Pakistani Designers Make History in Indian Lakme Fashion Week 2014", August 24, 2014, http://www.brandsynario.com/4-pakistani-designers-make-history-in-indian-lakme-fashion-week-2014/.
[67] Ali, Rozina, "A Troubling Culture War between India and Pakistan", The New Yorker, November 2, 2016, http://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/the-india-pakistan-film-wars.

the blogosphere -- where doves and hawks used various communications approaches to opine:

'It has left many artists uncertain about what will be considered "anti-Indian." [Siddharth] Varadarajan, the Wire editor, responding to the nationalist sentiment amid the Johar controversy, wrote a "confession" [produced online versions in text and YouTube video[68]] about his relations with Pakistanis, a beautiful ode to some of his friendships with his neighboring country. But, elsewhere, his colleague Sidharth Bhatia was more anxious. "Don't be surprised if soon, reading Pakistani authors or being Facebook friends with Pakistanis… could be declared anti-national," Bhatia wrote.[69]'

Voiced in the digital sphere, a more disturbing argument from India's anti-Pakistan talent camp uses political economy of culture as a basis for discriminate separation:

"…I want to talk to every Pakistani import to Bollywood. This letter could have well been addressed to Adnan Sami, Raahat Fateh Ali Khan, Mahira Khan… the list is endless and keeps increasing every year. Fawad, I don't think you can deny how much love we have showered on you over the past few years. We have given you more money in two years than what you could have possibly earned in Pakistan in 10 years. We have given you recognition that you would have never been able to earn sitting in Karachi. We made you act in great movies, we helped you endorse brands. And hey, we also made you a bigger star in Pakistan…Though you keep mum about the money, you have earned here, we know that you are grateful to India for showering you with wealth too. Thank you for acknowledging that.[70]"

Not be left behind in this contest of cultural negation, Pakistan responded by declaring a blanket ban on Indian media content on its radio and television. Pakistan's leading English daily Dawn summed it, thus:

The result has been to the detriment of the populations of both countries. Work and opportunities for collaboration have been lost and potential revenues thrown to the wind. Pakistan's cinema industry, which had in recent years started showing signs of revival (and consequently investment) after decades in the doldrums, is now worse off. Cineplexes appear as ghosts of their former selves and screens have had to be shut down — the hard fact is that the country's own cinematic output, even in addition to the Western fare that cinema-owners are able to put up, are nowhere near enough to sustain the industry at the levels that Bollywood made possible. Worryingly, the longer this 'dry' period persists, the harder it will be to reverse course.[71]"

This argument posits a fundamental question for the future of cultural co-production in Pakistan and India: Do nation-states believe that by claiming cultural superiority they can win the global creative economy game by playing solo? On the contrary, such an argument reduces the dynamic force of culture to the status of immovable, exclusive territory to be fenced, walled, protected by force and insulated from 'other' influences and contributors -- a regressive and self-defeating antithesis of a healthy and constructively competitive creative economy.

Going Beyond Conversations: Online Co-Creations

Since Independence in 1947, both countries have signed at least 47 bilateral treaties, agreements, MoUs, declarations and protocols. Of these, only two pertain to cultural exchange and cooperation. The first was a comprehensive Cultural Cooperation Agreement (1988) detailing exchange and cooperation in conventional arts and culture fields, which has primarily yielded the existing levels of people-to-people and

[68] Varadarajan, Siddarth, "J'Accuse…? No. I Confess.", The Wire, October 21, 2016, https://thewire.in/74706/i-confess/.
[69] Ali, Rozina, "A Troubling Culture War between India and Pakistan", The New Yorker, November 2, 2016, http://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/the-india-pakistan-film-wars.
[70] Banerjee, Soumyadipta, "Dear Fawad Khan. It's time. Go back to Pakistan.", https://bollywoodjournalist.com, September 20, 2016, https://bollywoodjournalist.com/2016/09/20/dear-fawad-khan-its-time-go-back-to-pakistan/.
[71] Dawn, January 29, 2017, https://www.dawn.com/news/1311409.

cultural exchanges[72]. The second was a rather non-descript and non-substantive MoU on Cultural Cooperation (2012) based on the 1988 agreement [73]. None of these two agreements specifically refer to ICTs and new media as sources, tools or platforms for cultural cooperation and co-production. The terms of reference for bilateral cooperation in the field of telecommunications continues to be dictated by a 1977 agreement limited to outmoded telephone, telefax and telegram services[74].

This is in stark contrast to the rapid advancements made in the Northern Hemisphere (North and South America, Europe and Australia) where countries leading in ICT innovation, goods and services have actively entered into bilateral agreements and treaties for media, art and cultural co-production based on new media technologies. Canada's comprehensive frameworks for its companies entering into international digital media co-production with other countries and entities is an excellent example of how Western governments are sharply aligned with technological innovation and are optimizing their economic growth through creative industries[75].

In the case of Pakistan and India, digital and new media technologies have reached on ground to a scalable extent. Cultural producers -- such as Bollywood, Coke Studio and news media organisations – are actively using these for content creation and promotion in domestic markets. However, scope for across-the-border co-production and co-creation has either remained limited because governments have not caught up with technology, or is constantly under threat because governments have allowed politics to prevail over cooperation.

In the pre-ICTs (information and communication technologies) era, cultural exchange mainly targeted students as an opportunity of personal growth through physical travel, discovering a foreign country, and experiencing a variety of intercultural and academic experiences. But the Internet and social media networks are providing new ways for people to interact, communicate, connect, and be ever closer in virtual spaces -- beyond borders and without any need for physical travel. They are creating dynamic ecosystems that nurture cultural exchanges between people and foster co-production through the content they create and share in virtual time and space[76]:

"Social media has impacted on the cultural production and cultural intermediaries by impacting the mainstream news, by 'managing and coordinating artistic production, gate-keeping, curating, cataloguing, editing, scheduling, distributing, marketing/advertising and retailing'… In the era of 'we are all cultural intermediaries', media audiences has transformed from passive consumers to active producers and intermediaries.[77]"

New media has empowered audiences and consumers – the netizens who are also cultural intermediaries --- to directly participate and influence the processes of cultural exchange and production, both online and offline. In the case of Pakistan and India, the digital space has heralded a "transformation in cultural communication[78]" that actors in the arts and culture sectors need to recognise, engage and manage.

See, for example, social media initiatives like:

[72] Official website of High Commission of India, Islamabad (Pakistan), http://mea.gov.in/Portal/LegalTreatiesDoc/PAB1233.pdf.
[73] Ibid, http://mea.gov.in/Portal/LegalTreatiesDoc/PA12B0300.pdf.
[74] Ibid, http://mea.gov.in/Portal/LegalTreatiesDoc/PA77B1726.pdf. [75] International Digital Media Co-Production: A Guide for Canadian Companies, Interactive Ontario, 2014, http://interactiveontario.com/resources/coproductionii/.
[76] "Social networks & cultural exchange", January 31, 2016, http://socialmediasculture.blogspot.com/2016/01/social-networks-cultural-exchange.html.
[77] "Cultural production, cultural intermediaries and social media, May 29, 2016, https://meco6936.wordpress.com/2015/05/29/cultural-production-cultural-intermediaries-and-social-media/.
[78] Russo, Angelina, "Transformations in Cultural Communication: Social Media, Cultural Exchange, and Creative Connections, Curator: The Museum Journal, Volume 54, Issue 3, 5 July 2011, pp. 327-346, http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.2151-6952.2011.00095.x/full.

Aman ki Asha (http://amankiasha.com/), Aaghaz-e-Dosti (https://aaghazedosti.wordpress.com/), Romancing the Border (https://www.facebook.com/RomancingTheBorder) and The Pind Collective (http://thepindcollective.com/).

These are small-scale but hugely inspiring cultural dialogue and co-creation initiatives primarily located and conducted in the virtual space.

The content of these digital platforms is predominantly millennial in character and features: young, nobly idealistic, makeshift, with untapped potential yearning for big breakthroughs. It comprises mainly of youth and civil society activist-led advocacy campaigns, messaging, exchange visits, events, articles, publications, poems, songs, videos, student art etc. These products can influence young minds and hearts towards peace and cooperation. But when such critical mass for peace is ultimately produced, then it needs bigger, mainstream platforms and spaces to create impact for change. That's where large-scale culture producers like Bollywood, Coke Studio, news media, fashion, arts, crafts and other tradable and profitable industries step into the picture.

It is crucial to understand that the digital space is primarily a vehicle, a tool, a platform and a space for exchange of dialogue, information, coordination, limited co-creation, marketing and promotion. It cannot be a substitute for large-scale cultural co-creation – the kind that generates economic activity and social change -- that occurs in real face time and space, physically bringing people together to work on creative projects and activities. At best, the digital space multiples real-time production's outreach and impact, while also offering e-commerce as a dynamic medium for trade of cultural products.

The new media space cannot be a game-changer on its own. It needs large-scale tangible (often traditional) industries -- such as the creative industry -- to thrive on.

But in the conflict-ridden environment of South Asia, if the digital space is not operationally linked to thriving, uninterrupted, sustainable and equitable large-scale creative industries, then it poses a real danger for all online initiatives and culture intermediaries. In such a scenario, the new media space will become just another extension and a mere sounding board for the conflict that threatens the already constrained levels of cultural exchange between India and Pakistan. We have seen this happen to the region's traditional media space (print and television) where – barring a few exceptions -- the bilateral conflict is played out on a daily basis through sensational and hate-peddling narrative and reporting filtered through a 'national security' prism.

The divisiveness played out in the digital space on the issue of Pakistani talent in Bollywood is an example of new media succumbing to old media characteristics and behavior. Left on its own, the Pakistan-India digital space will become just another political rhetorical battleground between both countries. This could deter the millennial youth from participating, just as it has retreated from the traditional media space that continues to be hogged by an aging old school and hawkish policy elite.

Therefore, the creative challenge is to protect this fledgling digital space and transform it into a creative communications arena where culture agents and intermediaries from both countries can find sanctuary, inspiration, entrepreneurial relationships, and opportunities to exchange, collaborate and co-create. The fact that culture producers and consumers share the digital space equally makes its experience and production participatory, innovative, creative and fun. Ultimately, the key is to allow large-scale Pakistan-India cultural exchange and co-production to happen in real-time, so that the digital space can thrive on its own wings. Because content is king, both online and offline.

10

CULTIVATING CULTURES OF HARMONY THROUGH ONLINE SPACES

Kaveri Bedi

While it has been 70 years since Pakistan and India have gone their separate ways, the traumatic memories of Partition have continued to erupt through political, popular cultural, scholarly, social media discourses at crucial moments. The Indo-Pak wars of 1965, 1971; the low-intensity conflict at Kargil in 1999; the Kashmir imbroglio since the emergence of the armed rebellion in J&K in 1989; nuclear tests of 1998; multiple episodes of terrorist attacks on mainland India in the post-millennium era have triggered sour memories of the truncation of 1947 that have been strategically couched through provocative rhetoric. The finely choreographed articulation of these memories through multiple discursive sites is largely targeted towards instilling a chauvinistic notion of nationalism and in reinforcing jingoist xenophobia against the demonic 'other'. However, the Partition narrative has also often been employed to cultivate and engender harmony between India and Pakistan by calling upon similitude in terms of shared culture, language, history, and trauma. This paper seeks to explore a few such narratives of harmony, and in doing so engages with online spaces so as to find cultural endeavors that exemplify shared alliances between the people across the border.

Chandra Prakash Dwivedi's Pinjar: Beyond Borders (2003), based on Amrita Pritam's novel by the same name, is one of just a few Bollywood films to have directly engaged with the theme of Partition. The film primarily engages with the traumatic struggles that the women of Punjab suffered during the vivisection between Pakistan and India that divided the two Punjabs, its (punj—five) rivers, villages, fields, crops, homes and families. While Pinjar cultivates palpable affect and emotion through story, performativity, sonic, visual, lyrical, spatial elements, and in so doing, succeeds in foregrounding the torment of the female protagonist—Puro (played by Urmila Matodkar), it nonetheless conveys a strategic misrepresentation of Partition by overtly emphasising the Hindu-Indian as largely the victim and the Muslim-Pakistani as the dehumanised aggressor. In Dwivedi's film, Indians are largely synonymous with Hinduism, passivity, victimhood, while the Pakistanis are stereotypically portrayed as the sword brandishing, villainous, barbaric rapists and abductors.

Dwivedi's Pinjar is not alone, several popular Bollywood films including JP Dutta's Border (1997), Anil Sharma's Gadar: Ek Prem Katha (2001), JP Dutta's LoC Kargil (2003), Kabir Khan's Phantom (2015) et al, have affectively reinstated similar stereotypical imaginations of the Pakistani as the demonic, aggressive 'other'. In this limited and reductive portrayal of the (Muslim) Pakistani, there is a calculative erasure of commonality shared between the people of the two countries, be it in terms of their shared history, culture, language, religion. In Pinjar for instance, the shared Punjabiat amongst the Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus of Punjab is purposefully overlooked, who are instead inaccurately articulated through dissimilar appearances, attires, practicing dissimilar values and speaking dissimilar languages.

It should however be noted that counter-narratives that speak of harmony, friendship, similitude between the two countries also exist. While such narratives might not be frequently making it to the mainstream, they are not peripheral either. Creative communications have been taking shape at different levels: through for instance the Aao Dosti Karein initiative, that has been exchanging letters between school students across the borders since 2001; student exchange programs like the one organized by Delhi Policy Group and Heinrich Böll Foundation in 2009, which included graduate/post-graduate students from Pakistan, Afghanistan, India, in which the author had also participated and consequently unlearnt her biases; films like Sabiha Sumar's Khamosh Pani (2003), a collaboration of an Indian screenwriter, a Pakistani filmmaker and a Franco-German team that captures the life of a Sikh woman who was kidnapped during Partition and was

forced into marrying a Muslim man in Pakistan.

The Internet is a powerful medium that, by means of aiding communication between citizens from across the border, has allowed for the deconstruction of deeply held prejudices, and in engendering a peace-building process between the people(s) of both the countries.

The 'Google Reunion' ad (2013) can be called upon as a case in point, that exemplifies the significance of the Internet in bridging the distance (geographical and emotional) between the people of the two nations, shedding biases, and in largely cultivating a seamless vibration of bonhomie. In this, the ad romantically uses the trope of the unbroken bond of love and brotherhood between India and Pakistan, as it highlights the significance of 'Google' in achieving the same. In the ad, two grandchildren, each hailing from India and Pakistan (synecdochic of the millennial generation in both the countries, who, while temporally distanced from the event of Partition, are still emotionally connected to it), plan a meeting of their grandfathers, who had once spent their childhood years together in Lahore, before being forcibly separated in 1947. The ad climaxes with a goose-bump worthy scene in which an old and wrinkled Yusuf uncle from Lahore stands teary-eyed at the doorstep of his Indian friend Baldev's house in New Delhi, as he wishes a chocked Baldev a 'Happy Birthday yaara'. The ad, that was released on both television and Internet, was thoroughly loved and praised by all, Indians, Pakistanis, diaspora, and garnered itself one of the maximum viewership on YouTube, which is presently to the count of 13,811,892. A look at the comments section of the same on YouTube finds refreshingly pacific exchanges between Indians and Pakistanis, who share serious-informal discussions on options like reunion between both the countries, open-borders, more exchange of people, artists etc across the border.

Another video that was widely appreciated among Pakistani, Indian and diaspora audiences was All India Bakchod's (AIB) video: 'When India spoke to Pakistan', published on August 15, 2014 on YouTube. In the video, a few Pakistanis and Indians are randomly made to telephonically speak to one another on the occasion of their respective Independence Days. The seven and a half minutes video captures both the excitement and nervousness of youngsters speaking to their counterparts on the 'other' side, mostly for the first time, as they curiously discuss topics ranging from Bollywood, boyfriends, girlfriends, Facebook, Shahrukh Khan, Arsenal. The videographed telephonic conversations extend on to the comments section below the video, with Pakistanis and Indians congratulating the team of AIB for making the potent video, inviting each other over to their respective countries, discussing the futility of hate politics etc. Such refreshing videos that are easily disseminated across the borders through the internet, assist in breaking the stereotypical notions that have long been mechanically fed to the populations of both the nations.

The Internet has also seen Pakistani and Indian netizens collaborating through social media initiative as well as through joint online endeavors with the motivation of bridging the gap through dialogues, sharing experiences, traumas, similarities…so as to be able to unlearn the hate that has been normalised and cultivated through school text books, political, media, popular cultural propaganda. Aaghaz-e-Dosti that started in 2012 is one such example of a joint initiative that reaches out to students, common people, politicians and victims of conflict like soldiers, prisoners, fishermen. The initiative connects people through social media, including a peace-building course called 'Friends Beyond Borders', in which people from either sides of the border engage in dialogue over different issues for eight weeks over Skype which are run on social media. The aim of this program through which students from India and Pakistan become 'e-pals', as they are tutored by mentors, academics, aims at "developing critical thinking, acceptance and respect for differences in order to celebrate similarities with a belief in peace and friendship as the sane way forward". Devika Mittal (can be found under the Twitter handle @devikasmittal) has been one of the Indian mentor's of this program in which she assisted three pairs, with each pair comprising of two students, each from Pakistan and India. In an interaction between Ms. Mittal and the author, the former passionately talks about the curious energy of the students from both the sides and about how the 'peace-building' course has been a boon in engendering the process of unlearning and transcending biases.

Such joint online ventures are becoming all the more imperative and relevant in the contemporary environment that has seen a drumbeat of jingoism particularly following the Uri attack that took place in September 2016 in the Indian administered state of Jammu & Kashmir, in which more than 15 Indian soldiers lost their lives at the hands of four terrorists who were suspected to have hailed from Pakistan.

Following the attack, Aaghaz-e-Dosti activists at Lahore gathered at the city's Liberty Market with banners and raised their voice for peace with the slogan 'Save our future-end war mongering between Pakistan and India' (Kamall 2016). An online campaign also took off around the same time, by a peace activist Ram Subramanium under the #ProfileForPeace, which became popular amongst Indians, Pakistanis and Diaspora peaceniks. The campaign required people to change their social media profile pictures to ones with them holding a placard reading: 'Dear leaders, do not let the actions of few violent men write the future of many people like me, who want peace'. Within days, one found a number of social media display-pictures being switched to the same.

Another popular campaign under the same hashtag had taken off on social media following the arbitrary ban in 2015 that had stopped Pakistani creative artists from performing in India. This was initiated by Shiv Sena's ban on Ghulam Ali's concert in Mumbai. This campaign that had also become very popular across the people of the two nations read: 'I am an Indian/Pakistani, I don't hate Pakistan/India, I am not alone, there are many like me'. But of course, there were several instances of people tweaking their sentences, e.g. 'I am a Hindu, and my best friend is a Muslim', 'I am a Pakistani and my best buddy is an Indian', 'I am an Indian and I would love to visit Lahore someday'….

The '1947 Partition Archive' is another example of an online platform that ingeniously reaches out to Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and the diaspora communities, with the end goal of sharing Partition experiences, so as to engender sharing and healing of the latent wounds suffered at the hands of the apocalyptic event. According to the initiative's Facebook page, which has over some 0.6 million followers, the Partition Archive is a 'grassroots non-political effort to document and preserve eye-witness accounts from all communities affected by the partition of British India, for future generations'. The endeavour was initiated by Guneeta Bhalla in 2011 with the intention of recording life stories shaped by Partition and gathering crowd-sourced oral history recordings through an online platform. In this, the project has people volunteering from across the border, who co-ordinate through monthly digital meetings.

The experiences of the people who lived through the event, their vivid and faint memories of life, environment before, during and after it are filmed and made available on the official 1947 Partition Archive website, as well as on its YouTube and other social media pages.

In the videos archiving the first-hand experiences of the witnesses, there are repetitive instances of people emotionally attributing the 'madness' of the communally charged truncation to all communities, with one of them noting that 'god did not intervene because not a soul acted in his name'. There are others in which people fondly reminisce about the secular and harmonious inter-religious experiences in the years before the 'independence' of British India and the consequent partition. In this context, Bhalla (Mohan 2015) talks about some experiences in which, while talking about their pre-Partition life, the interviewees identified themselves as only Punjabis or Bengalis, without calling upon religious or nationalistic ideas. Also evident in the series of videos are instances of interviewers and interviewees expressing their innate desire to visit the 'other' side. All in all, the sentiments echoed through these videos are seen resonating with those of a famous Punjabi song Ki Banu Duniya Da (what will be made of this world), has been sung by a popular Punjabi folk singer Gurdas Mann:

Saanu sauda ni pugda
Ho raavi ton Jhanaab puchda
Ki haal ae Sutluj da haaye
Ki haal ae Sutluj da.
Painde dur Peshawar'an de oye
Painde dur Peshawar'an de oye

O Wagah de border te. O wagah de border te
Raah puchdi Lahore'an de haye
Painde dur Peshawar'an de oye
Painde dur Peshawar'an de oye

Emotive lines that poetically express the deep urge of the two ruptured Punjabs to meet again. In this, it is lamented that Partition did not serve anyone well; the rivers of Punjab – Ravi (India) and Chenab (Pakistan) (that were arbitrarily separated, as a line of partition gushed through them in 1947), ask each other about Sutlej, the one river that flows through Pakistan and India. A somber eastern Punjab talks to its western brother, as it asks the latter for the directions to Lahore from the Wagah border that divides the two countries on the Western front. The chorus finds the singers crooning about the roads to Peshawar that are now far, far away.

Coke Studio also exemplifies a brilliant marketing strategy by Coca Cola (regardless of the author's critical notions about the aerated drink), and came to life in Brazil before crossing over to Pakistan and later, to India. The forum aesthetically brings together musical artists across genres and styles, as they magically fuse contemporary with sufi, folk, classical.

Coke Studio India produced a cover of Gurdas Mann's song that was posted online with Diljit Dosanjh and Jatinder Shah. The song was released on August 15, 2015 and has accomplished itself a substantial amount of popularity and over some 2 crore views on YouTube. A glance at the comments section of the song finds the pleasant emergence of a palpable camaraderie amongst people from across the Wagah Border as they exchange notes about a Punjabi unison. With comments like 'I love Punjab, no matter if it's in Pakistan or India'; 'Gurdas Mann is great, we love him here'; 'both the Punjabs should unite, we have so many similarities, we at the borders suffered the maximum during the Partition' etc., one finds music, lyrics, language and culture cultivating a dimension that transcends limited geo-political borders and worldviews. While discussing the popularity of Coke Studio in both the nations, Sanjay Monie (2011) exclaims that the initiative has breathed "New life into the rich tapestry of the subcontinent, by harvesting the unique music of the region, at once diverse yet instantly recognisable as part of a continuum".

Coke Studio (Pakistan) released another much-loved song, Paar Channa De (across the Chenab river), that narrates the popular Punjabi folk-tale of Sohni-Mahiwal, which is about two inter-religious lovers who drowned in each other's arms. The song that exudes a goose-bump worthy atmosphere, is the first of its kind in Coke Studio to have an Indian singer Shilpa Rao sharing the space with Pakistani band Noori. The song was released in September 2016, the same period that had also experienced jingoism and hate-speeches echoing from either sides of the border following the Uri attacks. In this sense, an 'Indo-Pak' musical blending that enjoyed trans-border love and appreciation, particularly during 'times of hate', indicated towards the balming, transcendental effect of musical intimacy.

Such shared endeavors, be in musical, peace hashtags in 'times of hate', oral narrations of the shared traumas of partition help in reminding us as much about our shared anxieties, pain, apprehensions, as about our shared cultural heritage, language, history. The space that these initiatives create for online dialogues amongst the viewers is equally significant as it builds scope for further dialogues. There are of course the occasional jingoistic comments, but, by and large, it is obvious the there is scope for counter-narratives.

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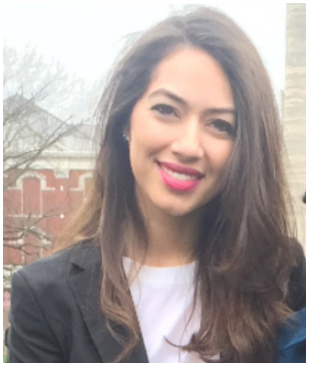
TASK FORCE

AMAL KHAN



Amal Khan is Features Editor at The Nation and was previously Op-ed editor for the same publication. She was awarded the 2016 Daniel Pearl Fellowship and spent 6 months at the Los Angeles Business Journal and the Los Angeles Times, and trained in investigative and data journalism at the University of Missouri. She holds a Bachelors degree in Government from Smith College and a Masters degree in International Relations from the University of Warwick.

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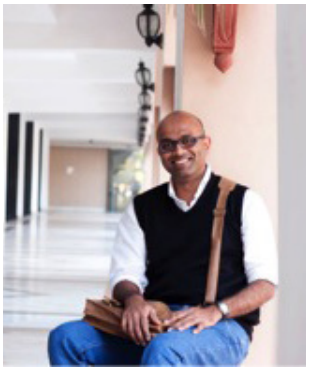

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His book of satirical non-fiction, How to Make Enemies and Offend People (Penguin Viking) was published in 2013 to favourable reviews. He is the editor of The Pleasure Principle (Amaryllis, 2016), an anthology of erotic stories, and his first book of short fiction, Autoplay: Not-So Stories (HarperCollins) was published last month. He is one of the humourists profiled in the documentary on humour/stand-up culture in India 'I am Offended' (2015). He is a regular speaker at literary, academic and media festivals/forums on subjects such as free speech, humour, labour rights, and the challenges facing news media in the digital era.nomics, and technology.

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He grew up in Lucknow in a Partition refugee family and studied at Delhi University. He prides himself at having made numerous Pakistani friends online without ever having visited Pakistan. He tweets as @DilliDurAst, the handle being a reference to Nizamuddin Auliya's famous curse, 'Delhi is still far'.

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