

# HOW A TALE OF SUPERSTAR LOVE FUELLED THE BITTER FEUD BETWEEN INDIA AND PAKISTAN

BY GETHIN CHAMBERLAIN



**Gethin Chamberlain** is a photojournalist who has covered India and South Asia for a number of newspapers and magazines, including *The Guardian*, *Marie Claire*, *Sunday Mirror*, *The Observer* and *South China Morning Post*. Based in India, he previously worked as a foreign correspondent for *The Sunday Telegraph* and now works for *The Observer* as a South Asia correspondent.

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## Pre-reading

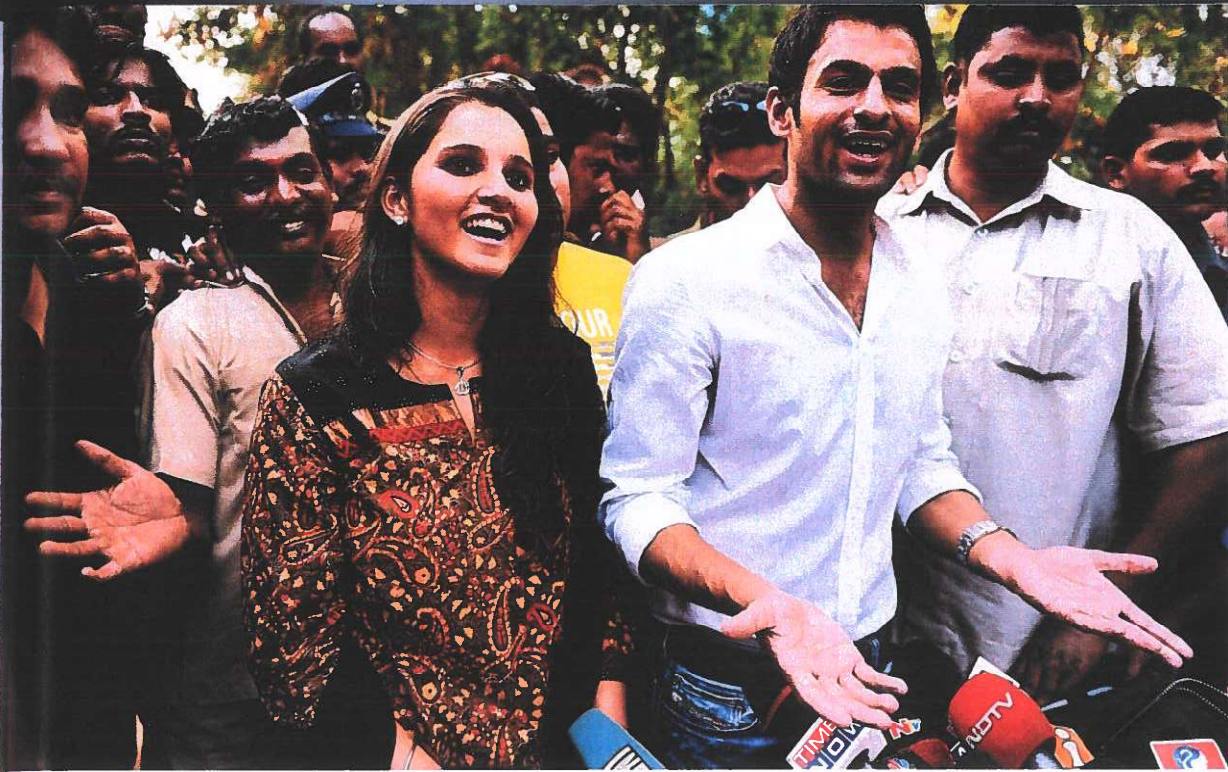
- 1 Look at the photo of Sania Mirza and Shoaib Malik on the next page. What is your immediate impression of them?
- 2 Compare the two headlines below. Which do you find most fascinating? Why?

Sania Mirza and Shoaib Malik give India and Pakistan a new reason to squabble

squabble skændes

How a tale of superstar love fuelled the bitter feud between India and Pakistan

- 3 What is the background for the “bitter feud between India and Pakistan”? [www](#)
  - 4 Find a summary of *Romeo and Juliet* on the internet. As you read the article, discuss the similarities suggested in the caption.
  - 5 Vocabulary. Synonyms and antonyms. [www](#)
-



fuel antænde

feud [fju:ð] fejde

sensibilities følelser  
bolster styrke, stive af  
Capulets and  
Montagues the two  
opposing families in  
Romeo and Juliet

emerge dukke frem

trepidation angst

pack flok

febrile febril, nervøs  
og ophidset  
partition deling  
unleash slippe løs  
forlorn håbløst

agenda dagsorden

nuptials bryllup

## How a tale of superstar love fuelled the bitter feud between India and Pakistan

*When an Indian tennis star fell for a Pakistani cricket hero, it offended Hindu sensibilities and bolstered Muslim pride. Gethin Chamberlain reports from Goa on the couple at the heart of a feud worthy of Capulets and Montagues*

It was never going to be a low-profile affair. When the 23-year-old Indian tennis star Sania Mirza emerged from her Hyderabad home to announce that she was marrying Shoaib Malik, former Pakistan cricket captain, she must have done so with a degree of trepidation.

"I think we are getting married. We are not making any statement, politically," she told the sceptical press pack. "I just want to know how I am going to look and how my hair is going to be, rather than think how India and Pakistan political issues are going to be."

Given the febrile atmosphere that exists between the countries – which have fought three wars since partition in 1947 and have barely been on speaking terms since 10 gunmen from Pakistan unleashed three days of terror on Mumbai in 2008 – it was perhaps a forlorn hope. The story shot to the top of the news agenda and it did not take long for India's voice of rightwing Hindu nationalism, Bal Thackeray, to drip poison all over the coming nuptials.

henceforth fra nu af

editorial ledende  
artikel

vow [vau] love  
(højtideligt)

**Commonwealth**

**Games** an interna-  
tional sporting event  
with athletes from  
the Commonwealth  
of Nations

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nummer med

chauvinism

[ʃəʊvənizəm]

compulsory tvungen

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liken to sammenligne  
med

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currently for øje-  
blikket

“Henceforth, Sania will not remain an Indian. Had her heart been Indian, it wouldn’t have beaten for a Pakistani. If she wished to play for India, she should have chosen an Indian life partner,” he wrote in an editorial.

5 There were demonstrations in India, and Mirza’s picture was burnt on the streets of Bhopal, where activists from the rightwing Hindu nationalist Vishwa Hindu Parishad party vowed to stop her competing at the Commonwealth Games in Delhi later in the year.

Yet on the other side of the border, the reaction was notably more enthusiastic. There was dancing in the street outside Malik’s house in his home town of Sialkot and the current Miss Pakistan, Ayesha Gilani, and the head of the Pakistan Cricket Board, Ijaz Butt, were trotted out to give the match their blessing.

15 “At least people can look up to them as a beacon of hope and peace for Pak-India relations,” said Gilani. Butt concurred: “I am sure it will have far-reaching effects and help improve relations between the two countries.” The former Pakistani prime minister, Nawaz Sharif, suggested political differences between the countries could be resolved through a similarly “positive approach”.

20 The reactions offer an insight into the state of the relationship between the countries. At one extreme are the hard-line politicians determined to play up differences for their own ends, while at the other are the ordinary citizens, who have much in common. “There is a little bit of Indian in every Pakistani and a little bit of Pakistani in every Indian,” as the late Benazir Bhutto, former prime minister of Pakistan, once observed – but can be easily whipped up when their old rival puts one over them.

And in a culture where male chauvinism is practically compulsory, that is precisely what has happened in the case of the Malik-Mirza marriage. The Pakistani boy is perceived to have won the Indian girl, and Indian male pride is hurt.

Amber Rahim Shamsi, blogging for the Pakistan newspaper *Dawn*, likened it to the positive response in India to Bollywood movies in which the male (Indian) lead charms his way into the affections of the (Pakistani) female lead. “I doubt if any of these films would have resonated with the Indian masses had the genders been reversed,” she wrote. “This also explains why the response on the Pakistani side has been so laudatory.”

40 For the couple, caught in the middle, the personal cost has been high. As the spotlight turned on them, the story began to spin out of control. It soon emerged that the 28-year-old Malik – currently banned from international cricket for a year for his conduct on a tour of Australia – was already married to a woman he claimed to have never met.

The young woman, Ayesha Siddiqui, had apparently sent him pic-

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 wriggle vride sig.  
 sno sig  
 negotiation forhand-  
 ling

WTA Women's  
 Tennis Association

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 vede

marital ægteskabs-  
 immemorial umin-  
 delig  
 humongous enorm  
 impact indvirkning  
 adverse negativ,  
 fjendtlig  
 contemplate overveje

sell short sælge sig  
 selv for billigt  
 gauche [gøʊʃ] klodset  
 get one's just desserts  
 få, hvad man har  
 fortjent  
 competitiveness  
 rivalisering  
 pawn (her) bonde i  
 skak, brik  
 vested interests (her)  
 personlige interesser

stance holdning

reluctant modvillig  
 take offence blive  
 fornærmet

tures of herself and they had talked on the phone. There were claims she then avoided meeting him because she had put on weight, and that they were eventually married over the phone. Malik tried to wriggle out of it, but when Siddiqui's family called in the police, he came clean and, after negotiations between the families, a divorce was agreed.

Mirza, once a national heroine after becoming the first Indian woman to break into the WTA (though she has since slipped back to 92), also found herself the subject of unfavourable comment as it was revealed she, too, had dumped her fiancé. A week after the news of the wedding broke, Cadbury Bournvita announced it was not renewing her sponsorship contract.

As she fell in love with Malik, it seems, India began to fall out of love with her.

"In India, cross-border marriages are a cultural shock given the political background of the two countries," Dr Bhavns Barmi, a psychologist and marital therapist, explained in the *Times of India*. "India and Pakistan, for time immemorial, have been portrayed as two warring nations which has had a humongous impact on our psyche. So, such adverse reactions don't come as a surprise."

Rashmee Roshan Lall, editor of the *Sunday Times of India*, said many Indian Hindus could not contemplate the idea of marrying a Pakistani Muslim.

"There are many reasons for this, not least the widely held view that she is selling herself short by marrying so gauche (and now, dishonest) a man as Shoaib," she said. "But the underlying sub-text was undoubtedly a sense that Sania is getting her just desserts. The whole affair illustrates a deeply held competitiveness between India and Pakistan."

But Neeraj Bhushan, an Indo-Pak expert based in Delhi, felt the couple were simply being used as pawns in a bigger political game.

"The Shoaib-Sania wedding is a very ordinary affair," he said. "But it looks like the vested interests on both sides will keep looking for such ordinary events to keep the pot boiling, without realising that their actions and speeches are affecting the lives of two young and innocent persons adversely, maybe for a long time to come."

Such marriages will remain unusual until politicians have the courage to drop their confrontational stance, he added. That mood of confrontation has been heightened since the Mumbai attacks, although there have been glimmers of hope recently.

On Friday night, the couple – apparently reluctant to allow time for anyone else to take offence – were reported to have brought forward the wedding, which was originally scheduled to take place in Hyderabad on 15 April, followed by a wedding party across the border in Lahore. Yesterday, they were denying having done so. Either way, it is perhaps significant that they have no intention of settling in India or Pakistan.

SPECTATORS

LOVE

EVIL

MAN AND NATURE

EMPIRE

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 et tydeligt vidnes-  
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 forringe

stir ophidselse, rore

“The decision of the couple to stay in Dubai instead of Pakistan speaks volumes about the societal and political scenario in Pakistan and the kind of ties New Delhi and Islamabad share,” said Smruti S. Patanaik, a research fellow at the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses in Delhi. Some fear the whole affair shows that the prospects for over-coming divisions have actually deteriorated in recent years.

When Reena Roy, a popular Indian actress, quit Bollywood at the height of her fame in 1983 to marry Pakistan cricketer Mohsin Khan, it caused nothing like the stir kicked up today. “The best part about our marriage was that I got a very warm acceptance in India and Reena received the same in Pakistan,” Khan explained earlier this week. “Times have changed, and sadly so.”

## While-reading

### COMPREHENSION AND ANALYSIS

- 1 Work in groups of four. A reads the first paragraph. B gives a brief summary of the main issues in it. C finds a headline for the paragraph which is then written down. D tries to predict what will follow the first paragraph. As the group then works through the following paragraphs, D's assignment is to explain how the paragraph is linked to the previous one. Swap roles after each paragraph. See how far you get in 15 minutes. In class, present the headlines and linkers.
- 2 Describe the various reactions to the love affair between Sania Mirza and Shoaib Malik in India and in Pakistan. Mention at least three reasons why people react the way they do. *AND LOOK AT 2,300, LL. 23-38 - EXPLAIN WHAT IS SAID ABOUT INDIAN GENDER ROLES.*
- 3 What negative stories have been revealed about Malik and Mirza and why are the stories mentioned?
- 4 a What consequences has the affair had for the couple?  
 b How do they try to solve their problems?
- 5 What are the future prospects for marriages between Pakistanis and Indians?

### OVERALL QUESTIONS

- 1 Half the class are Pakistanis and the other half are Indians. How do you look upon the affair?
  - a Prepare to present how you look upon the affair in small groups.
  - b Individually: meet a representative from the other nation and present and discuss your views.
- 2 What is the “bigger political game” in which they are used as “pawns”? (p. 301, l. 29)

- 3** Make a rhetorical analysis of the article (See Toolbox p. 329). Fill in the corners of the pentagon as you answer the questions below:
- a** Which adjectives would you use to describe the tone of the article?  
solemn – pedantic – playful – humorous – ironic – condescending – neutral – other ...?
- b** How would you describe the style of the article? Which of the following elements can you find and what effect do they create?  
long, loosely structured sentences – dialogue – plain, simple language – quotations – complex, historical information
- c** List the people who are quoted in the article. What kind of people are they? Why has Gethin Chamberlain chosen to quote these people?
- d** What is the purpose of the article?  
INTENTION
- e** Whose side is Gethin Chamberlain on?
- f** Who is the article written for?

## Post-reading [www](#)

### LEARNING CHECK

- 1** Synonyms and antonyms.

### TEXT-RELATED ASSIGNMENT

- 1** Interview and written assignment.

### WIDER CONTEXTS

- 1** Historical context: stealing women from rival communities.
- 2** Literary context: other text by a different author: Saadat Hasan Manto, "The Dutiful Daughter", p. 278.
- 3** Other works of art: Bollywood/Lollywood films.

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