

## BOOK REVIEW

# Bridging Partition: People's Initiatives for Peace between India and Pakistan

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**Edited by** Smitu Kothari and Zia Mian

With Kamla Bhasin, A.H. Nayyar and Mohammad Tahseen- contains essays from Shehryar Ahmad, Karamat Ali, Amrita Chhachi, Sumanta Banerjee, Kamla Bhasin, Nirupama Dutt, Madeeha Gauhar, Mubashir Hasan, Pervez Hoodbhoy, Asma Jehangir, Sheema Kirmani, Sanat Mohanty, Kuldip Nayar, Sandeep Pandey, Narendra Panjwani, Anand Patwardhan, Balraj Puri, Laxminarayan Ramdas, Lalita Ramdas, I A Rehman, Beena Sarwar, Jamila Verghese, Achin Vanaik

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The official track I dialogue between India and Pakistan is well documented and well researched not only in India and Pakistan but also in the US and UK. However, grassroots initiatives for peace have, so far, not caught the interest of researchers and academicians. *Bridging Partition* is an attempt to fill this gap in academic research and showcase unofficial people's initiatives for peace by ordinary citizens of India and Pakistan. The central argument of the book is pegged on the need for people's initiatives for peace, together with track I and track II peacebuilding efforts, which can bring

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the real change required for sustainable peace. This is a first-hand collaborative narrative from Indian and Pakistani peace activists who have been directly involved in promoting people-to-people contacts between the South Asian neighbours through their personal, professional or institutional work. Most of the contributors in *Bridging Partition* have remained active members of the Pakistan India People's Forum for Peace and Democracy (PIPPFD), the first and, so far, the largest people-to-people organisation working on India-Pakistan peacebuilding. Smitu Kothari and Zia Mian, the two main editors of the book are also credited with co-editing *Out of the Nuclear Shadow* in 2001, which documents the rise of the anti-nuclear movement in India and Pakistan in the aftermath of the nuclear tests conducted by the two warring neighbours in May 1998. Thus *Bridging Partition* represents a continuity of sorts from its editors and contributors (both volumes contain several articles from the same authors) who seem to believe strongly in the power of people-to-people contacts between Indians and Pakistanis as change agents and peace builders.

In his essay Sumanta Banerjee has tried to reformulate a conceptual framework for such people's peace initiatives. He differentiates people-to-people contacts from what is commonly known as track II diplomacy in international relations theory. He says track II is unequivocally associated with the track I official diplomatic relations between nation-states as it merely aims at easing relations at the top and reducing chances of conflagration of the conflict<sup>2</sup>. On the other hand, he says people-to-people contacts try to build a "counter hegemony of civil society – as a challenge to the hegemony of the state"<sup>3</sup>. Banerjee calls for deconstructing the nation-state system based on the narrow definition of 'national interest' and replacing it with a "consensual political system" by 'building up unanimity from the bottom among the underprivileged majority'<sup>4</sup>. This idea becomes clearer in I.A. Rahman's article. He argues that Indian and Pakistani elite have transformed their differences into what he calls 'quasi-religious ideologies,' which required strategies and programmes "making the people's voice strong enough to prevail over the state-sponsored jingoism"<sup>5</sup>.

Dr. Mubashir Hassan succinctly provides the history of transformation of the peace talks from state-to-state dialogue until the mid-1980s to the commencement of people's dialogue after the mid-1990s and its development up to 2005. Kuldip Nayyar shares his story of starting a candlelight vigil at the Wagah border (international border along Lahore in Pakistan with Amritsar in India) on the nights of 14 and 15 August to commemorate the joint 50<sup>th</sup> birthday of India and Pakistan in 1997. He explains how a modest gathering of nine people on its inauguration in 1997, transformed into an annual *mela* (festival) of sorts by 2005 drawing thousands of people from both sides of the border. Pakistani educationist Dr. Pervez Hoodhboy and Indian documentary film maker Anand Patwardhan have shared their personal experiences of directly interacting with the 'other' through their professional work and transforming the 'other' by contact. Patwardhan writes, "there are tears in our eyes-tears of relief at finding out that the

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<sup>2</sup>Sumanta Banerjee, '(Ad)ventures of Friendship,' In Smitu Kothari and Zia Mian ed. (2010) *Bridging Partition: People's Initiatives for Peace between India and Pakistan*, New Delhi: BlackSwan, p.68

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, pp.58-59

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p.58

<sup>5</sup> I.A. Rehman, Finding Roots and References in South Asia, in Smitu Kothari and Zia Mian ed. (2010) *Bridging Partition: People's Initiatives for Peace between India and Pakistan*, New Delhi: Black Swan, pp.105-107

monstrous 'other' is nothing but a manufactured construct, one that dissolves in the face of actual contact"<sup>6</sup>. Similarly Sandeep Panday and Sanat Mohanty in their diary of an historical peace march beginning 23 March 2005 from New Delhi (India) and culminating on 11 May 2005 at Multan (Pakistan), share several stories of humanising the other and transforming the conflict at the grassroots during their journey.

Women have been at the forefront of the people's peace initiatives between India and Pakistan. This is also evident from the fact that among the essayists in *Bridging Partition*, nine are women. Beena Sarwar, in her chapter, has tried to put the role of women in perspective vis-à-vis India-Pakistan peacebuilding. She explains how using art, drama, culture and their institutional links, women in India and Pakistan, in different capacities, have played important roles in promoting peace between the two nuclear neighbours. Sheema Kermani, one of the few Pakistani classical dance artists, in her article explains the activities of her NGO, *Tahrik-e-Niswan* (movement for women rights) that uses dance, music, visual and performing arts as mediums to promote peace. Kermani and her group have been performing in several cities and towns of Pakistan since 1980 and in India after 1989. Her anti-communal play *Jinney Lahore Nahin Vekhya* (one who has not seen Lahore) tells a story of a Hindu woman who refused to leave Lahore (Pakistan) at the time of partition when her whole family decided to move to India and another play *Jang ab Nahin Hogi* (now there will be no war) was based on the feminist struggle for peace on the 'no peace, no sex' theme adapted from the Greek classic *Lysistrata*. Similarly, Madeeha Gauhar tells the story of her theatre group *Ajoka* launched in 1985. The group has performed regularly in both India and Pakistan. Madeeha and *Ajoka* have also organised two Indo-Pak drama festivals in Lahore in 2004 and 2005. *Ajoka* dramatised plays like *Aik thi nani* (Once there was a grandmother) based on a real story of two sisters who were separated by the partition in 1947 and *Ajoka Children's Theatre* (ACT) produced *border border*, a story based on macho rituals performed at the Wagah border every day by Indian and Pakistani military personnel.

Lalita Ramdas, in her essay points out the education policies of Indian and Pakistani governments that promoted prejudices and stereotypes against the 'other' by tracing the attempts of scholars and educationists on both sides who tried to dismantle these prejudices through their scholarly work. Lalita also mentions some unsystematic cross-border exchanges of students, visits and workshops organised to address prejudices against the 'other'. Taking this forward, Jamila Verghese shares the stories of contacts between alumni of Aitchison College Lahore and Government College (G.C.) Lahore (Pakistan) and regular student exchanges between Doon School Dehradun (India) and Chandbagh School (Pakistan); and between Kinnaird College Lahore (Pakistan) and Lady Shri Ram College Delhi (India). Verghese also acknowledges the first WISCOMP<sup>7</sup> conflict transformation workshop, titled 'rehumanizing the other', which brought together students from several renowned educational institutions of India and Pakistan in Delhi in 2001.

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<sup>6</sup> Anand Patwardhan, Reflecting Peace, in Smitu Kothari and Zia Mian ed. (2010) *Bridging Partition: People's Initiatives for Peace between India and Pakistan*, New Delhi: BlackSwan, p.101

<sup>7</sup> Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace (WISCOMP) is a New Delhi based research and training initiative working on peacebuilding, security, conflict transformation and gender issues in South Asia since its inception in 1999.

This book was overdue as more and more scholarly emphasis is now shifting towards the role of indigenous civil society actors in peacebuilding and moreover in last decade or so people's peace initiatives for peace have mushroomed in India and Pakistan. *Bridging Partition* draws the attention of researchers to several people's initiatives for peace, which have so far been taken lightly by the two governments, the international community and scholars. However this book lacks a robust overarching theoretical framework and proper references to the theories of peace and conflict resolution and similar people's peace initiatives in other conflict regions. But this is quite understandable because no comparison or theoretical proposition was intended as this book focused on reporting the activities of citizens' peacebuilding initiatives between India and Pakistan only. The book provides a rich source of information for the scholars, students, policy makers, conflict resolution practitioners and common readers who are interested in people-led peacebuilding in South Asia.