Ideational Dynamics and Identity Politics: Hindutva's Influence on the India-Pakistan Peace Process

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Abstract: The identity politics as part of a Hindutva strategy has played crucial role in worsening Indo-Pak relations by hindering success of any bilateral peace process. Historically, India and Pakistan have involved in various peace processes but all to no avail. This research design follows exploratory and correlational approaches. The results are extrapolated by analyzing the quantitative and qualitative data obtained for the study. Using social constructivism as a theoretical framework, the study examines how ideational factors, propagated by Hindutva through the creation of 'us versus them' narratives or 'myths' constructing threats to Hindus, proved to be instrumental in forging a negative image of Pakistan which is intricately woven around the constructed perception of its dominant religion, Islam, and its adherents i.e., Muslims. The study reveals that the association of negative identities like those of terrorists and enemies with Pakistan as part of Hindutva agenda, has negatively affected India-Pakistan peace-processes. However, it suggests that adopting a multifaceted approach to peace can significantly contribute to the success of bilateral peace process.

Key words: Hindutva Ideology, Constructed Identities, Islamophobia, Terrorism, Peace process

1. Introduction

South Asia holds immense geo-political and strategic significance at global stage but struggles with complex interstate, regional and international disputes especially those between two regional and nuclear powers i.e., India and Pakistan. India, the largest South Asian state, shares its western boundary with Pakistan. Both countries have shared history as two communities in the subcontinent. Religious nationalism, instrumentalized for mobilizing the masses to get independence from colonizers in the 20th century, remained important in creation of both states. The entire political movement for Pakistan centered on Islam with the state carved out of the subcontinent as the land for Muslims. On the other hand, the Hindu nationalism, in form of Hindutva, also put all the efforts to make India a Hindu state but the ethno-cultural and religious diversity, which the secular leader Gandhi envisioned for the well-being of Indians, ultimately led to adoption of secular identity for the state, which is widely debated today. The existing Hindu nationalism, along with the role of ideational factors, undoubtedly has implications for bilateral peace between both states.

1.1 Research Hypothesis

The association of certain identities with Muslims, Islam, and Pakistan by the Hindutva ideology fosters mistrust between India and Pakistan, thereby hindering the success of bilateral peace processes. Implementing a multifaceted approach to the India-Pakistan peace process could facilitate conflict resolution and ultimately promote peace between the two countries.

The study uses the theory of social constructivism as theoretical framework to look into the creation or construction of identities of Muslims, Islam and Pakistan and the influence of Hindutva-driven ideational factors in on *India-Pakistan peace processes*. This research article intends to:

a) Explore the impact of Hindutva ideology and that of Islamophobia on India-Pakistan peace process.

b) Elucidate the bridging factors between the Hindutva ideology, Islamophobia, and consistent failure of India-Pakistan peace processes.

c) Investigate and highlight effective approaches for addressing Islamophobia in India and mitigating the adverse impacts of Hindutva ideology and Islamophobia on the India-Pakistan peace processes.

Precisely, this research article answers two critical questions. First, How the creation of the negative identities and threats constructed by Hindutva have affected India-Pakistan relations especially bilateral peace processes? Second, "What necessary factors shall be taken into account by both states to increase the likelihood of success of a bilateral peace process?

To approach these questions, the research uses qualitative research method while following exploratory and correlational approaches. The nature of the study is descriptive and analytical. With regards to data collection, both primary and secondary data are gathered and analyzed. In terms of primary data collection, apart from direct observation, governmental policies, speeches and statements, the research uses semi-structured interviews as the research tool. The interviews were conducted from professionals in both India and Pakistan. As far as secondary data is concerned, the researchers have collected data from journal articles, books, magazines and newspaper articles which have immensely contributed to the interpretation and analysis of overall data.

2. Contextualizing the Peace Process

Peace process encompasses series of talks, negotiations or in general, steps taken to rectify conflicts and engender harmony between the disputing parties. The process necessitates a profound desire for tranquility and therefore, it must carry enough capability to absorb clashes, lower their intensities and provide common grounds for cooperation with concrete implementation plans and strategies to the conflicting parties. The process's essence is comparative, entailing mutual reciprocity, meaning that the will for cooperation and conflict resolution should be present on both sides. Stated differently, cooperation and compromise serve as indispensable catalysts in propelling the process, whereas volition remains an indispensable prerequisite for its commencement. From an ethical standpoint, the will for peace shall reflect the pacifistic motivations of the actors which is not always the case between the states, like, India and Pakistan. Malik (2011) calls the Indo-Pak peace endeavors as *"half-hearted efforts made under foreign compulsion" (p.109)* which yielded nothing but intensified distrust between the two nations.

Scholars have mostly examined India-Pakistan relations through the realist lens which provides a comprehensive framework to understand the states' steadfast policies, hostile attitudes and aggressive behavior, which seldom engenders optimism for fostering interstate peace. Whereas, liberals tend to admire numerous bilateral peace processes, carrying hopes for successful outcomes on both sides, like the Indus Water Treaty, the Tashkent Declaration, and the Simla Agreement between India and Pakistan. Hitherto, these among many other endeavors have failed to establish sustainable peace, with manifold reasons contributing to such state of affairs. While realists analyze interstate hostilities, liberals are inclined to underscore the role played by international bodies in peace-making. The internal dynamics with implications for external relations between the states find value among social constructivists, who emphasize on ideational factors in international relations.

2.1 Constructed Threats and Identities

Muslims have been constructed as a threat to Hindus by Hindutva, so is the case with that of Muslims' Pakistan when seen by Hindus' Hindustan. The current Indian government has intensified the faith-based discrimination against Muslims. The antagonism within society further increases when media comes to play its detrimental role. The social constructivism theory when applied to India and Pakistan, explores the creation of identities which led to

inter-communal hostilities within India and heightened the animosity between both the states.

Hindutva targets Muslims by identifying them as 'threatening others', however, before partition the constructed threat lied within subcontinent, and after partition, it went beyond the demarcated boundaries of Hindustan (India). +

After partition, Hindutvatis considered:

IM (Indian Muslims) + PM (Pakistani Muslims) + (BM) Bengali Muslims = TM (Threatening Muslims/others)
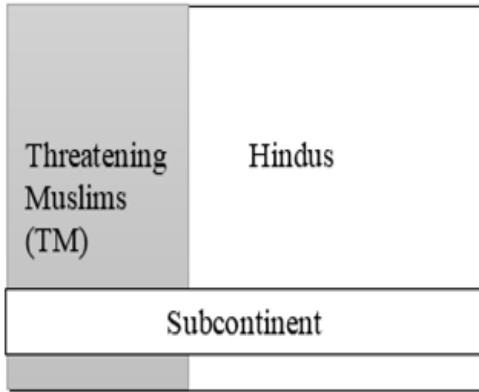*(TM- an identity given by Hindutva to Muslims for instigation of Islamophobia in India)*

Fig. 3.1 A
Constructed threat in the subcontinent
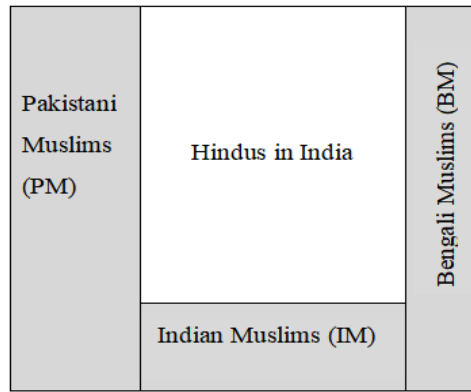**Idea:** *Muslims (TM) are a threat to Hindus*

Fig. 3.1 B
Constructed threat after partition
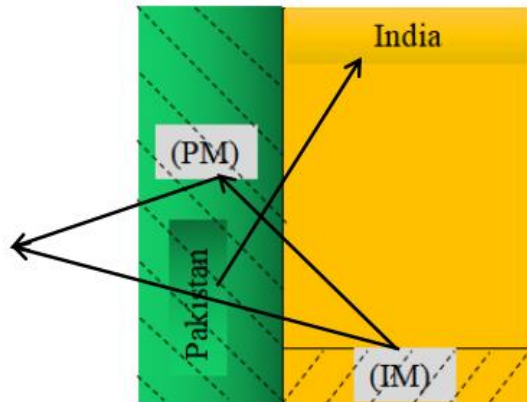**Idea:** *Muslims (PM+IM+BM) are a threat to Hindus*

Fig. 3.1 C
Concerned nations and region in study
 i) Green and saffron colors represent Pakistan and India respectively
ii) Area cut through lines present constructed threat to Hindus and Hindustan
Idea: *Arrows present Hindutva idea that IM belong to PM who are outsiders, they belong to Arabia where the territory (Pakistan) occupied by Muslims belongs to Hindus or Hindustan (with reference to Akhand Bharat).*

Note: The area representing nations or states does not depict anything regarding diverse ethnicity and demographics in the region, it is just to clarify that the threat remained the 'same individuals' before as well as after partition of the subcontinent.

The internal threat construction, within both the subcontinent as a whole and specifically in context of India is visible in figure A and B. As presented in the fig: C, the constructed threat, for Hindutvatis, is both the Indian and Pakistani Muslims or Pakistan where both are interrelated when seen through Hindutva lens. The identities like those of enemies, terrorists and traitors, associated with Pakistan are likewise associated with the Indian Muslims which has not only divided the Indian society but has also made the Modi government get massive Hindu support for adopting hard core internal as well as external policies.

The situation gets further deteriorated when the current Indian government sees Indian state through the lens of Hindutva. The ideological and theological contradictions between India and Pakistan date back to the very

independence of the states. But, the utilization of Islamophobia as a tool of governance in India became more pronounced when the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power (Shamsa Nawaz & Aarish U. Khan, personal communication, July 14, 2023).

The emergence of Pakistan was driven by an Islamic ideology stimulated by Sir Syed's two-nations theory, while India established as a secular state. It was the same time when Hindu nationalists pressed on making India, a Hindu state considering the establishment of both states as two sides of the same coin. It is also worth noting that the Indian constitution identifies India as 'Bharat' (with reference to Article 1 of Indian constitution) where the term 'secular' was only added to the constitution in 1976 (Rafique, 2021).

The theory of social constructivism argues, the identities of an actor whether self-derived or received from others, significantly shape its attitude towards others. In other words, one can also argue that the attitude of a state reflects the identity of that state and it is processed and perceived by others with the lens that they have already developed to identify the state as. As far as the case of India is concerned, its self-constructed identity of 'secular India' has remained a subject of contention, with supporters of Gandhian secularism and advocates of Savarkar's Hindutva holding conflicting views. However, the on-going situation in the state witnesses the political victory of Savarkar's Hindutva ideology.

As far as self-identity of Pakistan is concerned, there are various instances when Jinnah, the founding father of Pakistan, pressed on establishing an Islamic system. *"Pakistan [would be] ………. a laboratory where we could experiment on Islamic principles"*, said Jinnah (1946). The state emerged as the Islamic Republic of Pakistan in 1947.

The insidious undercurrent of xenophobia, in the form of Islamophobia in India, has been instrumental in forging a negative image of Pakistan which is intricately woven around the constructed perception of its dominant religion, Islam, and its adherents i.e., Muslims. Within the prevailing environment, where the core essence of Pakistan's identity is undeniably enmeshed with Islam, the religion finds itself subjected to egregious persecution at the hands of Hindutva forces in India.

Pakistan, in its portrayal, assumes the role of a hostile entity, a territorial domain occupied by Muslims who have a significant historical record of subjugating Hindus and presently stand accused of actively supporting and perpetrating acts of terrorism within the boundaries of India. "Modi has used the anti-Pakistan sentiment which through the loud narrative which is being turned out from popular channels and all of these public opinion groups, he has managed to very smartly mix the anti-Pakistan, pro-patriotic ultra-nationalist narrative with Islamophobia." (Dr. Salma Malik, personal communication, July 12, 2023). The statement aptly demonstrates the amalgamation of religion, nationalism, and the resulting state identities by hands of Hindutvatis in India.

3. Islam, Muslims and Pakistan: Hindus' Subjugation and the Factor of Resentment and Revenge

Pakistan which Hindutvatis consider a part of their holy-land still occupied by Muslims, was established in the name of Islam. With an agenda of Akhand Bharat, the Hindu chauvinist aspirations strengthened by nationalists' domination of Indian political landscape provide further confidence to the adherents of Hindutva for Hinduizing India. The agenda is a manifestation of resentment that Hindus carry because of their believed subjugation by the hands of Muslims-a narrative which via saffronization of education and revision of history in Indian curriculum, has gotten intensified. At mean, the adherents of Hindutva amalgamate intense anti-Islamic, anti-Muslim and anti-Pakistan sentiments where extreme factions even go so far as to deny the very existence of Pakistan as a sovereign state. The painting of the Akhand Bharat mural in the new Indian Parliament and the controversies that it sparked not only acknowledge India's overt expansionist ambitions but also exacerbate the already deep-seated chasm of mistrust between India and Pakistan.

The factor of resentment and revenge in past experiences and present attitudes is clearly visible in case of Indo-Pak relations having negative impact on bilateral peace process. This has not only led to action-reaction politics but has also made cyclic patterns of conflict and limited cooperation. Where Pakistan's alleged support to Sikh rebels in India seems to be the an outcome of split of East and West Pakistan, India's support to Baloch insurgents is the response (Chaulia, 2019) to what Pakistan does in Punjab.

3.1 Identities, Terrorism and Peace Process

As reported by Dawn (2023), Pakistan's foreign minister, Bilawal Bhutto said: "The BJP and RSS have been trying to create this myth — they declare Muslims across the world terrorists, they declare Pakistanis terrorists". And this

has not happened only for once, while addressing Jaishankar's point on Pakistan in UN Security Council (2022), Pakistan's foreign minister pressed on the point that India persistently says '*Muslim and terrorist together'* and associates terrorism with Islam and Pakistan. The concerns about association of Islam with terrorism have repeatedly been raised by Pakistan across international platforms.

Terrorism has lot to do with the peace process. It has undeniably exerted a profound influence on the formation of identities of both India and Pakistan by each other. Where India is branding Pakistan as a terrorist state, Pakistan adamantly refutes such allegations and responds by identifying India as a terrorist state. Both sides fiercely indict each other for deploying diversionary war tactics, skillfully sowing the seeds of internal instability and escalating tensions. The debate, however, is not about the merit of states' claims rather it is about the identities which have been meticulously crafted and endowed by the respective states, rooted in the constructed reality that *they are our enemies*. This point aligns seamlessly with the tenets of social constructivism.

Against the backdrop of these entrenched identities, the states have constructed distinct narratives, acting as conduits for their ideas, attitudes, and conduct towards one another. Essential to grasp is the shared predicament of terrorism, pervading the fabric of both India and Pakistan, irrespective of any particular territory or entity being explicitly branded as terrorists. In the context of India and Pakistan, a checkered history of relentless conflict characterizes their interactions, replete with numerous instances of initiating and subsequently terminating peace processes. Tragically, terrorism has consistently emerged as the harbinger of failure for these peace initiatives, effectively derailing their progress.

Where the world joined hands with US for fighting war against terrorism after 9/11, India started labeling Pakistan as a 'terrorist state' and down to the day, this created image has been repeatedly reminded to the world. The then Indian Deputy prime minister, Advani, while referring to Sikh secessionist movement in Punjab, declared that Pakistan has been sponsoring terrorist acts in India since 1980s, surprisingly the time when BJP emerged. In 1984, when Operation Blue Star was conducted against Bhindranwale, Indian officials blamed Pakistan of training the Sikh guerrillas in *religious* training camps in Kashmir (Claiborne, 1984).

The terrorism in one country even if used as an excuse, has led to either initiation of an interstate conflict or the termination of a peace process, if going on. For example, hijacking of an Indian plane by two Kashmiri separatists in 1971 led to protracted bilateral tensions when Indian government cut the communications between both Pakistani wings by blocking the overflights of Pakistani airplanes. On the other hand, Indo-Pak peace talks in 1984 failed, as argued by Indian Ministry of External Affairs, due to the involvement and support of Pakistan in various plane hijacking incidents by Kashmiris and Sikhs in early 1980s.

In extension to this, it too is noteworthy that after every major escalation of a bilateral conflict, the states have sought to initiate peace process, where almost every peace process without being completely successful, is terminated because of the predictable cyclic eruption or escalation of another extreme scenario. For example, after 1965, 1971 and 1999 war, various peace agreements were signed between both states like Runn of Kutch ceasefire agreement followed by Tashkent declaration, Shimla agreement and Agra Summit respectively, but none could stop states from getting into future conflicts. While looking deeper into the situation one unveils various events that happened.

The 1980s, when Sikh movement emerged in Punjab, was the period which a senior Indian politician, Advani, referred to, while declaring Pakistan as the sponsor of insurgency and terrorism in India. The period witnessed instances of plane hijackings like once in 1981 and twice in 1984, with Indian officials accusing Pakistan for supporting the hijackers who were actually Sikh and Kashmir separatists (Noor, 2007). This period also marked the adoption of hardline policy by Indian Ministry of External Affairs considering ending support of Pakistan to extremists in India as a pre-requisite for any kind of peace negotiations to initiate. In 1984, the Indian forces captured Siachen glacier which heightened the tensions between the states, and onwards, once again the issue of Kashmir directed the relations to further chaos. The period between 1984 and 1989 was also marked by unrest, as seen in case of the Brasstacks crisis (1986-1987). In 1989, insurgency erupted in Kashmir where India blamed Pakistan for its uprising and tensions between both countries reached at their peak. It was almost this time that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) led various nationalist movements, including the renowned Ekta yatra movement (1991) from Kanyakumari to Srinagar, showing India's ambitions to integrate Kashmir with Indian territory. The Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, has reportedly repeatedly referred to that movement as a challenge to the terrorists in Kashmir.

In 1990s, both states had continued their disputes followed by temporary negotiations which Koithara (2007) well calls as 'fight and talk' strategy. Despite the completion of seven rounds of foreign secretary level meetings (1990-

1994), the peace process failed. India also blamed Pakistan for Bombay blasts, 1993 while ignoring the Modi's stance of action-reaction laws which he adopted in case of Gujrat riots. However, from 1997 to 1999, a series of talks at the foreign secretary level were resumed to initiate a bilateral peace process which resulted in signing of a bilateral agreement i.e., Lahore Declaration, but an incident of plane hijacking and the renowned Kargil episode led to deteriorating relations and the termination of the peace process.

In 2001, under Agra Summit both states expressed optimism regarding peace however, the talks failed given that Pakistan was not willing to stop sponsoring cross-border terrorism which it calls as freedom struggle, as explained by Vajpayee in a press briefing (Noor, 2007). The attack on the Indian Parliament took place in 2001 was followed by series of plane hijacking incidents and blasts for which India blamed Pakistan. Kashmir, as usual, became the major bone of contention where India kept on pressing that Pakistan shall change its Kashmir policy, disturbing interstate relations. In 2003, Mumbai blasts took place and India blamed Pakistan. In 2004, another peace process was initiated, however, with a continued 3 years of foreign secretary level talks, the round of which was delayed as a response to 2006 train blasts in Mumbai for which, as always, Pakistan was blamed. Within 2 months, the process of negotiations was revived with a will to jointly combat terrorism.

The 2007 blasts in Samjhota Express could again hinder peace but this was the first time when both states refrained from blaming each other, in fact, they formed a Joint Anti-Terrorism Mechanism to combat terrorism. The year brought so many hopes for sustained peace on both sides when authors, journalists, politicians, and the general public of both countries were hopeful for improved relations and long-term peace. Unfortunately, the 2008 Mumbai attacks, referred to by India as "26/11" attacks drawing parallels to 9/11, marked a significant setback. This event is considered to have brought the peace process to an end, despite later half-hearted efforts made by both states to foster peace.

Since Modi's rule in India, the hostilities between India and Pakistan have further increased. The mistrust between both nations have reached at its peak. In 2016, series of terrorist incidents in India roused more tensions again, where in the following years, the states suspended their bilateral trade relations and shut the channels of inter-governmental communication. In 2019, Modi government abrogated article 370 which furthered the distance between two neighbors. From Pakistan's side the opening of Kartarpur corridor was an initiative for peace dialogue, though the corridor's opening attracted many Sikhs towards their holy site, Indian government refused to resume peace talks with Pakistan (Kulkarni, 2019). The Pulwama-Balakot crisis in 2019 furthered Indo-Pak rivalry followed by closing down of Pakistan's airspace to India, where within the same year, Pakistan repeatedly offered peace talks which the Modi's regime rejected.

More recently, there have been bitter exchanges of words between foreign ministers of both countries, Jaishankar and Bilawal Bhutto from India and Pakistan, respectively. These exchanges have included labeling each other as terrorist states. During an interview conducted by the researcher, Sandeep Mahajana (personal communication, July 17, 2023), an Indian professor, also emphasized on terrorism and its link with Pakistan and the resulting suspension of India-Pakistan talks on peace which he argued that Indian establishment feels proud at. Thus, it is crucial to understand the role of these identities and the phenomenon of terrorism as major obstacles in the progress of any peace process between India and Pakistan.

4. Levels with Respect to Islamophobia and India-Pakistan Relations

With regards to Islamophobia in India, not only the discourse exists at state or governmental and inter-governmental levels but it permeates deeply at inter-state societal level as well.

4.1 Governmental Level and Relations at Intergovernmental Level

Governmental level refers to government's Islamophobic narrative based on which it takes, stimulates, promotes or stays silent to stop, certain discriminatory actions within the state, manifesting Islamophobia. The intensity of such extreme narratives and actions at state level, vary with the form of government and the ideology it holds. The current BJP led populist government in India, ideologically as well as practically expresses hatred towards Muslims and Islam. The discrimination is expressed through current government's actions including stigmatization of Muslims, discriminatory internal policy formulation and enactment of numerous anti-Muslim legislations. To another extreme, the Indian Muslims are associated with Pakistanis wrapping them into the same package of threat defined by Savarkar as illustrated in fig. C. Since Modi's power in India, the decay of Indian pluralism, secularism and democracy has become a hot debate among international scholars.

The resulting existing internal setting in India has severe implications for its relations with the western neighbor.

For internal instability in the state, generally an external actor i.e., Pakistan, is accused. Since the partition of sub-continent, the only, perhaps predictably, constant factor between both the states is an ever developing "contradiction", which Galtung places at the base of conflict triangle. The contradiction of state ideologies with clash of national interests combined with a long history of poor experiences has led to adoption of hostile attitude of both the states towards each other. This attitude has been repeatedly expressed through their speeches and actions. Both states blame each other for using diversionary war tactics for internal destabilization. Occasionally, both have accused each other of committing acts of cross border terrorism like, recently, the Indian foreign minister, Jaishankar called Pakistan the supporter of cross-border terrorism, in response to which Pakistan's foreign minister, Bhutto Zardari called Modi, "butcher of Gujrat." This war of words in not new nor fought once, rather it has started becoming a norm at inter-governmental level.

Though the states have half-heartedly offered to reconcile but the endeavors were not more than offers. As of today, encountering any such offer especially from Indian side has become exceedingly rare. Nusrat Javed, a senior analyst, also indicated that political motivation for normalization of bilateral relations between India and Pakistan is absent under Modi's nationalist government in India (Petersen & Baloch, 2023). This seems quite true as never in the history have the two neighbours been so distant in their positions and never before this time, the doors for negotiations with strict conditions were shut by either side.

4.2 Societal level and relations at inter-societal level

Hindutva has demarcated a clear communal boundary between Hindus and Muslims in Indian where the governmental schemes have furthered the chaos. At societal level, the continued escalation of Hindu-Muslim riots and hatred towards Muslims by Hindus has become par for the course. This is also evident from the fact that most of the discriminary actions taken by government are either neglected or supported by majority of Hindus, given that Narendra Modi is a nationalist populist leader in India who has been elected by the majority and ruling the state for almost an entire decade. The current status of societal hatred is actually the result of gradual process of saffronization and systemic spread of Islamophobia across the Hindu society. Most of the nationalist organizations in Sangh parivar actually work at societal level which instigate Islamophobia ultimately resulting in spreading inter-communal hatred. There are various out of many unspoken instances where Muslims have faced discrimination at societal level. For instance, as cited by Ravishankar (2022), the "resume study" conducted by Led by Foundation revealed the bias against Muslim women in hiring for jobs in India, culminating that based on their religion, the ratio of selection of Muslim women for jobs was significantly lower as compared to that of the Hindu women possessing similar skills.

Apart from deterioration of intra-state societal relations, the inter-state societal relations are also marked by discord. These have much influenced by how, usually, Pakistan is perceived by most of the Indians or how Pakistan is portrayed by different actors like social, usually, nationalist organizations, media and government, given that the direct interaction between the people across the borders is almost zero. The poor inter-state societal relations are quite evident from BBC Country ratings poll of 2017 which reported that Indian people hold the most negative view of Pakistan's influence, especially since 2008 Mumbai attacks. Out of the sample taken, only 5% Indians expressed positive view of Pakistan's influence while 85% held negative view. This report well illustrates the inter-state societal gaps making people-to-people contact, a necessary pre-requisite for bilateral peace among nations.

Overall, these levels highlight the necessity for the peace process to not only encompass political factions (Track 1 diplomacy) but also the public to foster good relations among the people across the border (Track 2 diplomacy).

5. Towards an Actual Peace Process

As explicated in the beginning of the article, an actual peace process must be initiated to achieve peace, making the will for tranquility or pacifistic motivations of actors in the process, a prerequisite for the success of that peace process. Where there are many external factors like prejudices, trust deficit, negative identities and parallel roles of actors and blame games, impeding bilateral peace between India and Pakistan, there are problems inherent to the peace process too. India and Pakistan can enter into peace if they mitigate the hatred existing in the populace. The two neighbors cannot proceed towards peace unless and until, they don not listen to each other's partition stories (Pandey, 2022).

Concerning the peace process, the following elements have to be observed within it:

1. There are certain conditions for any process to initiate. Here, these can be termed as "conditions for initiation" of the peace process.

2. There are certain conditions which should be met for continuing of peace process. These conditions can be termed as "conditions for continuation" of a peace process.
3. If the states or conflicting parties fulfill the first two conditions i.e., for initiation and continuation of the process, the third and final condition for peace process i.e., "condition for successful conclusion" is likely to be achieved.

The existence of these conditions can be seen at distinct levels involved in a peace process.
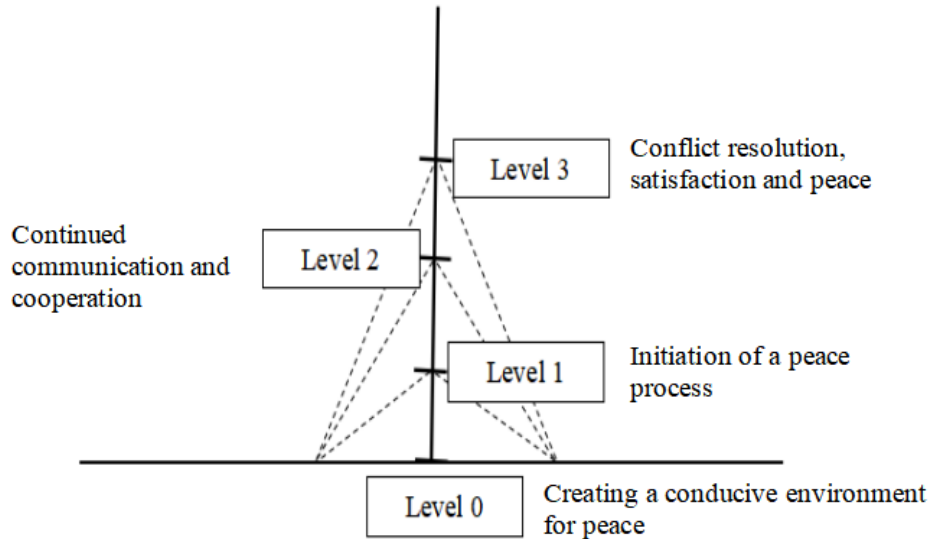

Fig. 3.2
The figure illustrates four levels involved in a peace process:

5.1 Level 0_ Creating a Conducive Environment for Peace

The level 0 lies at the basis of any peace process and forms the conditions necessary for its initiation. As indicated in the figure, this level intends to create an environment conducive for peace. It can be logically argued that any environment, even one characterized by conflict or hostility, is conducive for peace-process to take place. But, there needs to develop a distinction between instant opportunity or necessity for making temporary or permanent peace and the environment or atmosphere that develops the capacity and will of the actors required to initiate a peace process in good faith. The former prevails usually in situations where armed conflict or violent interaction between the conflicting parties takes place where the latter refers to the gradual regular developments made towards peace, which instill pacifistic motivations among the conflicting parties.

While referring specifically to the Indian context where Hindutva incites Islamophobia at state as well societal level, the significance of achieving level 0 increases with manifold reasons:

a) The existing and/ or constructed prejudices and proclivities among Hindutvatis about Muslims and Islam create an atmosphere favoring violence. The consequent communalism in India demonstrates the involvement of psychic elements in deterioration of state and societal relations. The need for achieving level 0 becomes more evident when the role of constructivits' ideational factor is examined in widening the communal gaps as well as the distance between the two neighbors i.e., India and Pakistan.

b) The populist Modi government in India emerges as another significant factor extending beyond the BJP-led government's pro-Hindutva ideology and its active involvement in instigation of Islamophobia in India. The widespread popularity of the leader also demonstrates a substantial Hindu support to his government or governance. This increases the probability of use of systematic violence indicating the dire need for achieving level 0 as peace seems impossible under such conditions.

c) The democratic peace theory in Indian context also marks the significance of level 0 given India's self-derived identity of world's largest democracy. The Islamophobic acts by the government and the prevailing conditions of Muslims in India have posed numerous questions on Indian democracy. The rapid erosion of democratic values in India marks the increased likelihood of escalation and intensification of conflict demonstrating the developments towards conflict rather peace. This emphasizes the significance of level 0 in the current situation.

Keeping in view the situation, multiple questions arise. Does the level zero intend to change the perceptions of Hindutvatis about Muslims? If yes, how real it is? Who would play this role? Is it possible to happen under BJP-led government? If not, would peace between both the states always remain an option? Does the Indian political landscape need to be dominated by Congress or should BJP change its stance about Muslims and Islam? Would Indian society become democratic? If no, what to expect about peace? If yes, how and when would this happen? And the list of such questions continues to grow. At the end, what remains significant is the atmosphere which leads the society and state towards peace within and without. The primary target for level 0 is neither government nor society but the [mis]perceptions, prejudices and proclivities generated by Hindutva regarding Muslims and Islam. And, to mitigate these prejudices, the role of Muslims is also an important factor to consider.

Certain impediments especially under current Indian government exist to achievement of this state of existence but this still remains an important prerequisite for actually going towards level 1. The presence of proclivities, prejudices, and various other factors has significantly contributed to a trust deficit, impeding the attainment of peace between India and Pakistan (Gul, 2007). In an interview by IDSA (2001), Jaswant Singh repeatedly pressed on the importance of presence of mutual trust and confidence, considering both as the basis for any peace talks to be held. "People to people relations will always help in bringing huge change compared to government to government because at the end of the day, democracy in India will work on the basis of people's narrative." (Sandeep Mahajana, personal communication, July 17, 2023)

The most likely outcome of level 0 would be the deconstruction of identities by development of trust between Hindus and Muslims making the former tolerant towards Islam and Muslims. This would ultimately generate spirit for peace within the society as well as with Pakistan, given that the level of hatred among people would decrease and their perceptions about Muslims and Islam and ultimately about Pakistan, would also change. This would shift the Indian political and strategic culture in favor of peace with Pakistan. The condition would also increase people-to-people contact between both states. This, by no means, means that peace would be achieved this way, but this refers to the creation of the conducive environment which encourages actors to go for initiating a peace process with popular support.

5.2 Level 1_ Initiation of a Peace Process

Given the good atmosphere required for the initiation of the peace process, the actors including public and government would play an active role in taking steps towards peace. The focus of the matter should not revolve around: "who will initiate peace?" since, in historical context, both states have initiated bilateral peace processes several times, albeit sometimes seemingly ceremonial.

The achievement of desired political and strategic culture, as part of level 0, would, motivate the political actors to formulate popular policies favoring peace between India and Pakistan. Recently, there have been discussions over India's unwillingness to enter into dialogue with Pakistan which may have several reasons including the internal instability in Pakistan, prompting inward-looking policies. Despite, Pakistan maintains its interests in offering peace talks to India.

The critical aspect to emphasize is the manner in which the process is initiated. For instance, if states adopt maximalist positions right from the beginning, like by giving hype to certain intense issues, such as resolution of Kashmir dispute and stopping support to cross border terrorism as base for negotiations, the base of process would weaken (Aarish U. Khan, personal communication, July 14, 2023). Therefore, initiation of the peace process necessitates:

a) Pacifistic intentions and motivations of leaders and often, the populace
b) Genuine commitment of the actors towards peace
c) Realistic aspirations for achieving peace as an outcome of the peace process

5.3 Level 2_ Continuation of a eace process

The level 2 includes the continuation of the peace process till the level 3 is reached. It refers to various steps including strengthening bilateral bonds via various means which can include foreign secretary level meetings, establishing effective and regular communication between the heads of the states, facilitating cultural exchange programs, promoting cross border interactions at public as well as at governmental level and suchlike, sustained over an extended duration. The emphasis of level 2 is more on the time span rather than the broad spectrum of interstate cooperation. It is beyond dispute that multilevel cooperation between the states would minimize the

likelihood of abrupt termination of a peace process, a regrettable recurring trait in India-Pakistan peace processes. The interstate cooperation across a broad spectrum would prove beneficial as inactivation of one way of interaction would not shut all the communication channels between both states.

The level 2 is more concerned about the continuity of cooperation while fighting with or absorbing all the obstructions on the way to peace. For instance, terrorism has always been the major impediment in any and almost every India-Pakistan peace process (see detail in section 3.4). Level 2 demands that peace process should withstand any such act. In fact, as far as terrorism is concerned, it shall be taken as a common national security threat for both India and Pakistan and therefore, should be jointly fought.

The achievements made in level 0 would highly support the states to become successful in completing level 2 and making them reach to the level 3. The improved Indian political and strategic culture along with reconstruction of previously entrenched national identities, as desired in context of India-Pakistan peace process, would generate the required political vigor and motivation to avoid blame games and thereby, continue peace talks.

The impact of the internal dynamics on peace process can be viewed from the case when in 2006, after commuter train attacks, the Indian government's response was positive regarding the ongoing peace process. But, soon, as Noor (2007) argues, the criticism on Congress's lenient approach towards Pakistan compelled the then Indian prime minister, Manmohan Singh to blame and warn Pakistan and postpone the upcoming secretary level peace talks with the state.

During an interview the researcher conducted with an Indian professor, he also spoke: "Parties which are hard towards Pakistan are seen as good governance parties [in India] …………It depends on us, public, to surmounting these difficulties of state" (Indian professor, personal communication, July 15, 2023) indicating the effective role that public can play in regards to bring peace between India and Pakistan.

The sustained bilateral cooperation would ultimately lead to a singular path: peace. This would make the states reach to level 3.

5.4 Level 3_ Conflict Resolution, Peace and Satisfaction

The level 3 refers to the conflict resolution making it the final stage of peace process. It is the stage in which states formally end up the conflict and develop new guidelines, plans and strategies to interact and behave. Undoubtedly, at the end, the satisfaction of both the states rests in attainment of peace achieved through peaceful means.

By analyzing the peace-processes between India and Pakistan, researcher finds that no process has ever included level 0 nor has any concluded at level 3. The inception of peace processes between both states took place at somewhere in level 1; however, the desire for peace and tangible outcomes from these efforts remained somewhat feeble. Subsequently, as the states entered level 2, their efforts were often thwarted by some obstructions, predominantly in the form of terrorist activities.

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