Dialogues on Coexistence: Initiating the Young

A Report

Sher-i-Kashmir International Conference Centre, Srinagar
October 22–24, 2013

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# Contents

Acknowledgements .................................................................................... 5

Introduction .......................................................................................... 7

Knowing the Other .................................................................................. 8

Youth Initiatives for Peace:  
Experiences and Lessons Learnt .......................................................... 12

Who am I? Exploring Spaces ................................................................. 22

Dialogue through Theatre: Explorations in Identity & Stereotypes, History and Culture ......................................................... 26

Bollywood: Promoting Peace or Prejudice? ........................................... 32

Kashmir: A Crucible of Pluralism and Coexistence ............................... 35

Participant Feedback ............................................................................. 42

Workshop Programme ............................................................................. 58

Profiles of Resource Persons ................................................................. 60

Workshop Participants ............................................................................. 62

Glimpses ................................................................................................. 64
Acknowledgements

This report is based on the proceedings of a workshop that was organized in Srinagar on October 22–24, 2013. The workshop was organized by WISCOMP (Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace) and its partner FAEA (Foundation for Academic Excellence and Access). WISCOMP is grateful to the FAEA Board members for their unwavering support and to Prof. V. R. Mehta for mentoring the project.

WISCOMP is grateful to Mr. Rajiv Mehrotra and the Foundation for Universal Responsibility of His Holiness the Dalai Lama for their constant guidance and encouragement. Special thanks to Dr. Meenakshi Gopinath, Founder and Director, WISCOMP, for initiating and giving shape to the WISCOMP Programme on Education for Peace.

The support of colleagues at WISCOMP, Seema Kakran, Meenakshi Puri, Shilpi Shabdita, Harish Bhatt, Sree Kumari V. and Devender Kumar was crucial to the implementation of this initiative.

Manjrika Sewak
Introduction

The FAEA-WISCOMP workshop titled *Dialogues on Coexistence: Initiating the Young* brought together 44 high-school students from Delhi\(^1\) and Kashmir for a dialogue-cum-training in conflict transformation. It was organized as part of the Hum Kadam Programme, which seeks to constructively channelize the potential and zeal of the youth to build trust across the divisions of conflict and to foster active coexistence. Six schools (two from Delhi and four from Kashmir) participated in the workshop.

A key focus of this initiative was to improve inter-region and inter-community perceptions by building the capacity of the students for conflict transformation and providing a safe and non-judgmental space in which they could ‘vent’ their feelings about issues that have led to hostility in the past and move towards collectively building trust. This was done with a view to help young people recognize the importance of values such as active listening, pluralism, and respect for difference—both in the context of classroom interactions and the social conflict in Kashmir—and to encourage them to contribute towards building cultures of coexistence and nonviolence. At the broader policy level, the initiative was informed by the National Curriculum Framework 2005, which identifies the broad aims of education as: independence of thought and action, sensitivity to other’s wellbeing and feelings, learning to respond to new situations in a flexible and creative manner, predisposition towards participation in democratic processes, and the ability to work towards and contribute to economic processes and social change.

Workshop facilitators used the methodology of sustained face-to-face dialogue combined with skills training in conflict transformation. They employed an elicitive and experiential approach to education, drawing on creative and non-conventional methods, such as role plays, theatre, film discussions, and heritage walks.

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\(^1\) The students from Delhi represented diverse cultural and regional backgrounds. Their families belonged to different parts of India, and this influenced their worldviews and perspectives.
Knowing the Other

The workshop opened with an introduction by FAEA-WISCOMP staff member Manjrika Sewak to the work of the host organizations in the field of education. Following this, she walked participants through the goals of the *Hum Kadam* initiative (and of this workshop in particular). These were as follows:

- Initiate a process of trust-building between high school students from Kashmir and Delhi by reducing social distance and prejudice through a positive change in individual attitudes and beliefs about ‘the other’.\(^2\)
- Assist youth leaders to build capacity in conflict transformation skills (such as active listening and dialogue). Also envisaged was a process through which the workshop could enhance the participants’ capacity to resist violence at multiple levels—within the home and in their communities.
- Build a deeper understanding of the concepts of pluralism and togetherness—particularly with respect to the history of coexistence between faith traditions in Jammu and Kashmir.
- A collective envisioning exercise to develop an action plan to foreground and deepen the learnings in the families, communities, and schools that the participants represent.

A series of ice-breaker activities were conducted to help participants get to know one another. Students were paired up with a peer from a different city to increase cross-region/cross-religion communication. This was also done to create a sense of safety and to draw out those students who were reticent or shy. After sharing in pairs, participants worked in small groups and then in larger groups before returning to the plenary. This methodology helped everyone (including those with less confidence to speak) to share their experiences and to also reflect on the conversations they had while working in pairs and in small groups.

\(^2\) The avenues for interaction between young people from the national capital region and Kashmir are severely limited, thus resulting in a situation where opinions are formed on the basis of family/community perceptions and coverage in the print/electronic media.
Students discussed a range of topics that were important to their generation and that formed part of their life experiences. They also responded to questions such as:

*What would you like to learn about your partner from Delhi/Kashmir? Share with your partner the name of one person who you admire and who you consider as a role-model. Share one thing that you want your partner to know about your identity (Kashmiri/Delhiite, Hindu/Muslim, girl/boy, etc.). Share one stereotype that people have about your family/your community/your country that you would like to change. Share one quality of peace that you have experienced (or wish to experience in your life).*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Participant Responses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Select Kashmiri responses to the question, ‘What image/word comes to your mind when you think of Kashmir?’</td>
<td>Home, Violence, No rights, Curfew, Security, Kashmir, does not belong to anyone,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Select Kashmiri responses to the question, ‘What image/word comes to your mind when you think of India?’</td>
<td>Diversity, Cricket, Taj Mahal, Corruption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Select responses of participants from Delhi to the question, ‘What image/word comes to your mind when you think of Kashmir?’</td>
<td>Beautiful place, Beautiful people, Shikara/Dal Lake, Hijab, Heaven Border, Misunderstanding/ No understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Select responses of participants from Delhi to the question, ‘What image/word comes to your mind when you think of India?’</td>
<td>Unity in diversity, Large population Scams and corruption, Rush and chaos</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The discussions around these questions were rich and helped the students to build a rapport with one another. They also reported important learnings from the one-on-one conversations, particularly with respect to values such as ‘respecting diversity and difference’, ‘learning to live with such diversity’, et al.

Since these values represented a primary goal of the Hum Kadam Programme, the facilitator engaged the participants in a few more in-depth activities on the subject of coexistence. One activity, for instance, invited participants to work in small (mixed) groups to identify five similarities and five differences among group members. Each group consisted of an equal number of Kashmiri and Delhi participants. This activity brought out interesting results. Students from Kashmir and Delhi said that they found it difficult to search for ‘differences’, but the exercise of identifying similarities was easy and took hardly any time! As Sara Khan, a class 11 student from Presentation Convent, Srinagar, said: ‘What I learnt was that even though we lived in different geographic regions and belonged to different religions, it didn’t feel like we were meeting for the first time…It felt like we had known each other for years. We had similar tastes in music and sports…We had so many things in common.’ No doubt, an important unifying factor was their membership to social media sites such as Facebook, which created a strong sense of connection and a context for bonding on issues that were important to this generation. Ironically, one group which consisted of students from elite schools in Srinagar and Delhi said that they bonded very well owing to their common love for ‘Tom and Jerry and shopping in the Saket malls’! Another group of Kashmiris and Delhiites identified the following similarities: ‘We love watching TV; we don’t like the book Twilight; we don’t believe in religious differences.’ A third group talked about the internet and WISCOMP as representing common areas of interest.

With respect to the differences, students were conscious of the variance between their respective religious identities. However, they didn’t perceive this in negative ways. On the contrary, there was the recognition that ‘what we all have in common is that

The learnings from the workshop will remain with me for an eternity. I would love to keep learning from such wonderful teachers and from the new friends from Delhi.

Isha Wali
Class 10 Student
Presentation Convent
Srinagar
we are different’ (drawing on the title of an article that talked about the efforts of schools in Madison, USA, to sensitize students to the concept of multiculturalism in the wake of a massacre at a Gurdwara in the city). Participants were in agreement of the need to learn about different cultures because, often, fear and hate emanate from an ignorance of the traditions followed by people of other religions/regions. Kunal Ahuja, a class 11 student from St. Mary’s School, New Delhi, said that all members of his group ‘disliked religious disputes’ and expressed a desire ‘to do something about the suffering these created’.

Workshop ground rules were also elicited and discussed in this session. Students agreed on the following principles to guide their conversations in the workshop space:

- Confidentiality (of what is discussed in the workshop space);
- Listen actively (which includes no interruptions or side conversations when a co-participant is speaking);
- Raise hands (to indicate that we want to speak);
- Be punctual (so that the sessions begin on time);
- We should think before we speak (and time should be allocated for thinking). Participants flagged this as an important ground-rule. The organizers were surprised that this ground-rule was proposed by a group so young (14–17 years). Students talked about how ‘confidence is a double-edged sword’. As one of them put it:

> We need confidence to speak, to express ourselves. But this same confidence can make us like empty vessels...lots of noise, but little substance inside...We become image obsessed, we take ‘selfies’ and put these on Facebook. We need to be true to ourselves, to who we really are. We need to remove the masks we wear and to think about what is important to us. We need to think before we speak.

The inaugural session concluded with a round of introductions. Instead of introducing themselves, participants introduced a partner (from ‘the other city’) with whom they had worked in pairs during the session. In addition to sharing their partner’s educational background and personal interests, each speaker focused on what they liked about their new friend from ‘the other city’.
Youth Initiatives for Peace:
Experiences and Lessons Learned

Informed by the primary goal of building trust and friendship between high-school students from diverse backgrounds, the session titled *Youth Initiatives for Peace: Experiences and Lessons Learned* focused on ‘actions for peace and social change’ that teenagers and young adults can initiate in their families, communities, and schools. In addition, it provided snapshots of initiatives undertaken by youth leaders (in other parts of the world)\(^3\) and offered participants a space to design group projects that could be implemented in their communities and schools. The projects focused on issues that teenagers confronted as challenges and which inhibited them from reaching their full potential.

The session opened with an introduction by workshop resource person Shreya Jani (Delhi-based peace educator and trainer) about the significant role that the youth can play in initiating change processes. She stated that, today, one in five persons is between the ages of 15 and 24 years. Altogether, there are over one billion youth, the largest population of young people in the history of humankind. More than 85% of this population lives in developing countries and 60% in Asia. In India, there are 315 million young people aged 10–24 years, representing 30% of the country’s population.

Jani also informed students about the recent launch of the UN Office of Youth Envoy, which seeks to primarily address the concerns of young people, globally. This is in response to the UN’s recognition of the need for a separate youth policy, which resonates for young people who now constitute a sizeable section of the world’s population. Motivating the students to think of themselves as future leaders for the region who can bring about political, social, and economic change, Jani stated,

*Most politicians are above 50 years, but they are making policies for a generation that lives in a digital*

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\(^3\) Short videos on these youth-led initiatives were screened to give workshop participants a sense of what boys and girls in other parts of the world have done and asked them to come up with their own videos/initiatives.
democracy—a democracy that many politicians are not familiar with. Your generation—the current generation of teenagers and young adults—is different because of your access to social media. You can use this powerful media, for instance your Facebook status, in a responsible way to bring about change...Your generation is far more aware of the environment, of stereotypes, and of prejudices. Your generation also has the privilege of attending such trust-building workshops and participating in cross-cultural exchanges...But there are also some serious challenges that your generation faces—for instance, your generation has the highest rates of drug and alcohol abuse ever. So, while you have more power to question things, to disobey your parents, to challenge your teachers, you must use this power responsibly.

In this context, Jani posed the following questions to the students for discussion:

- What is the impact of having such a large youth population in the world?
- Do young people in India have the power to be change-makers today?
- What are the key challenges that participants (as teenagers) face in their own lives?

Responding to these questions, students talked about how their teachers and parents make them believe that they are not capable of making independent decisions, and hence they are forced to listen to the elders (even if their views are archaic and inaccurate)! Since they are financially dependent on their parents, youngsters can’t push the envelope beyond a point. In addition, participants raised the following issues:

- They expressed a sense of powerlessness to affect any real kind of social (or even relational) change. The first challenge they raised

**Challenges faced by teenagers:**
- Sexual harassment
- Social hierarchies (coercion to obey elders)
- Peer-pressure with respect to drugs, sexual intimacy, depression, suicide
- Keeping up with the expectations of people
was with respect to their belief that they did not have enough experience to address big social issues. As one of them put it,

*With new ideas, there comes a lot of inexperience. So elders (whether in the family or at school) tell us not to act on these. They tell us that they have more experience; so they know better. There is no recognition of our own ideas. We want our parents to help us; to give us suggestions; not to impose their ideas on us.*

The majority of participants, both from Delhi and Kashmir, felt that their voice did not count. So why speak up? As one of them (from a Delhi school) put it,

*We are pressurized by our parents who force us to listen to them. Plus, the education system is not practical. In class 10, it is CCE, but in class 12, it is back to the high-stress boards. So we don’t trust the education system. Our teachers themselves don’t know which system is better (CCE or the board exams)!*

- The tendency among the young to ‘follow the mob’, rather than to act out of self-motivation, was noted. Participants expressed a need for activities to increase their confidence levels and faith in their personal judgment so that they could act on their principles, rather than succumbing to peer (or even parental) pressure. The example of parental pressure in the selection of careers/disciplines was cited. A participant from a Delhi school made the following remark:

*There is much conflict between what we think we should be and what our families want us to be. If we don’t listen to our parents, then they may not help us in finding a job. We don’t have a guiding force. We are being pulled in so many directions.*

While this statement represented the feelings of a good number of students, there were others who talked about the other extreme—which is that parents did not communicate with their children out of fear that they will commit suicide, or get into drugs, or get pregnant, if they interfere and lecture them about how to live their lives. ‘So we are pretty much left to ourselves to deal with our own problems’, said a participant from Delhi.
Another challenge that students from both regions—particularly girls—voiced was with respect to the insecurity they feel, which restricts their mobility and freedom to travel. As a participant from a Srinagar school said,

*We can’t even go to the market. The politics around us is affecting our lives…Post the Delhi rapes, our parents don’t let us go out as much. It is making us more inhibited. We are getting affected by it.*

Using creative means to delve deeper into these issues and explore solutions, Jani asked participants to work in small groups and employ the methodology of scripting and producing a short movie (in which they enacted these real-life problems/challenges). The focus was only on those issues that they as teenagers—living in Kashmir and Delhi—experienced personally and that were important to them. Possible solutions to these problems (which were doable and which participants could commit to) were also to be addressed in the videos.

Six working groups were formed—each group consisting of participants from Kashmir and Delhi. The following issues were addressed through theatre enactments, filmed on cell-phone cameras and shared with the larger group. Interestingly, these topics were common to students from Kashmir and Delhi. By working together, they discovered a broad range of common interests by virtue of the fact that they belonged to a certain age-group (14–17 years) and shared similar aspirations unique to their generation.

**Group One: Discrimination between boys and girls in the home and the growing distance between parents and children**

Group One addressed two issues with respect to conflicts within the family: one, discrimination between boys and girls within the home, and two, the growing distance between parents and children. The script was as follows: An adolescent girl asks her mother if she can visit her neighbour who has invited her to a get-together. The mother (who is doing the laundry) appears disinterested. Shunning agency, she tells the daughter to ask her father for permission. The father is too busy in phone conversations; so he tells his daughter to take permission from
the paternal grandmother. The grandmother tells the girl that since she is growing up into a young woman, she should stop going out with friends and instead help her mother with household chores. While she is counselling her granddaughter on this, the grandson walks into the room and informs her (does not ask!) that he is going out with his friends and will return late. She encourages him to go, while at the same time telling the granddaughter that she must stay back at home and help her mother.

The female members of the group, from both Delhi and Kashmir, said that they had experienced similar situations at home. In terms of solutions, they encouraged girls and young women to exercise their right to freedom of choice and movement. They also underscored the need for teenage girls to voice their opinions and to never feel insecure about doing so.

**Group Two: Sexual harassment**

Group Two enacted a scene of sexual harassment experienced by teenage girls. The movie started with two boys teasing (and then touching) two girls who were reading a book in the park. The girls decided to walk away, but soon started running as the boys got more aggressive. As they were running, they bumped into a group of girls. They share their story of harassment with them. The group of girls decided to confront the boys about their actions. As the girls approached, the boys got anxious as they had not anticipated that such a large number of girls would surround them and confront them about their behaviour. The film concluded with the boys acknowledging that they had committed a wrongful act, and apologizing (and even showing remorse) for their behaviour.

The female members of the group said that they had each experienced intimidating acts of sexual harassment, as depicted in their film. Although the group proposed a solution which lay in teaching girls how to fight for themselves and to ‘threaten’ boys who harassed them, it made the ironic (and sad) assumption that,

*Being the weaker sex, we can still be strong. Even if we are the weaker sex, it does not mean that we have to tolerate harassment. We know how to maintain our*
elegance, how to carry ourselves. We can fight for ourselves. This is a threat to boys out there. They will not win the next time they eve-tease.

This solution proposed by Group Two revealed how deeply ingrained the stereotype of women being the weaker sex is. Rather than questioning this belief, this Group chose to find a solution (training in martial arts) even while continuing to believe that girls are weaker than boys. They didn’t want to question this belief. Ironically, the female students felt it was important to emphasize that they knew how to maintain their elegance, how to conduct themselves! This was an important principle for the female members of this Group.

**Group Three: The silencing of professional aspirations**

Group Three dealt with the problem of parental (and community) pressure on young people to pursue conventional professions (such as teaching, medicine, engineering) even when they articulated an inclination and passion for other careers (that were perhaps less popular). Participants demonstrated how girls felt even more suppressed because their families narrow down the career options available to them, owing to the belief that their primary role should be that of a ‘home-maker’. For instance, in the film, a Kashmiri girl talks about how her family is against her desire to be a professional singer (even though she had proven her skill and passion for this profession). Similarly, a girl from Delhi talks about the overwhelming pressure (from her father) to become a doctor when her passion lies in being an artist. The film concludes with a frustrated student stating, ‘Parents want children to be doctors, engineers, and nothing else!’

**Group Four: The Kashmir conflict**

Group Four dealt with the conflict in Kashmir. Referring to the popular phrase used to describe Kashmir, ‘paradise on Earth’, participants demonstrated that those living in the Valley felt suffocated by the limits imposed on their freedom (and fundamental rights) to travel, to speak, and to assemble for public meetings. At best, they saw Kashmir as a ‘beautiful jail’. The Group invited the people of India to visit Kashmir and to see for themselves what was happening here, rather than believing what the media and politicians said. The film also dealt with the hope
that young people from both sides would work together to infuse ‘peace and justice’ into the Valley so that it could truly become a ‘paradise’ for those who inhabited this region.

**Group Five: Violence against women**

Group Five produced a silent film consisting of short enactments out of the life of a teenage girl (in Kashmir and Delhi) whose freedom is bounded by myriad restrictions. The enactments, which drew inspiration from the real-life experiences of the Group members, dealt with the following realities that most girls (whether in Kashmir or Delhi) have to live with:

- *I have to carry a pepper spray next to my lip-gloss in my bag.*
- *I doubt every man who looks at me.*
- *It’s my fault.*
- *I learn self-defense.*
- *No short skirts.*
- *What will people say?*
- *Family ki izzat ka sawaal hai.*
- *Why me?*

The Group concluded the enactment with the following assertion, which each member committed to live by:

> We were born with our eyes wide open and we are determined to never lower them before anyone.

**Group Six: Generation gap and technology**

Group Six addressed the burgeoning role that the internet and particularly social media have come to play in the lives of young people. This role has assumed significance owing to the sense of loneliness that teenagers feel and the shrinking time that their parents spend with them.

The film begins with a boy surfing the internet. After some time, his father’s childhood friends visit their home. Yet, he chooses not to speak
with them and continues to wile his time on the net. The visitors ask him about his father, and he casually responds that the father is always in office and hardly spends any time at home. When the father returns, he scolds his son for spending so much time on the computer and not being hospitable towards his friends. In the next scene (a few months later), the father is himself shown to be addicted to social media, unable to engage in face-to-face interactions with his friends.

The film conveys several messages: The first message of course is that the internet has become the new ‘baby-sitter’ with a growing number of teenagers/young adults spending several hours a day on social media sites. What has encouraged this trend is also the reality that parents have less time for their children (and members of the extended family are also less available). Equally significant is the fact that children play less in the outdoors, choosing to stay inside and socialize on the internet. This has reduced the child’s capacity for basic face-to-face inter-personal communication with those not plugged into social media. The second message that the film sought to convey was that membership to sites such as Facebook can become an illness to which parents are not immune either. What is needed is a technology/social media de-addiction process. There is also a flipside which is that technology can be used to bridge the generation gap (as the film, in the end, shows that the father and son are connecting with each other through Facebook).

Weaving together the learnings and recommendations from all the presentations, workshop resource person Shreya Jani highlighted the following issues and invited FAEA-WISCOMP to consider programmatic interventions in these areas:

- There is a need for a greater programmatic focus on personal change (including issues of self-esteem, self-dignity, and the sense of individual power that teenagers feel). This could be used as a starting point to make the youth feel that they have both personal agency and political agency to affect social change. She encouraged participants to reclaim this agency which is alive and well in each of them.

- Processes that seek to humanize ‘the other’ and build empathy for ‘the other’ are integral to the workshop curriculum. Jani noted that while the Hum Kadam workshops have made great strides in the
context of fault-lines between Delhi and Kashmir (and between religions), they have been less successful in addressing the otherization of ‘authority figures’ such as parents, teachers, school management, et al.

- ‘At some point, you need to get past the vent and move towards action!’ Jani acknowledged the participants’ grievances towards their families and communities, but sensitized them to the dangers of getting caught in a vicious cycle of venting (without taking action to address the issue).

- Jani pointed to the need for a peer mentoring component to be built into the programme as well as for one to be initiated by the teachers at the school level. Teachers should be more like mentors rather than telling the students what is right and wrong. They should also introduce the concept of mentoring to parents so that similar processes could be initiated within the home. Further, it was suggested that since most participants were currently in classes 10, 11, and 12, they could serve as mentors for their juniors.

- Jani encouraged the students to embrace incertitude. As she put it,

  *Don’t be scared of uncertainty. The more uncertain you are, the broader the canvas of opportunity is. Recognize your fears; they are great teachers. They will make you a better human being.*

This session received exceedingly positive feedback. It helped participants to collectively brainstorm on the challenges that they faced as teenagers. While some of these challenges were common to both Kashmir and Delhi (sexual harassment, for instance), others were specific to one region (for instance, the restrictions on the rights of young Kashmiris to speak freely or to travel/commute freely within their city). An important outcome of this session was that it sensitized participants to the problems that their peers from ‘the other city’ had to confront. For example, it was an eye-opener for the Kashmiri students to discover that youngsters in Delhi were also subjected to stress, parental pressure, and violence, albeit in different forms. The Delhi participants, on the other hand, realized that they could no longer ignore the violence and injustices, which they saw on television news channels. The conflict in Kashmir was ‘now’ not merely a political issue ‘out there’ that did not touch their lives. As Asmita Phukan, a class 11 student
from St. Mary’s School, New Delhi, put it: ‘This session made us question ourselves about things that we know are wrong, but which we simply ignore.’ Most significantly, this session witnessed a surprising degree of understanding, teamwork, and cooperation between the students from Kashmir and Delhi.

The use of creative methodologies (theatre and filmmaking) helped the reticent participants to share their views confidently. For example, although some of the girls from Pulwama spoke little in the formal dialogue sessions, they shed their inhibitions and gained immense confidence in this session. In fact, some of them were the lead characters in the plays that the Groups scripted and enacted.
Who Am I? Exploring Spaces

The next session titled *Who am I? Exploring Spaces* looked at how and why issues of identity play a crucial role in developing opinions about ‘the self’ and ‘the other’. Engaging with the stereotypes associated with different identities, workshop resource person Meenakshi Puri (Educator and WISCOMP Consultant) conducted a series of interactive exercises to help participants learn about individuals and communities different from their own and to develop attitudes that promote a respect for differences.

The session opened with a Circles’ Activity, which engaged participants in a process of identifying what they considered to be the most important dimensions of their identity. Each participant was given a hand-out which consisted of a diagram of connected circles. In each circle, they wrote about a dimension of their identity, which they considered important in defining themselves. In pairs, participants shared these markers of identity with their partners. In addition, they narrated two experiences: one, where they felt proud to be associated with an identity they had selected; and two, a time when it was painful to be associated with one of the dimensions of identity which they had chosen. Through this activity, stereotypes were examined as participants shared stories about when they were proud of their identity, and when it was especially hurtful to be associated with that identity.

This was followed by an activity in which Puri asked the students to share a stereotype they had heard about one dimension of their identity, but which failed to describe them accurately. This was captured in the following sentence, which the students were to complete.

‘I am (a/an) ____________ but I am NOT (a/an) ______________.’

Beginning with stereotypes associated with her own identity (and life experience), Puri shared the following statement: ‘I am a woman but I am not weak.’ ‘I am a woman but I am independent.’ ‘I am a feminist but I don’t hate men.’

Kashmiri participants shared the following stereotypes associated with their identity.
• I am a Kashmiri, but I don’t support the resistance movement.
• I am a Kashmiri, but I am not a terrorist.\textsuperscript{4}
• I am a Muslim, but I am not a terrorist.\textsuperscript{5}
• I am a girl, but I can do anything.
• I am a girl, but I am not weak.\textsuperscript{6}
• I am a girl, but I am not suppressed.\textsuperscript{7}
• I wear a \textit{hijab}, but I am not a terrorist.
• I am shy, but I am not dumb.
• I am a Muslim, but I do not hate other religions.
• I am from Pulwama/Kashmir, but I am not a stone-pelter.\textsuperscript{8}
• I am a Kashmiri, but I am not violent.
• I am a Kashmiri, but I am not a Pakistan supporter.
• I expect a lot from people but I am not dependent on them.

Participants from Delhi shared the following stereotypes associated with their identity:

• I am sensitive and I cry, but I am not depressed.\textsuperscript{9}
• I am a \textit{chinki}, but I am not a \textit{momo-wala}.
• I look \textit{chinki}, but I am from Delhi.
• I am a good son, but I don’t listen to everything my parents say.
• I want to be a good child, but I also want to fight for justice for those who have suffered violence.
• I am a Delhiite, but I feel no sense of togetherness with people from this city. I feel negative towards Delhi.

\textsuperscript{4} This statement was made by two Kashmiri students.
\textsuperscript{5} This statement was made by three Kashmiri students.
\textsuperscript{6} This statement was made by four students from Pulwama.
\textsuperscript{7} This statement was made by two students from Pulwama.
\textsuperscript{8} This statement was made by two Kashmiri students.
\textsuperscript{9} Two girls from Delhi shared this statement.
• I am a Bengali, but there is more to me than just fish and Rabindra Nath Tagore!
• I am Bengali, but I am also Punjabi.
• I am a boy, but I am gay.
• I am thin, but I am not weak.

This activity was an eye-opener for many students as well as for the organizers. For one, FAEA–WISCOMP were surprised to see the overwhelming presence of a strong gender identity among Kashmiri girls (particularly those from the non-elite schools and far-flung regions of the Valley). Perhaps, they—more than their affluent peers studying in the elite schools of Srinagar—experienced the denial of rights based on their gender identity. Female students from Pulwama were vociferous in questioning the assumption that, ‘Men are supposed to be the breadwinners and women are supposed to perform “motherly” roles in the home’. They wanted to push the envelope on this perception, because it was inhibiting their ability to do the things they had a passion for. For example, a 15-year old girl from a school in Pulwama talked about how her teachers (and the community at large) dissuaded her from pursuing her interest in basketball. She was told that, as a girl, it would do her no good to ‘waste time playing basketball’.

A second observation was with respect to the central role that the family played in defining the Kashmiri students’ sense of who they were. Kashmiri students spoke about how they drew their primary identity from their immediate (and extended) families and were proud that they belonged to such close-knit families. This pride in familial identity was not as dominant—although it was present—in the Delhi participants’ responses.

The session concluded with Puri facilitating a discussion around why stereotypes were problematic. Key points from the discussion are shared here:

• Participants agreed that although some stereotypes are harmless, the process of stereotyping is dangerous. This is because a stereotype is based on information which is not first-hand and which draws on someone else’s assumption or perception. This, as a result, opens up a context for the practice of bias, prejudice, and discrimination.
• Stereotypes restrict communication between people and inhibit their desire to explore and know more. They serve as a barrier between individuals to understand one another. A participant from Delhi stated, ‘A stereotype makes us judge an entire community based on limited information. This information could be correct or incorrect.’ His Kashmiri counterpart added, ‘We believe things about a whole community based on what a few people have done’.

• Students agreed that stereotypes are connected to the socialization that individuals receive from early childhood. Often, these are so deeply internalized that people are unable to recognize their compliance to oppressive/unjust situations.
Dialogue through Theatre: Explorations in Identity and Stereotypes, History and Culture

Building on the goal of prejudice reduction, the session titled Dialogue through Theatre: Explorations in Identity and Stereotypes, History and Culture focused on the role that theatre (particularly interactive activities that engage both the mind and the body) can play in transforming stereotypes as well as in assisting students to draw on those ideas/traditions from history and culture that may be used for coexistence work.

The session was conducted by Jaya Iyer, a renowned theatre trainer and practitioner, who creatively used theatre exercises and skits to generate dialogue, cultivate respect for differences (both in terms of opinions and cultural/religious practices), and increase the desire for coexistence between the diverse identities that were represented in the workshop space.

The session opened with a series of ice-breakers and warm-up games, each packed with a good mix of physical activity, relaxation, fun, and laughter. The purpose of each game/activity, as Iyer noted, was to deepen the friendships, encourage students to interact with peers from other schools/regions, and to increase their sense of comfort and confidence in the workshop space.

With the help of a game, Iyer divided the participants into small groups consisting of a mix of students from the myriad fault-lines represented at the workshop (religion, region, et al). The groups were then assigned their task. They were to script and enact a 10-minute film (using the methodology of theatre). Each group was given the same set of characters for the film. These were: Thakur Veer Pratap, Chameli, Rosy, Shaakha, Maulvi, a Brigadier, and a horse. More characters could be introduced, but the central plot had to revolve around these characters (which were deliberately chosen since they generated a whole set of stereotypes in the minds of the students). In addition, Iyer put the rider
that the theatrical performance should be like a Bollywood *masala* film and it must be politically incorrect!

Interestingly, even though the participants represented diverse backgrounds, all six groups came up with similar storylines—of a forbidden love between a boy and a girl from two different religions, of overbearing fathers who opposed their children’s choice of life partners (on the issue of religion); and of the cleric who also expressed his reservations about such a union. Since this was supposed to be a ‘Bollywood masala movie’, each play ended on a happy note with the powerful fathers and clerics consenting to the union of two religions through marriage! Each play also included a fair degree of violence and melodrama (perhaps borrowing from the over-usage of this filmmaking technique in Bollywood).

Ironically, even though the character of the cleric was Muslim (*maulvi*), the wedding ceremony was portrayed as a Hindu one with the bride and the groom walking around a fire. This perhaps was a reflection of the influence of a dominant Hindu culture in Bollywood films, which participants unconsciously imbibed, even though the lyrics and music score in many mainstream Bombay cinema films draws on the philosophy and traditions of Sufism.

In the debriefing that followed the performances, participants raised several issues. Iyer encouraged them to be ‘politically incorrect’ and to speak candidly about their personal views, grievances, and aspirations. As she put it, ‘Go beyond what is socially accepted…what is the norm…*Sahi ka seema jo hai, uske aage dekhen.*’

As a result, FAEA–WISCOMP got a glimpse into the deep churning that many participants (particularly those from Kashmir) were experiencing. Even though the Kashmiri participants represented a fairly young age-group (14-17 years), they were acutely aware of the denial of what was rightfully theirs. They felt as cheated by their own local politicians as they did by the army; as much by Pakistan as they did by India. They held Kashmiri politicians responsible for looting the natural resources of the state, reflected in the acute shortage of electricity (particularly in the rural areas). They shared that while Kashmir possesses the natural resources to generate an excess supply of electricity, it has to buy electricity from other states.
The discussion on some of these issues is shared here:

**Silencing of the Kashmiri voice:**
Participants from Kashmir talked about the different ways in which the Indian state had silenced their voice. Even though they did not support the militancy, they were not surprised with the fact that so many young boys had joined the movement. The decision was based purely on a sense of suffocation and stifling of their right to express their views. A male student from Pulwama (whose identity has been concealed owing to the sensitive nature of the experience he shared) talked about being tortured by the army in a mosque. The reason given to him by the army personnel was that he had called up the TIMES NOW news channel to share his views on the conflict during an intense stand-off between stone-pelters and security forces in the Valley. The views he had aired on the news channel were similar to those expressed by other presenters on the news-show (including Kashmiri politicians). Equally shocking was the method of incarceration that he was subjected to. He was not taken to a police station, but rather to a mosque where the security forces vented their anger by hitting him several times. The boy’s family was so traumatized by the incident that they stopped sending him to school, confiscated his cell-phone, and removed his access to television. He was locked up in a room for a month by his father who feared for his son’s safety. During the discussion at the workshop, this boy kept emphasizing that all he wanted to do was to voice his opinion on the human rights violations that were taking place in the name of ‘security’. Sadly, the violence that he experienced at the hands of the security forces served its purpose—which is that he now does not share his views in public; he does not talk about the denial of his fundamental rights, his thirst for justice, or his desire for a public acknowledgment by the Indian state of the suffering that the people of Kashmir have experienced. This boy is all of 15 years! Aware of the discriminatory treatment meted out to him, this young boy concluded his narration with the following statement: ‘A juvenile in Kashmir is treated very differently by the army. There is no concern for the fact that he is under-age.’

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**I would love to be a part of India if I, as a girl, was treated in the same way a girl in Delhi is. I want the same respect for my human rights which my friends in Delhi have.**

Female participant
15 years
Srinagar
Other workshop participants from Kashmir shared similar stories of suppression where the primary intent of the violence (by the security forces) was to silence the Kashmiri voice by instilling fear and insecurity in them. Because of this fear, they are unable to lead peaceful and fulfilling lives. Another boy from Pulwama said, ‘Everyone should be given a chance to speak. The Indian government should listen to Kashmiris. If we talk, we are suppressed. This is an injustice.’

Commenting on the restrictions imposed on the rights of Kashmiris to use social media and the internet, a female participant from Srinagar said, ‘We have to think several times before even putting up a status update on Facebook!’ A comment on Facebook could invite the wrath of the security forces and result in detention! While one participant had a direct experience of this, others knew of someone in the community who had undergone such detention (as a result of airing their views about the conflict and the violence on social media sites). As one participant shared, ‘A friend of mine had put a status update on Facebook about the Shopian killings. Soon, the security forces came knocking on his door. They accused him of being a militant or a stone pelter!’ There was consensus among the participants (including those from Delhi) that the fundamental rights of the civilians should be respected and there should ‘at least be a public acknowledgment of the suffering that Kashmiris have lived with for years’. As one participant from Srinagar put it, ‘We study fundamental rights in our political science class. But we can’t experience these. These are not practiced here (Kashmir).’

Participants from Delhi were shocked to learn of the measures undertaken by the state to prevent Kashmiris from communicating with those outside the Valley. Some of these measures included the blocking of local television channels (particularly those concerning news and current affairs), the withdrawal of SMS facility on cell-phones, and the suspension of the internet and phone lines.

**Different standards of justice for acts of sexual violence:** Female participants talked about the different nature of violence that Kashmiri girls and women experienced in the Valley. Even though participants were born in the early-to-mid-1990s, the Kashmiri girls were aware of the Kunan-Poshpora mass rape incident of 1991, and more significantly, they were aware of the complete absence of justice in the case.
Reference was also made to more recent incidents of rape and murder (such as those of two women in Shopian in 2009) allegedly by representatives of the Indian state who were deputed to the Valley to ‘protect’ the residents. Kashmiri students compared the inaction in these cases to the swift action taken by the Indian government in the Nirbhaya gang rape case of December 2012 in New Delhi. Comparisons were also drawn between the 24/7 media coverage and mass public outrage over the Nirbhaya case and the complete absence of these in the wake of incidents of sexual violence in Kashmir. What deeply saddened the Kashmiri participants was that while the wheels of justice moved swiftly in cases of sexual violence that took place in the national capital, such responsiveness and sensitivity were absent when the victims of rape (and other forms of torture) resided in Kashmir (even though, in the latter, the perpetrators were ‘men in uniform’ who were meant to protect the local residents). A female participant from Srinagar stated: ‘When people in Delhi protested against the Nirbhaya rape, the security forces used water cannons and rubber bullets. If we in Kashmir protest against the rape of our sisters, the security forces torture us and kill us!'

During the discussion, it was observed that participants from Delhi and Kashmir were comparing the suffering of women and girls in the two regions. While the Kashmiri participants felt that girls in Delhi were much safer, the Delhi participants talked about the large-scale gender-based violence that takes place within homes (and which is thus not as widely reported). Iyer encouraged participants to avoid a comparing of suffering because as she put it, ‘One group’s pain should not cancel the pain of another group.’ The rape and murder of the women in Shopian is as painful and deserving of justice as that of Nirbhaya’s.

Rights of the girl within the home: An important focus of discussion was with respect to the different standards of political correctness imposed on boys and girls. Kashmiri girls experienced this in a more
powerful way than their Delhi counterparts. For instance, some of them talked about societal expectations that girls should be ‘shy’ or that they should not befriend boys. It was clear that this group of girls from the Valley felt suffocated by the standards of political correctness imposed on them owing to their gender identity.

The session concluded with a powerful ‘closing circle’ facilitated by Iyer. Participants appreciated the space that she provided to them to shed the ‘charade of political correctness’ and to vent their grievances and feelings about issues that affected their day-to-day lives. Iyer’s interactive exercises that brought together strangers (from Delhi and Kashmir) and helped them to work as part of a team and build consensus, also received widespread applause.

*Jaya Ma’am’s workshop was so fresh and rejuvenating. In between the games and skits, she taught us some important lessons about life. We learnt so much about ourselves and those different from us, and that too in a fun way.*

Asmita Phukan  
Head Girl  
St. Mary’s School  
New Delhi
Bollywood: Promoting Peace or Prejudice?

Shifting focus to the powerful role that Bombay cinema plays in influencing the perceptions of young women and men, the workshop session titled *Bollywood: Promoting Peace or Prejudice* looked at how the film industry has portrayed Kashmir and India-Pakistan relations. Participants studied Bollywood films with a purpose to analyze how these have influenced the way young people perceive political issues and ‘the adversary’. Within this context, they addressed the following questions: Has Bollywood promoted the ideas of peace, coexistence, and reconciliation in the context of Kashmir and India-Pakistan relations? Or, has it increased conflict and prejudice between communities and nations? How has the film industry portrayed Kashmir and India-Pakistan relations? Does it provide an accurate picture of the ground reality in Kashmir?

Owing to reasons of logistical convenience, participants worked in their school groups before the workshop. At the workshop, they made short presentations on the following films:

- *Lakshya* (Central High School, Srinagar)
- *Inshallah Football* (Presentation Convent, Srinagar, Group One)
- *Border* (Presentation Convent, Srinagar, Group Two)
- *Veer Zaara* (DPS, Srinagar)
- *Earth 1947* (Bluebells School, New Delhi)
- *Lamhaa* (St. Mary’s School, New Delhi)

While some of these films used the genre of melodrama (*Lamhaa*, for instance), others were more in the nature of docu-dramas (which depicted the ground reality and did *not* try to intervene in the plot through a ‘happy ending’). Although the presentations were more descriptive with references to the central plot and storyline of the film\(^{10}\), students learnt how to use critical thinking skills to analyze the message.

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\(^{10}\) Even this aspect was important because, through a focus on the film storyline, participants from Delhi learnt about some of the terrible incidents of violence that had taken place in Kashmir over the last two decades.
and impact of the films and to recognize the complexity of the issues involved. Several stereotypes were also examined and deconstructed, particularly those with respect to women’s roles, perceptions of Hindus and Muslims, the image of the ‘terrorist/militant/freedom fighter’, the counter image of the army officer, the portrayal of ‘the other’ (Pakistani/Kashmiri Muslim/Indian Hindu), and the image of the ‘patriot’.

Session resource person, Ufra Mir, Founder and CEO of the Srinagar-based NGO Paigaam, facilitated the discussion. Since participants had selected films made over a 20-year period, she encouraged them to think of the different ways in which the Bombay film industry had changed and how this was reflected in the storyline of the films (particularly with reference to the psychology around patriotism). For example, Mir noted that the portrait of ‘the enemy’ in a jingoistic film like Border was quite intense and stark in comparison to the one conveyed through more complex films like Veer Zaara (which showed a Pakistani helping an Indian) and Earth (which was a poignant reminder of the reality that violence knows no religion and that everyone suffers when there are riots, as witnessed in 1947). In fact, the impact of films on young minds was demonstrated by the intervention of some Kashmiri students (from Presentation Convent, Srinagar) who said Border made them ‘feel respect for the Indian soldiers and hatred towards the Pakistanis’. Respect for the Indian soldiers came from the awareness that they were protecting ‘us Kashmiris’. For instance, one student (in response to Border) said: ‘How could the Pakistanis do this to us!’

While films made in the 1990s (and even some from the early years of the 21st century) portrayed the Pakistani Muslim as ‘the other’ and the Indian Hindu army officer as the ‘patriot hero’, these juxtapositions became more complex and less judgmental in films made post-2003 (when the peace process in Kashmir and between India and Pakistan gained momentum). As a result, it became possible for Bollywood to produce a film like Main Hoo Naa in which the villain is ‘Hindu’ and from the army; or even a film like Veer Zaara which generated public support (and a market) for cross-border romances and camaraderie between Indians and Pakistanis.

The issue of how Kashmir sees India through Bollywood and vice versa was also addressed. Kashmiri perceptions about ‘mainstream Indians’
are influenced by Bombay cinema as are the views of the mainstream influenced by how Bollywood represents the people of Kashmir in its films. The question that Mir encouraged participants to think about was this: Is Bollywood feeding into what is already happening on the ground (in terms of the armed conflict and the suffering it is generating? Or is it trying to change the way people look at the conflict and those perceived as ‘the other’?

Students found those films that used a documentary format (*Inshallah Football*, for instance) to be effective since these were more representative of the reality in Kashmir (depicting the life experiences of ordinary Kashmiris and what they have to deal with on a daily basis). Also, in the context of *Inshallah Football*, students said that their parents had narrated stories similar to what the lead character Basharat’s father shares in the film. For instance, the film highlights the sad reality that, like Basharat, hundreds of young Kashmiris have not been allowed to pursue higher education and professional training in disciplines for which they have demonstrated both an interest and a potential. In other words, the conflict and the Indian state's method of curbing it have resulted in the denial of the Kashmiris’ rights to pursue careers/professions of their choice. They appreciated this dimension because they felt that, with the exception of a few films, mainstream Bollywood has been unable to accurately portray the daily strivings of the people of Kashmir.

The session concluded with the participants expressing an interest in learning more about the influence of Bollywood films on public perceptions around inter-community relations and the Kashmir conflict in particular. They asked FAEA-WISCOMP to organize a follow-up workshop on this theme, but this time with a training in critical thinking skills.
Kashmir: A Crucible of Pluralism and Coexistence

The three-day workshop concluded with a Heritage Walk titled *Kashmir: A Crucible of Pluralism and Coexistence*. Highlighting the ideas of togetherness and inter-faith understanding—embedded in the history of Kashmir—the Walk was conducted by Mr. Saleem Beg (former Convener, INTACH, Jammu and Kashmir Chapter, and currently Member, National Monuments of India, New Delhi). It included visits to the Lal Ded Memorial Cultural Center (which showcases Kashmir’s rich and syncretic heritage of architecture and handicrafts), to Hari Parbat (which is home to a Mughal Fort, Mosque, Temple, and Gurudwara), to Mughal Gardens, and to shrines that hold historical and spiritual importance for both Hindus and Muslims. A primary purpose of this session was to help participants understand the depth of the unity of religions in the subcontinent prior to the 1947 partition.

The Heritage Walk started at the Lal Ded Memorial Cultural Center. Here, the resource person Saleem Beg opened his presentation with a comment on the significance of the Center, which is housed in a 1910 building that belongs to the period of colonial architecture. Although Kashmir was never ruled directly by the British, the architecture of this Center resembles the buildings of the colonial period. INTACH is responsible for the preservation of this Center, which today showcases the rich architectural, craft, and food heritage of Kashmir. Underscoring the significance of such spaces, Beg said:

*Unless you have visual cultural spaces, you can’t make much sense of the past or the present. Culture is very essential to the development of individuals and society. It is not just about protecting a monument, but about identity as well. It helps you to build your self-esteem and dignity, which has become an important goal in Kashmir today.*
Beg explained that Lal Ded is like a mother to Kashmiris (Muslims and Hindus alike) and is considered the patron saint for the whole of Kashmir. Although no one assigned her a religion, she was essentially a Shaivite Yogini who had a deep influence on the leading Kashmiri Muslim Sufi saint Sheikh Noor-ud-din Wali, also known as Nooruddin Rishi or Nunda Rishi. He considered her to be his spiritual mother. While the Hindus call her Laleshwari (like God), Muslims call her Lad Ded (like mother). Commenting on the significance of the Cultural Center established to honour Lal Ded’s legacy, Beg said:

*Now, a place where you have this kind of interaction, such kind of integration of faiths, you can imagine what kind of a culture the place would have developed. For instance, although Noor-ud-din Wali preached Islam, he was a vegetarian. This inter-layering of faiths led to the birth of a new faith—the Rishi faith whose practitioners believed in the positive quality of all human beings, irrespective of the different ways in which they practiced their faith.*

Beg walked the participants through a breath-taking tour of the Lal Ded Memorial Cultural Center which covered the richness and diversity of the region’s demography, landscape, languages, cuisine, places of worship, livelihood, and lifestyle practices. The fascinating display of crafts at the Center demonstrated how Kashmir’s handicrafts have been influenced by layers of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam.

From the Lal Ded Center, the group travelled to Hari Parbat (which is home to a Mughal Fort, Mosque, Temple, and Gurudwara). Tracing the history of this area, Beg said that the first city of Srinagar was established at Hari Parbat in the 6th century. There is a recorded history of a Hindu king shifting his kingdom from Srinagar to Hari Parbat. Beg noted that the reasons could be a combination of the following: proximity to water, natural calamity, issues of safety (from the enemy intruder), and/or the desire of rulers to immortalize their reign by instituting a city in their name.

After Hari Parbat, Beg took the participants to the Mughal Gardens, which he described as a ‘historical garden’ (different from a normal
municipal garden). ‘Historical gardens’ can be traced to the Mughal kings who were fond of constructing gardens. These gardens were of different types. The first type was the tomb garden (which was built in the memory of an emperor, Lodhi Gardens in Delhi, for instance). The second type can be categorized as a leisure/pleasure garden. Here too, there were two types: one made by the king or the queen, and the second, made by the Mughal governor of the area.

Beg shared that Mughal rule in Kashmir began at the time of Akbar. During their reign, the Mughals built around 700 gardens in Kashmir. Today, only 10 of these exist (some only in name). The Mughals believed in a philosophy, which informed their decision to build so many gardens. They wished to experience the concept of paradise (jannat) of the afterlife (mentioned in the Quran) in the living world as well.

Interestingly, Beg noted that the word ‘paradise’ is pre-Islamic because it predates the Quran. In the 6th century, there was a King in Iran called Cyrus. He established the garden layout that is known to us today. He would make a garden and then build a wall around it. This walled garden was called paradise in Persian. Beg used this example to talk about the historical dialogue and coexistence that has continued between different religions and cultures:

> Before the advent of Islam, there was thus some concept of paradise and this concept related to the concept that Islam articulated. This shows that there is a continuous thread and an overlapping of cultures, traditions, and practices between different religions. There is a continuity between civilizations and eras, and the beauty of this continuity is that diversity comes into cultures...because one civilization/culture draws from another. One civilization layers over another, and so forth. This is how societies have evolved.

> The compartmentalization of religions and regions is a political idiom. It is not a civilizational idiom. Some people want to protect a particular identity and they give this identity a name. The name could be geographic,
political, or religious. But in a larger context, human landscape is diverse and it is a continuous and evolving landscape. So we can’t say that our religion or our culture is better than others because each informs the other. There are people who live in their own ways, have their own styles of living, and their world does not have to conflict with our world and our styles of living—unless we create a political conflict out of it.

So, whenever you look at life and culture, you must acknowledge that you are not exclusive. You are part of a very big inclusive whole in which you too have a role to play. There are other people who live in this world. If you realize this, you will get to a place where you will start respecting the other. And when you start respecting the other, you in turn will get the same respect. When we do this, there will be harmony in human society. And this is the purpose of this workshop.

Describing the historical uniqueness of Srinagar, Beg said that this ‘ancient city’ has a continuously recorded history of at least 3500 years. In fact, one problem that historians in the subcontinent have faced is the paucity of recorded history. Yet, Kashmir is one place where, as a result of this recorded history, historians have a fairly good insight into the past of Kashmir—for instance, they know who ruled the area 3000 years ago; how people lived in those days; the medicines they used; the sports they played etc.

This recorded history has revealed that Srinagar was set up as a Buddhist city. During his reign, Ashoka decided to spread the message of peace through Buddhism; and the only way to do this was to send preachers to different parts of the subcontinent. In this context, in 250 BC, a party of preachers came and established this place as a city. Srinagar was thus established as essentially a Buddhist city. Srinagar was such an important Buddhist city that international conclaves of Buddhism were held here. For example, the 4th Buddhist Council where the Mahayana branch/philosophy of Buddhism was established was held in Srinagar. This conveys a sense of the significance of Kashmir for Buddhist practitioners.
Even though the influence of Buddhism had reduced by the 4th century (in that the King was not Buddhist), Beg referred to the chronicles of Huen Tsang (a Chinese Buddhist monk) who came here in the 5th century. He saw 500 major stupas in Kashmir (which geographically is a small place). So, Buddhism survived in Kashmir, even after it wound up as an official religion. Records of practicing Buddhists can be found up until the 8th century. In the 15th century, the Kashmiri ruler Zainab-ul-adin had a Buddhist Minister. Buddhism therefore did not vanish from Kashmir, at least not in cultural terms. Its influence on the architecture of Kashmir remains significant even today. For example, mosques in the 20th century were constructed in the stupa style, the Jamia Masjid in Srinagar being the most visible example. So, Buddhism survived in Kashmir in a different form—as a creed and as a culture.

Tracing the history of the advent of Islam in Kashmir (late 14th–early 15th century), Beg shared that no Muslim King conquered this place. Islam came through a subtle dialogue and interaction:

There was a Badshah from the adjoining border areas (which now constitute Ladakh). He saw that even though there were two established religions here, Kashmir was going through an upheaval due to a recent invasion by Zulju (a Mongol) who plundered and destroyed the place, and compelled the Hindu King to run away with his family. So this King came here. He saw a Muslim saint worshipping and was impressed by his method of worship and decided to convert to Islam. His name was Bulbul Shah. He was from Turkmenistan. But nothing much changed till the time a Muslim dynasty came here. This dynasty had a King called Zainab-uladin. He ruled for
50 years and was a secular man because he believed in diversity and respected all religions. He also treated all his subjects uniformly. And when you have established Kings who are able to bring peace, what happens? You have progress. Peace is an instrument for progress. Resultantly, the place flourished. The first dividend of peace in Kashmir was commerce, trade. People started producing surplus; then they started exporting surplus. The crafts industry flourished. Because of this, people started liking the place. The cool climate helped as well. So you have people from different regions coming here, and as a result, there was an interlayering of cultures (that these travellers brought). People came from Iran, central Asia, representing different religious belief systems. In the 14th and 15th centuries, people realized the importance of diversity because they had tasted both the eras of conflict and peace. And they had realized that peace will not come unless you respect, propagate, and promote diversity in the local society.

Even while acknowledging the extremely difficult period through which Kashmiris have lived for the last 20 years, Beg was of the view that the basic foundation of this diversity has not changed or been impacted. The scars are there for all to see (particularly with the exodus of the Kashmiri Pandit community), but he felt that these have had a superficial impact. In historical terms, these scars will not last because of the solid foundation of inclusivity which Kashmir has possessed for centuries. He concluded his presentation with the following conviction:

There remains a layering of cultures in terms of social practices, architecture, offerings, if not in terms of faith. There is nothing exclusive about any of the three religions. They interpolate and meet each other and influence. This culture of inclusiveness has sustained, in terms of our faith, in terms of our belief, and also in terms of our larger cultural interpretation. We should carry forward and sustain this heritage. And it is now up to your generation—the young students of Kashmir and Delhi—to take this heritage forward.
I would like to complement WISCOMP for bringing together such a diverse group to discuss a subject of immense significance. It is quite commendable that the student group is diverse in terms of not only region and religion, but also school, gender, and worldviews. It does not always happen that such a young age-group gets this kind of exposure...to meet people from ‘the other’ region. It was indeed a pleasure to be part of the program so imaginatively structured by WISCOMP.

Saleem Beg
Former Convener, INTACH
(J&K Chapter)
Member, National Monuments Authority of India, New Delhi
Participant Feedback

The workshop closed with an evaluation and feedback session in which participants shared their learnings and provided inputs to FAEA-WISCOMP on recommendations for future interactions.

The workshop included the participation of 44 high school students from Kashmir and Delhi. The diversity of the group (in terms of the representation of different religions, ethnicities, and sects) was a core strength of the workshop. In addition to the organizer’s own observations, many participants also commented on this—particularly with respect to how this diversity in the profiles and backgrounds of the participants enriched the learning process.

Expectations from the interaction

Participants responded positively when asked if the workshop addressed their expectations. The expectations, however, varied. Shared here are the expectations that the participants brought with them and their post-workshop responses:

The political conflict of the last 24 years and the ensuing mistrust between Kashmiris and those from the rest of India informed the expectations of the participants (even though they were aged 14–17 years, representing a generation that was born after the worst years of the insurgency). For instance, a Kashmiri participant (who did not wish to be named) said: ‘I wasn’t expecting Delhiites to feel the pain of Kashmiris. But they did. I was happy.’ Afeefa, a class 9 student from

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We learnt that Delhi and Kashmir are like different parts of a body. If our toe is injured, our eyes shed tears in pain. Our mind and body will be affected by the pain. And the entire body will not be able to function optimally. So if something wrong is happening in Kashmir, we in Delhi should raise our voice against it. If people in one state are experiencing pain, the rest of the country should come forward to help. Others should feel this pain as well. This is ‘unity in diversity’.

I will encourage the students to use this platform provided by WISCOMP to the fullest to further the goals of understanding and friendship.

Uma Anand
Mathematics Teacher
St. Mary’s School
New Delhi
the Dolphin International School, Pulwama, said, ‘I was looking forward to a dialogue on the Kashmir conflict, and my expectation was met.’ Shariq Bakshi, a class 11 student from DPS, Srinagar, said that he came with the expectation to have a ‘fruitful discussion on the relations between India and Pakistan and the resolution of the Kashmir conflict’.

While some participants were quite explicit in talking about the sense of alienation that the people of Kashmir felt towards ‘Indians’ and how the workshop helped to redress this feeling, others came with the expectation of simply meeting a peer from ‘the other side’ (and if possible, befriend them). As one student (from a school run by the Kashmir Creative Education Foundation, Pulwama) put it, ‘I have never interacted with a person from Delhi. I came to the workshop to make friends with a person of my age who lived in Delhi.’ Apoorva Sharma, a class 11 student from St. Mary’s School, New Delhi, said that she came to the workshop to ‘learn about Kashmir and what Kashmiris are like in real life’. Her classmate Pratibhu Rawat added, ‘My expectation was that the interaction will teach me about the various aspects of the lives of Kashmiris. Before meeting the Kashmiris, I had an image in my mind that I won’t be able to socialize with them; but I was wrong. They are amazing people.’ Resonating a similar view, Kunal Ahuja (from the same school) said, ‘I did not come with any expectations as such…But I never expected to be friends with the residents of Kashmir so quickly. It was very easy to talk with them about any topic. They were humble and it felt very homey with them. This surprised me.’ Manas Bodh, a class 11 student from Bluebells School, Delhi, said, ‘I was looking forward to going beyond the boundaries of my knowledge about Kashmir and its people. It was more than just met.’

The expectation of meeting peers from a different region/community and befriending them was common to both the Kashmiri and Delhi-based participants, with over 96% articulating this. Participants spoke in unison when they said that this expectation was met. Ghummar, a class 10 student from Presentation Convent, Srinagar, said that she came to the workshop to ‘learn how to interact with people from a
different culture and to make new friends from a different region’. Her peer from the Dolphin International School, Pulwama, added, ‘I wanted to know about the ideas and opinions of outsiders about Kashmir…I wanted to interact with them. This happened at the workshop.’ Her counterparts in Delhi came to the workshop space with a similar expectation. Sunder Bhusal, a class 11 student from St. Mary’s School, Delhi, said, ‘I wanted to meet the Kashmiris, learn about the problems they faced. This expectation was fulfilled.’

A reading of the participants’ responses on this subject brought out the starkness of an ‘iron curtain’ or a ‘border’ of sorts, which has prevented contact between youngsters living in Kashmir and Delhi. The only source of information about ‘the other’ is television news, and this has certainly not helped! A good number of the participants from Kashmir (more than 80%) saw the workshop as a platform where they could speak about the problems they faced (due to the political conflict). While the majority was satisfied that this expectation had been met, about 15% felt that more time should have been devoted to steering the conversation towards concrete solutions and to ‘brainstorm’ specific strategies to address the issues that the participants brought to the workshop space.

For FAEA-WISCOMP, this was challenging owing to the nature of the issues that the participants raised. For example, a class 10 student from Presentation Convent, Srinagar, raised the issue of the mass rapes in Kunan Pushpora in the early 1990s (and the failure of the state to convict the perpetrators who allegedly belong to the army). Another participant from Pulwama talked about his experience of torture at the hands of the army (at a tender age of 15). What was particularly disturbing was that no action had been taken to address the human rights abuse that this boy had been a victim to.

Since the workshop brought together a mix of new participants and alumni from earlier interactions, the latter came with the expectation

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After this workshop, my whole way of seeing things has changed. I learnt that there is always a positive side to everything that happens and we should never give up. We should try our level best to improve the lives of others, even if they are different from us.

Pratibhu Rawat
Class 11 student
St. Mary’s School
New Delhi
that the circles of dialogue would be expanded and a larger number of teenagers from the two cities would become active members of a coalition for understanding and social change. This expectation was partially fulfilled since the alumni are still in the process of charting the contours and goals of their coalition.

Learnings, takeaways, and surprises

Participants reported diverse learnings from the workshop. The majority of these were rooted in shifts in perceptions of those considered to be ‘the other’ as well as improvements in individual participants’ self-esteem and faith in their own capabilities to affect change.

Interestingly, an important takeaway (for participants from both Delhi and Kashmir) was one which they had not articulated as a pre-workshop expectation. This was with respect to the positive impact of the workshop on their self-image and the construction of an identity that was affirming and which did not draw strength from an ‘us versus them’ worldview. Participants thus talked about how the workshop had increased their ‘self-esteem’, taught them how to ‘speak in public with confidence’, and helped them to shed inhibitions and share their true feelings without fear. An overwhelming majority (over 85%) talked about how they felt more confident about themselves.

In the post-workshop surveys, participants made the following statements in response to a question about their learnings from the interaction (or what they saw as the accomplishments of the workshop):

- ‘I was able to express myself...my individuality...and not conceal it.’ This response, from Maria, a class 10 student of Presentation Convent, Srinagar, gives us a sense of the limited avenues available to young people in Kashmir to freely share their views and to truly ‘be’ who they are without any charade or imposition.

- ‘The workshop has made me a confident speaker. I am now able to talk in public.’ Comment made by Tanish from St. Mary’s School, New Delhi.

- ‘My ideas changed for the better, and many superstitions went away.’ Maumil, a Class 11 student from Presentation Convent, Srinagar (who made this statement), did not elaborate on the ‘superstitions’,
although it was clear that these were with respect to her perceptions of participants from Delhi whom she saw as representing the world of elite and mainstream ‘Hindu India’.

- ‘My thinking has expanded beyond a given circle.’ Comment made by a female student from Bluebells School International, New Delhi.
- ‘I came to know about my own capabilities’. Comment made by a male student from St. Mary’s School, New Delhi.
- ‘The workshop gave me the freedom to express myself completely. What is surprising is that I also got to know more about myself (even as I learnt so much about the participants from Delhi.’ Comment made by Sara Khan, a class 11 student from Presentation Convent, Srinagar.
- ‘WISCOMP helped me to come out of my shyness. The workshop made me feel good about myself. I want to participate in another WISCOMP workshop so that I can completely take out all my shyness.’ Comment made by Afeefa, a class 10 student from Dolphin International School, Pulwama. Once again, this is an indicator of the limited avenues available to young Kashmiris, particularly girls, to enhance their confidence and self-identity.

In addition to the above responses, participants shared a diverse range of learnings (in the feedback forms and closing session). These are shared below:

**Kashmiri participants: I learnt….**

- ‘To have faith in my capabilities…To be confident.’
- ‘How to interact…how to participate in discussions…how to make friends with people from a different culture.’
- ‘To be open to new ideas and different views.’
- ‘How to share my inner feelings while respecting other’s ideas.’
- ‘The importance of patience, coordination, teamwork and how to work in a group.’

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11 As one Kashmiri participant put it, ‘If we work together as a team, anything is possible. We can solve any problem.’
• ‘The value of togetherness—it is so important for people to connect.’

• ‘To interact with people from different parts of the country and to not judge anyone on their appearance or how they are being portrayed in the media.’

• ‘The true meaning of identity…which is that it is the expression of a person’s individuality and his/her concepts…I got to know that a person can have many identities…I also learnt about the benefits of not believing in stereotypes.’

• ‘The need to interact with people from different parts of the country.’

• ‘That violence does not work. We should not get involved in hate and violent activities. We should keep talking to each other.’

• ‘That Bollywood movies are not only for entertainment. We can learn a lot from them.’

• ‘That we Kashmiris are not alone…that people from Delhi are with us and feel our pain.’

• ‘About my own history…I learnt about the history of Kashmir…a history which I didn’t know about, even though I am from here.’

(This was with reference to the Heritage Walk conducted by Saleem Beg who educated the participants about the pre-Islamic history of Kashmir, which included Buddhist and Hindu phases.)

Delhi participants: I learnt….

• We must be the change we wish to see in the world.

• The people of Kashmir are not bad, the circumstances are.

• Not to be afraid and to speak my views in public.

• The importance of eye contact while talking.

• ‘To be proud of my identity.’

12 As one Delhi participant put it, ‘All people, irrespective of where they come from or which religion they belong to, deserve respect.’

13 Many of the Delhi-based participants quoted Mohandas Gandhi to summarize their most important learning. They also felt more confident about being the lone voice for a cause. As one of them put it, ‘We can be the change, even if others do not support us. We alone can stand for the cause of the Kashmiris.’ Another added, ‘I learnt to take a stand…To not be scared even if you are alone, but to stand for what is right.’
• ‘It doesn’t matter which state, religion, or caste a person belongs to. In the end, we are human beings and all we want is to live in peace and harmony.’

• ‘To be confident and have faith in myself.’

• ‘That Kashmiris are not anti-India/pro-Pakistan. All they want is peace.’

• ‘People from different backgrounds (be it religion, class or caste) should be treated equally.’

• ‘Not to judge people of a particular community…In fact, not to be prejudiced towards anyone.’

• ‘How to build consensus in a group, how to respect each other’s ideas, and especially how to listen.’

• ‘We cannot solve social conflicts unless we resolve the conflict of fear within ourselves.’

In the closing session of the workshop, FAEA-WISCOMP asked the participants if they were surprised by any of the experiences at the workshop. Some of their responses to this question are shared here.

What surprised me! Delhi responses

• ‘The people of Kashmir were so welcoming and caring!’

• ‘I was surprised that the same issue could be looked at in different ways. There was no one truth.’

• ‘I enjoyed working with the Kashmiri students!’

• ‘We were surprised at how easy it was to discuss topics, which we would not bring up with our own families or even our friends.’

What surprised me! Kashmiri responses

• ‘People from different religions and cultures can be friends.’

• ‘I didn’t expect such love and care from strangers…I didn’t think that people in Delhi cared (about what is happening to the Kashmiris).’

• ‘I was surprised to learn about the Buddhist and Hindu history of Kashmir. We are not taught about this aspect of Kashmiri history in school.’
• ‘Learning can be fun!’ ‘The teachers (referring to the workshop facilitators/trainers) were so friendly!’ ‘We were not scared of the teachers, but we still learnt a lot!’

(The workshop debunked the widely-held belief among the participants that learning is a burden or that it causes stress. Here, in the FAEA-WISCOMP space, they learnt that education can be fun.)

• ‘What surprised me was that some of the students (from Delhi) were not allowed to come to Kashmir. I hope this will change once the Delhi participants go back and spread the word that Kashmir is safe and that Kashmiri people won’t harm them.’

• ‘I thought the workshop would be like a debate, a clash of ideas, arguments, etc. But I was surprised…we were able to understand each other. Now we (Kashmiris and Delhities) will not depend on TV news channels to form our opinions about each other. We should not trust the media. It is blindfolded.’

**Popular Themes**

Participants were asked to select those themes/sessions that they found to be helpful and productive (and the reasons for this). While over 60% said that all the themes were relevant (and 100% agreed with the choice of trainers/facilitators), it was evident that some topics and facilitators were more popular than others.

The themes that received positive feedback are listed here:

• The sessions *Dialogue through Theatre: Explorations in Identity and Stereotypes, History and Culture* (conducted by Jaya Iyer) and *Youth Initiatives for Peace: Experiences and Lessons Learned* (conducted by Shreya Jani) received the highest rankings. The reasons for their popularity were several. While some participants (particularly those from Kashmir) said that the two sessions taught them to be ‘fearless’ and ‘confident’, others appreciated the fact that the facilitators provided ample space for all students to voice their opinions. The two sessions also included outdoor, physical activities, which made the participants feel refreshed. As one of them put it, ‘We used both our mind and body. That felt good.’ In addition, while the first session gave participants an opportunity to script and enact theatrical plays, the second invited them to dabble in
filmmaking. In both cases, the uniqueness of the methodologies used enhanced the outcome by increasing the learning trajectories of the students.

- The ice-breaker and warm-up activities (conducted by FAEA-WISCOMP staff) were received very well. Since these included one-on-one conversations and games (that were designed to make participants feel at ease in a new space), the ice-breakers opened up a context for learning that was fun and dialogues that sparked curiosity. Manas Bodh, a class 11 student from Bluebells School, New Delhi, said: ‘In the ice-breakers session, we learned a better way to make friends.’ His friend Kunal Ahuja from St. Mary’s School, New Delhi, added: ‘Through the ice-breaking activity, the friendships we built melted the stereotypes….without any effort.’

- The session on *Identity and Stereotypes* also received positive feedback, particularly from the Kashmiri participants. This session helped them to talk about the different layers of their identity (and how these were impacted by the conflict). For the Delhi participants, the USP of this session was that it led to the discovery that their own identity was so closely linked to the prejudices they held about other people. The focus on issues surrounding bias and discrimination helped participants to develop a better understanding of how prejudice gets enacted into discriminatory behaviour.

- The role of Bollywood in influencing perceptions about ‘us’ and ‘them’ was an issue that was extensively discussed. In the session titled *Bollywood Cinema: Promoting Peace or Prejudice* (conducted by Ufra Mir), participants selected mainstream Hindi films that addressed the Kashmir conflict and worked in their school groups to formulate a presentation in which they critiqued the respective films. A significant outcome of this session was that the Kashmiri participants realized that their peers in Delhi were aware of, and sensitive to, the needs and experiences of those who had lived with violence in the Valley. As one student from Pulwama put it, ‘Through the film session, we got to know that people in Delhi are also aware of the feelings of the Kashmiri people.’ Participants from Delhi expressed surprise at how much of their own perceptions about the conflict (and the people ‘on the other side’) were influenced by Bombay cinema. Not surprisingly, this session was quite popular as it sensitized participants to how the media (whether mainstream
cinema or television news channels) can perpetuate (and even construct) stereotypes and prejudices as well as challenge, critique, and debunk these. Faheem, a class 11 student from a school run by KCEF, Pulwama, said that the session on Bollywood and Kashmir ‘had opened up a new way of looking at India-Pakistan relations and Kashmir.’ His peer from a Srinagar school added, ‘I realized that even the most mundane and everyday things have an inner layer of meaning which escapes our notice, but does affect us at a subconscious level’.

- The session titled Kashmir: A Crucible of Pluralism and Coexistence which included a Heritage Walk (by Saleem Beg) to the Lal Ded Cultural Center and Hari Parbat was also received extremely well. While the Delhi participants got to see a very different side of Srinagar (in comparison to what they had perceived the city to be), the Kashmiri participants were surprised to learn about the rich, multicultural history of the Valley—a history that they were not taught in school.

**Workshop Methodology**

The workshop methodology (which drew on elicitive, innovative, and experiential tools) received extremely positive feedback. In fact, the use of interactive and creative methodologies helped the facilitators and the participants to get the most out of the topics that were discussed. Not only did it enable participants to learn about one another at a deeper level, it created an enabling context where all students were able to speak without inhibitions. For instance, Yamin, a class 12 student from DPS Srinagar said that those sessions which enabled him to have one-on-one interactions with the Delhi students were the most productive (irrespective of the specific issues that were discussed).

What I liked about this workshop was that we all felt safe to express our views. Nobody felt threatened. We could voice our opinions...The coordinators were very skilled and helped us to discuss topics that we normally would not be able to discuss with our families and teachers or even with our friends in school.

Atharva Puranik
Head Boy
St. Mary's School
New Delhi
The use of an elicitive approach also helped the facilitators to create a sense of psychological safety as a result of which participants experienced the freedom to express themselves and to shed fears and inhibitions. Thus, the *how* (or the process) of the workshop was as important as the *what* (or the content) of the interactions.

In their feedback forms, many participants appreciated the elicitive approach to learning. Some of their comments are as follows:

- ‘Because of the interactive nature of the workshop, I have made many new friends.’ *(Maria, Pulwama)*
- ‘Everyone was free to speak and the sense of fear was absent.’ *(Maumil, Srinagar)*
- ‘The workshop was productive because it was interactive.’ *(Shariq, Srinagar)*
- ‘We learnt how to speak in front of diverse groups of people. We got confidence to speak at such gatherings, outside of our Kashmiri circle.’ *(Kashmiri participant, not wishing to be quoted)*
- We were able to share our ideas because we were given opportunities to speak, rather than to listen all the time. *(Shikha, Delhi)*
- ‘Because of the interactive nature, students from Kashmir were able to express the hardships that they experienced due to the conflict…But some students from Pulwama were very quiet.’ *(Sunder, Delhi)*
- ‘Such serious issues were brought up in an innovative and comfortable manner. So we were able to talk it out…I felt so safe here. I brought up issues (like the Kunan Pushpora rapes) that I wouldn’t ever imagine that I would be voicing out to people from Delhi.’ *(Madiha, Srinagar)*

**Workshop Organization**

Participants found the workshop organization to be impeccable. Reflecting the views of his co-participants from Delhi, Kunal Ahuja (from St. Mary’s School) said: ‘The workshop was well planned. We learnt in a fun way…I never felt bored during these three days. The ice breaker session was very helpful in making it possible for us to
open up with the Kashmiris.’ His friend from Bluebells School, Manas Bodh, added: ‘Every moment was enjoyed thoroughly.’

The workshop was conducted at the SKICC (Sher-i-Kashmir International Conference Centre), which had a good ambience and infrastructure support. The location of the Centaur Hotel (where the Delhi participants were housed) next to the workshop venue was also helpful. Participants found the venue and the hotel to be comfortable and safe.

Three participants (from Delhi) made reference to the slightly hostile behaviour of an SKICC staff member on the matter of lunch and tea arrangements. Although overall, the SKICC staff members were hospitable, the hostility of this one member (from the catering department) did make an impact—so much so that it found a mention in the feedback forms of three participants from Delhi. A FAEA-WISCOMP staff member was also witness to this incident.

**Workshop constraints and recommendations for future interactions**

Although the majority of participants found each session/theme to be unique, well-planned, interactive, and valuable, some were disappointed with the module on *identity and stereotypes*. Owing to the paucity of time, this session could not be completed. Hence, the discussion did not reach a logical conclusion and left some participants confused.

The paucity of time was in fact a constraint that all the sessions faced. Thus, many made the suggestion that the workshop duration should be extended to five or seven days (rather than only three days). This would make it possible for more time to be given to each topic. The conversations would also deepen, thus enabling participants to understand each other better.

Due to the serious and complex nature of the issues discussed, a three-to-four hour session proved to be inadequate for participants to

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**FAEA is doing a great job of bringing different people together and helping them to know about each other.**

Yamin

Class 12 student

DPS Srinagar
understand the various dimensions of the problem as well as to evolve a vision and methodology for ‘the way forward’. Further, participants felt that if the workshop duration extended to a week, FAEA-WISCOMP would be able to include culture-oriented activities wherein through presentations, performances, and heritage walks, students could develop a more nuanced understanding of life on ‘the other side’. Although the programme included a heritage walk to the Lal Ded Cultural Center and Hari Parbat, participants felt that more places should be covered in these walks.

It was also suggested that the number of participating schools from Delhi should be increased. While there was considerable diversity with respect to the Kashmiri schools that participated, only two schools from Delhi were represented. Related to this was also the suggestion that FAEA-WISCOMP should reach out to a larger number of students from Kashmir and Delhi by increasing the number of workshops. Special attention should be given to the inclusion of a larger number of students from rural Kashmir. Such trainings would help them significantly, both professionally as well as personally (in terms of broadening their worldview and distinguishing hate propaganda from the ground reality). In addition, students from other states of India should also be included in these interactions.

Participants from Delhi added that greater effort should be made to invite those Kashmiri students who have been affected by the conflict in direct and tangible ways. Although a good number of participants from Kashmir came with experiences of violence, there were many who, owing to their privileged socioeconomic status, had been protected from the conflict (by their parents). This surprised the Delhi participants because they came to the workshop with the assumption that all Kashmiris, across generations, had suffered as a result of the conflict.

A larger number of male students should be invited. Participants (of both genders) felt that adolescent boys need greater guidance, particularly with respect to their identity and sense of masculinity. Participants also recommended the inclusion of a larger number of male trainers who could also serve as role models for the male students (and perhaps even mentor them in the long run).
Participants made a strong pitch to include sports and extra-curricular activities in future interactions. They talked about how the stone-pelting movement was propelled by frustrated and bored young boys who had no other avenue in which to channelize their energy. For instance, one participant from Srinagar said that ‘90% of the stone-pelters did it for fun…They were so bored because they had nothing to do….The internet was blocked, text messaging was blocked, and then finally news channels were blocked.’ In this context, reference was made to the film Inshallah Football, which was screened at the workshop. The film showcases the efforts of a football coach to cultivate a culture of sports among young Kashmiris in order to help them channelize their unutilized potential in a constructive and exciting way. Football offered young Kashmiris a hobby to pursue, which in turn reduced feelings of frustration and suffocation. It also reduced drug addiction rates in Kashmir. Participants thus urged FAEA-WISCOMP to consider introducing a long-term initiative in sports.

With reference to a question on the topics/themes that should be included in future interactions, participants made the following suggestions:

- A greater emphasis on how to deal with peer pressure.
- Women’s rights and gender equality. (Female participants from Kashmir proposed this topic.)
- Corruption. (This was seen as an important issue in both Delhi and Kashmir.)
- A module on human rights awareness and how individuals can access justice systems.
- A session on the biased reportage of the print and electronic media (in both Delhi and Kashmir). Participants felt that this would help people from the two sides to exercise caution and reason (so that they do not buy into the distortions that the media often projects).
- Strategies to respond to drug addiction in Kashmir.
- Prejudice reduction (particularly with reference to perceptions about Kashmiri Muslims in the National Capital Region).
- Conflict resolution theory and skills.
- The inclusion of a larger number of heritage walks.
Taking forward the learnings

A summary of the responses that participants gave when asked about how they would use the learnings from the workshop is shared here:

- Students from Kashmir and Delhi spoke in unison when they stated that they would share the proceedings of the workshop with their family and friends. They saw the dialogue as a unique opportunity from which the learning had been immense. Hence, they felt a need to share these learnings with those in their social and familial circles. In addition, the Delhi participants felt that it was their responsibility to educate their peers in the national capital about the problems that people in other parts of India are facing and to educate them about the need to respect those who have different views. For instance, Manas Bodh from Delhi said, ‘I would like to spread a positive image of the people of Kashmir in Delhi and defend their identity when spoken ill about by anyone in the public.’

- Since the workshop had a powerful impact on individual levels of self-esteem and confidence, several participants said that they would talk about the issues which were important to them (and would not feel inhibited in doing so). A strong sense of personal empowerment was discernible among the participants (particularly with respect to their faith in their own ability to influence the perceptions of their family and friends).

- Participants decided that they would not be judgmental or believe in a stereotype about a community whose members they had never met. They gave importance to the need to personally interact with members of that community before drawing conclusions about them.

- A good number of participants from Kashmir and Delhi talked about plans to organize similar dialogues at their respective schools so that a larger number of students could be exposed to the ideas of coexistence, peace, and inter-faith harmony. A starting point would be the school assembly where the learnings would be shared with the wider community of teachers and students. This would be followed by the organization of a workshop on school premises to reach a larger audience. Special mention was made of those students/teachers who tend to blindly follow the pronouncements of radical religious/political leaders about ‘the enemy’ without verifying the accuracy of their statements.
• One participant from Delhi decided to set up an online community to raise awareness of these issues; while another said that, in his summer holidays, he would volunteer with an organization for the betterment of the lives of the Kashmiris.

• A few participants (from Delhi and Kashmir) talked about the need to engage in social service (and sharing their wealth with the underprivileged). Although the issue of relative deprivation was not directly addressed at the workshop, it appears that participants were sensitized to the suffering of those less privileged than them.

• A good number of participants talked about changing their own behaviour (rather than trying to change others). For instance, Apoorv from Delhi talked about changing his own ‘primitive and not buying into stereotypes about others’. His classmate Asmita added that she would be ‘more sensitive to, and aware of, people’s feelings and perspectives’. Kunal (from Delhi) added, ‘I plan to be respectful and kind to every person I meet and act peacefully (both inside and outside).’

We, the youngsters have a lot of power; so the only thing needed is to use this power for the betterment of ourselves and the society. I take a pledge that whenever I see any wrong happening in front of me, I would step towards it, rather than running out of it and ignoring it.

Sunder Bhusal
Class 12 Student
St. Mary’s School
New Delhi
Workshop Programme

OCTOBER 22, 2013 (Tuesday)
Venue: SKICC, Srinagar

Session 1
Workshop Introduction & Ice Breakers
Facilitator: Ms. Manjrika Sewak
Time: 9:00 a.m.–10:15 a.m.

Session 2
Youth Initiatives for Peace: Experiences and Lessons Learned
Resource Person: Ms. Shreya Jani
Time: 10:15 a.m. – 11:15 a.m.

Tea Break
11:15 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.

Session 2 (continued)
Youth Initiatives for Peace: Experiences and Lessons Learned
Resource Person: Ms. Shreya Jani
Time: 11:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.

Lunch
1:30 p.m. – 2:15 p.m.

Session 3
Who Am I? Exploring Spaces
Resource Person: Ms. Meenakshi Puri
Time: 2:15 p.m. – 4:15 p.m.

Tea Break
4:15 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.

OCTOBER 23, 2013 (Wednesday)
Venue: SKICC, Srinagar

Session 4
Dialogue through Theatre: Explorations in Identity and Stereotypes, History and Culture
Resource Person: Ms. Jaya Iyer  
Time: 9:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.

**Break**  
10:30 a.m. – 10:45 a.m.

**Session 4 (continued)**  
**Dialogue through Theatre: Explorations in Identity and Stereotypes, History and Culture**  
Resource Person: Ms. Jaya Iyer  
Time: 10:45 a.m. – 12:45 p.m.

**Lunch**  
12:45 p.m. – 1:30 p.m.

**Session 5**  
**Bollywood Cinema: Promoting Peace or Prejudice?**  
Resource Person: Ms. Ufra Mir  
Time: 1:30 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

**Tea Break**  
4:00 p.m. – 4:15 p.m.

**OCTOBER 24, 2013 (Thursday)**

**Session 6**  
**Kashmir: A Crucible of Pluralism and Coexistence**  
**Heritage Walks to The Lal Ded Memorial Cultural Center & Hari Parbat**  
Resource Person: Prof. Saleem Beg  
Time: 8:45 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.

**Lunch**  
1:30 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.

**Closing Session**  
Facilitator: Ms. Manjrika Sewak  
Time: 2:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.
Profiles of Resource Persons

**Jaya Iyer** (New Delhi) has over 25 years of experience in the world of art, social development and ecological integrity through theatre, education, social action, organizational development, self-work, and spirituality. She has worked extensively with NGOs, government-supported autonomous institutions, universities, community groups, and individuals. She is an alumna of the WISCOMP Scholar of Peace Fellowship Programme.

**Manjrika Sewak** (New Delhi) is Assistant Director at WISCOMP where she works on issues of conflict transformation and education for peace. A Fulbright Conflict Resolution Scholar, she holds a Masters’ degree in Conflict Transformation from the Center for Justice and Peacebuilding, Easter Mennonite University, Harrisonburg, USA and a Bachelors’ degree in Journalism Honours from Lady Shri Ram College for Women, New Delhi.

**Meenakshi Puri** (New Delhi) is a Consultant with WISCOMP, where she is developing a resource kit for the Hum Kadam Education for Peace Project and facilitating cross-cultural workshops for young students. She has taught English at Sardar Patel Vidyalaya, New Delhi for over 20 years. Puri holds a Diploma in Conflict Transformation and Peacebuilding from Lady Shri Ram College, New Delhi.

**Saleem Beg** (Srinagar) is a Member of the National Monuments of India, New Delhi. Prior to this, he was Convener of the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH), Jammu and Kashmir Chapter, Srinagar. He is also the Founder Trustee of the Indian Heritage Cities Network Foundation, a UNESCO-sponsored Trust. He is affiliated with several national and international organizations.

**Shreya Jani** (New Delhi) is Managing Trustee of Standing Together to Enable Peace (STEP) Trust. She is a curriculum developer, campaigner, trainer and researcher for various NGOs, government institutions and private schools across India. She holds a Masters’ degree in Peace Education from the UN-mandated University for Peace (Costa Rica) and two Bachelors’ degrees—one in Political Science from Lady
Shri Ram College (New Delhi) and one in Education from CIE, University of Delhi.

**Uftra Mir** (Srinagar) is a peace-psychologist, social entrepreneur, peace activist, and a certified peace education trainer. She holds a Bachelors’ degree in Psychology and Mental Health from Luther College, USA and the University of Nottingham, UK. Her passion for positive peacebuilding led her to establish *Paigaam: A Message for Peace, Inc.*, an international non-profit NGO, where she serves as the founding Executive Director.
Workshop Participants

Bluebells School International, New Delhi
Joyee Bhattacharya
Manas Bodh
Pranati Panda
Aarshiya Bhatia
Muskan Bose
Ishita Chowdhury
Bhumika Singh
Ridha
Priyanka Malhotra (Teacher)

Central High School, Kashmir
Faheem Farooq

Delhi Public School, Srinagar
Kashaf-ul-Khair
Shariq Bakshi
Yamin
Saira
Arusa (Teacher)

Dolphin International School, Pulwama
Babra Ejaz
Sundaz Yousuf
Afeefa Farooq
Arsalan Amin
Mahnoor
Mudasir Fayaz
Ansa Ashraf
Asma (Teacher)
Life School Chari-e-Sharief, Badgam
Amanullah

Merry Land School, Pulwama
TANZEE LA RAFIG
Arjuman Ashraf

Presentation Convent, Srinagar
Maria Rehman
Saiqa Kahan
Zukruf Wani
Isha Wali
Sadiya Bazaz
Ghumar Shaheen
Hadeel
Haiqa
Ilah Mufti
Madiha Semmet
Maumil Mehraj
Sara Aftab
Sadia (Teacher)
Rubia (Teacher)

SAADI Memorial School, Kashmir
Malik Sabreena
Ishrat Rashid

St. Mary’s School, New Delhi
Kush Gaur
Apoorva Sharma
Atharva Puranak
Ashmita Phukan
Kunal Ahuja
Sunder Bhusal
Apoorv Kumar
Uma Anand (Teacher)