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Behind Every Successful Diplomat is Their Spouse: The Buffer Role of Indian and Pakistani Diplomatic Spouses

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BEHIND EVERY SUCCESSFUL DIPLOMAT IS THEIR SPOUSE
THE BUFFER ROLE OF INDIAN AND PAKISTANI DIPLOMATIC SPOUSES

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in the International Relations Program from
William & Mary

by

Sania Shahid

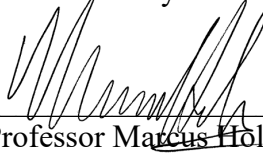
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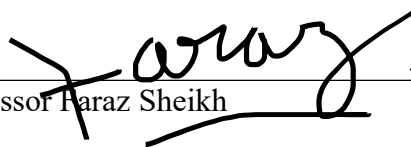
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**BEHIND EVERY SUCCESSFUL DIPLOMAT IS THEIR SPOUSE
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Sania Shahid

Introduction

Though often unrecognized, spouses play a central role in the careers of their partners in diplomatic service. By hosting dignitaries and forging close relationships with members of the diplomatic community, spouses offer informal introductions to their country's culture. The social role spouses perform also creates congenial environments, where diplomats can continue professional discussions.¹

The academic literature has increasingly been focused on the effect of individuals on diplomatic missions, such as a study of how cultural immersion affects the loyalty of diplomats to their assigned countries versus their home country.² However, research on agents that affect but are not directly engaged in international politics—such as diplomatic spouses—is limited. There have been attempts to explore the effect of diplomatic affairs on the families of diplomats, such as the toll of frequent relocation, but research on the contributions of diplomatic families to international politics is rare.³ For example, scholars have studied the degree to which women are incorporated into the diplomatic community and their management of familial responsibilities. The cases in which diplomatic spouses are credited for their role are largely restricted to examining how gender gives them access to restricted spaces.⁴

¹ Cynthia Enloe. "Bananas, Beaches and Bases : Making Feminist Sense of International Politics". *Berkeley: University of California Press*, 2014. Accessed November 21, 2020. ProQuest Ebook Central.

² Ashwath Komath, "'Localitis' in State Diplomacy: A Study of Cultural Immersion and Its Effect on the Indian Foreign Service." *Indian Quarterly* 77, no. 1 (March 2021): 78-100.

³ Aneta Shaw, "Discontinuous Lives : Listening to the Stories of South African Diplomatic Families in the Third World." (Ph.D. diss., University of Pretoria, 2007), 40-59; Sara Hiorns, *Diplomatic Families and Children's Mobile Lives: Experiences of British Diplomatic Service Children from 1945 to 1990* (London: Routledge, 2021), 83.

⁴ Eric Davoine, Claudio Ravasi, Xavier Salamin, and Christel Cudré-Mauroux. "A 'dramaturgical' analysis of spouse role enactment in expatriation : An exploratory gender comparative study in the diplomatic and consular field", *Journal of Global Mobility* 1, no. 1 (2013): 104-105.

Two essential questions, thus, remain unanswered: Which political dynamics enable spouses to play a more significant role in diplomacy? And what individual characteristics of diplomatic spouses are ideal for easing tense interactions—that is, when can they take on “buffer” role? This paper will investigate whether bi-lateral or multi-lateral encounters are ideal for diplomatic spouses to act as “buffers,” hypothesizing that multilateral interactions create opportunities for such interventions. I further argue that the flexibility of interactions and the physical location of the spouses can affect their role in the diplomatic process. Finally, I posit that the personal characteristics of spouses influence the conditions under which they gain access to the diplomatic community, enabling them to play a buffer role.

The following paper will first examine the literature on the primary agents of diplomacy, diplomatic families, and diplomatic spouses. The next section offers a theoretical framework outlining the ideal setting and individual characteristics that allow diplomatic spouses to perform a buffer role. I then discuss my research design, explaining the choice of Pakistan and India as case studies and describing my content analysis of three memoirs and data collected from seven interviews. Finally, I discuss my findings and avenues for future research.

Literature Review: The Role of Individual Agents in Diplomacy

Traditionally, the literature on diplomacy has focused on the personal experiences of diplomats and largely consists of autobiographical accounts. However, scholars have developed more general theories of diplomacy, in particular agent-level approaches.⁵ These approaches focus

⁵See, for example, Keren Yarhi-Milo, *Knowing the Adversary: Leaders, Intelligence, and Assessment of Intentions in International Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014); Andrew Moravcsik. “Taking Preferences Seriously: A Liberal Theory of International Politics.” *International Organization* 51, no.4 (1997): 513-53; Helen V. Milner. “Interest, Institutions, and Information.” *Princeton University Press* (1997); and Jakob Gustavsson. "How Should We Study Foreign Policy Change?" *Cooperation and Conflict*. 34, no. 1 (1999): 73-95.

on explaining the actions of diplomats and identifying which factors influence the agency of diplomatic representatives. This shift in focus may be due to a recognition that, in their day-to-day interactions, diplomats can alter the foreign policy of countries, reacting to conditions about which they cannot immediately seek advice.⁶ They can be central actors in foreign policy outcomes.

The existing literature on how individual diplomatic agents affect diplomatic outcomes falls into three categories: (1) the effect of the individual diplomats' characteristics, specifically those appointed by the state, on diplomatic outcomes, (2) the effects of the relocation process on family members of diplomats, and (3) the contributions of diplomatic spouses to the careers of the diplomats. It is evident from a review of this extant literature that the role of diplomatic spouses is relatively neglected. Specifically, the literature is missing an analysis of the ideal conditions and individual characteristics that diplomatic spouses should embody to perform a buffer role.

Primary Diplomatic Agents

While career diplomats and political appointees act as the primary agents appointed by the state, politicians, parliamentarians, military leaders, and members of different state agencies can also serve the diplomatic functions of a state.⁷ Opportunities for interaction, such as encounters with key individuals or the physical location of an encounter, and personal characteristics, such as educational background or gender identity of state leaders and diplomats, play an important role in shaping diplomatic exchanges.

⁶ Geoffrey Wiseman. "Theorizing Diplomacy and Diplomats on Their Own Terms." *International Studies Review* 13, no. 2 (2011): 348-50. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23017173>.

⁷ This paper will be focused on the contributions of primary diplomatic agents and their spouses. More specifically, I will look at the spouses of career diplomats, who are part of the foreign service division within the bureaucracy of their respective country. For a discussion of the difference between career diplomats and political appointees, see Evan T. Haglund. "Striped Pants versus Fat Cats: Ambassadorial Performance of Career Diplomats and Political Appointees." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 45, no. 4 (2015): 653-78.

Marcus Holmes and Nicholas J. Wheeler examine how the social elements of interactions among diplomats can affect the nature of diplomatic negotiations and informal encounters.⁸ Along with mutual trust, the factors for optimal engagement include: physical presence, barriers to outsiders, mutual focus of attention, and shared mood.⁹ As Holmes and Wheeler argue, if these factors are present, then the individuals involved feel collective excitement, forming a social bond. This bond results in a sense of belonging, culminating in a positive interaction. However, if these situational factors are absent, the interactions are likely to result in the lack of a social bond or even a negative encounter between the diplomats that could halt future negotiations.

At the same time, the individual characteristics of diplomats can affect both their appointments and their ability to form diplomatic connections. For instance, educational attainment, gender identity, and the characteristics of host countries, such as the quality of life or regime type, all factor into foreign appointments by the U.S. government.¹⁰ In his discussion of the value of diplomacy, Rathburg highlights the importance of negotiation styles, forms of communication, and individual characteristics of the agents engaging in diplomacy.¹¹ He argues that when diplomats view an environment differently, they adopt different negotiation styles. Therefore, the characteristics of diplomats determine their responses to different diplomatic situations. Indeed, Naurin and Alexander find that the performance of female diplomats may be subjected to gendered stereotypes by male diplomats, triggering chivalrous behavior during

⁸ Marcus Holmes, and Nicholas J. Wheeler, "Social bonding in diplomacy." *International Theory* 12, 133–161, doi:10.1017/S1752971919000162 *International Theory*, 2020; and Nicholas J. Wheeler, "Trust, Signalling, and International Relations." In *Trusting Enemies: Interpersonal Relationships in International Conflict*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.

⁹ Wheeler, "Trust, Signalling and International Relations." 1-2; Holmes and Wheeler, "Social bonding in diplomacy." 134. See also, Randall Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press).

¹⁰ Costel Calin, Kevin Buterbaugh, Male versus Female Career Ambassadors: Is the US Foreign Service Still Biased?, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, Volume 15, Issue 2, April 2019: 205– 223.

¹¹ Brian Rathburg, *Diplomacy's Value: Creating Security in 1920s Europe and the Contemporary Middle East*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014): 23-57.

negotiations and increasing the likelihood of favorable outcomes that may benefit the country of the female diplomats, such as better economic terms in trade deals.¹² This research, in particular, raises the question of whether diplomatic spouses can also alter the negotiating environments and have a similar effect on the conduct of diplomacy.

Families of Diplomats

The families of career diplomats often relocate to countries to which the diplomat is appointed. In the present age, the make-up of a family may vary greatly from one to the next. Given this variation, there are distinct effects that untraditional families have on diplomacy, involving their legal status. Traditional families of diplomats, in contrast, have indirect effects on diplomacy as well, such as stressors from a difficult family life affecting the duties of the diplomat.

Untraditional families have had the most pronounced effect on diplomacy. Same-sex and polygamous couples and their children prompt receiving states to take into account the sending states' definition of family.¹³ According to Rosputinsky, an adjustment of norms occurs with the approval of the visa applications submitted by same-sex and polygamous partners and well as children from those relationships. Such allowances lay the groundwork for advocacy among local LGBTQ+ communities. While this study is groundbreaking, absent an analysis of the kinds of political dynamics under which the outcomes are most favorable, we cannot fully anticipate the impact such families have on diplomacy.

Traditional families indirectly affect diplomacy. In her study on how relocation strains diplomatic families, Hennel-Brzozowska, observes that marriages can be negatively affected if

¹² Daniel Naurin, Elin Naurin, and Amy Alexander. "Gender Stereotyping and Chivalry in International *Negotiations*: A Survey Experiment in the Council of the European Union. *International Organization* 73, no. 2 (2019): 469–88.

¹³ Peter Rosputinský, "Current Diplomatic Practice on Partners of Homosexual Members of Diplomatic Missions and Wives of Polygamous Members of Diplomatic Missions." *Politické Vedy*. 22, no. 4 (2019): 172-220.

spouses have to give up their jobs and become dependent on the diplomat for a source of income. The dependency builds resentment, as spouses are locked into a situation where they have to keep adjusting for the diplomat's benefit.¹⁴ She further argues that children's educational attainment and connections to the extended family are also compromised due to constant relocation and distance from loved ones. These stressors affect the psychological well-being of the diplomat and may hinder the ability to perform his or her duties. Beyond the family dynamic, diplomatic spouses also have an individual role to play in diplomacy.

Diplomatic Spouses and Diplomacy

The existing literature on the effect diplomatic spouses have on the achievement of foreign policy objectives, demonstrates that "they matter," specifically due to their gender and gendered norms, at least in the latter half of the 20th century. Recent work on diplomatic spouses is also concerned with how gendered expectations are evolving as women become more likely to pursue their own careers. Overall, spouses are credited with creating opportunities for diplomats to interact with other members of the diplomatic community.

Diplomatic spouses matter because their preferences can influence the professional decisions that their significant others make, as well as the diplomats' standing in the international community. For instance, Groeneveld finds that a spouse's prior experience abroad and their own career ambitions are significant predictors of the willingness of couples to accept an international

¹⁴ Agnieszka Hennel-Brzozowska, "Psychological Problems in Families of Diplomats – A Systemic Approach" *Politeja*, no. 12 (2009): 543-56.

assignment.¹⁵ Dommet further argues that younger professionals in New Zealand and Britain are less likely to join the diplomatic service due to their spouses' professional priorities.¹⁶

Further, spouses who are less involved in the diplomatic community are less invested in their spouse's career and thus less likely to affect diplomatic outcomes.¹⁷ Likewise, Gudmundsdottir's study finds that by joining various social groups in the local community, a diplomatic spouse can provide access to additional social networks that benefit the diplomat.¹⁸ Therefore, the personal decisions of diplomatic spouses could indirectly help or hinder progress towards diplomatic goals.

Diplomatic spouses also matter because their gender identity gives them unique access to different social spaces. One of the main factors among diplomatic spouses that has been highlighted as integral to their diplomatic interactions is their gender. Some scholars have posited that gendered spaces (e.g., tea parties or 'ladies' lunches), diplomatic courtesies, and gift-giving practices can help foster diplomatic relationships. For instance, while researching English ambassadorial wives, Allen found that women had access to unique intelligence-gathering networks into which men were not allowed, especially in conservative societies.¹⁹ Gendered expectations, such as a partner's ability to fulfill the household roles (e.g., managing an American

¹⁵ Sandra Groeneveld, "Dual Careers and Diplomacy." *Review of Public Personnel Administration* 28, no. 1 (2008): 20–43; Molly M. Wood. "Diplomatic Wives: The Politics of Domesticity and the "Social Game" in the U.S. Foreign Service, 1905-1941." *Journal of Women's History* 17, no.2 (2005): 142-165.

¹⁶ Tania Domett. "Soft Power in Global Politics? Diplomatic Partners as Transversal Actors." *Australian Journal of Political Science* 40, no. 2 (2005): 289–306.

¹⁷ Domett, "Soft Power in Global Politics?" 304.

¹⁸ Svala Gudmundsdottir, Thorhallur Orn Gudlaugsson, and Gylfi Dalmann Adalsteinsson, "The Diplomatic Spouse." *Journal of Global Mobility: The Home of Expatriate Management Research* 7, no. 1 (2019): 103–22.

¹⁹ Gemma Allen, "The Rise of the Ambassador: English Ambassadorial Wives and Early Modern Diplomatic Culture." *The Historical Journal* 62, no. 3 (2018): 617–38.

officer's home, family, and social responsibilities), are also integral to diplomatic missions.²⁰ Furthermore, a diplomatic spouses' role involves creating informal spaces in which diplomats can continue serious discussions in a relaxed environment.²¹ In sum, gendered access and the expectations for diplomatic spouses affect the conduct of diplomacy through their ability to gain valuable information, foster relationships and host foreign dignitaries in congenial environments.

Bringing Diplomatic Spouses Back into Diplomacy

Much of the literature on diplomatic spouses has thus focused on establishing that they matter. Furthermore, there is a growing consensus that they matter because of their gender and the social access to restricted spaces enabled by their gender identity. Given the state of the existing literature on diplomatic spouses and their effect on diplomacy, I will make several contributions.

First, I will explore the 'buffer role,' which is a diplomatic spouse's ability to ease tensions by relying on their distinct social role within the diplomatic community. A diplomatic spouse's performance of the buffer role is not solely dependent on their direct involvement in conversations. Other potential instances in which they act as a buffer could include facilitating opportunities for communication, increasing the recognition of their nation, culture, or diplomats through charity events or socialization, and building long-lasting connections in host countries.

Second, I assess the ability of the diplomatic spouse to play a buffer role in multi-lateral, bi-lateral, and adversarial contexts. This analysis will help reveal whether the strategies of diplomatic spouses vary depending on whether they are posted in a state that is a friend, ally, or adversary. The current literature does not make distinctions between the appointments of diplomatic spouses to specific kinds of states (i.e., allies versus adversaries). Based on the answer

²⁰ Molly M. Wood, "Diplomatic Wives: The Politics of Domesticity and the "Social Game" in the U.S. Foreign Service, 1905-1941." *Journal of Women's History* 17, no.2 (2005): 142-165.

²¹ Wood, "Diplomatic Wives," 151.

to that inquiry, we will gain insight into the conditions that are ideal for diplomatic spouses to play a significant buffer role.

Third, I will apply this theory to contemporary diplomacy. Focusing on contemporary politics is important because the feminist movement has made significant advances since the early studies of diplomatic spouses, especially in conservative countries where women are now significantly more independent and vocal. Therefore, the way in which gender shapes diplomacy has evolved. For instance, women take a much more active role in diplomatic conversations. As a result, their contributions may be significantly more direct than previously found. Moreover, diplomatic spouses make contributions beyond the opportunities created by their gender identity. For instance, having a charismatic and social personality is not tied to gender. Therefore, it is important to recognize that a diplomatic spouse's contributions are not based solely on gender identity and may be affected by other factors.

Finally, the analysis of subcontinental countries shifts away from the focus on analyzing high-income countries and their diplomatic approaches. A vast majority of the literature on diplomacy is focused on Europe and the United States. Investigating the diplomatic environment of South Asia adds to the literature because its societal, political, and cultural context is distinct from the Western world.

Factors Affecting the Buffer Role of Diplomatic Spouses

Interpersonal relationships can enhance or undermine state-level interactions.²² Positive individual-level discussions can build trust and create potential benefits from interactions.

²² Wheeler, "Trust, Signaling, and International Relations," 2

However, a negative interaction can foster distrust and set back national objectives. Given the centrality of the individual to successful diplomacy, it is surprising that scholars have failed to recognize fully how other individuals involved in diplomatic interactions, aside from government officials and politicians, can shape outcomes.

When politicians and career diplomats relocate to other countries, their families accompany them. As members of the diplomatic community, spouses are invited to dinners, receptions, and national festivals and are also expected to host events in their own homes. As such, diplomatic spouses are often present during interactions among diplomats, and their participation can further or hinder progress towards foreign policy objectives. Specifically, diplomatic spouses offer the opportunity to have personal and cultural conversations outside official state-related duties. Therefore, I theorize that they can act as buffers during interpersonal interactions between diplomats.

Although diplomatic spouses can make valuable contributions in neutral or friendly relationships, they have the greatest potential to play an important buffer role in hostile or volatile relationships. Relative to diplomats, spouses invite casual conversations that are divorced from affairs of state, because they are not seen as official representatives of their countries. Their informal role allows diplomatic spouses to act as a buffer in high-stress environments, for instance, by steering a conversation away from a heated policy debate towards a discussion of the host country's hospitable public.

The two main categories of factors affecting the buffer role of diplomatic spouses are contextual and personal. In terms of context, there are ideal conditions for performing the buffer role which include: the number of countries that individuals present at diplomatic events belong

to, the structure of the interaction, and the physical location of the meeting. The second category pertains to the personal characteristics of the diplomatic spouse, such as ethnic background, educational attainment, and personal views of other countries.

Ideal Conditions for Buffer Role

Since the research program on the role of diplomatic spouses is in its early stages, the studies of conditions in which they are likely to be most impactful are limited. There has been some discussion about interactions in conservative societies being more fruitful when female diplomatic spouses are involved.²³ However, there has not been any analysis on how spouses affect the process of diplomacy. Below I discuss conditions under which diplomatic spouses can most effectively act as buffers.

Political relationships between countries tend to be hostile based on specific historical events, often past military confrontations. By including individuals from a third country in a conversation, there is less room for potentially heated discussion of past wrongs on either side, compared to a one-on-one interaction between diplomats representing states in conflict. Diplomatic spouses are social not political agents, therefore they may be able to diffuse the situation and shift the attention away from discussion of tense topics. Further, with more actors in an interaction, it is likely that individuals are less familiar with one another, and therefore there is more surface-level conversation. The social role of diplomatic spouses allows them to serve as buffers in multi-lateral contexts more often than in bi-lateral contexts.

H1: Diplomatic spouses are more effective buffers in multi-lateral than bi-lateral contexts.

²³ Allen, "The Rise of the Ambassador," 617.

Diplomatic spouses primarily perform a social and informal role within the diplomatic community. Therefore, they are more likely to be successful when the conditions surrounding an interaction are uncertain because there are more opportunities for casual exchanges. On the other hand, if an interaction is highly structured and limited to discussion of official business then the diplomatic spouse will be less effective in shifting the focus of the event away from state affairs to personal discussions, which might lead to opportunities for networking and the formation of casual relationships within the diplomatic community. Such connections better allow diplomatic spouses to perform the buffer role.

H2: If the conditions surrounding the interaction are uncertain, then diplomatic spouses are more successful.

Diplomatic spouses are more often able to perform the role of a buffer when gatherings are hosted at personal households. Diplomatic homes often display artifacts, which have national or cultural significance. Further, when spouses host other members of the diplomatic community, they are expected to share their culture with these delegations. This process could involve offering cuisine, playing music, and displaying paintings and books that are celebrated in their countries. Performing the function of a cultural representative within their homes, diplomatic spouses can personalize foreign policy. Entertaining in environments that they can control allows diplomatic spouses to feel more comfortable and gives them ownership over their physical location. Therefore, they are more likely to perform the buffer role in their own homes.

H3: Diplomatic spouses are more successful when the meetings are occurring within personal households as opposed to official institutions.

Personal Characteristics of Diplomatic Spouses Who Are Effective Buffers

In his work *Diplomacy and Self*, Alisher Faizullaev describes how the dispositions of diplomats, namely their emotions, temperaments, and prejudices, affect their ability to achieve the political goals of their home country and shape foreign policy.²⁴ Similarly, it is likely that the dispositions of spouses can shape the diplomatic process. That is, the personal characteristics of diplomatic spouses, such as their ethnic background, educational attainment, and personal attitudes towards other countries, can make them more or less effective as buffers.

Opportunities to act as a buffer are more likely if the spouse is socially engaged in conversations among members of the diplomatic corps.²⁵ Such conversations may open the door to informal relationships beyond the official duties that diplomats perform as representatives of the state. However, to have a seat at the table, diplomatic spouses must be taken seriously by members of the diplomatic community to avoid segregation at events and dinner parties. For example, in many countries men more often serve as diplomats than women, and women are often excluded from conversations with officials of the diplomatic community because they are not seen as representatives of the state. Therefore, they are segregated based on the perception that officials and spouses have nothing in common.

However, if spouses are able to identify similarities with members of the diplomatic community, they can find common ground. Based on Faizullaev's work, shared characteristics such as ethnicity, educational attainment, and views of other countries may, in addition to

²⁴ *Diplomacy and Self*, Alisher Faizullaev

²⁵ Diplomatic interactions and participation in conversations is affected by factors such as political, economic and social differences, conflicts between countries and temporality (past, present, future). For more details, see Svetlana Radtchenko-Draillard, "Psychology and Diplomacy in the Analysis of Negotiation: The Unavoidable Links and the Inevitable Interdependencies." *Université Paris Diderot* 7, no.1 (2021): 1.

providing a seat at the table, shape interactions that diplomatic spouses have with others in the diplomatic community, affecting the likelihood that they can perform the buffer role.

Casual conversations based on shared beliefs or similar personal characteristics are meaningfully different from political conversations, which tend to highlight points of conflict—they instead emphasize common ground. By drawing out similarities, diplomatic spouses can counter the common narrative of irreconcilable national differences and allow spouses to shape the diplomatic process by acting as buffers.

H4: Diplomatic spouses are more effective buffers when they share similar personal characteristics with diplomats and other members of the diplomatic community.

Why India and Pakistan?

As an initial investigation of my hypotheses, I explore the role that Indian and Pakistani diplomatic spouses have performed in the respective diplomatic communities of countries to which their spouses were appointed. The analysis covers diplomatic activity from before partition in 1947 to the present day. The range of countries in which the diplomatic spouses studied in this thesis have lived include friendly and adversarial states, and their postings occurred during periods of peace as well as war.

The selection of these countries is based on several factors. First, the diplomatic norms in these states are similar. While there are differences in the bureaucratic hierarchy, duration of foreign postings, and reliance upon internal diplomatic communities while in foreign countries, the foreign service departments of Pakistan and India evolved from the same institutions created by the British Raj. These similarities in bureaucratic structure offer similar opportunities for diplomatic spouses to interact with others in the diplomatic community. Therefore, the

bureaucratic element of access to diplomatic events can remain constant throughout the examples presented in the analysis.

Second, both societies share cultural similarities and are highly patriarchal. Officials from both countries are predominantly men in heterosexual relationships. Therefore, with the exception of one male diplomatic spouse, nearly all recollections examined here are from female diplomatic spouses. Thus, the expectation for a spouse to attend and entertain during diplomatic appointments is constant across the cases.

Last, the relationship between the two states represents an empirical puzzle: there are many instances of close personal relationships within and across their diplomatic communities, due in part to similarities—language, traditions and family life, and historic ties—even as the political dynamic between the two countries was often strained. The question then is whether personal relationships, especially those involving diplomatic spouses, helped reduce tensions during times of conflict.

The analysis of the contributions of Indian and Pakistani diplomatic spouses was conducted in two parts. First, an analysis of three memoirs written by diplomatic spouses from each country was conducted. These memoirs include two books by Indian diplomatic spouses and one by a Pakistani diplomatic spouse. The earliest memoir, *Light of Other Days* by Saraswati Menon records the experiences of the wife of independent India's first foreign secretary, K.P.S Menon.²⁶ The second book, *An Autobiography of a Diplomat's Wife from Cradle to Grave* by Sabahat Durrani details the interactions of the wife of Sultan Aziz Durrani, a former Pakistani foreign service official.²⁷ The most recent memoir, *A Life across Three Continents: Recollections of a*

²⁶ Saraswati Menon, *Light of Other Days* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1984)

²⁷ Sabahat Durrani, *An Autobiography of a Diplomat's Wife, from Cradle to Grave* (Lahore: Fisco Press, 1992)

Diplomat's Wife by Nilima Lambah offers an account of the activities of the wife of Indian foreign service official, Satinder Lambah.²⁸

Second, I conducted in-depth interviews with spouses of current and retired diplomats from Pakistan and India. A total of seven interviews were conducted, two of which were with Indian diplomatic spouses and the remaining five with Pakistani diplomatic spouses. Each interviewee was sent a pre-interview survey containing six questions about their previous appointments and those of their spouses. The interviews lasted between 30 minutes to an hour and a half.

One possible limitation of this empirical approach is that the experiences of diplomatic spouses have been related either verbally or in writing. Therefore, there may be embellishments or incorrect recollections. However, even if all of the details in their accounts are not precisely accurate, the memories and perceptions of spouses can nevertheless offer insights into whether and when they played a buffer role during their time in the diplomatic corps.

Analysis of Results

In order to discern whether diplomatic spouses are more successful in multi-lateral or bi-lateral conditions, uncertain or certain terms of interaction, within their own houses or institutional buildings, I conduct an analysis of the data collected from the memoirs and personal interviews. Furthermore, I investigate whether similarities or differences with other members of a diplomatic community aided spouses in performing a buffer role.

The first hypothesis posits that diplomatic spouses are more effective buffers in multi-lateral than bi-lateral contexts. To assess this claim I studied the accounts offered by the Indian diplomatic spouse, Nilima Lambah. She describes two different interactions during her husband's two appointments in Pakistan. Both events were hosted within the diplomatic community at times

²⁸ Nilima Lambah, *A Life across Three Continents: Recollections of a Diplomat's Wife* (New Delhi: Roli Books, 2008)

when tensions were high in Pakistan due to either religious or ethnic strife. During the first appointment, she was at a dinner hosted by a Pakistani where she was the only foreign attendee. During the second appointment, a dinner was hosted by the British high commissioner's wife in Islamabad, in honor of the British foreign secretary's wife, with many Pakistanis present. Therefore, the first occasion was a bi-lateral interaction whereas the second was multi-lateral.²⁹

From the first dinner she recalls:

My view that the US would hardly jeopardise its position by an act that would not only have religious but also political reverberations all over the Muslim world, was dismissed. I was told that I had no idea what the US was capable of. During the 1971 war, they said, the USSR had stood staunchly by India, whereas the US had let Pakistan down at the crucial time, leading to subsequent defeat...As I was the only foreigner, and that too an Indian, I refrained from making any further comments.³⁰

During this bi-lateral interaction, the diplomatic spouse tried to calm the situation. Her approach was to participate in the political discussion instead of shifting the conversation to a different topic.³¹ She was not successful as the political conversation progressed, and Pakistani members of the diplomatic community brought up an instance of war between India and Pakistan. The conversation affirms the hypothesis that bi-lateral interactions pose more significant challenges for diplomatic spouses seeking to perform a buffer role. The assumption that bi-lateral interactions rely on specific historical contexts usually involving military confrontations was further supported

²⁹ Both of these interactions included members of the diplomatic community, mostly wives of diplomats. However, diplomats themselves were not present at the dinners. These situations still offer important insights into the 'buffer' role that diplomatic spouses perform as there is variation in the numbers of countries that attendees are from. Furthermore, the behavior of the diplomatic spouse can still be observed within the larger diplomatic community.

³⁰ Lambah, *Life across Three Continents*, 63

³¹ This example illustrates the possibility of engaging in de-escalatory behavior while participating in political discussions and show signs of the "buffer role" in the absence of any diplomats in the room. Since wives of other diplomats, and members of the local community in the host country, were present the diplomatic spouse's actions were being closely monitored. Furthermore, the diplomatic spouse's choices in this circumstance may define the relationships that her spouse is able maintain with Pakistani diplomats. As such, the buffer role is still important in the context of this conversation.

by the content of this conversation. Mrs. Lambah specifically noted that her status as the only foreigner ‘and that too an Indian’ affected her participation. Her experience brings into focus the context of the Indo-Pak relationship that made her feel uncomfortable contributing to the exchange.

The second dinner, however, provided an opportunity for a multi-lateral interaction. The engagement is described below:

I attended a ladies’ dinner hosted by the British high commissioner’s wife in Islamabad, in honour of the wife of Sir Douglas Hurd, the British foreign secretary...I was the only wife of an envoy invited amidst the predominant Pakistani presence. Lady Hurd, turning towards me, enquired what the crisis pertaining to Karachi was all about... I told her how my family hailing from Lahore; and Sati’s from Peshawar, had migrated to India during the Partition. From our early years, neither of us recalled ever having been referred to as refugees, which proved how well integrated the migrants were in India’s mainstream. Unfortunately, the situation was not the same for those who had migrated from India to Pakistan. The fact that the Mohajirs had not been accepted in the mainstream even after decades was the basic cause of the present unrest. I also requested the others to give their opinions. Reluctantly, they agreed that what I had said was, in principle, correct.³²

In this interaction having a multi-lateral conversation allowed the Indian diplomatic spouse to feel more comfortable contributing to a conversation, even though it was about a political topic. The presence of members from a third country, Britain in this case, allowed for a surface-level conversation in which the causes of the ongoing unrest were described—allowing those present to not debate fault.³³

³² Lambah, *Life across Three Continents*, 137.

³³ An interesting distinction between the two interactions is the response of the Pakistani members of the diplomatic community. Perhaps in addition to allowing for surface-level conversations that are less contentious, multi-lateral

These interactions highlight that the presence of individuals from an adversarial state deters diplomatic spouses from engaging in politically contentious conversations. Interview data from seven diplomatic spouses from India and Pakistan confirmed that during appointments to adversarial countries, bi-lateral interactions are especially tense. However, multi-lateral interactions changed the dynamic and allowed for casual conversations.³⁴ Therefore, the number of people involved in the interaction may matter just as much as their country of origin. Multi-lateral or bi-lateral interactions alone do not define the ability of a diplomatic spouse to perform a buffer role, however.

The second hypothesis posits that when the conditions surrounding an interaction are uncertain, then diplomatic spouses can perform the buffer role more easily. In some instances, diplomatic interactions happen by chance. Under unstructured circumstances, diplomatic spouses have more room to redirect interactions. The following is an example of a Pakistani diplomatic spouse's role when her husband was asked to visit North Korea:

Aziz told the CDA of N.Korea that Pakistan did not have any diplomate (SIC) relations with his country and it would not be possible to pay such a visit without the permission (SIC) of his Govt. The C.D.A. said that perhaps Aziz could take a short local leave and pay an unofficial visit to his country without his Govt. knowing...After a while, when they met again, on Sabina's suggestion that there was no harm done to the existing relations between Pakistan and N.Korea, in case Aziz agreed to pay a week visit to N.Korea Aziz took a week's leave and both Sabina and her husband proceeded by train from Peking to N.Korea...They considered their trip to N.Korea as enjoyable, useful and successful

In this case, the diplomatic spouse was able to shift attention away from a purely political relationship as dictated by her country's government and instead open the door for an opportunity

interactions check any extreme behavior of members of the diplomatic community due to audience costs associated with acting out.

³⁴ Data from personal interviews of diplomatic spouses from July - November 2021

to interact unofficially. Similarly, during a trip to China that did not have a strict schedule, the diplomatic spouse's activities allowed for an interesting encounter with an Admiral from the United States.³⁵

The Chinese shop keeper from whom Sabina had bought the fur coat was also dining with three senior US Naval Officers. Seeing Sabina he got up and came to their table and greeted her...He told her that they were Admiral and two of his officers from the air-craft carrier anchored in the bay which they could see. Sabina said she would like to meet the Admiral...After introductions, the Admiral told Sabina that he commanded the aircraft carrier. That he was going back to the States for repair and refitting. Upon this Aziz told the Admiral that while he was in Sydney, Australia, he had visited a flotilla of U.S cruisers and destroyers who had come on a good will mission there, but that he had never been near an Aircraft Carrier. The admiral said that he could take them to the ship and show them round and would they like to come, if they were not already engaged³⁶

Connections made by the diplomatic spouse allowed her husband to get closer to a U.S. naval official and gain more insight. The lack of structure around the trip made the spontaneous plan possible. This interaction supports my prediction that uncertain circumstances are more conducive to the performance of a social role as a buffer in diplomatic relationships.

In their interviews, diplomatic spouses from Pakistan and India mentioned that there was not a lot of room to contribute to conversations if events required that they perform a specific role. For instance, if there was a national day event where the diplomatic spouses were in charge of stalls, food, or entertainment, then there was less time for them to engage in conversations with members of the diplomatic community. As less spontaneity was permitted at those events, there were fewer opportunities for connections.

Diplomats and their spouses meet other members of the diplomatic community in a variety of locations, including polo clubs, official buildings, hotels, homes of other diplomatic spouses,

³⁵ Durrani, *Autobiography of a Diplomat's Wife*, 162.

³⁶ Durrani, *Autobiography of a Diplomat's Wife*, 156-57.

and their personal households. The two most important categories are official buildings and personal households. I argue that diplomatic spouses are more successful when meetings occur within personal households as opposed to an official building. Saraswati Menon provides a description of a republic day reception, held at the Indian Embassy below:

Our Republic Day reception was attended by some 1500 guests. It is only the friendship of the Soviet Union for India that made our Republic Day reception so well attended, as no alcohol was allowed to be served. The other diplomats got over this handleap by having their drinks at the Australian Embassy, which had its national day on the same day, and then coming to us.³⁷

Governments had more control over events when they were hosted at an official institution. Alcohol being banned at an event could have hindered attendance. As Mrs. Menon explains, diplomatic spouses were not always allowed to entertain as they deemed most appropriate.

During an interview, a Pakistani spouse of a former ambassador remarked that she felt she had to keep her house in perfect condition at all times:

Our doors were always open, anyone could come. Different diplomats from our embassy and other embassies would come often. It felt good to host at home, they could have our food and see how we kept our home. Sometimes when I was preparing food for a lunch gathering, I would get a call from my husband about more people coming for dinner that same day.³⁸

With greater control over their environment, by hosting at home, diplomatic spouses were able to share more facets of their country's culture with other members of the diplomatic community. By

³⁷ Menon, *Light of Other Days*, 97.

³⁸ Personal Interview, July 16 2021.

offering a richer introduction to their country, spouses were able to perform the buffer role better in personal homes over official institutions.

In some instances, the line between personal and official is significantly blurrier. Officials appointed to specific roles are required to open up their rooms to others in the diplomatic community. Sabahat Durrani describes the status of the chief of protocol's house in Pakistan:

After termination of his tenure of office in Tehran, Aziz was posted as Chief of Protocol to the Ministry of F. Affairs. They occupied the bungalow earmarked for Chief of Protocol to the Foreign Ministry. After due changes in furnishing etc. Sabina began receiving the ladies of the Foreign Missions stationed in Karachi. The official call on Chief of Protocol's wife was considered as part of Protocol in the good old days.³⁹

As is clear, the house was used as an extension of the official position of the chief of protocol. As such, the building simultaneously served a personal and official function.

Lastly, I theorize that diplomatic spouses are more effective when they share similar characteristics with diplomats and other members of the diplomatic community. As Sabahat Durrani notes, her identity as an Iranian helped distinguish her from others and provided a reason for diplomats to reach out to her personally:

After the reception of the Queen, all Heads of Muslim Missions called on Sabina to wish her a happy new year by virtue of her father Jamil being an Iranian national. They regarded her as Iranian...The Ambassadors of Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Sabina, Ambassador of Syria, Turkey and Jordan.⁴⁰

By virtue of being different from other members of the diplomatic community, in that Sabina was regarded as an Iranian while others were not, she stood out. This distinction afforded

³⁹ Durrani, *Autobiography of a Diplomat's Wife*, 141.

⁴⁰ Durrani, *Autobiography of a Diplomat's Wife*, 141.

her the company of all Heads of Muslim Missions and provided an additional opportunity for her and her husband to interact with them.

However, during their interviews most diplomatic spouses from India and Pakistan disclosed that it was much easier to connect with members of the South Asian diplomatic community as opposed to the Western diplomatic community.⁴¹ The reason they cited was the similarities in their language, culture, and traditions. As such, it can be concluded that, while diplomatic spouses benefited from being different from other members of the diplomatic community in the wider international diplomatic circuit, similarities were preferred within diplomatic communities of other South Asian countries.

Conclusion

The data collected from memoirs and interviews conducted with diplomatic spouses from India and Pakistan reveal that multi-lateral interactions, uncertain circumstances, and hosting at personal households are the most conducive conditions for diplomatic spouses to perform a buffer role. However, differences or similarities in the individual characteristics of diplomatic spouses may be more salient for performing the buffer role depending on the larger diplomatic community in which the spouses are operating. Within the South Asian diplomatic community, similarities are more useful for connecting to others in the community; whereas in the international community, differences from other members of the diplomatic community set individuals apart and created more opportunities for interaction.

Research on diplomatic spouses is underexplored. Future scholars could consider variation in the seniority of the diplomat—the experiences of diplomatic spouses of junior officers could be

⁴¹ Data from personal interviews of diplomatic spouses from July - November 2021

very different from those of senior officers. Further, including Bangladesh in the analysis would prove interesting because the cultural and governmental make-up of the country is very similar to the two countries discussed in this paper. Lastly, future research could be directed exclusively at male diplomatic spouses, to highlight gendered differences in their experiences.

Appendix:

A. Pre-Interview Survey Questions

1. Are you currently or have you previously been employed?
 - If so, what is/was your occupation?
2. Was your employment within the diplomatic community?
3. How many foreign appointments has your spouse had and which countries have they been appointed to? (Please provide a list of countries)
 - In your opinion, were these countries allies? (Please provide a separate assessment for each country you listed above)
4. Has your spouse served as a diplomatic representative in another South Asian country?
 - If so, which one(s)?
5. Which South Asian countries' representatives has your spouse had interactions with?
6. What kinds of events were you in attendance for during your spouse's appointment?

B. Interview Questions

1. Could you describe what a typical day looked like, while you and your family were posted in X?
2. What was your role at events you attended during your spouse's appointment?
3. Where were these events hosted?
4. Who attended the gatherings held in host countries?
 - Were the attendees mostly official diplomats, spouses or a mix of the two?

- Were the diplomats from a mix of countries or just one country?
5. Who were you engaged in conversations with at these events?
 - Could you describe your participation in conversations with foreign diplomats during these events?
 - Was the nature of the interaction different depending on whether the conversation was with individuals from allied or adversarial nations?
 - What were some examples of topics discussed in your presence?
 - Did the topics vary based on whether the interaction was with an ally or adversarial nation?
 - Did it feel like a friendly meeting? How did you handle that? Was it comfortable/not?
 6. Were there any notable similarities or differences between you and members of other diplomatic communities that you interacted with?
 - What were the similarities?
 - What were the differences?
 7. What was your most memorable experience during your spouse's appointment in the country or interaction with other diplomats from that country?
 8. What was your role in your country's internal diplomatic community during your spouse's appointments?
 9. Did you ever witness or participate in an effort for diplomatic spouses to get paid, for their role as diplomatic spouses?
 10. Is there anything else you would like to add?