Since its inception in 1999, WISCOMP (Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace) has carved a unique niche for itself, as an initiative, which works at the confluence of gender, security and conflict transformation. It was established as part of the efforts of the Foundation for Universal Responsibility of HH the Dalai Lama to promote the leadership of women in areas of peace, security and international affairs. Through its various programs, WISCOMP has emerged as a resource for conducting research, training and advocacy, and for providing policy briefs to parliamentarians and diplomats.
This initiative was made possible with support from the Embassy of Finland, New Delhi.
Introduction

The two-day convention on *Women in Dialogue: Envisioning the Road Ahead in Jammu and Kashmir*, organized on August 5 and 6, 2006, in New Delhi was a continuation of a process that began with the roundtable *Breaking the Silence: Women and Kashmir*, held in 2000. It was an outcome of a conscious decision on the part of the WISCOMP initiative to acknowledge and work with a new constituency of women peacemakers in Kashmir whose experiences and vision can decisively shape dialogic processes.

The vexed issue of Jammu and Kashmir has been debated at various fora around the world for more than six decades now. Initially envisioned as a bilateral and strategic issue between India and Pakistan, the outbreak of the armed conflict in Indian Administered Kashmir since 1989 drove home two related points. One, the talk and text around Jammu and Kashmir could no longer be exclusively around “territory”, it had to include issues related to the security and well being of the “people” who inhabited that territory. Two, for sustainable peace, multiple stakeholders had to be brought into the process. The voices of women and men of Jammu and Kashmir, representing different regions, ethnicities, religions, and political beliefs had to be factored into an inclusive and plural peace process.

While India and Pakistan continue their engagement with the Kashmir issue as part of the composite dialogue, within the Indian administered part of Jammu and Kashmir, since 2003, there has been an attempt to initiate talks with the so called separatists represented by the All Party Hurriyat Conference. The roundtable conference in Srinagar on May 24 and 25, 2006, which was preceded by the Prime Minister’s Roundtable Conference in New Delhi on February 25, 2006, was envisioned as part of this process of engaging with the different stakeholders within Jammu and Kashmir. The question of inclusions and exclusions at this roundtable has been the subject of heated discussions and debates and has raised two fundamental questions. First, who represents the people of Kashmir? Two, what are the issues that need to be prioritized in envisioning the road ahead as peace processes unfold and dialogue is initiated at multiple levels between different stakeholders?

Women have been conspicuous only by their absence in the dialogic processes that are now unfolding in Jammu and Kashmir. What do the women of Jammu and Kashmir see as the road ahead? Where, if at all, do they locate themselves in the larger peace process that is unfolding? What have been their experiences of the armed conflict and how can this experience shape prospective peace processes? What does the total exclusion of women from the high table indicate?

This convention was an attempt to introspect on these issues. By providing a space for women to articulate their concerns on the nature of the conflict and chart possible paths for the future, WISCOMP and its initiative in Kashmir, *Athwaas*, (a Kashmiri word that means a handshake and consists of a group of Kashmiri women across ethnic faultlines who work at the confluence of development, education and reconciliation initiatives) seeks to bring to the attention of policy makers and key players that a peace process that excludes more than half the population also risks the possibility of excluding several creative solutions and options.

Consequently the convention sought to do the following:

- Identify and critically engage with the existing conceptual and methodological frameworks within which the current peace process in Jammu and Kashmir is located.
- Promote a better understanding of processes of dialogue and engage with their possibilities and limits.
- Contribute proactively to the ongoing dialogue on the peace process in Jammu and Kashmir by placing women’s perspectives and their visions of the road ahead squarely on the table.
- Assess the impact of using the alphabet of gender to shape the dialogue process.
• Strengthen the community of women peacebuilders in Kashmir by providing them a context to share their views, and to identify the skills they need in order to play a visible and meaningful role in talks and dialogues on the future of Jammu and Kashmir.

The convention began with an opening plenary which was attended by participants from Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh, and some key policy makers. The purpose of the plenary was to foreground women’s voices from different regions of Jammu and Kashmir, and connect with their vision of the opportunities and limitations of the dialogic processes that are currently unfolding.

This was followed by close-door working group discussions by members of the delegation from Jammu and Kashmir around four broad thematic rubrics. The onus was on identifying specific steps that can be taken by the women of Jammu and Kashmir in each of the following areas:

• Politics, Law and Governance.
• Economic development and planning, issues of relief and rehabilitation and disaster management.
• Cultural initiatives between people of the different regions of the state and from both sides of the Line of Control.
• Health and psychosocial healing.

Within these broad areas of engagement, the working groups specifically addressed the issue of rehabilitation of women particularly widows and “half widows”; measures to preserve the spirit of Kashmiriyat, and intra-regional dialogue that could be specifically undertaken by women. The role of women in local self-governance, representation of women in processes of negotiation and dialogue, steps that can be taken by women to prevent human rights violations by security forces and militants, and the politics of disaster management also formed part of the discussions. The convergences and divergences in the experiences of the Kashmir valley, Jammu region and Ladakh informed the deliberations. Each group prepared a working paper on their deliberations and listed policy recommendations.

The groups collectively re-convened at the closing session where the four working papers with specific recommendations were shared with a larger audience including key policy makers.

The participants included women and men from various sub-regions of Jammu and Kashmir. There were, for instance, representatives from the hill district of Doda and Ladakh, including the remote district of Kargil, representing a variety of political, cultural, ethnic, gender and economic identities. The group included people who have already been acquainted with the initiatives of Athwaas and also those who were new but equally and vitally important to the process of peacebuilding and management. The convention marked an attempt to broaden the community of active engaged women peacemakers in Jammu and Kashmir by inviting prominent women from all walks of life who have not hitherto been a part of the WISCOMP–Athwaas process to share collectively in re-imagining futures. The following report tables the range of issues that formed the subject of discussions.

This convention was made possible by the financial support of the Embassy of Finland in New Delhi. We are grateful to the Foundation for Universal Responsibility and to Mr. Rajiv Mehrotra for support and encouragement and to Dr. Meenakshi Gopinath, Honorary Director, WISCOMP, for her vision and guidance. We greatly appreciate the determination and efforts of Ms. Ashima Kaul who worked tirelessly to make this convention possible. We acknowledge the contributions of Mr. Harish Bhatt, Ms. Manjri Sewak, Ms. Stuti Bhatnagar, Ms. Deepti Mahajan, Ms. Tonusree Basu, and Ms. Asha Titus in enabling this initiative to take off. Special thanks are due to Ms. Sandhya Nambiar, who provided the initial inputs on which this report is based.

Sumona DasGupta  
WISCOMP  
Foundation for Universal Responsibility of His Holiness the Dalai Lama
The convention opened with a plenary session with participants from Jammu and Kashmir, key policy makers and activists in attendance, the purpose of which was to foreground women’s voices from the different regions of Jammu and Kashmir. The session also aimed to consolidate the various voices seeking to establish peace in the region, which had been the site of a protracted conflict for more than a decade leaving behind a trail of destruction.

The welcome address was delivered by the Secretary/Trustee of the Foundation for Universal Responsibility of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Rajiv Mehrotra, who spoke about the WISCOMP impetus that derived from His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s progressive vision which transcends specific political agendas to engage with regional and international initiatives and campaigns that promote values of universal responsibility.

Speaking about the iconic encapsulation of “universal responsibility” by His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Mehrotra remarked that it is the philosophical insight into the nature of interdependence, which formulates the concept of true happiness and peace, and impacts the engagement with processes of dialogue.

Commenting on the development of ideas and solutions for creative engagement with the world and the need to foreground the empathetic level of experience that can be provided by women, Mehrotra applauded and acknowledged the initiative and spirit of WISCOMP; the unique nature and role it plays in the areas of gender, conflict management and transformation; its members who share in the vision of WISCOMP; and the efforts of all the participants present.

Meenakshi Gopinath, Honorary Director, WISCOMP, highlighted that the work in Kashmir initiated by WISCOMP has primarily been to facilitate dialogue and in the process replace the fractious and confrontationist mode of communication with vocabularies that are inclusive. Genuine dialogue is by definition open-ended, flowing, even tentative. It explores rather than settles. The flux, even the collision of ideas opens up avenues of inventiveness. To seek a sterile uniformity where a richer diversity exists, is to stop “active listening.” integral to dialogic processes. Gopinath pointed out that dialogue requires constant openness to positive ideas. It accepts the fact that responses have to be flexible since positions and identities are not fixed.

The convention was a celebration of and tribute to a group of remarkable women and men who are the core group of the Athwaas initiative of WISCOMP and their fascinating personal and political journeys that today have the markings of a unique movement in strife-torn Jammu and Kashmir.

Tracing the trajectory of this journey, Gopinath drew attention to the roundtable in 2000 when the faultlines in Jammu and Kashmir foreclosed communication of any kind and fostered suspicion, animosity and even hatred. The Athwaas initiative that grew out of this roundtable represented diverse positions, identities, perspectives, and took its first tentative steps towards dialogue in a hitherto uncharted direction. In a journey that sought to break the silence of women, it transcended faultlines, framing responses to the grassroots realities, and providing safe spaces for processes of reconciliation, called samanbals. From expanding the parameters of local access, engaging with possibilities in the enabling provisions of the 73rd amendment and the Rights to Information,
grappling with the limits of the J and K Permanent Resident (Disqualification) Bill of 2004 to exploring creative spaces for expression of the anguish of displacement and disruption, the Athwaas initiative has consistently explored new paradigms of engagement.

This convention represented their vision of bringing these and other narratives for policy makers to hear – for in the evolving contours of the Right to Information there must be a context for policy makers and decision makers to listen to the voices and sentiments from the ground that seek utterance. The fundamental questions that this convention sought to address were: Was the continued exclusion of women representatives from the high table justified? Was it wise? Can there be a sustainable peace process that marginalizes this sizable group? Gopinath expressed the hope that the convention would open several doors for the free flow of thoughts and articulations and help bridge the gap between civil society and policy makers.

Sumona DasGupta, Assistant Director, WISCOMP, in her remarks, highlighted the diversity of the group that had come together at the convention. The diversity profile could be mapped in terms of not just ethnic backgrounds, religious and regional affiliations but also political affiliations, and the diversity in the manner in which the group had experienced the conflict. One of the fundamental premises on which the Athwaas initiative was built was that this diversity enhances the scope of dialogic engagement, opening up more and more creative avenues for thinking about the road ahead.

The convention sought to provide a connecting space to dialogue, even ‘multilogue’ at different levels. DasGupta expressed the hope that it would generate a series of dialogues in at least three discernable levels:

- Dialogues between the different groups of women from all three regions of Jammu and Kashmir.
- Dialogue between the women and men of Jammu and Kashmir who also believe in the same ideals of diverse expressions and gender justice.
- Dialogue between the policy makers, bureaucrats and the members of civil society.

DasGupta pointed out that that the aim of this exercise was not to hammer out solutions but to privilege dialogue and processes over solutions and outcomes. She expressed the hope that ‘solutions’ would evolve organically suggesting that the process may well show the way, and hence had to be valued in its own right.
Parvez Dewan, the Chairman and Managing Director of the India Tourism and Development Corporation (ITDC), and former Resident Commissioner of Jammu & Kashmir in New Delhi, then introduced the Chairperson of the conference, Wajahat Habibullah, currently Central Information Commissioner, Government of India. Speaking about his experiences while working with Habibullah in the state of J&K, Dewan admired the courage and determination displayed by him even at the height of militancy, and remembered particularly the events at Sopore, district Baramulla, where Habibullah was trapped in a gun battle with the militants. Dewan indicated that the character and personality of an administrator could determine the manner in which policy is shaped and executed and the manner in which the people perceive it.

Habibullah congratulated the WISCOMP initiative and the women of J&K who have essayed a major role in the reconciliation efforts. He remarked that the solution lies within, in the hands of the people and that exchange of ideas is the correct path towards conflict resolution in the region. Habibullah spoke of the beauty and glory of Kashmir, its traditions of nonviolence and tolerance and its Sufi culture, contrasting it with the present scenario of bloodshed, hatred, terrorism and violence that taints the beautiful landscape.

He wondered if the seeds of this current situation were sown before Independence or in the 1980s and which then came to a head in the 1990s. He asked also if India and its people have accepted the fact that the people of Kashmir acceded to India because they wanted to be part of it instead of being coerced to do so and if things would have been different if the loyalty of the people of Kashmir had not always been called into question.

He stressed that democracy should be allowed to work freely in the region instead of being constantly obstructed, and gave the example of the Right To Information (RTI) Act that has existed in the state since 2004, but is effectively toothless as an instrument of power in the hands of the people because of its various qualifying clauses and sub clauses.

He also stressed the role of WISCOMP in the peacebuilding efforts in the region, and hoped for reconciliation of differences. Debunking the theory that what happened in 1989-1990 was a proxy war, Habibullah said that the problem was that of widespread insurgency and denying that fundamental truth would not pave the way for solutions. While Pakistan’s hand in fuelling the insurgency was unmistakable, the causes for the widespread discontent called for introspection as to what had gone wrong internally, as a result of the flawed policies of the Government of India.

De-emphasizing the essentialized image of women as “natural” peacemakers, Habibullah pointed out that when popular insurgency broke out in the Valley, the women supported it. In the course of time the movement itself underwent several changes in its character, and the attitude of the women of Kashmir viz-a-viz a violent
militant movement also underwent a change. As victims of a militarized society and state, through the course of the conflict, women have been the major sufferers. Instances of rape, murder and torture of women abound, and it is up to the women to take a stand to make a difference and help rebuild the peace efforts and work towards resolution of the conflict. It is they who have to organize themselves into a movement for peace and know the direction that they have to take.

Habibullah blamed the social downslide in the state on the treatment meted out to the women. Psychological and healthcare conditions are at the lowest levels and the recent sex scandal is proof that the youth, children and women are suffering from a lack of basic psychological counseling and healthcare.

He remarked that for closure to be achieved, it is important to address all these issues concerning the women of J&K. Citing the example of the Kunan Poshpora case, where the women were raped by the army personnel, he pointed out that while there were conflicting reports on the nature and number of this gendered violation, the point is that women from the village were shunned for years. Emphasizing the importance of accountability and transparency in administration, he quoted Mahatma Gandhi, who had once stated that the idea is not to substitute one ruler with another, but to make rulers accountable for the manner of their rule.

In the discussion, which followed, issues of human rights violations specially where victims were women, were repeatedly raised. A participant raised a question concerning the rape of women in the Kunan Poshpora village, which is a matter of controversy due to the controversial verdict returned on it. She affirmed that there was hardly a woman who was not raped, and that with families suffering such ignominy and who felt so alienated, there is very little chance for peace and reconciliation. Sonia Jabbar, writer and activist, commented on the need to acknowledge the trauma of the sufferers and sought a redefinition of the parameters of rape and issues of what she called “hyper-nationalism.”

Arijimand Talib of Action Aid, Srinagar, raised a point about grassroots governance, and commented that the critical point with regard to local governance and the panchayati raj system in J&K has been missed. He suggested establishing a party-less system, which could address the different democratic projects.

Making a case for a citizen-driven peace process, Habibullah remarked that instead of looking to state agencies and governing bodies, the people of J&K would have to come up with creative and viable solutions to the conflict and be more active in order to move forward.

Hameeda Nayeem, faculty, Kashmir University and member of the Athwaas initiative, concluding the session, lauded the efforts of Habibullah, not only to engage in dialogue, but also to humanize the establishment in Delhi and to bring a democratic voice to the conflict in Kashmir. She remarked that it was refreshing not to dwell on empty rhetoric, but to participate actively in dialogue and in seeking solutions.
Women in Dialogue: The Athwaas Journey

The WISCOMP conference *Breaking the Silence*, held in 2000, was one of the first steps in the direction of peacebuilding through dialogue and communication between women who lived different realities but shared a collective trauma. Despite the trauma suffered they could not speak freely with or trust one another due to the political and social walls that had been built up since the outbreak of armed violence in 1989. It was a path-breaking step for them to meet each other and talk to one another, and to discover common ground and similarities. The initiative called *Athwaas*, which followed this roundtable, traces its beginnings to 2000-2001 as a non-formal space for dialogue.

In the session on *The Athwaas Journey*, moderated by Sumona DasGupta, Ashima Kaul, WISCOMP Consultant on Kashmir and Coordinator of the *Athwaas initiative*, mentioned the efforts of the *Athwaas* members – Qurrat-ul-Ain, Ather Zia, Hameeda Nayeem, Gurmeet Kaur, Ezabir Ali, Nirojini Bhat, Khalida Hanjura, Neerja Mattoo, A. R. Hanjura and Bilquis Bhat, who have traveled as a group to the remote villages in the Valley, especially in Northern Kashmir and to migrant camps of Kashmiri Pandits and those of people from Doda, Pooneh and Rajouri in Jammu – and have documented the experiences of women. Multiple identities and histories are under threat and most of the people, particularly the women, feel very vulnerable.

In this humanitarian crisis, pointed out Kaul, everybody has experienced a sense of loss. As long as policy makers are focused primarily on government bodies and depend only on diplomatic tools, **the deeper issues remain unresolved, until the time a human dimension is added to it.** Kaul assessed conflict management and resolution options in the state and found a glaring vacuum in terms of citizen-driven initiatives by women. This is where *Athwaas* bridges the gap and opens up spaces in civil society for dialogue and reconciliation, and helps transform the situation from one of violence and recriminations to that of dialogue and peace. **Dialogue provides the much-needed space required to build bridges and bring down walls, and dispel assumptions and myths about the ‘other’**.

Kaul pointed at two major transformations achieved in this regard within *Athwaas*:

- The women felt safe and free to express themselves. It was a safe, non-judgmental space, and there was a huge sense of acceptance, which went a long way towards the establishment of trust and understanding. It is felt that there is now a need to extend that space to other areas as well.

- There is an attempt at sincere understanding and not to posit one truth over another. Different truths and realities are accepted and held equally valid.

Since *Athwaas* was never meant as a dialogue directed towards final outcomes, and the destination is not fixed, the journey is essentially a non-linear one and spaces are built in for changes and correction at every point. **The process had become important in its own right and had emerged as a model of dialogic engagement that had implications even for the larger citizen-driven peace engagements.**
In view of the ways in which the violence has impacted the lives of women, the manner in which their grief had been co-opted into political games, and their voices forced into silences, the women at Athwaas have decided to reject violence resulting in the death of innocent civilians in any form and from any source.

They sought to replicate the Athwaas model at the local grassroots level, which led to the creation of Samanbal centers (the name connotes a ‘safe meeting space’) for women to meet and share their hopes and aspirations without fear or animosity, in a way that that restores the dignity of women and helps them build trust and negotiate for peace.

DasGupta, summarizing the essence of the questions that followed the presentations, drew attention to two major concerns that had been raised and invited Athwaas as a team to respond to these.

- In what way had the Athwaas project emerged as something more than just ‘listening to narratives?’ How many women had benefited from this project beyond finding the emotional solace coming from the fact that someone was ready to listen to their narratives?
- What steps had Athwaas taken to bring political grievances of the women to the notice of the government? What had Athwaas done as a team to redress these?

The Athwaas members responded in a number of ways to these issues. Ezabir Ali explained that each Athwaas member had taken an initiative individually that represented a movement forward from the first stage of listening to different narratives. Her own initiative for instance had helped empower a number of health workers in Budgam (Central Kashmir) and Pulwama (South Kashmir) with psychosocial counseling skills that represented a value added to their work profile as regular health workers. As a result of successive training sessions the self-image of these community workers had greatly increased and they had emerged as an important human resource within the village. Similarly Nirojini Bhat elaborated on the initiative she had undertaken in the Purkho migrant camp in Jammu, which served the dual purpose of income generation as well as confidence building. The samanbal, which she supervises, had become a space where a slow but steady process of healing had begun. A. R. Hanjura turned the searchlights on the widows of Dardpora where as a result of the Athwaas initiative twenty widows once separated by walls of mistrust and intense economic competition over scarce resources are now discovering new commonalities and spaces for dialogue as they individually and collectively make efforts to generate income from dairy units set up with loans from the Women’s Development Corporation of Jammu and Kashmir.

Kaul emphasized that these may be small beginnings but for her every single woman empowered in a situation of conflict is a leap forward. There were concentric processes of empowerment and capacity building that were built into the Athwaas vision and the quality of the empowerment was also important, not just the numbers.

Responding specifically to the concern about bringing women’s political grievances to the notice of the government, Hameeda Nayeem asserted it was WISCOMP that for the first time made a sincere attempt to reach
out, and create a family of sorts where women were able to come to terms with their differences. **Inclusiveness therefore has become the hallmark of WISCOMP.** It was not the mandate of this initiative to specifically enter the political arena and dialogue with the government – it was more about empowering women to articulate and solve their own problems.

Gopinath in her intervention pointed out that the notion of the “political space” was now being redefined and infused with new understandings. As the Feminists’ understanding of politics has highlighted, the **personal is the political**, and to the extent that the *Athwaas* initiative in its work had generated a new understanding on assertion of women’s rights, and pointed to the direction of dialogic engagements, it did have a political implication. Even without entering into the formal political arena, and without involving party politicians, the *Athwaas* initiative and its organically developed methods of dialogic engagement across constituencies, has offered lessons for the larger peace process.
Envisioning New Roles for Women

The next session, entitled ‘Envisioning New Roles for Women’, chaired by Meenakshi Gopinath, brought together women from diverse areas of interest to speak on the various dimensions of Women and the Peace Process in J&K.

Rekha Chowdhury, Professor of Political Science at Jammu University, spoke of the fragmented social and political identities of people in the region and the common experiences of women in their suffering. When the problem in Kashmir began, interests and attitudes were invariably defined in terms of insular isolationist positions with no thought given to the complex multidimensional identities and issues involved. With the passage of time there was however an acceptance of ‘the other’ and the perceptions of others that paved the way for breaking the silence around many of the issues emanating from this conflict. This recognition of multiple meanings and connotations of the conflict represented a huge step forward and was instrumental in paving the way for dialogues at all levels. The people have become conscious of the plurality of problems and their resolutions as well.

Speaking about the various possibilities for women asserting their agency in the midst of the conflict, Chowdhury raised a number of questions:

- There can be different categories of bonding – Marx for instance had indicated the significance of class bonding. She wondered if common suffering especially among women could be the binding force across diverse groups.

- There is no cogent women’s movement in Jammu and Kashmir. There is no women’s politics, only a politics about women. Women’s identities are often subsumed under another overarching identity – an identity based on ethnicity, religion, region and this asserted itself time and again. The sex scandal in Kashmir, the question of the women’s Bill were issues that should have united women across the state – yet they did not because these issues were overlaid by political, religious and regional identity politics and the space could not be appropriated by women.

- The issue of representation needs to be addressed, which is the most difficult issue since everybody claims to speak for the other. Who represents the women of Jammu and Kashmir? The agency of women is required to be foregrounded, to enable transformation of women from victims to survivors who could map agentive moments in their lives and articulate their own concerns.

- Highlighting the role of women in political restructuring, Chowdhury commented on the role of dialogue and creative solutions to the conflict, where there has to be consensus on the need for a secular state. It is of prime importance to claim women’s status as equal citizens and members of the political community.

- There is a need to look beyond peace to participation, which will lead to equal opportunity, development and prosperity in the state.

Roma Wani, Additional Secretary, Planning and Administration, J&K, referred to the increasing number of administrative units that have been created over the years in the state, obviously with the intention to provide better governance to the people. Whether that has really resulted in a more responsive administration or not was another question. The government had also segregated the bloating population of the state into different segments based on caste, tribe, gender, urban and rural population, poverty line divides, marital status, migration, and a host of other criteria, again with the intention of providing the fruits of good governance to each such identifiable group. However, the unintended consequence was that the population has also now become very
aware of differences and this has probably led to segregated identities, creation of walls of distrust and alienation that the administration was now faced with the task of breaking.

Wani raised questions about the need and efficacy of gender budgeting and whether it has helped create empowerment for the women. She asked: when the government spends money on roads is it not also doing so for the women population of the state? The Rs.3,500 crores that is allocated for the population is being spent for the 892 women for the 1000 males that characterizes the sex ratio in Jammu and Kashmir as per the latest census report (the ratio is higher in the rural areas). However, she acknowledged that since these categories had been created and this was in keeping with the age of specialization, this issue needed to be taken on board and we need to ask what role gender budgeting has and can play specially in reaching out to yet another categorys: namely women victims of the armed conflict.

Referring to the relationship between the government and the NGO sector she opined that the government had to reach out to the NGOs as they needed a partner to monitor and engage with the grassroots reality. The government and NGO relationship should be one of collaboration and not competition. The NGO efforts, through cultural initiatives, orphanages, training and vocational guidance had made a dent in the state, and these efforts need to be acknowledged. Somewhere along the way women have realized that they are a force and that they have an identity that is more than the one they have acquired as a result of their marital status.

She also stressed that roles should not be thrust on women and they should be allowed to voice their choices. Roles acquire meanings only in an environment and it is the environment we need to change. Thinking of roles first is like putting the cart before the horse.

Indeed the environment in the region had changed for the better in recent years – the coalition government resulted a greater spirit of give and take and this was seen in the gender planning and resource allocation between the three regions of the state. The security forces were now becoming more sensitive to the population compared to earlier darker years and the opening of roads between the two parts across the Line of Control heralded changes in trade and commerce that could work towards the betterment of the lives of the people. Wani suggested that the list of items that Pakistan wanted included in the trade list was a good way to understand the areas and industries where women from Kashmir could actively engage because there was a demand for these goods and services.

Hameeda Nayeem, Reader, Department of English, Kashmir University, and part of Women Waging Peace, spoke on the possibilities and roles for women, framing it within the purview of what she called an “insider’s critique” on some of the known positions on women and political participation that had become the hallmark of feminist advocacy. She began by interrogating the mere idea of women’s participation in processes of dialogue by adding that this would become meaningful only if it took place in the context of genuine democratic participation. Only then an alternative vision could emerge. What indeed is this women’s vision and if we don’t know what this is, she asked, What are we expecting the women to go to the peace table with?
She pointed to the utter lack of political consciousness or for that matter even the lack of consciousness of being women among even students of Jammu and Kashmir. This was in fact a part of the political culture being nurtured in Kashmir and which had percolated down to educational institutions. As a result they seem to be averse to exercising their political and legal rights. The women students in Kashmir University even today demonstrate this lack of political consciousness, and unlike the men, do not utilize opportunities to protest against injustice. Unlike girls who are in the forefront of protests in other parts of India, this culture of contestation is absent in women of Kashmir. In this scenario, argued Nayeem, whose participation are we pleading for? There could be a case for including women from the grassroots, as they had not been “infected” by an education system that sought to benumb political protest.

For Nayeem the moot question is who should represent women and bring the gender alphabet to the negotiating table? Neither the elitist women who have not undergone the tribulations of their less fortunate sisters or the government officials, who are duty bound to uphold their positions with all its associated patriarchal baggage or the extremist political parties like Duktaran-e-Millat who subscribe to an obscurantist view of religion sanctioned by patriarchy, can perform this role. She expressed unease at the increasing number of stakeholders all of whom were clamoring for a position at the negotiating table as a result of which the meta-narrative of Kashmir was being marginalized.

Women can be community peacemakers in sectarian or communal conflicts where there is no political repression. Such a role does not require the representative character of the women peacemakers. In the presence of political repression, however, the whole question has to be differently configured. Here the questions of genuine political representativeness of women become vital because it involves the deciding of the future.

What can women do in a situation like Kashmir where men have failed as they indeed have? Can they revolutionize the consciousness of the Indo-Pak delegates and urge them to solve the Kashmir tangle in a way that respects the wishes of the people of the state? Or would they sacrifice this in favor of ensuring the survival of their progeny? These are uncomfortable questions to which we would have to find answers before proceeding further with the mantra that more women at the negotiating table would result in an alternative peace.

Nayeem however was critical of men’s attempts to keep women away from the field in Jammu and Kashmir or making room only for the daughters of political figures. The objectification of women has happened both at the hands of the law enforcing machinery as well as the non-state actors. While she did not defend the patriarchal nature of Kashmiri politics she cautioned against accepting women as forerunners of change unless their political consciousness was raised and their skills as negotiators enhanced. A genuine democratic process where women from all walks of life are allowed to freely choose their representatives would have to be an essential prerequisite.

Shakti Bhan, surgeon and human rights activist and member of the Daughters of Vitasta, spoke on the vision that the organization had for bringing peace to Kashmir and asserted that the Daughters of Vitasta the women’s wing of Panun Kashmir was an inclusive and not an exclusive organization.

As a result of the exodus, thousands of Kashmiri Pandit families had been forced into exile in Jammu and other parts of the country and Panun Kashmir sought to provide them space to regain their sense of community and identity. Its main objective is to keep the ethnic socio cultural ethos of displaced Kashmiris alive and enable the women to move shoulder to shoulder with the men in protesting against what she described as the genocide on the community committed by terrorists in Kashmir. Supporting the claim that the organization was not exclusive in nature she pointed to the fact that the resolution they adopted in 1993 condemned the brutality committed on all women of Kashmir and not just Kashmiri Pandit women.
Envisioning the road ahead in Kashmir had to be contextualized in the backdrop of what went wrong in the state. The people involved in governing the state should accept the gross failures on their part. Jammu and Kashmir is a place of diverse ethnicities. Successive political parties at the centre and state have undermined the secular consciousness that had taken root in the state. She held the Indian state responsible for not allowing true secularism to flower in the state and for compromising with this cardinal principle time and again.

In her vision, the reclaiming of the secular space that had been a part of Kashmir’s legacy was the only way out and in the future that she envisaged Kashmiri Pandits would be allowed to return and no religious group would be allowed to hold sway in the politics of Kashmir. The reconciliation between Hindus and Muslims would begin from the time that a voice would be raised in the Valley asking about the genesis of the genocide on Kashmiri Pandits.

Commenting on the concept of Naya Kashmir, she talked of equal opportunities and secularism as its hallmark. Bhan expressed that unfortunately the undermining of this secular nature of Kashmir has been primarily responsible for the present turmoil, and stressed the need for all communities, especially those displaced by the conflict such as the Kashmiri Pandit women, to come together and help in the recreation of peace. She spoke of the future progeny of the people of Kashmir and how they need to be protected from this conflict. Women, she asserted, could go a long way in instilling the values of peace, tolerance and understanding in their children.

Bhan pointed out that history has innumerable testimonies to the fact that religious tolerance has traditionally been a marker of Kashmiriyat and she pointed out that the onus of reviving this tradition lay with the women. In conclusion she re-asserted the role of secularism in the road to peace and said that women are the primary stakeholders in dialogue and peace.

Sarla Chewang, President, Mahila Mandal and Former Director, Social Welfare Board, Ladakh, dwelt on the importance of gender equality in a world of unequal opportunities and rights. She stressed the need for women to assert their rights themselves instead of looking to others to fight on their behalf.

She spoke of the strength of Ladakhi women, their self-sustenance and their active involvement in every sphere of work, which has empowered them to a much greater degree than if they had depended on other agencies to speak for them.

Chewang also spoke on the issue of reservation and held it to be antithetical to the freedom and rights of women who, she stressed should be able to compete for their rights in an egalitarian environment. In the same vein as Nayeem, Chewang questioned the absence of political will among women, and questioned their absence in the area of political negotiation.

Citing the examples of Bhanwari Devi and Shah Bano, Chewang advocated the reclamation of women’s rights by the women themselves, and stressed that the solutions need to come from within and not without.

In the discussions that followed it was pointed out that there could be no emancipation or freedom for women in the presence of such discriminatory state instruments such as the Women’s Disqualification Bill. It was observed that the women from Jammu had formed an action committee on the rights of women and had formed a human chain in 2002 protesting against the exclusion of women from the Prime Minister’s Roundtable and against the Bill.
Understanding the Macro Context

A series of presentations were slotted to provide an overview of Jammu and Kashmir in terms of political, economic and social indicators. These were intended to provide the backdrop to the discussions in working groups that followed these deliberations.

Mohammad Syeed Malik, senior independent journalist, began by commenting that the political situation in Kashmir has three dimensions to it.

- The dialogue and political process.
- Violence that is now one of the most prominent markers of the region.
- Party politics that is affected by both the culture of violence and the culture of dialogue depending on which one is stronger at a given moment.

He remarked that the political process tends to get swayed by militant action. Citing the case of the recent Bombay blasts he spoke about how such occurrences can stall the process of political negotiation between India and Pakistan and within the region. The fact that the Government does not want to give that impression and therefore retains some hope of reconciliation, he asserted, can be seen as the saving grace. But the intra-Kashmir dialogue has been derailed, which affects the situation on the ground, compelling people to feel disheartened, and generating an atmosphere of uncertainty.

Malik made a strong case for the need for dialogue within the state, and commented that despite militancy remaining at the level at which it is; the impact on the ground is diminishing. The people of Kashmir are looking for options and alternatives through nonviolent demonstrations and gatherings, and women are at the forefront of these initiatives although more needs to be done in this field through initiatives like Athwaas.

Nisar Ali, Dean, College Education and Counseling, Kashmir University, provided an economic and demographic overview of the state, and quoted statistics that revealed that the tertiary sector in the state has become the most prominent in recent times with 52%–53% of economic activity taking place in this sector, up from the 21%–22% in the 1940s. He highlighted the need for employment generation in the state, as well as the creation of infrastructure.

Ali stressed for accountability and transparency in the usage of finances and also the need to build up infrastructure and resources in the state. He also advocated that both countries – India and Pakistan – should come together to help the state meet its demands, instead of accelerating the downslide which has converted the state into a market. This is one of the fundamental problems, which ails the region and should be addressed as soon as possible for a durable peace process. He advised that this trend be reversed immediately and more opportunities for employment be generated in the state.

A N Sadhu, senior economist, referred to the links between regional economics and regional identities. He lauded the Athwaas initiative, and talked about the development initiatives in the state, as well as the ancillary activities, with special reference to women.

He lamented the restrictive approach to the representation of women in development. Commenting on the sixteen years of turbulence, which have created shadows of gloom in the region, he said it was time to erase these dark shadows and start anew. In this context, he saluted Athwaas for its bold initiative of rehabilitation and
reconciliation through dialogue in the region, and commented on the role that women play within the home and lauded their enterprising spirit.

He suggested that in a fear-laden society, the women could be assisted in setting up nursery schools for children, and enumerated various traditional alternatives for the women in the cottage industry such as pickle and jam making, toy making, spinning, and weaving.

Stressing the need for self-reliance and the economic participation of women in the development of the region, Sadhu suggested that NGOs such as Athwaas should assist in emboldening and empowering the women. Counseling was also stressed, and he advocated that instead of doles, income generating initiatives should be provided to the women.

Sadhu suggested that the dialogic process should extend to include people from the valley and the migrant camps, especially because of the many commonalities shared between them. He suggested that dialogue could help rebuild the bridges of contact and understanding between them. Sadhu stressed on the need for both men and women of the region, belonging to different regional and ideological convictions to come together and work towards a peaceful Kashmir.

Bashir Ahmad Dar, former Director, Academics and Secretary, State Board of Education, J&K, spoke passionately about the role of education in conflict resolution. Dar rued the escalation of violence in many parts of the world, including Iraq and Afghanistan, and questioned the need and source of conflict itself.

He remarked that differences exist everywhere and it is to everyone’s advantage to seek resolution to the differences and to the conflict in a non-combative, nonviolent manner in the tradition of Mahatma Gandhi. He spoke about celebrating difference and tolerating diversity of languages, cultures, religions, and ideologies. He also remarked that safeguarding cultural diversity and pluralism is sometimes more important than safeguarding bio-diversity.

Dar highlighted the efforts made in 1986-1988, to have a national system of education that would teach tolerance of cultural diversity, but which was modified later in 1992 to suit a more homogenous interpretation of the idea of nation and nationality. He referred to the four pillars of education that provides the learning to know, to be, and to live together in harmony.

He made a mention of the fact that while earlier subjects such as History and Geography were instrumental in teaching children how to live together and respect diversity, they now have themselves become the source of conflict in India, and therefore there is a need to inculcate the values of tolerance and multiculturalism. He highlighted the requirement for peace and value education along with human rights education in schools and colleges, since promotion of values among children is of utmost importance in the present context.

Dar strongly recommended that a small group be constituted to examine books on various subjects, and history in particular, so that they can make sure that historical data is not tampered with.
He lamented the ignorance of the vernacular languages among the children today, who have no knowledge of their regional dialects which provide a rich cultural heritage and a link to the historical traditions of any region. Repeating the stress on the role of language in culture, Dar strongly advised that children be imparted knowledge of their vernacular languages instead of only learning English and Hindi.

He also made a point about the **use of the internet for the proliferation of hate material**. The websites target particular ethnic, regional or religious groups, which must be immediately addressed because of the easy access that children have to such websites, and which are contrary to all the objectives of education.

Hameed Naseem Rafiabadi, Head of Department, Islamic Studies, Kashmir University, pointed to the nature of political approaches that have not solved issues but have in effect led to the escalation of violence and conflict in most countries.

Speaking about humanity, ethics, politics and education, Rafiabadi remarked that he was addressing not politicians but intellectuals who can indeed effect a transformation in the conflict. Commenting on the vilification of Islam and the projection of Islamic terrorism, he stressed the nonviolent teachings of the Koran. It is the insidious workings of a few which has led to wrongful representation and a militant interpretation of the Koran, which in spirit preaches tolerance for all.

He highlighted the fact that nobody has any authority over the Koran or the Prophet, and that all communities and religions of the world spoke of their prophets. Rafiabadi suggested peaceful coexistence and speaking of religion as being entirely personal.

Arshad Hussain, Registrar, Psychiatry Hospital, Srinagar, touched on topics related to **mental and psychological health**. Concerned about the growing number of psychiatric disorders in Jammu and Kashmir, Hussain quoted statistics that proved that the situation in the state is steadily deteriorating with respect to the psychological health of the people. According to the statistics, the major sufferers are women, with 70% of the depression cases and post-traumatic-stress disorders being recorded in this category. Also the youth (in the 18–30 age group) recorded the highest statistics in lifetime substance abuse. Given the magnitude of this data, it was felt that the measures taken to counter these phenomena were totally inadequate.

With the high levels of psychological trauma and its long-term effects on the people, the need of the hour is **increased medical services and the integration of mental and general health services so that these needs of people could be readily addressed**. Hussain lamented the lack of basic medical services and also the lack of psychiatric departments in the hospitals, a pit-fall that needs to be remedied immediately.
**Working Groups: Deliberations and Recommendations**

Following the talk, the participants were grouped into four working groups to deliberate and work towards recommendations in four broad thematic rubrics. The onus was on identifying specific steps that could be taken by the women of Jammu and Kashmir in the following areas –

**Group 1: Politics, Law and Governance**

**Group 2: Economic development and planning, issues of relief, rehabilitation and disaster management**

**Group 3: Cultural initiatives between different people of the state**

**Group 4: Psychosocial Healing**

Within these broad categories, the working groups addressed the issue of rehabilitation of women, especially widows and “half widows”, measures to revive the spirit of Kashmir as *Kashmiriyat*, the role of women in self governance and representation of women in processes of negotiation and dialogue. Steps that can be taken by women to prevent human rights violations by security forces and militants and the politics of disaster management also formed the core of the discussions. The experiences of the people from all the three regions of J&K – Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh informed the scope of the deliberations.¹

¹ The deliberations and recommendations of the 4 working groups are outlined in a separate publication titled *Stakeholders in Dialogue-IX*, *Women in Dialogue: Envisioning the Road Ahead in Jammu and Kashmir*, WISCOMP 2007.
Deciding to Engage: Opportunities, Challenges and Dilemmas

A session was specially designed to engage policy makers and enquire about the spaces they see for civil society, especially women, to participate in dialogue with the formal machinery of the administration so that policy can become more responsive and can reflect the pulse of the people. This reflected a growing concern that policy is being made without adequate inputs and understandings of grassroots reality. How can this distance be bridged? Who are the interlocutors speaking to? Who do they need to speak to? What are the limitations and constraints they face when they are in conversation with multiple stakeholders in Jammu and Kashmir? Heads of working groups and interlocutors on Kashmir, Secretary of State Commission for Women, Additional Advocate General of Jammu and Kashmir shared their reflections.

George Verghese, former Editor, The Hindustan Times, and Visiting Professor, Center for Policy Research pointed out that in a dialogue process including one in which gender issues were being foregrounded men also could be incorporated into the exercise and the road ahead could be collectively visualized. Verghese alluded to a signpost in Ladakh, with seven posts indicating the way to different countries, which symbolically signified how Jammu and Kashmir could be visualized as the gateway to the world. He stressed the need to reclaim that position again and to restore Kashmir to its former glory and status in the world.

N. N. Vohra, former Home Secretary and Interlocutor on J&K, commenced by commenting on the need to envision what needs to be done in the state of J&K. He stated that as member of one of the groups of the Prime Minister’s Roundtable, he would forward the recommendations presented by the four working groups of the convention to the Prime Minister. Referring to the Srinagar Roundtable, Vohra stated that the PM of India before 2002 had called on all the people of Kashmir to take forward the peace process and the roundtable was a concerted effort to hear all the voices in J&K.

One of the major developments was the inclusion of all the stakeholders and political groups in that particular dialogue. All the political parties in J&K unanimously and voluntarily agreed to engage with each other in five working groups.

But having said that, it was also unfortunate that there is a complete lack of women’s participation in the roundtable and in the working groups. A possible reason according to Vohra, was that the representatives of the groups were nominated by the political parties which did not forward the names of women.

He commented that the genesis and modalities of the working groups permit them to invite advisors, NGOs, counselors and other stakeholders of the region, and therefore the inclusion of women in the future was a possibility, and he would definitely convey these concerns to the PM.

He remarked that it is the women in dialogue who constitute a seminal element of the entire exercise of getting Jammu and Kashmir back to normalcy and sooner or later they would have to play their destined role. There could not be a dialogue with only men. He took particular note of the establishment of the Samanbal centers, and observed that even in the middle of so much violence many good things could be done with the initiative of the people backing the exercise such as WISCOMP.
Vohra also spoke on the topic of psychosocial health and said that at the time of Mohd. Sheikh Abdullah, a pamphlet on mental health was published and distributed which was wonderfully conceived and received. Speaking of the futility of grand plans, he said that it were these small measures that went a long way towards the fulfillment of the goals, and that they could be achieved better in the absence of administrative paraphernalia, with only the will and strength of the people.

Hafiza Muzzafar, Secretary, State Commission for Women, began by emphasizing the need for convergence at all levels of society between various groups and spoke at length about the prevailing gender relations and the structures of society where the woman is subordinated and discriminated against. She pointed out that the State Commission for Women and those in academia should not work in isolation but identify areas of convergence.

She first posed a question to all women asking if they are really empowered because it is within the “safety” of the home that women are subjected to the most brutal tortures and crimes. Speaking about the crimes against women, she remarked that women in India have been traditionally the victims of society and that they are exposed to violence both within and outside the home. Speaking about domestic violence, Muzaffar asserted that it is a real and serious threat, and that women have to constantly fight for their honor and dignity. This itself poses a threat to her mental and psychological health, which then begins to affect her physical health in somatic ways. She said that instances of domestic violence are on the rise worldwide and it needs to be countered immediately. She also spoke on the role of education and quoted figures to show that uneducated women bear the brunt of domestic violence, and that most women (33%) face injustice across the board.

In conclusion, Muzaffar stressed the need for empowerment of women, and promotion of self-reliance along with education so that women would be able to live in a more equitable world free from fear.

Seema Khajooria Shekhar, Additional Advocate General, Jammu, spoke on the religion-based demographics of the state, and remarked that contrary to popular perception, all the three regions of the state maintain the presence of Hindus, Muslims and Buddhists in comfortable numbers. She identified the exclusions in the dialogue processes and commenting on the question of who the government needed to speak with she asked: why is the government speaking to only separatists, only the valley, and only men?

Khajooria Shekhar spoke of the present dialogic process as an opportunity to put things in order. She spoke of the need to address the aspirations of the entire state, which is like a mini-India in terms of its diversities. Consequently the dialogue cannot be held with only one section or one part of the state alone. Civil society needs to be engaged, along with corporators, panchayat leaders, NGOs, and we need to take cognizance of what needs to be done to repair the relations between the state and centre.
There should be a **cultural and political understanding of different regions at their levels**, and the consensus may even be to agree to disagree, but the point is to reach out and rebuild relationships. Remarking on the exclusion of women from the formal dialogic process, she said that that particular fact need not mean that women do not signify or participate in the process, but that working groups must connect and seek to find out the aspirations of the women and incorporate them as well.

Addressing the requirement for solutions, Khajooria Shekhar said that it was of prime importance to rectify the wrongs that have been done to the people and integrate the various people into the mainstream. She spoke of the need to create a system in which all the three regions can coexist in harmony and speak their minds without fear of reprisal actions. The alienation that the people of Jammu and Kashmir felt had to be factored in.

A. M. Ahmadi, former Chief Justice of India began by first applauding the WISCOMP initiative in the state. He talked of dialogue and spoke about his interaction with a cross section of people as also his participation in talks between the various groups. He remarked that when talking in terms of policy making, it is important to use the available resources and infrastructure and see if they benefit the people. Ahmadi questioned the absence of women in the dialogue processes in the past.

He commented that the world was becoming increasingly pluralistic and in that respect Kashmir presents a beautiful tapestry that needs to be woven closer in dialogue and reconciliation.

Mentioning the **effects of trauma**, Ahmadi observed that people in Bhopal still suffered from the trauma of the gas tragedy even though it has not had a physical effect. But the psychological trauma is itself sufficient to create physical imbalances in them. Linking the trauma of the people of Kashmir to the tragedy, he observed that their trauma has been more intense and long term and therefore it needs to be addressed as soon as possible.

Referring to the **issue of development**, he remarked that no country that does not utilize more than 50 percent of its resources can call itself developed, and women need to become more visible and part of the process everywhere.

He stressed on the issue of the **education of the girl child**. While the directives towards education for all are present in the constitution, they need to be enforced in every state. Speaking further on the topic, he commented that any development without cultural and human development constitutes development without a soul. He concluded by remarking that while it is important to talk of CBMs, it is also equally important to create awareness and understanding at the village levels.
Hamid Ansari, former Ambassador to Iran and currently Chairperson, National Commission for Minorities, addressed the issues concerning the women in the state of J&K, pointing out the nature and impact of the conflict on the lives of women. He remarked that there is no unilateral solution to the conflict and that the women have had to bear the larger burden.

He observed that if we have to reach a stage of finding solutions to the conflict then those who have suffered the most have to be involved the most. He said that that juncture had been reached and that efforts are now being made to trying to find alternative solutions through dialogue and reconciliation. He remarked that the remaining option was to widen the circle and to involve more people.

Commenting on the representation of women, he observed that this convention has a critical role to play since the working groups of the Prime Minister’s Roundtable do not have women’s representation, and that the impression received is that women do not want to be part of this political process. But the silver lining is that most people engaged in non-formal dialogue in a space untouched by political agendas. It was observed that it is not the background or affiliation of the sufferer that is important but the situation in which she finds herself in the conflict.

In this context, Ansari remarked that there might be some light at the end of the tunnel since there was now recognition of the importance of the representation of particular groups. The policy makers and activists are in touch with a wider segment of society than before but it needs to be widened and a lot more needs to be done.

Ansari remarked that the problem of Jammu and Kashmir is a unique problem and that it has many dimensions. He concluded by saying that there are indeed “fractured realities” in the state, which need to be acknowledged and addressed, as the background note rightly pointed out, and those realities need to be brought together.

In conclusion, Verghese referred to the words of Chairman Mao who had said that “women hold up half the sky”. Commenting on the dialogic process, Verghese stressed on the dialogue being extended to every segment of the society including the men, and also reiterated that while it was unfortunate that women had not been included in the PM’s working groups, women should not wait to be asked and should make themselves heard.

He commented on five major developments of importance that can provide a viable means of sustenance and employment generation in the state and would have a transformative impact:

- The advent of the railways, connecting the Valley to the rest of India
- The new road from Jammu-Srinagar
- Srinagar becoming an international airport
- The availability of power
- Broadband connectivity
He called on experienced members of the civil society to provide a vision for Jammu and Kashmir. He remarked that when this dialogue takes place then every working group will listen and ‘that will bring in the flood that lifts all hopes’.

Verghese also highlighted the importance of education along with training and vocational courses and suggested that these should be tailored to the new economic opportunities. He also spoke on Kashmiriyat and remarked that Kashmiriyat, resonant with the ethos of multiculturalism, holds out a lesson for the entire subcontinent and should be protected. He concluded the talk by stressing the need for knowledge of other cultures and of the need for understanding and raising cultural awareness.
Women and Peacebuilding: Closing Comments

Syeda Hameed, Member, Planning Commission, and Founder Member, Muslim Women’s Forum, who delivered the closing address for the conference, referred to the signposts that Verghese had mentioned, and spoke of Kashmir as having had the enviable position of ‘the center of the world’ – a picture that had changed dramatically in recent times due to the violence that wracks the region.

Hameed commented on women in dialogue, and spoke for the need to situate women in the heart of dialogue in order to broker sustainable peace. She stressed the importance of self-reliance and commented that women need to claim opportunities and rights instead of expecting external help that may never come. On the issue of the PM’s working groups she remarked that men too should refuse to sit on a panel that excludes women so completely. On the issue of domestic violence, Hameed remarked that no law can be effective unless there is budgetary allowance and support for it, and subsequently appealed to the policy makers to take note of the issue.

She talked about the road ahead as comprising the people from the three regions of Jammu and Kashmir, and remarked that the world we live in is an increasingly brutalizing world. As we live in the shadow of violence (Lebanon, Gujarat being very pertinent examples), it is important not to forget the suffering of these people. The impact of violence is felt most intensely by the women, and it is the women who have to come out of the shadow of victimhood.

Referring to children, Hameed lamented the differential treatment being meted out to innocent children because of the circumstances of their birth. The children of militants in Kashmir are treated as outcasts, and so are the children in West Asia.

She urged Kashmiris to reclaim the peace and vitality of Kashmir and remarked that it is for the women and the Samanbals, initiatives like Athwaas, the anganwadi programs, and the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyans to create this atmosphere of reconstruction. This mosaic of Kashmir, presents the vision of harmony and it comes from the peace within. Hameed concluded by remarking that it is often asked, “who represents Kashmir?” Perhaps the time had come to provide an answer by asserting that the women of Kashmir represent Kashmir.

Dr. Syeda Hameed, Member, Planning Commission and Founder Member, Muslim Women’s Forum, delivers the Closing Address at the Convention.
Glimpses...
Participants Profiles

**Syeda Afshana** is Lecturer, Media Education Research Center, University of Kashmir. She is also a Visiting Fellow, Cambridge University, England. Afshana has authored “The Fugitive Sunshine”, a collection of English poems and she is a regular columnist for local English dailies. She is a Member (Alumni) of the International Academy of Leadership, Gummusbach, Germany.

**A. M. Ahmadi** is the former Chief Justice of India and is one of India’s most respected champions for justice with over fifty years of experience in law. Justice Ahmadi was appointed judge in the Supreme Court in 1988 and was the Chief Justice of India from 1994 until his retirement in 1997. As the Chief Justice, he was appointed Patron-In-Chief of the Committee for the implementation of Legal Aid Services in India. Prior to his tenure in the Supreme Court, Justice Ahmadi was the Judge of the High Court of Gujarat. He was nominated by the UN as a member of the Inquiry Committee for Human Rights violations in East Timor. He also visited Zimbabwe as a member of the delegation appointed by the Human Rights Institute of the International Bar Association to review the state of relations between the judiciary, the legal profession and the executive powers and violations of human rights.

**Asmat Aijaz** holds a Post-graduate degree in History, and has been a High School teacher in Presentation Convent, Srinagar, for twenty six years. She has participated in training programs on counseling and trauma healing conducted by WISCOMP in the Valley and in Delhi as part of the *Athwaas* initiative.

**Qurrat-ul-Ain**, a core member of the *Athwaas* initiative of WISCOMP is a Political Science teacher. She is a prolific writer and political commentator and has written for *Quami Awaz*, *The Kashmir Times* and *Chattan*, a renowned Urdu Weekly from Srinagar. Her writings on the Shah Bano case, and critical analysis of *Aatish-e-Chinar*, a biography of late Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, have been well appreciated. She is also engaged with Peace Education programs in the Valley. She has helped conceptualize and conduct the Writers’ Workshop program of *Athwaas* in the Kashmir valley. She is also actively engaged with the Intra-Kashmir Dialogue group.

**Ezabir Ali**, a core member of the *Athwaas* initiative of WISCOMP, is a trauma healer, reconciliator and health & development professional. Currently, she is Project Officer, Rural Development Department, Kashmir, and a volunteer for the Voluntary Health Association, Jammu and Kashmir chapter. She has been instrumental in working with WISCOMP in conceptualizing a program for training health workers and schoolteachers in counseling skills. Ms. Ali has personally visited the earthquake-affected areas in the Kashmir valley and engaged in relief work. She is also a part of the Intra-Kashmir Dialogue Group and attended its Conflict Resolution workshop in Kathmandu in 2004.

**Nisar Ali** is Professor of Economics in the Post-Graduate Department of Economics, University of Kashmir and Dean, College Development Council and Faculty of Social Sciences. With 33 years of teaching experience, he has published articles and papers on a range of issues including economic systems in conflict regions, remodeling development strategy in Jammu and Kashmir, Biomass Resources and Quality Assurance in Higher Education. He has been a Member of several government committees and working groups for five year plan formulations and has been the Member of the State Task Force for Revision of the Gazetteer of Ladakh appointed by the Government of Jammu and Kashmir.

**Hamid Ansari**, a former diplomat, is the Chairperson of the National Commission for Minorities (NCM) before which he has served as a member of the National Security Advisory Board. He has been the Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations, High Commissioner to Australia and Ambassador to the United Arab Emirates, Afghanistan, Iran and Saudi Arabia. He was awarded the Padma Shri in 1984. He is currently...
the Chairman of one of the working groups constituted by Chief Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad, dealing with the rehabilitation of affected widows and orphans. These groups are attempting to evolve a consensus with a result-oriented approach to the unattended internal dimensions of the Kashmir issue and their recommendations will be discussed at a future roundtable conference.

**Shabnam Ashai** is a television newscaster and news translator. She is also a News Reader with Radio Kashmir. With a career spanning for more than a decade in television and radio, Ms. Ashai is an award-winning writer. In 1994, she received the “Udhart Bharti National Award” for Urdu conferred by the Orissa Government for her collection of poems “AKELI”. Her other publications include ‘Main Sochti Hoon’, ‘Camu’s Concept of Alienation’, and the ‘Existentialistic Concept of Alienation’ (a doctoral study).

**Yasmeen Ashai** is currently the Coordinator of the P.G. Department of Human Development, Women’s College in Srinagar. She has been associated with the Center of Dialogue and Reconciliation, New Delhi, and has been actively involved in dialogues between women of the two communities. She has been working on peace education in J&K for the last three years in the capacity of a resource person and trainer and is currently developing a peace kit for South Asian countries. She is the executive member of ASHI (Association for Social Health in India), Jammu and Kashmir Chapter and has also been associated with ASPBAE (Asian South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education). She has worked extensively for the rehabilitation of women and children in the Uri sector.

**Fatima Bano (Atum)** is the President of Women Muslim Center in Leh, Ladakh. She works on Muslim Women’s rights and engages with the clergy on dialogue in issues relating to the social and economic upliftment of Muslim women.

**Shakti Bhan Khanna** is a Senior Consultant (Obstetrics & Gynaecology) and a Gynaecology cancer surgeon. She is also the Chairperson of the Panun Kashmir Foundation and of its women’s wing, Daughters of Vitasta. A human rights activist, she represented the community at the United Nations Human Rights Commission in Geneva in the year 1995. She was Professor of Gynaecology at the Medical College in Srinagar prior to the exodus of the Pandit community.

**Sushila Bhan** is the President of Cultural Renewal of Kashmiri Student Youth (CROKSY), an organization that works in 200 schools in six districts of Kashmir. It works with the youth in an attempt to forge a nonviolent and tolerant identity based on Kashmir’s secular and pluralistic traditions and a more inclusive notion of Kashmiriyat. Bhan’s organization, the Institute of Peace Research and Action (IPRA) has developed a curriculum that integrates the four pillars on which Kashmiriyat stands – democracy, secularism, social justice, and human rights – through lessons, cultural activities, skill building opportunities, and inter-school competitions in government schools and villages. The key to Professor Bhan’s work is her strategic use of Kashmiri culture. In recognition of her work, she was awarded the Ashoka International Fellowship in 2003.

**Nirojini Bhat** is Lecturer, University of Jammu, and a trained nutritionist. She is actively associated with WISCOMP’s *Athwaas* initiative in Jammu, which works with displaced Pandit women in Purkhoo Camp – home to a large population of Kashmiri Pandits. She has also participated in a trauma-healing workshop conducted by WISCOMP in Delhi.

**Renuka Bhat** is Systems Administrator in the Department of Posts, Delhi. Hailing originally from Anantnag, Renuka migrated to Delhi in 1990. She is actively engaged with Kashmiri children across the divide for promoting cultural harmony, peaceful co-existence and non-violent ways of conflict resolution. She is also a member of Yakjah Reconciliation and Development Network which is a non profitable voluntary movement started by like-minded young Kashmires as a platform for expression and spearheading an initiative for a ‘culture of peace’ in the South Asian region.
Rekha Chowdhury is a Professor in the Department of Political Science, University of Jammu, with 23 years of teaching experience. She is also the Coordinator of the University Grants Commission sponsored Special Assistance Program in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Dr. Chowdhury has published two books and a range of articles on contemporary issues concerning Jammu and Kashmir – especially on current problems of militancy, internal contradictions of separatism and popular discontent. She has been a Visiting Fellow in Queen Elizabeth House, Oxford (1992-1993), a Commonwealth Fellow at the University of Oxford (1997-1998) and a Visiting Fulbright Scholar at the School of Advanced International Studies, John Hopkins University (Jan – April 2005).

Sarla Chewang is the President of Mahila Mandal, Leh, Ladakh. A teacher for 15 years, she later moved on to the NGO sector. She has been a member of the Social Welfare Board and of the Jammu and Kashmir Women’s Development Corporation.

Bashir Ahmed Dar worked as Director (Academic) and Secretary of Jammu & Kashmir State Board of School Education. Mr. Dar has received training in curriculum development from the University of Cambridge, Local Examinations Syndicate (U.K). He has worked as a Physics teacher (at school and undergraduate levels), as a science teacher trainer, as a Field Advisor, and as a curriculum developer. He has authored, co-authored and edited over 100 school books and given training to thousands of teachers. He has worked on a number of Projects such as Adolescence Education; Population Education, Environmental Education; Scientific and Technological Literacy for All. GLOBE (Global Learning and Observation to Benefit the Environment), and Peace Education – Learning to Live Together. Mr. Dar takes particular interest in the promotion of values that help human beings to live together as well as live in harmony with nature.

Nirmala Deshpande is a Member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha). A veteran Gandhian and Nobel Peace Prize nominee, she is a recipient of the National Communal Harmony Award (2004). Since her youth, Ms. Deshpande had a strong desire to serve the poor, deprived and downtrodden. Thus she joined Acharya Vinoba Bhave’s ashram in Paunar and later, the Bhoomdan Movement in 1952 and undertook padyatras of forty thousand kilometers with Vinobaji. Ms. Deshpande has led various peace initiatives between India and Pakistan and in Kashmir. She has worked for the tribals and Scheduled Castes in the field of education, employment and empowerment, and has been instrumental in the organization of “shanti senas” during communal riots and tensions.

Padma Deskit, the first female surgeon of Ladakh, is currently working in SNM Hospital, Leh. She holds an MBBS degree from Lady Harding and an MS (General Surgery) degree from GMC, Jammu. She has cleared the Part I and II Royal College of Surgery, Surgeons of Edinburgh Exam. Dr. Deskit has been contributing several articles to various national medical journals on surgical issues.

Parvez Dewan is currently the Chairman and Managing Director of the India Tourism Development Corporation (ITDC) and was previously the Resident Commissioner, Government of Jammu and Kashmir in New Delhi. A senior member of the Indian Administrative Services, he has served extensively in Jammu and Kashmir and was till recently based in Srinagar as the Commissioner of the Kashmir division. He has published nine books and his academic work, published in a weekly column in The Hindustan Times, is primarily centered on the oneness of all religions and all people.

Sanjali Dhar holds a Ph.D in Anthropology from Delhi University. A resident of Kashmir, she is interested in issues of gender and development in the Valley.

Poonam Dhawan is Director, Center for Adult and Continuing Education and Extension, and Director, Women Studies, University of Jammu. She has done her M.S.W from Delhi School of Social Work and holds a Ph.D from Jammu University. Dr. Dhawan works on development and empowerment issues with women and disadvantaged groups in the Jammu region. She is a Member of the consultancy group on ‘Civic Citizenship’,
Wayne State University, Detroit, U.S.A. and is the State Coordinator of the ‘Exploring Humanitarian Law Project’ of the Indian Council of Red Cross for Jammu and Kashmir. Dr. Dhawan has also been appointed by the UGC to train trainers on capacity building programs for Women Managers in Higher Education for the States of Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

Tsering Dolkar started her career as a school teacher in a Boy’s Secondary School in Leh. Later she joined All India Radio at Leh and served for a decade there. Her contribution in those days when communications were opening up in Ladakh has been instrumental. Radio Leh ran programmes related to health, agriculture, literature and revival of folk music. She then was posted to New Delhi where she took charge of Overseas English and Urdu programmes as Station Director, External Services Division. As Director Planning and Development, Directorate General Office, she introduced many new programmes. To her credit go interviews of great personalities in the subcontinent. Her most exciting period has been in Shillong, Meghalaya where she was in charge of Hindi and English programs, which acted as unifiers for the seven North-East States. Currently she is in charge of programs for the four North Indian states of Punjab, Haryana, Jammu and Kashmir and Delhi.

Pradeep Dutta is journalist, TIMES NOW television, Jammu. He has written extensively on development and gender issues, particularly highlighting voices of the marginalized. He was awarded the Charkha Fellowship in 2004 to analyze water conflicts in Jammu and Kashmir. Pradeep has participated in the Conflict Transformation workshop for Indians and Pakistanis organized by WISCOMP. He does voluntary work, especially with children, and is part of the Yakjah initiative, a network of Kashmiri professionals engaged in reconciliation work.

Gowhar Fazili is presently a Research Scholar in Sociology at Delhi School of Economics, working in the area of Modernity and Islam. He has been a student of Political Ecology and has been active as an Environmentalist with Green Kashmir Environmental Trust and with education/student activism with SPACE. He believes that academics and activism must go together and the learning space must provide correspondence between the two, especially in the Social Sciences.

Ahmed Ali Fayyaz is a Srinagar-based Kashmiri journalist and television producer. He has been working as the Srinagar Bureau Chief of Jammu & Kashmir’s largest-circulated newspaper, Daily Excelsior, since June 1995. Prior to that, he was a correspondent for several publications, including Rashtriya Sahara (English magazine) and Kashmir Times. He has participated in international conferences on the Kashmir problem in London, Toronto and Brussels and has also attended the Institute for Multi-Track Diplomacy’s workshops on Transformation of the Kashmir Conflict in Kathmandu and Male. In 2005, he visited different states in the USA on the US State Department’s prestigious International Visitor Leadership Programme that included interactions with senior functionaries of the US State Department, United Nations Security Council, leading US think-tanks, universities and media organizations. He was a speaker at Karachi’s World Social Forum meet in March 2006. In 2003-04, he was the first recipient of the Jammu and Kashmir State Award (instituted by Mufti Sayeed’s Government).

Mohini Giri is Founder and Trustee of the Women’s Initiative for Peace in South Asia (WIPSA), a broad-based women’s network, which has Chapters across the South Asian region. She is also Founder and President of the War Widows Association and Chairperson of the Guild of Service (a 2,70,00,000 member organization that works to improve the condition of India’s widows). Previously, Dr. Giri was the Chairperson of the National Commission for Women in India (1994-1998). She has worked extensively in zones of conflict in support of human rights and gender justice. She is the recipient of several awards including the Nehru Bal Samiti Award (2004), the South Asian Parliaments Towards Solidarity for Equality, Peace and Development Award (1997) and the Rajiv Gandhi Excellence Award (1996).

Wajahat Habibullah is presently the Chief Information Commissioner (CIC). In the course of a resplendent career in the Indian Administrative Services, he has served at the Embassy of India in Washington and in the
Prime Minister’s Office under Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi. During his active involvement in Kashmir affairs, Mr. Habibullah has served as vice chair of the Jammu and Kashmir Lakes and Waterways Development Authority and as Divisional Commissioner heading the administration of the eight districts of Kashmir Valley and Ladakh. As Commissioner in Kashmir during the early 1990s, he donned the cap of peace negotiator. He has conducted several major inquiries into human rights violations by Indian security forces and has written extensively on exploring substantive solutions to the Kashmir problem, particularly factoring in economic strategies. He received an award for distinguished service from the governor of Jammu and Kashmir (1996) and the Rajiv Gandhi award for excellence in secularism (1994).

Syeda S. Hameed is a Member of the Planning Commission and the Founder Member of the Muslim Women’s Forum, which is involved in Legal Literacy for Muslim women and voices their concerns to the government along with interfacing with the Ulema on matters concerning their rights. She is also the Founder Trustee of the Women’s Initiative for Peace in South Asia (WIPSA), an organization that mobilizes women as catalysts for people to people contact and dialogue in the South Asian region. The ‘Bus for Peace’ initiative between Delhi and Lahore and later Kolkata and Dhaka was one of its salient features. She heads the regional membership based body, South Asians for Human Rights (SAHR) and the Centre for Dialogue and Reconciliation which serves as a link between issues of dialogue with justice and equity and focuses on both internal and external peace and reconciliation in South Asia.

Nancy Handoo teaches English in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, National Institute of Technology, Jammu. She focuses particularly on developing communication skills among students. Prior to this, she taught English in B.Ed College, Srinagar for almost a decade. She holds a Post Graduate Masters degree in Education and has done English Language Teaching from Advanced Studies, Leeds, U.K.

A. R. Hanjura is an advocate and social worker. He runs an orphanage and is also the Coordinator of the Voluntary Association Network which is actively engaged in earthquake relief and rehabilitation work. As a member of the core group of Athwaas, the initiative of WISCOMP in Jammu and Kashmir, he has helped coordinate a project with the widows of Dardpora, located in the Kupwara district.

Khalida Hanjura, a core member of Athwaas, is a high school teacher, and works on the widows’ initiative in Dardpora, along with A. R. Hanjura. She has traveled with the WISCOMP team to participate in the workshop for the Dardpora initiative aimed at economic empowerment, rehabilitation and emotional healing of those widowed in the course of the political violence in Kashmir. She is also involved with an orphanage in Budgam district.

Arshad Hussain is Registrar, Department of Psychiatry, Government Medical College, Srinagar. A Gold Medallist in Psychiatry from GMC, he has worked on various mental health programs with MSF (Doctors without Borders) and Action Aid International. He has been involved in introducing child psychiatry, child guidance and counseling center in Srinagar which is the first of its kind in the region. Post-earthquake, he has been working in the disaster areas (Uri and Tangdhar sectors) including Waltengo (post-snow tsunami). He has been a resource person for many workshops and seminars on trauma healing. He has conducted various surveys in South Kashmir for Service Delivery, an NGO working in the area of drug abuse among the youth.

Shabeen Hussain is a development professional. She works with youth groups towards creating ethical leadership and social mobilization. She is currently in the process of setting up a group called Social Work Association of Jammu and Kashmir. Ms Hussain was earlier teaching in the department of Social Sciences, Kashmir University. She was also associated with ‘Action for Life’ and has traveled to many conflict zones in South East Asia. She has also worked with CAPART, the British High Commission, and WISCOMP in New Delhi.
Sehar Iqbal holds a Masters degree in International Relations and Development Studies from the University of East Anglia. She has worked on developing the communication campaign for the Jammu and Kashmir state government’s water and sanitation programme. Following the October 2005 earthquake that affected the Baramulla and Kupwara districts of the state, she led the disaster response and interim rehabilitation program of Inter Vida in seven of the worst affected villages in Kupwara and Uri. Since April 2006, she has been working as Community Development Program Officer with the Aga Khan Development Network’s rehabilitation and reconstruction program in 17 villages in Uri and Baramulla.

Sonia Jabbar is a writer, journalist, photographer and filmmaker, who has been working on the Kashmir issue since 1995. In 2000, she received the WISCOMP Scholar of Peace Fellowship for her research on Kashmir. In 2003, she made a critically acclaimed documentary, Autumn’s Final Country. Ms. Jabbar has initiated India-Pakistan peoples’ conferences at the grassroots level and founded several Indian movements for nuclear disarmament. After the 2002 Gujarat riots, she co-founded Aman Ekta Manch, a citizens’ group in New Delhi that worked for peace between the estranged communities. She is presently engaged in writing a non-fiction book on Kashmir.

Muslim Jan is Editor, Media Times, Media Education Research Center, Srinagar. She has been working with the local media as a panelist for many programs and is also actively involved in working groups on various social issues. She has participated in several Kashmir related conferences and was recently a participant at one in Sri Lanka.

Salima Jan is a research scientist with the Educational Multi-media Research Center, University of Kashmir. Her area of specialization is gender studies and educational television. She has authored a book and a number of research papers. Forced displacement of people is an area, which interests her the most.

Tadzin Joldan is Founder-Principal of the Government Degree College, Leh. She has taught English Literature at the Government College for Women for 25 years. The first Ladakhi lecturer, Ms. Joldan is also founder member of the Institute of Ladakh Studies and also a member of the International Association of Ladakh Studies.

Archana Kaul is Assistant Director, Department of Student Support Services, National Institute of Open Schooling, New Delhi. Ms. Kaul was formerly a lecturer at the Department of English, Government College for Women, Gandhinagar, Jammu. She is a member of the Society for Protection and Environment. She has coordinated several programs on AIDS, Environment and Child Rights in various schools (sponsored by the British High Commission). Ms. Kaul is currently pursuing a doctorate in Comparative Literature.

Ashima Kaul is a Consultant with WISCOMP and coordinates the Athwaas initiative in Jammu and Kashmir. A freelance journalist by profession, Ms. Kaul has participated in a number of national and international conferences related to conflict resolution and peacebuilding. She has an active interest in interfaith dialogue and is a founder member of the Yakjah initiative – a network of Kashmiri professionals working on reconciliation. Ms. Kaul is now working on small arms and light weapons in Jammu and Kashmir.

Chand Kaur is a graduate in History, and has been a High School teacher in Srinagar for 13 years. She has shown a keen interest in carrying the training program on counseling forward by sharing her skills with others. She has also participated in the Trauma Healing workshop organized by WISCOMP in Delhi. Ms. Kaur has been part of a cultural club committee and managing committee in Presentation Convent, Srinagar. In 1998, she visited Israel where she had an opportunity to understand the religious dimension of the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Gurmeet Kaur, a core member of the Athwaas initiative of WISCOMP, is Lecturer, College of Education, Kashmir. She has participated in reconciliation and peace workshops, and is actively involved in the Peace
Education program for teachers in the Valley. Ms. Kaur has also participated in earthquake relief activities and played an active role in the Athwaas Bijbehara project which aims at empowering young college-going women to enable them to emerge as agents of social change.

**Assabah-Ul-Arjumand Khan** is Editor, Vice Chancellor’s Office in Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences & Technology of Kashmir (SKUAST), Srinagar. She anchors the program Zarai Khabar on Doordarshan Srinagar. Assabah earlier worked as Supervisor in the Department of ICDS (Integrated Child Development Scheme) and for the English Weekly *Alsafa*. She also read News Headlines (Surkhiyaan) in Srinagar Doordarshan. Assabah has participated in several conflict transformation workshops on the Kashmir conflict (held in Kathmandu, Nepal and Male). She has also attended the European Social Forum in London in 2004.

**Rafia Khan** currently works with Maqbool National Welfare Association. She is in her BA final year. She visits villages, surveys cases, prepares reports and works towards rehabilitation of widows, destitute women and orphans.

**Sona Khan** is a Senior Attorney in the Supreme Court and also a columnist for *The Indian Express, The Hindu* and *The Hindustan Times*. She is renowned for her work on development, Muslim jurisprudence, child trafficking and women’s rights, particularly with regard to women’s inheritance rights framed by intersecting Secular and Religious Legal Systems. She is perhaps best known for her role in the landmark Shah Bano case which revolved around the significant legal and social issue of a Muslim woman exploring the possibility of claiming maintenance under Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code of India. Ms. Khan has been the Halle Distinguished Fellow at the Claus M. Halle Institute for Global Learning at Emory University in 2003.

**Kacho Gulzar Khan** is the Executive Councilor of the Ladakh Hill Development Council in Kargil, Ladakh.

**Shalini Khanna** is a teacher in a Higher Secondary school in Jammu. Her personal journey of healing and forgiveness has been a source of inspiration for many.

**Aasha Khosa** is the only woman journalist to cover Kashmir through the decade of the 90s when armed conflict was at its peak. She initially worked with *The Tribune* and later for *The Indian Express*. Based in New Delhi for the last six years, Ms. Khosa now covers women’s issues, human rights and issues related to scheduled castes.

**Rehana Kausar** is a Doctor and Trainer at the Regional Institute of Health and Family Welfare in Srinagar. She has attended a number of workshops on women’s health issues and population studies. She has been a resource person at a training workshop organized by WISCOMP in Srinagar where she conducted a capsule on health issues for the widows and half-widows of Dardpora, Kupwara.

**Anita Kumari** has been working with Maqbool National Welfare Association, Kashmir, for the last three years. She reaches out to the marginalized groups at the grassroots in different villages of the Valley. She works towards rehabilitation of widows, destitute women and orphans.

**Asma Khan Lone** grew up in Karachi and England where she received her elementary education and did her post graduation in Defense and Strategic Studies from Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad. After that, she worked as a Research Associate at the Institute of Strategic Studies (ISS) in Islamabad and has been contributing articles as a freelance writer to newspapers. Her articles appeared mostly in *The News* and occasionally in *The Nation* as well. After shifting base to Srinagar, she began contributing pieces to *The Hindu* and *The Indian Express* and currently she is working on a paper titled “Enlightened Moderation : Pakistan’s path to change?” with The Observer Research Foundation (ORF) in Delhi.
Syed Mahdi, a former member of the Indian Administrative Services, has taught at Kurukshetra University and Aligarh Muslim University. He has worked with the Food and Agricultural Organisation and was formerly Vice Chancellor, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi.

Hajia Marzia is an independent elected Councilor in Kargil, Ladakh.

Bashir Manzar is Editor of Kashmir Images, Srinagar. He started the Business Edition of Kashmir Images, which is the first-of-its-kind in Jammu and Kashmir. He has attended numerous international and national conferences on issues of peace and conflict. He is a member of the South Asia Free Media Association (SAFMA) and is actively involved in issues related to proliferation of small arms and light weapons.

Krishna Misri has had the distinction of having headed the only two Women’s Colleges in Srinagar. She has written extensively on issues of identity, gender and displacement.

Sabeha Mufti is Senior Lecturer and Media Researcher, Mass Communication, University of Kashmir. She has extensively worked on gender issues and specializes in Media and Conflict Zones. Ms. Mufti has attended a course on Video Productions and Development Communication from Development Communication Unit, Space Application Center, Gujarat. She is currently engaged in five research studies related to the Kashmir earthquake including Disaster Management (by the government and various NGOs). She has personally adopted the 214 patients admitted in the Sher-e-Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences and is taking care of their relief, counseling and medical care. She also participated in WISCOMP’s Reconciliation and Healing workshop in New Delhi. Ms. Mufti has contributed widely to research journals, delivered lectures at National and International seminars on Gender, Media, Sociology, Culture and Identity in Conflict Zones.

Hafiza Muzzafar is currently the Secretary of the State Commission for Women, Srinagar. A former Director of the Social Welfare Board, Ms Muzzafar has more than two decades of experience in Rural Development. As a member of Women’s Initiative for Peace in South Asia (WIPSA), she was part of the women’s delegation on the first ‘peace bus’ from India to Pakistan. She was also a member of the International Organization for Peace. She has participated in several international development related conferences, including one in Hong Kong called ‘India in the New Millennium’ where more than 500 ex-Presidents and Prime Ministers had assembled.

Hameeda Nayeem a core member of the Athwaas initiative of WISCOMP teaches English at Kashmir University and is Founder Member, Women Waging Peace, an initiative of Harvard University’s Kennedy School. Deeply interested in issues of conflict analysis and peace, Dr. Hameeda has attended a number of national and international conferences on these issues. Her field of interest embraces human rights, feminism and issues related to religion. She has spoken on the Sacred Feminine and Muslim women in India, at national and international forums, and 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. She has also attended Pugwash conferences and the conflict transformation workshop on Kashmir held by the International Institute for Multi track Diplomacy. Dr. Hameeda has been part of the Writers’ Workshops organized by WISCOMP that aim at creating spaces for creative expression and dialogue among different communities in Kashmir.

Renu Nanda is Lecturer, University of Jammu. She has worked extensively with border migrants and with women Panchayats in the Doda district of Jammu. She has participated in several WISCOMP workshops and contributed to the deliberations on Panchayats in Jammu and Kashmir organized by WISCOMP. Ms. Nanda has visited the earthquake affected areas in Poonch sector and is engaged in coordinating relief work.

Bilal Naqati is Consultant at the National Aids Control Organisation, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India.
Luv Puri holds a Masters Degree in English Journalism and is currently Jammu & Kashmir Staff Reporter for *The Hindu*. He has researched on ‘Militancy to the south of Pir Panjal’ and has published several papers in both international and Indian academic journals. As a daily reporter in J&K, he has published several articles in the Frontline magazine on militancy, terrorism and the autonomy debate.

Hamid Naseem Rafiabadi is Head of the Department of Islamic Studies in the University of Kashmir. His specializations include Muslim Philosophy, Islamic Studies, Sufism, Comparative Religions and Orientalism. He is well-versed in several languages like Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Hindi, Kashmiri and English. Prof. Rafiabadi’s academic background includes a Master’s in Theology from the Aligarh Muslim University, an advanced diploma in Mass Media from Jawaharlal Nehru University, and a PhD on *The Philosophy of Ghazalli and its impact on Western Philosophers* from the University of Kashmir. He has authored several books on Islamic history and philosophy and his articles have been published in the *Journal of Islamic Studies, Islam and Modern Age, Journal of Religion and Law Review, Journal of Center for Central Asian Studies*. His latest book titled *Islamic Beliefs and Ideals*, was published in 2005.

Saroj Razdan did her Post graduation in Mass Communication from Kashmir University and later joined the Regional Daily *Kashmir Times*. She covered political, educational, civic and cultural news. She was also briefly working for another Regional Daily *Greater Kashmir* and *The Hindustan Times*, a National Daily. Currently she is Senior Reporter with *Amar Ujala*, a National Hindi Daily and Reporter with ‘Shaharbeen’, Radio Kashmir’s News program. In early 2006, she participated in the ‘Conflict Reporting’ workshop organized by Thomas Foundation, Cardiff, U.K.

Sudha Ramachandran is an independent researcher/journalist based in Bangalore. She writes for *Asia Times Online* and *Deccan Herald*. She has reported from several conflict zones including Kashmir, Sri Lanka, Northern Ireland and Fiji. She was a WISCOMP Media fellow in 2000 and wrote a series of articles on women and the Kashmir conflict. She has collaborated on two research projects on Kashmir, “Crossing lines with a gender lens: Interrogating dominant narratives on the causes of conflict in Kashmir” and “Gender and armed conflict in Kashmir.”

Gurjeet Malik is currently News Editor, *Radio Kashmir*, Srinagar. She has worked in DAVP, Press Information Bureau, Doordarshan and Radio in different capacities in New Delhi and Srinagar. She has been actively engaged in the production of Television programmes on various aspects of the lives of women, most famous among them being ‘WAQFA’, on DD Kashmir, wherein she highlighted the fate of women during the proxy war. She is the first and only woman News Editor of All India Radio in Srinagar so far. Gurjeet is also a writer of poetry and features in Hindi.

Mohammed Syed Malik, veteran journalist, was the Executive Editor of *The Sunday Observer* for over five years and Political Editor of the Observer Group, as also Special Correspondent with *The Patriot* and *The Link*. During Sheikh Abdullah’s tenure, in 1976-77, he was Director, Information and Public Relations, Jammu & Kashmir. He has attended and covered many conferences in India and abroad, including the PLO Conference at Lisbon. He is also associated with Intra-Kashmir and civil society initiatives.

Rabia Mughal is an ad hoc Lecturer in Computer Applications, Urdu Department, Jammu University. She is pursuing her Ph.D in Romanticism in Modern Urdu Poetry at the University of Jammu. Ms. Mughal has participated in many seminars including those on creative writing, journalism and translations, post-modernism, modernism in comparative studies and Urdu Phonetics. Her forthcoming book is on Computer Applications in Urdu. She is also the Literary Secretary of Rasajavadeni Literary Society.
Afsana Rashid works as Correspondent with Kashmir Times and is a regular Columnist with Milli Gazette. She has attended a workshop on Conflict Reporting at Cardiff, London. Ms. Rashid has worked as an Editor with CROKSY, a branch of a Delhi-based NGO and has conducted media exposure among Kashmiri women in Srinagar district. She has conducted adult literacy surveys in Pulwama district, and worked as Research Investigator with Audience Profile and Preferences of the Program Broadcast from Radio Kashmir. She has also covered the 2002 elections in Kashmir for the print media.

A. N. Sadhu is a former Head of Department of Economics and Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences and Academic Affairs, Jammu University. He was also member State level Advisory Committee and member State Steering Committee Planning (8Th Plan). With more than five decades of research experience he was nominated by the U.G.C. to the World Economic Conference, Berlin 1980 and to visit Canada under the Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute. He has several papers and articles published in leading journals such as the Indian Economic Journal, India Journal of Labour Economics, Asian Economic Review, and Indian Journal of Agricultural Economics and others. He has written nine books and contributed chapters in several books. Professor Sadhu has participated in several national and International Seminars and conferences including Pugwash Conference in Islamabad, 2006.

Fahmida Shah has been the Principal of the Women’s Polytechnic and the Head of the Technical Education Department for the past twenty years. She is an English Lecturer and has been a member of the Kashmir Chapter of the Women’s Initiative. She holds an M Tech in Engineering Education and has an Advance Course Diploma in Pattern Making & Draping from NIFT Delhi.

Tsering Samphel is President, District Congress Party. He was formerly President, Ladakh Buddhist Association. He has been actively involved at the grassroots in building relations with Ladakhi Muslims, and also works at various levels of reconciliation initiatives in Ladakh.

Tinni Sawhney holds a Masters Degree in Rural Development, and currently works on the rural development program of the Aga Khan Foundation under implementation in Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, and in mid-2006 in Jammu and Kashmir. Previously, she has worked on watershed development and agriculture diversification programmes with the Danish International Development Assistance, and with communities around a forest area to resolve conflicts related to use of forest resources. Tinni’s professional interests include mainstreaming gender concerns particularly on issues related to agriculture, water conservation and forest management, and community involvement in the management and sustainable use of natural resources.

Aneesa Shafi is at present the Head of Department, Sociology, University of Kashmir. Her field of specialization is women, children and weaker sections. She is actively involved in the upliftment of women in conflict situation. She has a book and a number of articles to her credit.

Seema Khajooria Shekhar is member of the Consultative Committee of the Jammu and Kashmir State Commission for Women and also the Appointed Member of the High Court Legal Services Committee. The first woman to hold the post of Additional Advocate General in the State of Jammu and Kashmir, she has dealt with various cases under Civil, Criminal, Labor, Arbitration and Constitutional Law. She has been the Member of the Jammu and Kashmir State Social Welfare Board and is the Member of the Management Committee of the Indian Red Cross Society, J&K State branch. She has published a number of articles in various local dailies and weeklies and has delivered lectures on legal issues pertaining to women, in several awareness generation camps.

Kavita Suri is Special Correspondent with The Statesman. She has a doctorate in Education from the University of Jammu. She was invited by the US state department as part of the “US International Visitors Exchange Program” to study “Journalism in US”. She is also a recipient of the prestigious British Chevening fellowship.

Arjimand Hussain Talib is a columnist with the Daily Greater Kashmir, and is working as Project Manager for Action Aid International (India) for the Kashmir region. Action Aid is running the largest community-based psycho social care projects in Kashmir, establishing income generation units for the violence affected people, mainly women, and running disaster preparedness projects in 35 colleges of Kashmir. Action Aid is also running the largest non governmental rehabilitation projects at the cost of Rs 12 crores in the earth quake affected areas in Kashmir, through a unique model of local governance implemented by representative Village-level Committees. Arjimand has previously worked with UNESCO on its Culture of Peace Curriculum Project and has contributed three chapters to the training manual. He is presently also working on World Bank’s ProVention Consortium project for developing a disaster management system in both parts of Kashmir. His forthcoming book “Political Economy of Kashmir: a Kashmiri Perspective” is scheduled for release in October 2006.

Aarti Tikoo, Staff Reporter with The Times of India in Jammu, is a WISCOMP Scholar of Peace. Her study is titled “Guns and Books at Odds: The Impact of Militancy on Education in Jammu and Kashmir”. It explores the impact of armed conflict on the children of Kashmir. She has been a member of the Intra Kashmir Dialogues initiated by the Institute for Multi-Track Diplomacy, Washington DC.

George Verghese is a noted columnist and has been Visiting Professor at the Center for Policy Research since 1986. Educated at Delhi and Cambridge Universities, he was Correspondent and Assistant Editor at The Times of India (1949-69), Editor, The Hindustan Times (1969-75) and Editor, The Indian Express (1982-86). A Gandhi Peace Foundation Fellow, he received the Magsaysay Award for Journalism in 1975.

N. N. Vohra, educated at the Punjab and Oxford (UK) Universities, has been a member of the Indian Administrative Service (1959-94). During his tenure he served as Secretary Defence Production, Defence Secretary and Home Secretary, and later as Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister (1997-1998). He has served as Member of the National Security Advisory Board (1998-2001); Chairman of the National Task Force on Internal Security (2000); Chairman, Review Committee on Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses (1999-2001); Chairman, Committee on Review of Military Histories (2001-02); Member , CSCAP National Committee (2001-05); Co-Chairman, India-European Union Round Table (2001- ). He has also been the Government’s special representative for carrying out a dialogue in Jammu and Kashmir with various political parties, community and religious groups, academia, representatives of civil society etc. This dialogue, later elevated to political level, is continuing.

Roma Wani is Special Secretary, Planning, Government of Jammu and Kashmir. She was formerly Chairperson of Women’s Development Corporation, Jammu and Kashmir. She is deeply interested in issues related to spirituality, inter-faith dialogue and religion. She has supported the Athwaas initiatives at the grassroots level, particularly on issues related to women’s economic empowerment, and has personally visited the Rafiabad belt to assess the situation and interact with women’s self-help groups there. As a philanthropist, she has donated for a number of causes related to children’s rehabilitation and earthquake relief.

Shabnam Iqbal Wani is a Consultant and Lecturer in the Department of Psychiatry, Government Medical College, Jammu. She holds a Ph.D in Medical Psychology. Her thesis work was on Hyper Kinetic Children. She also has a Diploma in Personality Development and has completed a Course in Counseling and Psychology. She has to her credit several Research papers. Her important works include ‘Psyche of Migrants’, ‘Mass Hysteria’ and ‘Psychological Pains and Treatment’.
Dil Afroz Qazi is currently Principal of an Engineering College in Srinagar. She provides free education in schools and is currently running three such schools; one in Kupwara and two in Baramulla. She strongly believes that militancy can be countered through education. Dil Afroz also works for women’s upliftment and provides livelihood training especially for women victims of the insurgency. She has been part of a number of dialogue processes between India and Pakistan as well as dialogue between different regions of Jammu and Kashmir through the Intra Jammu and Kashmir Forum.

Sana Quereshi is a BA first year student. She is actively involved in Social and Development work.

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About WISCOMP

Since its inception in 1999, WISCOMP (Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace) has carved a unique niche for itself, as an initiative, which works at the confluence of gender, security and conflict transformation. It was established as part of the efforts of the Foundation for Universal Responsibility of HH the Dalai Lama to promote the leadership of women in areas of peace, security and international affairs. Through its various programs, WISCOMP has emerged as a resource for conducting research, training and advocacy, and for providing policy briefs to parliamentarians and diplomats.