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Media and Peace: Analyzing "Aman Ki Asha" as a Cultural Diplomacy Initiative

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Abstract

This paper examines the role of cultural diplomacy in conflict resolution through the case of Aman Ki Asha, a media-led initiative launched in 2010 to promote peace between India and Pakistan. Using a strategic communication framework, the study evaluates the initiative's agents, agenda, vehicles, and audience. While recognizing the transformative potential of media as a soft power tool and platform for cross-cultural dialogue, the paper critiques the campaign's limitations in the absence of institutional support, economic integration, and sustained engagement. Recommendations for future initiatives include mixed-method approaches, integration of economic diplomacy, and leveraging digital platforms for peacebuilding.

Keywords

Cultural Diplomacy, Pakistan-India Relations, Soft Power, Conflict Resolution, Peace Initiative

1. Introduction

Using cultural exchanges to promote international understanding, collaboration and cultural diplomacy is essential to international relations. Bound, Briggs, Holden, & Jones (2007) emphasize that cultural diplomacy extends beyond traditional statecraft, involving civil society actors, artists, and the media to foster trust and understanding among nations. Countries may foster peaceful cohabitation and cooperation on global issues by fostering these exchanges and helping people find common ground beyond political divides.

Nations present their cultural history, beliefs, and customs through cultural exchanges, which can aid in debunking myths and stereotypes that frequently exacerbate hostilities between countries. Cultural diplomacy is an international strategy aimed at promoting empathy and respect among disparate cultures by em-

phasising the commonalities in human experience. This strategy not only strengthens a country's soft power but also helps to create long-lasting partnerships based on communication and collaboration (Grincheva, 2024).

Furthermore, by encouraging cross-cultural communication and collaboration on solutions that are advantageous to all parties concerned, cultural diplomacy may be a weapon for tackling global concerns like poverty, health crises, and climate change. In the end, cultural diplomacy seeks to promote a more harmonious and interdependent global order by highlighting cultural interchange and respect for one another (Camilleri, 2020).

This study looks at the 2010 campaign *Aman ki Asha* (Hope for Peace) (https://amankiasha.com/), which was started by the Times of India and Pakistan's Jang Group. The project sought to strengthen ties between India and Pakistan, two nations with a protracted history of hostilities. The initiative's historical background, agents, agenda, vehicles, target audience, and suitability as a case study in cultural diplomacy will all be examined in this examination (Bjola & Jiang, 2021).

2. Historical Context

Aman Ki Asha historical background stems from the protracted battle between India and Pakistan, two South Asian neighbors with a history of territorial disputes, mostly centered around the area of Kashmir. Both countries have gone through many wars, military standoffs, and ongoing political unrest since their 1947 separation. Deeply ingrained animosities, widespread bloodshed, and huge migration during the division itself have remained to affect connections between the two nations (Bajpai, 2022).

The dispute over Kashmir persisted as a major concern in the following decades, sparking conflicts in 1947-1948, 1965, and 1999 (the Kargil conflict). These wars, in addition to continuous border skirmishes and terrorist attacks, have turned Pakistan-India ties into one of the tensest in contemporary history. Notwithstanding these obstacles, there have been times of comparatively calm conditions and attempts at official and informal communication with the goal of restoring relations. There have been moments when high-level negotiations, peace processes, and accords like the Lahore Declaration in 1999 and the Shimla Agreement in 1972 have given rise to optimism for long-term peace (Misra, 2021; Paul, 2021; Schaffer, 2021).

With the 2008 Mumbai attacks having severely strained ties, serious diplomatic consequences, and a halt on bilateral negotiations, *Aman Ki Asha* evolved against this backdrop during a period of relative thaw in Indo-Pak relations, but by 2010, efforts to rekindle communication and strengthen ties had resumed. The effort was intended to break through the political gridlock and directly appeal to the people of both countries by utilising the power of media and cultural interchange to promote communication and understanding (Saliha, 2018; Syed, 2016).

Aman Ki Asha, which means "Hope for Peace", was introduced in January 2010

by The Times of India and the Jang Group of Pakistan, two influential media organisations. The effort aimed to utilize the power of media to promote interpersonal communication and improve understanding amongst people via literary, artistic, musical, and cultural exchanges. In contrast to the sometimes-derogatory depiction of the "other" in mainstream media, *Aman Ki Asha* sought to create a narrative of peace and brotherhood by emphasising the shared cultural history and similarities between the people of Pakistan and India (Rid, 2020).

The campaign featured a range of events, including peace demonstrations, literary festivals, business conferences, and concerts with performers from both nations. The purpose of these gatherings was to unite people from all walks of life via deep conversations and interpersonal relationships. The idea was to build a basis for more significant and long-lasting peace initiatives at the political level by encouraging respect and understanding amongst people on a grassroots level.

In general, *Aman Ki Asha* signified a noteworthy endeavour by the media and civic society to end the hostile cycle and establish a foundation for enduring peace between India and Pakistan. Even while the political environment is still complicated and difficult, programmes like *Aman Ki Asha* highlight the value of cultural diplomacy and the part that common people can play in bridging gaps and promoting more peaceful cohabitation (Syed, 2016).

2.1. Problem Statement

Despite numerous efforts through cultural diplomacy initiatives like *Aman Ki Asha*, Indo-Pak relations remain volatile, marked by recurring conflicts such as the Pulwama incident in 2019. Although music, cinema, and people-to-people exchanges have sought to bridge divides, political hostilities, media sensationalism, and nationalist rhetoric frequently undermine these peace-building efforts. The persistent tension between India and Pakistan highlights a critical gap: while cultural initiatives generate temporary goodwill, they often lack the resilience and institutional support needed to survive geopolitical crises. This research seeks to analyze why cultural diplomacy alone has been insufficient in creating sustainable peace between India and Pakistan.

2.2. Significance

This study holds significant relevance for policymakers, scholars of international relations, peace studies practitioners, and cultural diplomacy advocates. By analyzing the strengths and shortcomings of initiatives like *Aman Ki Asha* and contextualizing them within broader historical and contemporary Indo-Pak dynamics, this research provides insights into the complex interplay between culture, politics, and conflict. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for designing more resilient and impactful peace-building strategies. Moreover, the findings offer valuable lessons for conflict-affected regions globally, where cultural diplomacy is increasingly being promoted as a soft power tool for reconciliation and cooperation.

2.3. Research Objectives

To investigate the factors that led to the failure of *Aman Ki Asha* in achieving lasting peace and understanding between India and Pakistan despite its cultural diplomacy efforts.

2.4. Research Questions

Why despite its considerable efforts at cultural diplomacy, *Aman Ki Asha* failed to bring about enduring harmony and understanding between Pakistan and India?

3. Literature Review

Numerous academics have talked about the advantages and disadvantages of using cultural diplomacy to resolve disputes. Nye & Brown (2019) highlights the significance of soft power, arguing that cultural diplomacy is essential for swaying foreign public opinion and projecting a favourable image overseas. In contrast to the coercive methods of hard power, Nye claims that a fundamental aspect of soft power is the capacity to influence the preferences of others through attraction and attractivity. As a subcategory of soft power, cultural diplomacy uses creative partnerships, educational initiatives, and cultural exchanges to forge connections between countries and promote respect and goodwill.

According to Clarke (2020), cultural diplomacy may lessen conflict by encouraging tolerance and understanding between various ethnic groups. According to his theory, cultural endeavours have the power to cut across political and ideological divides and provide a common ground for communication and collaboration. In a few case studies, Leonard demonstrates how cultural diplomacy has effectively reduced hostilities and opened the door for more official diplomatic discussions. These instances highlight how cultural diplomacy, when used carefully and effectively, may serve as a catalyst for world peace.

Zamorano (2016) examines the ways in which cultural efforts, such as joint ventures and artistic, sporting, and media endeavours, might function as instruments for promoting peace within the framework of Pakistan-India relations. The study demonstrates how cultural diplomacy may dispel prejudices that frequently strike hostility and humanize the "other". Through collaborative creative endeavours, athletic competitions, and media creations, individuals from both countries might encounter common human ideals and establish interpersonal relationships that surpass patriotic discourse.

In Gumenyuk et al. (2021) analysis of numerous people-to-people efforts and their effects on Indo-Pak relations, emphasize the media's role in influencing public opinion and promoting communication. According to their research, the media has two functions: it may either highlight good tales of collaboration and understanding to foster peace, or it can worsen tensions by reporting sensationalistically. They contend that media-driven campaigns, such cooperative newsrooms and joint motion picture productions, may craft narratives of harmony and cohabitation that sway public opinion in favour of peace-making.

In addition, Zhou et al. (2022) examine the operational and structural difficulties of cultural diplomacy, pointing out that although there are a lot of potential advantages, there are also a lot of important drawbacks. These consist of financing constraints, administrative roadblocks, and the politicization of cultural initiatives. For cultural diplomacy to be successful, it must be backed by strong institutional structures, sufficient funding, and a dedication to preserving the integrity and originality of cultural manifestations.

Along with improving scholarly cooperation, these interactions foster enduring interpersonal bonds that can act as unofficial avenues for diplomacy. It emphasises how these educational programmes have a transforming effect on participants' attitudes and views of the neighboring nation. It also looks at the function of sports diplomacy in India-Pakistan relations. According to their study, athletic events like cricket matches can act as neutral spaces where a spirit of rivalry is restrained by friendship and respect for one another. They contend that frequent sporting exchanges should be promoted as part of an all-encompassing peace-building approach because they may foster confidence and pave the way for more extensive diplomatic engagement (Gumenyuk et al., 2021).

3.1. Media as a Conduit of Soft Power and Platform for Cross-Cultural Dialogue

Within the field of cultural diplomacy, media plays a pivotal role that extends beyond simple message transmission. As conceptualized by Nye (2004), media functions as a critical conduit of soft power, enabling states and non-state actors to shape foreign publics through attraction rather than coercion. Media platforms possess the ability to construct compelling narratives, foster emotional connections, and project shared cultural values that can soften entrenched animosities. Recent scholarship highlights how digital and traditional media serve as strategic tools in cultural diplomacy by curating peace-promoting content and facilitating transnational engagement (Bjola & Jiang, 2021; McClory, 2021).

Moreover, media acts as a dialogic platform, providing spaces for cross-cultural communication and people-to-people diplomacy. Through collaborative media projects such as joint newsrooms, film co-productions, and cultural festivals media enables interactions that humanize "the other" and challenge dominant nationalistic discourses. This function is especially significant in conflict-prone contexts, where official diplomatic channels may be closed or mistrusted. However, the efficacy of media in these roles is often limited by commercial pressures, political biases, and competing media narratives that can undermine peace efforts. Therefore, understanding media as both a soft power instrument and a dialogic space is essential for analyzing the complexities of cultural diplomacy initiatives like *Aman Ki Asha*.

3.2. Advancing Media Diplomacy Frameworks in Cultural Peacebuilding

Building upon foundational concepts of cultural diplomacy and soft power, recent

scholarship emphasizes the multifaceted role of media as not only a communicator but also a strategic actor shaping peace narratives through narrative construction, public sphere facilitation, and agenda-setting functions. To deepen the analytical rigor of cultural diplomacy research, particularly in the context of *Aman Ki Asha*, it is essential to systematically engage with media diplomacy theories that conceptualize media as active agents shaping peace narratives and public discourse. Beyond serving as mere communication channels, media function as narrative architects that construct and frame meanings, as facilitators of the public sphere where cross-cultural dialogue can emerge, and as policy agenda setters that influence both public opinion and diplomatic priorities (Bjola & Jiang, 2021; Entman, 2008).

Employing narrative content analysis within these frameworks allows for empirical scrutiny of the discursive strategies and symbolic constructions embedded in Indo-Pak media, thus revealing the contestations and convergences shaping peacebuilding narratives. Moreover, the expanding field of digital peacebuilding introduces new dynamics, with grassroots media activism, diaspora-led digital platforms, and virtual communities decentralizing narrative production and enabling multi-vocal engagement across borders (McClory, 2021; Otmazgin & Ben-Ari, 2021). Integrating these emergent phenomena into the study of media-led cultural diplomacy broadens understanding of how peace initiatives can mobilize diverse publics, contest dominant nationalist discourses, and amplify marginalized voices. Incorporation of such perspectives enriches future research, enhancing both theoretical depth and practical relevance in a rapidly evolving media landscape.

3.3. Recent India-Pakistan Tensions and the Limits of Cultural Diplomacy

Despite intermittent cultural initiatives, the last decade has seen worsening relations. Events such as the Uri attack (2016), and Pulwama bombing (2019), fuelled nationalist fervour, limiting the space for peace narratives (Saliha, 2018). Both nations moved to a war-like footing, restricting airspaces and exchanging threats. This near-crisis demonstrated that cultural efforts, such as film collaborations or cross-border concerts, could easily be overshadowed by real-world political and military confrontations.

Right-wing populism, coupled with aggressive media rhetoric, has led to hardening public sentiment in both countries. Artists, musicians, and filmmakers promoting peace often face bans, boycotts, and threats. Consequently, initiatives like *Aman Ki Asha* struggle for relevance against the tide of jingoism and mistrust (Behuria, 2010). As Chadha and Desai (2022) argue, the rise of media-driven nationalism in India has reframed narratives of neighborly relations, making peace initiatives like *Aman Ki Asha* increasingly difficult to sustain.

3.4. Other Peace Initiatives between Pakistan and India

Beyond *Aman Ki Asha*, several other efforts have aimed to bridge the divide be-

tween India and Pakistan. The Indo-Pak Express Bus Services such as the Delhi-Lahore and Srinagar-Muzaffarabad buses were launched to promote people-to-people contact across borders. The Kartarpur Corridor, inaugurated in 2019, allowed Indian Sikh pilgrims visa-free access to one of their holiest shrines in Pakistan, symbolizing a rare moment of cooperation. Initiatives like Track II Diplomacy efforts, including the Neemrana Dialogue and the Chaophraya Dialogue, have brought together policymakers, retired officials, academics, and journalists from both sides for unofficial dialogues to foster mutual understanding (Rao, 2023).

Additionally, there have been initiatives in the fields of music and cinema. Cross-border popularity of Bollywood and Pakistani dramas created soft cultural bridges. Musical collaborations such as Coke Studio featured songs that resonated across both nations. Several Pakistani artists including Atif Aslam, Ali Zafar, and Rahat Fateh Ali Khan contributed significantly to Bollywood soundtracks, while Indian actors like Naseeruddin Shah acted in Pakistani productions like Khuda Kay Liye (2007).

Pakistani actors such as Fawad Khan (Kapoor & Sons), Mahira Khan (Raees), and Sajal Aly (Mom) were welcomed in Bollywood. Joint film festivals occasionally showcased movies from both countries, emphasizing shared narratives of humanity, love, and struggle. However, despite these significant artistic exchanges, political tensions often led to boycotts and bans, undermining the spirit of these collaborative efforts. While these initiatives reflect a desire for peace at multiple levels, they, too, have been vulnerable to political shifts, security concerns, and public mistrust during periods of heightened conflict (Jain, 2023; Sattar, 2022).

4. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, narrative-based conceptual case study approach to investigate *Aman Ki Asha* as a media-led cultural diplomacy initiative between India and Pakistan. The research does not aim to measure the campaign's effectiveness in quantitative terms; rather, it seeks to interpret the strategic, symbolic, and institutional dimensions of the initiative within the complex socio-political context of South Asia. Qualitative methods are particularly suited to examining meanings, narratives, and symbolic interactions, especially in conflict-prone settings where historical memory, lived experience, and media representations significantly shape public discourse.

The study is grounded in a comprehensive analysis of secondary sources, including academic literature, policy documents, journalistic reports, campaign archives, and official statements. These materials are examined to trace the evolution, discourse, and public reception of *Aman Ki Asha*, situating the initiative within broader Indo-Pak relations and the theoretical landscape of cultural diplomacy (Cull, 2008). The research does not involve the collection of primary data through interviews or surveys. Instead, it employs a narrative-interpretive method to uncover how the campaign was constructed, communicated, and challenged

across different platforms and audiences.

The analytical framework guiding this study is derived from strategic communication theory, a model frequently employed in public diplomacy and international media research. This framework provides a structured lens through which to evaluate *Aman Ki Asha*'s strategic intent, operational mechanisms, and its ability or inability to navigate entrenched political barriers and foster sustainable peace narratives. The initiative is analyzed as a soft power instrument (Nye, 2004), aiming to influence public opinion and bilateral relations through cultural engagement and symbolic communication.

It is important to clarify that this study does not conduct a content analysis. It does not involve the quantification, coding, or statistical treatment of media texts. Rather, it engages in conceptual and narrative interpretation, analyzing discourse patterns and campaign strategies through theoretical lenses of soft power, cultural diplomacy, and media theory (Bjola & Jiang, 2015). The objective is to understand how the initiative functioned within its discursive and institutional context, rather than to statistically evaluate its media impact or audience reception.

While this methodology offers rich contextual insight and contributes to the theoretical understanding of media-driven peacebuilding, it carries certain limitations. The absence of primary empirical data restricts the ability to directly assess audience perceptions or the lived experiences of participants and organizers. Moreover, without formal content analysis, the study cannot quantify the frequency or framing of peace-related narratives in the media. These limitations are acknowledged as inherent to the chosen methodological approach and point to future research opportunities, including mixed-method studies that combine interviews, ethnographic fieldwork, and quantitative media analysis (Silverman, 2020).

To enhance objectivity and academic rigor in analyzing a campaign led by powerful media entities, the study adopts a critical narrative perspective that positions media not as neutral communicators but as ideologically and economically embedded institutions. Given that *Aman Ki Asha* was spearheaded by *The Times of India* and *The Jang Group*, two influential conglomerates with their own editorial agendas the research is cautious to triangulate data from independent journalistic sources, academic commentary, and civil society critiques. Drawing on theoretical frameworks in media diplomacy and strategic communication (Entman, 2008), the study accounts for the dual role of media as both promoters of soft power and actors influenced by elite interests. This approach ensures a reflective and critical stance that avoids over-reliance on campaign narratives and remains attuned to broader structural dynamics.

In sum, the study offers a qualitative, interpretive examination of *Aman Ki Asha* as a case of symbolic media diplomacy. While its findings are not statistically generalized, they provide valuable conceptual insights into the evolving role of media in cultural diplomacy and peacebuilding. This approach illuminates how non-state actors, particularly media institutions, strategically engage in the poli-

tics of reconciliation through cultural initiatives in divided and adversarial societies.

5. Analytical Framework

This study uses a strategic communication analysis framework commonly applied in public diplomacy and cultural diplomacy research. The framework examines four key components of a campaign: Agent (the initiators of the effort), Agenda (the objectives and goals), Vehicle (the methods and platforms used to deliver the message), and Target Audience (the groups the initiative aims to reach). This approach allows for a structured understanding of how *Aman Ki Asha* operated as a media-led cultural diplomacy initiative and why it ultimately struggled to achieve sustained peace outcomes.

Strategic communication, as applied in this context, enables researchers to examine not just the content of cultural diplomacy campaigns but also the political and institutional processes behind them. As Hallahan et al. (2007) suggest, strategic communication frameworks are essential for understanding how public messages are deliberately crafted to achieve diplomatic objectives, particularly in conflict-prone regions. By applying this lens to *Aman Ki Asha*, the study captures how media narratives were shaped, disseminated, and received in both India and Pakistan within distinct socio-political environments.

Moreover, the framework allows for the integration of soft power theory and media diplomacy scholarship, enabling a nuanced exploration of non-state actors' influence in international relations. As Grincheva (2024) argues, contemporary cultural diplomacy increasingly relies on partnerships between state institutions, private media, and civil society actors. The use of strategic communication in this study thus helps bridge theoretical insights from international communication and practical case-level dynamics, offering a multidimensional understanding of why initiatives like *Aman Ki Asha* resonate symbolically yet falter structurally.

6. Analysis and Results

This section presents the core analytical findings of the study and reflects on the implications of the *Aman Ki Asha* initiative through a structured evaluation. By integrating theoretical insights from strategic communication and soft power diplomacy, the analysis seeks to understand how the initiative was conceptualized, operationalized, and received. The results section follows this analysis by assessing the practical effectiveness and limitations of the campaign, focusing on political, institutional, and media-related factors that shaped its trajectory and ultimate impact.

6.1. Analysis

The analysis is guided by the strategic communication framework, which deconstructs cultural diplomacy initiatives. By applying this framework, this section aims to provide a structured understanding of how *Aman Ki Asha* functioned in

the Indo-Pak context, particularly its role in promoting soft power and people-to-people engagement through media. It highlights the dual function of media and role of economic interdependence.

6.1.1. Agent

Aman Ki Asha was a non-governmental programme that aimed to promote cultural diplomacy between Pakistan and India. It was led by private media conglomerates, *The Times of India* and *The Jang Group* (Rid, 2020; Yousaf, 2021). In the end, the endeavour failed to bring about enduring peace and mutual understanding between the two countries, despite its admirable goals and great efforts.

The leadership of powerful media houses gave the campaign significant visibility and institutional resources but also exposed it to critiques of elite dominance and agenda-setting (Chadha & Desai, 2022). The private nature of the initiative meant that it could operate independently of government constraints, yet this autonomy also limited its reach in policymaking spheres. Moreover, the initiative's media-led structure highlighted the central role of communication actors in non-state diplomacy, serving as a case study in how media can act as both promoter and gatekeeper of peace narratives (Bjola & Jiang, 2015).

Despite being non-governmental, *Aman Ki Asha* relied on top-down mobilization strategies, with minimal grassroots involvement in agenda-setting. This imbalance raised questions about the authenticity and inclusivity of its cultural diplomacy efforts. A more participatory design might have enhanced local legitimacy and broadened the social base of the initiative, making its outcomes more resilient to political fluctuations (Grincheva, 2024).

6.1.2. Agenda

Aman Ki Asha's main goal was to use cultural diplomacy to improve understanding and peace between India and Pakistan. It aimed to promote interpersonal relationships, cultural exchanges in literature, music, and the arts, draw attention to shared heritage and similarities, and provide a forum for discussion and cooperation on a range of sociocultural concerns. The effort also sought to demonstrate the public's desire for peace to persuade legislators. In contrast to programmes that try to promote cultural diplomacy incidentally, *Aman Ki Asha* specifically sought to use cultural exchanges as a means of promoting peace and resolving conflicts.

The agenda emphasized shared cultural heritage as a foundation for mutual empathy. Through showcasing traditions, language affinities, and parallel histories, the initiative aimed to humanize "the other" and disrupt entrenched nationalist tropes (Grincheva, 2024). In doing so, it sought to normalize the idea of peace as a legitimate aspiration rather than an exceptional gesture. Furthermore, *Aman Ki Asha* aimed to create a shift in public discourse by targeting influential segments of society, including youth, artists, and intellectuals. By cultivating a soft power narrative rooted in shared identity rather than political confrontation, the campaign hoped to exert bottom-up pressure on policymakers to reimagine the

peace agenda in bilateral relations (Yousaf, 2021).

6.1.3. Vehicle

The programme made use of several platforms to carry out cultural diplomacy, such as large-scale media campaigns with unique segments and features that advance harmony and understanding. To bring together artists, authors, and performers from both nations, it arranged cultural events including concerts, art exhibitions, literary festivals, and sporting activities. To further highlight group innovation, the programme supported cooperative projects in journalism, music, and cinema. By holding conferences and seminars with intellectuals, professors, and activists to talk about problems of common concern and offer answers, it also created forums for discourse.

These cultural vehicles served both symbolic and practical purposes. Symbolically, they signaled a commitment to dialogue and reconciliation; practically, they fostered face-to-face contact and transnational collaboration. Cultural diplomacy here functioned not just as a tool of outreach, but as a mechanism for experiential learning and empathy-building across borders (Cull, 2008).

The campaign also utilized cross-platform media coverage, including editorials, televised features, and digital media to amplify its messaging. This media saturation strategy enabled the initiative to reach mass audiences and foster a cross-border conversation that transcended diplomatic channels. However, the media-centric approach also left it vulnerable to shifting editorial policies and political climates, which at times diluted its messaging or constrained its continuity (Chadha & Desai, 2022).

6.1.4. Target Audience

Aman Ki Asha, a joint project of Pakistan and India, sought to reach a broad audience with its message of harmony and peace. Its first goal was to contact as many people as possible to influence public opinion and create a grassroots movement that would support peace between the two countries. The programme mainly focused on youth, recognising their capacity to welcome change and including them in discussions and activities that foster cross-border cooperation and understanding. For example, initiatives such as student exchange programs, youth-led discussions, and university-level seminars were featured prominently in campaign reports and coverage (Rid, 2020).

Literary festivals and joint cultural events often involved scholars, writers, artists, and public intellectuals, aiming to generate elite discourse around peacebuilding. While there is a lack of formal impact data measuring attitudinal change among these groups, the campaign's programming choices and media materials indicate a deliberate strategy to engage young opinion leaders and cultural intermediaries, aligning with peacebuilding literature that identifies these demographics as critical for shaping long-term social narratives (Gumenyuk et al., 2021).

To emphasize the advantages of peaceful cohabitation and highlight common

cultural legacy, *Aman Ki Asha* also sought the cooperation of intellectuals and artists. Furthermore, by demonstrating broad popular support for peace measures, the project sought to influence political discourse by subtly addressing officials. *Aman Ki Asha* aimed to establish a comprehensive strategy for promoting enduring peace and harmony between Pakistan and India by including such a varied audience.

6.1.5. Media's Dual Role in the Aman Ki Asha Initiative

The *Aman Ki Asha* campaign exemplifies media's multifaceted role as a soft power conduit and platform for cross-cultural dialogue. As a media-led cultural diplomacy effort, the initiative leveraged the editorial influence of major media conglomerates to construct narratives centered on peace, shared heritage, and people-to-people connection. This aligns with Nye's (2004) conceptualization of media as a vehicle for attraction and public diplomacy, seeking to foster empathy and reshape public opinion beyond official political rhetoric.

However, the campaign's impact was constrained by the competing realities of media ecosystems in both India and Pakistan. While *Aman Ki Asha* offered dialogic spaces through cultural events and joint media productions, other media outlets continued to propagate jingoistic narratives and nationalist sentiment. Commercial imperatives and political affiliations often led to sensationalist reporting that undermined the campaign's messages.

Thus, despite its promise as a soft power instrument, *Aman Ki Asha* faced structural challenges that limited media's capacity to act as a transformative platform for sustained cross-border understanding. This analysis reveals that media's role in cultural diplomacy is inherently dualistic capable of both building bridges and reinforcing divides highlighting the need for more nuanced strategies that address media polarization while leveraging its potential as a peacebuilding tool.

6.1.6. Economic Interdependence and Cultural Diplomacy

Although *Aman Ki Asha* concentrated on media-led cultural exchanges as a pathway to peace, the campaign's framework overlooks the significant role that economic interdependence plays in conflict reduction. Scholarly consensus affirms that sustained economic ties including bilateral trade, joint resource management, and commerce can create mutual incentives for cooperation, thereby reducing the likelihood of conflict escalation (Nye, 2004). The Indo-Pak context presents tangible examples, such as the Indus Waters Treaty, which has persisted despite broader political tensions by fostering technical collaboration over shared water resources.

Furthermore, periods of economic disengagement, such as the 2019 trade bans, have coincided with deteriorating public sentiment and heightened hostility, highlighting the intertwined nature of economic and cultural relations (Kapur, 2020). This intersection suggests that the absence of a robust economic diplomacy component limited *Aman Ki Asha*'s ability to build durable peace narratives grounded in shared material interests. Incorporating economic dimensions into

cultural diplomacy initiatives could enhance their resilience by creating interdependencies that complement symbolic and communicative efforts.

6.2. Results

The findings of this study reveal both the strengths and limitations of *Aman Ki Asha* as a cultural diplomacy initiative. While the campaign succeeded in generating visibility and symbolic gestures of peace, its impact was constrained by structural limitations, political volatility, and media polarization. It highlights the outcomes of the analysis, offering insights into why the initiative struggled to achieve sustainable transformation in Indo-Pak relations.

6.2.1. Political Climate and Trust Deficit

Deeply ingrained political animosity and unsolved territorial issues between Pakistan and India were two of the main reasons *Aman Ki Asha* failed. The campaign was severely hampered by political events like the 2008 Mumbai attacks and the ensuing cross-border tensions, notwithstanding the cultural and social endeavours. The atmosphere that hindered the success of cultural diplomacy activities was one of ongoing security concerns and a lack of political commitment to address important issues (Saliha, 2018).

Internal political structures within Pakistan also shaped the trajectory of the campaign in significant ways. Internal political dynamics in Pakistan, particularly the primacy of military institutions in foreign and security policymaking, played a constraining role in the operational scope of *Aman Ki Asha*. The Pakistan military has traditionally shaped national narratives on India and has often been skeptical of civilian-led peace initiatives that appear to challenge dominant security paradigms (Kapur, 2020).

While *Aman Ki Asha* enjoyed some public and editorial visibility, it lacked explicit state endorsement, likely due to the military's cautious approach to people-to-people diplomacy. Moreover, periods of civil-military tension or post-crisis military dominance often resulted in discursive suppression of peace narratives, limiting the space available for cross-border cultural engagement. As Rahim & Ashraf (2022) note, the success of cultural diplomacy in South Asia is directly influenced by internal power asymmetries and the extent of civilian autonomy in shaping foreign policy discourse.

6.2.2. Media's Dual Role

While the media outlets that produced *Aman Ki Asha* championed peace, other media outlets in both nations persisted in spreading narratives that were patriotic and occasionally jingoistic. The media's dual role produced contradictory signals and lessened the initiative's impact. Sensationalist coverage of wars and military encounters eclipsed efforts to promote peace, creating mistrust and cynicism among the populace (Behuria, 2010).

The initiative's peace narrative was also shaped and, in many instances, constrained by jingoistic media coverage. While this study does not conduct a formal

content analysis of specific news texts, it draws on secondary sources and existing media scholarship to demonstrate how jingoism and media polarization have consistently undermined peace initiatives like *Aman Ki Asha*. Following events such as the 2016 Uri attack and the 2019 Pulwama-Balakot escalation, mainstream Indian and Pakistani news channels adopted aggressively nationalistic tones, framing the other state as a threat and marginalizing moderate or peace-oriented narratives (Chadha & Desai, 2022).

These moments exemplify how media framing, often driven by TRP incentives and political alignment, contributes to hardening public attitudes and shrinking the discursive space for dialogue. Studies have also shown that sensationalism and war rhetoric dominate prime-time coverage during crises, reinforcing stereotypes and obstructing peace messaging (Behuria, 2010). While narrative content analysis could strengthen this argument, current insights drawn from secondary evidence sufficiently illustrate the toxic media environment in which cultural diplomacy efforts operate.

6.2.3. Socio-Political Divide

The popularity of *Aman Ki Asha* was hampered by enduring sociopolitical divisions, historical grudges, and divergent national narratives on the partition and the ensuing conflicts. Hardline parties and individuals in both nations opposed the proposal because they believed that peace attempts compromised national interests and were reluctant to move past the past (Rid, 2020). These ideological barriers were further entrenched by educational curricula, nationalist media content, and political rhetoric that portrayed the other country as an existential threat. As a result, initiatives promoting reconciliation were often delegitimized as unpatriotic or strategically naïve, making it difficult for campaigns like *Aman Ki Asha* to gain broad-based public support.

The socio-political divide was also reflected in public perception. Media commentaries from both sides revealed widespread mistrust and skepticism, especially in the aftermath of border conflicts or terror-related incidents. These dynamics created a volatile environment where peacebuilding efforts were easily derailed by political events, limiting the ability of *Aman Ki Asha* to sustain consistent public engagement. Understanding this divide is essential for future cultural diplomacy efforts that must operate in contested public spheres.

6.2.4. Lack of Sustained Engagement

Even though *Aman Ki Asha* coordinated a few well-known events and campaigns, there wasn't constant and ongoing participation. For the project to stay on track and adjust to the changing political environment, a more comprehensive and long-term plan was required. Though powerful, fleeting events and media efforts weren't enough to effect long-lasting change (Farooq, 2021; Yousaf, 2021; Kapur, 2020).

Moreover, the absence of institutional mechanisms to continue dialogue such as permanent exchange platforms, regional cultural committees, or recurring joint

initiatives meant that momentum dissipated quickly after major events. Without a strategic roadmap for longitudinal engagement, the campaign struggled to maintain its presence in public discourse, leaving its impact vulnerable to political fluctuations and media cycles. Sustained peacebuilding, especially in adversarial contexts like India and Pakistan, requires continuity and resilience that transcend event-based programming.

6.2.5. Absence of Government Support

Initiatives aimed at promoting cultural diplomacy frequently need at least some degree of official backing to be successful, because *Aman Ki Asha* did not have official support from the governments of Pakistan or India, it was unable to sway policy or accomplish other political goals. Government support may have given the project the credibility and funding needed to continue (Rid, 2020).

Without formal diplomatic endorsement, the campaign lacked access to bilateral cultural cooperation frameworks, diplomatic channels, or state-level funding that could have elevated its reach. Furthermore, the lack of institutional alignment with foreign ministries or peacebuilding departments meant the initiative remained largely symbolic. As noted in peace diplomacy, state backing, even if indirect, can provide necessary stability and infrastructural support for non-state cultural initiatives to flourish (Grincheva, 2024; Yousaf, 2021).

7. Comparison with Successful Initiatives

Understanding the flaws of *Aman Ki Asha* and contrasting it with effective cultural diplomacy programmes such as the Franco-German Youth Office (FGYO) requires analysing the major elements that make the latter successful. Since its founding in 1963, the FGYO has prospered because of strong government support and bilateral agreements that guarantee ongoing funding from successive political governments.

Its success is attributed to ongoing, well-planned initiatives that actively include young people from both countries and create lasting relationships through cross-cultural interactions. Furthermore, the FGYO effectively incorporates cultural diplomacy into larger frameworks of French German political and economic cooperation, strengthening understanding between the two countries on several levels.

In contrast, *Aman Ki Asha* faltered because of a lack of constant bilateral agreements and inadequate official assistance, which made it difficult for the programme to retain pace and impact. The lack of ongoing initiatives with a wide range of participants further hindered its ability to foster strong cultural ties between India and Pakistan. Therefore, even though the FGYO thrived because of extensive institutional backing and integrated frameworks, *Aman Ki Asha* encountered significant obstacles that hindered its objective of promoting long-lasting peace and cultural harmony in the area.

8. Impact of Renewed Conflict on Cultural Diplomacy Efforts

The impact of renewed conflict on cultural diplomacy efforts is profound and

multifaceted, as violence and hostility significantly disrupt long-term diplomatic initiatives. The escalation of tensions, such as the Pulwama incident, illustrates how quickly cultural engagement can be undermined by violent events. These incidents not only derail ongoing cultural diplomacy programs but also reverse the hard-won trust between the peoples of both nations. When violence flares up, the years of careful relationship-building through cultural exchanges are often shattered, leaving behind deep scars that take considerable time to heal.

The consequences extend beyond the diplomatic sphere, with ordinary citizens bearing the brunt of the situation. Increased visa restrictions and tightened border controls make travel between the countries more difficult, affecting both personal and professional interactions. Cross-border marriages, family ties, and friendships suffer as movement becomes restricted, isolating individuals from their loved ones and further deepening divides. Business collaborations and economic ties that once thrived across the India-Pakistan border often collapse, as economic actors become hesitant to engage in uncertain environments. Additionally, artistic collaborations and cultural projects that once symbolized the potential for peace and understanding are also dismantled under the weight of nationalist sentiments and political pressure (Kruckeberg & Vujnovic, 2022).

As public attitudes harden, the emotional and psychological toll of the conflict becomes increasingly visible. Loss, trauma, and a sense of collective grievance permeate communities on both sides of the border, leading to a growing disconnect between ordinary citizens and the idea of cultural cooperation. Cultural diplomacy, which relies on fostering empathy and shared understanding, struggles to gain traction when the social and psychological wounds of war and loss remain raw. While symbolic gestures like movie screenings, cricket matches, and music festivals may offer temporary moments of connection and shared experience, they cannot address the underlying political issues or heal the emotional damage caused by years of conflict. These events, though valuable, risk being seen as superficial distractions from the real need for conflict resolution and peacebuilding. In the face of ongoing hostilities, cultural diplomacy efforts often find themselves in a difficult position, where the importance of soft power and people-to-people connections is overshadowed by the harsh realities of geopolitical tensions and the need for meaningful political dialogue (McClory, 2021).

9. Global Implications of India-Pakistan Tensions

The impact of India-Pakistan hostility extends far beyond the South Asian region, with far-reaching implications for global security, economic stability, and diplomatic relations. The prolonged tensions between these nuclear-armed nations have significant consequences for international peace and security frameworks. The existence of nuclear weapons in both countries creates an ever-present risk of escalation, where even a minor skirmish could lead to catastrophic consequences. The potential for nuclear confrontation increases the stakes, drawing global powers into the conflict, as they work to manage the risk of destabilization in a region

that is already fraught with complex political dynamics (Pethiyagoda, 2020).

Beyond the direct threat of military conflict, the ongoing rivalry has led to considerable military build-ups, with both nations investing heavily in defense spending. This diverts vital resources away from development, education, and healthcare, further hindering their economic growth and human development. The security dilemma between India and Pakistan exacerbates tensions within the broader Indo-Pacific region, as neighboring countries may respond to military posturing with their own defense initiatives, contributing to an arms race and regional instability.

Additionally, the enduring hostility between India and Pakistan has a profound impact on diasporic communities abroad, especially in multicultural societies like the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States. These communities often find themselves caught in the crossfire of polarized political narratives, with their identities and affiliations becoming a point of contention. This dynamic can lead to increased social and political polarization, affecting the fabric of these societies. Individuals who are part of these diasporic groups may face discrimination, stereotyping, and social exclusion, exacerbating feelings of division (Paul, 2021).

Moreover, the psychological toll of the unresolved conflict is not limited to those directly involved. Across continents, generations of families separated by borders endure emotional distress, as they grapple with the unresolved nature of the dispute. The impact on mental health is significant, creating a transnational divide that spans communities on both sides of the border. The global nature of this issue highlights that the India-Pakistan conflict is not only a regional concern but a matter of international importance, with the potential to influence global peace, security, and the socio-political landscape in multicultural nations.

10. Policy Directions for Enhancing Bilateral Relations

To strengthen cultural diplomacy between Pakistan and India, a series of interconnected policy actions should be adopted. First, both governments should establish formal partnerships to fund and support cross-border cultural initiatives. This official backing would not only provide legitimacy and stability but also ensure long-term planning beyond the influence of shifting political climates. Second, a structured framework for recurring cultural exchanges such as joint art exhibitions, educational projects, and collaborative media productions should be embedded into diplomatic strategies. These exchanges must be envisioned as part of a sustained, multi-year roadmap for people-to-people engagement.

In parallel, educational collaborations are essential for fostering mutual respect and countering divisive historical narratives. Initiatives like student exchange programs, joint research forums, and the development of shared curricula in history, media ethics, and cultural studies can promote long-term attitudinal shifts among youth and academia. Moreover, digital platforms should be leveraged to organize online forums, virtual events, and cross-border storytelling initiatives. These tools enable direct citizen engagement, allowing dialogue to flourish outside conven-

tional diplomatic constraints and in real-time digital spaces.

To further support peace-oriented discourse, media institutions should be encouraged to adopt conflict-sensitive journalism practices. This includes the creation of ethical reporting guidelines and training programs that emphasize reconciliation and avoid sensationalism. Such a unified media strategy could help promote constructive narratives and mitigate the polarizing effects of adversarial coverage.

Lastly, while *Aman Ki Asha* positioned itself as a non-governmental civil society campaign, its operational structure relied heavily on elite media institutions. The recommendation for institutional support does not conflict with this grassroots framing. Rather, it highlights the necessity of structural backing such as policy protection, diplomatic engagement, and resource mobilization to ensure continuity. As Grincheva (2024) and Yousaf (2021) contend, non-state peace initiatives in conflict zones require enabling environments created through public-private partnerships. Institutional support, particularly in the form of media freedom guarantees and cross-border facilitation, can protect these efforts from politicization and enhance their strategic sustainability.

11. Conclusion and Recommendation

11.1. Conclusion

When considering the *Aman Ki Asha* programme and its difficulties, utilising cultural diplomacy between countries with as many historical ties as Pakistan and India is a difficult undertaking. The initiative's failure to maintain peace over time brings to light the complex mechanics of cultural diplomacy in environments characterized by political unrest and historical strife. By using a strategic communication analysis framework considering the initiative's agent, agenda, vehicle, and target audience, this study offers a structured understanding of why *Aman Ki Asha* failed to generate long-term impact.

These developments have re-emphasized entrenched nationalist discourses that demonize the "other", leaving little room for peace-oriented media narratives. The revocation of Article 370 in August 2019, which stripped Jammu and Kashmir of its semi-autonomous status, further widened the trust deficit. Diplomatic channels froze, and even cultural engagements such as cricket tours, music exchanges, and academic collaborations were suspended or banned. The rise of right-wing populism in both countries has compounded the issue. In India, the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) muscular nationalism frames engagement with Pakistan as political vulnerability. In Pakistan, civilian-led peacebuilding efforts remain constrained by the military's strategic calculus. As a result, cultural diplomacy once a potential bridge now finds itself marginalized (Rahim & Ashraf, 2022).

Moreover, media polarization and sensationalism have exacerbated bilateral hostility. Newsrooms that once supported campaigns like *Aman Ki Asha* now frequently amplify war narratives, portraying the neighbor as an existential threat. This shift in media culture has significantly weakened public appetite for cross-

border collaboration and trust-building. Despite the bleak outlook, scattered civil society efforts led by journalists, youth groups, and diaspora communities continue to advocate for peace through digital storytelling, art, and educational projects. However, their reach remains limited without institutional and political support.

Successful cultural diplomacy demands a complete, ongoing commitment from all parties involved; it cannot be achieved with tokens of gestures or isolated initiatives. This involves active involvement from the media, cultural institutions, and civil society in addition to supporting from the government. To achieve inclusion and understanding between the two nations, such programmes must manage the intricacies of public opinion, media narratives, and political landscapes (Otmazgin & Ben-Ari, 2021).

Furthermore, cultural diplomacy needs to aim for concrete, long-lasting effects rather than just symbolic ones. This might include campaigns to encourage interpersonal communication, collaborative cultural endeavours, and educational activities that teach empathy and respect for others. Essentially, the benefits of effective cultural diplomacy in promoting amicable relations between countries are as great as the obstacles it poses. It calls for tenacity, smart preparation, and a sincere dedication to cross-border communication and collaboration. In fact, via such initiatives, cultural diplomacy may be extremely important in mending rifts and fostering enduring peace in conflict-prone areas of the world.

11.2. Recommendation

Based on the findings of this research, several directions for future studies are recommended. Future research could broaden the scope by exploring additional variables or different contexts to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the subject. It is also advisable to use mixed-method approaches, combining both qualitative and quantitative techniques, to gain richer and more nuanced insights. Longitudinal studies could be particularly beneficial in capturing changes over time. Expanding the sample size and ensuring a more diverse demographic representation would enhance the generalizability of future findings.

Moreover, cross-cultural comparisons could help identify universal patterns and context-specific differences. Integrating advanced technologies, such as AI-driven analysis, could open new dimensions for data interpretation. In line with McClory's (2021) findings, leveraging digital platforms for virtual cultural diplomacy initiatives could help mitigate the physical and political barriers that often obstruct Indo-Pak engagement.

Future research should also focus on translating academic findings into practical strategies or policy recommendations. Applying new or emerging theoretical frameworks could provide fresh perspectives and challenge existing assumptions. Additionally, addressing the limitations identified in the current study, such as methodological or sampling constraints, would strengthen future work. Finally, fostering interdisciplinary collaborations can enrich the research process and con-

tribute to more holistic and innovative outcomes.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest regarding this research.

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