

# **Trust-Building and Coexistence: A Dialogue**

**January 27-30, 2013  
New Delhi  
&  
September 3-5, 2013  
Srinagar**

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Foundation for Universal Responsibility  
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*Trust-Building and Coexistence: A Dialogue* is a report based on the proceedings of two workshops that were organized in New Delhi and Srinagar for college and university students from Delhi and Jammu and Kashmir. The first workshop was held from January 27-29, 2013 and the second from September 3-5, 2013. These workshops were part of the *Hum Kadam: Education for Peace* initiative of Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace (WISCOMP) and its partner the Foundation for Academic Excellence and Access (FAEA). We thank the Board members of FAEA for their unwavering support and Prof. V. R. Mehta for mentoring the initiative.

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# Introduction

*Guard your light and protect it. Move it forward into the world and be fully confident that if we connect light to light to light, and join the lights together of the one billion young people in our world today, we will be enough to set our whole planet aglow.*

– Hafsat Abiola<sup>1</sup>

Kofi Annan, former UN Secretary General states: “Young people should be at the forefront of global change and innovation. Empowered, they can be key agents for development and peace. If, however, they are left on society’s margins, all of us will be impoverished. Let us ensure that all young people have every opportunity to participate fully in the lives of their societies.” Annan’s statement resonates especially well with India, as fifty percent of its population stands below 25 years of age. Enormous possibilities for dynamic change, inclusivity, and progressive governance can open up if this demographic dividend works towards economic prosperity and development. In this context, it is essential for the youth to engage with the question: What role do they see for themselves in the future?

Reaping the benefits of a young population is not a seamless process owing to several factors that work against youth leadership. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, forces of globalization have increasingly triggered community decline, consumerist values, identity crises, and individual isolation ensuing from rapid urbanization. Consequently, the notion of viewing people and communities in a web of interdependent relationships is under severe strain. In many parts of the world these forces of globalisation have coincided with ongoing processes of nation building and existing conflicts along several axes. The result is increased intensity and complexity of conflicts across the divisions of class, caste, ethnicity, religion and region.

One sees this phenomenon in India, for example, in the context of Delhi–Kashmir relations. Cocooned in the luxury of their comfort zones, the youth in Delhi remain disconnected from the trauma and upheaval that people living in regions of conflict experience. The absence of

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<sup>1</sup> Hafsat Abiola is a Nigerian human rights, civil rights, and democracy activist. She is the founder of the Kudirat Initiative for Democracy (KIND), which seeks to strengthen civil society and promote democracy in Nigeria..

channels of communication (along with sensationalist media coverage) has, over the years, generated negative stereotypes and suspicion of ‘the other’. As a result, ‘us-versus-them’ perceptions have deepened. The same applies to the youth in Kashmir, which has grown up in a deeply troubled context where a general sense of mistrust permeates individual and societal interactions. In the absence of opportunities of positive interaction and experiences with youth in other parts of the country, Kashmiris perceive them as mirror images of Indian security forces with whom they have a very hostile relationship.

Evidence supporting the same was provided by several studies<sup>2</sup> on the changing nature of the conflict in Jammu and Kashmir (henceforth J&K) since 2000, including several by WISCOMP<sup>3</sup>. **Lack of trust and a sense of alienation** from the rest of India were noted as significant contributors to political violence in Kashmir. It was pointed out that the young people of Kashmir feel disconnected from the story of ‘Emerging India’.

Similarly, amongst the youth in Delhi, one notes a general sense of ignorance towards the various dimensions and implications of the protracted conflict in J&K, especially the demand of self-determination by Kashmiris. Differences along the faultline of religion, with Kashmir being a Muslim majority region further adds to the complexity of the relationship. Thus, **there is a marked disconnect from each other’s realities and challenges**. This condition gets exacerbated as safe public spaces for the articulation of opinions and expression of discontent have shrunk and public debates are increasingly marked with discordance and intolerance. In Kashmir, the use of street protests and stone-pelting have incited both negative reportage in the national media and state repression, thereby creating cycles of violence, further deepening the problem.

Thus, in the context of Delhi–Kashmir relations, the negative stereotyping about people from ‘the other’ region has led to deep-rooted prejudices and in the absence of positive face-to-face interaction between the younger generation this has led to mistrust and hostility.

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<sup>2</sup> Suri, Kavita. “J&K: A Return to Violence?” In *Armed Conflicts in South Asia 2010: Growing Left-wing Extremism and Religious Violence*, Edited by Suba Chandran and P.R. Chari, Routledge, New Delhi, 2011, p. 67 – 90.

<sup>3</sup> See Seema Kakran, *Competing Realities: Identity, Culture and Dialogue in Jammu and Kashmir*, New Delhi, WISCOMP, 2011.



Reducing this hostility and then rebuilding lost trust is a complex process especially since the society cannot be as termed ‘post conflict’. Though extremely difficult, it is a vital task. The first step in the journey towards conciliation is the restoration of fractured relationships at the personal level and dialogue is central to such a process.

Seeking to provide such an avenue for interaction and dialogue, the WISCOMP workshops titled *Unraveling Competing Realities: A Dialogue between Youth Leaders from Srinagar and Delhi* and *Trustbuilding and Coexistence: Transforming Relationships between Youth Leaders* brought together 53 college students from Srinagar and Delhi with a view to assist them in their individual and collective journeys to build bridges of trust and understanding with ‘the other’. The hope was to create a context conducive to ‘listening’ and development of peacebuilding skills with the embedded goal of gradual relationship building. The workshops thus sought to:

- Facilitate experiential learning from self and others;
- Help participants explore the value of democracy, pluralism and active coexistence;
- Introduce theoretical knowledge from the evolving discipline of peace and conflict studies;
- Introduce nonviolent communication skills; and
- Motivate participants to commit themselves to resist violence at multiple levels—within the home, in their communities, and in society.

It was WISCOMP’s hope that through constructive and sustained engagement, the dialogues, of which these workshops were one component, could open new horizons of understanding, help participants to cultivate positive working relationships, and build an ethos of inclusivity and equality. As conflict transformation scholar John Paul Lederach aptly states, reconciliation is not ‘forgive and forget’, it is to ‘remember and change’, and to collectively ‘renegotiate history and identity’.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> John Paul Lederach. *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Peacebuilding*, Oxford University Press, 2005.

# Methodology

WISCOMP believes in the power of individuals to paint the canvas of social change. Therefore, the WISCOMP workshops emphasize experiential learning and the use of multiple formats such as cross-cultural dialogues, film, theater, role-plays, simulations, and group discussions. These formats are informed by the ‘elicitive approach to learning’—drawn from the writings of one of the most influential educators of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Paulo Freire, and the subsequent ‘popular education’ movement. The idea is to create a mutual learning community where each individual, by sharing his/her own experiences, resources, skills, and knowledge, enhances the process of learning.

It stimulates reflection and ‘encourages people to trust their ability yet transcend themselves and to participate actively in identifying the challenges they face and the means to meet them.’<sup>5</sup> Importantly, it views people as resources, not recipients.

In the context of the WISCOMP workshops, this suggests that each participant, rather than being seen as a recipient of information, is encouraged to share the valuable experiences and insights that he/she brings to the dialogue. Viewing education as a ‘conceptualization of our experiences’, WISCOMP believes that participants learn as much from information they gather in a workshop setting as from the lived experiences of those they meet at such dialogues and from their own reflection on such encounters.

The two sections of this report document the proceedings of the WISCOMP workshops with a view to provide insights into youth perspectives on the Kashmir conflict and challenges to peacebuilding in the region in the coming years.

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*



## **First Workshop for Youth Leaders held in New Delhi**





## Overview

The workshop titled *Unraveling Competing Realities: A Dialogue between Youth Leaders from Srinagar and Delhi* began with an introductory session where the participants engaged in several interactive group exercises that served to initiate an inter-city and inter-cultural dialogue. The young leaders from Srinagar and Delhi explored the complex realities and competing perspectives inherent in any conflict situation, and hence the need to engage with a conflict at multiple levels. The session encouraged the participants to search for common ground and build on their commonalities, while simultaneously acknowledging their differences.

With a view to infuse a spirit of optimism, WISCOMP invited a senior peace practitioner to interact with the young participants. Sharing stimulating narratives from her own journey, she inspired the participants to recover agency in times of turmoil and view themselves as agents capable of engendering positive social change. This session established hope in the potential and capabilities of young individuals to address the shortcomings of existing social order and to build a more inclusive and peaceful future.

An important component of the workshop program was the relationship between democracy, peace, and justice. It is important to note here that quite often peace is understood as a cessation of hostilities or an absence of direct/physical violence. However, this form of peace—referred to as negative peace—serves only to put a temporary end to violence and imposes a superficial sense of ‘order’, without addressing the root causes of conflict. A more sustainable peace—positive peace—is possible when there is a gradual removal of structural and cultural violence. It foregrounds long-term relationship-building processes, institutional and structural transformation, active coexistence, and human security.<sup>6</sup> It thus emphasizes ‘the importance of building right relationships and social structures through a radical respect for human rights and life’. In this backdrop, the main challenge to democracy, it

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<sup>6</sup> Pakistani economist Dr. Mahbub-ul-Haq formulated the concept of ‘human security’ as ‘freedom from fear’ and ‘freedom from want’, and called for the addressing of seven dimensions of threat which cause insecurity and injustice.

seems, lies in the capacity of governing and representative institutions to remove different forms of violence, discrimination and inequality, and infuse justice, freedom, peace, security and transparency into daily democratic practices, so that people can exercise their power at all levels of government, beyond the act of electing representatives.

In this context, the workshop programme included conversations with experts on democratic rights, gender justice, and diversity within J&K. Giving the participants an understanding of the historicity as well as contemporary discourse of the conflict in J&K, it foregrounded the multiplicity of perceptions and stakeholders involved in the conflict and highlighted its complex layered intricacies. The constant erosion of democratic rights in J&K and the culture of impunity and misgovernance that prevails in the state were also an important focus of discussion. The purpose here was to familiarize the participants with the various dimensions of the conflict in J&K and to sensitize them to the need to engage collectively at multiple levels both internally and in relation with the perceived other.

Women's perspectives on issues of peace and conflict and the specific nature of violence they experience was another important theme at the workshop. The fact that armed conflicts are not gender-neutral and the costs of conflict are borne negatively and disproportionately by women was established, highlighting the various forms of overt and latent violence that women are subjected to. A new perspective was introduced to the participants, which enabled them to shift from viewing gender violence from a protectionist lens to viewing it from a rights-based perspective, by locating it within the framework of gender equality.

With a view to look at how individuals negotiate a sense of self, the workshop encouraged participants to explore the multiple identities they carry and how these identities come to the fore as circumstances and contexts change. The purpose of the session was to underscore the fluidity of identities and the ability of individuals to walk in and out of them. Furthermore, through several interactive and contemplative exercises, participants were sensitized to cultures and contexts other than their own. Here, a space was provided to help participants reflect on some concrete measures that they can take in their individual capacity to spread the message of coexistence and respect for diversity in their respective local contexts.

The cyclical relationship between personal change and social change was addressed. Participants were sensitized to the reality that they cannot do peace work without undergoing a deep personal transformation themselves. In this context, workshop facilitators invited them to draw on their own internal resources to ensure human diversity was respected and to recognize the power of language as a medium bearing potential for inculcating nonviolence and empathy.

The closing session, *Looking Ahead* explored what each participant could do to build on their zeal and passion to become catalysts for positive social change. It invited them to collectively formulate a blueprint for peaceful relations between Delhi and Srinagar—looking specifically at the roles that they see themselves playing and the responsibilities they are willing to undertake in this respect. This session also provided a context for participants to share their workshop experience and to give feedback on the structure and content of the dialogue.

## Welcome Remarks

The workshop opened with introductory remarks delivered by Meenakshi Gopinath, Director, WISCOMP. Extending a warm welcome to ‘next generation leaders’ from colleges and universities in Delhi and J&K, she expressed optimism in the exciting potential that institutional linkages could offer for building a network of young individuals who are committed to dialogue.

Gopinath noted that young people in several contexts across the world, had been instrumental in challenging conventional boundaries and assumptions in recent times. They have been able to cross ‘enemy-lines’ and reach out to those perceived as ‘the other’. However, avenues for interaction between youth from Srinagar and New Delhi were few, with the result that prejudices developed and crystallized over time. In this context, she stated, the workshop was an attempt to provide a context where future leaders from New Delhi and Srinagar could listen to and learn from each other. During this process they could gain insights into notions of leadership which moved beyond the confines of politics and entered the space of ‘thought and transformation’.

There was a palpable restlessness and a sense of discontent among young people across the world as they felt that responsive governance, democratic structures, and a humane future were constantly eluding them. Illustrating a recent example, she stated that when a young girl was gang-raped on a bus in December, the youth of Delhi converged on the streets to protest as a spontaneous response to the incident. For the first time, it felt as if reverberations from Kashmir, the North-East, and other conflict ridden areas collectively echoed at the center of power at Raisina Hill. It marked a moment of aspiration for justice, Gopinath observed, which seemed to subtly suggest that the youth of the nation could finally empathize with what may have triggered the unrest in Kashmir in 2010, when 112 young people tragically lost their lives.

Given this background, she stated that the need of the hour was to move from a divided past towards a shared future. It was a complex struggle which marked the endeavor to collectively unveil new horizons and to invest in a future that stood on a creative appropriation of the opportunities that the present offered. This required maintaining a



balance between forgetting and remembering, so that individuals did not operate at the two extremes of either—perpetually nurturing grievance or cultivating collective amnesia.

Examining the architecture of an inclusive society, Gopinath highlighted its key pillars as democracy, decentralization, dialogue, development, and respect for diversity. She underscored the need to consciously engage with all these aspects in the participants' respective areas of work and study.

At this juncture, Gopinath posed the following question: “how can one recover and exercise agency to restore democracy into the moribund institutions of our country such that values of justice and dignity are not compromised?” In this context, she said, the Justice Verma Committee Report was a remarkable example and an empowering point of reference since it underscored the idea that human dignity is the basis of human rights.

While there were several external resources which young people could rely on to provide a road map for where and how change could be brought about, there was an internal dimension of this change as well. Inviting participants to draw on the internal resources to build cultures in which human diversity and the rights of all individuals are respected, she encouraged them to question, challenge and interrogate prevailing ideas, assumptions and practices. It was **critical to question conventional borders across faultlines** of region, religion, caste and gender, she noted. In addition to these faultlines that have divided humanity for centuries, globalization and forces unleashed by economic development have created new borders of inclusion and exclusion that have created a vicious cycle of alienation and intergenerational anger.

Gopinath stated that the evolving fields of conflict transformation and peacebuilding provided valuable techniques for addressing many of these issues. One of these was to nourish internal capacity and temperament for waging conflict nonviolently. Others were skills such as dialogue, which involved a willingness to engage non-judgmentally, and deep listening. These techniques could assist participants to acknowledge differences while building on commonalities, encouraging them to reflect on the following blueprint for action (adapted from the work of John Paul Lederach):

- Reach out to those you fear
- Touch the heart of complexity
- Imagine beyond what is seen
- Risk vulnerability one step at a time

Envisioning a shared future for over a billion young people across the globe through a new lens, she asked the participants to contemplate a possibility that would allow them the space and liberty to become the writers of their own history and set the tone for their future. Gopinath emphasized that the objective of such an exercise should not be to define the future of individuals from Kashmir or Delhi as segregated components, but as the collective youth of the region. She foregrounded the necessity of developing an ability to imagine ourselves in an inclusive and expandable web of relationships, so that we worked collaboratively in pursuit of the goals of justice, peace, and security for all.

Concluding with the hope that the participants would freely express themselves and reciprocate the spirit of mutual respect towards divergent viewpoints, she invited them to address the following questions during the course of the workshop: ‘What will be the parameters on which we are willing to inherit this planet? How will it provide us nurture and how will we nurture it? What is our individual role in our common future?’

## Breaking Barriers of Mistrust

Facilitated by Shirin, a Delhi-based Theater Practitioner, the session *Participant Introductions*, opened with ice breakers and warm-up exercises to create a comfortable learning space for the participants. Interactive group activities, active listening exercises, and exploratory conversations were designed to help participants know each other and build a positive environment so that discussion could take place in an atmosphere of mutual respect. As a first exercise, Shirin asked the participants to engage in a brief conversation with the person seated beside them and subsequently introduce them to the entire group. This, she noted, was the first step towards learning about each other. During the round of introductions, Shirin noted the repetition of two words, 'friend' and 'common'. This, she observed, was an indication that seeds of friendship had been sown and individuals were infusing a positive spirit into the workshop space.

In the subsequent exercise, the participants were assigned the task of assembling colored building blocks into a structure. They were asked to put together the different colored blocks and attempt to construct one common structure where all colors were used and yet none dominated. In the process of building this structure, the participants slowly began to build team spirit which prepared them for the subsequent exercise.

With the participants seated in a circle, Shirin passed a baby doll around the room. As all participants experienced holding the doll in their arms, she asked them to individually express their feeling/thought that arose in the mind on seeing the doll. The emotions shared by the participants included 'innocent, joyful, pious, delicate, freedom, speechless, love, hopeful, shining, delicate, peace, silent, soothing, sweet, calm, pure, beautiful'. Some participants even suggested names like *Pari*, *Dua*, and *Insaan* for the baby, which were expressive of the emotion the doll evoked in them.

Reflecting on the responses, Shirin noted that the emotions shared by the participants on holding the doll were all positive and did not contradict one another in any way. She further observed that despite hailing from different regions and cultures, when participants saw a

child, they thought and felt similar emotions. At this point, she requested all the participants to close their eyes and think of someone in their family/community who was very young, vulnerable, and sheltered from the crippling conflicts that inflict the world. She asked them to bear the image of that person in their hearts for the rest of the workshop and channelize the emerging positive and tranquil emotions while interacting with other participants at the workshop.

For the purpose of building a better understanding of conflicts and the challenges they pose, Shirin used Forum Theater improvisations. In this form of theater, the goal is to bridge the divide between the performers and the spectators so that they can co-create meaning. Forum Theater facilitates mutual experience and idea sharing and rehearsal, and nourishes temperaments towards conscientization<sup>7</sup>. Shirin enacted a situation and invited participants to intervene, replace actors, experience the context, and improvise the amorphous script to determine its course. Subsequently, several situations were scripted and enacted by the participants.

At the end of several such improvisations, Shirin observed that in the course of performance, while some of the conflicts were quite trivial



*Participants engaging in a group activity during the workshop*

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<sup>7</sup> Conscientization refers to a process of developing a critical consciousness of one's own social reality through reflection and action.

in nature, such as 'I don't like your perfume' or 'I dislike the color of your shirt', several serious issues also emerged. These related to trust deficit, hostility from the past, domination and monopolistic control, and feelings of vengeance. She further stated that in any conflict, there exist individuals with varying perspectives and intentions. Thus, while there are spoilers who are instrumental in stalling efforts at resolution of the problems and sometimes even become conflict–profiteers, there simultaneously exist people who work tirelessly, making sincere efforts to build consensus and mutual understanding between hostile groups.

Shifting focus from the analysis of conflicts to an exploration of solutions, Shirin then invited participants to make a human cage and asked one person to volunteer to be the victim trapped in the middle. The cage, she stressed, must be creative, complex, entangled and fortified. She then called upon two volunteers to free the victim from the cage without breaking the chain of human hands. She elicited enthusiastic participation from the participants for this exercise, which culminated in the victim being set free.

The purpose of the exercise Shirin said was that they think about the following questions: 'At times, victims are comfortable in their cage and gradually adapt to it? How far is your perception as an entrapped victim influenced and determined by the people surrounding you in your immediate context? How far will you go to release someone when you have little interest and stake in it? Did you engage with the possibility of befriending the people who formed the cage? Do some cages need to be broken completely?'

Shirin suggested that the way forward in any conflict situation was a combination of several factors. One could not appease everyone in a group, and one could also not coerce a way forward. Some parts of the cage (or conflict) may be so unjust and oppressive that breaking them becomes necessary to ensure meaningful freedom. However, while breaking a cage, it was important to examine the means that are adopted, she noted. When we are talking of freedom, we are also talking of peace in some senses. This, she stressed, foregrounded the necessity to cultivate a capacity for nonviolent social change. Concluding the session, Gopinath called upon the participants to **engage with violent cycles of hate, break free of the virtual prisons etched in the minds, and build on commonalities to pave a path towards a just and harmonious future.**

## Creating Spaces for Peacebuilding

In situations of protracted conflict and heightened tension, an atmosphere of pessimism often engulfs individuals who live in these circumstances. At such times, hope can be rekindled by listening to inspiring accounts of how people managed to recover agency, break the impasse, and infuse dynamism. It was with this intention that in the following session, **Sushobha Barve**, a Peacebuilding Practitioner and Executive Director of the Delhi-based Center for Dialogue and Reconciliation, shared inspiring narratives from her own experiences of seeking to build peace. The purpose was also to highlight the complexities in any conflict and to reinforce the idea that one must be willing to engage with complexity and avoid looking for quick, simplistic solutions.

Initiating the session, *Creating Spaces for Peacebuilding*, Barve stated that she embarked upon her journey as a peacebuilder while studying at a college in Mumbai. Mumbai, being a cosmopolitan, is home to a rich diversity of people from different faiths and cultures. It was in college that she had her first encounter with Muslim students and became particularly close to a Muslim girl named Abida. She recalled how in the backdrop of the 1965 India-Pakistan war, there were strong anti-Pakistan sentiments lingering in the psyche of the nation. Around the same time, Abida's relatives from Pakistan were on a visit to India. Influenced by the widespread hostility and negative propaganda against Pakistan, a strong enemy image of 'the other' was embedded in her own mind, said Barve. In this context, she felt perplexed and betrayed on hearing that her closest friend was hosting relatives from Pakistan. She recounted having distanced herself, over a period of few months, both emotionally and physically from Abida.

During the same time, Barve mentioned that she attended a lecture in her college on the positive role that individuals can play in rebuilding society. This propelled her to introspect and engage with several questions, such as: 'How can I distrust someone who has never done anything wrong to me? Have I ever thought that post-partition, there are several thousands of families in Mumbai who perhaps have relatives in Pakistan? Is it possible for Indian society to be truly united and secular if we keep constructing invisible walls between people?' While

contemplating these questions, Barve recalled having confided in her friend, Abida, about how she felt incapable of trusting her after hearing about her relatives from Pakistan. She also shared that with great difficulty she mustered the courage to apologize to Abida for her unfounded suspicion. What ensued was a long and engaging conversation marked with deep listening, clearing of misconceptions, and a dialogue, where Barve felt truly transformed. That, she noted, was the beginning of an understanding that **any change that she wished to see in the world must begin with herself**. Hurdles, she stated, could be overcome only if one looked into one's own heart and eliminated any seeds of distrust towards others that emerged from biases and prejudices, rather than the other's shortcomings.

Barve explained that throughout her journey as a peacebuilder, she learned that every experience was precious in building a new perspective and cultivating greater empathy and understanding for others. She noted that after the anti-Sikh riots of 1984 when Indira Gandhi's assassination had triggered communal violence against Sikhs in India, it was extremely difficult for her to accept that Hindus, who were 'her own people' could be so cruel to those of different faiths. Condemning the brutal violence, she stated that retaliating to one act of violence with greater violence, only creates a vicious downward cycle of bloodshed and mistrust.

This set her off on a long journey, engaging with the victims of the riots, where one particular incident touched her so deeply that it made peacebuilding her mission for life. During her interactions with the victims, she met one man who had suffered severe burn injuries in the riot. She was astonished at how despite his pain and desperate condition he smiled and said to her, 'The fact that you and I are alive is a gift of life'. Barve shared: 'This man then made me promise that I will always reach out to all victims of violence everywhere, without making any exceptions.' She noted how the brutal victimization had not deterred that man's spirit of love for humanity and in the midst of all the suffering and hostility, he had transcended to a higher moral and spiritual ground. Drawing on this powerful experience, Barve stated that all those committed to building peace must always keep an open heart that is accepting of everyone, and must remain resilient and hopeful of a positive change in any situation.

Sharing another important experience, Barve said that during the second phase of the Mumbai riots of 1992-93, she worked extensively in Dharavi, one of the largest slum clusters in the world, where the threat of violence was high. She noted the importance of working at the grassroots level in conflict situations and recounted staying in a Muslim locality in the slum, where the residents were afraid of being targeted by militant Hindu groups, and also with Hindu families which felt vulnerable in the hostile environment. In the midst of this tense atmosphere, Barve realized that while it was important to address the immediate problem, what was more significant was to build capacity for preventive measures to ensure that such violence did not recur. **Any solution, she noted, should be short-term responsive and long-term strategic, designed with the goal of building a culture of sustainable peace.**

It was in this context that Barve set up the Mumbai Mohalla Committee to facilitate citizen-police joint ventures and to hold a dialogue between the police and riot-affected people in the city. Barve stated that they started with efforts to arrange a meeting in the worst-affected area in Mumbai, Mahim, where serial blasts had occurred after the riots and a lot of bitterness, trauma, and suspicion plagued the atmosphere. After much perseverance, the Committee managed to hold the first meeting in Mahim, which was attended by over 60 Muslim women. Barve shared that these women carried photo albums with pictures of their dear ones who were either killed or falsely implicated in the riots. Gradually overcoming the initial tension, the women started sharing their grief and narrating their personal experiences of the horror of the riots, which continued to haunt them. Barve noted that most of the women helplessly asked the Police Commissioner if the authorities were ever going to allow them to live in peace, or if the harassment would continue on grounds of mere suspicion indefinitely.

At this point, the Police Commissioner's response surprised everyone. He apologized for all the pain and grief that the actions of the police personnel had caused them. Following the public acknowledgement and apology, he expressed his sincere commitment to change the attitude of the personnel and the harsh policing pattern in Mumbai for which he sought the help of the women present there. After hours of dialogue and negotiations, they envisioned some changes and drafted a list of suggestions that would pave the way for a more peaceful



community. True to his word, the Police Commissioner ensured quick implementation of most of the ideas that had emerged from the meeting, winning the trust of the community, Barve recalled.

Reflecting on the lessons that she imbibed from these experiences, she foregrounded the importance of identifying and addressing the root causes of conflicts. Extensive research and sincere efforts prepare the ground for conflicting communities to engage in a dialogue, she observed. In this context, building trust was an important element of any peacebuilding effort. Barve shared that she learnt these lessons for life and used them during her work in Kashmir.



*Dr. Sushobha Barve sharing her experiences with the workshop participants during a session*

Sharing insights from the initiatives undertaken by the Center for Dialogue and Reconciliation in Kashmir, she noted the importance of understanding that one could never carry a readymade formula to resolve issues in any conflict zone. It was crucial to experience the situation and draw resources from the local context and culture. Thus, while working in Kashmir, she shared that her primary objective was to address the question: ‘**What is it that people in Kashmir want?**’

Barve shared her experience of holding the first meeting in Kashmir, which was attended by ten women from the Valley who had been

adversely affected by the conflict. Rather than following a pattern where the women debated general issues that plagued Kashmir, Barve tried to cultivate in them a spirit of trust, empathy, and understanding by adopting a different design for the dialogue. To this end, each woman shared her intimate experiences of living in a conflict zone. Barve noted that some of the women had shared their traumatic experiences for the first time in a public space and received acknowledgement for their pain. This process was extremely cathartic and marked the beginning of some form of healing. As they shared and unburdened, others practiced listening. Very soon, Barve shared that the women in the room felt connected.

Having formed a core group of members willing to work towards alleviating the situation in Kashmir, the next step was to collectively engage with the question: What can be done that will make a difference in Kashmir? They felt it was essential to train people in building internal capacity for peace and nonviolence. Thus, Barve shared that she gradually expanded the network to include college and school teachers. At the next stage, inter-regional dialogue conferences were held, where Barve worked to initiate dialogue and reconciliation between Hindus and Muslims from the regions of Jammu and Kashmir.

Barve shared with the participants that at one such meeting, in the wake of the Amarnath land conflict, people from the Jammu and Kashmir Chambers of Commerce and Federation of Industry were deeply hurt and upset, and hostile feelings lingered in the atmosphere. The initial rounds of dialogue were marked with bitter altercations, accusations, and rigid attitudes. However, Barve noted that through several rounds of dialogue, many misconceptions were cleared and opinions exchanged. Gradually, both parties converged on a common understanding and displayed a willingness to accommodate. Today, they stand united on several issues. Barve also briefly shared her long yet fulfilling journey of helping several women from the Indian side of Kashmir to cross the Line of Control to travel to Muzaffarabad.

Summarizing her learning from these experiences, Barve stated that trust building is not an easy process. Individuals seeking to build peace must recognize the importance of creating a safe space where conflicting parties can meet for a dialogue, which is sustained. Even though such dialogues will begin with hostility, Barve said that facilitators can play an important role by helping adversaries to think constructively of a

common, shared future and a network for sustained interaction. She concluded by remarking that this approach works in every conflict situation because, as she put it, 'I believe that deep inside every human being, there is a desire to play their part to make a difference in society and to harmoniously coexist with other human beings'.

# Democratic Rights in Jammu and Kashmir: Problems and Prospects

The session *Democratic Rights in Jammu and Kashmir: Problems and Prospects* opened with a presentation by Hameeda Nayeem, Professor, Department of English, University of Kashmir, on the status of democratic rights in Jammu and Kashmir. She structured her talk around three critical areas:

- What do we mean by democratic rights?
- What are the existing challenges to democratic rights in J&K?
- What are the prospects for a better future?

She opened with the question, ‘Why is there a problem in Kashmir?’ She briefly traced the history of the conflict to the partition of India, birth of Pakistan and subsequent accession of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir to India. All the struggle and discontent that plagues Jammu and Kashmir, Nayeem remarked, emanated from the fact that for decades, Kashmiris have challenged and questioned the legitimacy of this Accession. Furthermore, she noted that the inhabitants of the state had experienced a constant erosion and denial of constitutionally guaranteed democratic rights which fomented greater unrest in the state.

Nayeem asserted that the citizens of Jammu and Kashmir had experienced a continuous assault on their democratic rights. Almost every right, ranging from equality before law to freedom of speech and expression, freedom of assembly, and the right to life, had been violated in the state on the pretext of reasonable restrictions which can be placed in the interest of public law and order. Nayeem stated that this provision of reasonable restrictions has been exploited over the years, and deliberately misinterpreted and manipulated to suit the vested interests and authoritarian mindsets of those holding power.

Nayeem underscored the need to analyze the state of democracy in Jammu and Kashmir. In this context, she said that the first and most essential plank in a democracy was the right to dissent and the second plank was taking recourse to dialogue for the purpose of resolving problems. While the two were very basic to democratic spirit in any

state, Jammu and Kashmir had witnessed a breakdown of both. In 1989, people's resentment against rampant corruption, erosion of trust, and the cultivation of a political economy of violence through successive regimes in Jammu and Kashmir transformed into a rebellion against the Indian state. It was a protest against the violation of human dignity and rights of the people, Nayeem remarked. However, instead of responding to the rebellion with dialogue, the Indian state resorted to the use of force to suppress the movement.

Gradually, the state slipped into virtual military rule, from which it was yet to emerge, she opined. This militarization had been further reinforced through draconian legislations like the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA), Maintenance of Internal Security Act, and the National Security Act, among others, which suspended a whole range of democratic rights and freedoms of the people.

Highlighting the culture of militarization and impunity in the state, Nayeem remarked that in Jammu and Kashmir the army was used for external defense as well as for internal suppression. She challenged the claims of the Government that the army's operations were directed only against Pakistani militants who infiltrated into Kashmir. She noted how the line differentiating Pakistani infiltrators from Kashmiri residents had gradually blurred. Thus, the armed forces ended up treating Kashmiris as enemies leading to the dissolution of the distinction between human rights abuses and war crimes. In this context, the military became supreme commanders empowered with draconian laws and not bound by the rule of law that democracy establishes.

Once such a state of emergency became the norm, Nayeem observed that people with vested interests in the conflict benefited from unquestioning acceptance of the situation, and those concerned citizens who raised their voice, through whatever means available to them, were labeled terrorists and extremists.

Nayeem stated that the Government had made Jammu and Kashmir a 'laboratory' by giving security agencies supremacy over the political and administrative structure. This gave the security establishment independent and absolute powers and ruptured prospects for any democratic processes in the state. Nayeem noted that several draconian laws had been enacted in Jammu and Kashmir. The conditions that justified the declaration of a state of emergency and the enactment of

AFSPA in J&K in 1991 no longer persisted in the state. The Government of India had admitted to this truth and even Justice Verma, who previously upheld AFSPA, after examining the human rights violations under its façade, appealed in favor of repealing the Act. However, she stated, any scope of withdrawing the Act in J&K were shattered by fierce opposition from security agencies, who benefited immensely from maintaining the status quo.

Proceeding further, Nayeem articulated her concern about the administrative and executive challenges to democratic rights in the state. She argued that Jammu and Kashmir was ruled by a supreme military body called the Unified Command which had a vested interest in exacerbating the conflict. She even doubted the Chief Minister's and state government's credentials of upholding democracy in light of what she termed as "rigged elections". She remarked that there had never been real participation of the people of J&K in any democratic process.

Nayeem stated that the distinction between civil and military operations, and was blurred and military entered civilian spaces under the Sadbhavana Scheme through projects relating to infrastructure, community development, healthcare, and education, among several others.

Nayeem clarified that the anger, discontent, and grievances of the Kashmiris were directed towards the Indian state and not the Indian people. She expressed faith in youth across the nation which was awakening and protesting against atrocities committed on the common citizens of the country.

She asserted that the prospects of democracy will become bright only when all democratic rights are restored to the people and when there was a withdrawal of, or at least the imposition of restrictions on, draconian laws so that the rule of law could truly be established in the state. Only these steps, she concluded, will open the window for conflict resolution in J&K.

In the second presentation, Ahmed Ali Fayyaz, Jammu and Kashmir Bureau Chief, *The Hindu*, highlighted several instances of misgovernance in the state. In his introduction, he briefly delineated the myriad fundamental rights that were guaranteed to the citizens of J&K under the state constitution. However, Fayyaz noted that all these rights

were subject to certain reasonable restrictions which may be imposed by the state in the interest of maintaining the sovereignty and integrity of India.

Pointing to this legal provision, he explained that these reasonable restrictions were not codified and were purposely left ambiguous and open to varying interpretations in different contexts. Illustrating an example, he stated that article 19 of the Constitution guarantees its citizens the freedom to assemble peacefully and without arms. However, it fails to define the meaning of 'arms', which could range in interpretation from firearms to swords, sticks, and stones. In this context, in the state of J&K, the Unified Command, as the supreme governing body, interprets the meaning of reasonable restrictions, according to its own vested interests. These arbitrary interpretations, Fayyaz noted, justified the imposition of draconian laws such as the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA), the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act (TADA), and Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA), among several others in the state. Thus, he underscored the need to revise the Constitution to include parameters which introduce clarity on the extent of the rights so that they are not subjective across different contexts and capriciously violated according to the vested interests of incumbent officials.

Raising other concerns, Fayyaz explicated that over the years, media houses in J&K had become puppets in the hands of both India and



*Panelists Dr. Hameeda Nayeem and Mr. Ahmed Ali Fayyaz*

Pakistan, eventually losing their professional credibility as independent institutions. Drawing from his own experience as a journalist, he shared that he had reported several scams about poor governance in Srinagar, but barring a few, many were not taken cognizance of. Citing an example, he remarked that in the Jaipur Literary Festival, when a noted historian, Ashis Nandy made a comment on corruption among the lower castes in India, within 24 hours a First Information Report was lodged, and there was massive media coverage of the incident, sparking national debates on the issue. However, such incidents in Srinagar went unnoticed as no one took cognizance or held any one accountable, he remarked.

Fayyaz further drew a comparison between the remedial action taken with respect to scandals reported in the states of Haryana and Jammu and Kashmir. He stated that in the wake of the scam of illegal recruitment of 3,206 junior teachers in the state of Haryana, Om Prakash Chautala, former Chief Minister of Haryana, was sentenced to 10 years of imprisonment. Similar to this incident, Fayyaz noted that he had reported a scandal in J&K where 2,300 people had been illegally appointed in the State Health Department. However, no one took cognizance of the scam and there was no legal action on it.

He illustrated several such examples to foreground the bleak and corrupt picture of failed governance in J&K. The J&K Public Service Commission responsible for the Kashmir Administrative Services often engaged in corrupt, arbitrary, and biased selection of candidates. This, he noted, violated the fundamental rights laid down by the Constitution wherein the state cannot discriminate against anyone in matters of employment, and must instead protect this right of the citizens. He further noted how panchayat elections in J&K, which should ideally be held in the spirit of alleviating the deteriorating situation of '*bijli, sadak and paani*' in the state, were instead marred by plebiscite politics and vested interests of leaders.

Proceeding further, Fayyaz noted how government authorities benefited from dividing and manipulating the masses to rule over them in J&K. He stated that while there were some Hurriyat leaders who had cases of heinous crimes registered against them and yet were free to travel across the world, at the same time there existed several leaders who were arrested and interrogated every week and had their freedom of movement curbed. Thus, the government used its discretion to apply



restrictions on some, keeping in mind its vested interests and politics at the moment. This, Fayyaz termed as 'Lollipop Therapy', which reflects the façade of democracy where governments arbitrarily offer a tempting candy to some and a threatening stick to the other, to further their own interests.

Lamenting the prevailing state of unaccountable governance, Fayyaz noted that a public servant must offer the service to the citizens for which s/he was appointed. However, he stated that most public servants in J&K squander resources and exploit the powers vested in them. And they are never reprimanded or held accountable for their actions.

Fayyaz added that sometimes people in J&K are restricted from exercising their democratic right to vote on false allegations due to the collusion of political leaders and local government authorities. To this end, he stressed that the Election Commission of India should take cognizance of the violation of the right to vote of innocent citizens.

In conclusion, he remarked that the common man in Srinagar did not enjoy an iota of the rights guaranteed in a democratic state. Most political leaders in J&K voice their own opinions in public forums while the bigger constituency remains unrepresented. 'It is important that when we are living under the aegis of a democracy, we enjoy certain fundamental rights. When these are violated, they foment dissent and anger in the people', concluded Fayyaz.

## ***Discussion***

The dissuasion that followed the two presentations brought out a host of issues. In some the student participants expressed disagreement with the opinion voiced by the two experts.

A participant from Kashmir stated that dialoguing about the prospects of democratic rights in the state was a futile effort. He felt that discussing the possibilities for peace in the Valley was pointless since the term 'peace' had been deliberately securitized and had gradually acquired a negative

*'I have realized that there are multiple sides to any reality, which leads to the need to engage with every aspect of a situation and not hold rigid and absolute views.'*

connotation in the state. ‘How can we talk about peace in the presence of seven lakh soldiers in the state?’ Expressing his frustration he noted that the final solution has to be political and must include the will and consensus of the Kashmiris who are the primary stakeholders.

Thanking the resource persons for providing their perspectives on the prevailing circumstances in J&K, a student from Delhi raised a question. He inquired whether any initiative for dialogue had taken place between the army and the public of J&K, since the majority of the hostility and grievances were between these two groups. In this context, Nayeem urged the participants to bear in mind that the army was only an agency of the government and one cannot have a dialogue with an agency, which is powerless before the higher authority that commands it. Kashmiris, she noted, are in a state of conflict with the Government of India. Hence, any attempt at dialogue should be held between the Government of India and the people of Kashmir. However, the Government of India had not made any serious effort at dialogue. On the contrary, it had displayed political apathy and had even exacerbated the conflict by trivializing it on several occasions, she stated.

Reflecting on his learning from a previous session conducted by Barve, a participant from Kashmir said that most of the speakers through their presentations had apprised the participants about the various dimensions of the conflict in J&K, which were the outer invisible walls that people and situations had created. However, while talking about building peace, it was crucial to engage with the heart and ‘win over our own internal invisible walls of anger and mistrust’. He noted that the walls that we build outside of us were in essence reflective of the walls that we had inside of us. For the people of J&K, the biggest wall which hindered dialogue or any constructive progress was the personal association and grievances that they had developed with the conflict. This in turn made them hostile, sometimes violent, and even hesitant to trust. Parallel to this, he noted that in the general perception of the people of Delhi, any rebellion in J&K was a voice raised against India, which was seen as challenging the country’s territorial integrity, a value that could not be compromised upon. At this point, Gopinath interjected with a quote by Robert Frost ‘Every time I build a wall, I ask, what I am walling out and what am I walling in?’

- Commenting on the ability of the media to influence public opinion and shape events and discourses, Nayeem remarked that the media

had immense social and political power. However, the fact that most Indians were so ill-informed and apathetic to one of the most protracted conflicts in the country was reflective of how the media had been biased, selective, and controlled. The Indian national media functioned as an arm of the Indian state, she noted. By not informing the rest of the nation about the adverse grassroots reality that plagued J&K, the media had been instrumental in alienating the Kashmiris, exacerbating tensions in the state, and deepening prejudices across the country.

Gopinath concluded the session by flagging some points for reflection. She observed that in the backdrop of ordinary citizens being trapped between the violence of the security forces and the violence of the militants, and a culture of silence and impunity prevailing in J&K, it was important to acknowledge that our own people from J&K and Delhi were complicit. If you do not have a complicit group of people who are both corrupt and corruptible, it will be impossible for any state to continue with a culture of impunity and violence. Thus, Gopinath noted that we all have, in some senses, bought about the system, looked at our short-term benefits, and made compromises that had jeopardized the lives, liberties, and freedoms of a large number of people. As a last thought, she invited participants to think about the following question: The situation in J&K looks terribly bleak, hopeless, and impossible, but there has to be light at the end of the tunnel. Given the fact that today and tomorrow belong to the youth, how would they as young individuals negotiate, recover agency, and intervene to bring about constructive change?

## Identity, Conflict, and Dialogue

The following session titled *Identity, Conflict, and Dialogue* was facilitated by Shirin who used a range of interactive and experiential exercises to help participants cultivate an expansive identity. She opened the session with energizers and warm-up exercises with a purpose to create an exchange of positive vibes.

In the first exercise, participants formed two groups and a curtain was held to create a visual barrier between them. Sharing the rules of the game, Shirin explained that each group would democratically but quietly elect a leader amongst themselves (who would raise his/her hand). The moment the curtain was dropped, leaders of both groups would have to immediately identify each other's names. Whichever leader was quicker with his/her response would earn a point for the team. Through several rounds of this exercise, it was observed that participants cooperated as a team, irrespective of the regions they belonged to. Delving deeper into the purpose of the exercise, Shirin noted that despite having spent a day with each other, most individuals still did not know each other's names and had chosen to stay within the known group of friends. She raised a critical question for the participants to reflect over: **'Do we really make an effort to know others?'**

*I will try to be more objective in my observation of people and situations and not judge others without interacting with them. It is important to analyze and work on our own biases and prejudices first.'*  
– A Participant from Delhi

Further into the session, Shirin distributed small sheets of paper with a word written on each. Some of these words were: Hindu, Muslim, African, Terrorist, Married, Non-believer et al. Participants were asked to candidly write their first impressions of the words. They were allowed to write, draw, and use symbols, and expected to leave their responses anonymous. Shirin urged them to refrain from talking amongst themselves and stressed that they rely on their own understanding of the word.

Propelling the participants to reflect over identity and aiming to foreground an understanding of the same, Shirin asked them to share their observations about anything that, in their opinion, represented

her identity. Some of the points that were raised included that she is a woman, a theatre artist and a Muslim. Reflecting over these responses, Shirin noted that we all tend to have some preconceived notions about others, whether right or wrong, through their mannerisms, style of speaking, interests and looks.

After collecting all the responses, Shirin discussed some of these with the participants. On a sheet of paper titled Zoroastrian, participants had written: 'Jews', 'a heterogeneous group of people', and 'historical linkages with India'. At this point, Shirin remarked that **while we often complain about how we are misunderstood and unjustly judged by others, we seldom make efforts to know enough about other religious communities, nationalities, and cultures.** She clarified that Zoroastrians are fire-worshippers and not related to Judaism. Furthermore, Zoroastrianism originated in Iran and not India, to which they were later compelled to migrate since they were being persecuted as a community.

The next response that she shared with the group was with respect to the word Muslim. Some of the responses included: 'best friend', 'rich culture', 'reserved', 'connected with stereotypes in the sense targeted', and 'azaan'. In this context, Shirin invited participants to share



*Workshop participants engaged in an interactive group exercise*

examples of Muslim culture. Responses ranged from the Taj Mahal to the Red Fort, Fatehpur Sikri, cuisines like *korma*, and tombs and minarets. Drawing on these responses, Shirin explicated that most of the illustrations put forth by the participants were reflective of Mughal history and not Islamic or Muslim history in its entirety. The history of Islam in India predates Mughals, and is very vast and rich. Yet, we often tend to limit ourselves only to Mughal history while describing Muslim history, oblivious to the fact that the former is only a small subset of the latter.

Elaborating further on the concept of identity, Shirin observed that in Indian mythology, Ravana was the ruler of Sri Lanka, and a demon. But besides this identity, he was also a Brahmin, a Hindu, and a devoted worshipper of Lord Shiva. Similarly, even Lord Ram was a Hindu. Thus, she asserted that since there exist two individuals from the same religion with contrasting personalities, it would be incorrect to create a homogenous category for all persons from the same community or religion, and assign certain traits to them. Diversity and multiple identities must be acknowledged and respected, rather than coerced into a monolithic image of each community.

Through this exercise, Shirin provided participants a medium to identify, question, investigate, and challenge the stereotypes they harboured. She asked them to close their eyes and reflect on their own biases and prejudices, and understand that there are myriad religions and cultures that they are oblivious of; yet they complain when others don't know enough about their own culture. She invited participants to introspect over those stereotypes that they wish to remove and how might they work collaboratively with others in this endeavour. Concluding the exercise, Shirin asserted that **the moment they began to accept the fact of layered identities of self and others, stereotypes begin to break, and one develops a more tolerant mindset.**

In the next exercise, called 'Blame the Victim', participants occupied the floor, used improvisations, and enacted situations from their daily lives. The common thread running through all these scripts was that violence was depicted in the scene, blame was placed on the victim, and there was stark prevalence of public apathy. After several rounds of impromptu script enactments, the point emerged where victims suffered double-victimization, as they were held responsible and accountable for the adverse situation that they were placed in. Shirin also noted that

only a few people from the general public took an initiative to step in to intervene and help. Inviting participants to introspect on why the majority of people were reluctant to help in any situation, she remarked that, increasingly peoples' identities are becoming constricted and self-centred, and the understanding of interdependent relationships with fellow human beings is gradually fading.

In the last round of exercises, Shirin asked the participants to sit in a circle and think about the concrete measures and actions they could take, preferably in their individual capacity, to build a culture of peace in their immediate contexts. Responses to this question were varied. A participant from Kashmir shared his experience of disembarking at the Delhi airport where he had to undergo additional security checks. He echoed his feelings towards this incident saying, 'does my face depict that I am a terrorist?' In this context, he said that it was crucial that individuals shunned attitudes of hostility and scepticism towards others. Only when we purge our minds of suspicious and discriminatory images of the perceived 'other', and remove bitterness from our hearts that we can begin to understand others and relate to them, he stated. Echoing this view, another participant urged the audience to not harp on negative events of the past and to instead interact with 'others' with the intention of building a more positive future.

Several others suggested the organization of trust-building workshops and dialogues, such as the one they were attending, where individuals across different cultures and contexts could meet and dialogue in a safe space. One participant advocated the introduction of peace studies in school and college curriculum, while another suggested adult public education for teachers and parents, who serve as role models for the young. Engaging with 'out-of-box' strategies, a participant expressed faith in the power of sports to build bridges of peace across different cultures and communities and voiced the need to organize sporting events and matches with this specific goal.

Many participants, from Delhi and Srinagar alike, said that change at the systemic level was contingent upon personal change, and hence suggested action at the individual level. One participant expressed the need to be self-critical and to interrogate the ideologies they associate themselves with. Some expressed the desire to cultivate mindsets that were accommodative of differences, less judgemental, and open to listening and engaging with varying perspectives. Other participants

took this as a lesson and an opportunity to interact with people from different backgrounds to enrich their understanding of diversity. Taking this further, one individual observed, ‘We must allow different worldviews to coexist and not predefine things into rigid saturated compartments. Are we allowing proper space for all voices?’

Applauding these individual commitments, Shirin closed the session by stating that no matter how difficult or dismal any situation appeared to be, it was crucial to continue working with hope and consistency. Irrespective of how small the scale was, she said that even if we made one person give up a prejudice, we would be investing in a peaceful future. On this note, she urged the participants to initiate action and take the first step towards the future they mutually desired.



# Exploring Gender Justice in Conflict Contexts

Armed conflicts are never gender-neutral. Whether it is economic deprivation, displacement, poverty, or gender-based violence, the costs of conflict are borne disproportionately by women and children.<sup>8</sup> The same translates to conditions of latent conflict, where even during ‘peacetime’, violence inherent in structures, institutions, and cultures impacts women negatively and disproportionately. The needs and rights of women are constantly marginalized as the world is defined from a masculine point of view. Since all experience is gendered, it is crucial to use a gender lens for the analysis of discourse on a particular issue.

Focusing on this issue in the session titled *Women, Conflict, Violence: Exploring Gender Justice*, Rita Manchanda, Director (Research), South Asia Forum for Human Rights, provided insights on gender violence in Jammu and Kashmir from a rights-based perspective. She initiated the session by drawing attention to the Justice Verma Committee Report following the gang-rape in Delhi on December 16, 2012. Lauding it as a well-drafted report and an empowering point of reference, Manchanda observed that the report was remarkable in **shifting away from looking at gender violence from a protectionist lens to viewing it from a rights-based perspective**. Locating the issue of violence against women within a framework of gender equality marked an important shift. Traditionally, gender justice has been viewed through a patriarchal lens where the onus of protecting ‘helpless women’ was on men, and women were deprived of any sense of agency. This report, however, views justice differently from the traditional discourse of retributive or punitive justice. It seeks to tackle the roots of violence against women, which lie in lack of access to constitutionally guaranteed rights of equality, physical security, and freedom of movement. Thus, the report redefines justice and empowers women.

Manchanda observed that although the Verma Committee was given the task of reforming criminal law only in areas of ‘normalcy’ (where there was no armed conflict or excessive social and political turbulence), it chose to expand its mandate to include areas of armed conflict under its purview. What was the reason? Firstly, Manchanda explained that it

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<sup>8</sup> Lisa Schirch and Manjrika Sewak, ‘Women: Using the Gender Lens’ in *People building peace II Successful Stories of Civil Society* (London: Lynne Riennes Publisher, 2005).

was imperative to take cognizance of the fact that one-sixth of the population lived in areas labelled as ‘conflict-affected’. The second reason is recognition of the continuum of violence against women in peacetime which gets carried over and dramatically heightened in situations of conflict. She foregrounded the significance of recognizing gender inequality as the prime trigger for the victimization of women and societal biases and stereotypes, making women vulnerable targets of all forms of violence.

Expressing concern over the alarming rate of molestation and rape of women in conflict-affected areas, Manchanda explicated why systematic gender-based sexual violence was rampant in times of collective violence - wars, riots, ethno-nationalist movements and the like. She argued that women are the reproducers of a community and in a patriarchal setup they have traditionally been acknowledged as the repositories of a community’s honor, whose chastity has to be protected by men. Thus, sexually violating a woman with impunity serves as a means of psychological warfare to humiliate and dishonor the community to defeat.



*Ms. Rita Manchanda and Ms. Ezabir Ali at the workshop panel on gender justice*

Manchanda said that the most visible targeting of women occurs through **direct physical violence** in the form of domestic violence, mutilation, sexual assault, and rape, among others. She cautioned against the naïve understanding of gender-based sexual violence as a means for sexual

gratification driven by lust and desire. Rather, it is a tool to dominate and establish power and control over women by violating them.

Elucidating other forms of violence that women experience in regions of protracted conflict, she referred to the **psychological trauma** borne by half-widows and women who grieve the enforced disappearance of their family members. In such contexts, cultural violence is also rampant. Referring to the early 1990s, when abortion was banned by militants in Jammu and Kashmir, women suffered a gross violation of their reproductive rights. Also, their access to education was hindered, resulting in high drop-out rates.

Manchanda further explained how **structural violence** against women operated. In the event of death of a woman's husband due to militancy, compensation packages were given to the father of the deceased, with nothing in the widow's name. Such women were often evicted from the house by their in-laws, and suffered the loss of right to property, livelihood safety, and a life of dignity. Across the world, in diverse post-conflict situations, when governments and other agencies attempt to reconstruct society by providing employment, only men benefit from such schemes while women are completely marginalized. This aggravates the process of feminization of poverty in regions coded as 'post-conflict'.

Drawing the attention of the participants to certain laws, which offer impunity for sexual violence against women in Jammu and Kashmir, she shared that in February 2012, Omar Abdullah, the Chief Minister of the state, made a statement that from 1992 to 2011, sanctions were sought to prosecute army and paramilitary forces, but not a single sanction had been granted to date. Under AFSPA, Article 7 mandates prior sanction to be sought before prosecution of military personnel in cases of alleged sexual violence. Manchanda noted that the Justice Verma Committee Report has offered hope in delivering justice to women by recommending removal of mandatory sanctions in cases of rape and murder.

Concluding her presentation, she explained that while addressing violence against women, it is important to take a holistic approach—one that recognized that **justice does not get delivered merely through punitive action against the perpetrator or compensation for the victim. We must equally realize the significance of psycho-social**

**healing, trauma counseling, ensuring livelihood and community benefits, and devising ways to reintegrate women who have suffered violence without any stigmatization in the community.** To achieve this, restorative justice, reparation, and redistributive justice, must operate simultaneously in a larger framework which widens its purview from ‘protecting to enabling and empowering women with rights’.

Taking forward the discussion on violence against women, **Ezabir Ali, a Srinagar-based Health and Development Professional,** located her presentation in the context of enforced disappearances in Jammu and Kashmir and shared insights from her research on half-widows and women with missing sons and fathers in the wake of the armed conflict in the Valley. Women in Kashmir have unique experiences as survivors of the protracted conflict, she stated. They have suffered victimization in the form of physical exploitation, political violence, economic deprivation, social stigmatization, and a pervasive sense of insecurity in their daily lives. Women were systematically targeted at multiple levels—by men with guns, men wielding political power as well as men from their own community/household. In addition to being at the receiving end of all forms of violence, Ali said that they continued to suffer in silence without any substantial representation in the processes of reconciliation and peacebuilding.

She shared the findings of her research in the Valley in which she had examined the psychosocial impact of armed conflict on women whose sons/spouses went missing. Her study depicted the ‘anguish of ailing mothers who were fighting the woes of old age’, poverty, and loneliness, while waiting for the return of their missing sons. It also focused on the repercussions of the daily struggle for survival of half-widows as they encountered unjust cultural norms embedded in society and were compelled to assume the role of the primary bread-earner for the family’s survival.

Ali shared two evocative narratives from the Valley in the course of her presentation. The first was the story of Naseema, a half-widow and mother of four, who had been waiting for the last 12 years for news of her missing husband. After her husband’s disappearance, she lost the right to inherit his property and was brutally evicted from her home by her in-laws. Her story, she said was common to the experiences of hundreds of half-widows in Kashmir. The second story depicted the life of Khalida, mother of a disappeared son. Ali shared that she was

on her deathbed and refused to close her eyes, yearning for her son's return. Khalida was later buried in her own compound, in the hope of being close to her missing son upon his return. She represented the anguish of thousands of mothers whose sons were missing in custody.

Against the backdrop of these narratives, Ali shared that these women suffered from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. It was distressing to note that of all the women she had interacted with, 60% had considered suicide, with successive failed attempts.

Ali shared that every month, many such mothers and half-widows gathered in the central park in Kashmir to demand information about their missing family members and the ongoing search operations by the armed forces. These women often engaged in group mourning activities.

Concluding her presentation, Ali asserted that women in Kashmir have shown a lot of resilience, waging a silent war against the psychological, physical, structural, and cultural violence continually perpetuated against them. She highlighted a **pressing need for a wide range of psychiatric and psychosocial support initiatives to address the various somatic and psycho-somatic problems that these women suffer from.** She ended the session with an evocative quotation from the work of Paulo Coelho: 'Waiting is painful. Forgetting is painful. But not knowing which to do is the worst kind of suffering.'

## *Discussion*

- A participant raised the issue of how most societies failed to reintegrate militants who surrendered arms. Perpetual stigmatization and mistrust, coupled with other forms of cultural and structural violence, excluded them from the sphere of employment opportunities and a life of dignity. She noted that the private sphere often became their domain to vent out frustration, anger, and shame. This exacerbated the incidence of domestic violence.
- Another participant mentioned that during the course of her fieldwork in Dardpora and Kupwara, she visited homes of half-widows to examine the state of compensation they had received over the years. She was shocked to find that most women were unaware of their basic right as beneficiaries of any compensation. They were confined to their house, and lived in deplorable

conditions, with no access to education. They were dependent on others for their survival and were strictly warned against conversing with outsiders. In this context, she articulated the view that while codifying women's rights offers hope for a progressive and inclusive society, the disturbing truth was that most women lived their entire lives unaware of these rights.

- Ahmed Ali Fayyaz expressed concern over the lack of proper documentation of the figures and details of individuals who had disappeared during the course of the armed conflict in J&K. There was a stark mismatch in the figures offered by government authorities and the ones claimed by civil society bodies and private researchers campaigning against forced disappearances in the state, he said. Ali concurred on the issue with him and shared the example of the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP), which was initiated by a woman. She noted that since 2013 newer supporters of APDP had taken up formal documentation as a project and were doing it in several districts of the state, with the aid of interns from across the country. Ali added that among the various problems they encountered, a significant one was that several people had not registered a First Information Report about the disappearance at the time of the incident; many were unaware of the procedure of reporting a case; while with others the police authorities had refused to register any case. Yet, despite the myriad obstacles, APDP had shown progress and had gathered information from several districts. In this context, Manchanda stated that the process of documentation requires rigorous training and capacity building, and the onus was not only on the human rights activists and organizations, but on every concerned citizen, to translate sympathy into action.

## Non-violent Communication and Dialogue Skills

Introducing the session titled *Nonviolent Communication and Dialogue*, Seema Kakran, Assistant Director, WISCOMP, briefly recapitulated the learnings from the previous day. She stated that various concepts about the different forms of violence had been discussed at the workshop sessions. These had pointed to the state of militarization that prevails in Jammu and Kashmir and its connection with impunity and lack of good governance.

Kakran added that besides identifying the problems plaguing J&K, there were also discussions on the ways in which participants could respond to the situation. She flagged two suggestions from the previous day. First, drawing on Gopinath's invitation to the participants to resist the culture of hate and violence and instead 'wage conflict nonviolently', Kakran said that a capacity to practice nonviolence does not occur naturally in individuals. Just like there are war strategies, there also exist strategies and skills to wage conflict nonviolently, but these have to be acquired. Second, the skills of dialogue and active listening are vital for the transformation of protracted conflict and enable



*Ms. Elizabeth Kingsnorth interacting with the workshop participants*

the different sides of the conflict to converse with each other in a manner that allows them to move from rigid opposing positions towards a common understanding of issues.

Introducing theoretical concepts and practical exercises for nourishing an internal capacity for nonviolence and dialogue, **Elizabeth Kingsnorth**, Consultant, Lalaji Memorial Omega International School, Chennai, facilitated an interactive workshop on *Nonviolent Communication and Dialogue*. She invited the participants to engage with the interdependent relationship between social change and personal change, using an approach that was heart-centric and cultivated deep personal transformation in individuals.

At the start of the session, she drew the attention of the participants to a quote by Rumi, 'Out beyond all ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing, there is a field. I will meet you there.' Kingsnorth explained that these lines reflected the essence of nonviolent communication.

Quoting Margaret Wheatley, she said: 'It is not our differences that divide us; it is our judgments about each other that do.' Differences, diversity, and uniqueness in opinions are the richness of human beings, and must not be viewed in a negative light. Rather, it is our constant judgments and rigid interpretations which divide things into dualities of good and bad, right and wrong, and thus alienate people. This process starts purely from the head.

Underscoring the importance of relating and connecting with fellow human beings 'from our hearts', Kingsnorth explained how our thoughts and expressions through language determine the reality we see and shape our perceptions about the world. She observed that in our daily lives, we constantly make assumptions about people and judge them based on minimal information. We seldom realize how our ill-informed thoughts create stereotypes and place invisible emotional and physical barriers between us and other human beings. Thus, inadvertently we create enemy images through our thinking and language.

Explaining the origin, evolution, and significance of nonviolent communication, she noted that Marshall Rosenberg, an American psychologist, was determined to find a way where human beings could stay in touch with their essential compassionate nature and use a means



of communication that encouraged awareness and fuller connection to humanity.

Rosenberg developed nonviolent communication which can be described as a language of compassion, a tool for positive social change, and in some senses, spiritual practice. Kingsnorth noted that nonviolent communication was based on the belief that all human beings prefer to live in harmony and share common universal needs and values. These needs and values underlie feelings and inform actions as individuals attempt to meet them. Owing to the universal nature of these needs, if we focus our attention on them, and understand and acknowledge them, we can create a shared basis for connection, cooperation, and peace. She noted that by adopting this means of communication, people can learn to understand each other, connect with respect and compassion, and resolve conflicts. Kingsnorth stressed the understanding that we are not in conflict at the level of needs and values, but at the level of the strategies we choose to fulfill those needs.

In the midst of conflicts, she noted, it becomes difficult to stay in touch with our intention to be compassionate and respectful towards others. In such situations, **nonviolent communication can enable us to engage in deep empathetic listening and guide us on how to speak without accusation, demand, and threat.** It translates into creating and sustaining a compassionate quality of communication, which further translates into everybody's needs being met.

Kingsnorth foregrounded the idea that at the core of all human action is a desire to fulfill a need. These underlying needs are positive in nature and always contribute to enhancing life. For example, she asked, what positive underlying need might a bully be trying to fulfill when s/he is bullying children in school? She concurred with the participants' responses that a bullying act could be rooted in the need for respect and a sense of self-worth.

Illustrating another example, she presented a scenario where a child runs onto a busy road and the mother hits the child screaming, 'don't be so stupid! You nearly got yourself killed!' Kingsnorth elucidated that although the strategy employed by the mother was harsh, her underlying need was her child's safety. She stressed that **it is important we communicate what we really long for based on our underlying**

**needs.** In the case of the mother, she could have conveyed her positive need through a different response like grabbing the child and saying, ‘I want you to be safe!’ Using such a strategy ensures that instead of learning through fear, a child learns through love.

Engaging the participants in an exercise, she asked them to sit together in pairs and discuss some everyday actions and identify the underlying needs reflected in those actions through their words and behavior.

A participant, who was the founder of a dance community, expressed how she dances to fulfill her underlying positive need for creativity, joy, and peace. Another participant remarked how sometimes she seeks comfort in withdrawing herself from her social circle to spend some time with herself, which is often misinterpreted as hostility and rejection by people around her. However, the underlying needs identified by her were that of self-exploration and rest. Kingsnorth observed that we are always interpreting according to our likes and dislikes, feelings and expectations. Our duty, however, as compassionate human beings should be to focus our attention on the underlying positive universal needs and values of people, which are at the root of all actions.

She explained that if we desire to truly understand somebody, we have to acquire the emotional maturity and training to not react to aggressive words. Nonviolent communication involves a radical change in how we understand human behavior. It underscores the insight that it is our own thinking and interpretations, and the ‘enemy images’ that we hold, which lead to disconnection with others and conflict. In the process, **this form of communication teaches skills to understand the impulses beneath the language of threats, anger, manipulation, and oppression.** It also enables people to move beyond blame, criticism, and moralistic judgments, and change those into clear, considerate, and empowering communication.

Empathy is of paramount significance in nonviolent communication. Quoting Stephen R. Covey, Kingsnorth said: ‘Seek first to understand before you are understood’. Empathy applied this way has enormous transformative power to change a potentially violent situation into one of connection. To translate this idea into practice, she engaged the participants in another exercise. Sitting together in pairs, she asked one person in each pair to describe an issue that was troubling him/her,

while the other person empathized and listened to the feelings and underlying needs of the speaker. She cautioned the listener against finding solutions, probing, being judgmental, or giving advice.

At this point, a participant raised a question, enquiring about the significance of listening. It changes something for people in a very deep way, Kingsnorth explained. **One of the deepest needs of human beings is to be heard and feel understood**, because people feel the need to have their pain and suffering acknowledged. Proceeding further, she briefly discussed the kind of language which disconnects people. This includes: judgments, labels, threats and demands, ‘should or ought’, blame or accusation, and denying responsibility by using phrases like ‘I can’t’ instead of ‘I choose not to’. Such a language ensues from not taking personal responsibility for one’s feelings and blaming and accusing the other, thereby shifting the onus on them. Furthermore, the use of such language reflects the refusal to see the immense potential and possibilities that differences in opinions create for exploration and understanding of new perspectives.

**The process of nonviolent communication, involves the following: observations, feelings, needs, and requests.** Individuals should engage in nonviolent communication with the intent to connect with themselves and with others. She urged the participants to focus complete attention on what the other person was speaking, what their underlying needs were, and what they felt in that moment. She noted that it was very important to understand that feelings arise from needs. They reside and emerge from within individuals and hence individuals must take personal responsibility for their own feelings. This in turn helps to eliminate the blame culture, said Kingsnorth.

Elucidating the process of nonviolent communication through an illustration, she took the example of an accusatory and judgmental statement: ‘How can you be so selfish! You never think of anybody but yourself.’ This statement, she noted, disconnects people and hence must be reframed. The first step in this direction would be to describe the situation, in a neutral and objective manner, without interpreting and judging. Jiddu Krishnamurthi succinctly observes, **‘To be able to observe without evaluating is the highest form of human intelligence.’** Since evaluating disconnects, it is crucial we maintain a language of observation that is neutral and only describe the facts of

the situation. To this end, saying, ‘I noticed that in the last 15 minutes of this conversation, you have been describing your experiences and I have not been describing mine’, qualifies as a neutral observation. This will elicit the agreement of the other person and build a common ground that offers an opportunity to connect.

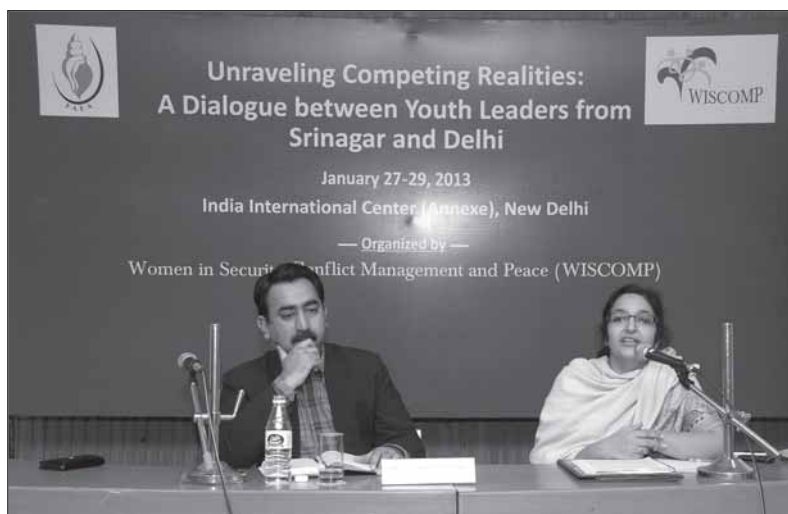
Proceeding further, she stated that once individuals identify the feelings and the underlying needs, whether met or unmet, they can communicate better with others. At the heart of nonviolent communication is the recognition of needs. Accordingly, one may express, ‘I am feeling lonely and upset because I really value being heard by you and would enjoy more balance and sharing in our communication.’ This statement links one’s feelings to the underlying unmet needs, Kingsnorth noted. As the last stage, an individual must make a request which is specific and doable such as, ‘How would it be if for the next 5 minutes I shared my experiences with you?’ This will initiate one step towards getting that need met, she explained.

Kingsnorth concluded the session, urging the participants to practice nonviolent communication in their daily lives by breaking down their own judgmental language into observations, feelings, needs, and requests.

## Exploring the Diversity in Jammu and Kashmir

The session *Conflict Resolution in Jammu and Kashmir: Competing Perspectives* opened with a presentation by Zafar Choudhary, Founder-Director, Indus Research Foundation, Jammu. Foregrounding the multiplicity of perspectives and stakeholders involved in the conflict in J&K, he said that this multiplicity can be very problematic as different parties to the conflict begin to assert the absolute nature of their own perspective and context. In the process, each one starts to negate the experiences and perspectives of ‘the other’.

He noted, it was crucial to understand why despite 65 years of protracted conflict in J&K, reconciliation and resolution continued to be elusive. The reason for this stagnation was the diversity in perspectives, aspirations, and stakes in the conflict situation, with no common ground being established. Even in terms of understanding the historicity and root causes of the conflict there exist multiple viewpoints. One lens looks at the conflict in the context of the partition of India and the subsequent accession of the princely state of J&K to the Dominion of India in 1947. Another perspective is that the conflict dates back to



*Mr. Zafar Choudhary and Ms. Seema Kakran responding to questions from the workshop participants*

1846, when several smaller units of land were brought together by Dogra warriors and amalgamated to form the state of J&K through a treaty. Another narrative which is dominant within the Valley dates the conflict to 1586, when Mughals invaded Kashmir and ended centuries of self-rule.

Analyzing the contemporary discourse on the conflict in J&K, Choudhary gave an account of the varied perspectives that existed in the state across both sides of the Line of Control. He stressed the importance of being aware of the history and root causes of any conflict to understand its contemporary reality. The year 1947 marked the division of the state of J&K, dividing its land, people, culture, and history. He explained that the former princely state constituted by the Valley of Kashmir, Jammu Province, and the Northern Areas got subsequently divided into Pakistan Administered Kashmir (PAK) and Indian Administered Kashmir, with a Line of Control becoming the de facto border.

Briefly delineating a historical background of how different cultures, communities, and identities were placed in the conflict, he first shed light on the situation on the Pakistan side of J&K. People in Gilgit–Baltistan have been deprived of basic democratic rights since the 1947 partition, he stated. It was only after a political movement began after the 1999 Kargil War, that the Government of Pakistan granted economic and political rights to the region in 2009. Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), another region on the Pakistan side, had suffered political disempowerment and failing governance for a long period of time. Although direct voting and local elections were introduced in this region in 1975, the region continues to be ruled by proxy executives appointed by Islamabad. Choudhary noted that on the Pakistan side, the prospect of restoring peace and democratic rights in a holistic sense seems bleak, and the citizens continue to live in a state of perpetual abeyance, with the hope that the region will be integrated into Pakistan as a province.

Choudhary then proceeded to provide insights on the situation in the Indian side of Jammu and Kashmir in the three regions of Ladakh, Jammu, and the Kashmir Valley. He explained that Ladakh had never acquired a central role in the armed conflict and remained rather detached from the events in the Valley of Kashmir. In Ladakh, he noted, the dominant demand was for separation from Kashmir and to get Union

territory status. Jammu, Choudhary remarked, was culturally, ethnically, linguistically, and geographically similar to Azad Kashmir on Pakistan side. This ensued from the fact that 76% of the land area and 68% of the population of the Pakistan side of Jammu and Kashmir constituted of the erstwhile undivided Jammu Province.

He then proceeded to shed light on the Kashmir Valley which had a unique identity and culture, and which lay at the center of the protracted conflict. In 1989, the entire discourse and agitation in the Valley regarding issues of democratic aspirations, governance, political rights, and dignity of the citizens, turned into overt protests and display of resentment against India. In the years following 1989, due to state repression, the situation was further exacerbated and the Kashmiri youth were radicalized.

Given this complex reality, the contemporary narratives in the Valley are the outcomes of a political economy of violence and gross violations of human rights. The popular demands prevailing in the Valley were for the withdrawal of harsh laws such as AFSPA and attenuation of stationed security forces. However, Choudhary explicated, the region has been in direct conflict with the Union of India, which in turn invites repressive measures by the Indian state, leading to a downward spiral of violence.

The large presence of security forces in Kashmir has been justified in view of the constantly looming threat of external aggressors like Pakistan and non-state actors from Afghanistan. In this situation, the people of Kashmir need to ask themselves if they want to continue to be collateral damage in the conflict that India and Pakistan are perpetually embroiled in. If that was the case, the people of Kashmir would have to wait for stability to be restored in Afghanistan and Pakistan to see any progress towards peace and stability in their lives. If not, then they have to ask themselves where they place themselves.

Kakran commented that several participants and speakers had suggested during the course of discussions that a political resolution of the conflict should be the top priority of the government, as nothing can change in the Valley without such a resolution. She stated that in view of the varied competing stakes in J&K and the historical diversity that exists in the different regions, it was crucial to understand that any solution

to the conflict that was acceptable to all the stakeholders was not in sight currently. Hence, **as the youth representing the next generation of leadership, participants should consider all the conflicting yet interrelated perspectives emanating from the situation to envisage a way forward.** Even if this process was very slow, it could culminate into a positive movement.

### *Discussion*

- A participant from the Valley observed that in the conflict in Kashmir, education had become a casualty. Thus, the education system in the state needed massive reform. Choudhary concurred with his point and observed that when a conflict becomes intractable, many important sectors contributing to human development are left unattended. In contexts of protracted conflict, people and their needs are pushed to the margins, he noted. Thus, while there has been an exponential growth of colleges and universities across the state, the quality of education remains abysmal.
- A participant shared that since she hailed from Kashmir she was often asked whether she would like to accede to India or Pakistan. This question looked at Kashmir in isolation and detached from the regions of Jammu and Ladakh. She asked what was the role or contribution of Ladakh and Jammu in the final settlement of the conflict? Choudhary answered that there were multiple ways of looking at the conflict in J&K. If we were to view the conflict through the lens of J&K as it was in 1947, then the regions of Gilgit–Baltistan, Azad Jammu Kashmir, Jammu, and Ladakh would have to be factored in. However, this method was bound to fail because over a period of 65 years, people in the different regions had molded and realigned their political affiliations and identities. An alternative lens could be to analyze the conflict by localizing it to the Valley of Kashmir where issues of failing governance and human rights violation had become rampant propelling the Valley to acquire centrality in the conflict.
- Nayeem raised a point where she highlighted that the structural relationship of J&K with India was through Article 370, which had been grossly violated. There should be no difference of opinion, she stated, amongst the different parts of J&K so far as the restoration of that status was concerned.



- One of the participants opined that in a forum that witnessed participation of young students from different parts of the country, we must explore the potential of building understanding, empathy, and better relationships, rather than harp on issues in the political sphere. Several other participants agreed and stressed the need for people-centric initiatives to bring about constructive social change. Kakran interjected with the view that the intention behind organizing such workshops was inspired by the need to provide a safe space for people from Delhi and Kashmir, so that they may interact and engage with one another. In the process, the hope was that they will be able to reduce prejudices and misperceptions about one another.

Concluding the session, Zafar highlighted the importance of acknowledging and understanding the diversity that existed in J&K to proceed towards negotiating any settlement of the conflict. Kakran complimented his point by remarking that we all have been guilty of being impatient with finding a quick solution to the conflict. The idea, she noted, was to become aware of the multiple levels at which resolution was required for the final settlement of the issue.

## The Silent Crusaders: A New Awakening

The last day of the workshop coincided with the eve of Martyrs Day (the day of Mahatma Gandhi's martyrdom) and the participants attended a panel discussion titled *The Silent Crusaders: A New Awakening* which was hosted by the Delhi Chapter of Sarvodaya International Trust. The Trust seeks to sensitize youth to the moral ideals of Gandhi and promotes Gandhian values of truth, nonviolence, universal brotherhood, and humanitarian service.

Contextualizing their talk to the street protests ensuing the gang-rape of the 23-year old girl on a moving bus in New Delhi, the panelists explored how in these turbulent times, the Gandhian concepts of nonviolence and *sarvodaya* could guide people in their quest for justice and gender equality. They shared their understanding of Gandhi's views on gender and women's empowerment. The panelists

*'When we have been given an opportunity to meet and understand each other and discuss our grievances, is it possible to blur the divides of Kashmir and Delhi and perceive ourselves as a group in solidarity with one another? As powerful agents of social change, can we perceive ourselves as youth of the nation and not of different regions?'*

highlighted that during the Indian struggle for independence, Gandhi played a pivotal role in mobilizing women to enter the public domain as nonviolent activists, shattering many stereotypes in the process. His efforts induced a sense of renewed agency in women, who had previously been confined to the household. The panelists noted that Gandhi's feminization of the political discourse was important in these hyper-masculinist times, when hegemonic masculinity and skewed power relations had become the norm. Providing several illustrations from Gandhi's life, they underscored that his entire life could be read as an attempt to bring people to a new threshold of understanding masculinity and femininity.

During the course of the presentations Gandhi's idea of the world as a family bound together in a web of interdependent relationships where the microcosm (the individual) was reflected in the macrocosm (the universe at large) was also foregrounded. It was explicated that **answers**

**to the difficult questions of the times, such as those posed by the challenges of escalating violence, would necessarily involve working towards nourishing our internal capacities, rather than searching for solutions ‘out there’.**

As a conclusion to the workshop, Dr. Navina Jafa, a Delhi-based cultural historian and performing artist, led the workshop participants on a Heritage Walk to the Nizamuddin Dargah where the participants engaged with stories of the Sufi Dargahs, which are considered to be symbols of syncretism in both Kashmir and Delhi.

## Looking Ahead

Addressing the question, ‘Where do we go from here?’, the session *Looking Ahead* explored how workshops, such as the one WISCOMP had organized for youth leaders could be taken forward to serve as safe spaces for enhancing cross-cultural and regional collaborations between young people. Jointly facilitated by Gopinath and Kakran, this session used a semi-structured format, where the participants shared their opinions on the subject and collectively reflected on it.

At the very outset, Gopinath established that the purpose of the session was to elicit reflections from participants hailing from Kashmir and Delhi to be able to discern the differences and commonalities in terms of their realities, narratives, and perceptions of themselves and the rest of the world. She invited the participants to share their insights from the morning session *Nonviolent Communication and Dialogue* facilitated by Kingsnorth. One participant remarked that the session had been an invaluable learning experience and had empowered her with skills to begin internalizing a capacity for nonviolence. It helped her to be appreciative of the tremendous power of words, she said. Several others expressed that the session had helped them to analyze their own thought process, observe reality from the perspective of others, and had engendered a better understanding of their underlying needs and emotions.

Gopinath urged the participants to share any new insights or learning that they took away from the workshop. A participant observed that through this workshop, he had understood the value of not only imbibing new learning from the interaction, but also of making a conscious effort to “unlearn several notions” etched in his mind. Some participants from Delhi pointed to the deeper understanding of the issues that afflict J&K that they had acquired by directly engaging with individuals impacted by and invested in the conflict.

Reflecting on the insights gained from the workshop, one participant from Delhi underscored the power of dialogue. She asserted that through the one-on-one interactions at the workshop, the realization dawned upon her that the conflict in J&K, although geographically restricted, cannot be isolated from the lived realities of people residing in Delhi. Hence,

assembling in a common space and dialoguing over pertinent issues, had provided a space to build relationships of respect and develop stakes in each other's causes. Several participants from Delhi concurred with this view and expressed a desire to work towards the alleviation of the human rights situation in Kashmir.

Some participants from Kashmir interjected to share the following view: 'Our problem is that you people [in Delhi] don't talk about us'. They talked about the deep sense of alienation and betrayal they felt with respect to the behavior of their peers in Delhi, who did not rally for their cause. References were made to the differential value attached to sexual violence in Delhi and Kashmir (the example of Shopian was cited), the negative stereotyping of Kashmiris as terrorists, and the general apathy of the youth in Delhi towards the conflict in J&K.

Participants from Delhi and Kashmir placed their mutual grievances on the table and attempted to defend their stands. At this point, a participant intervened in an effort to bridge the differences. She said that different sets of issues exist in both Delhi and Kashmir and neither is insulated from a sense of insecurity. She further added: 'If all our attempts to dialogue get engulfed in selfish agendas emanating from our identities as girl, boy, Delhiite, or Kashmiri, then how will we move ahead collectively?'

Prodding the participants to reflect on the rationale behind the title of the session, Gopinath posed the question: 'For whom do you think it is the "way forward", and is there only one way or are there several ways?' After some deliberation, the point was established that when we talk about the 'way forward', it is not solely for Kashmir or Delhi but for the collective future of the youth. She further explicated that **atrocities and violations were committed in both Delhi and Kashmir, in varying degrees. However, it was crucial to understand that one person's pain does not cancel another's pain.** Both hurt and both are unjust. Hence, she stated that it was not a question of 'your grief cancelling my grief' or whose pain was more intense, but rather 'a question of our collective pain'.

Gopinath added that there were innumerable experts constantly evaluating and analyzing the situation in J&K and suggesting many potential solutions to the conflict. However, the objective of the

workshop was to initiate interaction amongst young individuals of the nation, with the hope that they will engage in a sustained dialogue, build capacity for nonviolence, and embark on an exploratory journey together, awakening their consciousness at each step, and emerging as catalysts for constructive change. Gopinath further explicated that there was a value to these kinds of interactions.

Nudging the participants to think more deeply, Gopinath asked them to share the image that comes to their mind when they hear the word 'state'. Responses included: soldiers, police constables, community of people, and administration of people, among others. In this context, Gopinath made the following observation:

*Whenever we speak about “the state”, ...we tend to objectify social relations as a thing and regard them impersonally. Following from this understanding, when we think of the state, we tend to give it a symbolic existence which stands above us. But if we were to unscramble our thoughts and describe our relationship with the state, we would realize that **essentially it is people that we are talking about**. The nature of the state may vary: it can be protective and serve to establish a semblance of law and order, and it can also be a predator which attacks. But the state is fundamentally constituted by people.*

Concluding the session, Gopinath encouraged participants to think about the following key questions:

- When you talk about the Indian state/ the state of J & K, what images comes to your mind?
- What is the new learning that you take away from this interaction?
- Is it the conflict 'in' Kashmir that we are talking about or the conflict 'of' Kashmir? If so, are they the same, different, or interdependent?
- What is it that you can do in your individual capacity to build a culture of peace around yourself?
- Are there any 'ways forward'? If yes, what are they and for whom?

As a closing comment, Gopinath expressed hope that a group of young peace animators would emerge from amongst the workshop participants, who will engage in a sustained dialogue and embark on a journey to collectively address the issues of our times.

## Participant Feedback

The workshop witnessed the participation of 42 youth leaders from Srinagar and Delhi. They candidly discussed issues that, in the past, have led to mistrust and even hostility between young people from Kashmir and those from other parts of India. The workshop successfully provided a safe space for the participants to articulate their viewpoints on various issues, including democratic rights, identity conflicts, and stereotypes.

In their feedback, participants said that they had high expectations from the workshop since they knew that it would provide a rare opportunity for young people from different backgrounds to come together. The most important aspect, for participants from Kashmir, was the interaction with their counterparts from Delhi. Their hope was that when they shared their experiences of living in a conflict-affected region, young people in Delhi would become more sensitive to the everyday insecurity that they faced and that perhaps cultivate a sense of collective responsibility to address the atrocities committed in the name of 'national interest'. This hope was expressed by a participant in the following words: 'I expect that Delhi and Kashmir participants will develop better relations, and in the future, young people in Delhi will talk on behalf of Kashmiris.' Similarly, through interactions and exchanges of ideas with the Kashmiri youth, most participants from Delhi expected to build a better understanding of the problems that plague Kashmir.

Several participants entered the workshop space with the hope of learning practical tools of conflict transformation. Many others hoped to interact with individuals from diverse settings, engage with new perspectives, and create a platform to 'collaborate with future leaders on the shared goals of a common future'. While a majority felt their expectations were largely met and thanked WISCOMP for the 'enriching experience', others felt that the proceedings of the workshop had only partially fulfilled their expectations. A few participants stated that they had expected a more informal dialogue, but the sessions were rather structured, leaving limited time for spontaneous interaction. Nevertheless, the Kashmiri participants shared that they were going back to the Valley with a renewed sense of hope that the situation in Kashmir will improve with the support of their 'friends in Delhi'.

As one participant put it, ‘We are not alone. There are still people who are with us.’ Participants from Delhi were inspired by the interaction and stated that they had learned to empathize with their counterparts in Kashmir who lived in perilous conditions. One of them stated, ‘I got to see that people of my age suffer so much in Kashmir. It is not fair.’

Most participants stated that the workshop had ignited in them the ‘spirit of dialogue’ and active listening and had made them feel part of a common, shared humanity. Several others expressed delight at having learnt new ways of effectively communicating with others without attracting hostility. The need to be tolerant and respectful of other’s views and to allow everyone the space to express themselves was emphasized as an important takeaway. Another important learning was the understanding that there is a need to start with transformation at the personal level before setting out to change the world. In fact, at the end of the workshop, participants articulated **a deeper understanding of the interdependence between social change and personal change.**

The sessions *Participant Introductions* and *Identity, Conflict, and Dialogue* were widely appreciated as these were seen to be very interactive, engaging, and innovative. As one participant put it, ‘I liked that we were all involved together’. Each exercise helped in the creation of a safe space in which they could exchange views, perceptions,



*Participants deliberating on the way forward during the workshop*



feelings, and experiences in an honest and open manner—precisely the kind of exchange that is integral to efforts that seek to minimize the trust deficit and build mutual understanding.

The session *Non-violent Communication and Dialogue* also received a very high ranking. The myriad illustrations and exercises in the session helped appreciate the tremendous power that words held. One participant noted, ‘For the first time, we listened calmly to each other’. Participants said that they learned invaluable lessons about the importance of observing situations with a neutral perspective, devoid of judgments, and engaging with the underlying needs of others.

Commenting on the themes of the sessions, a few participants mentioned that the session *Democratic Rights in Jammu and Kashmir: Problems and Prospects* did not quite meet up to their expectations. Yet, the majority stated that every session taught them a new lesson. As one of them put it, ‘We came here to learn and every theme was useful.’

There was unanimous appreciation for the overall organization of the workshop, which was seen to be ‘very efficient’ and ‘welcoming of all’. One participant commented, ‘WISCOMP’s thinking is very broad and inclusive. It doesn’t hurt anyone’s sentiments.’ The workshop ambience was lauded by most as being productive and conducive to learning and exchanging ideas. However, some participants observed that while most people had an opportunity to speak and participate, at several instances, voices of individuals from Delhi dominated and Kashmiris felt slightly inhibited in expressing themselves. The need to allocate more time for discussions and one-on-one interaction between individual participants was expressed as a suggestion for future workshops. There was also the suggestion that youth leaders from other parts of India should be included so that everyone is sensitized to the problems of conflicts in border areas.

Suggesting thematic components that should be included in future workshops, participants proposed the following: ‘nationalism and patriotism’, ‘role of the individual in the whole’, and ‘ways to implement

*‘It was a really fruitful workshop. One important thing I want to mention is that by understanding the youth of Delhi, my perception of them changed. They are really good people. India has a good future.’*

– A Participant from  
Kashmir

ideas for peace into practical work'. A need to retain interactive and participatory activities in future workshops was strongly echoed by most participants. Commenting on how they plan to use and take forward the learning from the workshop, participants made the following observations:

- 'I will spread the learning from this workshop and share the positive experiences with my classmates and friends in Kashmir and also spread the message that we must not give up hope for peace.'
- 'I will incorporate methods of nonviolent communication in my daily life while interacting with individuals in my context, and express my views without blaming others.'

Participants were unanimous in the expression of their eagerness to be part of such workshops that WISCOMP organizes in the future. Some shared how the interaction had developed new bonds of friendship and belief in an optimistic future. A few post-workshop messages that the participants shared with WISCOMP are listed below:

*'I feel refreshed, inspired, and motivated. And I am so happy I came back with so many new friends from WISCOMP and the workshop in my life.'*

*'People of Delhi have started thinking differently about the Kashmir problem. They have started understanding it in a positive way. They feel it needs to be resolved. There is hope.'*



## Follow-up Alumni Workshop held in Srinagar





## Overview

As a follow up to the workshop held in January 2013, the Workshop titled *Trust-building and Coexistence: Transforming Relationships between Youth Leaders from Delhi and Jammu and Kashmir* was organized in Srinagar from September 3-5, 2013. It brought together 39 youth leaders from universities and colleges in Delhi and Jammu and Kashmir, of these 28 were participants from the January dialogue and 11 were new participants. The workshop sought to provide an opportunity to the Delhi participants to experience the reality in Kashmir first hand and also to take the process of trust building forward.

The **Workshop goals** were as follows:

- Take the next steps in the process of trust-building which had been initiated during the first workshop.
- Strengthen the participants' capacity and commitment to engage with the concepts of democracy and coexistence, and to resist violence at multiple levels—within the home, in their communities, and in society.
- Undertake a collective envisioning exercise to develop an action plan to foreground and institutionalize the learnings (from the workshop) at the centers, colleges, and universities that the participants represented.

The workshop programme used the arts centrally to ensure that the participants had multiple opportunities for giving expression to their emotions emanating from experiences of conflict and violence. The commonalities in these experiences were used by the facilitators to encourage the participants to come up with strategies for reducing violence and addressing conflicts constructively.

## Ice Breakers

Seema Kakran, Assistant Director at WISCOMP, opened the workshop with a series of ice-breakers and warm-up activities to help the alumni of the first workshop to be introduced to those who had joined the group for the follow-up workshop. These activities also enabled the participants to think about life affirming qualities that they experience. Emphasizing active listening for positive affirmations and exploring possible areas of convergence, she invited participants to share stories of individuals (known personally to them) who they saw as role models. Delhi and Srinagar participants were paired together for this activity. Participants were encouraged to practice active listening as no interruptions were allowed while one person was speaking.

Since the role models were people who the participants knew intimately from real life interactions, family members were listed repeatedly. Other influences included were: teachers, feminists, lawyers, politicians, and counselors. They had inspired the participants with their resilience, feisty spirits, conviction, and courage. The participants were not only able to share their stories of inspiration in pairs but also shared them with the larger group. The exercise provided an opportunity to get a glimpse into values that are part of human experience regardless of the regional/ geographical differences and begin a conversation on personality traits that inspire others.

The session was also used for the alumni of the earlier workshop to share their learnings with those participants who were joining the group for the first time.

## Exploring Peace through the Arts

Based on participant feedback from the earlier workshop for more one-on-one interactions with ‘the other’ (particularly in an informal setting), the session *Exploring Peace through the Arts* created a space for in-depth introspection on conflict situations that individual participants had experienced. The workshop resource person, **Feruzan Mehta**, a peace educator and trainer, invited the participants to use the tools of drama, poetry, and music to share their individual (and collective) experience of violence and pain. She also invited participants to explore the possibility of looking for nonviolent and healing solutions to the different conflicts/problems they articulated.

Mehta used the following structure: Participants were divided into small groups and asked to share an incident from their personal lives where they were in direct conflict with authority and felt physical hurt, psychological damage, humiliation, and/or frustration. The group could then select one or two incidents from those shared and present it through any medium. Those choosing to keep their stories only within the group could exercise the option. During the presentations the identity of the person who experienced the incident was not disclosed to the rest of the participants.



*A group of participants using poetry and dance to express themselves at the workshop*

The following incidents were enacted:

- A Kashmiri woman being stalked and sexually harassed, and her hair being cut off by the man who claimed to love her.

- A school prefect unable to live with the guilt of non-performance, the jibes of his schoolmates and therefore wanting to resign, and a teacher's intervention and encouragement to not quit.
- A young Kashmiri being asked for his identity card, being beaten up by the police, and being taken away despite his friend's pleas.
- A Kashmiri youth disillusioned by the violence in the 'city of angels'.
- A victim of childhood sexual abuse.

Participants used diverse methods to articulate these experiences: a mock TV interview, poetry (both self-composed and using lines from Bill Morrison), story-telling, an Odissi dance, and sketches. They were then taken through a guided meditation exercise to ensure that everyone left the workshop space with positive energy and sense of hope and not despair. The exercise emphasized the importance of forgiving the perpetrator and to 'go beyond' the incident. It was underscored that forgiveness did not mean condoning the incident nor did it imply trading off justice needs of the victims of violence.



*Workshop participants with the resource persons*



## Who Am I: Exploring Identities

The session was structured to analyze the stereotypes that each participant harboured about other communities and to simultaneously think about multiplicity and fluidity of identities. To initiate this group reflection, participants started with names – a significant marker of identity in Indian society. They came up with a list of names that could belong to either religious community (Hindu/Muslim), or even gender. Some names that surfaced were Aman, Sameer, Kabir, Saba, among others. The ensuing conversation revealed the fluidity of ‘cultural identity’ and ethnicity, where it was recognised that many a times one individual could trace roots back to four or five places/religious communities. Participants shared the food preferences in their regions, revealing the diversity cuisine represented. The discussion then shifted to issues concerning choice of clothing/dress. The stereotype of Muslim women wearing the hijab or the *burkha* was questioned—leading to a discussion on a Muslim woman wearing a mini skirt. An exercise on immediate, spontaneous responses to words revealed other stereotypes around skin color (for instance, fairness). This led to a discussion on the stereotype of the ‘beautiful Kashmiri’ and what it meant for young Kashmiris who did not ‘match’ up to this definition of beauty.

Post the discussion on stereotypes, for an activity to understand the nature of oppression the group was split into two where people from conflict regions were to describe their trauma and ordeals, and the other group had to listen empathetically. Narratives included the police forcing themselves into people’s homes without a warrant and repeated identity checks on a ‘typical’ day; the presence of the army and weapons, where even the early morning view was that of the sunlight kissing the barrel of a gun before entering a person’s home; of people taken away at gun point; of unidentified graves and disappeared persons, et al. There were two narratives from a different area of conflict, Assam.

Theater exercises were meant to check alertness and quick thinking; the dangers of rumor mongering through a game of Chinese whisper<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Shirin called the exercise *Rumor* (a staple of theater workshops). She whispered a sentence to one participant who then whispered it into the ear of another, and so on. The chain continued and the last participant in the chain spoke aloud the sentence. The group then compared the trainer’s sentence to the final participant’s sentence.

Shirin, the facilitator, called the exercise *Rumor*. An important learning from this exercise was that during times of tension and conflict, individuals should be cautious when acting on negative information about ‘the other side’. Very often, such information which portrayed ‘the other side’ in demonic ways was based on hearsay and rumor, and had little to do with the group’s behavior. It also highlighted how the media was culpable, especially in times of riots. Props were used creatively and transformed into things other than what they were associated with; and improvised story-telling was employed. Two participants commented how their colleagues’ responses revealed the psychological states of mind. Even where there were opportunities for a story to take a positive turn, the flow was blocked by a sense of hopelessness, despair, and cynicism.

To address the negativity, Shirin creatively used the tool of a ‘trust circle’ in the next exercise, where a person in the center of the circle was to fall on those surrounding him/her and have faith that the group



*Participants engaging in a group activity at the workshop*

would not let them get hurt. Morale was kept high with songs sung by the group on peace and communal harmony, and welfare of all, especially the poor.

Since the group had successfully moved beyond the initial dialogue stage and had expressed the desire to work towards an alliance, Shirin decided to use the tool of active listening to move in this direction. She

facilitated structured listening activities in which the entire focus was on the speaker and not on what the listener thought about the former's experience. This was important as it is often the case that when people have been talking about an issue for some time, it is assumed by the 'privileged' in the group that their understanding of the issue

*Overall participation was fabulous and the venue was good. The participants were amazing. They really are sharp and willing to participate. I can see so much hope! In fact, there were times when I got pretty sad (listening to the stories), but the participants lifted up my spirits by talking of hope and possibilities.*

– Shirin

is complete. At this stage, a strong reminder is needed that the struggle for peace must be led by the ones who are closest to the violence. Their experience should be the starting point. In this particular case, Shirin gave talking space to participants from regions with heavy military presence (including the North East). Then, participants were asked to enact two conflict situations and come up with specific ideas that can help improve the situation or resolve the conflict.

Through theater and role play activities, empathy for the situation in Kashmir in the minds of the participants from Delhi was generated. It started a process of mutual understanding between the groups from Kashmir and Delhi. As a result, in the second half, Shirin introduced activities around the theme of *trust-building*. The intent was to gradually shift the discussion towards brainstorming on working together and building sustainable partnerships. The trust element had to be talked about and possibilities in that area explored in order to enable participants to move forward as a team.

## Cinema and Kashmir: A Terrain to Assert Nationhood

Shifting focus to the powerful role that Bombay cinema plays in influencing the perceptions of young women and men, the Workshop session titled *Cinema and Kashmir: A Terrain to Assert Nationhood* looked at how the film industry has portrayed Kashmir and India-Pakistan relations. Led by Dr. Sabina Kidwai, Professor at Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, the session opened with a comment on the representations of Kashmir in cinema, which portrayed it as the idyllic honeymoon location, filled with romance and beauty. Women were the subject of much male admiration and conflict was never a part of the films. Clips from two distinct examples of this genre of films *Kashmir ki Kali* (1964) and *Jab Jab Phool Khile* (1965) were used to illustrate the argument.

The violent manifestation of the conflict in the 1990s influenced the content and intent of many Bombay cinema films, which dealt with the issue of Kashmir. Kidwai screened clips from blockbusters that addressed the political conflict. Commenting on these clips, she said that common to all the films, particularly those shot in the 1990s, was



*Sabina Kidwai using film clippings during her session*

that the ‘beautiful Kashmir’ disappeared from cinematic imagery; the focus shifted to the intruder (from another nation), and the nation claimed space through iconography. For instance, the opening shot could be of the valley with the national anthem being played in the background, or the protagonist saluting the national flag. The films were also replete with stereotypes—for instance, those of the Muslim cleric who betrays his people or the Sikh army commander in the Amarnath Yatra who protects his nation—and how these later became stock images embedded in public memory.

Focusing on the period 2002–2004, Kidwai said that during these years, the Hindi feature film industry was obsessed with issues of nationalism and the nation state. Many of the war films received support from the state and the army. And in the majority of the stories, Kashmir continued to be the center of all major conflicts between India and Pakistan. It was in Kashmir that the terrorists were born, supported by Pakistan’s ISI, whose main agenda was to teach the ‘Indian Kafirs’ (non-believers of Islam) a lesson! In films like *Zameen* (land) (2003), *Ab Tumhare Hawale Watan Saathiyo* (the nation is in your hands brothers) (2004), and *The Hero: Love Story of a Spy* (2004), an attack on the Indian nation by Pakistan’s ISI through Kashmiri militants was the main theme. In all three films, the terrorist group was fighting for an ‘Azad Kashmir’ against the Indian nation. Pakistan’s ISI planned the attacks and the Kashmiri militants executed the plan. Thus, cross-border terrorism was the perspective used in many of these war-genre films, post-2001.

In all these war films, the location of the enemy was clear: it was Pakistan (and Muslims in Pakistan) or the Kashmiri Muslims. The purpose of Pakistan was simply defined as hatred of India and the destruction of the ‘Kafirs’. The ‘Azad Kashmir’ movement was manipulated and engineered by Pakistan. The nation was to be protected and glorified in relation to the enemy. It was as black and white as ‘Indian Muslims are good, Pakistani Muslims are bad’. Iconography reflecting Indian nationalism was liberally laced through these films, the most popular being the protagonist planting the national flag on the victory post. The films *Ab Tumhare Hawale Watan Saathiyo* and *Hero* were examples of this narrative.

In stories of conflict-ridden Kashmir, the space for the liberal Muslim is even more limited. Stories on the Valley tend to either portray the people as victims or as jihadists. In 2005, the film *Yahaan* tried to

reflect a more complex relationship between Kashmiris and Indian soldiers, but ultimately nationhood was the only solution to the problem. The film *Shaurya* raised the issue of human rights violations, but ultimately reduced the problem to the idiosyncrasy of one man. The film *Fanaa* built on the fear that the enemy can come in any disguise and nationalism was the only antidote to this.

Kidwai also drew attention to the role of women in the films she had chosen. Women characters, though much stronger and more individualistic like *Zooni* in *Fanaa*, *Ada* in *Yahaan*, and *Aziza* in *Lamhaa*, ultimately bend to nationalism. They seem to draw their strength not only from a belief in peace, but also faith in the Indian nation state. For example, Kajol in *Fanaa* and Bipasha Basu in *Lamhaa* are 'empowered' into choosing the nation state over their loved ones. One kills her husband, and the other exposes her father, both being ISI agents and 'traitors'. Juhi Chawla, in *I Am*, brings forth a more complex representation. She is a Kashmiri Pandit who returns to the Valley and meets her childhood friend. However, she chooses to sell her house to her friend and to restart life in Delhi.

Kidwai also touched on the visual imagery in these films, which depict the landscape of Kashmir as cold and beautiful, but also tragic. Most films post-2000 profile a Kashmir which is snow-bound, inhospitable, and dangerous. It is not a landscape of flowers and happiness. For instance, films like *Yahaan*, *Shaurya*, *Fanaa*, and *Tahaan* portray the visual beauty and tragedy of Kashmir. These changes in the representation of Kashmir in popular cinema impact the views of ordinary people across the country, either fueling hostility or sympathy and were therefore very important for young people to deconstruct, Kidwai concluded.

## Heritage Walk: Composite Culture

On the third and last day of the workshop, WISCOMP organized a Heritage Walk to places that represented the syncretic history of Kashmir. Conducted by Dr. Saleem Beg, State Convener and Mentor, INTACH (Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage), Jammu and Kashmir Chapter, the Walk sought to familiarize participants with different religious, spiritual, and cultural traditions that have coexisted for centuries and that could perhaps be used as resources to enhance inter-cultural and inter-religious understanding.

The Walk began at the Lal Ded Cultural Center (located in the heart of downtown Srinagar). A visual repository of Kashmir's multicultural history, the Center is named after Lal Ded, a Shaivite mystic-poet revered by both Muslims and Hindus. Introducing Kashmir as a veritable 'crucible of cultures', Beg traced the ancestry of the region, elaborating particularly on the advent of Buddhism, the period of the poet-scholar-historians Kalhana, Bilhana and Abhinavagupta; the writings of the travelers on the Silk route; and the story of Baba Reshi, the patron saint of Kashmir.



*Workshop participants being led on a heritage walk by Saleem Beg*



He emphasized the multicultural history of Kashmir, which is dotted with stories of coexistence between diverse ethnic and religious groups. He also made a reference to Kashmir's historical trade links and cultural exchanges with Afghanistan, Iran, China, and countries in central Asia. These exchanges influenced Kashmir's architecture and handicrafts. For instance, the trademark Kashmiri *papiermache* baubles are the result of historical exchanges with Iran. In fact, the art of *papiermache* traveled from Kashmir all the way to France, which imported Kashmiri shawls wrapped in *papiermache* boxes. As a result of this historical connection, one, for instance, finds Kashmiri *papiermache* in the palaces of France.

To cite another example, Beg showed participants an unmistakably oriental wooden engraved dragon (wrought of Chinese influence), which was on display at the Center. He also drew their attention to pictures of sacred spaces whose architecture reflected Buddhist, Islamic, and Hindu influences. Historically, temples and mosques existed side-by-side, and yellow rice that traditionally was offered in Buddhist and Hindu places of worship was offered at mosques as well. Further, mosques in Kashmir, including the famous Jamia Mosque, look different from those in other parts of South Asia. Rather than a dome, their architecture bears resemblance to a Buddhist pagoda—yet another symbol of the inter-layering of diverse belief systems and traditions in Kashmir.

From the Center, Beg took the participants to a mosque, a Hindu shrine, and a graveyard where the inscriptions were both in Arabic and Sharda. He also took the group to the river front and explained how the river had always been an entry point into the city, but with the changed urban landscape, the river now formed the rear of the city. The group continued its walk along the river and then through the old parts of the city, where wares of spices, utensils, cloth, and wedding gifts dotted the streets. Also visible in the old city were the desolate homes of Kashmiri Pandits, now in complete disrepair. The walk culminated at the Budshah Tomb, which uses exquisite tiles from Samarkand, demonstrating the links that the Kashmir Valley has had with Trans Asian civilizations.



## Exploring the Possibilities of Collaborations

The evaluation and feedback session was facilitated by Feruzan Mehta. She opened the session by asking the participants to recollect the various discussions at the present workshop (and in the case of those who had attended the earlier workshop in January 2013, to recall their experience from that time onwards). They were asked to identify ideas and suggest ways in which they could extend their own learning, as also to take lead in helping to spread the messages of active coexistence and dialogue.

The workshop had impacted participants at a personal level, influencing their thinking on issues concerning ‘the other’ and the conflict in Kashmir. The impact was deeper for those who had participated at the earlier workshop organized in Delhi. The experience of traveling to ‘the others’ space (for Kashmiri participants traveling to Delhi and vice-versa) was highlighted as an important contributor to building cross-cultural understanding.

Amidst the positive stories one of participant mentioned that during the stay in Delhi an auto driver had said that he thought all Kashmiris were terrorists. This made him question why he remembered the incident even though he had been able to forge friendships with many of the Delhi participants. Another participant spoke of the associations formed with peers from Delhi and how he would cherish them, always. This underscored the importance of discussing experiences both in and outside the workshop space in order to maximize the positive impact of the interaction.

Another participant spoke about the indifference of the government to the plight of Kashmiris, and also acknowledged the pain that many women—Kashmiri and non-Kashmiri—endure because of the widespread condoning of domestic violence and sexual assault. Yet, he observed that there was a difference in how sexual violence was perceived in Delhi and Srinagar. He thought that in Kashmir it was seen as a tool used by the state against the community with little regard for the survivor except as member of the community, whereas in Delhi it was considered either as a mistake or blame was placed on the survivor.

Shifting focus to the feasible options for post-workshop dialogue and collaboration, participants decided to work in small groups, which were

formed initially on the basis of the educational institutions or regions they represented (so that follow-up would be more sustainable). However, participants were later encouraged to partner with others from different colleges/areas, according to interest/commonality of purpose. Some participants also chose to form small groups, based on similarity in their core beliefs. The discussion, in these groups, was built around development of action plans to widen the impact of the workshop. Some of the suggestions are shared below.

As a starting point, it was proposed that all the participants connected through social media to set up interest-based groups. Participants who were studying to become educators (at the school/university level) said that they would share their learnings with teachers in their peer group, conduct similar workshops (as those organized by WISCOMP), and circulate stories on breaking stereotypes they had collected (during the course of the workshop). They emphasized the need for support from WISCOMP to deepen the skill building process as also to provide theoretical inputs on designs for systemic change.

Participants from Lady Shri Ram College (LSR) made the following suggestions: They proposed to hold events on ‘education for peace’ at their college and to gradually expand this to other colleges. These could be screening of documentary films, debates with relevant resource people as moderators/key-note speakers, etc. The students also suggested the organization of a Peace Fest where a number of events and activities could be held to include a larger group of people from the education community. Specific sessions on breaking stereotypes and transforming prejudices should be held every couple of months at multiple campuses across Delhi and Srinagar. They also proposed the holding of workshops for teachers so that they are sensitized and are better equipped to go into the classroom with the skills to address *both* difference and diversity. The LSR students however gave primary importance to the need to organize frequent exchange programs (for *both* students and teachers) between Delhi and Srinagar. ‘The learning that takes place by traveling to ‘the other side’ and interacting with ordinary people is far more powerful than a lesson taught in a classroom or the knowledge gained through the mass media’, they stated.

Students from Jamia Millia Islamia made the following suggestions: Launch a website to showcase the group’s work and share ideas and viewpoints. Publish an article in the University newsletter about the experiences. Conduct workshops that highlight varying perspectives

on different conflicts and how they are managed, across the world.

Kashmiri students, currently enrolled at St. Stephens' College (New Delhi), proposed the setting up of a Students' Alliance that addresses social issues and structural change. They also underscored the need for more frequent and structured dialogues between students of Srinagar and Delhi. Mukarram Wahid, a student of St. Stephens College, made the argument that students need not consider themselves powerless or apolitical. Rather, they should work together and take a stand against divisive forces and vested interests, so as to galvanize much needed change in the society. This idea found a lot of traction in the group.

Students from colleges and universities in Kashmir felt that the most important issues that needed attention in Kashmir were related to psychosocial counseling, drug de-addiction and rehabilitation, and employment. They underscored the urgent need to build the professional capacity of Kashmiri teachers. As a starting point, it was suggested that a partnership with workshop participant Ufra Mir's organization *Paigam* could be initiated since it already had some rudimentary infrastructure and processes in place in Kashmir.

Alumni, who had attended earlier WISCOMP workshops (and therefore already had some training), offered to conduct sessions for school-children, where they would share what they had learnt, thus spreading the message of coexistence, conflict transformation, and social awareness.

Noteworthy is the fact that there was a marked shift in the attitude from the beginning of the workshop, where the feeling was, 'We are mere students and can't do much beyond working on social issues'. At the end of the workshop, the majority shared the sentiment that, 'We are the youth and have a say in how our government and society functions and we have the power to bring about/demand change.' The positive spirit among the workshop participants was discernible at the end of the dialogue, without doubt. It was noted that the idea which seemed to elicit the maximum response and whole-hearted support from the group was the idea to start a Student Alliance to work towards social and structural change.<sup>10</sup> There was unanimity in the group on the need for political action, and that perhaps the Student Alliance could fulfill this expectation. What was however quite clear, at the end

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<sup>10</sup> Participants felt that some 'hand-holding' from WISCOMP would be very valuable and critical at this stage.

## Participant Feedback<sup>11</sup>

A total of 29 participants completed written anonymous evaluations of the workshop.

The participants pinned a lot of **expectations** to the workshop and looked forward to positive interpersonal interactions that would “bridge the gap” between young people from different regions and backgrounds. Several participants from Kashmir saw this as an opportunity to sensitize their counterparts from Delhi about the reality in Kashmir. Many students from Delhi highlighted the negative stereotypes of Kashmiris perpetuated through sensationalist media and the dearth of avenues for meaningful interaction available to young people from Delhi and J and K. Given this backdrop, they stepped into the workshop space, eager to meet people from Kashmir, experience their context firsthand, and learn from their narratives and experiences. As one participant put it, “I wanted to experience Kashmir for myself, to meet people that would sensitize me, educate me, and with whom I could relate.” Several first-time participants from Delhi hoped to build a better understanding of the problems that plague Kashmir through interactions and exchange of ideas with Kashmiri youth.

In the post-workshop evaluation, a large majority (90%) indicated that their expectations from the workshop were **completely met**, while 10% felt that the workshop had fulfilled their expectations to some extent.

The participants’ responses regarding their **most useful learning** at the workshop were the following:

### **Sensitization and Positive change in Attitudes and Beliefs towards other Communities**

Several participants felt sensitized to the realities and challenges of other communities and noted a positive change in their attitudes and perceptions of the ‘other’. 72% of the participants reported this change in attitude. People from Kashmir wrote “I realized that students from Delhi were so friendly and understanding”, “I will try to make everyone

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<sup>11</sup> All statements made by the participants have been reproduced verbatim in this section without making any grammatical and syntax corrections or using sic in parentheses.

in Kashmir understand that we mustn't generalize every Indian to be an 'oppressor'". Those from Delhi expressed "We felt their pain is our collective pain", "I empathized and truly understood the intensity of the plight of the people of Kashmir and their problems". Many stated that they were able to transcend their differences and truly connect with each other as human beings. To this end, one wrote, "I learnt to respect human values and that our first religion is humanity". Many lauded the effort to include Kashmiri Pandits in the workshop space which gave them an opportunity to 'understand the often unheard perspectives of religious minorities in Kashmir.' Several participants also shared that the workshop provided them a context to listen to the 'other', 'collectively share our grief, pains and hopes' and interrogate biases and prejudices. Many foregrounded that they became aware of the need to understand the multiplicity of perspectives that existed on any issue, and to not hold rigid views.

### **Motivation/Impetus for Positive Change**

Following from their experiences at the workshop, several participants began to believe in the potential of youth leaders as potent "change-makers" and 46% said that they felt inspired to act for constructive social change. One person shared, "I was personally motivated to work for peace".

### **Conflict Transformation Skills**

Many participants began to see value in forgiveness- and its power to alleviate pain, empower, and make individuals at peace with themselves. Others learnt the importance of dialogue, active listening and empathy and shared 'we learnt to respect the pain of others'. Several pointed towards having learnt 'human values like compassion, interdependence and respect for all'. Some Kashmiri participants also shared that they learned to express their anger and vent out their feelings non-violently using the arts as a medium. Overall 36% participants reported that they gained conflict transformation skill of one kind or the other.

Sharing their views on the **session/theme at the workshop that they liked the most**, majority of the participants rated the session *Exploring Peace through the Arts* very highly as it was seen to be very interactive, inclusive and innovative. This session provided ample space for reflection, sharing of stories, and cultivating trust and empathy amongst the participants. One person wrote, "We shared personal stories about

where we felt helpless and this built empathy”. Furthermore, several participants highlighted that arts hold universal appeal and hence this session allowed “effective and personal ways to express our feelings”.

The session titled ‘*Who am I? Exercises in Exploring Identities*’ was also widely appreciated by the participants. During this session, through several interactive and contemplative exercises, the participants became aware of their multiple identities and were sensitized to cultures and contexts other than their own. One person wrote, “She allowed people from conflict zones to express their frustration and feelings freely”, while another shared “I became aware of the experiences and pain of others”. The session also encouraged the participants to search for common ground.

Several participants also rated the session *Alumni Group Reflections* very highly as it allowed ample space for the participants to reflect over their learnings from the January workshop and share their experiences with the workshop participants who were not present at the previous interaction. One participant wrote, “We had a lot of time to freely express ourselves and discuss in this session.”

Commenting on the themes of the sessions, several participants mentioned that the session *Cinema and Kashmir: A Terrain to Assert Nationhood* did not quite meet up to their expectations. Some commented that the presentation failed to create an impact due to lack of time for discussion in the session. Some participants were also not satisfied with the Heritage Walk due to the logistical difficulties of handling a large group. At the same time, a substantial number of participants wrote that every session at the workshop was interesting and taught them something new.

There was unanimous appreciation (100%) for the **overall organization of the workshop** and several participants shared that “everyone was treated well and taken care of”. The **ambience** of the workshop was lauded by all (100%) as being very productive and conducive to learning and exchange of ideas. Participants shared that the venue of the workshop, being located on the bank of Dal Lake, induced a very calm atmosphere to engage in, and one student wrote, “our conflicted minds found solace here”. Several participants from Kashmir noted that the sense of peace emanating from the venue was reflective of the fact that “it is not like Kashmir has always been in violence”. A clear majority of 93% felt that **everyone had an opportunity to speak** and participate

and “no one remained unheard”. However, 7% of the respondents felt that “some people did not speak up enough owing to the sensitivity of topics and situation”.

While most participants could not think of any **limitations of the workshop** and felt it was “very productive and fruitful compared to January workshop”, others suggested increasing the duration of the workshop and exploring other options for heritage walks. A need to retain interactive and participatory activities in future workshops was strongly echoed. Suggesting thematic components and ideas that could be included in future workshops, participants proposed the following:

- Nonviolent Communication
- Exploring Culture
- Identity Construction and Empathy Building
- Alumni Reflections
- Gender Violence
- Advanced training in Dialogue
- Storytelling and exploring other creative medium like pictures and books
- More icebreakers and more elaborate introductory sessions
- Inclusion of more Kashmiri Pandits and people from religious minority groups in the region
- Dedicate a day to working in the field and interacting with the locals
- Inclusion of resource persons representing the State, politics and armed forces

Commenting on how they plan to **use and take forward the learning** from the workshop, participants made the following observations:

- 45% of the participants said that they would transform their learnings into **action plans** for constructive social change and partnerships for peace. Keen to “put into action what we have learnt”, participants displayed enthusiasm to work at the grassroots level through local groups like Peace Club and Be the Change in Kashmir. Many hoped to support the idea of initiating a cross-border Student Alliance conceptualized by one of the workshop participants. Others proposed to hold awareness campaigns and street plays to sensitize people about the conflict in Kashmir. Several participants who were interning as teachers at primary schools in Delhi shared that they

would strive to build a peaceful environment in their classrooms and introduce values such as nonviolence, mutual respect and coexistence to their students at an early age.

- 35% of the participants felt the need to **share their learnings and experiences** from the workshop with their friends, family and community members to sensitize them. A student from

*‘It was an enlightening experience to be a part of a group with diverse opinions and different stories to tell. The teachings from this workshop I will carry with myself forever. Not only did we get an insight into the issues underlying the conflict, we also made friends who have enriched our life in many ways.’*

Kashmir shared, “I will educate my friends, classmates and others about the common human qualities that we share, and try to make them understand we mustn’t generalize every Indian to be an ‘oppressor’”. To this end, some participants proposed starting an online newsletter called *Conflict Sensitization* that would invite articles from young people from different regions in India. A Kashmiri participant stated that he would use a local television channel *HBN* to share his experiences and thoughts with the viewers, in the hope to convey a message for peace and coexistence.

- 20% of the workshop participants shared that they would initiate **change at the personal level** before planning to impact the larger society by making a conscious effort to imbibe the learnings in their daily lives and “live in harmony”.

Participants were unanimous (100%) in the expression of their **eagerness to be part of future workshops** that WISCOMP organized. A participant from Kashmir shared ‘WISCOMP has done a great job in making the gap between Kashmir and Delhi less and WISCOMP is really doing a great job in peace building at Kashmir’. A few post-workshop messages that the participants shared via email are reproduced here: ‘It was really a great experience for me. It shows me the way how to contribute to the society and how to interact with people.’



# Programme of Workshop I

## *Unraveling Competing Realities: A Dialogue between Youth Leaders from Srinagar and Delhi*

January 27–29, 2013

India International Center (Annexe), New Delhi

### **JANUARY 27, 2013 (Sunday)**

#### **Interaction Followed by Welcome Dinner\***

Time: 4:30 p.m. – 9:30 p.m.

Venue: Culture Gully, Kingdom of Dreams, Gurgaon

(\*All participants are to arrive at India Habitat Center, Gate No. 1.

WISCOMP has arranged Transport to the venue and back.)

### **JANUARY 28, 2013 (Monday)**

#### **Welcome Remarks**

Dr. Meenakshi Gopinath

Honorary Director, WISCOMP

Time: 9:00 a.m. -9:15 a.m.

Venue: Lecture Hall

#### **Session 1**

##### **Participant Introductions**

Facilitator: Ms. Shirin

Time: 9:15 a.m.-10:45 a.m.

Venue: Lecture Hall

#### **Tea Break**

10:45 a.m. -11:00 a.m.

#### **Session 2**

*Interaction*

##### **Creating Spaces for Peacebuilding**

Resource Person: Dr. Sushobha Barve

Time: 11:00 a.m. -12:00 p.m.

Venue: Lecture Hall

### **Session 3**

*Conversations*

#### **Democratic Rights in Jammu and Kashmir: Problems and Prospects**

Resource Person: Prof. Hameeda Nayeem, Mr. Ahmed Ali Fayyaz

Time: 12:00 p.m.-1:30 p.m.

Venue: Lecture Hall

### **Lunch**

1:30 p.m.-2:15 p.m.

### **Session 4**

*Workshop*

#### **Identity, Conflict and Dialogue**

Resource Person: Ms. Shirin

Time: 2:15 p.m.-3:45 p.m.

Venue: Lecture Hall

### **Tea**

3:45 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

### **Session 5**

*Roundtable*

#### **Women, Conflict, Violence: Exploring Gender Justice**

Speakers: Ms. Rita Manchanda, Ms. Ezabir Ali

Time: 4:00 p.m.-5:15 p.m.

Venue: Lecture Hall

### **JANUARY 29, 2013 (Tuesday)**

### **Session 6**

*Workshop*

#### **Non Violent Communication and Dialogue**

Facilitator: Ms. Elizabeth Kingsnorth

Time: 9:00 a.m.-10:30 a.m.

Venue: Lecture Hall

### **Tea**

10:30 a.m.-10:45 a.m.

## **Session 6 (continued)**

*Workshop*

### **Non Violent Communication and Dialogue**

Facilitator: Ms. Elizabeth Kingsnorth

Time: 10:45 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

Venue: Lecture Hall

## **Session 7**

*Conversations*

### **Conflict Resolution in Jammu and Kashmir: Competing Perspectives**

Resources Persons: Mr. Zafar Choudhary

Time: 12:00 p.m.-1:30 p.m.

Venue: Lecture Hall

## **Lunch**

1:30 p.m. - 2:00 p.m.

## **Session 8**

*Roundtable*

### **Looking Ahead**

Facilitator: Dr. Meenakshi Gopinath, Ms. Seema Kakran

Time: 2:00 p.m. - 2:45 p.m.

Venue: Lecture Hall

## **Session 9**

*Panel Discussion*

### **The Silent Crusaders: A New Awakening**

Panelists: Dr. Maya Joshi, Dr. Aseem Srivastav

Time: 3:15 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Venue: IIC Main Auditorium

## **Session 10**

### **Heritage Walk: Nizamuddin Dargah**

Resource Person: Dr. Navina Jafa

Time: 5:30 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.

# Programme of Follow-up Workshop

*Trust-Building and Coexistence: Transforming Relationships  
between Youth Leaders from Delhi and Jammu and Kashmir*

September 3–5, 2013

Sher-i-Kashmir International Conference Center (SKICC),  
Srinagar

**SEPTEMBER 3, 2013 (Tuesday)**

*Venue: Committee Hall III, SKICC*

**Session 1**

**Workshop Introduction & Ice Breakers**

Facilitator: Ms. Seema Kakran

Time: 9:45 a.m.–11:00 a.m.

**Tea Break**

11:00 a.m. – 11:15 a.m.

**Session 2**

**Exploring Peace through the Arts**

Resource Person: Ms. Feruzan Mehta

Time: 11:15 a.m. – 12:45 p.m.

**Lunch**

12:45 p.m. – 1:30 p.m.

**Session 2 (contd.)**

**Exploring Peace through the Arts**

Resource Person: Ms. Feruzan Mehta

Time: 1:30 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

**Tea Break**

3:00 p.m. – 3:15 p.m.

**Session 3**

**Who am I? Exercises in Exploring Identities**

Resource Person: Ms. Shirin

Time: 3:15 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.

**SEPTEMBER 4, 2013 (Wednesday)**

*Venue: Committee Hall III, SKICC*

**Session 4**

**Alumni Group Reflections**

Facilitator: Ms. Seema Kakran

Time: 9:45 a.m. – 10:45 a.m.

**Tea Break**

10:45 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

**Session 5**

**Who am I? Exercises in Exploring Identities**

Resource Person: Ms. Shirin

Time: 11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

**Lunch**

1:00 p.m. – 1:45 p.m.

**Session 6**

**Cinema and Kashmir: A Terrain to Assert Nationhood**

Resource Person: Dr. Sabina Kidwai

Time: 1:45 p.m. – 3:15 p.m.

**Tea Break**

3:15 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.

**Session 6 (contd.)**

**Cinema and Kashmir: A Terrain to Assert Nationhood**

Resource Person: Dr. Sabina Kidwai

Time: 3:30 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

**SEPTEMBER 5 (Thursday)**

*Venue: Main Entrance, SKICC*

**Session 7**

**Heritage Walk: Lal Ded Cultural Center**

Resource Person: Prof. Saleem Beg

Time: 9: 30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

(Participants are requested to arrive punctually at 8:30 a.m. at SKICC. The group will travel together to the Heritage Walk site.)

**Lunch (Centaur Lake View Hotel)**

12:30 p.m. – 1:30 p.m.

## Profiles of Resource Persons

**Ahmed Ali Fayyaz** (Srinagar) is a senior journalist and television producer based in Srinagar and works as the Jammu and Kashmir Bureau Chief for *The Hindu*. Previously, he worked at the *Daily Excelsior* (Jammu). He has participated in international conferences on the Kashmir issue in London, Toronto, and Brussels and attended workshops organized by the Washington D.C. based Institute for Multi-Track Diplomacy on the transformation of the Kashmir Conflict. In 2005, he visited USA on the U.S. State Department's prestigious International Visitor Leadership Programme. In 2003–4, he was the first recipient of the Jammu and Kashmir State Award instituted by the Mufti Sayeed Government.

**Aseem Srivastav** (New Delhi) is co-author of *Churning the Earth: The Making of Global India*, (Viking Penguin, New Delhi, 2012). He wrote his doctoral thesis in environmental economics at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, USA. Mr. Srivastav has taught economics for many years in India and the US. He has written extensively on globalization and its impacts.

**Elizabeth Kingsnorth** (Chennai) works as a process facilitator, trainer, mediator, and coach. She is currently a consultant with Lalaji Memorial Omega International School—an institution founded by her Guruji to transmit human and spiritual values through education. Ms. Kingsnorth practices Sahaj Marg, a heart-centered meditation. Before coming to India, Ms. Kingsnorth was the Founding Director of an organization consultancy in Scotland, specializing in 'people development'. She is an accredited international trainer with the Center for Nonviolent Communication (NVC).

**Ezabir Ali** (Srinagar) is a Health and Development Professional and has been working for the psychosocial health and economic empowerment of women in Kashmir. She is a trainer, healer, and conciliator. Ms. Ali has worked as a Project Officer in the Rural Development Department, Kashmir. She is a board member of the Jammu & Kashmir Voluntary Health Association and has worked with WISCOMP to conceptualize a program for training health workers and schoolteachers in counseling skills.

**Feruzan Mehta** (Gwalior) is an Educator who specializes in curriculum development and teacher training, with particular interest in schooling

for marginalized communities. She is currently involved in an initiative aimed at training teachers to weave peace across different areas of the curriculum. Previously, Ms. Mehta was Program Director at Seeds of Peace, India, which is an international organization that empowers youth to become leaders of tomorrow.

**Hameeda Nayeem** (Srinagar), a core member of the *Athwaas* initiative of WISCOMP, is a Professor of English at Kashmir University. She is Chairperson, Center for Social and Development Studies and is Founder Member, Women Waging Peace, an initiative of Harvard University's Kennedy School. Her publications include *Rhythms of Life: Early Fiction of Margaret Drabble* and *Demystifying Ideology: Identity, Gender and Politics in Kashmir*. Dr. Nayeem has participated in the UN conference on women in New York, in deliberations on the UN Commission on Human Rights, and the International Conference on Women and Millennium Goals in Pakistan.

**Maya Joshi** (New Delhi) is Associate Professor, Department of English, Lady Shri Ram College for Women, University of Delhi and is also Editor of the Tibet House Bulletin, Tibet House, New Delhi. She holds a Masters' of Philosophy degree in English Literature from the University of Delhi and has recently completed her doctorate in the same subject.

**Navina Jafa** (New Delhi) is a Heritage Educationist and Classical Dancer. She is the Director of the Indian Cultural Heritage Research. She is also a cultural activist, an academician, a performing artist, a cultural historian, and a cultural entrepreneur. She specializes in creative activities including academic cultural tourism, cultural representation, cultural diplomacy, arts in development programs, and conflict transformation through the arts. She received her PhD from Jamia Millia Islamia. She is author of *Performing Heritage: Art of Exhibit Walks*, Sage, 2012.

**Rita Manchanda** (New Delhi) is Director Research, South Asia Forum for Human Rights. She is also Program Advisor for the Human Rights and Peace Audit of Partitions as a Method of Conflict Resolution. She has previously been assigned as Gender Expert, Commonwealth Technical Fund in Sri Lanka and at SAFHR she founded and developed the programs – 'Women Conflict and Peace-building' and 'Media and Conflict'. Among her many publications is an edited volume entitled *Women War and Peace in South Asia: Beyond Victimhood to Agency* which has been a pioneering study on feminist theorizing and praxis

on conflict and peace building. She is an alumnus of University of Geneva.

**Sabina Kidwai** (New Delhi) is Associate Professor of Film Editing at Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, where she is also enrolled as a Doctoral candidate. She has worked as an editor for a number of documentaries and has directed a film titled ‘Shadows of Freedom’ for the Public Service Broadcasting Trust, Delhi. She has also co-directed a film titled ‘Diminishing Resources’ as part of the UK Environment Film Fellowship (2006), which was widely telecast on Discovery and National Geographic channels. She has co-authored *Illusion of Power* and *Crossing the Sacred Line*. She was a recipient of the Scholar of Peace fellowship from WISCOMP and her work was published as *A study on the representation of Muslim Women in Media 1985-2001*.

**Saleem Beg** (Srinagar) is Convener of Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage, Jammu and Kashmir Chapter. Mr. Beg is also Founder Trustee of Indian Heritage Cities Network Foundation, a UNESCO sponsored Trust. He is affiliated with several national and international organizations including Working Group on Climate Change, University of Kashmir; National Council for Promotion of Urdu, Human Resource Development Ministry; Shalimar Gardens Network, Department of Landscape Architecture, University of Illinois, USA; Restoration and Conservation of Ancient Shrines in Srinagar, Prince Claus Trust, Netherlands. Mr. Beg was honored with the INTACH-Satte National Award for Heritage Conservation (2009) and conferred Honorary Fellowship and Life Membership of International Association of Ladakh Studies, Leh.

**Shirin** (New Delhi) is a theater practitioner and educator using both street and proscenium theater. Most of her work deals with peace between communities and also women’s rights. Organizations she has worked with include the US Network for Global Economic Justice, Peace Vigil, and the Pilgrimage Project (in the USA) and Nishant Natya Manch in India. Her educational experience includes facilitating workshops for the Institute for Policy Studies and teaching theater for public education at various universities in the United States, including the San Francisco School of Arts, University of Maryland, Georgetown University, and Catholic University. She holds degrees in Journalism from Lady Sri Ram College and in Women’s Studies from La Trobe University, Australia.



**Sushobha Barve** (New Delhi) is the Executive Director of Center for Dialogue and Reconciliation. Ms. Barve has received several awards including being one of the 1000 women nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. She was elected to an Ashoka Fellowship in 2005. She is the author of *Healing Streams: Bringing Hope in the Aftermath of Violence*. Ms. Barve is a founding member and trustee of the Mumbai Mohalla Committee Movement Trust, which functioned from 1992-2000 to set up citizens-police joint ventures. She also served on the Governor's Peace Committee during the Mumbai riots of 1992-93. Ms. Barve joined Moral Re-Armament (now called Initiatives of Change) as a volunteer after college and continued working with the organization for many years building bridges of understanding across the divides in South Asia.

**Zafar Choudhary** (Jammu) is the Honorary Director of Indus Research Foundation, a Jammu based research initiative. He is also Asia Society Fellow on India-Pakistan Young Leaders Forum. He is currently Editorial Advisor with *Rising Kashmir*. Mr. Choudhary was previously the Editor-in-Chief of *Epilogue*, a monthly current affairs magazine on Jammu and Kashmir. He has been Resident Editor of the English daily, *Kashmir Images* (Jammu edition) and Executive Director of the Center for Media Research and Documentation.

## Profiles of Participants

**Aamir Shafi Mir** (Srinagar) is pursuing a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration at The Islamic University of Science and Technology, Awantipora.

**Abdul Basit Wani** (Srinagar) is a student of International Relations at Islamic University of Science and Technology, Awantipora. He holds Bachelors' degrees in Arts and Law from the University of Kashmir.

**Abhijit Bhattacharjee** (Delhi) is pursuing a Masters' degree in Development Studies at Ambedkar University, New Delhi. Simultaneously, he is also pursuing a Diploma in Creative Writing in English at IGNOU. He holds a Bachelors' degree in Political Science from University of Delhi.

**Aditi Dhyani** (Delhi) is pursuing a Bachelors' degree in Elementary Education at Lady Shri Ram College, University of Delhi. She is President of the Department of Elementary Education at her college.

**Afroza Rashid** (Srinagar) is currently a Doctoral candidate. She holds a Bachelors' degree in Education and Masters' and M.Phil degrees in Kashmiri Literature. With an avid interest in writing short stories and poetry, Ms. Rashid is a member of a writers' group called Qalamkar Samithi.

**Akorshi Sengupta** (New Delhi) is pursuing a combined Bachelors' and Masters' degree program in Clinical Psychology at Amity University, Noida. Mr. Sengupta is a Fellow at the Nokia Create to Inspire Fellowship which aims to promote sustainable consumption through the medium of art.

**Akshay Bhat** (Jammu) is a student of Mechanical Engineering at Shri Mata Vaishno Devi University, Katra.

**Anjali Chhabra** (New Delhi) is pursuing a Masters' degree in conflict resolution at Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi. As a part of her Masters' thesis, she is undertaking a gendered analysis of Muslim Personal Law in Jammu & Kashmir.

**Arif Amin** (Srinagar) is pursuing a Masters' degree in International Relations from University of Kashmir. He holds a Bachelors' degree in Education from Kashmir Creative Education Foundation B. Ed College, Pulwama.

**Basil Mohammad** (Srinagar) is pursuing his graduation in Civil Engineering at SSM College of Engineering and Technology, Srinagar.

**Dheeba Nazir** (Srinagar) is a Lecturer of Urdu at University of Kashmir. She holds a Bachelors' degree in Education and has completed Post-Graduation in Kashmiri Literature, Urdu and Education. She holds a Diploma in Computer Science and Textile Designing. Ms. Nazir is Coordinator of Qalamkaar Samith, a group of young writers in Kashmir.

**Diksha Poddar** (New Delhi) is pursuing a Masters' degree in Development Studies at Ambedkar University, New Delhi. Recently, she completed a Post-Graduate Diploma course in Conflict Transformation and Peacebuilding at Lady Sri Ram College, New Delhi.

**Faik Ali** (Srinagar) is a student at Islamic University of Science and Technology, Awantipora.

**Fouzia Khan** (Srinagar) is pursuing a Bachelors' degree in Education at Government College of Education, Srinagar. She also holds a Bachelors' degree in Science from Government College for Women, Srinagar.

**Himani Saini** (New Delhi) is pursuing a Bachelors' degree in Elementary Education at Lady Shri Ram College for Women, New Delhi.

**Iqra Zaffar** (Srinagar) is pursuing a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration at The Islamic University of Science and Technology, Awantipora.

**Irm Mehraj Janwari** (Srinagar) is pursuing a Bachelors' degree in Education at Government College of Education, Srinagar. Previously, she has done her graduation with non-medical as her subjects from Government Degree College, Baramulla.

**Jahangir Saani** (Srinagar) is pursuing a Bachelors' degree in Science at Government Degree College, Srinagar. He is a passionate writer and was awarded the title of Poet of the Month for his contribution to *Kashmir Insight*, a monthly magazine.

**Javaid Lone** (Srinagar) is a student at the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism at Islamic University of Science and Technology, Awantipora. He also works as a Reporter at Kashmir Observer.

**Lavanya Nath** (New Delhi) is pursuing a Post-Graduate Diploma in Conflict Transformation and Peacebuilding at Lady Shri Ram College for Women, New Delhi.

**Mohammad Abbas Mir** (Srinagar) is pursuing a Bachelors' degree in Education at Government College of Education in Srinagar. He holds Bachelors' and Masters' degrees in Kashmiri from the University of Kashmir, Srinagar.

**Moutuchi Tamuly** (Delhi) is pursuing a Masters' degree in Political Science from Jamia Millia Islamia University, New Delhi. She holds a Bachelors' degree in Political Science from University of Delhi and finished her schooling from Cotton College, Assam.

**Mukarram Ahmad Wahid** (Srinagar) is pursuing a Bachelors' degree in History from St. Stephen's College, University of Delhi.

**Munazah Gul** (Srinagar) is pursuing a Bachelors' degree in Electronics and Communications Engineering at Islamic University of Science and Technology, Awantipora.

**Nadeem Ahmad** (Srinagar) is pursuing a Masters' degree in International Relations at University of Kashmir. He holds a Bachelors' degree in Education from Kashmir Creative Education Foundation B.Ed College, Pulwama.

**Nadia Mushtaq** (Srinagar) is pursuing a Bachelors' degree in Arts (Political Science, Sociology and Economics) at Government College for Women, Srinagar.

**Naincy** (New Delhi) is pursuing a Bachelors' degree in Elementary Education at Lady Shri Ram College for Women, New Delhi.

**Neha Jagtiani** (New Delhi) is pursuing a Bachelors' degree in Psychology at Lady Shri Ram College for Women, New Delhi.

**Nehal Ahmed** (Delhi) is pursuing a Bachelors' degree in Political Science at Jamia Millia Islamia University (JMI), New Delhi. He is co-convener of Jamia Discussion Forum which provides a platform for debate on socio-political issues.

**Nighat Shafiq** (Srinagar) is pursuing a Bachelors' degree in Law at Kashmir Creative Education Foundation Law College, Pulwama. She has worked on a project 'Save Dal Lake' and produced a short documentary on the same, propagating environmental activism.

**Niyati Choudhary** (New Delhi) is pursuing a Post Graduate Diploma course in Conflict Transformation and Peacebuilding at Lady Shri Ram College for Women, New Delhi. She holds a Bachelors' degree in Business Administration.

**Nuzma Magray** (Anantnag) is pursuing a Bachelors' degree in Actuarial And Financial Mathematics at Islamic University of Science and Technology, Awantipora.

**Osheen Tripathi** (Delhi) is pursuing a Bachelors' degree in Economics at Lady Shri Ram College for Women, University of Delhi.

**Priyancka Kalra** (New Delhi) is pursuing a course in Conflict Analysis and Peacebuilding at Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi. She has worked with the Tehelka Foundation and completed internships with various NGOs and journalists in Kashmir.

**Priyanka Saini** (New Delhi) is pursuing a Bachelors' degree in Elementary Education at Lady Shri Ram College for Women, University of Delhi.

**Sagnik Banerjee** (Delhi) is pursuing a Masters' degree in Conflict Analysis and Peace Building at the Nelson Mandela Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution at Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi. He holds a Bachelors' degree in History from Loyola College, Chennai. **Saila** (Srinagar) is pursuing a Bachelors' degree in Education at Government College of Education, Srinagar. She holds a Bachelors' degree in Arts.

**Salman Khan** (Srinagar) is pursuing a Bachelors' degree in Business Administration from Islamic University of Science and Technology, Awantipora.

**Sampurnaa Dutta** (Delhi) is pursuing a Masters' degree in Political Science from Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi. She completed her undergraduate studies at Indraprastha College for Women, University of Delhi.

**Sangini Kumar** (Delhi) is pursuing a Bachelors' degree in Economics at Lady Shri Ram College for Women, New Delhi.

**Sanobar Hamid** (Srinagar) is pursuing a Bachelors' degree in Law at KCEF Law College, Srinagar.

**Sara Hasan** (New Delhi) is working as Program Coordinator at Kutumb Foundation, New Delhi. She holds a Masters' degree in Conflict

Analysis & Peacebuilding from Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi. She has completed a Diploma in Global Perspectives of Democracy and New Media at the University of Virginia.

**Seerat Mushtaq** (Srinagar) is a student in the Department of Actuarial and Financial Mathematics at Islamic University of Science and Technology, Awantipora.

**Shweta Sharma** (New Delhi) is pursuing a Bachelors' degree in Elementary Education at Lady Shri Ram College for Women, New Delhi.

**Snober Hamid** (Srinagar) is pursuing a Bachelors' degree in Law at KCEF Law College, Srinagar.

**Suhail Ahmad Bhat** (Pulwama) is a student at Islamic University of Science and Technology, Awantipora.

**Surya Ghildiyal** (Delhi) is pursuing a Masters' degree in Conflict Analysis and Peace Building at the Nelson Mandela Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution at Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi.

**Syed Ameer Hamza** (New Delhi) is pursuing a Masters' degree in Conflict Analysis and Peacebuilding at the Nelson Mandela Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution at Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi.

**Tarun Baid** (New Delhi) is pursuing M Phil in Chinese Politics at the Department of East Asian Studies, University of Delhi, New Delhi. He holds a Masters' degree in Conflict Analysis and Peacebuilding, a Bachelors' degree in History and a Post Graduate Diploma in International Humanitarian and Human Rights Law.

**Ufra 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 found Paigaam: A Message for Peace, Inc., an international nonprofit NGO, where she serves as the founding Executive Director.

**Umair Gul** (New Delhi) is pursuing a Masters' degree in Conflict Analysis and Peacebuilding in the Nelson Mandela Center for Peace and Conflict Resolution at Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi.

**Umar Mukhtar Tantary** (Srinagar) holds a Diploma in Computer Applications, Bachelors' degree in Education and Masters' degree in

Urdu from University of Kashmir. He has many years of experience in News Casting and hosted the program “*Shagufe*” in Doordarshan Kendra, Srinagar and also hosted programs at Radio Kashmir.

**Vasudha Dhawan** (New Delhi) is pursuing a Bachelors’ degree in Psychology (Honors) from Lady Shri Ram College for Women, New Delhi.

