Gender, Democracy, and Peacebuilding in South Asia
Ninth Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop
December 2011
A Report

Compiled by:
Manjrika Sewak

Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace
Foundation for Universal Responsibility
of
His Holiness The Dalai Lama
New Delhi
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Support for this Workshop was provided by the Government of Finland. The WISCOMP team is grateful to the Embassy of Finland, New Delhi, for its valuable support and guidance to the Conflict Transformation Workshops.
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Acknowledgements

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The Conflict Transformation Program of WISCOMP comprises a series of workshops which facilitate dialogue between young people from across conflict divides in South Asia, and provide them with the expertise and skills to participate in processes of nonviolent social change. Since its inception in 2001, the Program has brought together over 400 young women and men (in the age group of 22 – 35 years) with the purpose of broadening the network of “future influentials” and enhancing their capacity for nonviolent, democratic engagement in the communities they live and work in.

The underlying assumption of this initiative is that face-to-face dialogues along with professional training in Conflict Transformation are prerequisites for building cultures of peace, justice and coexistence. Informed by a generational approach to peacebuilding, these workshops create a space and context for young people to rise above the baggage of preceding generations and build a future based on trust and mutual respect. While participants of these dialogue-cum-trainings have represented diverse socioeconomic, cultural, and political backgrounds as well as professions such as conflict resolution, advocacy, education, media, business, medicine, law, development, public policy, and the social sciences, they have come together for a common purpose: to build their capacity to engage in peacebuilding work and to do their bit to reduce human suffering.

Titled *Gender, Democracy, and Peacebuilding in South Asia*, the Ninth Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop brought together a group of youth leaders from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka for a dialogue-cum-training in Conflict Transformation. The Workshop also included
refugee voices, this year represented by Tibetan and Afghan youth based in India. It sought to:

- Build trust and strategic relationships between young South Asians from a diversity of cultural, linguistic, ethnic, and religious backgrounds;
- Enhance professional development in the areas of gender, nonviolence, and conflict transformation;
- Promote cross-border partnerships for peacebuilding; and
- Encourage empathy for diverse worldviews among South Asian youth leaders.

Over the last 10 years, WISCOMP has used a Conflict Transformation approach to peacebuilding in South Asia. In other words, it has focused on trust and relationship-building between key stakeholders (primarily women and youth leaders) as part of its efforts to contribute to sustainable peace and democracy across the horizontal and vertical divisions of society. The assumption is that when individuals (from across fault-lines of conflict) “walk in the shoes of the other”, they are able to empathize with a perspective different from their own and, develop solutions that will serve the interests of all (rather than only their constituency or community). WISCOMP sees trust – and relationship-building work as a prerequisite for institutional and structural transformation in the democracies of South Asia.

This Workshop marked the culmination of a decade of WISCOMP’s Conflict Transformation initiatives. Even as the WISCOMP team honored this anniversary and applauded the inspiring peace and justice work that our alumni have engaged in, we are deeply aware that South Asia remains a site where organized violence, poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, gender inequality, and xenophobia, mix dangerously together.

Seventeen years after the late Pakistani economist, Dr. Mahbub-ul-Haq articulated the concept of “human security” – as “freedom from fear” and “freedom from want” – and called for the addressing of seven dimensions1 of threat which had led to widespread insecurity and injustice, it is pertinent to ask the question: What has been the track record of the countries of the South Asian region in embracing Haq’s vision of human security and human development? The 2011 UNDP Human Development Report projects a bleak

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1 The seven dimensions of threat outlined in the 1994 UNDP Human Development Report include, economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security, and political security.
picture for South Asia, with the region faring poorly on human development and gender equality indices, such as female literacy, life expectancy, healthcare, maternal and child mortality, and violence against women, to name a few.\(^2\) Paradoxically, India as the largest democracy that is also projected as an impressive emerging economy fares poorly in the region on these indicators.\(^3\)

Worsening this picture is the scourge of direct, armed violence, which is also widespread in the South Asian region. While countries such as Afghanistan and Pakistan grapple with violent insurgencies, Nepal and Sri Lanka struggle to balance the goals of inclusion, justice, and reconciliation as they make the transition from long periods of conflict. In Bangladesh, the cultures of violence continue to serve as threats to the efforts towards deepening democracy. While in India, terrorism, the Maoist insurgency, and coercive state action and pervasive violence in Jammu and Kashmir and the Northeast continue to dominate public discourse. Yet, data analysis by the India Armed Violence Assessment reveals that the above account for only five to ten percent of all violent deaths in the country. For example, “in 2009, there were 32,369 homicide victims compared to 2,231 deaths linked to terrorism and insurgency in India.”\(^4\) The high number of homicide fatalities is attributed to violence stemming from political, caste, religious, and gender conflicts. In this context, the easy availability of small arms and light weapons emerges as a serious threat to efforts to deepen peace and democratic processes. In fact, India accounts for 40 million of the 75 million privately owned firearms currently in circulation, and ranks only second after the United States in a comparison of the number of privately owned guns in 178 countries.\(^5\) Of these, 33.7 million are unlawfully held guns\(^6\), with only 6.3 million reported to be registered.\(^7\)

\(^2\) In India, female foeticide and infanticide have led to a skewed sex ratio with an estimated 12 million girls aborted over the last three decades in the country.


\(^7\) Ibid.
The incidence of gender-based violence in the SAARC region is particularly alarming. While it is estimated that one in every three women is a victim of gender-based violence\(^8\), in a recent survey on the world’s most dangerous countries for women, three South Asian countries, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India, ranked first, third and fourth respectively.\(^9\) The survey revealed a continuum of structural, cultural and direct forms of violence, ranging from lack of access to education, employment, land, healthcare, and nutrition, to high rates of maternal mortality, female infanticide and foeticide, forced marriages, domestic violence, dowry deaths, honor killings, trafficking and, sexual harassment and assault.

What does this say about the functioning of democracy and its ability to deliver peace and justice to the people of South Asia? Although democratically elected governments now govern all the SAARC countries, why are they unable to create a general sense of security and wellbeing for the people of the region? A report on the *State of Democracy in South Asia* reveals that while there is widespread support for democracy in the region, its track record of achieving justice – particularly structural justice – and people’s power and participation has been far from satisfactory. Further, the report notes that democracy has been unable to accommodate the diversities and differences that the existence of multiple identities and aspirations has generated. On the contrary, democratic institutions have emerged as the personal preserve of autocratic political families and caste and class elites. So, while people actively participate in elections, these do not result in adequate representation of the social diversities of the subcontinent. The low levels of accountability and transparency that exist in public and representative institutions have also eroded people’s faith in political parties, placing them below the judiciary and the army. The main challenge to democracy, it seems, lies in the capacity of governing and representative institutions to remove different forms of violence (including structural violence), discrimination and inequality, and infuse justice, freedom, peace, security, and transparency into daily democratic practice, so that people can exercise their power at all levels of government beyond the act of electing representatives.\(^10\)

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\(^9\) The survey was conducted among gender experts and carried out by Trust Law, a legal news service run by Thomson Reuters Foundation. For more details, see “The world’s most dangerous countries for women” (June 15, 2011) http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/06/15/us-women-danger-factbox-idUSTRE75E32A20110615 (Accessed on: November 13, 2011).

At the international level, although a decrease in the number of “active armed conflicts” has been recorded (from 36 in 2009 to 30 in 2010)\textsuperscript{11}, there remains considerable debate on the realization of aspirations such as political participation, democratic governance, gender equity, human rights, and social and economic inclusion, even in “democracies” not experiencing “active armed conflict”. Conflict Transformation scholar John Paul Lederach, in his critique of contemporary peacebuilding practice, draws attention to the ways in which peace accords are perceived. While such agreements have been successful in dealing with the more immediate crisis-oriented issues, they have often been unable to meet the expectations of long-term social and economic change, particularly structural justice. He cites the gap between expectations of justice and what is finally delivered once the armed violence stops, as a key factor in the renewal of grievance and conflict.\textsuperscript{12}

Ostensibly, there appears to be a consensus among international organizations, governments, donors, and civil society groups that *peace* and *democracy* are the priority goals. The two terms have acquired a variety of meanings in different regions of conflict based on variables such as local realities, customary laws, cultural beliefs, indigenous practices, and aspirations of stakeholders. Even as researchers and practitioners acknowledge this diversity in definitions, there continues a tendency to apply a top-down approach, invariably imported from models outside the region. As a result, the two concepts continue to be contested and critiqued even as formal “democracies” experience increased levels of violence.\textsuperscript{13}

This trend has serious implications for the field of peacebuilding. Over the last decade, governments, international organizations, and civil society groups

\textsuperscript{11} Uppsala Conflict Data Program, Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University (Sweden: 2011)

http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/faq/#How_many_conflicts_were_there_in_the_world_in_2009 (Accessed on: November 21, 2011).


\textsuperscript{13} International Alert, a UK-based civil society organization has come up with a basic working definition of peace, which has found considerable international acceptance: “Peace is when people are anticipating and managing conflicts without violence, and are engaging in inclusive social change processes that improve the quality of life.” *Democracy*, at a basic level, includes structural and institutional change (elections, separation of powers between the executive and the legislature, an independent judiciary and press, an active political society, to name a few) as well as personal and group transformation (characterized by increased trust and coexistence in society, collaborative endeavors between individuals and groups across conflict lines, and citizen participation in governance and decision-making processes).
have turned to this field for ideas, methodologies and processes that can help sustain human security and democracy in divided societies. This faith in the field of peacebuilding was perhaps most visibly reflected in 2005 when the United Nations set up a Peacebuilding Commission. The foreign ministries of several countries today have designated peacebuilding desks to address issues of conflict prevention, resolution, and transformation. Peacebuilding organizations and university-supported peace and conflict study centers have mushroomed across the world. More and more young people enroll for specialized courses in peacebuilding.

Yet, the big picture transformational change is indiscernible or complicated at best. Articulating this growing unease among scholars and practitioners that the field of peacebuilding was not living up to its transformative mission, in 2008, leading trainers Simon Fisher and Lada Zimina, wrote an open letter titled Just Wasting our Time?14 While acknowledging the successes made in improving the conceptual vocabulary of the field and in mobilizing a diverse group of actors (from the grassroots to the government level), the authors stated that the message of peacebuilders “seems to be too muted, weak and fragmented”, while “globalized corporate power exerts even more undemocratic control over the essential components of peace”.15 They identified a variety of obstacles, all leading to the “deep gap between the rhetoric and the reality of fundamental change”. They pointed to the dichotomy between “technical peacebuilding” implemented by a “peace industry”, and “transformative peacebuilding” carried out by a social movement. Many actors tend to focus on the former, thereby neglecting long-term change processes and the crucial goal of “social justice”. Fragmented relationships within civil society (and the concomitant ego wars and organizational rivalry) as well as excessive financial dependency (and therefore political dependency) on donors (governmental and commercially-oriented) were identified as other factors that inhibit success.16 In light of the above, the time is perhaps ripe for the peacebuilding community to re-examine its assumptions and approaches to the task of reinforcing the inextricable link between peace and substantive democracy.

16 For the authors’ full critique of contemporary peacebuilding practice, see http://www.berghof-handbook.net/documents/publications/dialogue7_pbcrossroads_complete.pdf
The WISCOMP Workshop

The Ninth Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop sought to address these issues, drawing on WISCOMP’s work over the last 10 years in the areas of trust-building, sustained dialogue, citizen participation, and coexistence. It was premised on the belief that gender equality is central to the advancement of peace and democracy in any society. In this context, the Workshop sought to address the following questions:

- Are South Asian democracies truly representative of their populations? In what ways can old power imbalances, particularly those pertaining to gender, caste, and class, be transformed at decision-making levels?17
- How do we move beyond the conception of democracy as one that simply involves the casting of an electoral vote, or worse still, an exercise in getting popular sanction for elite rule?
- How might democratic practice be infused with more vigor and range so that it can truly enhance the sense of wellbeing and freedom for the majority of the people of South Asia? In this context, what insights might we draw from the Principles enshrined in our respective Constitutions?
- How might democratic practice expand the base of public dialogue on a diverse range of social and justice issues? Further still, how might the base of economic prosperity be broadened to include historically disadvantaged and marginalized groups?
- How can gender relations and gendered power structures, embedded in patriarchy, be transformed so that women and men can co-create inclusive understandings of freedom and peace in society?
- What efforts have regional organizations and initiatives such as SAARC made to prevent and reduce armed violence (as well as less visible forms of violence such as hunger, poverty, and high maternal and child mortality rates)?
- In democracies, how do we engage with the existence of legislations that legitimize draconian state actions, which not only hinder democratic

17 Amartya Sen and Jean Dreze, in an essay on India’s growth-development story, raise the issue of representation. They cite two interesting examples: one, in a survey of editors and other leading members of the print and electronic media in Delhi, it was revealed that none belonged to a scheduled caste or scheduled tribe. Rather, 90% belonged to a small group of upper castes that make up only 16% of the country’s population. Similarly, in the Indian Parliament, the proportion of women has never crossed 10%. Amartya Sen& Jean Dreze, “Whose Growth is it Anyway”, Outlook (New Delhi: November 14, 2011), p.56.
dialogue but also serve as inappropriate responses to citizen grievance or even armed conflict?

- What are some of the options that the field of peacebuilding offers for enriching the processes of democratic governance, particularly at the local-level? How might we strive to make peacebuilding frameworks and vocabulary an integral part of democratic practice?

In this context, an empirical study from Burundi, Liberia and the Democratic Republic of Congo brings to the fore some interesting findings. The authors of the study, Howard Wolpe and Steve McDonald, note that “the principal challenge in building peace and democracy in divided societies, lies not in sector-specific institutional ‘fixes’, but in bringing key leaders together in a long-term process designed to resolve the tensions and mistrust…and to build…their capacity to work effectively together across all of the country’s lines of ethnic and political division. Failing that, institutional transformation will have…no sustainability.”

Secondly, the study states that the fundamental challenge to democratization and peacebuilding lies not in the absence of democratic values, but in the fact that members of different ethnic and religious groups perceive members of other communities as “outsiders” or even worse, as “dehumanized and threatening adversaries”. As a result, members of these different groups do not see themselves as part of a “national community”. This is particularly true for countries that were previously colonized and where national boundaries were drawn by colonial or external actors. So, there is a discernible disconnect between the nation and the state.

Thirdly, Wolpe and McDonald note that conflicting groups must see collaboration with each other as a prerequisite for sustainable peace. They should come to recognize that interdependence and an inclusive political process is in their self-interest and that their constituencies will be more secure and happier through collaboration with former foes. Further, relationships and trust fractured by the conflict must be restored. While the process must begin with the top-level leadership, it must also be initiated amongst diverse

19 Ibid, p.139.
stakeholders at the grassroots and at other levels (such as education, media, business, sports et al).20

Workshop Methodology

The WISCOMP Conflict Transformation Workshop encourages experiential learning through the use of multiple formats such as cross-community and cross-cultural dialogues, interactive sessions, role-plays, panel and group discussions, and creative forms of expression such as theater, music, art, and cinema. These are informed by the “elicitive approach to learning”, drawn from the writings of the educator Paulo Freire, and the subsequent “popular education” movement, which emphasize the creation of a mutual learning community where each individual, by sharing his/her own experiences, resources, skills and knowledge, enhances the process of learning and education.

Conflict Transformation scholar John Paul Lederach summarizes some of the key principles of this “pedagogy” in the following words: “Popular education promotes change both in social and educational systems. It is centered on the concept of conscientization – the process of building awareness of self-in-context that produces individual growth and social change. Popular education is a process of mutuality – student and teacher discover and learn together through reflection and action, which are kept in direct relationship as the root of learning and transformation…Posing problems relative to real-life situations and challenges rather than providing prescriptions about those situations is an important pedagogical tool.”21 It stimulates reflection and encourages participants to trust their own ability to transcend violence.

Drawing on this pedagogy, WISCOMP sees participants as resources, not recipients, and believes that participants learn as much from what they are taught in a workshop setting as from the lived experiences of those they meet at such dialogues and from their own reflections on such encounters. WISCOMP places particular emphasis on the use of creative methodologies such as theater, cinema, and music to engage with issues of conflict, prejudice, protest, resistance, and dialogue. These are powerful methods, which have the potential to approach issues of violence and peace in a holistic manner as well as to reach out to a very wide cross-section of society.

20 Ibid, p.140.
Imagining South Asia 2020

The Workshop closed with a participant-led session titled *Imagining South Asia 2020: Through the Prism of Gender, Democracy, and Peacebuilding*. In small groups, participants articulated their vision for South Asia, using the following questions as a guiding framework:

- **How do youth leaders see the interface between Gender, Peace, and Democracy in their vision of South Asia?** What are some of the mechanisms (institutional structures/practices/methodologies that could be used to realize this vision?

- **What does being South Asian mean?** Is there a convergence between this regional identity and our own national identities? Are regional cooperation and regional identity desirable and possible in the South Asian region? Which are some of the government/civil society initiatives that have the potential to build an inclusive South Asian identity drawing on the region’s shared history and the ideals of nonviolent peaceful coexistence?

- **What are some of the steps that can be taken to ensure “human security” for each individual in the South Asian region?** Why does the South Asian region fare poorly in human development and gender equality indices? What can be done to improve this situation?

- **In what ways have participants’ perceptions about people from other countries of the South Asian region changed as a result of their interactions during the course of this Workshop?**

- **What are the challenges to peace and security that each country faces today? Are the frameworks of conflict transformation and peacebuilding helpful in addressing these challenges?** If not, what approaches could work?

The closing session invited feedback from participants on the overall Workshop structure and content, and how this four-day dialogue could be taken forward to serve as a platform for enhancing post-Workshop collaboration and supporting the participants in their peacebuilding endeavors.
Welcome Address

The Workshop opened with a *Welcome Address* by Dr. Meenakshi Gopinath, WISCOMP’s Hon. Director. Inviting the South Asian participants of the Ninth Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop to use the WISCOMP space to engage with the connections between the three central themes of the 2011 dialogue – gender, democracy, and peacebuilding – she flagged the following questions:

- How might young South Asian women and men build a vocabulary of gender-sensitive conflict transformation, which becomes integral to the region’s understanding of democracy?
- How might the next generation of South Asian leaders forge an understanding of the region which is inclusive, which doesn’t suffer from the desire for hegemony, and which recognizes the interconnectedness of the destinies of the countries in this part of the world?
- How might we collectively endeavor to move democracy from a formalistic, legalistic, *de jure* understanding to a real and lived engagement of participatory publics?

Gopinath said that while there have been substantial conversations between “gender and democracy” and between “gender and peacebuilding”, a dialogue between the three fields, particularly between democracy and peacebuilding, has been limited and at best off-the-cuff. For South Asia, this represents an important area of contemporary engagement as many countries in the region grapple with diverse, often violent, challenges to democratic practices.

In this conversation between the three fields, Gopinath said that an engagement with issues of security is critical. “We have this notion of security as an extremely exclusive, state-centered enterprise. Yet, in our part of the world, security has to be wrested from elite bastions and put into the space of democratic debate.” She pointed to the lens of human security in this context, which foregrounds the security of individuals and peoples as opposed to the security of nations and states. Quoting Pakistani economist Dr. Mahbub-ul-Haq, she said that human security is not about territoriality and weapons; rather it is about the dignity and freedom of individuals. As Haq put it, “human security is a child
that did not die from a disease, an ethnic conflict that did not erupt in violence, a job that was not cut, a dissident who was not silenced...” This understanding of human security, when married to the frameworks of sustainable development and nonviolence, offers new insights into how democracy could become a lived reality for the citizens of South Asia. Gopinath added that an important component of this engagement is the “trust-building” between different countries of the South Asian region, as also between communities divided along markers of gender, caste, class, religion, ethnicity etc. The framework of conflict transformation can be particularly helpful here in addressing the multiple trust deficits that serve as obstacles to enriching democratic practice in South Asian societies.

Introducing the idea of “connectors that cut across divides”, a key focus of the Conflict Transformation Workshop, Gopinath urged participants to look at borders and boundaries in South Asia in ways different to how previous generations have perceived them. If borders were seen as centers of cultural and economic exchange, how might this transform thinking around the fear of partitions and border conflicts? Introducing another important focus of the 2011 dialogue, “spirituality and peacebuilding”, Gopinath said that it is difficult to set religion aside in a region where faith governs the lives and attitudes of millions of people. While religion is often seen as a source of conflict and the Marxist allusion to religion as the “opiate of the masses” is popular among...
young scholars, Gopinath urged for a distinction between three terms – spirituality, religion, and religiosity. She argued that spirituality and religion are often confused for religiosity. Religiosity, which involves the political mobilization of power and undermines the true essence of faith, needs to be interrogated. Spirituality and religion are also different, and WISCOMP’s perspective is that peacebuilding has to, at one level, be a spiritual activity – an activity in which the interconnectedness of all human beings is foregrounded. On the ground, this also means a recognition that the democracies of South Asia are intertwined and so are the destinies of the people in this region. In this context, Gopinath posed the question: “Can we create a South Asian sensibility where we retain our own national, religious and ethnic identities, yet look at our region as a whole and strive for regional connections?” While there are several challenges to the realization of such a vision, according to Gopinath, perhaps the most daunting is South Asian governments’ fear of partitions and the hesitation to transcend the borders of the mind in the context of the regions’ (often violent) historical legacy. Yet, the future must be different from the past, and for the sake of the wellbeing of “all” people in the region, these borders must be transcended. The WISCOMP Conflict Transformation Workshop seeks to provide a space for such transcendence. The space that the Workshop offers is catalytic, non-judgemental, and allows participants to engage with their own hopes and fears in a frank and open manner. It is based on WISCOMP’s belief that trust- and relationship-building between youth leaders is the key to sustainable peace in the region.

Gopinath shared that the Workshop, which is the ninth in a series of annual peace dialogues, reflects the mantra of the students’ movements of the 1960s which was, “Be a Realist. Attempt the Impossible.” The dialogues began in the year 2000 at a time of intense hostility between India and Pakistan, and were in a sense the only game in town. At that time, it was considered difficult and even foolhardy to believe that the hostility and mistrust could be transformed by empowering the next generation of leaders to build cross-border peace partnerships. Yet, 12 years later, the results – whether seen from the perspective that visas came through for every dialogue or that deep internal and group transformations took place – are there for all to see.22 As Gopinath put it, “We all know from history that the most momentous events have been when boundaries were broken, when walls were brought down. The Berlin

22 For more information on the accomplishments of the WISCOMP India-Pakistan Conflict Transformation dialogues, please refer to our website www.wiscomp.org. See also the publication, Closer to Ourselves: Stories from the Journey towards Peace (New Delhi: WISCOMP, 2008).
Wall is one example among many. The need for us South Asians is to bring down these walls and transform them into bridges.” Another critical dimension of peacebuilding work is to address peoples’ pain, reduce suffering, and remove the sense of exclusion and alienation that ordinary people feel. This can come about through a confluence of personal, structural, and cultural transformation.

Commenting on the intersection of gender with democracy and peacebuilding, Gopinath said that a key goal for WISCOMP is to foreground women’s voices in the negotiations and contestations of democratic practice. “En-gendering” does not mean the mere inclusion of more women. It is not just the size of the table, but what is brought to the table that is important. The key questions are, “Does ‘en-gendering’ imply a significant qualitative shift in the way people understand democracy or peacebuilding, or is it just adding women and stirring? Is it merely about adding a women’s panel at a conference on peacebuilding or democracy? Or, does it go beyond this?”

Even though the women’s movements in South Asia have interrogated conventional structures of security and democracy and offered feminist perspectives which also include the voices of other historically marginalized groups (based on caste, religion, ethnicity et al), Gopinath said that violence against women in different spheres remains rampant as also does their exclusion from arenas where decisions are taken. There is a need to negotiate a new kind of democracy where women and men co-create a just and equitable society.
Gopinath shared that in India, women have been at the forefront of many movements for justice, whether it is the Narmada Bachao Andolan, the struggle for upholding the human rights of the victims of the Bhopal gas tragedy, or the movement to promote the rights of farmers and other disenfranchised groups. They have impacted Indian democracy by pushing the boundaries of how governments define “security”, “development”, “displacement”, and have articulated for people, basic rights such as those to food, shelter, and dignity. Yet, despite this, the majority of women in India remain powerless and speak the language of silence, whether it is the domain of the home, the community, the workplace, or politics. This Workshop, said Gopinath, seeks to generate ideas on how young South Asian women might break this language of silence, and how young South Asian men might emerge as their partners in this quest. She concluded with a poem on Silence by Anasuya Sengupta, an Indian writer and activist.

Silence

Too many women in too many countries
speak the same language of silence.
My grandmother was always silent, always aggrieved.
Only her husband had the cosmic right (or so it was said)
to speak and be heard.
They say it is different now.
(After all, I am always vocal and my grandmother thinks I talk too much)
But sometimes I wonder.
When a woman shares her thoughts, as some women do,
graciously, it is allowed.
When a woman fights for power, as all women would like to,
quietly or loudly, it is questioned.
And yet, there must be freedom – if we are to speak
And yes, there must be power – if we are to be heard.
And when we have both (freedom and power), let us now be understood.
We seek only to give words to those who cannot speak
(too many women in too many countries)
I seek to forget the sorrows of my grandmother’s silence.
Prof. Pratap Bhanu Mehta, President, Center for Policy Research, New Delhi, delivered the Keynote Address at the Workshop. Situating the discourse on democracy in South Asia in a global context, Mehta said that many of the ideas, concepts, and frameworks pertaining to democratic practice have a global history and are shaped by global currents. The reference to “global” was not to suggest that the concepts were invented elsewhere and South Asia appropriated them, but rather to look at similar movements and engagements with democracy that are currently underway in different parts of the world.

Reflecting on the events of 2011, Mehta noted that on the one hand there was the extraordinary spectacle of the Arab Spring, which unleashed transformations and aspirations that most historians would not have thought possible a few years ago. The desire of people to collectively control their destiny is genuine and part of the broader movement for modernity which governments can ignore only at their peril. So, there was a discernible deepening of democratic consciousness. On the other hand, events in Syria were a reminder about the limits of this kind of resistance to authoritarian rule. It reflected a sad truth, particularly relevant to South Asia, which is that if organized power has the willingness to be brutal, it can succeed for very long. The key question, according to Mehta, in this context is, “When is it that rulers in a particular society, those who hold power, simply lose their will to
rule? What is the difference between Mubarak and Assad?” This is an important question, which is not asked often enough by those who work for social change. The collapse of the Soviet Union could also be looked at through this lens. While there were the underlying economic contradictions of the Soviet system and its inability to keep up with the West, among other factors, Mehta said that there was also this very nebulous element where one got the sense that the Communist Party simply lost the will to rule. It would be instructive to ponder on this question in the broader discourse on conflicts and social change. The events of 2011 revealed that democracy is fragile and can be crushed by small groups of people if they are determined to use force.

Commenting on to the growing perception among citizens in countries such as India and the USA that democracy is a politically dysfunctional system, Mehta identified three structural challenges. These have been ignored over the last 15 years or so, but have now resurfaced with resurgence as a result of the economic recession. The first challenge lies in the relationship between democracy and inequality. Many people have argued that at one level, “the history of democracy reveals that it was a conservative answer to revolution... It is the price we have paid for avoiding revolution.” The capacity of a democracy to put up with an astonishing range of inequalities requires a much deeper engagement. For example, historically, democracies have been unable to facilitate land reform processes. Although there are some exceptions, the only successful cases of land reforms have been countries where revolutions or colonial powers facilitated the process. But by and large, the capacity of democracies to not only put up with, but to structurally create the conditions of extreme income inequality is astounding. The second challenge is the compatibility of democracy with extreme concentrations of power. Why it is that democracies appear to be in the grip of oligarchs? What are the processes within democracies that push them in this direction? While Mehta noted that at a conceptual and moral level, people would agree that the answer to the problems of democracy should be more democracy, the question does require deeper introspection. According to Mehta, we need to ask ourselves the harder questions about why it is proving difficult to deepen democracy in the ways we had hoped to. The third challenge relates to our own complicity as citizens in putting up with these oligarchic structures of power. According to Mehta,

One very crude manifestation of our complicity in these concentrations of power is the simple fact that most economies are facing an economic crisis at the moment...When politicians told their populations that they could have a free lunch, we were all too ready to believe it. So in the USA, politicians said that
absolutely everyone can own a home, credit can be cheap. Likewise, governments in India said that there is a need to expand the nature of the state in particular critical areas, but they can do it without raising resources or without nourishing the growth dynamism that allows you to generate those resources. Why is it that we bought into all these messages? What is our own complicity as citizens...to avoid the truth? So, one of the big challenges at this historical juncture of deepening our democratic structures is, how frank are our conversations in a democracy?

Linking issues of democracy and peace in South Asia to the global economic crisis and the ensuring conflicts (reflected in the Occupy Wall Street movement and other struggles to address growing inequality across democracies), Mehta articulated the following question as one that is going to influence the destiny of the region: What is going to be the shape of the economy in the next 15-20 years? In this context, the most disturbing statistic from all the comparative literature on economies (including China) is that the employment elasticity of capital is declining. “There seems to be something about the structures of global production at the moment...that in order to be efficient, firms have to use more capital intensive technology. In India, we have the phenomenon of a jobless growth which is nine per cent...The question of productive employment
is going to define the destiny of South Asia”, said Mehta. While employment has always been important for politics, what is radically different is the current context. Politics had a certain kind of dynamism and vitality, but the pace of change in social structures and aspirational structures that underlay that politics was relatively slow. What has changed over the last 10-15 years is the explosion of aspiration at all levels of Indian society. There has been a “disembedding of individuals from inherited social structures, whether it was caste, gender or class”. This process of individuation that modernity unleashed has acquired great momentum in the last 15 to 20 years. And most of the conventional frameworks of development don’t quite know how to respond to this new dynamism. A common thread in all the conflicts that India is experiencing today – from those over land acquisition and forest rights to opposition to the location of nuclear power plants in areas with rich ecosystems which sustain rural communities – is therefore a great clamor for economic and political participation. It is reflected in the fact that civil society and ordinary citizens are telling governments that they have to consult the people before taking decisions.

Mehta pointed to another critical change that India has witnessed over the last decade or so. There now appears to be a disconnect between what the poor demand (in terms of participation in the economy) and the way governments think about helping the poor. Earlier, one of the features of South Asian economies was that anybody could enter the economy at any price point. A person could be poor, but participate in it. However, in the context of the development trajectories of cities over the 15 to 20 years, Mehta said that it is going to be increasingly difficult for the poor to participate in the economy at lower price points. So, an economy with a poor but participatory structure could be replaced by one that is prosperous but has a dual and dichotomous structure. According to Mehta, the defining questions in this context are, “Will cities be hospitable to the poor? Will their structures allow poor migrants access? How might these questions be addressed in contexts where there are immense aspirations and rising social mobility and migration? How will our political and dialogic structures respond to this real fact of mobility? Because the democratic frameworks within which governments used to think of people – bound by place, group identity, and the circumstances of birth – may no longer reflect reality.” This presents a significant challenge to all the countries of the South Asian region.

Commenting on the different ways in which conflict transformation could take place, Mehta said that while many of the intractable conflicts in South
Asia have their roots in the management of social and political aspirations of group identities, what is interesting to observe today is that participants of those conflicts are beginning to look for ways out of these conceptual categories (of group identity) by which they were defined. While economic growth is not a sufficient condition for the transformation of intractable conflicts, it has done something very significant for India with reference to the trajectory of identity-based conflicts. “For the first time, it has provided an alternative narrative where there is something else that is aspirational…and is a real possibility”, said Mehta. The example of migration from the Northeast to Delhi for better economic livelihoods was cited. While this is not to suggest that the focus should shift away from processes of dialogue to transform the conflicts in this region, the point is that such social mobility in pursuit of a better quality of life has sown the seeds for an alternate narrative, which moves beyond group identity and alienation from the state. However, Mehta noted that such mobility has generated a different set of conflicts because when young women and men from the Northeast shift to Delhi, they are subjected to racist behavior. So, a conflict around territorial and cultural identity has shifted towards a discourse on racism in the metropolis.

Mehta concluded with the assertion that South Asia has 10-15 years to get its house in order. The core challenge lies in the triad of social aspiration, economic mobility, and the recasting of identities in less conflictual ways so that all individuals can enjoy the fruits of liberty and equality. “If we don’t focus single-mindedly on these concerns, we will remain in this low-level logjam of democracy…This window of opportunity is narrowing in the context of an uncertain global environment”, said Mehta.

In order to move forward, the focus has to be on the truly important rather than on what appears to be urgent. The foundation of the discourse on democracy must be built on the primary goal to lift people out of poverty, and to make the constitutional structures of liberty and equality a lived reality for them.

Mehta proposed education as a key area for intervention. He quoted from the latest NSSO data which reveals that women constitute more than 50 per cent of enrolment in higher education in India. Added to this is also the university-specific data which shows that women are excelling in academics and in higher education. Yet, if one were to look at a different piece of data, female employment participation (for the educated), it stands at only 20 per cent. In the context of the general refrain in the country on the shortage of human
capital, Mehta drew on the above statistics to assert that the human capital is very much there! However, the best human capital that the country has invested in cannot enter the job market. Why is this so? While Mehta pointed to the cultural battle that still needs to be waged to advance women’s rights, the majority of the reasons are fairly prosaic. Are our cities safe for women? What kind of support systems to organizations provide for women? Are they responsive to the fact that more flexible working structures are needed for women, particularly mothers?

**Discussion**

H.E. Terhi Hakala, Ambassador of Finland to Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, and Sri Lanka, New Delhi, chaired the discussion. She congratulated the WISCOMP team on its unwavering faith in the capacity of young South Asians to transform intractable conflicts, and for sustaining its efforts to provide a space where young women and men could dialogue on the visions for their communities, nations, and the region. Articulating the Government of Finland’s support to processes of facilitation and conflict resolution in different parts of the world, she made reference to the contributions of former Finnish President and Nobel Prize Winner, Ambassador Martti Ahtisaari, to peace and mediation processes in different regions of conflict.

*Workshop participant Mr. Syed Ali Raza poses a question to the panel.*
Hakala said that a global perspective on democracy, peace, and security is crucial in a context where countries are increasingly connected to one another through trade, economy, climate change, and other processes. While regions are important geographically, politically, ethnically, and culturally, there is now the recognition that the next generation of leaders will have to take decisions with a global perspective on issues.

Hakala also drew attention to the different context within which armed conflicts take place today. These are entirely different from those of the Cold War period and what we have today is a far more complex picture. Along with this is also the realization that arms cannot be used to resolve conflicts. The processes of politics, economics, mediation, and other dialogic frameworks must be the primary methodologies through which conflicts are resolved and transformed. Concluding with a comment on the international and regional efforts to increase women’s participation in peace processes, Hakala said that the challenge is daunting, because despite all the rhetoric, the track record of including women’s voices at decision-making levels remains poor in many countries and regions of conflict.

There was considerable discussion in the Q&A session on the possibility of a universally accepted definition of democracy. Pointing to a “constitutional representative democracy” as comprising what a bare minimum definition should include, Mehta expressed caution against packing too much into democracy as a term because very expansive definitions convert what should be empirical relationships into a sort of tautology.

The discussion also engaged with the recent corruption scandals and anti-corruption movements in India and their relationship to democracy. Mehta’s view was that corruption represents only one point in the broader context of why democracy is facing a legitimacy deficit. In fact, he noted that, barring very few exceptions, it is difficult to think of societies that went through a rapid period of growth without significant corruption. The instability and legitimacy deficit that Indian democracy is confronted with today has to do with the dissolution of three assumptions on which democratic institutions were run up until now. The first assumption was the slow pace of social change, particularly at the grassroots where the majority of the impoverished lived. The second was a state structure based on secrecy, where the conception of accountability was hierarchical. So, government servants, political party workers, and others were accountable to their superiors, not to the average citizen who paid taxes. However, Mehta noted that vertical hierarchy will no
longer be the framework for accountability. Rather, it will be horizontal where politicians and government officials will be answerable to citizens and to civil society. The Anna Hazare movement for a strong Lok Pal Bill is a manifestation of this process. The third assumption was control over knowledge and information. While legal instruments such as the Right to Information have foreclosed this assumption, the existence of an educated and aware citizenry has also played a big part in doing away with controls on information dissemination. What is interesting today is that all these three assumptions have broken down. Any model of political control that was premised on these pillars is not going to work any longer. In addition, Mehta noted that these processes have been accompanied by a great social disembedding, which means that peoples’ wants have become more complicated, and can no longer be understood through frameworks meant to deal with group identity aspirations.

The challenge, across South Asia, is that there is a political system which still functions within this old paradigm, and it is now colliding with the new reality. Underlying this “great churning” that India has witnessed over the last year or so (vis-à-vis one corruption story following another), is a shifting of what the norms of a democracy should be, said Mehta.

Responding to questions on the relationship between economic growth and democracy, Mehta clarified his view that while growth will not solve the problems of conflict, it is an important condition for democracy. His perspective on economic growth did not pertain to numbers (which often disguise several inequalities), but to the generation of jobs, education, and mobility. Second, he said that an interesting dimension of growth and an expanding economy is that these open up spaces for alternate dialogues and create new contexts for engagement. They broaden people’s worldviews and add new lenses through which they look at conflict and their own social and economic aspirations. Mehta cited the example of caste in India. While it remains a political reality, the fact that today there are opportunities for economic mobility and migration, has transformed the political discourse beyond recognition over the last 10 to 15 years. Pointing to another example – Afghanistan – Mehta said that it would be very difficult to imagine an economically stable and peaceful Afghanistan without open trade links through the region. While trade cannot solve conflict, it opens up new contexts for dialogue, which have the potential to transform social structures and open up possibilities for coexistence.
Prof. Peter deSouza, Director, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, delivered a plenary lecture on the *SAARC Citizen Charter for Democracy*. He opened his lecture with a reference to the ex-Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad’s statement that India had too much democracy and that it could have achieved better growth and development had it been “less democratic.” The comparison was to China which had met many of its human development indices and growth targets, although in a fairly authoritarian way.

Inviting participants to suspend their immediate judgement on Mahathir’s statement and use this as an opportunity to engage with the different ways in which democracy is understood and practiced in the South Asian region, he drew attention to local and international events in 2011, such as the Occupy Wall Street movement, the Arab Spring, and, the anti-corruption movement in India, and articulated a need for deeper engagement with these processes. deSouza’s proposition was that these are part of a “historical process of great transformation”, which doesn’t lend itself to easy recognition. He questioned the language used by international academic rankings that

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23 The former Malaysian Prime Minister had made this comment during a visit to New Delhi in December 2011.
label South Asian countries as “flawed democracies”\textsuperscript{24} and urged the young participants of the Conflict Transformation Workshop to observe and record the struggles for democratization in their respective countries as components of a historical process of great transformation. He said,

\begin{quote}
\ldots This great transformation is being driven by a democratic aspiration for equality and for voice. These are the two normative goals that are hidden in our history, that are hidden in all this hubris we read in the newspapers. And when this historical aspiration for equality and voice begins to take root, you will get the kind of churning that you are witnessing in South Asia today. Building democracy therefore takes time because what is at stake is a deep normative transformation. Every dimension of society is being transformed because of this democratic aspiration.
\end{quote}

In South Asia, this is a complex process because governments have to build democracy with little room for negotiation and flexibility and in the face of resource scarcity. Unlike the USA and Western Europe, which, two centuries ago, had the luxury of time and space to build and deepen processes of democratization in their respective societies, the challenge for the relatively younger democracies of South Asia is far more complex. According to deSouza, countries in this region have to build democracy alongside four simultaneous processes.

- **The first is the process of expanding state formation.**

The relatively young states of South Asia are tasked with the exercise of institution and infrastructure building. Bangladesh, for example, has over the last six years, experienced a situation of near anarchy and the subsequent suspension of democracy. During this period, a caretaker government introduced ordinances which sought to build new institutions and accelerate state formation. It also proposed the ideas of human rights and accountability commissions, and was responsible for the subsequent conduct of free and fair elections. How does one understand such a situation where an authoritarian government unleashed processes that were otherwise seen as functions of a democratic government?

\textsuperscript{24} According to the Economist Intelligence Unit, countries of the South Asian region come under the category of “flawed” democracies.
• **Democratization is also taking place during a period of national identity construction.**

Disparate communities with distinct histories and cultures are being invited to be part of one political nation. The concept of nationalism is fluid and the question of how multiple “nations” can coexist within one “state” remains a central challenge for the countries of South Asia. deSouza cited the example of Bangladesh, where the notion of “nation” changed drastically within a period 25 years from 1947 to 1971. Often, the invitation to be part of the nation-state is violent, as has often been the case with reference to the Indian government’s behavior towards states in the Northeast. The exercise of managing differences between diverse, and sometimes antagonistic, identities even as efforts are made to build a national identity, poses complex challenges to the task of deepening democracy.

• **Added to the above two processes is the initiation of welfare programs based on the principle of social justice.**

Social justice is emerging as a very important idea in India. Currently, one of the greatest transfers of resources from the state to the individual, in the history of India, is taking place through welfare programs. It is estimated that about 20 billion dollars is being transferred through the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) to give ordinary citizens the security of livelihood. This has transformed various sectors, such as the labor market, the fiscal structure, agriculture, and most significantly, it has changed people’s aspirations.

• **At the same time, processes of globalization are also underway in the countries of the South Asian region.**

For example, the Indian economy is opening up in ways it has never before. The recent debate in the country over FDI in retail is but one example of this. No other region in the world has had to build democracy alongside these simultaneous processes.

deSouza proposed that democracy can be understood in terms of two core principles: popular control of government and political equality. What is interesting to observe at this juncture in South Asia is how these two principles are influencing every aspect of social life – how they are transforming political practices, institutions, communities, regions, and relationships. Democracy has changed not only the ways in which politics are conducted, it has transformed educational institutions with schools and universities becoming more accessible to historically disadvantaged groups through affirmative
action. However, deSouza added that the reverse of this question makes for an even more engaging study: “What is South Asia doing to democracy?” The discourse on democracy is no longer influenced by theories and precepts imported from the West. Rather, South Asia is changing the contours of this discourse by offering new ideas and experiences.

For example, scholarly literature cautions against the overloading of the concept, thereby suggesting that democracy should not be mixed up with other ideas such as justice, rights or development. The logic is that these are big concepts in themselves, and must be treated separately. Discussions on democracy should therefore be limited to the processes by which governments are formed through popular elections. Yet, deSouza shared that in the study *State of Democracy in South Asia* which he co-authored, it was revealed that to the people of South Asia, democracy implies the presence of these very concepts – rights, justice, and development. Without these, it has little meaning for the people of South Asia. A Conflict Transformation practitioner in South Asia must have this nuanced understanding of the complex ways in which democracy is understood and practiced in the region, and resist the tendency to internalize long-accepted Western theoretical frameworks.

In the context of India, deSouza cited example of the dynamic party system – perhaps the most competitive party system – which has evolved unique practices such as coalition-building and the Common Minimum Program. These are complex practices which countries in Europe have only recently begun to explore. The uniqueness of Indian democracy can also be seen in the context of its federal structure. India has built some very innovative federal institutions to protect and preserve its diversity. While the state of Jammu and Kashmir has a special status, north-eastern India is an example of the unique structure of “a federation within a federation”. Further, autonomous regions have been constituted within states, for instance, the Darjeeling Autonomous Council and the Ladakh Autonomous Region. Further decentralization has taken place through the Panchayati Raj institutions, which have devolved power and governance to the grassroots’ level. The example of India also challenges Western assumptions that democracy can exist only at a certain level of wealth. Democratic aspirations have transcended the barriers of poverty and illiteracy, and these have, in a sense, become the common sense of popular culture in India. In fact, the *State of Democracy in South Asia* study revealed that even when formal democratic institutions appear wobbly, the culture and public endorsement of democracy remains vibrant and permeates all aspects of social interaction.
Yet, deSouza noted that there are also many dark stories that challenge the very efficacy of Indian democracy. For instance, the statistic of 250,000 farmer suicides (linked to debt and poverty) tells a grim story of the kind of stain Indian democracy must carry. Similarly, stories of law enforcement officers carrying out human rights violations, judicial officers siphoning off public money for personal benefit, and different kinds of insurgencies in several districts across India, portray a picture of the immense and complex challenges that confront democratic practice in India.

Democracy produces its own challenges as well. According to deSouza, the process of democratization has created four challenges, which could be seen as unintended consequences, but nevertheless which must be addressed:

- The first consequence is that democracy seems to have produced in all the countries of South Asia a predatory politics – a politics where those who are running the democratic process are predators on the resources of the state. In other words, the economic surplus in each of the countries of the region is skimmed off through rent-taking by the political class. So, there is an elite capture of institutions – state, political, as well as civil society. Apart from the political class, the new elite comprise corporate leaders, film stars, and sports persons, who can access the structures of the democratic state in a way that ordinary citizens are unable to. This had led to a situation where, in India for instance, the Supreme Court has stepped in to redress the widespread usurpation of public revenue by the political elite in a series of cases concerning large-scale corruption. This is however not unique to India alone. Democratic politics has produced a predatory class which has taken over the resources and structures of the state in all of the countries of South Asia.

- The second feature of the democratic process is the erosion of the boundary between the private and the public. Constitutional structures in all the South Asian countries make an important distinction between the private and the public domains, and offer provisions for the preservation of this boundary. Yet, across the region, there is a growing erosion of this boundary. The media has of course played a part in this intrusion into the private lives of citizens. Its coverage of the 2004 tsunami in which pictures of parents grieving for their lost children made it to the covers of news magazines was cited as an example to make the point that personal grief and loss are no longer confined to the domain of the private. In the years since the tsunami, this trend has increased in popularity, not just in the domain of news but also in the area of television entertainment. deSouza urged for an
engagement with the forces that are causing this erosion and in what ways is the state responding to this.

- The third process relates to rising social aspirations of historically disadvantaged groups and the new elites who lead these movements. New leaders of grassroots movements are increasingly getting co-opted into the very political system that they set out to transform. In all of the South Asian countries, it has been observed that over a period of time, they begin to accept the normative structure of the system, thereby reducing their own capacity to transform the same. deSouza cited the example of new political parties in India whose leaders started out with much promise, but over time, their politics turned out to be no different than those of older parties. As a result, the transformative potential and social aspirations of new movements – which have emerged because of popular control of government and political equality – are being neglected through a co-option of their leaders, the new elites.

- Fourth is the process of the invisibilization of the losers. The absence of a serious public engagement with the question, why have 250,000 farmers committed suicide over the last 10 years, is a reflection of this process through which those who are poor or who have less power become invisible. A whole new culture of politics has been created for the powerful. So, for example, Indian cities are now being re-designed to meet the aspirations of the rich and the healthy, and the space for groups such as the elderly and the urban poor is shrinking. deSouza also cited the example of the privatization of resources, which has created a situation wherein international consultancy firms have become very powerful. They now advice governments on issues such as water, health, education, and the environment. These processes need to be interrogated in a more serious manner.

Saying that South Asia is one of the most exciting laboratories in human history for processes that seek to build societies based on equality and democracy, deSouza asserted that it would be difficult to govern any of the countries in the region without democracy. Aside from the theoretical and moral arguments, the choice of democracy is a pragmatic one because there is no other system that could manage the diversity of South Asia in the way democracy can. South Asia is in fact the most diverse region of the world, home to the largest number of languages, the largest number of ethnic groups, the largest number of religious groups, and, the largest number of young people in the world. Managing such diversity is a task that only a democratic system can take on.
Concluding with an invitation to the participants to read newspaper reports of conflicts and social movements in the broader context of a great historical transformation in democratic practice that is currently underway, deSouza urged them to engage with the inconvenient and complex questions that the experiences of democracy highlight for the countries of the South Asian region. For example, why is it that despite having some of the richest and largest mineral deposits, the region is home to the largest number of people who go to bed hungry? Why do these two realities coexist? To address this and many other puzzles and paradoxes, deSouza invited participants to use the SAARC Citizens’ Charter for Democracy as a template for the kind of moral, normative structures that young South Asians should work towards. The Charter, which contains the aspirations of the people of South Asia from all walks of life, may be seen as a manifesto for democratic debate in the region.

The session Chair, Ambassador Veena Sikri, Ford Foundation Chair, Bangladesh Studies Program, Academy of International Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, drew on deSouza’s assertion that the present moment represents an opportunity for great historical transformation to say that there is a very real chance that this will be lost because of the co-option of power by a handful of people at the top. She cited the example of Panchayati Raj, which represents an ancient Indian system of grassroots democracy and development. In fact, this system was a reference point for Mahatma Gandhi during the
freedom struggle when he spoke of concentric circles of development beginning with the unit of the village. Today, even though this concept has become legislation, the co-option of power by people at the top has completely distorted the very purpose of Panchayati Raj, not to mention the serious threat that such concentration of wealth in the hands of a few, poses for a country like India. Sikri added that the “trickle down” theory of development, which has been propounded over the last 20 years of liberalization, does not seem to be working. There remains at the grassroots intense deprivation, reflected in the large numbers of Indians who continue to die of hunger, malnutrition, and illness.

In this context, Sikri advocated for a return to the bottom-up approach to development, which by its very structure includes historically disadvantaged groups. She cited the example of the microfinance system in Bangladesh, started by economist and Nobel Peace Prize winner, Prof. Muhammad Yunus. Through the Grameen Bank, a microfinance organization and community development bank, Yunus made small loans available to the impoverished, particularly women, who otherwise had limited livelihood options. The idea of microfinance for the poor was based on Yunus’ observation that farmers in the Chittagong area of Bangladesh had little or no means to access Western-oriented “modern” banks to procure loans to start a business. Interestingly, Yunus observed that when a loan was given to a woman, it reaped far better dividends and was also used for catering to the educational and nutritional needs of the children. It was also observed that when loans were given to men, not only was the return far less, there was also an attempt to co-opt power and leave out the women.

Sikri also drew attention to the education systems that exist in the South Asian countries. “Our education systems do not teach us anything about each other. If anything, there is a disastrous hate literature in some countries about the other.” Instead of providing credible information about the cultures and peoples of the region, textbooks and teachers often promote negative stereotypes about the other country, thereby making it all the more difficult for South Asians to dialogue on issues such as coexistence and peacebuilding. As Sikri put it, “the DNA that your education has given you serves as an obstacle to conflict resolution in the region”.

Sikri cited the example of the Franco-German Education Board which was instituted soon after the Second World War. It played a key role in improving relations between France and Germany and in facilitating the kind of integration
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that we see in Europe today. The Board painstakingly went through the school and college curriculum of the two countries to remove texts and literature that were seen as negative or prejudiced by either of the two countries. Over the years, the revised curriculum infused in German and French youth a new way of looking at the other, shedding the baggage of the past centuries. Sikri felt that a similar process should be initiated in South Asia in order to facilitate a deeper and more respectful understanding of the diverse cultures that make up the region.

Commenting on the challenges that democracies in South Asia confront today, Sikri pointed to the danger posed by the reassertion of the feudalistic order and the exclusion of the voices of the powerless. In this context, the task for young South Asians is to assert their perspectives, not simply by voting, but by continuously engaging with governance processes and resisting the forces of co-option.

Democracy also requires the presence of peace and harmony between the diverse nations of South Asia. Commenting on this relationship, Sikri pointed to the need to look at relations between nations as not limited to relations between the governments of the day, but rather as constituting genuine attempts at building relationships among the peoples of these diverse regions. Trust and understanding form must the foundation of these cross-border relationships.
at different levels of society. On the relationship between democracy and development, Sikri foregrounded the need to use the instruments of democracy to bring in development – a development that is not dictated from the top, but one which is designed in consultation with the people.

**Discussion**

The questions and ensuing discussion centered on what deSouza defined as “inconvenient facts” and how these may assist young scholars in making sense of democratic practice:

- While South Asia has been lauded for being able to use the instruments of democracy to govern more than a billion people, representing very diverse cultures, it was felt that such large populations could serve as a threat to democracy. This is particularly true if the track record of the dispensation of social justice in the region is examined. The challenge of population has certainly complicated the task of building democracy. It has meant that democracy has to be built under huge resource constraints and with a population that is huge, that is demanding (particularly with reference to social justice and economic mobility), and at this point in time, hugely aspirational.

- The discussion included methodological questions about the efficacy of attitudinal surveys, for instance, in order to gauge people’s perceptions about democracy, particularly when some groups are more marginalized than others. The Swat region of Pakistan was cited as an example to highlight the complexity of the task of gauging women’s attitudes in a context that is deeply patriarchal to the extent that women are excluded from active roles and rarely step out of their homes. How would qualitative research tools deal with such situations where levels of unawareness and non-participation, amongst certain groups, in this case, women, are extremely high. What methodological tools would be used in such a context? How would democracy make inroads in such a region? In this context, deSouza elaborated on the different research tools that were used for the *State of Democracy in South Asia* project. In addition to attitudinal surveys, the research team used the tools of ethnographic case studies (which would be helpful for regions such as Swat) and in-depth dialogues in different parts of South Asia to delve deeper into the areas under study.

- The idea of “building democracy on the run” with governments attempting to do many things, and carry out new experiments in devolution and transparency simultaneously, was an evocative image. While it created an
enabling context to understand the shortcomings and challenges in a more holistic manner, there remained a sense of disillusionment among the Workshop participants with respect to the many setbacks that processes of peacebuilding and democratization have confronted in emerging democracies such as Nepal and Afghanistan. In this context, deSouza urged participants to look at these setbacks in the context of a historical process. The tasks of creating a new constitutional order and building democracy from the bottom-up are long-term processes and require time and patience. It was therefore necessary to look at these events in a broader historical context of a deep-rooted transformation that is currently underway.

• deSouza urged participants to engage deeper with the inconvenient facts and paradoxes that stories from the field reveal. For example, despite the intense political energy for democracy and the realization of social aspirations, why do certain political families dominate the discourse in all of the countries of the South Asian region? Why is it that even the most competitive politics degenerate into dynastic rule by a handful of elites? The overwhelming prevalence of dynastic politics and members of the same family representing different political positions, was also explained through a comment on how South Asians perceive (and in this case do not perceive) the notion of “conflict of interest”.

• The comment about private consulting firms generated considerable discussion on what the alternative to these could be. Some participants expressed the view that in a situation where government functionaries demonstrate indifference and apathy even towards fundamental tasks assigned to them, let alone advising the government, wouldn’t it be appropriate to in fact seek the advice of these consultancy firms? While acknowledging the sentiment behind this question, deSouza felt that the problem lay with the way consultancy firms view social transformation – as an assignment with a deadline, rather than a lifelong engagement which it should be. They have demonstrated a tendency to set aside the complex and paradoxical data from the field that does not fit into pre-conceived definitions of concepts such as democracy, development, local-level governance et al.
The panel discussion *Democracy and Conflict Transformation: Regional Perspectives* opened with a presentation by Dr. Krishna Menon, Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, Lady Shri Ram College for Women, New Delhi, titled *Feminist Understanding of Democracy: Musings from India*. Beginning with an introduction to the concept of democracy, Menon said that contemporary understandings lay significant emphasis on representation, participation, and involvement in decision-making. Liberal democracy – currently the most popular incarnation of democracy – hinges on liberal philosophy, which is committed to the empowering idea of universality that assumes that rationality is possessed by all human beings. Because human beings possess rationality, which is universal, therefore they are all worthy of equal treatment; they are all free; and they are all equal. As a system of government, liberal democracy recognizes and honors this universality of rationality and equality.

Tracing the history of feminist engagements with this understanding of democracy, Menon drew attention to the key question that women asked, “If all human beings are considered equal, how come we are not equal to men? If all human beings possess rationality, why are women not part of this discourse?” According to Menon, there were two answers. The first, a minority
view, was that women do not possess rationality, and therefore they obviously can’t be part of this discourse. The second response was that their exclusion was probably an oversight on the part of liberal philosophy and that amends could be made by creating some room for women to walk into this universal space called liberal democracy.

While this view was welcomed and celebrated, gradually, feminists realized that liberal democracy was not as promising as it had set out to be. The stage was already set by the norms and principles of “patriarchy”. Within the concept of liberal democracy, there was already a distinction between the public and the private, and a strict policing of the boundaries between the two spheres. The assumption was that in order for the man to be a successful, dynamic, and committed citizen in the public sphere, it was required of the woman to be confined to the private sphere to ensure that there was food on the table, the home was cleaned, and there was bodily gratification (for the man). With these boundaries being so strictly policed, if a man were to enter the public sphere with a child on his hip, or burst into tears at a public meeting, this would be seen as a transgression of the boundaries between public and private.

Contemporary feminists have found this boundary to be extremely problematic. They have argued that if the core ideas of democracy are to be translated into reality, there is a need to extend these to spaces such as the nursery, the kitchen, and the bedroom. In this context, feminists have articulated the need to recognize women’s specificity, and also of groups who do not fit into the definition of the so-called universal. The engagement of feminism with liberal democracy has led to an exciting dialogue between the discourse of so-called universalism and the idea of specificity. As Menon put it,

> Is specificity always a challenge to universalism, or can specific experiences actually help to democratize the content of universalism? I would like all of us to remind ourselves that any kind of universalism is a definition. And, in the stratified societies that most of us live in, definitions are made and propped up by those who are in power. So the content of the definition of universal is skewed in favor of those who have power. Feminists, like many other groups all over South Asia, are asking for a review of this so-called universal, the content of which is determined by those who have power.

Feminism is asking for the recognition of two ideas: equality and difference. These are not to be seen as polar opposites, but as occupying places on the
same continuum. So while the equality of women and men must be acknowledged on the one hand, there are also situations where differences and the different experiences of being a woman, a dalit woman, a Muslim woman etc. have to be recognized. These diverse experiences and identities which need to be acknowledged distinctly, should not be seen as a threat to liberal democracy, but rather viewed as a perspective that strengthens the idea of democracy.

In the context of India, Menon said that three processes were unleashed in the 1990s, which proved to be a turning point for the women’s movement. These were Mandal, Mandir, and Market. These posed a very fundamental challenge to the way the women’s movement looked at itself. The Mandal Commission, which asked for an extension of the affirmative action program to include people belonging to so-called “backward” communities, created a great deal of anxiety amongst the upper castes, and India has never quite been the same since. The conflict around the Mandal Commission report reiterated the significant role that caste has come to play in politics and social engagement. For the women’s movement, the disconcerting question was, “Can we pretend that there is a sisterhood? Or do we need to acknowledge that caste is indeed a factor that divides Indian women’s experiences? Is there a brahmanical feminism as opposed to a dalit feminism?” On the second issue – Mandir – which related to the mobilization around the construction of a Ram Temple in Ayodhya, Menon posed the question, “Are all Indian women sisters or are the experiences of women belonging to the minority communities distinct from those of women belonging to other religions?” This question has become even more pertinent after the violence in Gujarat in 2002 which targeted Muslim women and their bodies with a kind of brutality that had not been witnessed before. The third issue – Market – relates to economic reforms which unleashed processes of liberalization, privatization, and globalization. These had very different kinds of impact on Indian women, again fracturing the ideal sisterhood notion. While some women have benefited from globalization processes through high paying jobs in call centers and multinational companies, the lives of those women who work in the informal and unorganized sectors have become more insecure, and poverty levels among them have risen post-liberalization. These diverse experiences present themselves as yet another example of the conflict between the so-called universal discourse of liberal democracy on the one hand and the lived reality of specificities on the other.

Menon concluded with the assertion that “one needs to move away from the universal discourse which tends to homogenize, and work towards a democratic
universalism or a ‘strategic universalism’ which suggests that the notion of the universal is fluid in itself. You define it in universal terms with the acknowledgement that, as time goes by, as new identities emerge, you may need to redefine the universal.”

Engaging with these issues in the context of a case study from the northeast of India, the next presentation by Dr. Deepti Priya Mehrotra, Fellow, Center for Conflict Resolution and Human Security, New Delhi, looked at *Irom Sharmila’s Nonviolent Struggle against Militarization in Manipur*.

Irom Sharmila, a 39 year old woman from the border state of Manipur, has been on a fast for over 11 years – the longest political fast in human history – to seek the withdrawal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA). Imposed in Manipur in 1980, AFSPA is an emergency Act that is meant to be used only for six months with a review after this period. It can be imposed in an area which has been declared “disturbed”. The Act, which allows armed personnel to shoot at sight and to kill on mere suspicion, takes away the Right to Life of the people of Manipur. It has been misused, by the state armed forces to carry out an endless series of killings, disappearances, torture, and rapes with impunity. The armed forces can also conduct “combing operations” in villages to catch insurgents. Mehrotra shared that in this crossfire between the armed forces and underground insurgent groups, the ordinary civilians are the worst affected.

Tracing the history of the conflict in Manipur, Mehrotra said that different forms of violence plague the state of Manipur. The easy availability of drugs, weapons, and money has also built a vested interest in the conflict. Today, Manipur is perhaps the worst governed state in India. Yet, little is known about this border state in the mainstream Indian imagination. There is paucity of resources channelled towards people-centered development, health services, education, agriculture, local industry etc. There is in fact a steadily downward graph in terms of economic self-sufficiency of the people and of the state of Manipur. The efforts of the government to provide livelihood options for the people are almost non-existent. This has generated considerable discontent among the people of Manipur, which dates back to the period of Indian independence in 1947.

It was in this context that groups of young men took to violence to increase their power to negotiate with the Indian state on political and economic issues.
The reactionary repression of the Indian state has been met with a further increase in the number of people joining insurgent groups. This has led to a cycle of mindless violence where the AFSPA is justified in the context of the growing insurgency and local support for the insurgency increases due to the human rights violations committed by the armed forces. While there was only one insurgent group in 1964, the number increased to three in 1980 (which was when AFSPA was imposed), and now there are 35 insurgent groups.

Introducing Irom Sharmila’s struggle in this context, Mehrotra said that prior to her arrest Sharmila was a social worker and a journalist. She had been part of many youth and women’s groupings that were trying to counter the violence in Manipur. She found that these tools of advocacy were not working, and finally, on November 2, 2000, she took a unilateral decision to begin a fast unto death to protest against the AFSPA. The immediate cause for her decision was the gunning down of 10 ordinary, innocent civilians by the armed forces. They were waiting at a bus stop near Imphal, women and men, the youngest 16 years and the oldest 60 years. Sharmila took up their cause as her own. She went to the bus stop and began her fast.
In order to keep her alive, the government force feeds Sharmila. It collaborates with the police and the judiciary to arrest her, try her in a particular court, sentence her for “attempt to suicide”, and imprison her. Since the maximum sentence for “attempt to suicide” is one year, she is released every year, continues her fast in public for a few days, and is then rearrested and taken to a high security wing of a hospital in Imphal where she is force-fed. This has continued for over 11 years now.

The significance of this story is that Sharmila is waging a nonviolent struggle against an Act that curbs the human rights of innocent civilians. She is doing this in a country that is ostensibly a liberal democracy. The situation in Manipur is representative of peoples’ experiences in many other parts of India as well where the gross neglect of the state has resulted in deep-rooted discontent. The key question in this context is, “Can the use of force by the state to quell this discontent by its own citizenry be acceptable within a democracy?”

Mehtrotra shared that civil society in Manipur is extremely active and vocal with a large number of women and youth groups using constitutional methods to call for the repeal of AFSPA as also the respect for human rights. Large groups of women from different parts of Manipur have come to Imphal to camp outside the hospital where Sharmila is being held. They have been on a relay hunger strike for more than 500 days.25

Sharmila has drawn on a key Gandhian mode of protest, which has a significant nonviolent legacy in India. According to Mehtrotra, even though the Indian state has not repealed AFSPA, Sharmila’s nonviolent protest has been extremely effective in building a mass peoples’ movement, which grows in strength with each passing day. With the movement’s visibility increasing, both nationally and internationally, and with the story of Sharmila’s personal sacrifice touching an emotional chord in many an Indian heart, the nonviolent movement for respect for human rights in Manipur has, like Mohandas Gandhi’s struggle many years ago, offered to the world a new tool for political protest and social change.

25 As a result of another significant protest in 2004 against the brutal rape and murder of a young Manipuri woman by the armed forces, the Indian government constituted a commission to review the need for AFSPA in Manipur. The commission met with a wide range of stakeholders in Manipur and concluded that the Act should be withdrawn. Although the report has not been tabled in Parliament by the government, it was leaked by the Press, and is therefore now in the public domain. Despite the recommendations of this government-appointed commission, the Act remains intact in Manipur.
Exploring the relationship between gender and democracy in the context of *Burmese Refugee Women and the Gendered Politics of Exile, Reconstruction, and Human Rights*, Ms. Sheena Kumari shared the experiences of Burmese refugee women in India.\(^{26}\)

In spite of having one of the world’s largest refugee populations, India is not party to the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, nor does it have a national refugee protection framework. According to NGO estimates, there are about 80,000 Burmese refugees living in India.

Burmese men and women fled to India for a variety of reasons: ethnic civil war, human rights abuses, forced labor, religious and political persecution, silence on political dialogue, economic mismanagement, lack of opportunities for education and employment, and the general struggle for survival in a climate of fear. Women have also left the country because of gender-based violence such as rape, sexual harassment, or to escape border trafficking.

The Chin women who form the focus of Kumari’s research hail from diverse backgrounds and are mainly employed in the informal sector as nurses and teachers, since they do not hold a work permit. Some of them are pursuing higher education while others have become activists, working to draw attention to the issues faced by women refugees. In Burma, the Chin women suffer from forced labor, poverty, extortion, land confiscation, and religious persecution because they are largely Christian. Other abuses include beating, torture, imprisonment, as well as systematic rape and abuse, which is part of a larger strategy by the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC)\(^{27}\) aimed at terrorizing ethnic minorities by destroying their culture. Women flee Burma to escape this persecution, but in this flight they end up being persecuted. Most of the women who are abused by the army are afraid to report it for fear of further persecution by the Burmese military. Women who have been victims of sexual violence also fear stigmatization within their communities. International aid agencies and NGO’s continue to be denied access to the minority communities in Burma who are at risk. Women are more at risk because in a patriarchal society, they symbolize the honor of their communities, and sexual abuse also sends the message that the men in their communities

\(^{26}\) The summary of this presentation was prepared by Ms. Rashi Sarawgi.

\(^{27}\) This is the official name of the military regime of Burma.
are weak and cannot protect the honor of their women. Kumari quoted from an interview with a Burmese woman belonging to a refugee organization: "Women refugees had no conception of what women’s rights were until they came to New Delhi and were exposed to these new ideas.”

Kumari emphasized the fact that the focus should not only be on the victimhood narratives of these women but also on their roles as active agents of change in their communities. The women have organized themselves and try to raise awareness about the issues affecting the refugees in the absence of a national refugee protection framework, their country’s progress towards democracy etc. The Burmese refugees in India have the freedom to follow their tradition and culture and there is a very strong sense of belonging to a community among them.

Kumari recommended the following measures to alleviate the challenges faced by Burmese refugees in India:

- A national refugee protection law to supplement the work done by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).
- A change in the UNHCR policy when dealing with refugees living in urban areas. Their current policies are more suited for refugee camps.
- An independent body to monitor and evaluate UNHCR policies and programs.
- Build bridges between the local communities and Burmese refugees.
- Measures need to be taken to improve documentation about Burmese refugees living in India, particularly the challenges they face as a result of the apathy of the Indian administration.

Kumari concluded with the assertion that Burmese refugees will continue to flee Burma until wide sweeping changes are carried out in the country. The 2010 elections towards partial democracy in Burma were a step in the right direction, but the rights of the minority communities, particularly women, will only be protected when there is a percolation of democracy to all segments of society, which goes beyond the exercise of the right to vote.

Shifting to the context of Afghanistan, Mr. Ahmed Shikib Dost, News Presenter, Afghanistan National Radio and Television, Kabul, made a presentation on
Peace and Security in Afghanistan. In his opening comments, he said, “In Afghanistan, we have everything but security.” Nine years ago, the international community was welcomed with open arms when its forces entered Kabul with the goal of bringing security to the country. Up until 2004, the situation was hopeful as projects for good governance and security were undertaken and even the Taliban recognized the need to cooperate with the government of Afghanistan.

Post-2004, as a result of certain actions by the government and the international community – night-time air strikes, frisking of women by international troops without consultation with the community or the government, the existence of a shadow government, and the flourishing of military and security companies – there has been a sense of disillusionment among the local people and the security situation has deteriorated. The existence of private security companies is a sore point for the local people and the source of a big media war between Kabul and Washington. The people of Afghanistan want the private security companies to exit and they want the government to strengthen and invest in the country’s national forces – the Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police. This however is not in the commercial interest of some sections of the international community.

For Dost, a primary cause of the instability that Afghanistan is witnessing today, 11 years after Operation Enduring Freedom, is that the models to promote peace, governance, and democracy in the country have been designed by Western policymakers and scholars, with little consideration for their resonance with the lifestyles and aspirations of ordinary Afghans. Instead of consulting Afghan women and men, Dost said that the international community has exported peace and democracy models to Afghanistan and dictated to the people how they should run their country. The space for Afghans to envision their own future and create democratic structures rooted in the traditions of their own culture has not been nurtured. He argued that Afghans should have led the consultations on the kind of democracy to be established in Afghanistan. This would have broadened the constituency for peace and stability as also ensured that the cultural and religious practices of the diverse communities were taken into consideration. Dost was also of the opinion that the decision to bring Western style democracy to a country where a majority of the population is illiterate, was akin to putting the cart before the horse. Education should have received far greater priority in Afghanistan in the post-9/11 years.
Dost made reference to the assassination of Mr. Burhanuddin Rabbani, Chairman of the Afghan High Peace Council, who was leading Afghan efforts to negotiate with the Taliban. Saying that the assassination was a severe blow to peace and stability in Afghanistan, he underscored the need for open and honest conversations with insurgents, as also a more serious engagement with Pakistan, which has “not demolished the safe havens for militancy that exist inside its territory”. Reference was made to Pakistan’s role in exacerbating the conflict in Afghanistan as well as in bringing peace to the war-ravaged nation. In fact, it was stated that the success of the Afghan peace process hinges on the constructive participation of Pakistan.

In addition to Pakistan, Dost also pointed to the important role that regional countries such as Iran, India, China, Russia and others play in bringing stability to Afghanistan. The security issue is in fact no longer an Afghan problem, but has escalated to a regional problem. In this context, Dost quoted Afghan President Hamid Karzai who made the following statement at an international conference: “In the past, we have suffered alone. Now, everyone (in the region) will suffer with us. An effort to divide Afghanistan ethnically or weaken it will create the same consequences in the neighboring countries.”

Dost concluded with a call to countries of the South Asian and Central Asian region to work cooperatively to build sustainable peace and security in
Afghanistan. As he put it, “The instability in Afghanistan is now a regional problem and needs a regional solution. Peace in Afghanistan means peace in the region. Without the support of the region, the security problem will spread its tentacles to Afghanistan’s neighbors.”

Shifting focus to the Prospects of Conflict Transformation in Jammu and Kashmir, Mr. Tahir Aziz, India-Pakistan (Kashmir) Projects Manager with Conciliation Resources, London, shared his views on peacebuilding in the region. Picking up on a point that Dost had made on Afghanistan, Aziz said that the meaningful and constructive engagement of Pakistan with Afghanistan and Jammu and Kashmir has emerged as a vital issue in both regions. Pakistan’s effort to stabilize Afghanistan is linked to its role in building peace in Jammu and Kashmir. This dynamic must be recognized by local, regional, and international stakeholders.

Commenting on the current status of the peace dialogue between India and Pakistan vis-à-vis Jammu and Kashmir, Aziz said that while there is the realization that war is no longer an option (owing to nuclearization), at the same time, neither country has been able to persuade the other, through dialogue, of what the roadmap for the future should look like. So, there appears to be an impasse with neither side taking any proactive or creative steps to move towards the possibility of a meaningful peace. While the current stalemate in the composite dialogue does not give much hope, Aziz pointed to a few positive developments which have emerged as a result of the official and non-official dialogues of the last several years. The first relates to the growing inclusion and participation of local people from Jammu and Kashmir. These perspectives are being taken more seriously by the governments of India and Pakistan, and this has now created the hope that the people of Jammu and Kashmir could actually serve as a connector or a bridge between the two countries.

The second development pertains to the implementation of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh’s strategic “out-of-box” thinking reflected in his call to “make borders irrelevant”. According to Aziz, this statement has acquired huge credence with the passage of time and has changed the situation on the ground in a very significant way. Even though the flow of people and trade across the LoC has been limited and constrained, what is remarkable is that
the initiative has been sustained and has not experienced any disruptions (even in the wake of the Mumbai terror attacks in November 2008). It has even changed the thinking of those people who opposed the idea because of reservations that travel and trade would sideline the political issues of the conflict. With the passage of time, they have added their voice to the need for greater contact between the two Kashmirs. There were also some voices within the Indian government that opposed the move citing the enormous security challenge that such an opening of the LoC would entail. However, none of these apprehensions have come true over the last six years of cross-LoC travel and trade.

On the contrary, the initiative has given local people a political voice, it has facilitated family reunions, and has contributed to internal processes of healing. Further, cross-LoC trade has steadily increased in volume and gained greater legitimacy among the communities on both sides. This is in spite of the several obstacles that traders and communities have faced in terms of security, finances, and the fact that the transaction is based on the barter system without any banking support. This has emboldened the governments of India and Pakistan to not only continue with the trade and travel measures, but to also initiate processes for additional confidence building measures in the two areas of travel and trade.

While cross-LoC travel and trade cannot be seen as a panacea to the challenges that currently plague Jammu and Kashmir, it has certainly opened people’s
minds to envision the opportunities and freedoms that the idea of “soft borders”
could bring. The economic interdependence that this initiative could generate
should be used as a stepping stone for normalization within the region, and
also for emboldening stakeholders on all sides to undertake a serious dialogue
on the broader political changes that are needed, said Aziz.

Discussion

• There was considerable discussion on the disconnect between the state and
the efforts of citizen-led peace dialogues, conflict transformation workshops,
and civil society activism. How do we engage with the state as also with
non-state actors who use violence? How might these centers of power be
brought into dialogues on nonviolence? Participants also problematized
the very concept of the nation-state. Menon responded to these concerns
by saying that while the concept of the nation-state needs to be revisited,
it is important to remember that in countries such as India where much
disparity and diversity exist, the nation-state is still an important arbiter
and it does have the resources and energy to make a difference. Menon
cited the example of enabling legislations such as NREGA. While the nation-
state is challenged by new kinds of configurations, immigrants, floating
labor population, refugees etc., the need perhaps is to revisit the idea of
citizenship first. Further, Menon asked what were the alternatives to the
nation-state?

• In response to questions on Manipur, Mehrotra commented on the power
of the 2004 women’s protest in which elderly women disrobed in public to
articulate their disgust and anger against AFSPA. As a result of this protest,
for the first time in the history of independent India, the government set up
a commission to review a national security law. The protest had far reaching
consequences and demonstrated the ability of people’s struggles to make
the state reconsider the imposition of laws such as AFSPA, despite the
presence of vested interests. Mehrotra however noted that whether in
Kashmir or in Manipur, the mere withdrawal of the AFSPA will not bring
peace by itself. Several measures concerning peace, development, and
justice would need to be taken in order for conflict transformation to take
root. A comment was also made with reference to the connection between
processes that question hegemonic patriotisms and the imposition of AFSPA.
This was cited as the reason for the imposition of AFSPA in border states
such as Manipur and Kashmir, but not in Naxal affected areas in central
India where a direct to challenge to patriotism is not discernible.
• A question was posed with reference to the comparative success of the fasts undertaken by Irom Sharmila and Anna Hazare. While both employed a Gandhian tool of nonviolence, why did Anna Hazare receive more political and media attention? According to Mehrotra, the first reason has to do with the issue that Hazare took up – corruption – in which all Indians have a stake and can relate to very easily. Second, mainstream India is ignorant of the kind of insecurity that people in the northeast live with. There is misinformation, and the media has failed in its duty to inform the rest of India about the root causes of the conflicts in the northeastern states. Education also plays its part here. History books don’t tell young women and men about the anti-imperial struggles in the northeast. There is therefore a near blackout about the history and culture of the region and the trajectory of ongoing peoples’ struggles. As a result, mainstream India has little sympathy for the causes of people living in this region. Third, Mehrotra felt that the image of Anna Hazare, “a benevolent patriarch” vis-à-vis the picture of a young woman also has something to do with the kind of public attention the two have received.

• How genuine or how open is the space that has ostensibly been provided to Afghan women to participate in politics and governance? There was a sense among the Afghan participants that women can participate in politics as long as they do not question male authority and cultural norms that are biased towards men. If they try to change the power equation, there will be trouble for women, as some recent cases of violence and threats against women politicians have shown. Dost however urged participants to look at Afghan women’s inclusion in political processes in the context of the legacy of the last 40 years. Change, particularly with respect to gender roles and expectations, takes time. He argued that some degree of change is discernible, for example if a comparison is undertaken of the participation of women in political processes from 2005 to 2011.

• A question was asked about Menon’s reference to the idea of a “sisterhood”. Is it a useful conceptual tool vis-à-vis issues concerning solidarity, Indian feminism or South Asian feminism? Menon was of the view that “sisterhoods” in the plural and multiple senses, would be a more helpful tool.

• The use of sexual assault during social conflict was discussed extensively. It was clarified that sexual assault is not simply a tool to assert group power by “shaming” the community to which the woman belongs, it is also a very clear assertion of power over what is perceived as the weaker sex or the weaker community.
• There was considerable discussion on the divergent and often contradictory public perceptions that exist in Afghanistan and Pakistan about the other. In this context, reference was made to the role that the media in Afghanistan, Pakistan and even in the USA, could play in furthering the cause of trust-building and conflict transformation, as also upholding the universality of human rights principles. While acknowledging that the media in Afghanistan and Pakistan could play a key role in transforming “enemy” perceptions, Dost said that unfortunately, the media in both countries is more of an “agenda follower” than an “agenda creator”. The trust deficit between Afghanistan and Pakistan runs deep. While a sensitive media is necessary for its transformation, much more would need to be done by way of individual and societal interventions.

• Pakistani participants acknowledged Dost’s concerns, but they also reminded him that Pakistan had suffered economically because of the Afghan crisis. Despite its economic constraints, Pakistan hosted more than four million Afghan refugees in its territory. Post-9/11 and Operation Enduring Freedom, it has lost more than 40,000 civilians and soldiers in its efforts to bring peace and stability to Afghanistan. Further, it was felt that by focusing on regional support, stakeholders tend to sidestep the important need for national support, the lack of which was evident when the Afghan opposition parties boycotted President Karzai’s grand peace jirgah initiative. Dost acknowledged that Afghans are responsible for being unable to build a national consensus on the need for peace and stability. Complicating this picture is the poor condition of the country’s economy, the low rate of literacy, and what Dost called “the deadly interference of neighboring countries”.

• Several questions were raised about the volume of money that is being pumped into Afghanistan to stabilize the country and deepen democracy, but with little results to show. Dost’s response was that as long as a local stake and ownership of the peace process is not created, the deadlock will continue. He articulated a need for democratic institutions to be designed within Afghanistan, and not in the USA or UK. He also shared that only 20 to 50 per cent of donor money is being spent through Afghan institutions. The rest of the funds are used by donor countries for projects designed and executed by them. This picture gets further complicated in a situation where international actors are unfamiliar with local culture and traditions.

• A question was posed with reference to the interest of Western nations, particularly the USA, in the Kashmir conflict and the possible role they
could play in the region. Aziz was of the view that rather than looking at Western interests in Kashmir, it would be more significant to focus on South Asia’s interest in the resolution of the conflict. This is particularly relevant in light of the fact that many South Asian initiatives fail to take off owing to the India-Pakistan standoff on Kashmir. So, Aziz underscored the need for local and regional ownership of the Kashmir peace process, rather than looking to Western countries for support. Also, Western interests change with the passage of time and may not always be guided by altruistic motives. While the United States was a supporter of Kashmiri rights 12 to 15 years ago, its contemporary economic interest perhaps lies in doing business with India. This may mean that it will take lesser of an interest in Kashmir than it did 12 years ago.

- Aziz’s assertion that cross-LoC travel and trade could facilitate broader conflict transformation processes in the region was contested by a Kashmiri participant who said that the Valley had witnessed intense violence against ordinary civilians, particularly unarmed youth. The connection between trade and de-escalation of the conflict was seen to be too simplistic. Responding to questions on the political roadmap for Jammu and Kashmir, Aziz noted that even though there are about 75 proposals for the resolution of the Kashmir conflict, which look very good on paper, why is it that the ground situation is so different? The proposals articulate different solutions – independence, autonomy within India, autonomy within Pakistan etc. – and are based on good research. Even though they have been in circulation for many years, the ground reality in Kashmir has remained unchanged. According to Aziz, the reason for this is the absence of a sustained people-owned process. A Conflict Transformation perspective gives primacy to the process over the outcome. Stakeholders, in this case governments, need to have the courage to build a process based on justice and inclusivity, and which respects the outcome that emerges out of such a people-owned process. At this stage of the conflict, what is crucial is the process that is used to achieve the outcome, not the other way round. Related to this is the need to make the perspectives of the local people living on either side of LoC central to the peace process. They need to be provided with a safe political space in which they can interact and articulate their own perspectives to different stakeholders, including the governments of India and Pakistan.

Highlighting the key messages of the diverse presentations, the session Chair Prof. Anuradha Chenoy, Professor, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, made the following points:
The relationship between conflict transformation and democracy is cyclical. This means there must be multiple transformations and alternative ways of looking at the notion of transformation. There is a need to question how states define peace and conflict, which also includes the denials by states that certain conflicts don’t exist.

The concept of nationalism requires critical engagement. While the presentations engaged in different ways with the question of nationalism, the discussion often brought out how internalized the dominant discourse of a jingoistic nationalism was.

Several comments focused around a critique of the nation-state in the context of the diverse conflicts that were discussed. Pulling together these comments, Chenoy said that the struggle should be for a more humane nation-state, which is inclusive, which is feminist, and which is people-centered. This can come about only through popular struggles and popular discourses. She pointed to the history of the struggles for women’s rights, adivasi rights, dalit rights etc. which succeeded not because the state was benevolent, but because of the power of popular movements. The significance of dialogues such as the Conflict Transformation Workshops is that they generate ideas that seep into these popular struggles, which then push the nation-state to be more humane.
Ms. Irene Santiago, Chief Executive Officer of the Mindanao Commission on Women and Co-Founder of the Mothers for Peace Movement in the Philippines, delivered a plenary lecture titled *Engendering Conflict Transformation: Experiences in Peacebuilding*. Looking at the ways in which gender roles, gender identities, and gender ideologies, manifest themselves during armed conflict, she opened her lecture with the comment that “gender crosscuts the social divisions of language, ethnicity, religion, nationality, and geography that underlie conflict. Yet, it is marginalized, trivialized, and therefore postponed because it is not seen as lying at the root of conflict.” She shared the following statistics in support of this statement:

- Women made up less than eight per cent of negotiation teams in peace agreements signed over the last 20 years.
- Even though the widespread prevalence of gender-based violence, particularly the use of sexual assault as an instrument of war, is well-documented, a survey of 300 peace agreements signed since the end of the Cold War reveals that sexual/gender-based violence was mentioned in only 18.
- Only eight per cent of budgets for post-conflict recovery mention gender. So, while the current discourse might acknowledge the gendered nature of armed conflict, there remains a paucity of funds to support gender-sensitive peacebuilding.
A gender perspective recognizes that women’s and men’s experiences and actions during armed conflicts are determined by gender roles and identities assigned by society. These different experiences need to be acknowledged and addressed. So, while gender may not be central to the conflict, it is certainly central to conflict prevention and resolution.

While an armed conflict provides opportunities for women to move out of the home and take on new roles and responsibilities, what happens once the violence stops? Do power relations between men and women (and values pertaining to the roles they are expected to perform) change after the society is coded as “post-conflict”? Looking at what happens to gender identities during armed conflict, Santiago said that “in times of war, men and women usually take on the roles that society has traditionally assigned to their gender. The dominant-subordinate relationships – what is masculine and what is feminine – are played out in times of conflict.” Therefore:

- Men go to war and fight.
- Women stay home and take care of the extended family.
- Women and girls are conscripted as cooks and sex slaves.
- More women are victims of gender-based violence.
- More women are in refugee and IDP camps.

As a result, the language, symbols, and discourse on conflict remain gendered. Killing is equated with winning; losing is a loss of masculinity. Rape is used as an instrument of war to humiliate the enemy by making the latter feel that they failed to “protect their women”. The discourse on “protection” comes into play here. Santiago called for an interrogation of this discourse because it is part of the reason why rapes are committed. Another reason has to do with the belief in many societies that by tainting the women of the enemy community, their culture also gets tainted. The source of such thinking, said Santiago, lies in societies’ obsession with chastity and virginity and the image of “women as bearers of culture”.

In times of conflict, motherhood is also exploited. Mothers are encouraged to “offer their sons to the cause” and “mothers of martyrs” have an elevated position. Santiago cited the example of Iran where “mothers of martyrs” received greater respect because they had sent their teenage sons to fight at the frontlines, knowing well that their sons would be killed.
Gender roles may also shift in times of conflict. For example, women may become combatants and spokespersons. Those who stay back to look after the children, may experience a sense of economic empowerment because now they are the sole breadwinners of the family. During this period, women might even feel that there is gender equality, and that the conflict has diluted the barriers to their participation in society. However, as Santiago noted, power remains the central element in gender relations, and once the conflict is over, there is a societal expectation that women will return to performing functions that fit within the traditional domain of “femininity”.

Situating the exclusion of women’s perspectives from peace processes in the broader context of patriarchy, Santiago said that women and men, boys and girls, are socialized into patriarchal ways of thinking and behaving. These have deep roots in many societies, and will require multi-sector, long-term interventions, beginning with the family and school systems. “One of the main manifestations of patriarchy is the excessive need for control and power by men”. This is reflected in the low number of women present in official, track one panels that negotiate peace agreements, even though they are involved in myriad peacebuilding activities at the grassroots. Likewise, at the mid-society level, women have proved their mettle through their lobbying and peace advocacy work. Yet, they are prevented from sitting at the peace table in government-level negotiations.

Patriarchy also lies at the root of gender-based violence because it builds certain stereotypes to which boys and girls, men and women, are supposed to adhere. Boys are socialized to:

- Be tough
- Be aggressive
- Be in control
- Not show their feelings
- Not cry
- Never ask for help
- Protect girls and women

Girls are taught to:

- Be passive
- Be accommodating
• Not challenge men
• Look good
• Be dependent
• Take care of the family
• Not complain
• Need men’s protection

This socialization is very much part of the culture of a society or community. “Control is therefore enforced through culture”, which gives sanction to men to use different forms of violence such as rape, incest, street harassment, and domestic violence, to enforce the system of patriarchy.

Santiago shared that the exclusion of women is often couched in the language of “caring”, seeking to “protect” them, and preserving their “honor”. Added to this is the belief that “women’s exclusion is embedded in local culture”. Therefore, the peace table is not the place to address “cultural norms”. There is also the tendency to sequence gender as a not-so-pressing issue in a long list of goals such as liberation, democracy, ceasefire etc. As a result, male leaders often accord gender secondary importance, delinking it from “peace negotiations”. However, there is now sufficient evidence to suggest that the sustainability of peace negotiations requires the inclusion of women’s perspectives and experiences.

The struggle for increasing women’s participation in peace processes, particularly at the track one level peace negotiations, also points to the need to broaden the focus from one of merely ending violence, to the goal of building peace and justice in societies. Such reframing would logically require the participation of all stakeholders affected by the conflict, women included. Moreover, given women’s vast experiences in grassroots peacebuilding, such a broadening of purpose would open up a space for the inclusion of their expertise.

Dr. Soumita Basu, Assistant Professor, Department of International Relations, South Asian University, New Delhi, made an intervention on the UN Security Council Resolutions on Women and Armed Conflicts, critiquing the politics surrounding the adoption of these Resolutions. She said that after the adoption of SCR 1325, the references to gender have increased in Security Council resolutions. In fact, nearly 50 per cent of the country-specific Security Council Resolutions
(in which the Council talks about mandates for peace operations and so on) actually make references to gender.

Unfortunately, gender appears in particular ways. For instance, it appears less in what are called the “operational paragraphs” of the Resolutions where the Security Council actually tells people what to do. There are more references to it in the introductory paragraphs in which the Security Council acknowledges gender, but doesn’t really share information on “what to do” and “how to do it”. Further, the way the references to gender appear makes it look like a “copy-paste” job with little original application of how a gender analysis would influence the design of programs on the ground and how this would vary from one conflict to the other.

Basu noted that even though in the years following the adoption of SCR 1325 (in 2000), the emphasis on women’s roles in conflict prevention was significant, an analysis of the implementation reveals that the Resolution has been watered down to look primarily at “protection of women and girls” and “participation of women in peace agreements and post-conflict reconstruction”. Even in the follow up Security Council Resolutions to 1325–1820, 1888, 1889 and 1960– there is greater emphasis on “protection” of women and girls during armed conflict. There is some talk of women’s “participation” in SCR 1889, but the predominant message remains one of “protection”. In fact, at times,
it seems that the Resolutions are trying to “make wars safe for women”. The intention however was far more revolutionary and very different to what the implementation on the ground now looks like.

Basu added, “If we look at how the Resolution has been employed in the crafting of subsequent Resolutions (1829, 1880, 1889, 1960), women’s role in conflict prevention has been systematically sidelined. So, it is clear that the Resolutions use ‘gender’ in a certain way, primarily to talk about the ‘protection’ of women and girls and at a secondary level, their inclusion in peace processes”. There is little emphasis on power relations between men and women, or on the transformation of inequitable structures and cultural beliefs that lead to the enactment of specific kinds of violence against women, and even men. Further, the Resolutions do not elaborate on what a gender perspective might mean, or what “gender mainstreaming” might look like on the ground.

Even in terms of the Security Council composition, Basu noted that it remains a male bastion of politics where “security” formulations are limited to narrow conceptions of territory and borders. More holistic understandings of peace such as those of “human security” are shunned by some Council members even though SCR 1325 seeks to widen the dialogue on many of these issues. There is a perception that these issues should be discussed by the General Assembly or the Economic and Social Council, despite the theoretical recognition that peacebuilding cannot happen in the absence of holistic formulations of peace and security.

Concluding with a comment on the National Action Plans on SCR 1325 that have been adopted by the Philippines and Nepal, Basu said it would be crucial to look at how these are implemented, and evaluate the broader execution of SCR 1325 in regions coded as “post-conflict”.

The session Chair, Ms. Rita Manchanda, Research Director, South Asia Forum for Human Rights, New Delhi, opened her comments with a reference to the valuable contribution that Santiago has made to women’s movements globally. Santiago, who was a member of the peace panel during negotiations between the Government of Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, represents the small minority of women (eight per cent) who have been involved in track one-level peace negotiations.
Speaking in the context of the passage of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, Manchanda urged participants to reflect on the question, “Why would the UN Security Council, comprising a powerful club of men, consider passing a Resolution that is focused on women?” While there was a great deal of lobbying by several women’s groups, Manchanda shared that there was also considerable introspection in the track one echelons of power about the reasons for the high failure rates of peace accords and negotiations. There was a recognition that regions or countries coded as “post-conflict” were relapsing into violence because the processes that led to the signature of accords were not inclusive, and more significantly, did not represent the different perspectives and expectations of women and men. The inclusion of a gender perspective is often shunned by male political leaders because such an engagement requires a transformation in the power relations between women and men as also deep attitudinal and behavioural changes in all spheres, from politics and governance to the home and the workplace.

Manchanda invited participants to look at a study by Christine Bell and Catherine O’Rourke on peace agreements where they show that women have actually made a significant and unique contribution to track one-level peace dialogues. They have shifted the focus from “ending war” to “building sustainable peace”, and they have made the processes “inclusive” by bringing into the dialogue diverse stakeholders across the vertical and horizontal divisions of society.

Workshop participants Ms. Thiagi Piyadasa, Ms. Tenzin Dolkar, Ms. Akanksha Mehta, and Mr. Shubranshu Mishra.
The session closed with a comment from Dr. Meenakshi Gopinath on the several references to patriarchy that were made. She said that, today, there is a sense that young women are better situated to dismantle this system of belief and practice than women of the earlier generations were. The primary reason is that many young men support and believe in the need for greater gender equality. There is a real possibility today for young leaders, women and men, to partner with one another to advance equality in all spheres.
Roundtable

Women’s Movements for Peace and Democracy: Experiences from South Asia

The Roundtable on Women’s Movements for Peace and Democracy: Experiences from South Asia engaged with the question, “What do women do differently in times of conflict?” How do they define the needs of security, development, identity, and access to decision-making? Stories of women putting their lives on the line to build peace across the faultlines of conflict abound in South Asia and beyond. The recent award of the Nobel Peace Prize to three women for their peacebuilding work has provided a further impetus to governments and international organizations to engage with the issue in a more serious and consistent manner. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Africa’s first democratically elected female president, Leymah Gbowee, a Liberian grassroots peace worker who united Christian and Muslim women against militias using rape to terrorize and humiliate opponents, and Tawakkul Karman, a Yemeni activist waging a nonviolent battle for freedom and human rights well before the “Arab Spring” were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for using nonviolence to advance women’s rights and their participation in peacebuilding work. The Nobel Prize is a testament of the skills that women can bring to infuse inclusivity, nonviolence, and compassion into their work in communities torn apart by years of violence.

In fact, women’s groups have had a positive track record of foregrounding “positive peace” in their work. A notion that moves beyond the absence of overt, violent conflict to include processes of social justice, gender equity, economic equality, and ecological balance, with an emphasis on equitable human and institutional relationships, “positive peace” has received widespread
Yet, the presence of women at government-level dialogues and decision-making processes continues to be the exception rather than the norm. In the year 2000, the United Nations Security Council, in an effort to address this disturbing trend, adopted Resolution 1325 which sought to foreground women’s perspectives on peace and security, particularly at the level of international policy mechanisms. This was followed by Resolutions 1820 and 1888, which recognized the gendered nature of armed conflicts and peace processes. However, in recent years, challenges have emerged in introducing these “new security concerns” into the institutional context of the UN Security Council and into national agendas for action.

In this context, the Roundtable examined the successes and deficits in the implementation of these Resolutions in light of their impact on the lives and livelihoods of women living in contexts of violence in South Asia. It also showcased a diverse range of women-led movements for peace and democracy, with a particular emphasis on the unique perspectives that women have brought to issues of peace, security, development, justice, and nation-building.

The Roundtable opened with the facilitator, Prof. Tasneem Meenai, Director, Nelson Mandela Center for Peace and Conflict Resolution, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, stating that there remains no doubt about the track record of women’s movements in building sustainable peace and security at the grassroots level, as also in their families and communities. Examples from different regions of conflict about the diverse ways in which women have advanced peace and democracy have proved this point beyond any reasonable doubt. Even though there is now a clear recognition of the fact that lasting peace requires the participation of both women and men and the inclusion of multiple gender perspectives, the images of peace negotiations and track-one level dialogues remain lopsided with women conspicuous by their absence. Their concerns and perspectives find little space at government-level dialogues where key decisions about their lives and futures are taken. Meenai noted that the token representation of one or two women at high-level peace panels creates further problems because this is misconstrued to imply the presence of a “gender perspective”.

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A gender perspective however calls for much more than numerical representation. It begins with the need to seek and foreground the diverse perspectives of women and refrain from essentializing how men and women think. According to Meenai, governments and international organizations must focus on this aspect of the interface between gender, peace, and conflict.

The first presentation on the subject examined the *National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security in Nepal*. Dr. Bandana Rana, President, Saathi, Kathmandu, talked about how women’s groups in Nepal have used UNSCR 1325 to promote peace and foreground women’s participation in the years following the end of the civil war.

In 2006, the civil war in Nepal ended with the stakeholders signing the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. Numerous structures were developed to promote peace, reconciliation, and reconstruction. However, Rana said that women were conspicuous by their absence from these processes. This was surprising because women had been participants in the armed conflict. In fact, it is claimed that they constituted about 30–40 per cent of the Maoist forces. More significantly, women played a key role in bringing about peace at the grassroots level and advocating for policy changes at the national level. They gave support to victims of conflict, provided shelter and legal aid, and advocated against the use of violence as a method to articulate discontent.

Yet, they were absent in the post-conflict structures that the peace agreement created. According to Rana, one reason relates to the misplaced perception that the end of the armed conflict meant that all forms of violence (particularly those against women) have ended. A second reason is that women are perceived as passive victims rather than as key agents for social change who have demonstrated their ability to build peace at the community, district, and national levels. At the end of the armed conflict, even as they focused on the rebuilding of their lives and those of their families, women realized that they had been completely excluded from the “high table” negotiations. They organized themselves to protest against this exclusion, and, as a result, four women were included in the last stage of the interim constitution drafting process.

However, Rana noted that even today, women remain absent from several high-level peace process mechanisms, such as the technical committees on reintegration and reconstruction, or even the peace secretariat. This presents a
serious challenge to the integration of women’s perspectives in the peace process. Pointing to another significant challenge, Rana shared that different forms of violence against women have increased in the post-conflict period:

- Sexual violence has been exacerbated by the increased presence of criminal gangs and small armed groups.
- Domestic violence has increased because male combatants have returned to their families, but because of their traumatic experiences during the civil war, have taken to drugs and alcohol, and to physical aggression against their wives and children.
- Sexual exploitation has increased because of displacement and the low levels of literacy and awareness among young women.
- Polygamy has received growing cultural sanction. Many men lost their lives during the armed conflict, which resulted in a skewed sex ratio. Patriarchal norms made it difficult for women to avoid marriage.
- The vulnerability of girls has increased the number of child marriages, with many parents marrying off their daughters at a young age to “wash their hands off” the responsibility of protecting their girls from violence.
- Trafficking has been used as a method for illegal migration.

These factors, along with existing impunity, have increased women’s vulnerabilities and their sense of insecurity in the post-conflict period. In this context, Rana noted that women’s groups have been advocating for a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the proposal for which is pending in Parliament. There is much hope that this transitional justice mechanism would enable women to have some access to justice.

It is in this backdrop that women’s groups in Nepal employed the UN Security Resolution 1325 (and subsequent Resolutions) to advocate for women’s participation in different peace mechanisms, as also to end the different forms of violence against women that continued (and even increased) in the post-conflict phase. In 2007, the Ministry for Peace and Reconstruction was established, which was allocated the mandate to address issues relating to UNSC 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security.

Rana shared that women’s advocacy for a National Action Plan on UNSC 1325 led to the decision that 33 per cent of the members of high-level steering committees would be from civil society women’s organizations. The was followed by women’s advocacy in the year 2010, the tenth anniversary of
UNSCR 1325, for a National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security to facilitate women’s full participation at different levels and stages of the peace process. The argument was that a NAP would strengthen women’s ownership of the peace process, bring in diverse stakeholders, enhance accountability, and it would lead to the allocation of specific resources in the national budget.

Commenting on the strengths of the NAP, which was instituted in February 2011, Rana said that it has facilitated participatory, consultative, and collaborative processes among diverse stakeholders, built a healthy rapport between civil society and the government, and strengthened women’s ownership of the peace process. Rana outlined five pillars for the implementation of the NAP on Women, Peace, and Security:

- Participation and Protection
- Relief and Recovery
- Prevention
- Resource Mobilization
- Monitoring and Evaluation

So far, the process has been participatory with the government, NGO’s, and development partners (such as the UN and civil society organizations) collaborating with one another to draft the inter-ministerial implementation plan. Capacity building workshops for political representatives at the district level have been conducted, and similar exercises are envisaged at the village level. In this context, Rana shared that women’s groups have refrained from evolving a separate plan, but rather have attempted to integrate “women, peace, and security” issues of the NAP into existing plans of the different government ministries. The following learnings were highlighted:

- Collaboration between government, civil society, and other stakeholders is essential. This does not foreclose the possibility of critiquing the actions of different stakeholders at different stages, but it suggests that there is a need to engage with a diversity of perspectives.
- The process must be participatory, all stakeholders must take ownership.
- The methods to integrate gender perspectives into existing plans require deeper engagement.
The next presentation, by Dr. Salma Malik, Assistant Professor, Department of Defense and Strategic Studies, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, examined the trajectories of women-led, cross-border peace dialogues between India and Pakistan. Echoing the views of earlier speakers that women’s presence in high-level, government dialogues (the track one composite dialogue, for instance) was the exception rather than the norm, Malik noted that the contributions of Indian and Pakistani women to broadening the constituencies for peace in the two countries has been astounding. In fact, the history of grassroots’ peacebuilding between the two countries can be traced to the Indo-Pak women’s movements, and these cross-border connections have been sustained even when government-level dialogues have faltered. Malik added that these women-led initiatives were also more representative of the populations of the two countries, and stood out for their focus on the role of the youth in conflict transformation processes.

Reflecting on her experience of participating in the WISCOMP-led India-Pakistan dialogues, Malik said, “We learnt new things about each other by talking with each other, rather than talking to each other. We got rid of our preconceived notions and transcended many barriers.” Malik also drew...
attention to the SAVE (Sisters Against Violent Extremism) initiative which has been facilitating low-key, deep dialogues between young women from India and Pakistan. SAVE is an initiative of the Vienna-based Women Without Borders, which was established in 2002. It has adopted a range of strategies to “mainstream” women’s voices, ranging from its initiative in Afghanistan where it came out with a handbook for Afghan women to encourage them to participate in elections, to its Mothers for Change initiative in Pakistan which looks at the key role that mothers can play in instilling the values of coexistence and nonviolence in their children, and also serving as “early warning systems” when their sons are brainwashed by extremist and violent ideologies.

With reference to India-Pakistan relations, SAVE launched a courageous initiative which brought together Indian and Pakistani women in the context of the Mumbai terror attacks of November 2008. Due to the way the attacks were reported in the media, it was difficult to build bridges of understanding between women from the two sides, particularly those whose lives had been affected by different types of extremist violence. Malik, who was a participant in one of the SAVE dialogues, said,

When the Mumbai blasts happened, the pain was equally felt in Pakistan. Immediately, people flocked to the one particular space where we can at least see our Indian friends, if not meet them – the Wagah border. There were candlelit vigils and peace marches in Islamabad, and other places in Pakistan. But what I want to underscore here is that these initiatives were being led by women. Men were of course participants in these initiatives, but the vision behind the peace vigils was of the women.

Through the SAVE initiative, women from Pakistan were able to connect with Indian women who had lost loved ones in the Mumbai attacks. Likewise, women from Mumbai were able to listen to the stories of Pakistani women who had lost family members to suicide bomb attacks. They wrote about their experiences in the media, with a purpose to generate a different view of the ways in which people, in this case women, can build trust, facilitate healing, and transform the bilateral relationship towards coexistence and security.

Concluding with some of the challenges that women’s-led dialogues between the two countries have faced, Malik said that the bureaucratic red-tapism and restrictions on travel need to be addressed in a serious manner by the two governments. Many civil society initiatives between the two countries fail before they are launched because of the severe restrictions imposed on groups
working for peace and goodwill in the region. Ironically, the visa restrictions on business groups are less constricting.

Shifting focus to a unique initiative from Bangladesh, the next presentation by Ms. Naomi Sharin, a Researcher with BRAC (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee), Dhaka, looked at Women Barefoot Lawyers’ Role in Conflict Resolution in Rural Bangladesh. BRAC was founded in Bangladesh in 1972 to address the issue of poverty with a strategic and holistic approach, using the tools of microfinance, ultra-poor programs, health, education, legal aid, and social justice. Over the years, the organization’s work has expanded to nine countries, influencing the lives of over 138 million people.

The focus of BRAC’s work is based on its research of conflicts in Bangladesh, which reveal that poverty is a central issue in a majority of these. Its microfinance interventions and legal education trainings for women were developed in this context. BRAC also engages in alternative dispute resolution work in cases of family conflicts. However, Sharin explained that in such conflicts, often the woman holds less power because of various economic and cultural factors. In such cases, the ADR process sometimes requires the mediator to play the role of the arbitrator to take decisions in favor of the woman in order to promote gender equity. Legal empowerment is in fact a key methodology used by BRAC to advance women’s rights.

Speaking about the concept of women barefoot lawyers, Sharin explained that BRAC trained rural, high-school educated women to work as paralegals and promote the ideals of gender equity and dignity for all human beings. The identification of women from the rural areas was a considered decision because BRAC wanted them to be representative of the women of rural Bangladesh. They live in and interact with rural communities, and have over the years, become agents who challenge traditional and hierarchical male-centered notions of power. Their role in educating illiterate or semi-literate women about the law and their rights has been particularly significant.

Even as they facilitate traditional dispute resolution methods with a gender perspective, many women barefoot lawyers are often encouraged by the community to stand for local-level or district elections. This further leads to their political empowerment as well as to the leverage that rural women who voted for them have. Women barefoot lawyers have played a vital role in
facilitating family disputes, particularly those that have a gender dimension. They have facilitated peace within the family in a manner that doesn’t shame or anger anyone, and yet the process concludes with an amicable and just solution. Their success is also linked to their skill in challenging traditional power structures in a disarming and culturally sensitive manner. They have also played the roles of advisor, counselor, friend, sister etc. to empower disadvantaged women and to transform conflict in the family and the community.

Sharing excerpts from the diaries of women barefoot lawyers, Sharin said that the main challenge that these women experience comes from the presence of the dominant patriarchal belief system which intersects with a conservative culture to create a context where men are the custodians of power in the community. This challenge is complicated further by the presence of male religious leaders who see the women paralegals as a threat to the hegemony they enjoy in the community. As a consequence, the convergence of these powers means that sometimes a woman barefoot lawyer is unable to reach out to another woman against whom a certain act of familial or community-based violence is being carried out.

Another source of challenge is the barefoot lawyer’s own family, often her husband. If the husband decides to impose restrictions on her freedom to carry out her work, particularly if she wishes to join politics, there is very little that the woman can do. Yet, the women continue courageously on this path. They try to educate other girls and women of their rights in the family and in the community. Sharin shared a folk song that the women barefoot lawyers often sing during the course of their work: “Oh women! Where is your home? First you cook food for your father’s home and then you cook food for your husband’s home. But have you ever thought where your home is?”

Thiagi Piyadasa, Research Assistant at the International Center for Ethnic Studies, Colombo made an intervention on the Aspirations of Women in Post-War Sri Lanka. Within what one can call Sri Lankan civil society, women human rights defenders have played a significant role in voicing out and advocating against violations of human rights, not just in the context of the country’s protracted ethnic conflict but also throughout the violent youth insurrections. Women have pioneered the human rights movement in Sri Lanka, working together with male colleagues and continue to do so even today. For very specific reasons however, the Sri Lankan civil society took a conscious decision not to
give evidence to the LLRC (Lesson Learnt and Reconciliation Commission). This was primarily due to lack of trust in yet another “Commission of Inquiry” modeled redress mechanism which lacked implementation power, and concentrated on incidents occurring post-2001, but not in 2009. The lack of witness protection mechanisms for example deterred many who would have otherwise wanted to make submissions.

Nevertheless, there is a good example of a community-rooted redress mechanism spearheaded by Muslim women. The “Citizen’s Commission on the Eviction of Northern Muslims by the LTTE in 1990” was led by civil society with the active participation and engagement of the displaced community. The report was launched in January 2012 by the Law & Society Trust. The priority given to people’s experiences and memories, and the need to record and document the same, demonstrate a more progressive approach to truth seeking, enabling the community to give their side of the story. To Piyadasa, this Commission is important because it was also led entirely by Muslim women. It was a first of its kind, conducted in a somewhat difficult human rights environment, with the recommendations of the Commission stemming from the community. One can only hope that similar efforts would be possible to understand and seek justice for the numerous other incidents of human rights violations that have occurred over the past several years.

Speaking in the context of *women’s roles in the Mindanao peace process in the Philippines*, Ms. Irene Santiago, Chair, Mindanao Commission on Women, Davao City, said that in order to transform women’s mobilization at the grassroots to advocacy at track one, different initiatives have been taken at the mid-sector and government-levels. A member of the Philippine government peace panel negotiating with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (from 2001 to 2004), Santiago led efforts to make the stakeholders take gender more seriously and to bring the voices of Muslim women in Mindanao to the track one level negotiations. Along with this, she brought together women from different religious communities and constituted two groups, Mothers for Peace and Youth for Peace, to mobilize the peace constituency on the ground, while the Mindanao Commission on Women worked at the mid – and top-levels of peacebuilding. The work of Mothers for Peace and Youth for Peace was founded on three pillars:

- Values
- Skills
- Food security
The participants of these initiatives were trained in conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and conflict containment. Through the methodology of peace circles (comprising 12-25 participants), women were empowered to become local change-makers, key to the sustenance of peace in the fragile post-conflict period. At the mid- and government-levels, the Mindanao Commission on Women sought to exercise its influence on peace negotiations by ensuring that at least one woman was present on the peace panel. This woman was supported by the Commission and other women’s groups. International actors and NGOs that are involved in the negotiations between the Government of Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front also report to the Mindanao Commission on Women. Further, the Commission carries out gender-sensitive trainings for the international monitoring team, which evaluates both the ceasefire and development projects (and is composed of representatives from Indonesia, Libya, Malaysia, Japan, Norway, and the EU). It has also drafted the gender provisions for the negotiators to insert into the peace agreement.

Santiago pointed to a recent initiative called the Women’s Peace Table that was undertaken to unblock the negotiations (which had encountered hurdles). The Table sought to provide an alternative context for the stakeholders to have a new conversation about how to take the peace process forward. Its slogan is “bridging relationships, advancing alternatives”.

Commenting on the challenges that the Commission faces, Santiago said the first is with reference to making the Mindanao issue a national concern. Because it is not seen as a national issue, there is a tendency for the central government and mainstream Filipinos to ignore the grievances and security concerns of the people living in the Mindanao region. So the challenge is to transform initiatives such as Mothers for Peace and Youth for Peace into national movements. Cultural violence is a second challenge. The attitudes of the people, their prejudices that encourage demonization of the other, and other negative perceptions which have cultural sanction present significant challenges. There is also the challenge presented by structural violence in terms of the relationship of the state with the minority Muslim population in the country. In conclusion, Santiago said that the goal is to develop the capacity of key people for peace as also to expand the constituencies for peace and work with stakeholders on all sides of the conflict.

Shifting focus to a women-led initiative in Jammu and Kashmir, Ms. Seema Kakran, WISCOMP’s Assistant Director, made a presentation on the Athwaas Initiative of WISCOMP. The Athwaas initiative started in the year 2000 with a Roundtable titled Breaking the Silence: Women’s Voices from Kashmir.
The purpose was to bring women’s voices to the center-stage and provide them a forum where broad-based discussion could take place with stakeholders from Jammu, Kashmir, and Ladakh, as well as other parts of India. One of the outcomes of this deliberation was that a small group of women who belonged to the Kashmir Valley (representing different religions, ethnicities, linguistic groups), expressed an interest in transforming this conversation into some kind of action on the ground.

They approached WISCOMP to help them build a group that could take collective action on an issue pertaining to the conflict in Kashmir. WISCOMP played the role of a facilitator, providing a safe space where the members of this group could come together to talk about their trauma and pain, and to also envision a blueprint for collective action. Kakran shared that in the year 2000, this was a very difficult task for WISCOMP because for anyone in Kashmir at that point of time to talk about “peace” was akin to supporting the actions of the Indian government in Kashmir. “Peace” was therefore a taboo word at the time.

WISCOMP brought together this very diverse group of women, provided them with a space for face-to-face dialogue, and initiated activities to facilitate individual and group healing. While some activities focused on team-building, others engaged with skills such as active listening, sustained dialogue, etc. Through this process, the women of Athwaas decided, as a next step, to travel the length and breadth of Jammu and Kashmir and listen to the different narratives of the conflict as well as peoples’ diverse aspirations. As a result, for the first time since the onset of the conflict in 1990, Valley Muslim women visited displaced Pandit women who were living in the Jammu camps. Similarly, the Kashmiri Pandit women who were now living outside the Valley traveled to different parts of Kashmir, to listen to the voices of women from different communities, whose lives had changed because of the conflict. This listening project helped the women of Athwaas to identify the specific goals for their interventions. These were:

1. Networking
2. Generating awareness
3. Reconciliation
4. Advocacy
Over the years, they gradually began to engage in a range of other activities, primarily acting as an interface between women and government officials. In November 2003, they started a very significant initiative called Samanbal, which in the Kashmiri language means a meeting place or a safe space. Each of the core Athwaas members, decided to take responsibility for a Samanbal depending on their own professional background and personal interest. As a result, six different Samanbals were started in six districts of Jammu and Kashmir. The idea was to replicate the healing that the women of Athwaas had experienced at a broader community level, and to use this as a context to build constituencies for peace.

The Samanbal centers therefore sought to facilitate trauma healing and reconciliation even as they initiated other so-called “tangible activities” such as psychosocial trainings, income generation projects, computer education for the youth etc. WISCOMP would often provide a context for members of all the Samanbals to come together to engage on a deeper, conceptual level about the diverse perspectives on the root causes of the conflict, and envision a blueprint for coexistence. Exploring areas of convergence, they also worked together on issues such as the Domestic Violence Bill, the Right to Information Act, Panchayati Raj institutions etc.

In addition, WISCOMP initiated a youth-level project, drawing in young Kashmiri journalists and training them in conflict-sensitive reporting. They were also invited to engage with the syncretic history of Kashmir and explore possibilities for rebuilding some of these values of coexistence and openness, which were so central to the ethos of the region.

Sharing some of the challenges that WISCOMP has encountered in facilitating this peacebuilding initiative, Kakran said that a key obstacle has been the political difference of opinions between the Athwaas members. While they have been able to connect with each other at a personal level and transcend some of their prejudices, the differences over their political positions have remained entrenched and have served as an obstacle to the group’s ability to make effective peace interventions. The heightened polarization in the state and conflicting positions of political parties over the last few years have placed the relationships within Athwaas under even greater strain.

Another significant challenge, which was accentuated in the wake of the polarization following the Amarnath land conflict in 2008, has been the existence of multiple narratives of victimhood. Irrespective of their religion, geographical location, political position or their minority-majority status,
different stakeholders across the state feel victimized vis-a-vis the other group, albeit for different reasons. These complex narratives of victimhood have proved to be a challenge. WISCOMP has attempted to address this by creating a broader peace coalition and bringing in a larger number of young people into the fold.

As a result, it started the Qalamkar Samith where young aspiring writers and poets are mentored by senior writers from the Kashmir Valley. They have expressed interest in translating the work of Dogri writers into Kashmiri so that there is a coming back of the syncretic culture of Kashmir. WISCOMP is also now working in Jammu with civil society and has started the Marasim Samanbal. It has adapted the Samanbal project, which began as a small, grassroots initiative, to include broader civil society coalitions. WISCOMP has also consistently sought to engage with track one and serve as a space where government representatives can listen to the perspectives of women from the state. Recently, WISCOMP provided an interface between the Government of India interlocutors and members of the expanded Athwaas and Samanbal initiatives.

Summarizing the key points of the Roundtable presentations, the facilitator, Prof. Tasneem Meenai said that South Asian women’s groups have performed diverse roles to build peace, security, and justice in their communities:

- indigenous dispute resolution
- mediation
- legal aid and training
- nonviolent campaigns
- civilian peace monitors
- civilian fact-finding missions
- listening projects
- peace education
- peace journalism
- exchange visits

In the discussion that followed the presentations, participants drew attention to the competition, turf battles, and hostility between women’s organizations that work for peace, human rights, and development. A participant who had been involved with peace work in Gujarat cited several examples to make the
point that women’s organizations also need to engage in some introspection to re-examine their own stereotypes and hostile ways of looking at men, even those who do not fit into their conventional stereotypes of *the other*.

Participants also articulated a need for some kind of engagement with male perpetrators of violence. If the goal is long-term conflict transformation, peacebuilders should engage with perpetrators in order to put an end to cycles of violence. Initiatives should be taken to work with perpetrators to change their mindsets, attitudes, and behaviors. Further, there is the complex reality that many perpetrators are also victims in a different context (or at least see themselves as so). So, the discourse on victimhood is complicated, including both “victims” and “perpetrators”. How do peacebuilders address this aspect of conflict, particularly when framing legal instruments for justice delivery?

A comment from a Pakistani participant pointed to the “elitist” composition of many women-led NGOs in Pakistan, which are unable to connect with the grassroots population or even influence policy. In the broader context of South Asia, many participants agreed with this perception. Generalizations are however difficult because while there might be some women’s groups that tend to be “elitist”, there are several working at the grassroots in all the countries of the South Asian region, that are doing extraordinary work with both women and men to transform inequality and violence. In this context, reference was made to WISCOMP’s initiative in Jammu and Kashmir, which has brought to the dialogue table stakeholders as diverse as stone-pelting youth, counsellors, government interlocutors and representatives, the army, surrendered militants, the media, and women’s groups.

The exploitation of a “victim” identity or a disadvantage to access donor money was discussed at length. Many civil society organizations, including women’s groups, which work in regions of conflict, have misused the suffering caused by violence to situate themselves strategically to receive large sums of donor money. How effectively this money is used to advance women’s rights or to build peace is anybody’s guess. So, there is a “conflict industry”, which thrives on the chaos and tragedy that mass violence generates.
A central focus of the WISCOMP Conflict Transformation Workshops is the engagement with women’s roles and perspectives on issues of peace, conflict, and justice. While this has created a repertoire of lessons on the valuable contributions that women have made to peacebuilding, over the last few years, WISCOMP’s experience has shown that if the goal of gender equality is to be advanced, practitioners need to focus on the fundamental ways in which gender roles, identities, and expectations are defined. In other words, the transformation of violence — whether this is enacted inside the four walls of a home or within the spaces of politics, markets, workplaces, or even the battlefield — requires a re-examination of, and engagement with, gender identities.

The women’s movements in South Asia have made great strides in their efforts to advance the rights of women and girls in different spheres of life. Laws and policies have changed as a result, and some degree of change in knowledge and attitudes is also discernible. Yet, the flipside is also true. Violence against women remains rampant in most parts of South Asia. In India, it is estimated that 40 per cent married women experience domestic violence. The statistics on sexual assault, whether in the context of political conflict or otherwise remain very high. Women who have attempted to speak out for their rights have often faced resistance from the men in their families and communities. In some cases, there has been a backlash against women’s efforts to promote gender equality and feminist movements have often been labelled anti-men.
Gender equality requires an approach which elicits the participation of both men and women wherein they cooperate with one another to promote integrative and mutualistic expressions of power and advance the values of equity, justice, and compassion for all human beings. There is now a recognition, within the field of peacebuilding, of the need to engage with men and with notions masculinity. If gender equality is to become a lived reality in the countries of South Asian region, multiple interventions at different levels of society are required in order to transform gender identities and the exclusive ideologies that sustain them. In this context, WISCOMP invited Ms. Kamla Bhasin, a leading voice of the women’s movement in India and Cofounder and Advisor, SANGAT, New Delhi, to conduct a workshop on *Masculinities and Femininities: Transforming Gender Identities and Gendered Ideologies*.

WISCOMP believes that a re-conceptualization of violent masculinity and of power relations between women and men is central to efforts to build peace, security, and justice in South Asian societies. In this context, the dialogue sought to address the following questions:

- Is it possible to move beyond a definition of masculinity where a man’s sense of self is drawn from the exercise of power and dominance, often through violence, over other people (women and children in particular)? Is a nonviolent masculinity – one in which a man’s sense of power is not related to aggression – possible?

- Likewise, is it possible to transcend the association of a woman’s femininity with vulnerability, and with her identity as a homemaker and an upholder of her community’s traditions? Can we envisage a femininity that recognizes *agency* and *subjectivity*, and that empowers a survivor of sexual violence to speak out in public and fight for justice?

- How can gender relations and gendered power structures, embedded in patriarchy, be transformed so that women and men can co-create inclusive understandings of freedom and peace in society?

Bhasin opened the dialogue with an invitation to participants to reflect on their understanding of gender. The conversations revealed that there was much ambiguity about this concept and how it influences the identity and behavior of men and women. Bhasin defined gender as the following:
Gender is a social construct, which defines the way in which girls and boys, women and men, think and behave in a society. It has little to do with a person’s biology, which is related to his/her sex. Gender refers to the norms, values, customs, roles, personality traits, attitudes, and behaviors that society ascribes to women and men. It also refers to the relationships between women and men, and the ways in which biological differences are exaggerated into a wider social system of set rules for behavior.

Bhasin noted that nature creates only one distinction between men and women, which is the latter’s ability to carry a child in her womb and the biological and hormonal differences to facilitate this process. However, society has magnified this difference to an extent that two separate worlds have been created for men and women wherein they are coerced to think and behave in certain ways. The concept of gender permeates every aspect of a human being’s identity. It determines for women and girls (as well as for men and boys):

- how they should behave
- what they can wear
- what types of emotions they can express
- what activities they can indulge in
- where they can go
- curfew hours for boys and girls
- career choices

In this context, Bhasin said that these distinctions between what women and men can do and cannot do have little to do with what the Divine has ordained for human beings. While acknowledging that dialogues on peacebuilding in the context of nations and communities have their place, Bhasin was of the view that the more significant and challenging conversation pertains to those conflicts that take place within the family over gender identity. In other words, how might equality and peace be established within the four walls of a home? As Bhasin put it, “Peace, for us feminists, must begin with the family. Families constitute the primary and most significant site for discrimination and injustice against women and girls, whether it is dowry, female foeticide, domestic violence, marital rape, discrimination in education and healthcare, or the curbs on mobility that are imposed on daughters and daughters-in-laws, but not on sons and son-in-laws.” Feminists make the very pertinent argument that concepts such as “democracy” and “peace” do not exist out there, but rather
are meant to be practiced within the family. It is in this context that the feminist slogan “the personal is the political” is extremely relevant because it transcends the artificial divides between the external and the internal, between the private and the public.

Language and vocabulary present another significant challenge for gender equality. For example, Bhasin shared that the original meaning of the word “husband” is “master of the house”, one who “directs” and “manages”. Even Hindi, Urdu, Pashto, and other language translations have similar meanings: “lord”, “master”, “owner” et al. Bhasin argued that “if one person is a master, logically speaking, what is the other person? Slave! To husband is to control, to manage, to domesticate.” So the very vocabulary used to define the marital relationship between a man and a woman is problematic. This presents a daunting challenge – one that requires a cultural revolution, which transforms a society’s value systems, beliefs, as well as practices. Efforts to transform gender relations towards equality and mutual respect must begin at this very fundamental level of transformation of the vocabulary that a society uses. In this context, Bhasin invited participants to reflect on how the use of alternative gender-sensitive terms could be popularized [for example, partner, saathi (Hindi), humsafar (Urdu), humsar (Dari) et al].

While masculinity is a social construct based on how a society sees men and boys and the qualities it ascribes to them, femininity relates to the societal expectation of how women and girls should behave, look, and dress. “Men and women are born male and female. Society turns them into masculine and feminine”, said Bhasin. She also introduced the notion of a “hegemonic masculinity”, which is based on power and propels men to act aggressively and violently. It is closely tied to the perpetuation of armed conflict and other forms of violence, and is a central element of patriarchy. In this context, the following terms were elicited from the participants as being associated with conventional definitions of masculinity: strong/hardy, power (over others), muscular, macho, emotionless, aggressive, dominating, arrogant, revengeful, bold, brave, chivalrous, robust, resolute, vigorous, well-built, strapping, and rational.

29 According to Bhasin, patriarchy is “a social and ideological system which considers men to be superior to women…one in which men have more control over resources and decision-making. Patriarchy is historically constructed and its form, content, and extent can vary across time as also from one context to the other.” It perpetuates a system in which men are heads of households, inheritors of family name and property. As a result, gender relations become unequal and hierarchical. Patriarchy influences all aspects of society – the state and its institutions as well as the family and the community.
Such conceptions produce a whole set of problems. For one, they lead to a definition of femininity, which consists of the antonyms to these words: subservient, sensitive, weak, powerless, fragile/delicate, docile, fearful, cowardly, tolerant, soft, caring, nurturing, emotional, and irrational. If women exhibit any of the masculine qualities, they are considered “bad”, “loose” or “immoral”. The second problem is that unreasonable expectations are imposed on men to behave in a certain manner. Their inability (owing to a variety of factors such as poverty, disability, physical construction etc.) or refusal to do so, results in them being shamed by society for not being masculine enough! Unfortunately, often the response to this dichotomy between masculinity and femininity is that women try to be more like men, exhibiting the qualities traditionally associated with masculinity – strong, powerful, unmoving, emotionless etc. Examples abound in politics, from Madeline Albright and Margaret Thatcher to Indira Gandhi.

It was noted that masculine and feminine qualities are also contextual. For example, a male domestic helper will project the so-called feminine qualities of being servile and polite in his interaction with the owner of the house where he works. He does this because of his class. When he goes home to his wife, he will put on the role of “man of the house” and exhibit qualities such as power, aggression, and perhaps even violence.

Over the last decade or so, these societal constructs have come to be increasingly questioned by many women. Today, women have greater access to education and economic independence. They do not want to compromise their dignity and fit into limiting identity constructs of femininity. Bhasin shared that the paucity of efforts to sensitize men and involve them in efforts to promote gender equality has resulted in many marriages ending in separation or divorce. While in Western countries, the divorce rates are as high as 50 per cent, similar processes can now be observed in India as well.

If men and women practice the so-called “feminine qualities” (caring, nurturing, loving, patient, forbearance, forgiving et al) out of choice, the potential for peace, development, and democracy will be limitless. But when these qualities are imposed on women because they are women, they lose their value. Bhasin clarified that gender equality has little to do with the numerical representation of women in Parliament; it has more to do with the balance of masculine and feminine qualities within an individual. Individuals who have demonstrated such a balance of the yin and the yang are His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Mother Teresa, and Mahatma Gandhi. These are also
individuals who have received the respect of societies, cutting across cultures and religions.

Saying that the transformation of gender identities is crucial for the wellbeing of the unit of the family, Bhasin advocated a need for identities where both men and women practise the positive aspects of the feminine and masculine qualities. In other words, each individual irrespective of his/her sex should be strong as well as gentle, rational as well as emotional. In addition, Bhasin argued for the inclusion and participation of men in the so-called feminine activities of nurturing and caring for children and the elderly.

Yet, it was noted that the transcendence of patriarchal beliefs and actions is difficult – for men as well as women. The primary reason lies in the reality that patriarchy has pervaded all systems of society, whether these are the home, education, healthcare, the workplace, or politics. Women, as much as men, participate in these processes. In fact, these processes are so internalized that one participant shared that even as she fights for gender equality, she would also expect a man to be “chivalrous” by holding a chair for her or opening a door for her.

Women buy into patriarchy in a big way and they too can be instruments of subjugation and violence. For example, while it is correct that 40 per cent
married women are beaten by their husbands, often mothers-in-laws and other women in the family are also parties to such violence.

Even when women take a position against patriarchy and hegemonic notions of masculinity, often, their expectations do not change. For instance, they continue to hold on to conventional expectations such as – their husbands should be taller than them, they should earn more money than them, they should provide for the family, the brother should protect his sister, and so on. Bhasin noted that in the South Asian context, women can in fact be more patriarchal than men. This is because they are bound by religion and culture in ways that men are not; sometimes, they also might have less education and less exposure, which leads to the creation of rigid worldviews.

There was a perception among some male and female participants that feminism is anti-men. They said that any kind of shrillness or stridency in mobilizing for a cause would not work. The methodology has to be one that is consultative, dialogic, and that elicits from people what their needs and aspirations are. Mobilization must be based on active listening and a needs’ assessment. It was felt that the methodology that some women’s groups have employed has pushed men and even some women away from the cause, because of the stridency of the approach.

Bhasin corrected this view by stating that the struggle for gender equality should not be seen as a conflict between women and men. Rather, it is the conflict of two ideologies, one that subscribes to patriarchy and the other which believes in equality for both men and women. In fact, she noted that there are several men who support efforts to advance women’s rights. Men’s inclusion and participation was underscored as an important component of the struggle for gender equality.
Armed conflict affects men and women differently. While both suffer during conflict, their experiences are different. During the mass atrocities in Rwanda (1994) and in the former Yugoslavia (1995), it was observed that while young men disappeared or were killed, young women were sexually assaulted in order to terrorize and shame the opponent. In the years since then, sexual violence against women has increasingly been used as a “tactic of war” in countries experiencing armed conflict, prompting the United Nations Security Council to adopt Resolutions 1820 and 1888 (in 2008 and 2009 respectively). However, this is not to discount the reality that civilian boys and men are also vulnerable to sexual torture and other forms of violence. Revelations of such forms of violence from Afghanistan and Iraq in recent years are only the tip of the iceberg.

Men and women also experience cultural and structural forms of violence, which invariably lie at the roots of conflict. These subtle forms of violence in fact continue even after the signing of peace accords, in the form of poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, domestic violence, and discriminatory cultural norms and traditions. Men and women are also participants in different forms of structural and cultural violence, which continue long after the visible violence has ended, thereby problematizing generalizations that link women to peace and men to war.

30 These Resolutions seek to address the use of rape as a tactic in war by ending the impunity that perpetrators of such violence possess.
Armed conflict also provides a context for women and men to play different roles, which in turn impact their identities. Because of these diverse experiences and perspectives, it is important that both men and women be included in processes that seek to end violence and build sustainable peace, even as we remain mindful of the historical reality of patriarchy and its impact on gender relations.

The Roundtable on *Gender and Armed Violence in South Asia: From the Home to the Battlefield* addressed the diverse range of threats, the easy availability of small arms and light weapons in particular, to the security of women and men in the region, and how these might be addressed and mitigated. Exploring the role of the security sector in this regard, it looked at how the delivery of security and justice services could be improved for men and women, boys and girls.

The changing understanding of security from an exclusive reliance on territorial security to one that also embraces the wellbeing and protection of the population has led to the growing relevance of security sector reform and governance. In addition, the fact that the security sector has, at different points of time, shed its role of protector and turned perpetrator, has also drawn attention to the need for reform. Even in ostensibly mature democracies, the incapacity of the security system to protect civilians raises vital questions. Reform of the
security sector, comprising the armed forces, police, intelligence and border management services, oversight bodies such as parliament and government, justice and penal systems, non-statutory security forces and civil society groups, has become a particularly relevant subject in South Asia.

The Roundtable opened with a presentation by Dr. Salma Malik on the *Culture of Gun Violence in Pakistan*. She traced the problem of widespread gun violence in Pakistan to over a century ago when the British promoted a gun culture in the north-western areas of the country for the proverbial Great Game, and over the years, a major black market for the sale and purchase of weapons developed and flourished. Once Pakistan became independent, the north-western areas were left as federally administered tribal areas (FATA) with little state jurisdiction. As a result, the arms’ market remained untouched. While the arms’ market was not very active from 1947 to the mid-1970s, when the situation in Afghanistan deteriorated and the Soviet Union stepped in, this market was reinvigorated with considerable money and energy, and with encouragement of the ISI and the CIA. The result was that a whole variety of sophisticated weapons (AK 47s, local variants, G3s, etc.) and the related technology – required to make the Afghan war costlier for the Soviet Union – began to be manufactured in this market. The border between Afghanistan and Pakistan has always been porous, and this facilitated an easy flow of weapons and combatants. This set the stage for a lethal situation that would lead to the current gun culture problem in Pakistan.

Malik shared that a second arms’ pipeline, sponsored primarily by the CIA, was opened through which weapons would enter Pakistan through Karachi or Rawalpindi. The weapons that would enter the country were supposed to go to Afghanistan because the arrangement between Pakistan and the USA was that none of the weapons should be traced back to the latter. The weapons meant for Afghanistan therefore had to be routed through Pakistan, which would then hand these over to the *mujahideen* commanders. There were however leakages in the pipeline. Many of these weapons were hoarded by interest groups depending on their different requirements for them. Once the Afghan War ended, these weapons fell into the hands of different sectarian groups and “militants” to carry out the “dirty work” of different agencies and vested interests. As a result, violence spread to Karachi and select pockets in other cities.
Shifting focus to the contemporary situation in Pakistan – a consequence of 9/11 and “Operation Enduring Freedom” – Malik said that while Pakistan had initiated several de-weaponization efforts (some indigenous, others at the behest of the US), these have been only partially successful. As part of the de-weaponization efforts post-9/11, the weapons’ market was to be revamped and brought under state control. Gun smiths were to be provided alternate vocations. However, Malik said that this didn’t work because the gun smiths were making millions of rupees as part of the illicit weapons’ trade, and alternative vocations were no match financially. The Government of Pakistan imposed a ban on the flow of weapons into Afghanistan as well as on their use by the Taliban forces, but not by the Northern Alliance. This was problematic because if a ban on weapons is to be imposed, it has to be a blanket one. Otherwise, weapons will continue to leak into society.

In this backdrop, the levels of violence gradually increased, and eventually the problem of small arms and light weapons assumed serious proportions, culminating in the 2007 Lal Masjid tragic encounter in Islamabad. The Lal Masjid encounter proved to be the proverbial wake up call for the government, said Malik. Because young women, many of them armed, were inside the mosque, the situation became very complex. Finally, there was a military standoff, which led to the mosque being attacked and precious lives being lost. The Lal Masjid episode, explained Malik, took place in the context of broader social and political processes, the most visible of which was the growing stridency of the followers of certain clergy who had assumed the role of the moral police in Islamabad. They carried lethal weapons with them to coerce people into following their dictates. According to Malik, this episode resulted in the initiation of the insurgency in Swat. For the Pakistani security forces, this was a huge burden because they were already battling violence in FATA. And for the people of Swat, the insurgency signified the initiation of Talibanization processes in the area. Civilians lost their livelihoods, men were killed, and a significant number of women became IDPs. Even today, the rehabilitation of, and livelihood generation for, the people of Swat remains a challenge.

Shifting focus to FATA, Malik said that developments in this region form a big part of the puzzle vis-a-vis the gun culture in Pakistan. The situation in FATA is complicated because several insurgent groups including the Taliban and the Al Qaida have been active here. They have done away with the traditional jirga system of governance and have not allowed alternate mechanisms to set in. Because of the high levels of insecurity, there has been
a flight of people as well as of capital. A large number of women have been widowed, and girls and boys orphaned. In fact, Malik noted that over the last ten years, young boys have emerged as the most vulnerable group, with many of them being forced to become suicide bombers. They come from poor families and are often orphans. In such a scenario, brainwashing becomes easy and they become fresh recruits in the suicide bomber factory. So, while both boys and girls are vulnerable in this context, the challenges facing them are very different.

Commenting on the effort of the Government of Pakistan to transform the gun culture, Malik said that initiatives were taken to offer an alternate option to the Taliban – through the concept of *aman lashkars*. This has however had mixed results. While the concept has been received well in some areas, in most regions, the Taliban and other insurgent groups, with their sophisticated weapons, have overpowered the *aman lashkars*. As Malik put it, “if you arm one group today to fight another group, tomorrow, it is going to create problems for you.” This is what has been happening in Pakistan with the mujahideens of yesteryears transforming into the warlords and the Talibans of today.

The cyclical relationship between multiple insurgencies and the gun culture in Pakistan has resulted in nearly 40,000 civilian deaths. There has been a disturbing increase in the number of young Pakistani soldiers who have died or are returning from the battlefield with severe disabilities. This has a huge impact on their families, psychologically as well as financially. The problem of suicide bombers, while it does not fit technically within the ambit of the discourse on small arms and weapons, is a very serious issue for Pakistan, and one that has caused much damage to civilian life and safety.

Malik noted that these events, together, have burdened the civilian government and the military with a new set of problems (rehabilitation of IDPs, development challenges, reconstruction, employment etc.) in multiple areas (FATA, Swat, Balochistan, and others). This has resulted in people losing confidence in the state’s ability to provide basic governance and justice. In fact, Malik noted that this has also helped the Taliban to build a constituency for itself in the north-western parts of the country by filling the governance and justice vacuum in the region, and thereby garnering popular support.

The next presentation by Ms. Binalakshmi Nepram, Secretary General, Control Arms Foundation of India, New Delhi looked at the *Impact of the International Arms’ Trade on Women’s Lives*. Encapsulating the material dimension of

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31 The summary of this presentation was prepared by Ms. Rashi Sarawgi.
militarization across the globe, she said that there were close to 875 million small arms in circulation in the world. There was a weapon for every 12 people. According to UN estimates 300,000 people were killed by small arms and light weapons every year and 90 per cent of the people killed in armed conflicts were civilians. The arms industry is a trillion dollar industry, and 88 per cent of all the conventional arms exported were manufactured by the permanent five members of the UN Security Council – USA, UK, China, France, and Russia. Interestingly, these weapons are exported to regions such as South Asia, where non-state groups, divided along caste, ethnicity, religion, and other markers, use them to kill one another.

In India, most of the illegal weapons in circulation are Cold War leftovers from the Afghanistan conflict of the 1980s and 1990s. The weapons travelled from one conflict zone to the other as they had a lifespan of 10-20 years. India accounts for 40 million of the 75 million illegal small arms in circulation. Nepram shared that in the Northeast, the arms trade is closely linked to the prevailing drugs trade of heroin and other illegal substances. For example, drug traffickers get a 9mm handgun free for every one kilogram of heroin trafficked successfully.

Nepram also traced the history of the various UN initiatives to regulate the arms trade. In 1991, the UN established the Registry of Conventional Arms according to which nations were invited to report annually, on a voluntary basis, their imports and exports of certain types of conventional weapons during the previous calendar year. This was followed by a panel that was established in 1992 to study the issue of Small Arms Violence. Before 1992, disarmament only referred to nuclear disarmament. But after the then Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali coined the term “micro-disarmament” which meant practical disarmament in the context of small and light weapons that were killing thousands of people, the discourse on disarmament sought to include these weapons as well. In 2001, the UN had its first session on all aspects of small arms and light weapons; this was followed by a 2006 Resolution where 153 countries voted at the United Nations to start work on developing a global Arms Trade Treaty (ATT).

According to Nepram, the ATT must have provisions which hold governments accountable for the arms they produce, enable tracking of weapons, and stop weapon transfers to countries where it could be used for serious violations of
human rights or humanitarian law, or acts of genocide or crimes against humanity.

Nepram also shared her experiences of working with the Manipur Women Gun Survivors’ Network (MWGSN). After the rape and extrajudicial killing of Thangjam Manorama by personnel belonging to the Assam Rifles and the extraordinary protest by some Manipuri women who disrobed in front of the Assam Rifles Head Quarters with a banner saying “Indian Army Rape Us” (2004), Nepram said that rumors had started circulating about the motives behind the protest of these women. With the objective of finding out the truth behind these rumors, Nepram travelled across Manipur, listening to the perspectives of the women who had participated in this extraordinary protest as also to those of the Meira Paibis who were accused of having links with militant outfits in the region.

This search for the truth led Nepram to start the MWGSN after witnessing the aftermath of the killing of a young man by unidentified gunmen, and the repercussions of this on the lives of his wife and children. Manipur Women Gun Survivors Network was formed in an attempt to help women, whose lives had changed dramatically because of the killing of a family member, by state/non-state actors or unidentified gunmen. The group which started with 25 women, now constitutes more than a 1000 women. The women have experienced gun violence at close proximity and have an intimate understanding of how weapons shatter families. The Network supports these women by giving them finances to start small enterprises or businesses, through which they can support their children and experience some degree of economic independence.

Speaking in the context of armed violence in the Northeast, Nepram said that 58 types of weapons from 13 countries have flooded the region. Of these, lethal weapons such as AK47s, are the most popular and widely circulated. Interestingly, none of them are made in India. In the conflicts of the Northeast, “it is not the Nagas, Kukis, Manipuris, Bodos or any other community that is winning. On the contrary, it is the arms dealers who are laughing all the way to the bank as we slaughter each other”, said Nepram.

Nepram also pointed to the changing nature of armed violence, which is no longer limited to regions of armed conflict in Manipur or Kashmir. Saying

32 Meira Paibis are the watchdogs of human rights at the community level, initiating and engaging in campaigns against rights violations, such as arbitrary detention, cordon and search operations, and torture, committed by the security personnel.
that small arms and light weapons kill 300,000 people a year worldwide, and at least 12 Indians are shot everyday, she said that many of these acts of violence take place in ostensibly peaceful cities such as Delhi and Mumbai. Surprisingly, the issues are as minor as a row over car parking space, or school children avenging a sarcastic comment by using their father’s guns against a classmate or teacher. What this trend shows is that the threshold for violence is very low in many South Asian societies, and the cheap and easy availability of guns makes it easier for people to buy these and use them to address a diverse range of conflicts.

Engaging deeper with this changing nature of armed violence, Ms. Sonal Marwah, Project Coordinator, Small Arms Survey, New Delhi, spoke on the Continuum of Armed Violence in India and the gendered nature of insecurity that it unleashes. In this context, she introduced her work with the India Armed Violence Assessment, which seeks to advance understandings of domestic and social violence, and human security debates beyond insurgency and terrorism issues.

Opening with a broad definition of armed violence (drawn from the Geneva Declaration), Marwah said that armed violence is “the intentional use of illegitimate force (actual or threatened) with arms or explosives, against a person, group, community, or state that undermines people-centered security and/or sustainable development.” The big picture of armed violence-related deaths reveals the following:

- Nine out of ten violent deaths occur outside of conflict situations.
- Indirect victims of armed violence die due to preventable diseases such as hunger, malnutrition, loss of access to basic health care, adequate food and shelter, clean water, and other necessities of life.
- Roughly 66,000 women are killed violently globally each year, accounting for approximately 17 per cent of total intentional homicides.

Marwah noted that even though there has been a sustained decrease in the number of inter-state conflicts, and reduction in battle-related deaths in intra-state conflicts, there has been an increase in the fatalities occurring from non-conflict scenarios and indirect conflict deaths. In other words, more civilians are dying in regions that are coded “peaceful” or “post-conflict” than those in regions experiencing armed conflict.
A recent Global Survey by the Thomson Reuters Foundation revealed that the “top five countries most dangerous for women” were Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Pakistan, India, and Somalia. In this context, Marwah shared the following information with reference to armed violence against women:

- Men are five times more likely than women to be victims of homicide, but women are up to six times more likely than men to be killed by their intimate partner.
- 70 per cent of femicide victims were physically abused before their deaths by the same intimate partner who killed them.
- A gun kept in a household where domestic violence occurs increases the risk that the violence will end in homicide.

This data calls for a need to look at the broad spectrum of violence, which is not limited to armed conflict. Fatalities that are the consequence of the use of fire arms, gun accidents, and suicides, need to be brought into the conflict discourse as well. Marwah pointed to another significant issue, which is the difference between licensed weapons and unlicensed weapons. Unlicensed weapons account for 86 to 92 per cent of reported fire arm murders in India. Just three states, Bihar, Jharkhand, and UP, account for almost two-thirds of murders by fire arms. What is significant here is that these states have not been categorized as “disturbed” or areas where “armed conflicts” are located.

Women are especially vulnerable to armed violence, although their vulnerability is overlooked in official statistics. Not only are women vulnerable to direct violence, they are disproportionately victimized by less visible, indirect effects. However, Marwah wondered if the increase in incidences of violence against women is an indication that the situation is getting worse on the ground, or is it that women are more confident to report crimes at police stations? Or have reporting institutions/mechanisms improved in functioning?

In the context of the data gaps on gendered insecurity, Marwah proposed the following:

- Support for international initiatives to track violence against women (VAW) on a global basis.
- Promote field-based research on mapping VAW.
- Develop improved costing tools for estimating the effects of VAW on development.
• Extend work on a contextual appraisal toolkit for implementing VAW interventions.

• Support a comprehensive evaluation toolkit for VAW and reduction programming.

Locating her work in the context of the previous three presentations which highlighted the vulnerabilities of women and men, and boys and girls, in contexts of violent conflict (as also in ostensibly peaceful societies), Dr. Mallika Joseph, Executive Director, Regional Center for Strategic Studies, Colombo, talked about the interface between Gender and Security Sector Reform. Underscoring the relevance of this discourse in the context of the very diverse vulnerabilities that men and women live with, Joseph looked at the ways in which state and non-state actors can reform their policies and programs to address the gendered insecurities that the civilian population is confronted with.

Underscoring the centrality of the security issue, Joseph noted:

• Security is fundamental to reducing poverty, protecting human rights, and supporting sustainable development.

• Security and development are inherently linked and neither can function without the other.

• The “security of states” and the “security of the people” have different connotations, but are mutually dependant.

• Insecurity in one country can have a significant impact on neighboring countries and beyond.

The traditional, state-centric understanding of security, which embraces a narrow notion of the security sector, focusing on those public sector institutions that are responsible for providing external and internal security, has undergone a deep transformation with the growing recognition, in recent years, that a state-centric approach to security is insufficient. In many contexts, security and justice are not just provided by state agencies but also by non-state actors including customary justice and security providers and private military and security companies. Moreover, non-state actors such as the media and civil society organizations have begun to play an important role in providing...
oversight of the security sector. The question now is how to include them in an SSR process. The new concept of security has gradually expanded the beneficiaries of society. While the traditional security agenda focused on military security providers and the state, there is now increasingly the view that the citizen is the center of security and the focus is on both military and non-military security.

In this context, Joseph drew attention to the emerging discourse on human security, which was initiated with the UN Millennium Report 2000. It articulated the need for a more human-centered approach to security. This was followed by Dr. Kofi Annan’s assertion in 2001 that “security can no longer be understood in purely military terms… Rather, it must encompass economic development, social justice, environmental protection, democratization, disarmament, and respect for human rights and the rule of law”. So there is a gradual expansion of what constitutes security, and a recognition that security is a precondition for development (European Security Strategy, 2003). Finally, the UN Human Security Report 2009 states that “without human security, traditional state security cannot be attained and vice-versa”. It is this new concept of security, reflected in the discourse on human security, which has become the fulcrum of Security Sector Reform (SSR).

Joseph stated that there is no one definition of the Security Sector (SS). However, broadly, the SS comprises four areas: state providers (armed forces, police, judiciary), state oversight (human rights commissions, legislature), non-state providers (security contractors, private security companies, vigilante
groups), and non-state oversight (media, civil society). Any discussion on SSR must therefore include all these different state and non-state actors. While the state actors’ primary responsibilities are to provide security and justice, the non-state sectors have a significant part to play through their governance, oversight, and management functions. However, these categorizations are fluid and each state will have its own security architecture based on its history, cultural heritage, and constitution. In some cases, international actors may also be involved in delivering security and justice as well as in providing oversight in the security sector.

Joseph stated that it is broadly accepted that SSR is a nationally owned process aimed at ensuring that security providers are:

- accountable to the state and its people;
- effective, efficient, and affordable;
- respectful of international norms, standards, and human rights; and
- legitimate.

She shared that SSR is initiated or undertaken in the following situations:

- When the security sector has become partially or fully dysfunctional;
- There is an ineffective and inefficient provision of security;
- When security providers (armed forces, heavily armed police etc.) become a source of insecurity;
- Inadequate accountability and oversight (governance deficit).

The purpose of SSR is to facilitate the effective and efficient provision of state and human security within a framework of governance, rule of law, and respect for human rights. The United Nations recognizes SSR as a critical element in ensuring an effective, professional, and accountable security sector, which is crucial for sustainable peace and development. Simply put, SSR is about making people safe, in perception and in reality.

Why is the gender discourse important for SSR? Clarifying that gender includes the socio-cultural roles and expectations of women and men, boys and girls, Joseph said that each individual has a different experience of conflict and insecurity, and hence different needs. The insecurity of a woman or a girl would be different from how secure or insecure a boy or a man feels. In this context, it becomes crucial for a close interface between gender and SSR so
that the different vulnerabilities of men and women can be addressed and transformed.

While the insecurities of men and boys (in conflict, or even non-conflict zones) include death, being maimed, gang violence, molestation, sexual torture, forced recruitment into armed groups, and even being forced to assault their own female family members, women and girls’ vulnerabilities include rape, domestic violence, trafficking etc. The goal and challenge for SSR is to address these very diverse and important vulnerabilities.

According to Joseph, the inclusion of a gender perspective enhances the effectiveness of SSR in the following ways:

- Strengthens local ownership: women’s organizations are often bridges between local security and justice needs and policymakers.
- Ensures effective security and justice delivery through representative security sector institutions; and ensures prevention of, and timely response to, gender-based violence. It was noted here that violence against men and boys is also included in the definition of gender-based violence. For instance, 91 per cent of firearms’ victims are men.
- Institutions become more representative and participatory. They have greater civilian trust and legitimacy.
- Operational effectiveness: The example of border guards on the Nepali-Indian border who work with women’s organizations to identify potential victims of human trafficking, was cited. Also, in Afghanistan, the inclusion of women in the armed forces has greatly enabled the latter to perform better. The assassination of Rajiv Gandhi could have been prevented if women police officers were present to do body searches or use metal detectors.
- Enhances oversight and accountability of the security sector.
- Compliance with international, regional, and national law and instruments.

Another important dimension is the integration of gender with the entire process of SSR. Joseph noted that often gender is added in an ad hoc manner at the implementation or evaluation stage. This needs to be corrected by including gender in the entire SSR cycle, beginning with assessment and identification; design and planning; implementation, monitoring and review; and finally, evaluation; lessons learned. Joseph underscored the following questions, which must be asked throughout the process: How can gender be addressed at each
stage? Are women and men being consulted or are they involved in the process? Are the security and justice needs of women, men, boys, and girls being taken into account? Are institutions equipped to deal with these differentiated needs?

Addressing the *how* of this process, Joseph identified two complimentary strategies to integrate gender into SSR:

- **Gender mainstreaming**: Joseph explained that gender mainstreaming is the process of assessing the implications for women and men (as well as boys and girls) of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programs, in all areas and at all levels. It seeks to ensure that women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences are an integral dimension at every stage of the program, so that inequality is not perpetuated. Mainstreaming gender into an SSR assessment involves the identification of the different insecurities faced by men, women, boys and girls. For instance, this could point to the need for a gender budget, a gender expert as part of a team, et al.

- **Promoting the equal participation of men and women**: This includes measures, which seek to uphold both men and women’s rights to participate in decision-making on SSR and in security policy in general. Since men are usually over-represented within SSR processes and in security sector institutions, this strategy usually focuses on increasing the recruitment, retention, and advancement of women, and ensuring the participation of civil society organizations, including women’s organizations in SSR processes.

Joseph pointed to the following gender entry points for such work: training, operations, staffing, legislation/policy/protocol, institutional structure, logistics/infrastructure, and budget. Highlighting the different ways in which gender can be integrated into different levels of a security organization, Joseph identified the following:

- **At the policy level**, this could include initiatives such as codes of conduct, sexual harassment policies, and reform of existing protocols.

- **At the structural level**, interventions could include the appointment of gender advisors, a gender-based violence unit, and, internal and external complaint mechanisms.
• At the programmatic level, gender could be integrated with SSR through actions such as community policing, internal hotline for sexual harassment, and providing trafficked victims with referrals.

• At the personnel level, it could include policies on recruitment, retention, and advancement, training on gender issues, and sensitization campaigns (to change mindsets and cultures).

Summarizing the key points of the panel presentations, the session Chair Mr. Ravinder Pal Singh, Defense Analyst, New Delhi, pointed to the inextricable link between the flourishing illicit weapons trade in each South Asian country and the regional dimension of this problem. This is a challenge that the South Asian countries must address collectively and collaborate at international gatherings to push for a global Arms Trade Treaty.

With each country in the region being governed by democratically-elected representatives, Singh said that this provides an opportune moment for women and men to ask their civilian governments questions about the security sector’s effectiveness and accountability in preventing and reducing armed violence and in generating a feeling of security in the average citizen. Several processes concerning checks and balances, verification, and scrutiny of the security sector need to be operationalized in this context.

The other issue that needs to be addressed is the weak nature of democratic oversight. In the context of the debate on AFSPA, Singh critiqued the state legislatures of Manipur and Jammu and Kashmir for failing in their responsibility to carry out their oversight functions. A similar paralysis of will has gripped Parliament, not to mention the absence of women in Parliamentary oversight committees.

The fact that armed violence and the free availability of illicitly bought weapons is concentrated in certain pockets of the region, often those that constitute the “periphery” of the nation-state (Manipur, for instance), requires deeper introspection. Is the violence in these regions part of the broader center-periphery conflicts? Or, are they part of nation-building conflicts? Or are they a consequence of the inability and indifference of the central (“mainstream”) elements of society to care about those living on the periphery? These elements constitute not just the central government, but also the majority of the media,
the academia, and civil society, which remain ill-informed and under-energized to engage with the concerns of the periphery.

A key source of the problem, according to Singh, lies in the way South Asia perceives discontent and the consequent deployment of its security sector forces to “deal with this”. The armed forces in each country of the region continue to reflect the legacy of British colonialism. Their attitude to the articulation of discontent and grievance is also similar to how the British responded during the days of the Raj: If there is a problem in Nagaland or Jammu and Kashmir, the first response is to deploy the armed forces to suppress, control, and even demolish discontent. The experience of the last 60 years has shown that such heavy-handed application of the military is not an appropriate or even useful technique. The dominant belief is to overcome opposition with the use of the armed forces. This must be questioned because such an approach will never permit the transformation of conflicts towards sustainable peace and security. The solution has to be one which includes socio-economic programs for the population, which focuses on democratic governance, and most significantly, on providing individual and public security. Singh cited the example of India where 200 districts have been declared “disturbed”. The government has used enabling legislation to deploy the police and armed forces to quell the violence and militarily defeat the “enemy”. This has been accompanied by a culture of impunity as a consequence of immunity from prosecution.

In this context, Singh underscored the need for the state to engage with processes of discontent, even those that use violence for articulation, from a long-term, holistic perspective. This would naturally shift the focus to what the people need, which often means socio-economic development, and individual and public access to justice and security. This would work far more effectively in transforming discontent than the conventional method of using force to demolish public expressions of grievance.

Singh also drew attention to the question of knowledge creation – the generation of data and information on issues concerning peoples’ security, human rights violations, the prevalence of private armies, illicit small arms proliferation, public accountability of the social security sector et al. It is the right of citizens to access information on the performance of the security sector, whether it is the military, the police or even public administration and representative institutions. Related to the issue of knowledge creation is also the need for training within the armed forces. The Indian armed forces remain insular, and far removed from regular interactions with society. The nature of their
interaction with the broader society needs to be addressed. This dialogue can be initiated by think tanks and civil society organizations with the purpose to encourage the view that security means more than territorial protection of the state or its sovereignty. It must include the important goal of public and individual safety.

Discussion

The following issues were discussed in the Q&A session.

- The stereotype of Pashtuns representing a gun-wielding community and culture was questioned by some participants. They felt that the problem had more to do with the easy availability of guns and a people who have been brutalized and exploited by state and non-state actors at different points of time over the last century. After all, it would be instructive to remind ourselves that this was the same community which, under the leadership of Abdul Ghaffar Khan, raised the world’s first Shanti Sena (nonviolent peaceforce), putting into practice one of Mahatma Gandhi’s key principles of satyagraha and Ahimsa.

- Questions were asked about Pakistan’s motivation to host a weapons’ pipeline through which the CIA sent arms to Afghanistan for the mujahideen to fight the Soviets – and how leakages from this pipeline played a big part in the current problem of widespread gun violence in the country. Pointing to the staggering sums of money and drugs that were used to fund the Afghan jihad, Malik said that this was a war that the Pakistan government legitimized in the name of religion, seeing itself as the harbinger of a modern jihad. Obviously, religion had little to do with the situation, and it was more about power and vested financial interests.

- The problem of accessing data on fake encounters, extra-judicial killings, and forced disappearances was identified by Marwah as a huge challenge to building a database on what types of violence are killing how many people. Apart from fact-finding missions undertaken by civil society groups, it was noted that the absence of credible information on such forms of violence presents a very serious challenge for conflict research, the purpose of which is to give policymakers the necessary data to change policy.

- The term “gender mainstreaming” was critiqued for the ways in which it is implemented at the program level, which is that it ends up becoming part of a checklist that is done in a mechanical way without much attention to the ways in which the different perspectives of men and women can influence the efficacy of an intervention.
The definition and delivery of justice, an important function of the security sector, requires considerable reform in light of the fact that in any armed conflict, the boundaries between “victims” and “perpetrators” are blurred. It was proposed that retributive understandings of justice need to be broadened to include a restorative definition, which addresses the needs of the victim, the family, the community, and the perpetrator. For example, while military action against a militant might be justified in the context of a particular instance of violence, what is missed is the fact that this militant is also a victim in a different context and time period. Also, the security sector oversight bodies often fail to take into consideration the chain of victims that are created when an ostensible perpetrator is silenced. What happens to his children, wife, and extended family is a question that remains unaddressed and only serves to perpetuate a feeling of injustice.

Several questions were raised about the new roles that the police and military are having to take on in regions experiencing intense violence. For example, in Pakistan, the ordinary police force has been entrusted with the task of counter-terrorism for which it is not adequately trained and which conventionally does not fall within its domain. The Pakistan army is performing the functions of development and rehabilitation in regions such as Swat. These are however not its primary responsibilities, and this has led to an overburdening of the security forces. The common tendency during a situation of insurgency is that the state militarizes the police to deal with the violence, and little emphasis is placed on the accountability of its security...
The efficacy of the security sector is inextricably linked to the accountability of its personnel. The arming of ordinary police in Afghanistan with the responsibility of counter-insurgency has meant that normal law and order has been neglected. Because of this neglect of law and order, people’s individual sense of insecurity has increased. A similar situation has been witnessed in the areas affected by Naxal violence in India where law and order has all but broken down. This also leads to a problem reflected in the questions, “Once the insurgency is over, what does the state do with a highly militarized police? How might police units be redesigned and personnel trained to address democratic governance needs as well as maintain public safety?” The solution lies in compartmentalizing responsibilities and building a separate force for counter-insurgency, independent of the traditional law and order police.

- The relationship between the function of the security sector to ensure safety, and the societal expectation that it should be accountable to the government and therefore to the people of the country was discussed. Participants argued for the recognition among security forces and intelligence agencies of their responsibility to comply with the rule of law.

- Several questions were raised about AFSPA and what needs to be done to interrogate the existing impunity. While some participants expressed the view that it should be repealed because it violates an individual’s fundamental rights and is a blot on Indian democracy, others articulated a need for professionalism, responsibility, and accountability in the application of the law.

- How might countries of the South Asian region balance their short-term security concerns with the long-term security needs of the region?

- The dialogue ended with a consensus that security must now be centered around the individual and community’s sense of safety. Ultimately, security has to do with how safe the average citizen feels. This is also the foundation of SSR.
A culture of open-ended dialogue, based on the principles of nonviolence and compassion, is central to processes that seek to deepen democracy and build peace and justice. The imperative of the engagement with the precept and practice of nonviolence for peacebuilding cannot be overstated. In this context, the work of Mohandas Gandhi, and his contributions to developing “nonviolence as a political practice” in particular, deserve special engagement. Gandhi has emerged as a symbol and inspiration for many working in the field of Conflict Transformation. His assertion, “We Must Become the Change We Want To See In the World” is a talisman for those seeking to build peace in regions across the world. By suggesting that individuals cannot do peace work without undergoing a personal transformation themselves, Gandhi called for radical social transformation, which required deep personal commitment and a high level of self-awareness, not to mention an abiding faith in spirituality. Inspired by Gandhi’s life, individuals have adopted many of his key ideas and
practices to advance peace and deepen democracy. For instance, the belief that conflict can be a positive force (and is in fact required for constructive social change), the notion of waging conflict nonviolently, the separation of the character of one’s opponent from his/her actions, the primacy of respectful communication and sustained dialogue, and of course, the full range of strategies and tactics of nonviolent action to transform armed conflict.

From a Conflict Transformation perspective, particularly relevant today are the reasons that Gandhi gave for his unwavering faith in nonviolence. According to Prof. Vinay Lal, a scholar of Gandhian philosophy and Professor, Department of History, Delhi University, the Mahatma “held nonviolence to be superior to violence” because “its proponents extend an invitation to those who swear by violence to enter into a dialogue. The advocates of nonviolence are always in a conversation with the adherents of violence”. With human dignity as the guiding compass, in Gandhian nonviolence, there is always space for opponents to respectfully engage in a dialogue where there are no “winners” and “losers”.

Gandhi’s work also holds a central place in democratic discourse. At a time when citizens are seeking to move beyond the mere exercise of their electoral vote to deepen and broaden the principle of democracy, it would be instructive to remind ourselves of Gandhi’s conception of decentralization, where each unit down to the village level was vested with autonomy and power so that the fruits of development and growth could touch the lives of the poorest. Gandhi was also one of the leading voices to link the vibrancy of a democracy to how it treated its minorities. He was an initiator of “the modern campaigns against colonialism, racism and xenophobia, and in this respect he can be viewed as an advocate of the right of people to live an unfettered life of dignity.”

Exploring the diverse representations of Gandhi in visual culture, the Workshop module Gandhi and the Democratic Imagination: A Visual Journey looked at the compelling ways in which his followers and critics have interpreted his life and its message, the paradoxes that coexisted in his life, his views on

women’s roles in the private and public domains, and the diverse and lesser known roles that he played. For example, Lal notes that “Gandhi’s life was wedded to an ethic of care”, adding that “one of the most endearing images of Gandhi is of someone who nursed the wounded, nurtured the young, and furnished solace to those who appear to have been defeated by life…He was always present to provide…‘the healing touch’ on various occasions when the streets in one town or another were rocked by communal conflict.”35 The session also included conversations on Gandhi’s complex relationship with the West, the inspiration he drew from Western philosophers and writers, and how their ideals transformed his personal and political practices.

Engaging with these diverse interpretations through the lens of Gandhian iconography, Workshop resource person Prof. Vinay Lal walked participants through extraordinary images of Gandhi. The first set of visual representations showed Gandhi as a “world historical figure”. Among Indians, he is the only political leader to have been likened to the founder of a religion, and this is seen in many works of art, which both precede and succeed his assassination in 1948. Yet, he is not the founder of a religion, and at the same time he cannot be compared to other politicians. This represents a central problem concerning the representation of Gandhi, which is that while some saw him as a politician, others felt that he exhibited qualities which didn’t feature within the ambit of a politician. The latter likened him to a saint, even though he was squarely involved in politics. Gandhi himself addressed this ostensible paradox between religion and politics when in his autobiography, he wrote, “Those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics know the meaning, neither of religion nor of politics.”

Many of these images – from newspapers and poster art in India and across the world – appeared in the weeks following his assassination on January 30, 1948. For instance, Lal showed a newspaper sketch which depicted Gandhi and Lincoln together, as martyrs of humanity. It appeared on February 12, 1948 in the St. Louis Post Dispatch, an American newspaper. This was the first in a series of visuals which over the years, would lead to the establishment of Gandhi as a world historical figure. Pictures of statues of Gandhi from different parts of the world were also shown to further demonstrate the point that he belongs to the rank of world leaders and that his ideas of truth and ahimsa have a universal resonance. For example, Lal took drew attention to a statue of Gandhi which is placed in the heart of Washington DC alongside

American heroes and other liberators. It took several years of negotiation and finally approval from the District of Columbia Landmarks Commission to place the statue here. A similar process was followed prior to the institution of Gandhi statues in other locations of the world.

Public statues of Gandhi (in India and the world) represent the most iconic visual representations of him. Commenting on the place of public statuary in democracies, Lal drew attention to the following questions: Where are statues placed in a city? How are they placed? How do people interpret them? What is the relationship of the statue to the public sphere? Even though statues are meant to dwarf everything around them and make a public statement about the place of a particular individual in the oral history and memory of a nation, the irony, as Lal noted, is that they are simply not noticed and gradually become invisible. Over a period of time, the significance of a statue in public consciousness changes, and they often end up becoming place-markers or landmarks, which they were never intended to be. Lal showed pictures of Gandhi statues from India and around the world to demonstrate the point that people who lived or worked in areas surrounding the statues had little or no knowledge of the person whose statue it was.

The second set of images sought to convey the impression that “India is Gandhi and Gandhi is India”. Several posters printed in the 1940s–50s show Gandhi merging into the map of India. They seek to communicate the message of his invaluable contributions to the building of a self-confident and independent India. In many of the posters of this category, Gandhi is also shown with his lieutenants – Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel, and Subhash Chandra Bose. Post his assassination, the visuals portray him with a halo, and he is “blessing” the leaders of independent India. In some of the prints, he is shown in a strategic position between Nehru and Patel, attempting to facilitate a reconciliation of sorts between the two leaders. There was some degree of hostility between the two, which had been widely reported in the months following independence. Gandhi is shown with a halo, implying that these prints are post his assassination in January 1948. They seek to convey Gandhi’s immortality and his influence over the leaders of independent India.

The third set of visuals project Gandhi as a “secular” figure. A predominant image in many of these is one of Gandhi trying to build harmony between Hindus and Muslims and tackling religious extremism. In fact, Lal noted that Gandhi is the only “secular” Indian figure to have a very specific kind of iconography – most commonly represented by the stop-watch, walking stick,
bald head, “mickey mouse” ears, and rimmed glasses. The dominant presence of these images in public consciousness has led many scholars to argue that visual representations of him have rendered Gandhi immortal – as one print visual put it, “even time cannot forget”. Interestingly, an analysis of the Gandhi posters and prints also shows an iconography that merges the secular into the sacred. While some of these show Gandhi alongside images of Hindu gods and goddesses, Durga and Krishna, others invoke a Christian iconography, depicting Gandhi with a halo (in one case, even a stigmata in his chest), and placed alongside Jesus. Several posters, particularly those printed in the months and years after his assassination show Gandhi (with a halo) as part of a pantheon comprising Buddha, Jesus, and Krishna. This suggests that the printmakers thought of Gandhi as someone who had to be looked at as akin to the founder of a religion – a religious figure, but one who could cut across religions.

In many of these prints, the Indian national flag is prominent, which suggests that even as Gandhi is projected as a religious figure transcending the boundaries of different religions, he remains Indian. His affinity with rural India comes out clearly in the prints which show Gandhi’s “Indianness” in the context of the village. The rural was the domain in which he worked.

A fourth category of prints seek to demonstrate the power of nonviolent action. For instance, in one, Gandhi is shown with just the charkha and the spindle, facing British soldiers who are equipped with multiple weapons of war.
Interestingly, Nehru is shown as Hanuman, assisting Gandhi in this ostensibly unequal battle in which nonviolent action will emerge as the winner. This merging of a secular and religious iconography is in fact rife in many of the nationalist prints of the time.

Next, Lal showed a series of cartoons that depicted Gandhi and the political developments of the time. Conceptually, the first set sought to convey Gandhi’s message that “there is room enough for everyone”. For Gandhi, there was no concept of enemies or foes. His message was one of coexistence and the presence of certain rights and duties for all those who called India their home, including Anglo-Indians. As Lal noted, it would be incorrect to view Gandhi as someone who was dogmatically opposed to the West. Some of the greatest inspirations for him were the writings of Western scholars such as Henry Salt (Plea for Vegetarianism), John Ruskin (Unto this Last), Leo Tolstoy (The Kingdom of God is Within You), David Thoreau (Civil Disobedience), and others. Tolstoy and Thoreau were in fact great influences when Gandhi penned his manifesto Hind Swaraj (1909) in which he argued that before Indians demand rights from the British, they must learn to rule over themselves.

A second set of cartoons, printed in British newspapers, criticized Gandhi’s inability to control the violence that emanated from his various nonviolent campaigns. Even though he tried to train his followers in nonviolence, he was unable to prevent incidents such as the massacre of policemen at Chauri Chaura (in Uttar Pradesh). The cartoons showed the masses “disobeying” Gandhi’s nonviolent strategy even as he asked them to “disobey” unjust colonial laws and practices.

The medium of cartoon was also used to promote Gandhi’s message that political independence was only one component of swaraj (self-rule). India was yet to acquire other equally significant aspects such as economic, social, and cultural independence. Most significantly, Gandhi urged his followers to acquire mastery over their own thoughts, feelings, and actions. In such cartoons, a dwarfed Gandhi was shown standing against a herculean mountain to depict the nature of the challenges that lay ahead for independent India.

Through the visual section titled “sartorial Gandhi”, Lal drew attention to Gandhi’s relationship with clothing: what did clothes signify to him (when he was young)? Later in life, what did their absence signify to him? As Lal put it, “One way to write the biography of Gandhi is to understand that he began his adult life vastly over-dressed and ended it vastly under-dressed…His ambition in life was to reduce himself to zero, to become not. In every mystical tradition,
there is an understanding that when you become nothing, you become the receptacle for God’s love.” There were also political and economic dimensions to why Gandhi divested himself of clothing. Gandhi shed his clothing to dress like the majority of Indians, and to thereby become one with the masses. The sparse clothing of the masses was linked to their deprivation in every aspect of life – economic, social, political, and cultural. By taking the decision to wear a loincloth, Gandhi made a powerful statement about the wide disparity that existed between the “haves” and “have-nots” in all of the above dimensions. Lal showed posters and other works of art, which depicted this nuanced understanding of clothing that Gandhi had.

In the section titled “spectral Gandhi”, Lal invited discussion on the questions: What does it mean to follow in Gandhi’s footsteps? What kind of space does Gandhi occupy at the present moment in India? What is the relevance of Gandhi’s legacy in the context of the challenges that face contemporary India? More significantly, how many Indians actually understand Gandhi’s legacy? Over the last 60 years, the medium of cartoon has been used extensively to highlight the disconnect between Gandhi’s political practices and those of contemporary politicians who see themselves as the custodians of his legacy. Lal also showed a set of posters from countries that have used Gandhian nonviolence to suggest that his ideas and practices continue to have a resonance and usefulness for people experiencing oppression, irrespective of the cultural and regional differences.

**Discussion**

Several questions were raised about the contemporary “relevance” of Gandhi – how does one translate his teachings into contemporary politics? According to Lal, this was a difficult subject to address because of what it required of the ostensible follower of Gandhi. In this context, he urged participants to look beyond the protocols that are followed on October 2 and January 30, and to engage more seriously at a substantive level with Gandhi’s practices. Such engagement requires a lifelong commitment, a discipline, and a sustained seriousness with the issues at stake, which is lacking in many contemporary politicians and activists. There are however certain segments in Indian society which are seriously engaging with and deploying some of his ideas – many of the ecology movements (for example, the Chipko Andolan in India), the Narmada Bachao Andolan, and others. Internationally, his methods of nonviolent action have been used widely with considerable success in contexts as diverse as the US civil rights movement, the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa, the overthrow of Serbia’s dictator Slobodan Milosevic, and many others.
However, Lal noted that there is a wholeness to Gandhi’s ideas, which makes it difficult to segregate the practice of one from the other. What this therefore requires of a Gandhian follower is a serious engagement with *all* of his ideas – from politics, ecology, and economy to religion, sexuality, and nonviolence. Nevertheless, even if his ideas are taken independently of one another, they have much to contribute, particularly with respect to how one becomes an instrument of change, how one engages in social work, the relationship between personal integrity and public integrity, and the consequent dilution of the boundary between private and public acts.

Responding to questions on Gandhi’s views on gender relations, Lal drew from an article that Madhu Kishwar, an Indian feminist and author, wrote in 1985 on the subject. Arguing that Gandhi could not be assimilated into a seamless argument about patriarchy, she wrote that while politicians make liberal pronouncements but remain conservative in their practices, Gandhi did the opposite. Gandhi’s statements on gender relations appear conservative. But if one looks at his actions – for instance, how he organized the division of labor in his *ashrams* – they appear quite radical, even by 21st century standards. According to Lal, the conservative nature of Gandhi’s statements on women could perhaps be attributed to the fact that he was always alive to the constituency to which he is speaking. Lal also made reference to the autobiographies of women in the 1920s and 1930s where there is a wide admission that Gandhi opened up the public and political space for Indian women in ways that none of his predecessors had been able to. Critiques of Gandhi’s views on gender relations should be more nuanced, incorporating not just his pronouncements, but also his actions, which were far more liberal.
Diverse frameworks and approaches have been used to address the interface between gender equality, peace, and democracy. While some have been rooted in “secular”, agnostic, and atheist worldviews, others have drawn on religious scriptures and the spiritual teachings inherent in these to advance women’s rights. For peacebuilders in South Asia, the latter is particularly relevant in view of the reality that faith and religious practices have a strong resonance for a majority of the people in this part of the world. Further, experience has shown that gender equality is closely wedded to beliefs and practices drawn from religious and cultural sources.

The WISCOMP session *Gender and Peacebuilding: The Sacred-Secular* engaged with one such approach to explore how “women and men can work shoulder to shoulder to apply spiritual principles to the construction of a new social order characterized by justice, peace, and collective prosperity”\(^{37}\). The purpose was to examine if a spiritual framework could help in the quest for gender equality, as also in the building of inclusive identities and coexistence. This particular approach, which uses spiritual principles to promote gender equality, was developed by the Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity\(^{38}\), and draws on the endeavors of the Baha’i international community in this direction.

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\(^{36}\) Secularism has diverse interpretations in different countries. While its classical understanding points to a separation of religion and state, it can also be defined as respect for all religions equally in public life where each individual has the right to practice and profess his/her faith and there is inter-religious harmony. The Workshop explored these diverse interpretations of “secularism” and its relationship with spirituality.


\(^{38}\) ISGP is a non-profit institution, based in New York. It seeks to build capacity in individuals, group, and nations to contribute to prevalent discourses concerned with the betterment of society.
A debate on whether religion is a cause of division or a resource for peace can draw vociferous speakers to defend each side. While people have been subjected to undue misery, violence, and torture in the name of organized religion, there are also examples of situations where faith has been used to build peace and heal individuals traumatized by violence. In South Asia, the relationship between religion, peace, and democracy is tenuous. Violent manifestations of religious intolerance have found a space in all the countries of the SAARC region, and organized religion has often been seen as inimical to inter-community understanding. Yet, religion has such a powerful resonance in this part of the world that to sidestep it is simply not an option for peacebuilders.

But what if spirituality replaced religion? What if the emphasis shifted to the threads that unify the diverse religions of our world? What would the canvas of peacebuilding look like? While religions differ from one another in their systems of knowledge pertaining to policies, laws, and social expectations and roles, they often include similar spiritual principles and frameworks. For example, the innate nobility of human nature – the inherent ability of all human beings to act compassionately and do good for others – is seen as a spiritual truth, which cuts across religions. In this context, spirituality can be understood as touching that potential in each individual which rises above the immediacy of a moment to establish links with the eternal and to emphasize the interconnectedness of the human community. In fact, spiritual journeys often create spaces for the dissolution of narrow and atavistic identities, leading to an inclusion of the other into the individual’s own consciousness. These in turn empower the individual to operate from the wellspring of self-understanding, oneness, and interrelatedness.

Exploring the potential of such journeys to transform gender relations towards equality, the session *Gender and Peacebuilding: The Sacred Secular*, engaged with the following questions:

- Is it possible to draw on the spiritual principles of religions to motivate individuals and communities to work collectively towards the promotion of gender equality, peace, and justice?
- What are those spiritual principles that could serve as a strand of commonality (cutting across different religions) to facilitate processes of gender equality, social justice, and democratic practice? Yet still, how might

39 Comments made by Dr. Meenakshi Gopinath, WISCOMP’s Hon. Director.
communities recognize the differences that exist between them even as they work towards coexistence?

- How might individuals be assisted to reflect on their own cultural values and practices that are prejudiced towards, or that harm, women and other marginalized groups? What are some of the strategies they could use to transform those unjust practices that receive sanction within their communities?

In this context, the WISCOMP dialogue engaged with the role that spirituality can play in advancing the equality of women and men, and in enabling them to work together to promote active coexistence and, where necessary, reconciliation. It was predicated on the twin principles of interconnectedness and the equality of women and men, which exist as “spiritual truths” and cut across cultures and belief systems. The moot question however was, “how might these truths be expressed in practice” so that a belief in the interdependence of the human community and the accordance of full equality between women and men become lived realities in the societies of South Asia.

The dialogue was facilitated by Dr. Farida Vahedi, Executive Director, Department of External Affairs, National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha’is of India, New Delhi. She drew on a paper titled “Advancing towards the Equality of Women and Men”\(^40\), which is based on the experiences of the Baha’i community in the application of the “spiritual principle of gender equality” in their family and community life.

The dialogue opened with Vahedi’s invitation to participants to identify those spiritual principles that cut across religions. For example, she proposed that equality between women and men is a universal spiritual principle, and its absence is a condition created by human action. The challenge however was to find ways to translate this spiritual principle into a visible transformation of social structures.

Articulating the rationale for the use of a spiritual approach, Vahedi cited the example of domestic violence against women in India. She said that despite the tools of legislation, advocacy, trainings, capacity building etc., domestic violence remains rampant with a majority of Indian women enduring it silently. The missing dimension here is a deep transformation in the hearts and minds

\(^{40}\) This paper was prepared by the Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity, New York.
of ordinary men and women towards this issue, which is possible through a return to spiritual teachings embodied in all religions. The theoretical assumption was that an invocation of the spiritual nature of human beings can vastly influence their social behavior in the direction of respect, equality, and compassion. In this context, the WISCOMP dialogue was designed around five issues, identified in the context of the quest for gender equality in society:41

- **Expanding the basis of human identity**

This principle proposes that if human beings broaden the base of their identities, beginning with the primary identity of being human and seeing the oneness of all human beings, then equality between women and men will be a natural and logical corollary. Highlighting this aspect of human identity, Vahedi said,

> **We are all human beings first. God has created all humanity equally, irrespective of sex, race, and other socially made distinctions. Our essential identity – which makes us human – is the existence of the soul. And the human soul has no sex. Other aspects of our identity such as our sex, nationality, religion, or culture are secondary...We must expand the basis of human identity and shake off negative identity constructs which seek to divide people into fragmented groups.**

Such a belief — in the oneness and interconnectedness of all human beings as forming the core of our primary identity — would enable individuals to cut across the boundaries of class, caste, religion, sex, and nationality to act against practices that are denigrating to women or that impose curbs on their rights. In this context, Workshop participant, Ms. Naomi Sharin, a Researcher with BRAC in Dhaka, shared the example of class identity and domestic violence in Bangladesh. Often, the economic class of affluent women in Bangladesh prevents them from acting against the violence, which women of the “lower classes” experience. Yet, if women and men were to see their primary identity as one that is grounded in the belief of oneness of humanity, taking action against the violence that any human being experiences would then be a logical progression.

Vahedi suggested that if this principle is seen as the starting point for efforts towards gender equality, it becomes possible to change the way scriptures are understood and interpreted, as well as the ways in which boys and girls, women and men, are socialized into enacting gendered roles and functions.

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41 These issues were drawn from the ISGP paper, “Advancing towards the Equality of Women and Men”. 
• Overcoming oppression through the acquisition of self-knowledge

The dialogue on this section began with the postulation that different forms and levels of oppression can be overcome by building the capacity of men and women “to know who they are and the purpose for which they have been created”.

“This is one of the most profound yearnings of the human soul. And yet, this self-knowledge is denied to so many by the oppressive forces at play in all societies. Women and men are taught false conceptions about who they are, what their true nature is, and what conduces to their happiness and fulfilment. Their inherent nobility and potential is denied. Violence against women and girls…poses an immediate threat to millions and perpetuates in men harmful attitudes and habits that are carried from the family to the workplace, to political life, and ultimately to international relations.”

According to Vahedi, historically, humanity has had two sources of knowledge about the nature and potential of the human being: science and religion. However, in the years after the Second World War, science has dominated this discourse to the exclusion of religion as a source of knowledge. As a result, even though the world has witnessed large-scale industrialization and an astounding increase in wealth generation, the benefits have been limited to a minority of the world’s population. The gap between the rich and the poor has widened with women now accounting for a majority of those who live below the poverty line. According to Vahedi, this rapid pace of industrialization and growth has resulted in the narrowing of the lens, which sees human beings as only material beings, thereby marginalizing the spiritual dimension. While religion has been used in an instrumental way to support various programs for growth and development, the belief that it could also be a source of knowledge has been an exception (in the post-World War period). Vahedi contended that when religion is used as a source of knowledge, individuals move beyond a preoccupation with the pursuit of personal wealth and satisfaction, and undertake action for the benefit of the larger community. In this context, participants explored ways in which education and the media could be used to foreground the spiritual base for knowledge acquisition to transform oppression and foster social change.

42 Ibid., pp. 3-4.
• Moving beyond cultural relativism

Recognizing that certain cultural traditions are prejudicial towards, or are in some way harmful to, women and girls, this principle calls for an intense engagement with such practices, and advocates that these be replaced by universal moral standards that promote equality, justice, and respect for all.

Cultural relativism – the view that all cultural practices and beliefs are equally valid – has received attention in recent times in light of efforts to respect cultural diversity. However, when cultural relativism is used to accept and condone actions that are harmful to women and girls because of the belief that “these are part of the culture of a people”, it inhibits efforts to advance gender equality. Often, such a belief has promoted inaction in people – a sort of “paralysis of will”. At other times, it has led individuals and communities to defend practices that intentionally harm women and other marginalized groups. The condoning of cultural practices in the name of cultural relativism only serves to further perpetuate inequality in society. If gender equality is to become a lived reality, there is a need to re-examine these cultural practices which favor men or which impose limitations on women to realize their full potential. In this context, Vahedi highlighted the following questions: Who is to decide which elements of a culture should be practiced or rejected? What are some of the universal values or norms pertaining to gender equality that find resonance across different religions?

Dr. Farida Vahedi with Ms. Nilakshi Rajkhowa (Representative, National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of India, New Delhi).
• **Transforming economic structures and processes**

The fourth principle is the transformation of economic structures and processes in ways that accord importance to the work that both women and men do. This becomes particularly relevant in view of the fact that 50 per cent of the world’s population controls only one per cent of its wealth, and 10 per cent of the population controls 85 per cent of the wealth. Women make up the majority in the first category and represent a very small minority in the latter. The structural marginalization of women in the current economic order is now a reality with an increasingly large number of women and their children constituting the most impoverished group in many countries of the world. This represents a serious challenge to collective human prosperity.

The economic empowerment of women is not only a prerequisite for the advancement of gender equality, it is also a necessary condition to ensure that women have options as well as the ability to take decisions with respect to different aspects of their personal, professional, and political lives, as well as those of their children. In this context, a radical transformation of economic structures is needed so that prosperity and happiness can become a lived reality for all human beings, not just a handful at the top. This also requires a change in societal attitudes so that diverse economic activities are accorded equal value. For example, a woman cutting vegetables in the kitchen or raising her children in a nurturing environment should be seen as equally important to the act of a man working in an office or a factory. Further, it calls for a deeper change in competition-based definitions of progress and growth, and a shift towards an understanding based on the principle of interconnectedness and reciprocity.

In this context, Vahedi invited reflection on the following questions:

- How do we redefine an economic activity?
- How do we take into account the unremunerated work that women, particularly homemakers, do all the time? How do we acknowledge the work of feeding, nurturing, and caring for others, and infuse this into our understanding of an economic activity?
- How do we also encourage men to become participants in the acts of caring and nurturing and ensure that women are able to participate in all fields of work?

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How do we economically empower women?

How do we broaden our understanding of economic growth and productivity so that a larger number of women may become active participants in this process?

Redefining Power

Exclusive understandings of “power” and “empowerment” present a significant challenge to gender equality. Vahedi urged for a redefinition of traditional conceptions of power associated with domination and manipulation towards more integrative, cooperative, and mutualistic expressions. She drew attention to the limitless and generative sources of power that rest in concepts such as love, unity, justice, humility, integrity, and truthfulness, and asked participants to imagine a society built on these alternative conceptions of power, where mutual empowerment was the preferred goal.

Discussion

Engaging with these principles, Workshop participants raised the following issues and questions.

The dialogue was predicated on the assumption that all religions talk about the same ethical norms and spiritual principles. Participants however expressed divergent views on this issue. For example, there was disagreement over the proposition that all religions talk about the existence of a soul, which has no sex. Peacebuilders would be on shaky ground if they held this to be true for all faith traditions. All religions do not talk about the existence of a soul, particularly one which is sexless. For example, Ms. Zamrooda Khanday, Senior Research Officer at the Center for Enquiry into Health and Allied Themes, Mumbai, posed the question, “Would it be possible to attribute behavioral differences between toddler boys and girls only to processes of socialization?”

Further, some participants felt that it would be naïve, confusing (and perhaps incorrect) to say that all religious scriptures speak of equality between women and men. Mr. Syed Ali Raza, a Lahore-based lawyer, noted, “three of the world’s religions – Judaism, Islam, and Christianity – explain the creation of men and women through the story of Adam and Eve, in which the woman was created from the rib of the man. If this interpretation is used to determine social relationships between men and women, it would lead to a situation where women would have a lower status.” Other
participants echoed this sentiment, stating that the use of religious scriptures (or even spiritual principles) to determine gender relations is dangerous because it could lead to justifications for the existence of inequality, through citations of texts and teachings. So, while recognizing the need to expand the basis of human identity, participants were uncertain about the use of religious scriptures (from which spiritual principles are drawn) for the promotion of women’s rights.

- The quest for gender equality should not be seen as the struggle of only women. Both men and women have to work shoulder to shoulder and partner with one another to translate the spiritual principle of gender equality into a social reality. As Vahedi put it, “We have passed the stage where only women were asking for their rights. It was necessary for a period of time, but now we are at a stage where men must speak up and support women in their struggle. The active participation of men is central to the quest for gender equality.” She cited examples of initiatives where the involvement of men led to the end of practices such as domestic violence and alcoholism.

- There was some ambiguity about anti-women practices that fall within the domain of religion and those that are prescribed by culture. Although some cultural practices were identified as obstacles to efforts to implement the spiritual principle of gender equality, participants found it difficult to separate these from religious practices. Often, the boundaries between...
culture and religion are blurred. One example that was cited and debated considerably in this context was the dress code that is often imposed on women. Although it was assumed that cultures determine dress codes, references were made to religious scriptures as also to the assertions of the clergy, which advocate certain types of clothing for women. Then again, some practices were clearly in the domain of culture with no links to religion – dowry harassment and domestic violence, for instance.

• Gender equality requires simultaneous efforts at multiple levels: at the individual level (where mindsets and attitudes need to be changed), at the cultural level (where gender-insensitive beliefs and unequal practices which have cultural sanction need to be transformed), and at the structural level (where institutions and laws need to ensure that gender justice is a lived reality for both women and men).

• The social expectations of women and men’s roles and the processes of socialization that they have undergone since childhood require attention. Often, due to socialization, girls as much as boys grow up with certain stereotypes about gender roles and expectations. As a result, it was noted that often, women become women’s worst enemies. Several examples were cited in support of this argument, for instance, the problematic relationship between mother-in-laws and daughter-in-laws in many South Asian homes.

• Questions were raised with reference to the different understandings and interpretations of religious scriptures. The clergy play an important role here. They can interpret a progressive religious text in a conservative and even retrogressive way, and further complicate the situation by meshing unequal cultural practices with religious teachings. It was also noted that, often, the clergy make references to scriptures to point to the different roles and purposes for men and women in society. This not only causes confusion but also inhibits women’s ability to speak up for their rights.

• Even as participants expressed their discomfort with certain aspects of religion, Vahedi urged them to see religious teachings as fluid and evolving. Religions developed at different points of time in the context of very diverse social and cultural contexts. Some of their prescriptions were a response to the challenges that societies were facing at a particular time in history. These are however not cast in stone and should evolve in response to the challenges of contemporary times.

• While participants were in agreement on the goal – to build societies where security, peace, and justice are a lived reality for both women and men –
they proposed diverse entry points and frameworks as also different viewpoints on the kind of discourse in which such work should be grounded. Several participants felt more comfortable with a “secular” human rights approach. Within this group, some argued that spirituality should be limited to the private domain of the home and not brought into development and peacebuilding work. Others felt that such a spiritual framework would alienate those people who prescribed to atheism and agnosticism or for whom spirituality was simply not a reference point in the conduct of their daily practices. Then, there were some traditions that didn’t believe in the concept of the soul or an external God. How would a spiritual approach engage with such worldviews?

- Those who agreed that spirituality could provide an empowering framework were of the view that religion could not be set aside because women’s rights (even the freedom to dress as they choose) were determined by religious frameworks, as interpreted by the clergy and the community. As a female participant from Afghanistan noted, “A big problem that we have in the community is that we (women) cannot speak for our rights. The traditional leaders will not accept it. They will create problems for the women.” In this context, two key challenges were identified. The first is the state’s inability to ensure that women enjoy their rights. The second challenge pertains to the role played by community elders in blocking women’s rights. Here, cultural norms and practices are often passed off as having religious sanction, thereby creating further obstacles for efforts to advance gender equality.

- This led to discussion on a more complex question, “Who is to decide what is good for women and what is bad for them?” Even though it was acknowledged that the “right of choice” and other fundamental human rights should be available to women, the question gets complicated when specific situations are taken into account. The example of the burqa was cited by one participant who asked, “If a woman decides to wear a burqa, does it mean that she is expressing freedom of choice or is she wearing it for reasons of security or because she does not have another option?”

This dialogue revealed that even though faith is so central to the everyday lives of the people of South Asia, the use of a faith-based approach to peacebuilding is tenuous in a context where there exists such diversity in religious belief and practice. Further, if religion has been used to unleash such violence and misery, how can it be a resource for peacebuilding? Noorin Nazari, a participant from Afghanistan currently working as a Governance Specialist
with the International Center for Integrated Mountain Development, Kathmandu, noted,

*In a region where there is such diversity of religious belief and where religious fundamentalism is spreading so rapidly, won’t we get into conflict in terms of which universal norms we should adopt for capacity building for peace and development? We may have different norms and values within religions, let along between religions. Four Afghans will have four different ideas on what Islam is. So then what do we do? Who is to decide what the ‘true’ or accurate interpretation of Islam is?*

Echoing this sentiment, several participants therefore articulated the view that it would be best to keep religion within the confines of the home and outside of the discourse on development and peacebuilding.

Yet, as Ms. Seema Kakran, WISCOMP’s Assistant Director, noted,

*People in the real world do not live their lives in this compartmentalized manner. In South Asia particularly, we cannot set religion aside when we talk of gender or peace. For instance, during discussions on gender equity, people’s response often is that their ‘religion says that this is how things should be’, even if it means an unequal relationship between women and men. So we can’t sidestep this issue. We can’t keep religion in our homes because it influences so many different aspects of our lives, particularly our ability to make decisions.*

The tension between those who use a spiritual or a religious lens to approach peacebuilding work and others who prefer an atheist or agnostic approach was fundamental to the conversations that took place in this session. Many of the pioneers of the field of Conflict Transformation, such as Desmond Tutu, John Paul Lederach, Elise Boulding, and others, approach their work with the belief that this is a spiritual exercise and inner transformation is a necessary prerequisite for social and structural transformation. Clearly, they recognize that their faith informs the work they do. At the other end of the continuum are peacebuilders who are atheist, agnostic or who see religion as a private affair which should be kept within the domain of the home. They approach peace work with frameworks which are devoid of references to spirituality or religion. They believe that the insertion of these into peacebuilding efforts could very easily lapse into religiosity and proselytization. This remains an eternal dilemma within the field, and was reflected in the discussions in this particular session.
Exploring representations of conflict, prejudice, and violence in film, the workshop *Identity, Prejudice, and Transformation: The Lens of Popular Cinema* looked at the role that Bombay cinema, popularly known as “Bollywood”, has played in addressing issues concerning religious identity, stereotypes, communal violence, coexistence, and reconciliation. Popular cinema is a powerful tool, particularly when it comes to the creation of perceptions about *us* and *them*, prejudice and conciliation, and the perpetuation or transformation of conflict. It has an all-pervasive influence and can be enlisted to support peacebuilding efforts. In this context, the Workshop looked at how Bombay cinema has engaged with the critical and traumatic histories of the countries of the South Asian region (with particular reference to Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India). Many of these, which are rooted in partition experiences, continue to influence the lives of individual men and women today through processes of identity formation, enacted prejudices, and even acts of mass violence.

The Workshop was conducted by Prof. Ira Bhaskar, Associate Professor of Cinema Studies at the School of Arts and Aesthetics at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. She opened the dialogue with an invitation to participants to reflect on the following questions:

- How has Bombay cinema dealt with the memory of the 1947 partition and contemporary manifestations of the trauma from violence surrounding this event?
• What are the ways in which it has attempted to promote cultures of pluralism and coexistence and transcend negative stereotypes?
• How has it engaged with conflicts around gender and religious identities?
• In what ways has it transformed popular consciousness in the context of issues concerning majority-minority identities and communal violence associated with these?

Bhaskar showed clips from a variety of Bombay cinema films to engage with these questions. The first set of films looked at identity formation (and the corresponding process of otherization) in the context of Hindu-Muslim relations in India, and their broader connection with India-Pakistan relations. Bhaskar noted that even as South Asian identities are fluid, multiple, and cross-cutting, during conflict, there are often attempts to build singular identities through the process of othering wherein certain people are cast out of a group on the basis of their cultural, religious or other socially-determined characteristics. In order to congeal these differences, stereotypes and prejudices are created of this out-group. They are magnified to such an extent that, over time, the qualities attributed to them assume a mythological character. Yet, due to ignorance and a conscious drawing of rigid boundaries, it becomes difficult to verify if there is any truth to the stereotype or the prejudice. Also, Bhaskar shared that this out-group often becomes a scapegoat on whose shoulders are placed those qualities that we dislike about ourselves. Examples of this process of othering can be seen in all countries of the South Asian region, where often the minority community (distinguished on the basis of its religion, ethnicity, class etc.) is depicted as the other – Muslims in India, Tamils in Sri Lanka, Hindus in Pakistan, and so on. The impact of these demarcations on inter-personal and inter-community relationships has been devastating. Clear-cut boundaries have been created between people who shared historical and cultural ties and whose lives – social and economic – were inextricably linked.

In the context of Bombay cinema – the focus of Bhaskar’s presentation – such processes of othering have been addressed in the context of the complex history of Hindu-Muslim relations in the subcontinent. Interestingly, even though this conflict predates the 1947 partition, Bhaskar noted that it was only after the demolition of the Babri Masjid (December 1992) and the ensuing riots in many parts of India that popular Bombay cinema began to address the issue of communalism and communal violence. While there were a few films such
as *Garam Hawa*\(^{44}\) (1973), which addressed partition and its residues, by and large, popular cinema saw communalism and Hindu-Muslim relations as too inflammable and complex to address. In fact, Bombay cinema was replete with positive stereotypes of the Muslim up until the communal violence of the early 1990s, which was triggered by the demolition of the Babri Masjid and the initiation of the insurgency in Kashmir. According to Bhaskar,

> What has changed is that after 60 years, the issue of communalism has come home. It has come home with a kind of ferocity and violence that has in many ways shaken the foundation of the way in which India has imagined itself. India has imagined itself to be a secular nation – defined in the South Asian way, which is religiously plural, not a divorce of religion and state. The Indian state has been very proud of this. It is this identity which received a huge jolt in 1992 with the demolition of Babri Masjid and 10 years later again with the Gujarat pogrom against the Muslims...These two events have been absolutely cataclysmic and very foundational in the way in which popular Bombay cinema now engages with issues of religious identity, conflict, and violence.

Looking at how the Muslim community in India has been stereotyped as the *other* in popular discourse and how cinema has intervened in this process, Bhaskar screened clips from the films *Roja, Sarfarosh, Hey Ram,* and *Mission Kashmir.* These films demonstrate that prejudices influence identity construction and that contemporary discourse on the relationship between Hindus and Muslims in India has come to pin itself on two issues: communalism in India and cross-border terrorism in the relationship between India and Pakistan.\(^{45}\) The films deploy a narrative in which identity, stereotyping, and prejudice interact with one another, and the Muslim minority community has to deal with these on a daily basis. Because of the close interplay

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\(^{44}\) *Garam Hawa* was amongst the first films to deal with the 1947 partition in a hitherto unaddressed fashion. It highlighted the victimization of the minority Muslim community, which up until this point had been idealized in films and about which “positive stereotypes” existed. The problem with these positive stereotypes of Muslims in Bombay cinema was that they ignored the broader realities of power, history, and oppression. The film also tried to make the political statement that the killing of Hindus and Muslims was an experience that had to be transcended in order to build a joint struggle for rights concerning livelihood, employment, food, shelter, and citizenship.

\(^{45}\) Bhaskar also showed clips from the film *Salim Langde Pe Mat Ro* (1989), which belongs to the category of new wave cinema. This film is particularly interesting because it was amongst the first to address the issue of communalism.
between the two issues, Workshop participant Syed Ali Raza expressed the view that sometimes Pakistan-bashing becomes inevitable in a context where the films want to show friendship between Hindus and Muslims in India.

Interestingly, it was only in 1992 that a Muslim, for the first time, was portrayed as a terrorist in a mainstream film, *Roja*. Prior to this, there is a whole history of the positive portrayal of Islamic culture and symbols in Bombay cinema. While *Roja* was criticized for the way in which the terrorist was portrayed with critics pointing to the dangers of stereotyping and the prejudices it can generate about minority communities, other films have tried to address stereotypes in a constructive manner. Bhaskar showed a clip from *Sarfarosh*, a film about cross-border terrorism (from Pakistan), which attempts to project the ideal of brotherhood and friendship between Muslims and Hindus in India. Through the character of *Saleem*, an Indian police officer, the film draws attention to how Indian Muslims, especially those in government service, are looked upon with suspicion. In fact, they have to make double the effort to prove their patriotism which is perpetually under suspect. At the same time, they are also targeted by the radical and conservative elements within their own community.

The film *Hey Ram* (2000), set at the time of the 1947 partition of British India (and the large-scale violence that surrounded the process of nation-building) explores this issue further by examining how prejudices about the *other* enter into everyday discussion, and therefore also into politics. *Hey Ram* is about two friends – a Hindu and a Muslim. While the Muslim – a follower of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan and Mohandas Gandhi – has moved from Karachi to Delhi after the partition, the Hindu has come under the influence of a right-wing political group and has been selected to assassinate Gandhi. Through the conversations between these two characters, *Hey Ram* attempts to counter the processes of otherization and openly critiques Hindu right-wing groups, which it holds responsible for the death of Gandhi and for much of the post-partition violence. The film is complex and difficult to digest because it highlights the reality that a Hindi right-wing individual assassinated Mohandas Gandhi, and it also shows the violence of the majority community against the minority community in a very explicit way. Further, it connects partition-related violence to contemporary violence between Hindus and Muslims, linking the two not only in terms of a narrative structure, but also with respect to ideology.

The theme of identity construction and otherization continues in later films such as *Mission Kashmir* which seek to communicate the message that terrorism
knows no religion. In this particular film, the protagonists plan to attack the Shankaracharya Temple as well as the Hazratbal Mosque in Kashmir, indicating that terrorists are not committed to any religion, Hinduism or Islam.

Looking at the ways in which popular Bombay cinema has addressed the question of communalism in the context of the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, the movement for the construction of a Ram Temple, and the ascendency of the Hindu right-wing in India, Bhaskar opened this section of the presentation with a clip from the movie *Fiza*. It is set in the context of the communal riots in Bombay and connects communalism and terrorism, sending out the message that the Muslim youth are being marginalized and pushed into the hands of organizations that are extremely powerful and very violent. *Fiza* is a unique film because of the way in which it depicts a communal riot, and also in terms of how it portrays the trauma of the family, which then becomes the trauma of the city and the nation. The key questions here pertain to the representation of violence and the trauma it generates, as also to the options that young Muslim men have, to articulate their masculinity as well as their faith. And then, there is the larger normative question of how Hindu-Muslim relations should be represented.

Bhaskar pointed to an interesting aspect of films that deal with the issues of communal violence and Hindu-Muslim relations. In many of them, the narrative is interspersed with real life footage (photographs) of events such as the demolition of the Babri Masjid, communal riots, as well as efforts made by ordinary people to improve inter-community relations. The ending of the film *Bombay* was shown to make this point. In this particular scene, the common people of Mumbai come together and form a human chain to speak out against the savage violence that has gripped their communities. This was drawn from a real life incident following the Bombay riots where residents of Mumbai – cutting across communities – intervened to bring peace to the city. On February 13, 1993, they formed a 63 kilometer-long human chain as a symbolic act against fanatic political forces that had destroyed the city. The film ends with a vision of unity between Hindus and Muslims, shown through the clasping of hands and the reunion of the family separated by violence. So, the film picks up on a real-life peace intervention and converts it into a poetic image of a possible future where Hindus and Muslims could live in harmony and with justice.

Shifting to the subject of the homeland, nationhood, and the figure of the woman, Bhaskar screened clips from *Mammo, Pinjar, and Khamosh Pani*
which look at the gendered nature of violence during the 1947 partition. Women’s bodies not only took the brunt of the violence but also became symbols of the assertions of power and honor and dishonour for whole communities. The film Mammo tells the story of a woman who, during the partition, went with her husband to Pakistan. After she was widowed, she decided to return to her natal family in India. However, the Indian state does not allow her to make India her home. She is forced to return to Pakistan where she has nobody. Even though “home” means India, political realities have redefined what is meant by “homeland”, and individuals suffer silently. While the Indian state plays a role that is perhaps legally correct, its actions are clearly inhuman and anti-people. What is interesting about this film is how the woman redefines the meaning of home – she is at home in a place that denies her a homeland. Pinjar, set during the time of the 1947 partition is about a Hindu girl who falls in love with her abductor and acknowledges him as her husband. Khamosh Pani, a Pakistani film, is set in Pakistan in the 1970s. The central character is a Sikh woman who survives the partition violence and stays back in Pakistan while the rest of her family moves to India. After partition, she converts to Islam and leads a happy life till this particular moment in the film when her brother visits Pakistan in search of her.

The films look at how women made homes for themselves in opposition to their families and to the state. In so doing, the films question statist notions of identity and point to the ironic disconnect between nation and home for women. Bhakar shared that several films in fact address the traumas of the 1947 partition through the eyes of women who were abducted and then forcibly “recovered” by the states of India and Pakistan after they had settled down in the other country.

Exploring cultural resources for coexistence in Bombay cinema, Bhaskar screened clips from Jodhaa Akbar (2008), which celebrates syncretic and plural traditions. Questioning singular notions of identity, the film introduces the ideas of plural selfhood and cross-cutting identities. Bhaskar in fact noted that Bombay cinema, across the decades, has tried to communicate that secularism in India, rather than a divorce of religion and state, represents a plural religious experience. Often, this plurality has been shown through the portrayal of Sufism and Sufi music, even in films where the storyline has nothing to do with religion. The significance of Sufism in present-day Bombay cinema also has to do with an attempt to generate a different view of Islam, not linked to extremism. In other words, through the use of Sufi music or the portrayal of Sufi traditions, filmmakers are trying to introduce to the public the idea that Islam is about
music, poetry, equality, social responsibility, and several other things, which are easily repressed because of the emphasis on radicalism.

In this context, *Jodhaa Akbar* was a landmark film. It demonstrated the ability of popular cinema to make important political statements. Foregrounding the coexistence of two faith traditions, Hinduism and Islam, reflected in the union of *Jodhaa* and *Akbar*, the film’s director Ashutosh Gowariker goes a step further to demonstrate that the Mughal kings were not savage people as some Hindu right-wing groups perceive them. If it was their desire to exterminate Hindus, how would India still be a Hindu majority nation? On the contrary, the Mughals – *Akbar* is their best example – married Hindu princesses and mingled with their constituents. They made India their home and promoted religious pluralism. So, in a way the film is trying to demonstrate that symbolically, the story of *Jodhaa* and *Akbar*, is the story of India – a land where all kinds of diversities have flourished and have been nurtured by the rulers of the time.

Bhaskar added that Bombay cinema has also played an instrumental role in addressing and at times even transcending, partition-related trauma and baggage. As she put it, popular cinema has the power to transform “traumatic memory into narrative memory” so that a psychic process of peace with the past can be initiated. It has the ability to give voice to the baggage of the past, and yet also transcend this, so that human beings, in spite of their diverse identities, can connect with one another in ways that reconciliation and coexistence become possible.
Concluding the discussion, Bhaskar urged Workshop participants to look at what cinema does with prevailing stereotypes. Does it reinforce them, does it question them, or does it go further to break negative stereotypes? She noted that the majority of Bombay cinema films which have engaged with issues of religious identity and communalism have used different narrative techniques to promote the ideals of coexistence and reconciliation. They have played a valuable role in transforming stereotypes by generating images that are more realistic and by creating alternatives that are beyond the reality that we see today. In fact, Bhaskar noted that barring a few exceptions, filmmakers in Bombay cinema have demonstrated a larger commitment to humane, liberal, and plural values that transcends short-term commercial goals.
The Workshop, *Theater of the Oppressed: A Tool for Conflict Transformation* introduced a form of participatory theater, which is dialogic and has been used to wage conflict nonviolently in situations of injustice. Developed by Brazilian activist Augusto Boal and inspired by Paulo Freire’s path-breaking book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which explores the struggle for justice and equity within the education system, Theater of the Oppressed (TOO) works on the assumption that all human beings desire peace and dignity and are capable of using dialogue and nonviolence to achieve these for themselves.

Conducted by Ms. Jaya Iyer, a Delhi-based theater activist and peace educator, the Workshop provided a context for participants to understand the socio-cultural contexts within which each of them works, and demonstrated how TOO can be used for Conflict Transformation work.

Introducing this concept, Iyer explained that TOO draws on the basic premises of the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which advocates a shifting of roles for the “educator” and the “learner”. Brazilian theater director Augusto Boal developed TOO in the 1960’s in response to the oppression of the military regime in the country. Boal was a member of a progressive theater group, which commented on socio-political events. In an effort to transform theater from the “monologue” of traditional performance into a “dialogue” between

Ms. Jaya Iyer
audience and the performers, Boal experimented with many kinds of interactive theater.

This session included a discussion on different forms of TOO, including Image Theater, Invisible Theater, Forum Theater, and Legislative Theater – and how these might theatrically portray the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed in a given conflict situation (latent or overt). Participants were given an opportunity to use Forum Theater to enact different forms of oppression/violence, based on caste, class, gender, education, color and appearance, religion, and region. Because this form of theater connects every aspect of the body and the mind, Iyer explained that people who use such theater to wage conflict nonviolently report a feeling of liberation from the oppression they feel owing to their gender, caste, religion or other markers of identity. TOO offers a unique methodology to transform these markers of oppression.

Image Theater uses the power of images to communicate a story and is most effective when performed in public spaces where large groups of people congregate. Typically, the image would be a stereotype, so that spectators could immediately understand the intention of the play. As the performance progresses, the actors elicit inputs from the audience to change the images presented before them. Such performances encourage the audience to reflect on various issues ranging from gender discrimination and caste oppression to other inequitable relationships that often remain unnoticed.
Invisible Theater is conducted in a context where the audience is unaware that a performance is in progress. Iyer shared her experiences from such an enactment on a crowded bus. Two male actors occupied seats reserved for women, while two female actors requested them to vacate the seats. The men refused and an argument ensued. The actors involved the other passengers on the bus into the discussion, which included topics ranging from domestic violence to affirmative action for women. The purpose was to draw out peoples’ views on inequitable relationships, in a non-threatening manner, and to, through theater dialogue, open up a space where issues could be discussed and shifts in perspectives facilitated.

Forum Theater involves a play with a clearly defined issue/conflict. However, unlike conventional theater, the performers are not the bearers of solutions. These are elicited from the audience. The play begins with a clearly defined oppressor and oppressed, and is enacted till the point of conflict. The audience is then asked to share its ideas on how it would want the play to conclude and what strategies might be employed to address the injustice and resolve the conflict.

A significant aspect of this dialogue was that participants sketched and engaged with diverse situations involving an “oppressor” and an “oppressed”. In so doing, they realized that often, the distinctions between the oppressors and the oppressed are blurred with the oppressed in one context becoming the oppressor in another. The key message for peacebuilders here is that individuals recognize these multiple cycles of oppression and develop a sensibility to intervene. Attention was also drawn to the goal of such an exercise, which is to empower the oppressed.

In addition to the theater enactments, an important focus of this session was the methodology and the process used to transform relationships based on oppression. Facilitators play an important role in steering the process in a direction where participants can search for constructive and inclusive solutions. It was noted that a facilitators’ work should be based on certain core values. For instance, an important value for facilitators in such theater performances is that violence should not be condoned in any situation. Dialogue should be encouraged as a preferred medium of communication. An important assumption here is that people and their everyday understandings and experiences are valuable resources for learning and resolution. Their knowledge and experiences are a vast and untapped resource, which if validated and trusted, will lead to inclusive and sustainable processes of personal and social change.
The workshop, *Musical Protest Traditions: Songs of Resistance, Songs of Freedom* looked at how music has been used, by marginalized groups, to consciously articulate protest. Drawing on the historical evolution of this genre of music, which can be traced to the early-to-mid 20th century when South Asia was emerging from the shackles of colonialism, this session engaged with the diverse ways in which music has been employed in film and theater, in vernacular languages, to address different forms of oppression. And even today, it remains a powerful tool for mobilization, used widely by women’s groups and social movements.

Martin W. Bauer and George Gaskell, in *Qualitative Researching with Text, Image and Sound: A Practical Handbook*, note that the dominance of verbal data in the social sciences has left sound and music as generally underexploited resources for social research. Music as a medium of symbolic representation is pervasive and holds universal emotional power. This suggests that it could be a valuable source for data that enhances our understanding of social reality. However, its potential has not been fully harnessed. In the field of Conflict Transformation too, while music has for a long time been a part of the repertoire of the peace practitioner, theorization on its transformative potential is rudimentary. Few scholars have investigated how music has been used for

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46 The report for this session was written by Ms. Seema Kakran.

Enormous potential lies in the inter-linkages between the musical text, the creative process through which it is composed, and the processes through which it is perceived and interpreted.

The Workshop on *Musical Protest Traditions: Songs of Resistance, Songs of Freedom* engaged participants in an exploration of the potential of music to mirror as well as influence the world that produces and consumes it. The idea was not only to look at music as a “tool” for peacebuilding but to see music as social text. It drew on the ideas of John Shepherd, who in his seminal work, *Music as Social Text*, argues that music is socially mediated and thus has enormous social significance. He based his argument on two key premises: one, people reproduce in their music their own thought process and; two, people’s thought processes are socially mediated. By implication, music as a medium of communication significantly impacts the reality of any society which is collectively constructed by its members.48

The Workshop resource person, Dr. Sumangala Damodaran, Associate Professor, School of Development Studies, Ambedkar University, Delhi, combined lecture with short clips of recorded music and singing to share the findings from an archiving exercise that she had undertaken. The archiving exercise involved the music of the Indian People’s Theater Association (IPTA), an organization that was set up during the colonial period and which comprised a range of artists – painters, dancers, musicians, and poets – who sought to bring about a cultural awakening in India. In her presentation, Damodaran shared the history of IPTA, provided a glimpse into the social issues that were raised by the Association through its music, and explicated how the documentation of such musical traditions can make a contribution to bridging the cultural divides between South Asian countries. She observed that it was especially relevant to Pakistan, India and Bangladesh, the three states from the region that share their oral traditions and continue to have commonalities.

Explaining the genesis of the idea of documenting the music of IPTA, she noted that for any student of music in the Subcontinent, the work of IPTA was

48 John Charles Shepherd propounded the idea that music is a social medium in sound which articulates socially mediated messages. For a detailed discussion on John Shepherd’s, *Music as Social Text* see The Canadian Encyclopedia at http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com
extremely valuable. It was a rich repository of the work of several eminent artists. But most of the work had not been documented due to the nature of the movement and the limitations of technology at the time. It was only carried forward in an oral form through surviving artists. The archiving exercise was therefore necessitated by the urgency to record some of the early work of these artists for posterity. However, she shared that this was not the only reason for undertaking the archiving exercise. Another important reason for someone like her who was interested in music as part of a larger web of cultural activity, was the subject matter of the IPTA music and the context in which it was created. When IPTA music is seen as social text and particularly by someone located within the context of communal violence of the kind that occurred in the late 1980s and the 1990s in India, it serves as a powerful symbol of syncretic traditions of the Subcontinent. It was due to this symbolism that during the anti-Sikh riots in 1984 or when the Babri Mosque was demolished in 1992, a large number of artists went back to the music of this period, Damodaran remarked. Musicians of the 1940s had successfully transcended exclusionary and narrow identities and their work became a symbol of the syncretic and expansive identity. In the context of the communal violence of the last three decades, it appeared that Indian society had lost this inclusivity.

Further, when we understand this music in terms of the processes through which it was created, disseminated, and received, it has several related implications about the issues of cultural and social identity. In some ways, it challenged the assumption that different music forms merely reflect existing social and cultural differences. In fact, it demonstrated that music plays an active part in the process by which the differences — such as those of region, nationality, race, gender, language or class — come to be experienced and rendered meaningful. In this context, Damodaran gave the example of a musical play titled *Bhooka Bengal* that was written in 1943-44 to draw attention to the plight of the people dying of famine in the eastern part of India. Reba Roy Choudhary, a member of the IPTA who was interviewed by Damodaran, had shared that the play was received exceptionally well in Godhra, a place that has come to signify incessant hostilities between communities in the post-independence period and is infamous for a communal massacre in 2002. Choudhary had observed that in the 1940s, the people of Godhra had given generous financial support for the famine-affected areas. The physical distance between famine-affected Bengal and Gujarat or the religious identity of the victims of the famine was irrelevant to the people of Godhra. Damodaran observed that for Reba Roy Choudhary, the true identity of Godhra still lay in that 1940s’ period. This gave Damodaran an added reason to preserve the
Damodaran explained that although heer is widely known in the northwest of India, it is not limited to this geographic space. Similar forms of music can also be found in West Asia, Northern Africa, and Southern Spain.

Citing a similar example, Damodaran underlined the growing popularity of Sufi music and why it gained this status at a particular juncture in Indian and Pakistani history. She observed that when the hostilities between the two countries were at a high, artists sought to revive the Sufi tradition, which for them represented the shared spaces that could mitigate the othering processes that were underway.

Moving from the context of music to its form, Damodaran talked about the aesthetic quality of the IPTA musical tradition. She observed that although some of the IPTA music was protest music, it did not compromise on the aesthetic quality of the musical experience. Very often it is mistakenly assumed that to protest against something or to express anguish about something, the sounds have to be aggressive in order to convey the message. However, the IPTA composers and performers demonstrated that singing could be woven into the context, it could take the form and energy from the situation within which it arises, it could reflect these conditions, and thereby avoid the aggression that may at first appear necessary for effective protest.

Providing one such example from the IPTA tradition, Damodaran sang a heer, a folk form of music that is connected to the Heer-Ranjha love story. A key characteristic of this form is that it denotes longing, separation, and tragedy. It is in some senses very evocative and makes the listener thoughtful and reflective. Unlike the protest music of recent times, which is more upfront and does not rely on the ability of music to describe the situation and leave the listeners to draw conclusions, the heer does not compromise on aesthetics. It was therefore used by IPTA, especially in Lahore, to mobilize people during the colonial period.

The selection of the form is very conscious in all music that is social text. Musicians use the form based on the message being conveyed. Thus, Pandit Ravi Shankar, another eminent member of the IPTA, chose the classical musical form combined with use of a large number of instruments, to create the effect of a heroic person who was marching towards freedom and fighting the oppressors. Damodaran played some samples of this music from the IPTA repertoire.

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49 Damodaran explained that although heer is widely known in the northwest of India, it is not limited to this geographic space. Similar forms of music can also be found in West Asia, Northern Africa, and Southern Spain.
Continuing with the discussion on form, Damodran talked about another section of the IPTA that used satire quite successfully to carry socially relevant messages. Harin Chattopadhayaya was a master of this genre and used his poem called Curd Seller very effectively to raise issues of contemporary relevance. Although an accomplished classical singer, he used simple lyrics and folk form to convey ideas in a humorous or satirical style. Similarly, another composer, Hemango Biswas combined indigenous and western idiom to create music that appealed to a large cross-section of people. Because his music drew on folk traditions, he felt that it truly came from within and aroused the masses against colonial rule. Many contemporary street theater artists such as the late Safdar Hashmi continued to use folk forms like Aalha and Sapri which lack the aesthetic appeal of classical forms, yet are powerful mediums to convey social messages. The power comes partly from the form of the music that does not require musical literacy.

Damodaran therefore cautioned against the use of music without thinking through the relationship between the context and the form. She observed that one of the reasons that old forms of music were given contemporary interpretation was that change in context altered the message music conveys. As an example, she played the clip of a song Jaaga Desh Hamara. While it was used in the 1950s to convey the message of nationalism, if it were to be played in the same form today, it would be considered jingoistic and exclusionary. On the other hand, some songs which were placed in a different context could find resonance in entirely different situations today. An example was a song about the Bengal famine which could be sung in the context of farmer suicides in Maharashtra and would immediately evoke people’s sympathies for the affected farmers. Similarly, a song from the film Usne Kahatha titled Jaane wale Sipahi se Poochho could resonate in

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50 Aalha is a folk music form that comes from the Bundelkhand region of north India. Aalha and Udal were two warrior brothers, and in the songs, the performers praise the valor of the brothers in a dramatic fashion.
51 Sapri is sung in parts of north India at the time of weddings.
52 This song is believed to have been written when its composer Maqbool Moinuddin was exiting a railway station and saw some emaciated poor youths who had been conscripted. In the song, the composer is asking a soldier going out to war, where he is going. The backdrop to this conversation is described as the voice of the woman who is trying to calm her hungry children, the smell of burning flesh, and life crying out. The poet then goes on to say that one can see how much fear there is in the atmosphere because even the stars are afraid to twinkle. The young men are being butchered and the edges of the sari are being stained with blood. The final stanza expresses hope that the dark clouds are now beginning to lift and we can begin to see a new dawn. He says to all those who are leaving the country, a revolutionary dawn is approaching.
many war contexts although it was written in the backdrop of the Second World War.

Damodaran concluded her presentation with a song in Malayalam that was sung in the 1940s by a young coir industry worker from Alleppey. Although, it was a love song, it alluded to the peasant protest movement of its time. She sang this song with a view to underscore the importance of giving new interpretations to the sounds since a mere reproduction impoverishes the potential that music holds.

**Discussion**

During the discussion, many participants shared experiences from their own contexts of how music had either been used as a tool for carrying political messages or how some of the ideas expressed by Damodaran resonated for Nepalis, Afghans, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, and Tibetans.

One participant expressed some concern about using the “relationship of art to politics” and the “relationship of artists to politics” interchangeably, to which Damodaran responded that she was engaged in an exercise which sought to find an answer to the question, “how can we read from music into politics rather than locating music within politics?” How might people read from sound what politics it signifies, and therefore for Damodaran, politics and art were inextricably connected.

Another question related to the issue of perception about any musical repertoire. How, within a given milieu, some forms of music can be exploitative? This concern was raised by a participant from Afghanistan who noted that music in Afghanistan had been used to promote martyrdom of a militarized kind that fuelled hatred against other communities. To this Damodaran responded that just the way there is music for emancipation, there can also be music for torture. There is a lot of contemporary work that has been undertaken on Music in Nazi Germany, which incited hate against Jewish people. Notions of gender, machismo, and male avenger play an important role in such music. History is replete with examples of such music. Again, it depends on how that music is perceived, individually and collectively. It is important to also remember that any repertoire of music is seldom perceived in the same way even within a given milieu.

The power of music and its transformative potential partly accrues from the fact that the existence of music is independent of its material form. Since it
cannot be confiscated, it continues to exist through performance, independent of the material form in which it might be embodied. Musicians can be arrested, music cannot. The Workshop provided the participants with an opportunity to see music as a transformative tool as well as existing musical traditions as a reservoir of unexplored creative techniques for social transformation.
Workshop Program

DECEMBER 1, 2011 (Thursday)

Session 1
Introductions & Welcome Address
Time: 9:30 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.
Resource Person: Meenakshi Gopinath

Break
11:00 a.m. – 11:15 a.m.

Session 2
Keynote Address
Peace and Democracy in South Asia: Prospects and Challenges
Time: 11:15 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.
Chair: Terhi Hakala
Speaker: Pratap Bhanu Mehta

Lunch
12:30 p.m. – 1:15 p.m.

Session 3
Panel Discussion
Democracy and Conflict Transformation: Regional Perspectives
Time: 1:15 p.m. - 3:15 p.m.
Facilitator: Anuradha Chenoy

Speakers:

- Krishna Menon: Feminist Understanding of Democracy: Musings from India
- Deepti Priya Mehrotra: Iron Sharmila’s Nonviolent Struggle against Militarization in Manipur
- Ahmad Shikib Dost: Peace and Security in Afghanistan: The Role of India and Pakistan
- Sheena Kumari: Burmese Refugee Women and the Gendered Politics of Exile, Reconstruction and Human Rights
Break
3:15 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.

Session 4
Workshop
Theater of the Oppressed: A Tool for Conflict Transformation
Time: 3:30 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.
Resource Person: Jaya Iyer

Welcome Reception
Time: 5:30 p.m.

DECEMBER 2, 2011 (Friday)

Session 5
Lecture-Discussion
Gandhi and the Democratic Imagination: A Visual Journey
Time: 9:30 a.m. – 12:00 noon
Resource Person: Vinay Lal

Break
12:00 noon – 12:15 p.m.

Session 6
Workshop
Gender and Peacebuilding: The Sacred-Secular
Time: 12:15 p.m. – 1:30 p.m.
Resource Persons: Farida Vahedi & Nilakshi Rajkhowa

Lunch
1:30 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.

Session 6 (continued)
Workshop
Gender and Peacebuilding: The Sacred-Secular
Time: 2:00 p.m. – 4:15 p.m.
Resource Persons: Farida Vahedi & Nilakshi Rajkhowa

Break
4:15 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.

Session 7
Lecture-Discussion
Engendering Conflict Transformation: Experiences in Peacebuilding
Time: 4:30 p.m. – 5:45 p.m.
Chair: Rita Manchanda
Speaker: Irene Santiago
Discussant: Soumita Basu
*Gender Inequality as a Threat to International Peace and Security: The UN Security Council Resolutions on Women and Armed Conflicts*

**DECEMBER 3, 2011 (Saturday)**

**Session 8**

*Plenary Lecture*

SAARC Citizen Charter for Democracy

Time: 9:30 a.m. – 10:45 a.m.

Chair: Veena Sikri
Speaker: Peter Ronald deSouza

**Break**

10:45 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

**Session 9**

*Roundtable*

Women’s Movements for Peace and Democracy: Experiences from South Asia

Time: 11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

Facilitator: Tasneem Meenai

Speakers:

- Bandana Rana: *National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security: Experiences from Nepal*
- Salma Malik: *India-Pakistan Women’s Movements for Peace*
- Seema Kakran: *Athwaas – A WISCOMP Peacebuilding Initiative in Jammu, Kashmir & Ladakh*
- Naomi Sharin: *Women Barefoot Lawyers’ Role in Conflict Resolution in Rural Bangladesh*
- Thiagi Piyadasa: *The Aspirations of Women in Post-War Sri Lanka – In Search of Justice and Reconciliation*

**Lunch**

1:00 p.m. – 1:45 p.m.
Session 10

*Interactive Session*
Masculinities and Femininities: Transforming Gender Identities and Gendered Ideologies
Time: 1:45 p.m. – 2:45 p.m.
*Resource person:* Kamla Bhasin

**Break**
2:45 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Session 11

*Film Workshop*
Identity, Prejudice and Transformation: The Lens of Popular Cinema
Time: 3:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.
*Resource Person:* Ira Bhaskar

DECEMBER 4, 2011 (Sunday)

Session 12

*Roundtable*
Gender and Armed Violence in South Asia: From the Home to the Battlefield
Time: 9:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.
*Facilitator:* Ravinder Pal Singh

**Speakers:**
- Salma Malik: *Culture of Gun Violence: The Impact of the Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons on the Security of Women and Men in Pakistan*
- Binalakshmi Nepram: *The International Arms’ Trade: Women in the Firing Line*
- Sonal Marwah: *The Continuum of Armed Violence in India: Gendered Insecurity*
- Mallika Joseph: *Gender and Security Sector Reform*

**Break**
11:30 a.m. – 11:45 a.m.
Session 13

Interactive Session
Musical Protest Traditions: Songs of Resistance, Songs of Freedom
Time: 11:45 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.
Resource Person: Sumangala Damodaran

Lunch
1:00 p.m. – 1:30 p.m.

Session 14

Participant-led Session
Closing Circle: Evaluation & Looking Ahead
Time: 1:30 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.
Facilitators: Meenakshi Gopinath, Manjrika Sewak
Resource Person Profiles

Ahmad Shikib Dost (Kabul, Afghanistan) is a Journalist and News Presenter for Afghanistan National Radio and Television (RTA). He has worked extensively in the fields of journalism and communications for both government and non-government run media. He holds a Bachelors’ degree in Business Administration with Certificates in Journalism and Communications.

Anuradha Chenoy (New Delhi, India) is a Professor at the School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. She is the author of India Under Siege: Challenges Within and Without (1994), The Making of New Russia (2001), and Militarism and Women in South Asia (2002), The Maoists and Other Armed Conflicts Co-authored with Kamal Chenoy (2010) among others.

Bandana Rana (Lalitpur, Nepal) is the Executive Chair of Saathi, an NGO working on violence against women and children. She is the former Chair of the National Women’s Commission. She has a background in gender, media and development. She has led numerous advocacy and research programs related to sexual and other forms of gender-based violence during the conflict and post-conflict situation in Nepal.

Binalakshmi Nepram (New Delhi, India) is the Secretary-General, Control Arms Foundation of India (CAFI) and Founder of the Manipur Women Gun Survivors Network (MWGSN). She is a writer-activist who is spearheading work on making disarmament a movement and a meaningful issue.

Deepti Priya Mehrotra (New Delhi, India) is an Independent Scholar and Activist. Her book Burning Bright: Irom Sharmila and the Struggle for Peace in Manipur (2009) draws attention to non-violent modes of struggle for justice and human rights. As a Fellow of the Center for Conflict Resolution and Human Security, New Delhi, she is currently writing a monograph on Education for Peace: A Gandhian Perspective.

Farida Vahedi (New Delhi, India) is a Member of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of India and a Trustee of the Bahá’í House of Worship, better known as the Lotus Temple. She serves as the Secretary for External Affairs, National Spiritual Assembly and the Executive Director of its Department of External Affairs.
Ira Bhaskar (New Delhi, India) is an Associate Professor of Cinema Studies at the School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Her research interests include historical poetics, cinematic forms including melodrama, cinema and modern subjectivities, literature and film, and historical trauma, violence, memory and representation.

Irene Santiago (Davao City, Philippines) is Chair and Chief Executive Officer of the Mindanao Commission on Women and Co-Founder of the Mothers for Peace Movement in the Philippines. She is a Senior Advisor to the Presidential Advisor on the Peace Process, in which she assists in policy and strategy formulation, specifically on demobilization, disarmament and, reintegration.

Jaya Iyer (New Delhi, India) is a Peace Educator and Theater Activist, currently associated with the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library and is a Guest Faculty at several Delhi University Colleges. For over two decades she has been exploring the warp and weft of the world, art, social development, and ecological integrity through theater, education, social action, organizational development, self-work and spirituality.

Kamla Bhasin (New Delhi, India) is Co-Founder and Advisor of the South Asian Network of Gender Activists and Trainers (SANGAT) and one of the founder members and conveners of the South Asian Women’s Forum, Jagori and Ankur. Her publications include Borders and Boundaries: Women in India’s Partition (coauthored with Ritu Menon, 1998), What is Patriarchy? (1993), and Hamaari Betiyan Insaaf Ki Talaash Mein (1987), among others.

Krishna Menon (New Delhi, India) is an Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science, Lady Shri Ram College, New Delhi. She holds a PhD in Political Studies from the University of Delhi and her areas of interest include political theory, Indian politics, and feminist theory and politics. She teaches a course titled Development Politics in India to Master’s students at South Campus, University of Delhi.

Mallika Joseph (New Delhi, India) is Executive Director of the Regional Center for Strategic Studies, Colombo. She has been associated with the Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies, New Delhi, for several years as its Director, and works on various issues relating to South Asian security. Her areas of specialization are gender, security sector reforms, human security, left extremism, small arms, landmines and small arms, and improvised explosive devices.
Nilakshi Rajkhowa (New Delhi, India) is the Representative of Office of Discourses of Society of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha’is of India, an office that has been engaged in promoting the discourses on equality of men and women, effective governance and discourses on Science, Religion and Development.

Peter Ronald deSouza (Shimla, India) is the Director of the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla. He was a Senior Fellow at the Center for the Study of Developing Societies where he was Co-Director of the Lokniti program. He has edited two books *Contemporary India: Transitions* (2000) and *India’s Political Parties* (2006) with E. Sridharan. He was also one of the principal investigators of a five nation study on the *State of Democracy in South Asia* (2006).


Ravinder Pal Singh (New Delhi, India) is a Defense Analyst and Former Project Leader on Arms Procurement, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. His publications include *Arms Procurement Decision Making, Volume 1: China, India, Israel, Japan, South Korea and Thailand* and *Vol. 2: Chile, Greece, Poland, Malaysia, South Africa and Taiwan* (1998).

Rita Manchanda (New Delhi, India) is Research Director of a South Asia Forum for Human Rights project *Human Rights Audits of Partitions as a Method of Conflict Resolution*. She has written extensively on security and human rights issues, and among her recent publications are the edited volume *States in Conflict with their Minorities* (2010); *No Nonsense Guide to Minority Rights in South Asia* (2009); the edited title *Women, War and Peace in South Asia: Beyond Victimhood to Agency* (2001).

Salma Mehr Fatima Malik (Islamabad, Pakistan) is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Defense and Strategic Studies, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad. She specializes in the areas of war, arms control and disarmament, military sociology and South Asian affairs. Her publications include *Small Arms and the Security Debate in South Asia* (2005).
Sheena Kumari (Singapore) is currently pursuing a Masters’ degree in History at the National University of Singapore. Her research interests include interdisciplinary approaches towards the study of gender and women’s history, post-colonialism, intellectual and cultural history, theories of travel, literature and narrative studies.

Soumita Basu (New Delhi, India) is an Assistant Professor at the Department of International Relations, South Asian University, New Delhi. She was the Kenyon Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow and Visiting Assistant Professor of International Studies. She received her PhD in International Politics from the University of Wales, Aberystwyth. She has published extensively on gender, security and the United Nations.

Sumangala Damodaran (New Delhi, India) is an Economist, working in the School of Development Studies, Ambedkar University, New Delhi. She has been involved with the cultural protest movement in Delhi from the early 1980’s and was part of a protest song group called Parcham in Delhi. Over this period and later as well, she has worked with Safdar Hashmi and his street theatre group Jana Natya Manch, and has also been associated with theatre personalities like Habib Tanvir and Prasanna.

Tahir Aziz (London, United Kingdom) is the India-Pakistan (Kashmir) Projects Manager for Conciliation Resources, London. He holds two Masters’ degrees – one in Anthropology awarded by the Quaid-i-Azam University, Pakistan and the second in International Peace and Conflict Studies from the Joan B. Kroc Institute of International Peace Studies, University of Notre Dame, USA.

Tasneem Meenai (New Delhi, India) is the Officiating Director of Nelson Mandela Center for Peace and Conflict Resolution, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi. She has been closely associated with several initiatives in the field of peace education notably with the United Nations University for Peace, Costa Rica; UNESCO-National Council for Teacher Education, New Delhi; Centre for Dialogue and Reconciliation, Gurgaon and the Asia South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education.

Terhi Hakala (New Delhi, India) is the Ambassador of Finland to India, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and the Maldives. An expert on the Southern Caucasus and Eastern Europe, she took up her duties as the Head of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Mission to Georgia in October 2007.
Veena Sikri (New Delhi, India) is a Professor and the Ford Foundation Chair at the Bangladesh Studies Program, Academy of International Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi. She is also the Convenor of the South Asia Women’s Network (SWAN). She has previously served with the Indian Foreign Service in various capacities.

Vinay Lal (New Delhi, India) is a Professor of History, Delhi University, New Delhi. He was the Director of the University of California Education Abroad Program. His publications include The History of History: Politics and Scholarship in Modern India (2003); Of Cricket, Guinness and Gandhi: Essays on Indian History and Culture (2003); Introducing Hinduism (2005); The Other Indians: A Political and Cultural History of South Asians in America (2008) among others.
Participant Profiles

Akanksha Mehta (Singapore) is an Associate Research Fellow at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Singapore. She holds a Masters’ degree in International Relations from the same institute. Her research interests include political violence, insurgency, nationalism, and gender and feminist issues.

Anam Gill (Lahore, Pakistan) is a communicator and journalist working at Express 24/7 as an Associate Producer. She has contributed articles as a freelance writer to various newspapers and worked as the Content and Outreach Coordinator for Forgotten Diaries an initiative of Youth Action for Change.

Arun Fernandez (Chennai, India) is a Project Coordinator for the Peace Rangers and a faculty member in the Department of Foundation, Loyola College, Chennai. He holds a Masters’ degree in Social Work from Loyola College, Chennai.

Azeema Cheema (Islamabad, Pakistan) is an Independent Consultant working on issues related to international development and security. She holds a Masters’ degree in Public Administration from the Maxwell School of Citizenship & Public Affairs, Syracuse University, New York.

Bhavana Mahajan (New Delhi, India) is a Manager for Corporate Communications for iDiscoveri Education, New Delhi. She holds a Masters’ degree in Economics from the Centre for Economic Studies and Planning, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

Chandula Kumbukage (Colombo, Sri Lanka) is a Research Assistant at the Centre for Policy Alternatives where she works on human rights, post-conflict development, reconciliation and rehabilitation. She is pursuing a Post Graduate Diploma in Conflict & Peace Studies from the University of Colombo.

Elmie Rengma (Diphu, Assam) holds a Masters’ degree in International Politics from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, UK. Her research interests include South Asian politics and women issues in the context of modern South Asian conflicts.

Faheem Aslam (Srinagar, India) is a Public Relations Officer for the University of Kashmir, Srinagar. He holds a Masters’ degree in Mass Communication
and Journalism from the Media Education Research Center, University of Kashmir.

Faisal Abbas (New Delhi, India) is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Economics, South Asian University, New Delhi. He has completed his PhD, funded by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), on Health Economics with reference to developing countries like Pakistan.

Fazal Ahmad Rahel (Kabul, Afghanistan) is an Assistant Grants Manager and Integrity Promotion Officer at United Nations Development Program, Kabul. He holds an Associate Degree in Business Administration and Political Science from the American University of Afghanistan, Kabul.

Feroz Ahmmead (Dhaka, Bangladesh) is the Founding Co-ordinator and Chief Executive for Lifelong Education and Development, Dhaka. He holds a Masters’ degree in Philosophy from the University of Dhaka, Dhaka.

Haris Ahmad Jahangeer (Kabul, Afghanistan) is pursuing a Masters’ degree in Post-War Recovery Studies from the University of York, UK and a Bachelors’ degree in Law and Political Science from Balkh University, Mazar-i-Sharif.

Humera Iqbal (Islamabad, Pakistan) is a Research Officer at the Institute of Regional Studies, Islamabad and is pursuing an M.Phil. from the Department of International Relations, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad. She holds a Masters’ degree in Political Studies from the same university.

Kahkashan Farooq (Lahore, Pakistan) is an Assistant Editor with the Daily Times Editorial Section, Lahore. She holds a Masters’ degree in Mass Communication from the University of Punjab, Lahore. She has published Galaxy of Stars, a directory of professionals associated with the performing arts.

Kandala Singh (New Delhi, India) is a Project Coordinator for the National Foundation for India, New Delhi. She was an Erasmus Mundus Scholar and holds a Masters’ degree in Human Rights Practise from the Göteborg University, Sweden; Roehampton University, UK and University of Tromsø, Norway.

Mashruka Khaled (Dhaka, Bangladesh) is pursuing a Masters’ degree in Peace and Conflict Studies from the University of Dhaka, Dhaka. She holds a Bachelors’ degree in Peace and Conflict Studies from the same university.
**Masoora Ali** (Rawalpindi, Pakistan) is a Program Coordinator, National Volunteering and Youth Development at the Voluntary Service Overseas. She holds a Masters’ degree in Defense and Strategic Studies from the Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad.

**Muhammad Sajid Khan** (Rawalpindi, Pakistan) is a Lecturer of History at Government Postgraduate College Asghar Mall, Rawalpindi. His research works include *Gandhi’s strategy of political mobilization: A Case Study of Khilafat Movement; Prospects of Peace Process between India and Pakistan* among others.

**Mushtaq Ul Haq Ahmad Sikander** (Srinagar, India) is a part time reporter and freelancer for various newspapers, journals and magazines. He holds a Masters’ degree in Political Science from Kashmir University, Srinagar.

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**Nazia Shafi** (Srinagar, India) is the Manager – Publicity and Public Relations for the Jammu and Kashmir Entrepreneurship Development Institute, Srinagar. She is pursuing an M.Phil from the Media Education and Research Center, University of Kashmir, Srinagar.

**Noorin Nazari** (Kathmandu, Nepal) is presently working in Nepal as a Governance Specialist at the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development. She holds a Masters’ degree in International Development from Duke University, USA.

**Nyima Lhamo** (Dharamsala, India) is a Program Coordinator for Empowerment through Action Desk for the Tibetan Woman’s Association, Dharamsala. She holds a Bachelors’ degree in Law from Mangalore University, Konaje.

**Pranika Koyu** (Kathmandu, Nepal) is a Special Assistant to the Representative of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, Kathmandu. She is pursuing a Masters’ degree in Sociology and English Literature from Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu.

**Rakesh Ganguli** (Pune, India) is a development practitioner involved in peace and development work in India. He has worked closely with communities
that survived the communal carnage in the state of Gujarat. He holds a Masters’ degree from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai.

**Roya Saqib** (Kabul, Afghanistan) is currently pursuing a Masters’ degree in International Relations from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. She has worked as a Project Support Officer in a Civil Service Reform Project for the World Bank, Afghanistan and as a Volunteer for the Youth Parliament Foundation.

**Rubina Lone** (Srinagar, India) is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Microbiology, Sher-i-Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences Medical College, Srinagar. She holds a M.D. in Microbiology from the Institute of Medical Sciences, Soura and an M.B.B.S degree from Government Medical College, Srinagar.

**Sharin Shajahan Naomi** (Dhaka, Bangladesh) is a Researcher for Research and Evaluation Division, BRAC, Bangladesh. She holds a Masters’ degree in Human Rights from Curtin University, Australia.

**Shubranshu Mishra** (New Delhi, India) is pursuing a PhD at the Center for International Politics, Organization and Disarmament, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. He holds an M.Phil degree from the same Center.

**Sonal Marwah** (New Delhi, India) is Project Coordinator for India Armed Violence Assessment (IAVA), a project of the Small Arms Survey (SAS). She holds a Masters’ degree in International Affairs from the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva.

**Sreyasa Mainali** (Kathmandu, Nepal) is a Research Coordinator for the Asian Development Bank Nepal Resident Mission in the School Sector Reform Program of the Government of Nepal. She holds a Masters’ degree in Conflict, Peace and Development Studies from Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu.

**Syed Ali Raza** (Lahore, Pakistan) is a Draper Hills Fellow from Stanford University, USA and holds a Masters’ degree in Law from the National University of Singapore, Singapore. He is a practicing lawyer and also assists the Office of Chief Minister Punjab on various legal reforms and public policy initiatives.

**Tenzin Chodon Chophel** (Dharamsala, India) is a Trainer and Information Officer for the Tibetan Centre for Conflict Resolution, Dharamsala. She holds a Bachelors’ degree in English Literature from Delhi University, Delhi.
Tenzin Dolkar (Dharamsala, India) is a Grassroots Director with Students for a Free Tibet – India, which creates awareness and sensitizes the world on the just cause of Tibet. She holds a Bachelors’ degree in Economics from Pune University, India.

Tenzin Tseten (Dharamsala, India) is currently working with the Tibet Policy & Research Institute, Dharamsala. He holds a Masters’ degree in Economics from Maharaja Sayajirao University, Baroda.

Thiagi Piyadasa (Colombo, Sri Lanka) is a Research Assistant at the International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Colombo. She is the Co-Founder of The Young Researcher’s Collective. She is pursuing a Bachelors’ degree in Law from the Open University of Sri Lanka.

Tsering Wangmo (Dharamsala, India) is a Grant Manager and Project In-charge of Stitches of Tibet at the Tibetan Women’s Association. She holds a Bachelors’ degree in Humanities from Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu.

Zamrooda Khanday (Mumbai, India) is a Senior Research Officer at the Center for Enquiry into Health and Allied Themes, Mumbai. She holds a Masters’ degree in Social Work from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai. Her publications include Women in Kashmir: Negotiating for Life among others.

Zeenat Masoodi (New Delhi, India) is an Advocate in the Delhi High Court. She holds a Masters’ degree in Law from National Law School, Bangalore. Her publications include Sovereign Debt Restructuring–An Analysis of the Legal Aspects Involved and A Case for the Electronic Service of Process in India.
The WISCOMP Team

Meenakshi Gopinath is the Founder & Honorary Director of Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace (WISCOMP). She also serves as Principal, Lady Shri Ram College for Women, New Delhi. Dr. Gopinath serves on several boards including co-chair of the Academic Council of the UN University of Peace, Costa Rica; Governing Board of Coexistence International, USA; Center for Policy Research, New Delhi; Regional Center for Strategic Studies, Sri Lanka etc. She was awarded the Padmashri by The President of India for her distinguished contribution to the field of Literature and Education in India in 2007.

Seema Kakran is Assistant Director at WISCOMP. She holds an M.Phil. and a Masters’ degree in Political Science. She also holds a Graduate Certificate in Public Policy Analysis from University of Nebraska – Lincoln, USA. Her recent publications include: with Ashima Kaul, Symbol and Substance: Exploring Inter Community Dialogue in Ladakh (2011); Exploring Contours of Democracy in the Maldives (2011); with Navanita Sinha and Manjrika Sewak, Education for Peace and Multiculturalism (2008) among others.

Manjrika Sewak is a Consultant with WISCOMP. A writer and trainer in the field of peacebuilding, her areas of specialization include the India-Pakistan peace process and justice and reconciliation issues. She is the author of Multi-Track Diplomacy between India and Pakistan: A Conceptual Framework for Sustainable Security (2005) and has published several papers and articles on issues pertaining to peace education, gender and armed conflicts, conflict transformation, and peacebuilding.

Rashi Sarawgi is Program Officer at WISCOMP. She holds a Masters’ degree in Conflict, Governance and Development from the University of York, UK; a Post-Graduate Diploma in Conflict Transformation and Peacebuilding from Lady Shri Ram College, Delhi University and a Bachelors’ degree in Psychology from Jesus and Mary College, Delhi University.

Tamanna Khosla is a Consultant with WISCOMP. She holds a PhD in Political Theory from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi; an M.Phil. in Political Theory and a Masters’ degree in Political Science from the same university. She has previously worked as a Research Associate for the Centre for Social Research, New Delhi; Political Assistant to Diplomats for the Embassy of Japan, New Delhi; Research Associate at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi and also taught undergraduates at the same university.
Glimpses