Enriching Democratic Practice in South Asia: Possibilities from the Field of Peacebuilding
Eighth Annual Conflict Transformation Workshop
October 2010
A Report

Compiled by:
Manjrika Sewak

Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace
An initiative of the
Foundation for Universal Responsibility of His Holiness The Dalai Lama
New Delhi

in partnership with

Wiscomp

GPPAC
Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict
South Asia Regional Secretariat, Colombo
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We are deeply grateful to the Foundation for Universal Responsibility of HH the Dalai Lama (FUR), of which WISCOMP is an initiative, for their visionary and sustained support over the last 12 years. Special thanks to Mr. Rajiv Mehrotra (Trustee/Secretary, FUR) and Dr. Meenakshi Gopinath (Hon. Director, WISCOMP) for their inspirational leadership and to the WISCOMP team of Ms. Seema Kakran, Mr. Harish Bhatt, Ms. Aarti Narain, Ms. Smruthi Rammohan, Ms. Sree Kumari V., and Mr. Devender Kumar. Thanks also to all the workshop resource persons and participants for taking time out to be part of this initiative.
In 2009, the Uppsala University Conflict Data Program recorded 36 active armed conflicts in the world. Interestingly, 29 of these conflicts were “intrastate” and the remaining seven were “intrastate with foreign involvement”. No “interstate” conflict was registered for 2009. The Program added an interesting rider to this data: The steady decline in casualty figures and organized violence (which began in the late-1990s and continued into the initial years of the 21st century) has now ceased.

An analysis of these conflicts reveals that a majority of them are driven by issues of political participation, democratic governance, human rights and social and economic inclusion. Historical group marginalization, social-ethnic-religious divisions and a deep sense of mistrust are other key elements of these conflicts.

Not surprisingly, there seems to be a consensus among international organizations, governments, donors, and civil society groups that peace and democracy are the stated goals. The two terms have acquired a variety of meanings in different regions of conflict based on variables such as local realities, customary laws, aspirations of stakeholders, cultural beliefs and indigenous practices. Even as scholars and practitioners acknowledge this diversity in definitions, there is a tendency to apply a top-down approach, which is imported from the outside. As a result, the two concepts continue to

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1 Uppsala Conflict Data Program, Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, Sweden http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/
2 Ibid.
be contested and critiqued as more and more post-conflict countries relapse into violence.³

The case of Iraq is perhaps the most visible example of the inability of the international community to build peace and democracy in a divided society. Iraq is also a reminder that democracy should be based on local ownership and local customs and it must respond to local realities. Sadly, Iraq follows a long list of countries, which have fallen victim to organized violence and civil war within just a few years of signing peace accords. Five years ago, the Human Security Report (2005) recorded this alarming trend when it stated that 40% of peace accords collapse within five years of signature. Many more fail after the five-year mark. Even as the peacebuilding community congratulates itself and shifts its focus to the next big conflict, the stage is set for a relapse to violence in the country which is now coded as peaceful and democratic. U.S. President Barack Obama drew attention to this trend when, in 2007, he stated that the United States was on the “wrong battlefield” when it shifted focus from Afghanistan to Iraq in the mid-2000s.⁴

Examples of this difficult transition from violence to peace abound in South Asia. For instance, in Afghanistan and Nepal, people are discovering the harsh reality that a peace agreement – which is supposed to mark a formal end to the conflict – is by no means durable or lasting. Events over the last few years have shown that the deep mistrust between key leaders has played a key role in hindering sustainable peace.

This trend has serious implications for the field of peacebuilding. Over the last decade, governments, international organizations, donors and civil society groups have turned to this field for ideas, methodologies and processes that can help build sustainable peace, security and democracy in divided societies. This faith in the field of peacebuilding was perhaps most visibly reflected in

³ 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).

2005 when the United Nations set up a Peacebuilding Commission. The foreign ministries of several countries in fact now have a designated peacebuilding desk 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 and an even larger sum of money is pumped into regions experiencing organized violence.

Yet, the “big picture transformational change” is invisible, or complicated at best. New conflicts are added to annual datasets even as post-conflict democracies become unstable and relapse into organized violence. Initiatives that entered peacebuilding textbooks as success stories collapse within a decade (if not before). While some disintegrate because of internal struggles, ego, turf battles, and the like, others are simply unable to hold their ground in an environment marked by mistrust, continuing inter-group hostility and the absence of a culture of pluralism and coexistence.

Articulating this growing unease among scholars and practitioners that the field of peacebuilding was not living up to the transformative goals it professed, in 2008, leading trainers Simon Fisher and Lada Zimina, wrote an open letter titled Just Wasting our Time?5 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”.6 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

5 See http://lettertopeacebuilders.ning.com
(governmental and commercially-oriented) were identified as other factors that inhibit success.7

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 building peace and democracy. A first step is to identify where the problem lies. Are value-based divisions within the field an obstacle? Are differences over how peacebuilders define long-term social change a factor? Or, do the contradictions lie at the very heart of peacebuilding practice?

The WISCOMP Workshop

It is in this context that WISCOMP in association with the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict, organized a peacebuilding workshop titled Enriching Democratic Practice in South Asia: Possibilities from the Field of Peacebuilding in New Delhi.

The Workshop sought to build on a unique opportunity, which is that all countries of the South Asian region are ruled by democratically elected governments.

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 among key stakeholders (such as 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 the conflict divide) “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). Through such an engagement, a genuine process of transformation can take place. Related to this, WISCOMP believes that face-to-face dialogues along with professional training in the field of peacebuilding have the potential to transform enemy images, build long-term relationships and contribute to the emergence and sustenance of a culture of coexistence.

While WISCOMP acknowledges the important role of democracy building activities such as constitution drafting, multi-party elections, transparent

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7 For the authors’ full critique of contemporary peacebuilding practice, see http://www.berghof-handbook.net/documents/publications/dialogue7_pbcrossroads_complete.pdf
governance structures, judicial reform, et al, it sees individual and community transformation as central to the pursuit of institutional transformation. There is no dearth of institutional designs for democratic governance in societies torn apart by violent conflict. Yet, none of these will bring the expected social change unless key stakeholders put themselves “in the shoes of the other” and recognize the need to coexist and make decision-making an inclusive and collaborative process. WISCOMP believes that long-term investments must be made in transformatory processes that focus on trust- and relationship-building (among key stakeholders), sustained dialogues, citizen participation, and the promotion of a culture of pluralism. In the absence of these, even the best institutional designs for peace and democracy are likely to fail.

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.”

Second, 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 hostile 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 complete disconnect between the nation and the state.

Third, Wolpe and McDonald note four imperatives for sustainable peace and democracy:


\[9\] Ibid, p.139.

\[10\] Ibid, p.140.
- 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. It is only when leaders from different sides of a conflict arrive at this conclusion that they acquire the will and the capacity to collectively address social and political inequalities.

- 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 at the grassroots and at other levels (education, media, business, sports et al).

- Key leaders must forge an inclusive consensus on the process of democratic governance and citizen participation.

- Leaders must at all times engage in active listening and express their views in ways that encourage a search for common ground, rather than invite further acrimony and mistrust.

John Paul Lederach, a Conflict Transformation practitioner, also offers an interesting explanation as to why peace and democratic transitions are proving so difficult in societies coded as post-conflict. The first problem lies with the way in which the peace accord is framed and perceived. There is a tendency, among external and internal actors, to focus on peace agreements and their structural and institutional dimensions. Little attention is paid to the fact that, apart from the public handshake, leaders may not have changed their attitudes, particularly the way they perceive their enemies. Yet, these are the people that they have to live with and work with in order to build a democratic, peaceful and just society. While peace accords have been successful in dealing with the more immediate, crisis-oriented issues, they have rarely addressed the expectations for long-term social, economic and cultural change which gave rise to the fighting in the first place. While they can establish the frameworks for democratic governance and participation, they cannot transform mindsets and attitudes.

In fact, a focus on institutional and structural transformation in the absence of parallel trust and relationship-building work (among conflictants) is comparable to putting the cart before the horse. Highlighting this dilemma,

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Lederach draws attention to the different levels at which change must be simultaneously envisaged:\(^\text{12}\):

- **Personal change**, which incorporates the creation of new beliefs, attitudes, perceptions, knowledge and behaviors;
- **Relational change**, which involves better communication and improved relationships between conflict parties, as well as a recognition of their interdependence;
- **Cultural change**, which promotes cultural values, traditions and customs that support an inclusive and egalitarian peace;
- **Structural change**, which involves addressing the “root causes”, establishing the rule of law and justice systems, setting up participatory governance institutions, and empowering a new generation of leaders.

Lederach also notes that the field of peacebuilding has concentrated more of its resources and capacity-building on horizontal relationship-building, ignoring the vertical dimension.\(^\text{13}\) Horizontal capacity refers to efforts to work with *enemies* across the lines of division. So the focus is on improving relationships by getting counterparts to meet with each other – for example, initiatives that bring together women’s groups, community leaders, NGO workers and political leaders from across enemy lines. Vertical capacity is the ability to develop relationships of respect and understanding between higher levels of leadership and mid-range, community and grassroots levels of peacebuilding. Lederach attributes the high failure rate of peace accords to the fact that “high, middle-range and grassroots levels of leadership rarely see themselves as interdependent, until they discover they need them, usually when the process is under enormous stress and time constraints”. For democracies to be sustainable, horizontal and vertical relationships should move in tandem on an equal basis.

The gap in expectations of justice and what is finally delivered forms a key area of focus in Lederach’s critique of contemporary peacebuilding practice. Peace accords reduce direct violence, but often fail to address the social injustice and structural violence that gave rise to the fighting in the first place. According


to Lederach, “we have focused our lenses more on negotiations and peace accords than in understanding the processes of structural change”. While a peace agreement creates more space for political participation, people expect it to address the fundamental issues that gave rise to the fighting. For example, there are expectations for social, economic and cultural change. Peace accords have rarely facilitated such change thereby creating a gap between justice expectations and what is finally delivered.

Examples of this gap can be seen in many post-conflict democracies where the peace accord has had little impact on the incidence of gender-based violence, proliferation of weapons, unemployment rates, and inequitable economic development. In this context, Lederach makes the following recommendations for sustainable peace and democracy:

- Social capital, built through networks, relationship-building, mutual trust and dialogue exercises, is a prerequisite for sustaining peace and democracy. Many societies coded as “post-conflict” often fail to build this much-needed capital.
- Relationships should be built before, during and after accords (particularly between people who are not like-minded).
- Coordinate the work of multiple actors and approaches: This suggests a need for collaboration between multiple activities and multiple roles at multiple levels, and a strategy to deal with ego issues and turf battles.
- All categories of peacebuilding are interdependent, and each is indispensable to the success of the other. No one activity and no one level will be able to deliver and sustain peace on its own.

**Workshop Program**

Bringing together a group of 54 youth leaders (in the age group of 21–35 years) from Afghanistan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and the USA, the WISCOMP Peacebuilding Workshop sought to use the above perspectives as a starting point for a dialogue on how peacebuilding can nurture and enrich democracies. Exploring the makings of a peacebuilder, the sessions introduced the key theoretical concepts of the field and imparted skills in nonviolent conflict communication. Representing immense diversity, the participants came together for a common purpose: to build their capacity to engage in peacebuilding work and to do their bit to reduce human suffering. While some were pursuing post-graduate studies in international relations and peace and conflict resolution, others were associated with media houses, non-profit
organizations and research institutes. For many, the commitment to reduce human suffering and build peace was central to their chosen vocations.

Drawing on the work that WISCOMP has done over the last 10 years in the area of conflict transformation, the Workshop examined the potential of a trust- and relationship-centered process to deliver on the long-term goals of sustainable peace and democracy.

Broadly, it addressed the following questions:

• What makes democracy work and peace sustainable?

• 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?

• Why is the field of peacebuilding – despite extensive scholarship and vast sums of money at its disposal – unable to bring sustainability to conflict transformation efforts and democratic transitions?

• Why do democracies remain unstable in post-conflict societies?

• Despite similarity in methods and goals, why does the relationship between peacebuilding and democracy promotion remain tenacious? How might we build a synergy between the two?
The Inaugural Lecture on Democracy and Peacebuilding by Dr. Meenakshi Gopinath, Hon. Director, WISCOMP, opened with an exploration of the ways in which a peacebuilding vocabulary and sensibility can enrich democratic practice in the countries of the South Asian region. Gopinath drew on the recent experiences of societies transitioning out of violent conflict, and the contributions that the field of peacebuilding has made to the sustenance of democracy. Underscoring the centrality of a culture of dialogue in processes of democracy, she posed the question, “When we are talking about democratic practices, is it possible for us to imagine these without the institutionalization of processes of dialogue? How can a culture of dialogue, of coexistence, feed into democratic practice in such a way that aspects of peacebuilding, such as active listening, become integral to what we understand the so-called democratic package to be?”

The challenge, as Gopinath pointed out, is to see how policymakers integrate perspectives on dialogue into administrative responses in a structured and systematic way. “The modern conception of democracy underscores the need for sustaining social relationships governed by terms and conditions that can be accepted freely by people who are affected by those relationships. A sense of justice and fair play therefore need to be sustained by a social ethos of enlightened public opinion, which is crafted by dialogic predispositions.”

In the context of the immense cultural and ethnic diversity that countries of the South Asian region represent, a key question for policymakers and political leaders revolves around the attempt to build common ground without seeking to remove differences. As Gopinath put it, “How do we build common ground
in spite of our different identities? How can people find a democratic articulation that is able to maintain these separate identities and yet somehow transcend them in order to engage in a grand coalition?” Because of its emphasis on social relationships, coexistence and multiculturalism, the field of peacebuilding was proposed as a methodology to bring people together to work collaboratively in pursuit of the goals of justice, peace and security.

Mention was also made of Mahbub-ul-Haq’s evocative articulation of human security in the UN Human Development Report, where he defined the concept as “a child who did not die, a disease that did not spread, a job that was not cut, an ethnic tension that did not explode in violence, a dissident who was not silenced.” The notion that security is not just about weapons and protecting borders, but about human life and dignity, has significantly influenced the discourses on democracy and peacebuilding. This point is particularly relevant for “post-conflict” societies where, in the hurry to begin reconciliation and peace projects, the individuals’ sense of security if often compromised.

Sharing WISCOMP’s approach to peacebuilding, Gopinath underscored the important role of democracy building activities such as constitution drafting, multi-party elections, transparent governance structures, judicial reform, an independent media, and a strong political and civil society, but said that individual and community transformation was a prerequisite for institutional transformation. There is no dearth of institutional designs for democratic
governance in societies torn apart by violent conflict. Yet, none of these will bring the expected social change unless key stakeholders put themselves “in the shoes of the other” and recognize the need to coexist and make decision-making an inclusive and collaborative process. WISCOMP believes that long-term investments must be made in transformatory processes that focus on trust- and relationship-building (among key stakeholders), sustained dialogues, citizen participation, and the promotion of a culture of pluralism. In the absence of these, even the best institutional designs for peace and democracy are likely to fail. In fact, a 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 hostile 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, thereby resulting in a complete disconnect between the nation and the state.
Introduction to Peacebuilding Workshop

The Workshop session *Introduction to Peacebuilding* delved into the diverse definitions and activities that make up the field of peacebuilding. WISCOMP staff members, Ms. Seema Kakran and Ms. Manjrika Sewak, facilitated this session, which also included three participant group presentations on:

- The map of strategic peacebuilding (Lisa Schirch)
- The role of trust in conflict transformation processes (Nicholas Wheeler)
- The integrated model of peacebuilding (John Paul Lederach)

The session opened with a set of ice-breakers and participant introductions. Following this, the facilitators invited ground-rules, and then opened the space for dialogue on some key debates within the field of peacebuilding. These were captured by provocative statements, on which there was a dialogue, with participants dividing themselves into three groups: *agree, disagree* and *unsure*. The statements were:

- Violence is an effective methodology to achieve justice.
- Religion is a source of conflict; only a secular approach can help us achieve peace.
- Forgiveness is a prerequisite for building social harmony in a post-conflict society.

Following this exercise, the facilitators presented a brief lecture on the evolution of the field of peacebuilding. Peacebuilding emerged as an independent area
of study in response to the vastly different challenges of the post-Cold War global world order. In the early-to-mid 1990s, conflicts erupted in different parts of the world, but they were characteristically different from what the world had experienced during the Cold War days. The violence and hostility were raging within the boundaries of the nation state and a new category of conflicts emerged, localized yet internationalized. The international community was initially at a loss in terms of how to deal with these new conflicts. But the horrific violence unleashed in Rwanda and in the former Yugoslavia (in the mid-1990s) galvanized the international community to mobilize the resources for the prevention and transformation of armed conflict.

Yet, as far as definitions were concerned, the field of peacebuilding evolved and adapted itself to the socio-cultural specificities of the regions where the conflicts were located. As a result, there was little agreement on the use of terminology, with concepts such as conflict prevention, conflict resolution, conflict management, conflict transformation and peacebuilding being used interchangeably in different contexts. Recognizing the dilemma that such conceptual and terminological ambiguity presented for the field of peace and conflict work, the initial years of the 21st century witnessed a UN- and civil society-led effort to build a consensus around the language of the field.

As a result, peacebuilding, a word that gained prominence after the UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros Ghali used it in his Agenda for Peace in 1992, came to be seen as a catch-all term to refer to diverse processes related
to local, regional and international peace and conflict work. No longer seen as a post-conflict activity, peacebuilding now includes the whole range of processes from crisis management (humanitarian assistance and ceasefire negotiations) to the more long-term efforts at conciliation, transformative mediation, relationship building, peace education, nonviolence training, and restorative processes for justice and reconciliation.14

In 2005, the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) led a civil society effort to “integrate research and discussion” in this area by bringing together more than 500 organizations to build an inclusive, international consensus on peacebuilding and the prevention of armed conflict.15 Dr. Lisa Schirch, a member of the Editorial Board of the GPPAC book project titled People Building Peace II: Successful Stories of Civil Society, came up with the following definition: “Peacebuilding seeks to prevent, reduce, and transform conflict and help people recover from violence in all forms, even structural violence that has not yet led to massive civil unrest. At the same time, it empowers people to foster relationships at all levels that sustain them and their environments… Relationships are a form of social capital. When people connect and form relationships, they are more likely to cooperate together to constructively address conflict.”16 Peacebuilding encompasses the full range of activities that seek to prevent the violent expression of conflict even as they promote nonviolent action against injustice and oppression. It includes efforts to build trust and strategic relationships between leaders (from conflicting sides) so that they can work collaboratively to build sustainable peace and democracy in their societies.

Providing a visual representation of these diverse activities, Schirch came up with a “map of strategic peacebuilding” (Figure 1), which was discussed at length at the Workshop. A brief description of the map, which includes four categories of peacebuilding, is shared below:

1. waging conflict nonviolently;
2. reducing direct violence;
3. building capacity;
4. transforming relationships.

14 For a glossary of key peacebuilding terms, see www.colorado.edu/conflict/peace/glossary.htm.
15 The website of the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (www.gppac.org) provides useful information on how the contours of the field/s of peacebuilding, conflict transformation and conflict prevention are being shaped by contemporary practice.
The category of “waging conflict nonviolently” seeks to increase a group’s power to address grievances and ripen the conditions for transformation. This includes *monitoring and advocacy* (monitor the way states and other actors protect human rights, create public awareness of abuses), *direct action* (raise awareness of injustice through protests, marches, persuasion, non-cooperation and boycotts), and *civilian based defense* (as used in Denmark in the Second World War to protect the Jewish population from Nazi persecution by moving them out of the country on fishing boats).

![Four Categories of Peacebuilding Approaches](image)

The second category focuses on the more immediate need of “reducing violence” and saving human lives. This can be achieved by restraining perpetrators of violence through legal and judicial systems, preventing and relieving the immediate suffering of the victims (as carried out by groups such as the ICRC), putting in place peacekeeping operations (as in Kosovo, East Timor and Afghanistan), using force and even military intervention to prevent violence (Bosnia, Kosovo), and developing early warning systems to focus international attention and resources on a conflict before it erupts into mass violence.

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“Capacity-building” represents a third cluster of strategic peacebuilding activities. This includes training workshops, development, peace research and the embracing of a broader security agenda by channeling military resources towards human security issues and needs. This agenda also includes disarmament, and reintegration of former combatants and child soldiers.

The fourth category – “transforming relationships” – focuses on the following activities:

- **Trauma Healing:** The field of trauma healing seeks physical, emotional and spiritual healing. It involves reconnecting people to their own self and to other people, and reestablishes a sense of personal control.

- **Restorative Justice:** It is used either as an alternative to the state-based criminal justice systems or as a supplement to them. The focus of this process is on involving the community and building relationships even as issues of human rights and justice are addressed through a dialogic and participatory process.

- **Transitional Justice:** Transitional justice mechanisms come into force in a post-war context when government authority may be weak. These include institutions such as Truth and Reconciliation Commissions, Reparation Commissions, War Crimes Tribunals and other mechanisms that help to address the demand for justice as a society makes the transition from violence to peace.
Governance and policy-making: Effective design and implementation of policies for administration and governance form an important strand of transformation.

The facilitators walked the participants through some of the key frameworks within the field of Peacebuilding, namely Conflict Prevention, Conflict Resolution, Conflict Management and Conflict Transformation. While these embrace overlapping processes and activities, they also signify different approaches to addressing violent conflict.

Conflict Prevention refers to the anticipation and aversion of violence in social and political conflicts. It is addressed at three levels. At the primary level, the focus is on early warning – minimizing the possibility of the occurrence of a violent conflict. At the secondary level, containment and mitigation are the focus. At the tertiary level, the emphasis is on the prevention of a recurrence of armed conflict. The following were identified as some of the early warning signs that can help stakeholders identify impending violence and prevent it:

- Polarization between communities
- Mounting demographic pressure on resources
- Sustained human flight: massive movement of IDPs and refugees
- A legacy of vengeance and group grievance
- Uneven economic development along community lines
- Sharp decline in economic growth
- Widespread human rights violations
- De-legitimization of the state (corruption/human rights abuses)
- Intervention of other states or external actors

Conflict Management sees conflict as following patterns and evolving in ways that can be anticipated and interventions can consequently be designed. It comprises a range of approaches to prevent conflict from spiraling into violence. Although this framework offers insights into how violence can be controlled and prevented, it does not focus on mainstreaming concerns relating to justice, reconciliation and the long-term needs for social change. It also does not preclude the possibility of the use of force to “manage” conflict. Within India, this perception is widespread because of the common usage of the term in counter-insurgency operations.
Conflict Resolution refers to nonviolent processes that comprise a range of approaches and tools, such as those of negotiation, mediation and facilitation, to resolve conflicts and promote mutually acceptable agreements. Yet, several communities in conflict have expressed discomfort with this terminology because they believe that some conflicts ought not to be resolved. Sometimes, conflict must be escalated if the injustices of structural violence and institutionalized discrimination are to be highlighted and transformed.

In this context, Conflict Transformation asks a different question: How do we transform conflict and build peace? The focus is on, as John Paul Lederach suggests, “what we are trying to build”, not just “what we are trying to end”. The term Conflict Transformation was first used by John Paul Lederach in the context of the armed conflicts that erupted in Central America in the 1980s. Sharing his perspectives on the choice of this terminology in Central America, Lederach wrote: “Resolution carried with it a danger of co-optation, an attempt to get rid of conflict when people were raising important and legitimate issues. It was not clear that resolution left room for advocacy.”18 Since the reality of injustice and institutionalized oppression shapes the contours of several contemporary conflicts, prevention and resolution frameworks are often perceived as attempts to suppress movements for equality and democracy.

The facilitators shared that a fundamental distinction between these various terminologies lies in how they see conflict. While *resolution* language tends to focus on methods for de-escalating conflict, *transformation* involves both de-escalating and engaging in conflict, even escalating it in pursuit of constructive social change. *Transformation* goes beyond a process focused on the resolution of a particular problem to seek its epicenter. The epicenter of conflict is the web of relational patterns, often providing a history of lived episodes, from which new episodes and issues emerge. While the Conflict Transformation paradigm acknowledges the enormous challenges that conflict unleashes, it also sees conflict as presenting opportunities for nonviolent social change. If positive social change is to be accomplished, latent conflict must be brought to the surface and expressed in ways that improve the well-being of the human community. It was with this thinking that leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Desmond Tutu and Aung San Suu Kyi led some of the most powerful, mass-based movements of the 20th century to confront oppressive structures and relationships.

The session concluded with participants sharing their own reflections on the above theories and concepts.
Even as the Workshop focused on trust- and relationship-centered processes, there was recognition of the fact that a conflict transformation lens falls short of providing a holistic approach to the immediate and medium-term prevention of large-scale violence – mass atrocity crimes and genocide in particular. This is where the frameworks of conflict prevention and human rights assume significance.

Seeking to highlight the vital role of conflict prevention and human rights in building sustainable peace and strengthening democratic institutions, Dr. Taina Jarvinen, a Human Rights Consultant currently based in New Delhi, conducted a workshop on the two concepts and their relationship with broader processes of peacebuilding.

The framework of conflict prevention argues that the “problems between people and nations should be addressed following the basic principle that violence only makes things worse”. It urges the peacebuilding community and stakeholders alike to see violence as the enemy. This approach, by defining violence in the broadest sense possible to include structural and cultural violence, provides a context for the peacebuilding community to address issues of historical wrongs and social injustice.

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Jarvinen opened the workshop with a reference to the symbiotic relationship between human rights and conflict prevention. Noting that many post-conflict regions relapse into violence within a few years of the signature of the peace accord, she pointed to the importance of identifying the key factors that precipitate this violence. The absence of a culture of respect for human rights was identified as a central reason for the high failure rate of peace accords as well as for fresh bouts of social violence. On the ground, concepts such as “pre-conflict” and “post-conflict” are extremely fluid and the end of one conflict often becomes a prelude to the next. Conflict prevention therefore should entail looking at how a peace accord can satisfy the needs of all the stakeholders, particularly those concerning demands for justice and for the promotion and protection of human rights.

Looking at conflict prevention from the perspective of international actors, Jarvinen said that very little work is actually happening on the ground, even though the early warning signs are there for all to see. In most regions of conflict, international responses tend to be reactive rather than proactive and are initiated only once the conflict has become violent. As a result, containment rather than actual prevention becomes the goal. However, real conflict prevention requires looking at the root causes. She pointed to the lack of political will as a key reason for the dismal record of prevention efforts.
Also, the reality of today’s conflicts is such that all parties commit human rights abuses, sometimes as a planned strategy. As a result, at the time of negotiations, no one wants to address the issue of human rights because of the fear of being held responsible for the violence. Having said this however, Jarvinen noted that since the mid-1990s (post-Rwanda and post-Bosnia), there is a far greater international consensus that human rights violations cannot be ignored. These must be addressed, even if many years later. The example of the genocide in Cambodia is pertinent here. The country recently set up a war crimes tribunal for atrocities that were committed in the 1970s. It is a reminder of the fact that for victims to transcend violence and put the past behind them, there has to be some righting of the wrong. Human rights are central to human dignity and peace accords that do not recognize this are doomed to fail. It is however important to remember that the human rights of all groups affected by the conflict should be addressed, and not just those of the “victorious” community. The rights of the insurgent, of the defeated community, of the perpetrators of violence, must also be addressed.

In this context, the following steps were identified as central to human rights work:

- An acknowledgment from the state or the perpetrator that the abuse did happen. The suffering of the victims needs to be publicly acknowledged by the perpetrator and/ or the state.
- An act of genuine regret, by both the state and society at large.
- Reparation: a return to the victims’ previous economic status or more. The state bears the primary burden for this.
- Justice: this could take different forms. While legal justice (sometimes also referred to as retributive justice) is the most common practice, new methods and mechanisms have been conceptualized to deliver some degree of justice without enhancing inter-group acrimony. These include concepts such as restorative justice and transitional justice.

Jarvinen shared that for a very long time, peacebuilding language was different from human rights language and frameworks. In the past, peacebuilding frameworks focused on the need for social cohesion, healing and reconciliation. While they acknowledged the necessity of some form of justice, there was a preference for concepts such as restorative justice (rather than retributive justice) which did not cause further acrimony between conflict parties, and yet sought to right the wrongs of the past. Investigations, prosecutions and punishment were seen as having the potential to block negotiations and reignite conflict.
On the other hand, human rights frameworks highlight individual accountability as a prerequisite for sustainable peace and reconciliation, and impunity for past crimes only serves to undermine respect for the rule of law. According to this approach, reconciliation will be unsustainable if human rights are not addressed. Also, in the long run, the strength of democratic institutions depends upon the existence of a culture where human rights are respected and the rule of law prevails.

However, in recent years, practitioners have emphatically sought to emphasize that peace and human rights are two sides of the same coin. Rejecting perceived contradictions, a growing number of scholars and practitioners see the two as complementary concepts. Yet, the sad reality, as Jarvinen noted, is that at the international level, the actual thinking and practice is still very traditional, influenced by the Realist school of thought.

As a result, international actors continue to emphasize the goals of stability and order rather than a just peace. The addressing of human rights abuses is seen as jeopardizing this stability. Jarvinen made a reference to Afghanistan where such a process is unfolding. The goal of international actors today (nine years after Operation Enduring Freedom) is to find a stability solution even though, in 2001, human rights violations (particularly against women), were cited as one of the reasons for the intervention. This however is not in discussion today and instead the focus has shifted to negotiations with the Taliban. Peace is seen as being equal to stability and human rights are perceived as pursuing an opposing objective. Offering a different perspective, Ahmad Shikib Dost, a media and peace practitioner from Afghanistan, said that it is important to bear in mind the timeframe for such activities. For Afghanistan, stability is a more pressing need. However, once the government is stable, human rights will be addressed. In fact, it often takes several years to set up mechanisms to address human rights abuses.

Jarvinen also made a reference to the peace process in Aceh where the separatist group GAM as well as the Indonesian security forces were silent on the issue of human rights when they came to the negotiation table. While the peace

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20 Aceh is a province of Indonesia. For almost 30 years, it tried to establish an independent identity with the separatist group GAM leading the movement for an independent Aceh. Several peace processes were initiated in the 1990s, but each time the conflict relapsed into violence. The 2004 tsunami hit created a window of opportunity for reconciliation. Since the devastation was so huge, the government of Indonesia was compelled to allow international assistance. As a result of this aid, the international community, particularly the European Union, got interested in the conflict and expressed a desire to facilitate peace talks. Martti Ahtisaari, the former President of Finland, was the mediator and he pushed for an agreement between the two parties. GAM gave up its demand for secession, its members received amnesty, and now it has metamorphosed into a political party.
accord, which was signed in 2005, had provisions for the establishment of a Human Rights Court and a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) for Aceh, these were not implemented. The negotiations were carried out with little consultation, civil society participation was limited, and women’s perspectives were not included in the talks. As a result, there was an absence of voices pushing for human rights.

While GAM itself had emphasized human rights abuses by Indonesian security forces, when its leaders sat at the negotiation table, they were silent on this issue. Rather, the focus was on political power-sharing. People were told to set aside the past and work towards building a new future together. Yet, the demand for some kind of addressing of past abuses continues. Responding to requests from victims, a few grassroots groups have organized truth-telling sessions at the local level. The feeling that the perpetrators of violence have been rewarded for their crimes is widespread amongst the local population of Aceh. This forces one to reconsider labeling the Aceh story a “success” in peacebuilding terminology. “The accord was non-inclusive for civil society and that was a downside”, said Jarvinen.

In many regions of conflict, there is a tendency to grant amnesty to those who have been responsible for human rights violations. While the International Criminal Court rejects amnesty, it has become a common practice in many “post-conflict” societies. Afghanistan is the most recent example where the Parliament signed an amnesty agreement with former combatants.

Foregrounding the centrality of human rights in a peace process, Jarvinen pointed to the changing nature of violent conflict, which is that, today abuses are systematically carried out against civilians by all the conflict parties. Such abuses include torture, sexual assault, rape, disappearances, mass displacement, starvation, and forced recruitment of child soldiers. These abuses are no longer a side effect of the conflict, but rather a “weapon” that all conflict parties have used. In fact, Jarvinen noted that in the absence of some form of justice for human rights abuses, the legacy of violence persists and feeds into the outbreak of the next conflict.

Looking at the different ways in which human rights abuses could be addressed, Jarvinen introduced transitional justice as a framework that is often seen as a bridge between the peacebuilding and human rights approaches. Transitional justice comprises judicial and non-judicial mechanisms and processes that address past abuses in a society’s transition from conflict or repressive rule. It takes various forms: national and international criminal prosecutions, truth-
telling, reconciliation commissions, reparation programs, parliamentary and other inquiries, vetting processes, lustration, institutional reforms, and amnesties. While a mechanism such as truth-telling may not facilitate prosecution for abuses, it often generates a cathartic process through which the stories of victims are heard and acknowledged. It also opens up possibilities for victims to come together and form self-help groups.
The panel discussion *Peacebuilding: Different Frames* delved into the theories and approaches that have informed peacebuilding practice. The influence of three frameworks – **gender studies, nonviolence, and coexistence** – on contemporary peacebuilding were highlighted.

With reference to the first, it is now widely recognized that armed conflict affects men and women differently. While both men and women suffer during conflict, their experiences are different. During the mass atrocities in Rwanda and in the former Yugoslavia (in the 1990s), it was observed that while young men ‘disappeared’ or were killed, young women were sexually assaulted in order to shame the community and impregnated so that the “purity” of ethnic groups was diluted. Many more such perverted reasons have been given by combatants who have used sexual assault as a weapon of conflict in different regions across the world. For sustainable peace and democracy, it is therefore crucial that the different needs and roles of women and men are addressed.

Peacebuilding “advocates a multi-track and multi-level methodology with the assumption that sustainable peace requires the participation of diverse civil society actors, particularly women’s groups, who have a proven track record of crossing enemy lines and facilitating peaceful coexistence between antagonistic communities and nations”.²¹ Perhaps one of the most significant perspectives relates to the way women’s groups define *peace*. Making a

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distinction between negative and positive peace, they associate the former with the absence of overt, violent conflict where other forms of violence such as cultural (violence against women) and structural (poverty, institutionalized discrimination), continue long after the guns have gone silent. Donna Pankhurst in *Mainstreaming Gender: A Framework for Action* introduces the notion of positive peace as one that includes social justice, *gender equity*, economic equality and ecological balance, with an emphasis on equitable human and institutional relationships.  

In this context, Dr. Sumona DasGupta, a research consultant and political scientist based in New Delhi, looked at the different ways in which violent conflict affects women and men and the specific roles that women and men play in conflict and peace processes. She opened her presentation with the following observations on gender, conflict and peace.

First, she pointed to a common tendency among peacebuilding organizations to define a project as gender-sensitive if a certain number of women were the beneficiaries or had participated in it. While the inclusion of women is necessary for a project to be gender-sensitive, it is not a sufficient condition. The project must look at both women and men, and their different experiences of, and perspectives on, conflict. Gender is a cultural notion pertaining to the expectations that society has about masculinity and femininity. So bringing in women can be a part of a gender perspective, but it does not constitute a gender perspective.

Second, DasGupta noted that there is a need to deconstruct the oft-used term *gender mainstreaming*. “The intent and purpose of a gender mainstreaming exercise often gets lost because in our efforts to mainstream, we end up isolating gender. So we talk about food security, water security, livelihoods, and then we come to gender security.” Yet, there is no aspect of life in which gender does not enter. It is not one “other” item which is there in a large menu; rather it is interwoven with other concepts, such as food security, water security, and livelihoods. It is therefore important that peacebuilders be mindful of the notion of “integration of gender” in issues of peace, security, livelihoods etc.

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It is also crucial to understand that men and women are affected by the conflict in different ways, and this difference should be factored into a peacebuilding initiative. In the context of South Asia, patriarchy influences gender relations, which in turn are interwoven with other markers of identity such as class, caste and religion. Together, these create exclusion in a certain context, and are accentuated during periods of conflict. DasGupta therefore cautioned that peacebuilders must be mindful of these multiple identities and not see women as a monolithic block. She cited two examples to elaborate on this point. One, in the context of the Gujarat carnage in 2002, men and women were affected differently. Muslim women were targeted not simply because of their gender identity, but also because of their religious identity. Two, in the context of Nepal, much has been said about the high representation of women in the Constituent Assembly (which is more than any other legislature of South Asia). However, DasGupta shared that at a recent conference on women and conflict in Nepal, a Dalit women posed the following question to the organizers, “Can you give me one good reason why I should vote for an upper caste Hindu woman when I have faced oppression all my life at the hands of her community? I would much rather vote for a Dalit man.” This sentiment is an indication to peacebuilders that gender is not a monolithic construct, and that a gender analysis must be integral to any project that talks about women and peacebuilding.

DasGupta flagged the following questions as benchmarks that peacebuilders could use when conducting a gender analysis of peacebuilding work:

- How does conflict impact individual men and women? Conflict brings about certain changes, which influence men and women differently. It affects the livelihoods of men and women in different ways. Women may be forced to take up jobs in an area that was conventionally a man’s domain.

- How do gender relations change as a result of the conflict? Gender relations involve a number of roles. The division of labor inside and outside the house might change as a result of the conflict. However, even as gender roles change (because of the abnormal situation created by the conflict), society may not allow gender identities to change because the assumption is that men and women will go back to their traditional roles once the conflict has ended. It is also useful to look at how gendered power structures (police, judiciary, schools, college etc.) change as a result of the conflict. These are institutions which control resources and in which patriarchy is invariably embedded. Further, does gender ideology – which consists of values and belief systems – change as a result of the conflict? In fact, DasGupta noted
that there is often a sense of “ambivalent empowerment” in regions experiencing conflict because while the change in gender roles gives women a sense of empowerment, this is not sustainable because there is an expectation that women will return to performing traditional roles once the conflict has ended.

- Why are we talking about women’s rights? Men are also affected by the conflict and therefore don’t they need a voice? If the priority is to save human lives, why should the focus be only on women?

- The last question pertains to how women and men define security. Many women’s groups in regions of conflict define security in terms of “freedom from want” and “freedom from fear”. This question can be useful in terms of flagging those issues that are of concern to women and men.

The following presentation by Prof. Vinay Lal, Associate Professor, Department of History, University of California, Los Angeles, looked at how the field of nonviolence has informed peacebuilding practice, exploring the contributions of Mohandas Gandhi in particular. Gandhi’s assertion, “be the change you want to see in the world” has became a sort of talisman for peacebuilders around 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, peacebuilders have adopted many of his key ideas and practices. 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.

Lal opened his presentation with the comment that a cursory reading of Gandhi would suggest that he was in fact not a “peacebuilder”. Referring to a book by T.M.P. Mahadevan titled An Approach to the Study of Gandhi, Lal said that the author reduced Gandhi’s thinking to five principles:

1. Satya (truth)
2. Ahimsa (nonviolence)
3. Brahmacharya (celibacy as an approach to God)
4. Tapasya (sacrifice)
5. Sadhna (self-realization)

The word *peace* did not feature here. According to Lal, there is a reason why Gandhi did not emphasize *peace*. For him, peace flowed from acts of nonviolence. So an emphasis on nonviolence would organically result in peace. However, if the focus was on peace, this did not imply that nonviolence would be used as a methodology. As the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan have shown, all forms of violence have been used in order to advance the goal of “peace”. Therefore, cautioning against its use, Lal shared two quotes.

“I just want you to know that when we talk about war, we are talking about peace.”

George W. Bush

“They make a solitude, they make a desert, and call it peace. They create a waste-land and call it peace.”

Roman historian, Tacitus
(describing the Romans’ attempt to expand their empire through war, in the early part of the 1st Christian millennium)

Lal drew attention to a letter that Gandhi wrote to the British Viceroy in India (in 1930) as a good example of peacebuilding in practice (Annexure 1).23 Equally relevant for a peace practitioner was the manner in which Gandhi chose to deliver the letter. Written in March 1930, the letter was penned after a long period of reflection. Gandhi wanted to signal his dissent by undertaking a march to the sea to break the widely-hated salt law. He promoted the idea that if there is a particular law, which is offensive to an individual’s conscience, then he/she is bound to break that law. While Gandhi recognized the sovereignty of the law in principle, he believed that if certain laws violated the spirit of the law, these must be resisted. The salt tax was one such law. The letter also discussed the salaries of the ICS officials and those of the average Indian. Gandhi informed the Viceroy that his average salary is 5000 times the average salary of the Indian.

For peacebuilders, perhaps more significant than the content of the letter was *how* Gandhi chose to deliver it. Indicating a message of peace to the Viceroy,

23 See Annexure 1 (Page 82) for the full text of the letter.
he used the services of a young British friend, Reginald Reynolds, a Quaker, to deliver the letter. Quakers represent a strand of Christianity, which emphasizes nonviolence, pacifism and reflection, and disavows any interest in political power. Lord Irwin was a devout Christian, but belonged to a school of thought which believed that Christianity should be harnessed to the exercise of political power – an entirely different perspective on the religion vis-à-vis the Quakers.

The purpose of sending the letter through a British Quaker was to suggest to Irwin that, “my animosity is not with you, it is not with the British, it is with the institutions that you represent...It is with the nature of colonial rule that you preside over.” Lal noted that this was an extraordinary demonstration of what it means to build on the notion of human collegiality and to have a certain sense of equanimity vis-à-vis one’s opponent. While Gandhi had every reason to be angry with the British, he used a dialogical method of engagement, often disarming the British and leaving them at a loss as to how to respond to his gestures.

The place of **coexistence** in a democracy was another key focus of the discussion. In the multicultural societies of South Asia, there exist myriad diversities – of ideology, belief systems, faith, ethnicity, socio-cultural values and nationality, among others. Often, these differences are manifested in conflicts among communities and nations. However, in spite of the manifest differences, there are significant commonalities as well as examples of celebrating this diversity. As Andrew Masondo, a leader of the African National Congress, South Africa, puts it, “understand the differences, act on the commonalities”. While it is important to identity commonalities, it is perhaps even more crucial to act on these commonalities to build sustainable peace and democracy. South Asia, with its varied cultures and traditions and socio-political orientations is perhaps a good case study to understand how differences have been perceived in society, how a society continues to coexist along with its differences, and what can be done to address the violent manifestations of the implicit and explicit tensions and strains.

Coexistence has been defined in numerous ways:

- To exist together (in time or place) and to exist in mutual tolerance;
- To learn to recognize and live with difference;

24 Charles Hauss, “Focusing on Commonalities”, *Beyond Intractability (website)*

http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/commonalities/
• To have a relationship between persons or groups in which none of the parties is trying to destroy the other;

• To interact with a commitment to tolerance, mutual respect, and the agreement to settle conflicts without recourse to violence.

At the core of coexistence is the awareness that while individuals and groups differ in numerous ways, they embrace diversity for its positive potential and recognize that interdependence is in the interest of all. Central to this is the process of building mutual trust, respect and strategic relationships across the lines of conflict.

Looking at the relationship between diversity, difference and coexistence, Prof. Gurpreet Mahajan, Professor, Center for Political Studies, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, addressed a central question of the Peacebuilding Workshop, “why are democratic societies confronted with internal violent conflicts”? She highlighted two interrelated concepts:

• One reason for the emergence of internal conflicts is the deepening of democracy. While on the one hand, democracy connotes dialogue and participation, it also implies a continuous demand from citizens to be treated as equals. This causes an upheaval in the patterns and structures of relationships. Therefore, as democracy deepens, there is a growing desire among individuals and communities to be treated as equals and to see their own perspectives being included in policymaking. It is not just a desire to cast the same vote, but, also for instance, a desire for a better livelihood, to drink from the same well and walk on the same road as members of other communities. It also includes the aspiration to see one’s own children have access to a better education as well as to a language that is their mother tongue (and not somebody else’s). This deepening of democracy creates a situation where historically marginalized groups become uncomfortable with disadvantage and discrimination. As they begin to voice their demands, their struggle is met with resistance by the state as well as by groups that are privileged. The resistance from the state intensifies as struggles become organized and seek to change the modes of distribution. If the struggle is protracted, violence often becomes a methodology of protest (and is also used to quell such protest).
Another dimension is added when these claims of adjustment and redistribution become layered with the language of culture and culture-related identities. They are then seen as a threat to the survival of the nation state and a far deeper resistance is built up in the name of protecting national unity and territorial integrity.

Saying that the above two processes have created new challenges for democracies (particularly those that have recently transitioned out of armed conflict), Mahajan looked at how these conflicts could be addressed to promote coexistence:

- The first step is to promote initiatives that seek to increase trust and build cross-community relationships. These include efforts to initiate and sustain dialogue and develop sentiments of empathy, reciprocity and trust between members of different groups. The logic is that ignorance and indifference increase misperceptions and prejudices about the other group, and thereby exacerbate conflict. Hence, a more holistic understanding of the other group’s needs, interests and fears is required. However, while such initiatives play a positive role, they cannot succeed beyond a limit. They can create an environment for the de-escalation of tensions and the minimization of misunderstandings. But this is not a sufficient condition for coexistence. It needs to be supplemented by a second dimension.

- The second dimension involves some reconsideration on the part of the state. It points to the need for state action since the goal for one or more of the groups is a change in existing laws and policies, for instance, the demand for one’s mother tongue to be recognized as a second language, or the aspiration that one’s children have access to good schools. The state is implicated here and needs to be engaged with. It must open itself to the possibility that these demands have to be considered, even the most extreme claims of political autonomy and secession. The state should engage with these issues with a sensibility that providing degrees of political autonomy does not weaken its sovereignty. “It has to recognize that it is far better to have people who feel a sense of belonging to the state than to have people who are alienated from it,” said Mahajan.

The foci of the next presentation by Prof. Swaran Singh, Professor for Diplomacy and Disarmament at CIPOD, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, were the specific approaches to peacebuilding practice, which have been employed over the last two decades. Singh referred to a recent discussion on peacebuilding (in July 2010) at the United Nations Security Council, where it was noted that the tool of
peacebuilding should be used to strengthen democracy and four areas were flagged as requiring greater attention. These were:

- Leadership
- Strategy
- Clarity in terms of roles and responsibilities
- Improving civilian contributions and capacity-building

Underscoring the importance of leadership and the roles of various actors in a conflict, Singh introduced the first approach to peacebuilding, drawing on scholar-practitioner John Paul Lederach’s *Actors and Approaches to Peacebuilding* model. Envisioning peacebuilding as a *process*, which incorporates different functions, roles and strategies employed by different people at different stages of conflict progression, Lederach explains this in the form of a three-tier pyramid. The pinnacle represents the top-level leadership (policymakers, politicians, military, diplomats) and the base represents grassroots workers (indigenous NGOs, psychologists working with trauma victims etc.). The grassroots’ leadership represents the voices of the people who are directly affected by the conflict and for whom issues of livelihood are crucial. This level comprises people who are the real victims of the conflict and for whom access to food and shelter are the focus. Indulging in an analysis of the conflict is a luxury for them. The middle-range leadership comprises individuals representing NGOs, educational institutions, humanitarian and relief organizations, the academia and the media.

Individuals/groups at each level of this pyramid use different and unique methodologies to contribute to the process of building peace. For example, at the middle-level, peacebuilding comprises problem-solving workshops, conflict resolution training, the establishment of peace commissions, while high profile peace missions led by diplomats and political leaders, and negotiations between government interlocutors characterize top-level peacebuilding.

The middle-level leadership is connected to both the grassroots and the top-level leadership. Leadership at this level is not necessarily based on political

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or military power and this gives intermediaries greater flexibility and room to maneuver. Lederach defines the middle-range leaders as “persons who function in leadership positions within a setting of protracted conflict, but whose position is defined in ways not necessarily connected to, or controlled by, the authority structures of the government or opposition movements.”

The positioning of these leaders is such that they are likely to be known by the top-level leadership as well as have the respect and support of the constituency that the top-level leaders claim to represent.

Flagging the importance of looking at peacebuilding as a national activity where international actors play a supporting role, Singh introduced the second approach to peacebuilding, which is based on the timeframe and nature of activities. In this context, he pointed to the reconstructive and transformative approaches. Much of the United Nations peacebuilding work is reconstructive in nature, involving the rebuilding of infrastructure such as telecommunications, roads, buildings etc. This approach looks to address what Johan Galtung calls the negative aspect of peace where the focus is on addressing the immediate needs such as ceasefire agreements and other initiatives to end violence and save human lives. The transformative approach

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26 Ibid, p.41.

looks at the underlying, invisible causes of violence, which are often interwoven with social and political relationships between stakeholders. A central element of this approach is the transformation of antagonistic identities and relationships. This approach is less visible because it is difficult to set benchmarks for success. For instance, while relationship-building between perceived enemies is central to a peacebuilding process, it is difficult to measure the success of such an exercise, particularly since such a process could take years.

Peacebuilding approaches can also be categorized based on those that are peace-based and those that foreground justice. Singh explained that a peace-based approach privileges the sanctity of life, and therefore a leader or a peacebuilder might make some compromises and accommodation in order to meet the larger goal of ending or preventing visible violence. In such a situation, human rights might be seen as standing in the way of reconciliation. A justice-based approach however would want to see some kind of reparation, restitution, even retribution, as a prerequisite for sustainable peace. This is a more long-term approach to peacebuilding because it seeks to address the root causes of conflict and demands social justice for the marginalized.

Introducing the political democracy approach, Singh said that this framework is particularly relevant for the South Asian region. It emphasizes governance and seeks democratic and popular validation for a peace agreement. The idea is to establish that there is popular support for the peace accord and for the unfolding peace process henceforth. So in this context, a democracy approach is used to legitimize and further the activities undertaken under the umbrella of peacebuilding. Singh underscored the need for patience here because the dividends of such an approach become visible after a long period of time.

The “integrated/whole-of-government” approach, which is used by the United Nations and other international bodies, seeks to very gradually blend military and civilian strategies. Singh pointed out that the emergence of international and national non-governmental organizations in regions of conflict is a recent post-Cold War phenomenon, and that historically, peacebuilding was a political-military exercise. In fact, there continues to be a mindset that sees conflict zones as places in which the military participates and operates. Over the last two decades however, the situation has changed drastically and a growing number of INGOs, NGOs, research institutes and civil society groups are active participants of the peacebuilding process. In light of this change, the “integrated/whole of government” approach focuses on coordination and cooperation
between these diverse actors, drawing on the strengths of civilian and military approaches.

The contributions of feminist perspectives and women’s grassroots groups to peacebuilding approaches were also highlighted. In many regions of conflict, practitioners and researchers have noted that women understand peace and conflict differently. Emphasizing the continuum of violence from the private to the public sphere, women’s groups have advocated a broadening of the definitions of peace and security to include issues of individual dignity, human rights, social justice, gender equity, water security, food security, humane governance and environmental sustainability – concerns that were seen earlier as “soft issues”. Further, they have highlighted the central role of spiritual and psychosocial approaches in peacebuilding work. Singh concluded with the remark that feminist scholars and women’s grassroots’ groups have in fact transformed the discourse on peacebuilding byforegrounding positive peace and human security in contexts of violent conflict.

Speaking on the **theories of peacebuilding**, Dr. S. P. Udayakumar, Director, Transcend South Asia, Nagercoil, Tamil Nadu, opened his presentation with a reference to the military-industrial-academic complex that has hijacked the discourse on international peace and security. This was cited as one of the reasons for the failure of the peacebuilding community to build sustainable peace and security in so many regions of the world. One way to address this challenge is to bring the focus back to our families and schools, and devote resources for the promotion of education for peace. The idea is to sow the seeds for building a culture of peace for our children and grandchildren’s generation, said Udayakumar. Another key proposal was that even as peacebuilders continue to work towards preventing violence in all its forms, like Mohandas Gandhi and so many others that have followed him, they must wage conflict against institutions of repression and exclusion. In fact, constructive social change requires that citizens use nonviolent strategies to express their discontent with, and opposition to, discriminatory policies and laws.

Udayakumar drew attention to the “mainstream narrative” which tends to influence how big powers conduct international relations. There is a division of good and evil and the international arena is seen as consisting of dangerous
and unruly classes and countries. Such an approach sees no good in others and no evil in oneself. The remedy therefore is military, economic, cultural and political domination so that one can promote one’s own interests. The USA-Iraq conflict is an example of this narrative. Describing the “alternative narrative”, Udayakumar said that such a worldview sees an endless agenda of conflicts, which must be transformed, rather than resolved. There is no end-state where all conflicts are solved. There is also an endless agenda of peacebuilding, with a view that peace has to be built constantly. Focusing on positive peace, this narrative foregrounds equity, justice, cooperation and harmony.

In this context, Udayakumar identified five steps that a peacebuilder should engage in for the promotion of positive peace:

- Assess the problem
- Construct a goal
- Map a path from the present state to the end-state
- Address the obstacles
- Divide the path into small steps and start working
Discussion

Workshop participant Kiri Atri, a Graduate Student of International Relations at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, posed a question with reference to DasGupta’s comment that while gender roles might change as a result of conflict and while women might experience a sense of empowerment, gender identities remain untouched because there is a societal expectation that men and women will go back to their traditional roles once the conflict has ended. He wondered if the time period of a conflict – for instance Afghanistan where people have lived with violence for 30 years – could influence gender identities in a way that processes of empowerment are sustained even after the conflict has ended. DasGupta put forth the view that the long duration of a conflict would certainly have a bearing on gender identities. It would be possible to see how in such a situation the empowerment of women may not be ambivalent, but rather quite deep-rooted. The long duration of the conflict in Afghanistan could transform gender identities because what was initially seen as abnormal would, with time, come to be accepted as normal. Women who have taken on new roles may hesitate to go back to their traditional positions. In this context, DasGupta said that gender identities could change with gender roles.

Ipshita Ghosh, a Masters’ student (English) at the University of Delhi, posed the question, “Is there something common that women bring to processes of conflict transformation?” Cautioning against essentializing the roles and
perspectives of women, DasGupta said that the experiences of men and women, living in a zone of conflict, are quite different. Hence, the perspectives of both must be taken into consideration. While one could identify some commonalities – in terms of how women define peace and security – evidence from different regions of conflict suggests that generalizations are not possible.

Several questions were posed to Singh and Udayakumar about the tendency of peacebuilders to focus on top-down approaches. While Udayakumar underscored the importance of using one’s own cultural heritage and indigenous resources to build peace, Singh, using the example of Afghanistan, said that the pressure to do something to end the violence and loss of lives, compels peacebuilders to focus on “urgency” rather than “efficiency”. As a result, there is a tendency to focus on peace agreements between the leaders of the various groups that have used violence. Yet, if peace is to be sustainable and just, the peacebuilding community must draw on the ideas and concerns of those who live at the grassroots and whose lives are most intimately affected by the conflict.

Divyank Chaudhary, a student at the Nelson Mandela Center for Peace and Conflict Resolution, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, asked Mahajan the following question: How do we address conflict situations where a sense of discrimination on the part of the minority community is a key factor? Mahajan was of the view that action must be taken at all levels – by the state, the community and the individual. While civil society groups can play a positive role by facilitating dialogue between minority and majority communities, the primary responsibility in addressing this sense of insecurity among minority groups rests with the state. For example, it was noted that localities where minority communities live should have the same facilities and infrastructure (for example, an atm machine, post office, restaurant home delivery services et al) that neighborhoods with a predominantly majority community have. Mahajan added that education is also an important tool in this regard. She cited the example of the Right to Education Act in India, which includes provisions for minority education. There is a need to build curriculum that would take into account the future rights of the child as well as the interests of minority communities.

Commenting on the question about minority identity, Lal drew attention to the very notion and definition of a minority and majority. Urging reflection on the two concepts, Lal said that the idea of a minority/majority identity is a modern kind of political arithmetic. Historically, people who would factually
be described as a minority have not thought of themselves as such. Citing the examples of the Jews in India, Lal said that there is no record of any act of anti-Semitism in India. Similarly, he wondered if the Parsis – whose contributions to the city of Mumbai are well-known – behave like a minority, even though numerically, they are one.

Responding to questions concerning the relationship between conflict and the deepening of democracy, Mahajan said that the moment a society starts taking democracy seriously, it becomes intolerant to the existence of inequality, discrimination and disadvantage. In a sense, democracy disturbs existing equations as hierarchies – tacit or explicit – are questioned, thereby leading to conflict between groups aspiring for greater equality and those seeking to maintain the status quo. Conflict therefore becomes inevitable as processes of democracy deepen.

Saying that political autonomy is essential as a strategy in the processes of deepening democracy, Mahajan said that the state must address and transform the fear that recognition of identity claims and demands for autonomy would weaken it. Struggles for recognition (of identity, of language etc.) must be addressed at some level by the state. It has to be open to the possibility that political autonomy is needed, at least some of the time. Political autonomy has different connotations. A kind of political autonomy that is readily accepted
is the distribution of power on the basis of federalism. However, this is also accompanied by the possibility of secession or separation based on different claims of identity, and therefore must be carefully dealt with.

On the subject of nonviolence, Workshop participants expressed concerns about the effectiveness of using nonviolent methods in contemporary conflicts. They expressed the view that nonviolence does not give groups the kind of attention and visibility that the use of violent methods does. In such a situation, would violence then be seen as the only recourse? Lal believed that nonviolence could be considered as having a certain grammar of dissent by means of *hartal* and fasting. Nonviolence is not static. In this age and time, Lal asserted that Satyagraha needs to be rethought and re-conceptualized to speak to the current contexts within which conflicts take place. He suggested that certain kinds of transnational linkages need to become part of the grammar of Satyagraha. A nonviolent movement today would require international outreach, publicity and visibility. Gandhi was a master in creating that kind of visibility.

Commenting on the oft-repeated assertion that nonviolence would have not worked in Nazi Germany, Lal drew attention to the nonviolent Rosenstrasse protest (in Berlin in 1943), which was the only successful resistance to Nazi rule. Many years later, a Nazi commandant who survived the war was asked why he did not take action against the Rosenstrasse protestors. He said that the German army did not know how to respond to nonviolence. If people had come out with guns, the army could have handled that. However, it was at a loss as to how to respond to a group of 300 women who led a huge nonviolent demonstration on a daily basis in the heart of Berlin. Lal noted that nonviolence should be viewed from a complex lens because it takes long years of preparation. If Gandhi had to launch a nonviolent movement in Nazi Germany, he would not have waited till 1939 when the world was on the brink of disaster, but rather, he would have begun work in 1920 when the conflict emerged and began to simmer in Germany.

Responding to questions on Gandhi’s views vis-à-vis women and caste, Lal drew from an article that Madhu Kishwar had written in 1985 on the subject. Her argument was that while politicians say the most radical things but end up doing the opposite, Gandhi stood apart in this regard. Differentiating between orthopraxy and orthodoxy, Lal shared that while Gandhi stated that women were guardians of the home and that men should go out to the public sphere, his actions would suggest otherwise. Similarly, while he is often labeled “casteist”, Gandhi undertook actions (vis-à-vis caste relations) that would be
considered radical, even in the second decade of the 21st century. For instance, he would joyously clean the chamber pots of individuals belonging to a so-called “lower caste”. He would unhesitatingly pick up a broom and clean village roads and sweeper colonies – tasks that so-called “higher caste” men would not perform. His actions were thus far more radical than his pronouncements. In this context, Lal suggested that any critique of Gandhi should be more nuanced, incorporating not just his pronouncements, but also his actions.
Moving from theory to praxis, the panel discussion *Best Practices in Peacebuilding* conducted a critical inquiry into peacebuilding concepts, bringing to the fore challenges and obstacles faced on the field. Also highlighting “success stories”, it underscored the importance of using positive approaches in peacebuilding practice.

Specifically, the following case studies were discussed:

- The role that women’s groups in Nepal have played in furthering the goals of peace and security;
- The challenges to building stability and democracy in Afghanistan;
- Peacebuilding practices in contexts of communal violence in Uttar Pradesh;
- Local perspectives on peace, justice and political participation in Jammu and Kashmir;
- Lessons learned from a peace education experiment in Gujarat.

The session opened with a presentation on the role that women’s groups have played in advancing the **peace process in Nepal** amidst widespread political turmoil. The presenter, Dr. Rita Manchanda, Project Research Director (Human Rights Audits of Partitions as a Method of Conflict Resolution), South Asia Forum for Human Rights, Kathmandu, underscored the importance of using a holistic conception of peace and security. Stating that institutionalized exclusion lies at the root of the conflict, she called for a broader conception of peace and security built on the pillars of *proportionality, inclusion and participatory governance.*
Walking the participants through a brief history of the conflict, Manchanda said that Nepal is a deeply divided society. The fault-lines are in terms of exclusion on the basis of caste, class, region and ethnicity, and a majority of the indigenous communities have been historically excluded from the benefits of development. All of these fault-lines have converged to create a situation of what Nepali political scientist Mahendra Lawati calls “institutionalized exclusion”. It is estimated that between 47% and 57% of the population has been excluded from the benefits of governance and development.

Following the massacre of King Birendra and members of the royal family in June 2001, King Gyanendra came to power and introduced an authoritarian system of governance. This destabilized the polity of Nepal, which had multiparty democracy and the monarchy on the one side and the Maoists on the other. Because of the autocratic monarchy, there was a shift in the balance of power and a shift in India’s position, which till then had supported the monarchy. Articulating their discontent with the rule of the monarchy, Nepali civil society groups came together to launch a Jan Andolan, an urban, unarmed people’s protest. In the rural areas, it was supported by the Maoists. As a result, a unique consensus emerged which buoyed the peace process, and which led to the toppling of the monarchy and an end to the ten-year “peoples’ war”. Nepal became a secular republic and the peace process was officially initiated with the signature of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2006 and the
historic Constituent Assembly elections. The closure of the war was facilitated by the intervention of left parties in India as well as with support from India as a whole.

During this consensual period (2006 – 2008), there was a remarkable writing of the interim constitution, which was inclusive, gender-sensitive and provided for proportional representation. Unfortunately, the consensus which buoyed the structure of the institutions that flowed from the peace process now lies fractured. It has been fractured largely because, in 2008, in the Constituent Assembly elections, the Maoists won in a major way. It came as a surprise to all the stakeholders and made India rethink its politics. This destabilized the situation. It resulted in a polarization between the forces that represent the status quo and those that represent change. It is roughly divided with the Maoists on one side and the seven political parties on the other side (supported by India). In the midst of this turmoil, the Nepal army has re-emerged as a potent force and further complicated the power equation.

In light of the current imbroglio, there is a need to examine why the peace process has stalled. Referring to the fact that most peace accords falter at the five-year mark, Manchanda said that there is a real chance of the peace process – which was initiated in 2006 – coming apart in 2011.

Over the last two years, many of the very creative technical institutions that flowed from the peace process have encountered obstacles. Elections have taken place, the constitution has been rewritten, there is provision for a truth and reconciliation commission, and the Constituent Assembly has a remarkable 33% representation for women (74 of the 197 women are Maoists). These women have not only tried to inscribe gender rights into the constitution, but have also lobbied for inclusion and proportional representation. In fact, a lot of the changing of the electoral law which resulted in the system of proportional representation came about because women’s groups actively lobbied for it. They demanded 33% representation not only for women, but also for Dalit and indigenous communities and, within these categories, they lobbied for 33% reservation for women. They have also managed to push forward some very progressive legislation on abortion rights, citizenship rights, and ancestral property rights. Manchanda shared that Nepali women own less than 1% of all property in Nepal, but now they are entitled to ancestral property. So, such gender-enabling language has been inscribed in the interim constitution.

However, Manchanda noted that nothing was given to the women; they had to fight for all of these laws and policies. Earlier, there were no women in the
drafting committee of the interim constitution. They had to struggle for the inclusion of women, and even took the conflict to the streets of Nepal. They formed an inter-party alliance, which was supported by the United Nations. As a result, there are now four women in the drafting committee.

Subsequently, the election law was also amended to include 33% reservation for women to reach the Assembly. However, Manchanda shared that over the last two years, politics has unfortunately shifted out of the democratic, plural space of the Constituent Assembly and into back room dealing where upper caste men are the key actors. The struggle is between those who hold power and those who wish to spread and share that power. The multi-party consensus has decimated, and Nepal is in turmoil. In spite of 13 rounds of elections, the political parties have been unable to form a government.

In light of these developments, Manchanda made an important observation. The peace industry prescribes the setting up of technical institutions as a way of building sustainable peace. But in the case of Nepal, politics has moved out of these democratic and plural institutions into the backrooms where upper caste men broker power deals. The Constituent Assembly has become a hollow shell and upper caste men are once again at the helm of decision-making. However, Manchanda pointed to the role that women played in preventing a complete disintegration of the peace process. In May 2010, there was a likely chance of a collapse of process as the Constituent Assembly term was to expire. Women legislators cut across party lines, besieged the speaker, and pleaded with their party leaders to effect a deal to rescue the peace process. Because of these efforts (at least in part), a backroom deal was effected and Nepal got a respite for another year.

In conclusion, Manchanda flagged three points:

- When a society shifts to a “post-conflict” context and the actual reality of sharing power is negotiated, the inter-party peace consensus gets vitiated. When this consensus is vitiated, issues of social justice and gender justice are also pushed aside. Sarita Giri, a Nepali politician, in fact said, “When you no longer have a political consensus, when there is inter-party conflict over power-sharing, there is no way that gender rights will be allowed to surface”. In fact, the failure to democratize political party structures also means that while women maybe visible (with a representation of 33%), their presence does not translate into influence, and you have what Bina Agarwal calls “participatory exclusion”. So the exclusion of their perspectives continues, despite the creation of democratic institutions.
• It was also noted that when women call for social justice, for the restructuring of the state, and for a more federal set-up, they not only speak for themselves, but for historically excluded communities as well. When the electoral law was being reformed, it was women who were in the forefront to demand 33% representation not just for themselves but also for the Dalits, the madhesis, and indigenous communities. And within these groups, they demanded 33% representation for women. In fact, it is the women who have often articulated and expressed a sensitivity to issues of social exclusion.

• It is only when individuals and communities walk in the footsteps of the other that there is a possibility to build reconciliation. This has to be built both at the horizontal and vertical levels. The issue of justice has not yet been addressed in Nepal, and there are many grievances, particularly at the local level. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has not facilitated any degree of healing or justice, and is seen mainly as a hype mechanism. The initiative was seen as a top-down process and did not resonate with the people.

• In post-conflict situations, when power becomes a central factor and the issue of state restructuring becomes a question of status quo forces as opposed to new forces that represent change, this is when the consensus on gender rights, social justice, and inclusion gets vitiated. As a result, the great institutions that the peacebuilding conveyor belt sets up actually become silent spectators that watch in despair the unfolding of processes of power-brokering and backroom deals by upper caste men.

Shifting to the context of Afghanistan, Mr. Ahmed Shikib Dost, a Strategic Communications Specialist with USAID in Kabul, echoed the challenges to peacebuilding that the presentation on Nepal had highlighted.

Dost opened his presentation with the following statement, “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 – air strikes during the night, 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.

Speaking on the role of the large media industry in Afghanistan, Dost expressed disappointment at the performance of the myriad television networks, newspapers and radio channels that currently operate in the country. Rather than being an “agenda creator”, they follow the perspectives of international dailies such as the New York Times, Washington Post, and The Guardian. Further, there is a tendency amongst the private news channels to attack the government’s initiatives in a manner that is destructive and does not really lead anywhere. In this context, Dost felt that the media should introspect on the constructive role it can play by setting the peace agenda and by pushing the government and the international community to deliver on the goals of stability, security and sustainable peace.

Referring to the Peace Jirga initiative, Dost said that the exercise involved a coming together of a grand coalition of political leaders and community elders from the different provinces to discuss the how of bringing peace to Afghanistan. This initiative has been followed by the establishment of a Peace Council – a high-level gathering of leaders, which also includes women. Expressing optimism at the initiation of this peace effort, he underscored the importance of the support of the international community without which the peace process would come apart. The security issue is in fact no longer an Afghan problem, but has escalated into a regional problem. Reference was made to Pakistan and its 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.

On the subject of the perceived strength of the Taliban, the speaker shared that the group uses the media and the internet to build a strong presence in the

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28 Dost shared that the Jirga constitutes more than a thousand participants while the Council consists of about seventy members. All decisions taken by the Jirga are implemented by the Council.
public psyche. While it has a dominating presence in the media, on the battlefield, the Taliban is not strong enough to fight the national army or the police, and therefore uses suicide attacks as a weapon of war.

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, “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.”

Mr. S. M. Faizan Ahmed, a Research Coordinator at the Center for Conflict Resolution and Human Security, New Delhi, shared the highlights of a study on communal violence in Uttar Pradesh. At the outset, it was noted that while communalism is harmless if it focuses on building organizations for the welfare and service of the community, more often than not, it takes on a negative character, which is competitive, retaliatory, and ultimately violent in nature.

Following interviews with more than 200 individuals across diverse sectors – politics, media, non-profit, civil rights and public policy – the study on communal violence revealed the following facts:

- The political elite are primarily responsible for instances of communal violence. Most incidents of communal violence take place in the backdrop of elections and political gain, where politicians misuse the religious sentiments of the people, and at times even succeed in trapping religious leaders.

- The administration is also implicated because it is well-equipped to maintain law and order during a situation of communal tension. However, its officers choose not to take the necessary action. The reasons for this vary. While most bureaucrats are under pressure from politicians, there are also many officers who are lethargic and even a party to the violence. Ahmed shared that pressures on administrators to spur or quell violence come in the form of threats of demotions, promotions, transfers and suspensions.

- The media was identified as the third important sector, which could play a decisive role in a situation of communal violence. In the case of Uttar Pradesh, it has a poor track record because it has depicted members of different communities in a way that has often inflamed an already tense situation. Acknowledging this, some sections of the media have attributed the problem to poor training and a lack of sensitivity, responsibility and professionalism among reporters. In fact, Ahmed noted that neither the
media nor the market have missed an opportunity to encourage religiosity in the public sphere, thereby profiting from peoples’ religious sentiments.

- It was also observed that while civil rights groups and NGOs have played an important role in raising awareness about communalism, they have an abysmally low presence in the rural and remote areas. Their absence plays a significant part in the exacerbation of communal tension.

In addition, Ahmed noted that growing intolerance and an unwillingness to accept other ways of life is at the source of the communal problem that Indian society faces today. While approaches such as peace education and prejudice reduction are important in the long-run, he underscored the critical role that law enforcement agencies could play by acting promptly and responsibly. Further, if the administration is able to actively communicate with people from the two communities, there is little possibility of communal anger exploding into violence. This is possible only when the officers in authority are able to convince the people of their own neutrality and impartiality. Ahmed concluded with a plea that communal violence requires far greater research and should be seen from the perspective of the security of the individual and of people.
Exploring the methodologies through which people’s voices could be placed at the center of a peace process, Mr. Yashwant Deshmukh, Founder-Owner, YRD Media, New Delhi, shared the findings of a **peace poll conducted in Jammu and Kashmir** (on both sides of the LoC) in 2008.  

He opened with a comment on why peace processes fail. Peace negotiations are conducted in the backrooms amongst the **stakeholders**. Often, these **stakeholders** are not **the people** for whom conflict is an everyday reality. Nor is there an effort to get the voices of **the people** to the peace table where the **stakeholders’** perspectives influence key decisions. As a result, peace processes fail.

Peace polls can play a role here. They seek to put the voices of the people into the agenda of the peace process. The brainchild of Dr. Colin Irwin, a British social scientist based at the University of Liverpool, peace polls have been used with success in various regions of conflict such as Northern Ireland, Palestine, the Balkans and Jammu and Kashmir.

The Jammu and Kashmir peace poll was conducted by Dr. Irwin in partnership with the Team CVoter Foundation (Delhi) and the Indian magazine *The Week*. While the staff of CVoter carried out the research for this poll on the Indian side of Jammu and Kashmir, owing to visa constraints, the services of Gallup Pakistan were used to conduct the survey in Pakistan Administered Kashmir. This was the first ever exercise to conduct a peace poll on the conflict, using the same questionnaire on both sides of the LoC. In phase one of the project, the researchers went to the people and asked them two questions:

- What questions would you like to be asked in a survey about the conflict?
- What solution would you suggest in response to this question?

With more than 300 questions in hand (and a smaller number of solutions), the researchers started their fieldwork with a sample of 3000 people spread across the length and breadth of Jammu and Kashmir.

Listed below are some of the key findings of the poll:

- The people of Jammu and Kashmir want an end to the corruption that has destroyed governance and development in the state.
- They want to live in harmony with their fellow countrymen and women.
- They want a secular state without borders.

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30 Ibid.
• They want their children from different communities and faiths to go to school together.

• They want an end to all forms of discrimination, and human rights abuses and killings.

• India and Pakistan should stop using Kashmiris for their own selfish interests.

• Kashmiris want to be masters of their own destinies and to this end they want negotiations in good faith.

• Unhappy with both India and Pakistan, Kashmiris want azaadi. However, the definition of azaadi is fuzzy because what the people in the Valley want is not what those in Jammu and Ladakh desire and vice versa. Similarly, the aspirations of the people in Pakistan Administered Kashmir are not only varied internally, but also differ from the concerns of those living on the Indian side.31

Deshmukh shared that the peace process has often excluded the voices of “minority” stakeholders. In fact, the very definition of a minority in Jammu and Kashmir requires attention because it is different from what the conception would be in the rest of India. Those that are seen as a minority community in the other parts of India are in fact a majority in Jammu and Kashmir, and the equations therefore change. While displaced Kashmiri pandits have some visibility as a minority group, there is a complete blackout of the refugees of the 1947 war who crossed into Indian Kashmir from the Pakistani side. They have lived in India for 63 years, but still do not have citizenship rights and remain stateless. While their official documented number is 15,000, Deshmukh said that the actual figure would be much higher. Attention was also drawn to the gujjars, who have since time immemorial wandered from one side of the border to the other, and to the shias of Kargil who think differently from the sunnis of the Valley. Then there are the Buddhists, who are in a minority in terms of their numbers in Jammu and Kashmir, but who live in the largest geographical area of the state. A population of 2% occupies 70% of the territory of Jammu and Kashmir. Saying that the discourse on the conflict fails to capture this complexity and often ends up highlighting the dominant narrative, Deshmukh shared that the purpose of the peace poll was to include these

31 Deshmukh shared that the survey on the Pakistan side of Kashmir was more ambiguous with many respondents selecting the “unsure/maybe” options in the questionnaires. This could perhaps be attributed to the lack of a strong media presence in comparison to the Indian side of Kashmir which has a fairly independent and vociferous print media.
diverse voices and to compel leaders to put the perspectives of the people on the negotiation table.

While there was disagreement on the basic constitutional approach to the question of independence/political autonomy, interestingly, there were many issues over which the different communities were in agreement. These areas of convergence could be used as a starting point for negotiations, rather than opening the dialogue with issues over which there is disagreement. For example, the people of Ladakh have been demanding (for over 50 years) that their language should be included in Schedule 8 of the Indian constitution. People in the Valley and in Jammu do not have a problem with this demand. Similarly, there is an inter-region and inter-community consensus on the need for a common school curriculum. There is also agreement on the opening of a trans-border route (for communication and trade), which goes beyond Srinagar-Muzzaffarabad to extend to the old silk route entry through Ladakh. However, the overwhelming focus on one part of the Valley prevents people as well as leaders from seeing this much broader and more complex picture.

Drawing on his experiences of conducting a similar poll in places such as Aceh and Congo, Deshmukh noted that in any region of conflict, women and children are the most vulnerable. Yet, during peace talks and negotiations, they are the least represented at the table. Deshmukh concluded with the assertion that the inclusion of people’s aspirations and concerns must be the central ingredient in any peace process. Without the inclusion of their perspectives, peace accords are likely to falter and fail.

Concluding on a positive note, the last presentation of the panel discussion looked at a successful peace education experiment in Gujarat. Ms. Gazala Paul, Founder of the Ahmedabad-based NGO Samerth, spoke about the organization’s efforts to reduce prejudice and build trust between Hindu and Muslim children in Gujarat in the aftermath of the 2002 riots (in which a majority of the victims were Muslims).

The processes of communal polarization in Gujarat have adversely affected the mindsets and beliefs of children. At a very young age, they have witnessed gruesome acts of violence, looting, and destruction. The trauma of the 2002 violence still remains with many youngsters who report symptoms of post-traumatic stress syndrome. Added to this is the problem of negative stereotyping, encouraged by a segregated system of education.
It is in this context that Samerth developed its peace education initiative in Gujarat, focusing on the concept of coexistence and using a participatory and learner-centered pedagogy. The curriculum relies largely on role-plays, games, group activities and collaborative learning techniques. Listing some of the methodologies that have been employed to address issues of prejudice and identity, Paul highlighted the practice of celebrating festivals together, encouraging email communication among adolescents of different faiths, and inter-community dialogues.

Currently, the organization works in 46 schools in the Juhapura locality of Ahmedabad, which has a mixed population of Dalits and Muslims. The purpose of the peace education projects initiated in these schools is to sensitize children and adolescents (between 12 and 17 years of age) to the values of coexistence and pluralism, and to also work with teachers who bring their own prejudices to the classroom. For instance, Paul shared that many teachers would articulate their prejudices in the classroom and these were absorbed by the children as “the truth”. Often, students would ask questions about the 2002 violence and some teachers would openly admit that they were happy about what happened (to the minority community).

However, through exposure to the peace education modules, many of these teachers later expressed regret at their prejudiced behavior and began to think more critically about the events of 2002. Perhaps the most significant yardstick of the program’s success is that the teachers consider the peace education modules worthy enough to be willing to take on the additional responsibility that their inclusion in the curriculum entails. They are ready to bear this extra burden (in terms of both time and energy) to change the communal mindset of the children.

Sharing some of Samerth’s accomplishments, Paul flagged the following:

- Friendship among children of different faiths. The program has succeeded in arresting the process of “demonization” of “the other” community – a process that has been underway in several schools across Gujarat.
- The modules have been able to reach out to those displaced by the riots.
- Many myths and prejudices have been removed.
- In program evaluation sessions, children have talked about finding internal peace and have shared that participation in the modules has enhanced their listening skills and improved their performance in studies. They also underscored the importance of using nonviolence as a methodology when in conflict.
Discussion

Addressing questions on the opposition faced by Samerth, Gazala Paul said that initially, political parties were doubtful of the organization’s identity and what it was going to teach. There was a general skepticism and on some occasions stones were pelted at the building housing the Samerth office. However, through its message of compassion and coexistence, the organization gradually made inroads into people’s hearts, and now is respected in the community for the work it does. Many of the staff members are Muslim women who were affected by the 2002 violence. For these women, working for peace with children is part of their own healing process.

Yashwant Deshmukh was asked for his own opinion on a possible solution to the Kashmir conflict. He was of the view that a mature democracy such as India should have the confidence to conduct a plebiscite. Not choosing to do so would suggest that the government has committed wrongs and therefore has something to hide. Further, the only way to achieve a lasting solution is to include the perspectives of the people. This however, as Deshmukh stated, would require the political class in India and Pakistan to adopt a bold and courageous approach.

Asked about the ways in which India can aid in the Nepali peace process, Rita Manchanda stated that India should shoulder some of the blame for precipitating
the current crisis. The Indian government was unwilling to accept that there could be a Maoist-led government, and its policy of keeping China at bay backfired. China is far more active in Nepal than it was earlier and this further complicates the dynamics of the conflict, opined Manchanda. The important lessons from Nepal are the need for inner-party democracy, transcendence of the ego, and alliance-building across the vertical and horizontal divisions of politics and society.

Manchanda also drew attention to the need to anchor reconciliation models and institutions in local traditions and culture. She cited the example of the proposed truth and reconciliation commission – a transitional justice concept – which has accomplished little in the context of advancing the goals of justice and reconciliation in Nepal. Due to the publicity that this approach received in the context of the reconciliation process in South Africa, Guatemala, Rwanda and other regions, there has been a tendency among peacebuilding practitioners to replicate this model in other “post-conflict” countries, ignoring the cultural and religious sensitivities of these regions. The failure of this approach in Nepal could in part be attributed to the fact that it was imported from a context which was culturally and historically different. As a result, the idea of truth-telling as a means to achieving some kind of healing and justice did not resonate for the people of Nepal. In this context, Manchanda pointed to a need to develop indigenous methods to address the demands for justice.
Peacebuilding Skills: Dialogue and Negotiation

Workshop

Sustainable peace and democracy require effective skills in communication, dialogue and negotiation. The art of active listening and the ability to articulate one’s own perspective without increasing the acrimony are a prerequisite for the nonviolent transformation of conflict. Yet, in the din of elections and legal and constitutional reform, the importance of training in dialogue and communication skills is often lost, or at best, diluted. As a result, leaders and their followers continue to engage in conflict communication that exacerbates tension and mistrust, and the need for active listening and a respectful articulation of one’s own perspective is recognized very late in the day.

The field of peacebuilding sees dialogue as a preferred methodology to resolve intractable issues and build mutually-beneficial human and institutional relationships. According to Lederach, “Dialogue is essential to justice and peace on both an interpersonal and a structural level…We typically think of dialogue as direct interaction between people or groups. Conflict transformation shares this view. Many of the skill-based mechanisms that are called upon to reduce violence are rooted in the communicative abilities to exchange ideas, find common definitions to issues, and seek ways forward toward solutions.”

While the content of peace processes is important, there is growing evidence to suggest that if peacebuilders focus on the process and methodology of conflict communication first, the chances of a fruitful and successful negotiation are far greater.

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According to Harold Saunders, Founder, International Institute for Sustained Dialogue, and Former Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, State Department, USA, “Dialogue is a process of genuine interaction through which human beings listen to each other deeply enough to be changed by what they learn. Each makes a serious effort to take others’ concerns into her or his own picture, even when disagreement persists. No participant gives up her or his identity, but each recognizes enough of the other’s valid human claims that he or she will act differently toward the other.”

Jayne Docherty, a peacebuilding practitioner, defines negotiation as involving “two or more people or parties who communicate with one another in order to promote shared understandings, overcome differences, reach compromises, or make mutually beneficial trade-offs.”

Using role plays and active listening exercises, the workshop on Peacebuilding Skills: Dialogue and Negotiation by Dr. S. P. Udayakumar, Director, Transcend South Asia, Nagercoil, Tamil Nadu, helped participants to experience the processes of dialogue and negotiation.

Udayakumar walked the participants through two sets of skills that a peacebuilder must have:

1. Speaking
2. Writing
3. Recording
4. Communicating

The second set of skills are:

1. Listening
2. Reflecting
3. Reproducing
4. Understanding

Flagging the first skill – speaking – Udayakumar said that peacebuilders should have the ability to speak their mind clearly, express their feelings and thoughts

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coherently and concisely, and do this without offending their audience. They must also cultivate the skill to speak with conviction and sincerity. In this context, the importance of “I messages” was underscored, which implies that a peacebuilder should focus on his/her values, thoughts and feelings rather than using his/her energy to blame the other person. This facilitates constructive communication. Effective “I messages” are difficult to practice and require training. As a mediator, a peacebuilder must ask the conflict parties to focus on their own feelings and concerns, what they need and what their interests are. Udayakumar suggested the following statement as an example: “I feel let down”, rather than “you let me down”. The purpose is to communicate one’s message without increasing the acrimony.

The value of silence in a dialogue process was also underscored. In a world that is increasingly competitive and information-dependent, silence has become a less valued resource with people increasingly growing uncomfortable with the idea of maintaining silence. Yet, for a peacebuilder, it is important to cultivate this habit through practices such as meditation and yoga. Journaling and recording were flagged as two important practices that a peacebuilder must sustain. It is helpful for a peacebuilder to record his/her experiences, thoughts and feelings, whether he/she is a mediator or a party to the conflict. As an intermediary, the practice of journaling enables a peacebuilder to keep track of facts and figures as well as to analyze the changing trajectory of a conflict.
Elaborating on the second set of skills, Udayakumar underscored the importance of listening. Central to peacebuilding work, listening is a basic human need (because it allows people to feel heard and understood). For life to have meaning, people need to believe that others respect and understand them. Listening helps to clarify different perspectives (because often people hear the same message differently). Active listening can in fact transform relationships between opponents because it helps them to see each other in new light and provides each side with new information about the motives and actions of the adversary. Irrespective of our own identity (whether we are a mediator or a party to the conflict), listening involves accepting and empathizing with another person’s experience, even if it is very different from our own.

Good listening also involves putting oneself in the other person’s shoes. The cultivation of empathy is central to any listening exercise for a peacebuilder. This requires a peacebuilder to be centered, which means that he/she should refrain from framing his/her own counter responses when the other person is speaking. Non-verbal communication also plays a role in any listening exercise. Through eye contact, paraphrasing, summarizing and our own body language, a peacebuilder can reassure the speaker that he/she is listening with empathy. A person’s body language (posture, gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, and voice tone) in fact has more impact on a conversation than the actual words used. By paying attention to our body language, and to how we respond, we can better communicate respect and sincere interest to the speaker.

Udayakumar shared that in Indian tradition, there are four types of conversations:

- **Vada**: a mutual search for truth
- **Jalpa**: arguing constructively as well as destructively for victory
- **Vitanda**: destructive argument – a verbal duel where the goal is to defeat the other person because one is certain that the other person’s perspective is incorrect.
- **Samvaad**: a dialogue where the conflict parties share their feelings and fears, and are open to listening to the other person’s needs. They are willing to be changed by what they hear. A dialogue therefore requires that we open ourselves to the idea of vulnerability.

Often defined as a “structured conversation”, the purpose of dialogue is not to convince, compromise or persuade, but rather to help human beings understand and respect the values, feelings and needs of others and to more clearly
articulate their own. The first step in a dialogue process is to recognize your conflict partner. The second step involves a mutual truth-seeking exercise. The conflict parties must be mindful of the fact that there is no “one” truth and that the dialogue process might generate multiple truths. They should be open to accepting this reality. Third, the parties must engage in truth-speaking, sharing with honesty and sincerity all the information they have. Dialogue therefore is a mutual search for truth where the conflict parties engage in truth-seeking as well as in truth-speaking. A dialogue process is successful when, as Udayakumar put it, “the exclamatory mark at the end of our statement becomes a question mark”, and we become more open to the idea of changing our perspective based on what our conflict partner has shared.

Turning to the methodology of negotiation, Udayakumar defined it as “a structured process of dialogue that enables parties to discuss options and formulate agreements through face-to-face interaction.” Negotiation may involve two or more parties and is often carried out by a third party facilitator. A conflict is ripe for negotiation only when the parties agree that the status quo must change and that the solution should be a joint one.

Peace workers and civil society in general, can help the parties recognize that there is a “mutually hurting stalemate.” The parties need to be convinced that since the conflict hurts both equally, they should engage in dialogue so that they can move towards an opportunity which is mutually beneficial. The parties must believe that the negotiated agreement would be in their interest and that it would shift power relations towards equality.

A negotiation process is usually spread over three phases: preparation, interaction and closing. The preparatory phase includes analyzing and researching the conflict, mapping the stakeholders and power relations, considering potential options, and making contact and building trust. The crucial step at the planning stage is to consider options and prepare the “Best Alternative To a Negotiated Settlement”35, commonly referred to as BATNA. BATNA is the standard that protects a party from accepting terms that are too unfavorable and from rejecting terms that would be in its interest to accept. To negotiate from a position of strength, it is imperative for a party to improve its BATNA and be aware of the other party’s BATNA.

Once the facilitator has laid the ground for negotiation, transition can be made to the second stage of the process i.e. interaction. The role of the facilitator also includes discussing confidentiality agreements and ground rules, and setting the tone for the negotiation process. The introduction of the negotiation process is followed by “the story-telling phase”. This stage involves the sharing of different perspectives, and active listening. The role of the facilitator here is to create opportunities for the parties to vent their emotions. Once all parties have had the opportunity to share, the next stage of the interaction focuses on “problem-solving” where the parties are encouraged to collectively analyze the conflict and generate options for resolution. This stage should eventually help parties find common ground and generate sustained solutions. Finally, the closing phase includes codifying the agreement and deciding on the timeline and procedures for implementation. The “post-agreement” stage involves monitoring commitments and arrangements.

The second half of the session comprised a series of role-plays on dialogue and negotiation. Listed below are some of the key insights from these role plays:

- Relationships are central in conflict, and therefore building and maintaining them should be a significant goal in any dialogue or negotiation process. The key question should be, “How do we express our anger, needs and feelings without hurting the other person or destroying the relationship?”

Workshop participants Bani Gill and Debak Das participate in a negotiation role play.
• In many relationships, there is already a power play at work. People don’t come with equal power to the dialogue table. This power imbalance could make the dialogue asymmetrical. A peacebuilder must be mindful of this.

• The parties must always ask their opponents what they want. Clarity on each party’s goals, needs and expectations is important.
Religion often finds a mention in discussions on armed conflict and organized violence. However, more often than not, it is seen as part of the problem rather than the solution. While this is partly due to the widespread media coverage that the negative and violent side of religion gets, a large chunk of the credit also goes to individuals and groups that – for reasons of self-interest and power – engage in mass violence in the name of religion, and, worse still, in the name of God.

In any part of the world, a debate on whether religion is a cause of division and conflict or a resource for peace can draw vociferous speakers to defend each side. While people have been subjected to undue misery and have even been slaughtered in the name of religion, there are also examples of situations where religion has been used to build peace and heal individuals traumatized by violence. The so-called “war on terror” and its repercussions on Muslim-Western relations have renewed interest in the positive role that religion can play, particularly with respect to its ability to build cross-cultural understanding and coexistence. Yet, even as this dialogue continues, individuals and groups across the world continue to use religion to generate hate, mistrust and violence.

But what if spirituality replaced religion? What if we shifted our emphasis to the common threads that unify the diverse faith traditions of our world? What would the canvas of peacebuilding look like? What role can religion – or spirituality – play in building peace and healing survivors of violence?

In this context, WISCOMP screened the documentary film *Beyond Our Differences* (directed by Peter Bisanz) in order to provide a context for
engagement on the role that faith or a person's spirituality can play in promoting peace, goodwill and inter-religious harmony. The film highlights the perspectives of religious leaders, politicians, and peacebuilders on the role that their own faith plays in the work that they do. Through these interviews, the film advocates that religion can indeed support and strengthen compassionate action and peacebuilding in regions torn apart by violence. In fact, it goes a step further and showcases past and present religious-inspired movements that have resulted in positive social change.

Two speakers were invited to share their views on the relationship between spirituality and peace, Ms. Swati Chopra, a Delhi-based Writer and Editor, and Ms. Ashima Kaul, WISCOMP’s Kashmir Consultant.

Chopra noted that every religion has a spiritual core. In fact, most religions have their roots in the initiation of a spiritual journey of an individual or a group of individuals. For the field of peacebuilding, the pertinent question is “how do we shift to that core”? How might we realign ourselves towards this spiritual core and away from the external paraphernalia that religion often embodies?

Chopra proposed that the first step in this direction must be undertaken by the individual. By bringing the onus back to the individual, “we take our attention
away from the outside and bring it within”. “It is a way of taking our power back from external circumstances and from what governments and our community might do to us. It is a way of reclaiming our own power for our own lives and for our own reactions.” Elaborating on what “going within oneself” means, Chopra said that such a process requires a watching of the mind – its flow of thoughts, ideas and emotions. This is the first step in the journey that one must undertake to know oneself. The spiritual quest as also the quest for peace must begin with the need to know the answer to the question, “Who am I?”

Moving beyond the mental and physical attributes, this question often brings out interesting discoveries for the individual. While the articulation of “who am I” will vary from person to person, Chopra noted that an inevitable consequence of such a journey is the cultivation of a feeling of coexistence and oneness with the other. As a result, a spiritual journey often results in the dissolution of some of the narrow boundaries and rigid definitions of identity. Instead, there emerges an inclusion of the other into one’s own consciousness in a way that he/she is no longer vilified or sought to be annihilated. This new definition of “I” takes the individual out of a limited way of being and of relating to the world towards a shared oneness. Chopra concluded with the assertion that in order translate the ideals of peace and coexistence into a lived everyday reality, we have to begin by living “inside out” – operating from the wellspring of self-understanding, oneness and interrelatedness rather than in a way that is reactionary. This connection with our deeper self leads to a situation where we no longer act from the need to protect our narrow self-identities; rather, we see the other as part of our larger sense of self.

Ms. Ashima Kaul, a Consultant with WISCOMP, made a presentation on her own spiritual journey and transformation as she worked for peacebuilding in the violence-ravaged state of Jammu and Kashmir.

Her story is shared below in her own words.

### Spirituality and Peacebuilding: A Personal Journey

*Shiva chhuy thali thali rav zaan*
*Mov zaan Heund ta Musalmaan*
*Trukay chhuk ta panun paan praznaav*
*Soy chhay Sahibas zaanizaan*
Shiva is everywhere, know Him as the sun,  
Know not the Hindu different from a Muslim  
If you are wise, know yourself.  
That is the way to know the Saheb (the Lord).

I dedicate my journey and quest for peace in Kashmir to Lal Ded, a 13th century Kashmiri woman Shavaite saint and according to me a peacebuilder. Her spirituality found an expression in her vaaks, which enabled a common Kashmiri to transcend their religious identities and recognize the oneness of God.

Vaaks were Lal Ded’s agency, Vaaks were her vehicle, she went village to village, town to town singing them, Vaaks were her tool for building peace in times when Kashmiri society was divided on religious and caste fault-lines. Lal Ded, for me, will ever remain a symbol for cultural renaissance in Kashmir, a symbol of going beyond and transcending religious identities, a symbol that I continue to strive for.

Is this a spiritual experience?

Even as I continue this quest, this journey, I continue to seek an answer. Perhaps at times, I was able to transcend, go beyond, perhaps it was then that I experienced what we may define as spirituality. Yet other times, I continued to struggle for besides a group, there is a personal identity, which is ever growing, ever unfinished and becomes itself in relation to God. That is where religion comes in, the cycle continues. Perhaps this is spirituality, this constant search. Hence I have understood spirituality differently, have experienced it differently, at different points of times. However, at all times it had less to do with results but more with the process itself. That is when spirituality acquires a perpetual sense of being alive, vibrant, erotic, creative and arriving at a state of being which holds the multiplicities within with calm and ease, which accepts in totality ones’ attributes and weaknesses, ones’ fears and strengths.

As a peacebuilder, the constant struggle to deal with your dilemmas, resolve inner conflicts which arise from ones’ own conditioning, understanding and perception to carve new possibilities for peace, is how I understand spirituality.
At times, there is an incident or an individual that one meets that puts you on the path, starts guiding you in a direction which you have never thought you would take. It was a spontaneous decision I took when I met over 200 Kashmiri Muslim women in the city of Jammu, almost 300 kms. from the Kashmir Valley, culturally, ethnically, linguistically and religiously different from Kashmir. They had come to avail family planning facilities as the militants had banned it in Kashmir. The impact of their narratives on that cold January on my sensibilities and the fact that we, in the capital city of the country, were not hearing anything about what was happening to women, influenced my decision to go back to the Kashmir Valley a decade after I had left it, to find out what was happening.

I was emotionally not prepared to witness, hear and grasp the magnitude and totality of people’s experiences, of those who were living in the Valley and those who had to leave under threat to different parts of the region and country. How does one deal with diversity which is a given like culture, language, ethnicity, and religion? A diversity which is constructed like politics and identities? A diversity which is tied to personal experiences and historic memories of persecution, injustices, suppression, divisions or for that matter even memories of dialogical inter-personal relations vis-à-vis the existing breakdown of sinews and tissues which had kept the Kashmiri society together. It becomes all the more difficult when people are not ready to negotiate their fears, gross injustices, anger and isolation.

I stepped in these volatile and hostile spaces with my own prejudices, biases, and memories, primarily to open communication links between the people of my community and those who they believed were their perpetrators. I did not have the strength to go through the experience of absorbing the multiplicity of emotions - the pain, anger, bitterness, loss, the opaque walls that people had built, nourished their souls with hatred, unprepared to forgive. I was breaking up. It is then that I started visiting scared spaces of all faiths - the Sufi shrines, Sikh Gurudwaras, Hindu temples, crying for help. These powerful spaces helped me make a nascent inner shift to recover and discover that it is only when we overcome our fear of loosing what we have grown up to believe is ours, that is when the spiritual journey begins. It’s a
daily struggle to become aware of these fears and transcend them. And once we transcend, there is true freedom. It is then that we start seeing ourselves as not separate from what is outside, for the diversity that is in the external realm resides within us too. It is during this time that I met Khaksar Mohammad Maqbool Shah. I quote from an obituary I wrote for him after he was killed by an unidentified gunman.

“I first met Shah Sahib in 1999. A journalist friend in Reuters had insisted that I meet him. ‘You will get a profound insight about Islam and Sufism in Kashmir from him,’ he told me. I wasn’t sure I wanted to meet an imam of a local mosque for I strongly believed that there was no possibility of a dialogue with imams. I did not know at that stage that my search for peace would start from Shah Sahib’s doorsteps. With no appointments that day, I decided to go and meet the imam. He greeted me by placing a hand on my head and asked me to come and sit in the sun. ‘Be careful of the winter sun in Kashmir. It befools people,’ he said. I told him that I was aware of the fact. He looked surprised. When I told him that I was a Kashmiri, he got up to hug me. ‘I am fortunate and blessed to have you as my guest. I miss the Pandits.’ With that, he broke into tears. Lost in a bygone world, he narrated tales about how Muslims and Pandits used to live together. ‘I had many Pandit friends in college. Winds of irrationality, extremist ideologies sounded the death knell to centuries-old Kashmiri traditions. It was a sailab which drowned brotherhood.’

He then whispered, ‘We should say sorry to the Pandits.’ For me, the vulnerable submission of Shah Sahib was like balm on my wounded self. Loaded with prejudices, I was unable to reconcile to the divide between people and myths which had taken birth. One is most lonely when one is surrounded by myths and that’s how I had felt during my visits to the Valley. Meeting with Shah Sahib dispelled many of them. I felt encouraged by his indomitable spirit that sowed within me the seeds of recovery. The discussions that day revealed Shah Sahib’s immense understanding of different faiths. Within, he carried the essence of the teachings of the Vedas, the Granth, the Bible and the Quran. And that day, he revealed to me the real meaning of Islam. ‘Secular, compassionate and democratic’, he said. It is from him, I understood the Other. Later, he told me, ‘Ashima, keep the quest on.
You must be like the Prophet. He spoke to Nature and She revealed Herself to Him. You, too, talk to Nature and go write your own Quran.’ Views that could be considered blasphemous. But he just looked reassuringly and said, “Don’t be ever sacred. Always follow your spirit.”

One had to renunciate ones’ position, give up to keep the women’s dialogue group Athwaas that I had formed, going. After walking this entire journey, I had to come back to being who I was, a devout Hindu. It was very important to anchor myself and the work that I was engaged with. As a women’s group (Athwaas), we came from different backgrounds which reflected the larger diversity of the Kashmir conflict. It was important that we were able to create an inclusive feminine space. My advantage was that I did not carry any political baggage, on the other hand what was deeply personal to me, my spiritual experience, required, in fact, demanded of me to manifest the personal as a political action. How does one do it was an unnerving question. It was during this time that I met His Holiness the Dalai Lama. An intimate conversation with him on such questions helped me to evolve a personal strategy for peace. I simply needed to ask myself whenever I was confronted with challenges - what would his Holiness have done?

And this what, I think, each of these people, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Desmond Tutu, asked themselves in their most challenging moments. How to respond? And I feel the response to this question always stems from deeper values of righteousness.

As such, one is not afraid to then make choices for it is the larger good of all people, the entire polity that one has in mind. This entire experience which involves the spirit, its daily struggles, victories and evolution...It is this spirituality which informs peacebuilding strategies. Hence I feel, for shifts and transformation to take place, efforts have to be made for deeper consciousness shifts which will awaken the human heart for interconnectedness, which goes beyond differences, beyond workable unities, because this is what my personal God would have wanted.

Ashima Kaul
Closing Session

The Workshop concluded with participants making group presentations on different case studies and approaches to building peace and democracy. Drawing on their own experiences, pre-Workshop readings and research, and learnings from the two-day interaction, they addressed four themes:

- Diversity, Difference and Coexistence
- Nonviolence and Conflict Transformation
- Conflict Prevention
- Women and Peacebuilding

The explicit focus on “why peace processes falter and fail” and the engagement with specific South Asian case studies (such as Nepal and Afghanistan) was a central theme of the discussion. The problematization of the very concept of “peace” was also consistently flagged. The idea that peacebuilding is not necessarily a nonviolent exercise and can come with a variety of vested interests was flagged, and this kind of critical dialogue was indeed essential for the young audience. In this context, some speakers urged the participants to focus on the framework of nonviolence rather than on peace, because as one resource person put it, “If you use nonviolence, peace will automatically follow. But the reverse may not be true.” This kind of critical engagement with issues was an important outcome of the two-day dialogue.

The dialogue closed with a discussion on the approaches and proposals that could enhance peace and democracy in the contexts within which the participants lived and worked. It provided a rare space for students of peace
and conflict studies in Delhi to interact with one another and build a loose coalition for advocacy on peace and conflict issues. As WISCOMP discovered, there are few avenues for young peacebuilding practitioners (based at different universities in Delhi and even in India) to get to know one another and build professional partnerships. Serving as a unique space for this kind of relationship building, the WISCOMP dialogue generated ideas and proposals for enhancing post-Workshop collaboration and supporting the alumni in their peacebuilding endeavors.

For the young students and practitioners, the Workshop proved to be a platform where they not only voiced their personal views on various conflict-related issues, but also learnt from the worldviews of their peers and senior practitioners. “It was a valuable opportunity to share Afghanistan’s realities with our peers in India”, concurred the participants from Kabul. “It was a perfect forum for networking”, a media professional from Kashmir said. “There was uninhibited interaction which exposed me to innumerable opinions on the subject”, added another.

“The enthusiasm and seriousness displayed by these youngsters is a huge sign of encouragement for people like us on the field”, exclaimed Ms. Gazala Paul, a peace practitioner from Gujarat. WISCOMP’s Director Dr. Meenakshi
Gopinath echoed Paul’s sentiments. “The number of young minds committed to the building of peace and coexistence indicates that there is no need to despair just yet.”

Whether it was to return to their theses, research or report on the conflicts in Kashmir, Nepal and Afghanistan, or to continue with their activism for peace, the participants took away with them insights from a platform where peacebuilding theory met practice perfectly – paving the way for the creation of yet another set of peacebuilders the world so urgently needs.
March 2, 1930

Mohandas Gandhi’s letter to the British Viceroy, Lord Irwin, announcing plans for a Salt Satyagraha.

Why I regard the British Rule as a Curse!

Dear Friend,

Before embarking on Civil Disobedience and taking the risk I have dreaded to take all these years, I would fain approach you and find a way out. My personal faith is absolutely dear. I cannot intentionally hurt any thing that lives, much less fellow-human beings even though they may do the greatest wrong to me and mine. Whilst therefore I hold British rule to be a curse, I do not intend to harm a single Englishman or any legitimate interest he may have in India.

I must not be misunderstood. Though I hold the British rule in India to be a curse, I do not therefore consider Englishmen in general to be worse than any other people on earth. I have the privilege of claiming many Englishmen as dearest friends. Indeed much that I have learnt of the evil of British rule is due to the writings of frank and courageous Englishmen who have not hesitated to tell the unpalatable truth about that rule.

And why do I regard the British rule as a curse?

It has impoverished the dumb millions by a system of progressive exploitation and by a ruinously expensive military and civil administration which the country can never afford. It has reduced us politically to serfdom. It has sapped the foundations of our culture, and, by the policy of disarmament, it has degraded us spiritually. Lacking inward strength, we have been reduced by all but universal disarmament to a state bordering on cowardly helplessness.

In common with many of my countrymen, I had hugged the fond hope that the proposed Round Table Conference might furnish a solution. But when you said plainly that you could not give any assurance that you or the British Cabinet would pledge yourselves to support a scheme of full Dominion Status, the Round Table Conference could not possibly furnish the solution for which...

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1 Famous Letters of Mahatma Gandhi, Indian Printing Works, Lahore (1947)
http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/First_Letter_to_Lord_Irwin
vocal India is consciously, and the dumb millions unconsciously, thirsting. Needless to say there never was any question of Parliament’s verdict being anticipated. Instances are not wanting of the British Cabinet, in anticipation of Parliamentary verdict, having pledged itself to a particular policy.

The Delhi interview having miscarried, there was no option for Pandit Motilal Nehru and me but to take steps to carry out the solemn resolution of the Congress arrived at in Calcutta at its Session of 1928.

But the resolution of Independence should cause no alarm if the word “Dominion Status”, mentioned in your announcement, has been used in its accepted sense. For, has it not been admitted by responsible British statesmen that Dominion Status is virtual Independence? What however, I fear, is that there never has been any intention of granting such Dominion Status to India in the immediate future.

But this is all past history. Since the announcement, many events have happened which show unmistakably the trend of British policy.

It seems as clear as day light that responsible British statesmen do not contemplate any alteration in British policy that might adversely affect Britain’s commerce with India or require impartial and close scrutiny of Britain’s transactions with India. If nothing is done to end the process of exploitation, India must be bled with an ever increasing speed. The Finance Member regards as a settled fact the 1s. 6d. ratio which, by a stroke of the pen, drains India of a few crores. And when a serious attempt is being made through a civil form of direct action to unsettle this fact among many others, even you cannot help appealing to the wealthy landed classes to help you to crush that attempt in the name of an order that grinds India to atoms. Unless those who work in the name of the nation understand and keep before all concerned the motive that lies behind the craving for Independence, there is every danger of independence itself coming to us so charged as to be of no value to those toiling voiceless millions for whom it is sought and for whom it is worth taking. It is for that reason that I have been recently telling the public what independence should really mean.

Let me put before you some of the salient points. The terrific pressure of land revenue which furnishes a large part of the total revenue, must undergo considerable modification in Independent India. Even the much vaunted permanent settlement benefits a few rich Zamindars not the ryots. The ryot has remained as helpless as ever. He is a mere tenant at will. Not only then has
land revenue to be considerably reduced, but the whole revenue system has to be so revised as to make the ryot’s good its primary concern. But the British system seems to be designed to crush the very life out of him. Even the salt he must use to live is so taxed as to make the burden fall heaviest on him if only because of the heartless impartiality of its incidence. The tax shows itself still more burdensome on the poor man when it is remembered that salt is the one thing he must eat more than the rich man both individually and collectively. The drink and drug revenue too is derived from the poor. It saps the foundations both of their health and morals. It is defended under the false pleas of individual freedom, but in reality it is maintained for its own sake. The ingenuity of the authors of the Reforms of 1919 transferred this revenue to the so-called responsible part of dyarchy so as to throw the burden of prohibition on it, thus from the beginning rendering it powerless for good. If the unhappy Minister wipes out this revenue, he must starve education, since in the existing circumstances he has no new source of replacing that revenue. If the weight of taxation has crushed the poor from above, the destruction of the central supplementary industry, i.e., hand-spinning, has undermined their capacity for producing wealth.

The tale of India’s ruination is not complete without a reference to the liabilities incurred in her name. Sufficient has been recently said about these in the public Press. It must be the duty of a free India to subject all liabilities to the strictest investigation and repudiate those that may be adjudged by an impartial tribunal to be unjust and unfair. The iniquities sampled above are maintained in order to carry on a foreign administration, demonstrably the most expensive in the world. Take your own salary. It is over Rs. 21,000 per month besides many other indirect additions. The British Prime Minister gets 5,000 per year, i.e., over Rs. 5,400 per month at the present rate of exchange. You are getting over Rs. 700 per day against India’s average income of less than annas 2 per day. The Prime Minister gets Rs. 180 per day against Great Britain’s average income of nearly Rs. 2 per day. Thus you are getting much over 5,000 times India’s average income. The British Prime Minister is getting only 90 times Britain’s average income. On bended knee I ask you to ponder over this phenomenon. I have taken a personal illustration to drive home a painful truth. I have too great a regard for you as a man to wish to hurt your feelings. I know that you do not need the salary you get. Probably the whole of your salary goes for charity. But a system that provides for such an arrangement deserves to be summarily scrapped. What is true of the Viceregal salary is true generally of the whole administration.
A radical cutting down of the revenue, therefore, depends upon an equally radical reduction in expenses of administration. This means a transformation of the scheme of Government. This transformation is impossible without independence. Hence, in my opinion, the spontaneous demonstration of 26th January, in which hundreds of thousands of villagers instinctively participated. To them Independence means deliverance from the killing weight. Not one of the great British political parties, it seems to me, is prepared to give up the Indian spoils to which Great Britain helps herself from day to day, often in spite of the unanimous opposition of Indian opinion.

Nevertheless if India is to live as a nation, if the slow death by starvation of her people is to stop, some remedy must be found for immediate relief. The proposed conference is certainly not the remedy. It is not a matter of carrying conviction by argument. The matter resolves itself into one of matching forces. Conviction or no conviction Great Britain would defend her Indian commerce and interest by all the forces at her command. India must consequently evolve force enough to free herself from that embrace of death. It is common cause that, however disorganised and for the time being insignificant it may be, the party of violence is gaining ground and making itself felt. Its end is the same as mine. But I am convinced that it cannot bring the desired relief to the dumb millions. And the conviction is growing deeper and deeper in me that nothing but unadulterated non-violence can check the organised violence of the British Government. Many think that non-violence is not an active force. It is my purpose to set in motion that force as well against the organised violence force of the British rule as the unorganised violence force of the growing party of violence. To sit still would be to give rein to both the forces above mentioned. Having unquestioning and immovable faith in the efficacy of non-violence as I know it, it would be sinful on my part to wait any longer. This non-violence will be expressed through civil disobedience for the moment confined to the inmates of the Satyagraha Ashram, but ultimately designed to cover all those who choose to join the movement with its obvious limitations.

I know that in embarking on non-violence, I shall be running what might fairly be termed a mad risk, but the victories of truth have never been won without risks, often of the gravest character. Conversion of a nation that has consciously or unconsciously, preyed upon another far more numerous, far more ancient and no less cultured than itself is worth any amount of risk.

I have deliberately used the word conversion, for my ambition is no less than to convert the British people through non-violence and thus make them see
the wrong they have done to India. I do not seek to harm your people. I want to serve them even as I want to serve my own. I believe that I have always served them. I served them up to 1919 blindly. But when my eyes were opened, and I conceived non-co-operation the object still was to serve them. I employed the same weapon that I have in all humility successfully used against the dearest members of my family. If I have equal love for your people with mine, it will not long remain hidden. It will be acknowledged by them even as members of my family acknowledged it after they had tried me for several years. If people join me as I expect they will, the sufferings they will undergo, unless the British nation sooner retraces its steps, will be enough to melt the stoniest hearts.

The plan through civil disobedience will be to combat such evils as I have sampled out.

If we want to sever the British connection, it is because of such evils. When they are removed the path becomes easy. Then the way to friendly negotiation will be open. If the British commerce with India is purified of greed, you will have no difficulty in recognising our independence. I respectfully invite you then to pave the way for an immediate removal of those evils and thus open a way for a real conference between equals, interested only in promoting the common good of mankind through voluntary fellowship and in arranging terms of mutual help and commerce suited to both. You have unnecessarily laid stress upon the communal problems that unhappily affect this land. Important though they undoubtedly are for the consideration of any scheme of government, they have little bearing on the greater problems which are above communities and which affect them all equally. But if you cannot see your way to deal with these evils and my letter makes no appeal to your heart, on the 11th day of this month I shall proceed with such co-workers of the Ashram as I can take to disregard the provisions of Salt laws. I regard this tax to be the most iniquitous of all from the poor man’s standpoint. As the Independence Movement is essentially for the poorest in the land, the beginning will be made with this evil. The wonder is, that we have submitted to the cruel monopoly for so long. It is, I know, open to you to frustrate my design by arresting me. I hope there will be tens of thousands ready in a disciplined manner to take up the work after me, and in the act of disobeying the Salt Act lay themselves open to the penalties of a law that should never have disfigured the Statute-book.

I have no desire to cause you unnecessary embarrassment or any at all so far as I can help. If you think that there is any substance in my letter, and if you
will care to discuss matters with me, and if to that end you would like me to postpone publication of this letter, I shall gladly refrain on receipt of a telegram to that effect soon after this reaches you. You will however do me the favour not to deflect me from my course unless you can see your way to conform to the substance of this letter.

This letter is not in any way intended as a threat, but is a simple and sacred duty peremptory on a civil resister. Therefore I am having it specially delivered by a young English friend, who believes in the Indian cause and is a full believer in non-violence and whom Providence seems to have sent to me as it were for the very purpose.

I remain,
your sincere friend
M. K. Gandhi
Resource Person Profiles

Gazala Paul (Ahmedabad, India) is the founder of Samerth Trust, a Gujarat based NGO, which works towards designing and implementing various projects for livelihood promotion and peace education. She is also a part-time consultant advisor for west India with the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, U.K. Ms. Paul holds a Masters’ degree in Coexistence and Conflict Management from Brandeis University, Massachusetts, and has also studied Peace and Conflict Management from INCORE, University of Ulster, Northern Ireland. Her primary focus is on education (especially of educators) on issues of war, peace, tolerance and reconciliation. Working at the grassroots, her focus remains on people-to-people contact, and helping communities (in Gujarat, Sri Lanka and the Northeast) to overcome entrenched attitudes of prejudice and hatred.

Gurpreet Mahajan (New Delhi, India) is Professor at the Center for Political Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Her teaching and research is in the area of political and social theory, and the philosophy of social science. Her publications include The Multicultural Path: Issues of Diversity and Discrimination, Identities and Rights: Aspects of Liberal Democracy in India, Explanation and Understanding in the Human Sciences, and more recently, Religion, Community and Development: Changing Contours of Politics and Policy in India (Routledge 2010), jointly edited with S. Jodhka. Prof. Mahajan has been closely associated with the WISCOMP Fellowship Program in an advisory capacity.

Kamla Bhasin (New Delhi, India) is a well-known feminist activist, author and poet. She is Co-Founder and Advisor, South Asian Network of Gender Activists and Trainers (SANGAT). She is also one of the founder members and conveners of the South Asian Women’s Forum, Jagori, and Ankur (Society for Alternatives in Education), New Delhi. Ms. Bhasin has served as a member of the Asian Cultural Forum on Development (ACFOD) and of the Governing Body of the Spastic Society of Northern India, New Delhi. She has worked with the Freedom from Hunger Campaign of the FAO for over twenty years, and has written extensively on issues related to development, participatory training, media, communication and gender.

Rita Manchanda (New Delhi, India) is Research Director of a South Asia Forum for Human Rights (SAFHR) project “Human Rights Audits of Partitions
as a Method of Conflict Resolution”. She has also served as a Gender Expert for the Commonwealth Technical Fund in Sri Lanka and developed the programs “Women, Conflict, and Peacebuilding” and “Media and Conflict” at SAFHR. Rita Manchanda has written extensively on security and human rights issues, and among her recent publications are the edited volume “States in Conflict with their Minorities”; “No Nonsense Guide to Minority Rights in South Asia”, the edited title “Women, War and Peace in South Asia: Beyond Victimhood to Agency”. Her present focus is action research on peace processes in South Asia. She did her doctoral studies in International Relations at the Graduate School for International Studies, University of Geneva. She is also a peace and human rights activist and a National Committee member of the Pakistan India Peoples’ Forum for Peace and Democracy.

S. M. Faizan Ahmed (New Delhi, India) works in the capacity of Research Coordinator at the Center for Conflict Resolution and Human Security. He is leading the recently launched studies on Communalism as well as implementing other research projects. He holds a Masters’ degree in Sociology from the University of Delhi and has worked for several organizations in Delhi, such as the Center for Development Economics, UNIFEM, Institute of Socio-Economic Research on Development and Democracy, Agha Khan Foundation, and the Institute for Defense Studies and Analyses. He has also worked in Germany at Islamwissenschaft, University of Erfurt, and Zentrum Moderner Orient (Berlin).

Swati Chopra (New Delhi, India) is a writer and editor. She is the author of Dharamsala Diaries (Penguin, 2007), a travelogue of the spirit, and a modern introduction to Buddhism, Buddhism: On the Path to Nirvana (Brijbasi, New Delhi; Mercury Books, London, 2005). Her writing, exploring spirituality and its relevance to modern lives, has appeared in publications in India and abroad. As an editor she has worked with Life Positive, The Times of India, and Roli Books. Swati’s new book, Women Awakened: Stories of Contemporary Feminine Spirituality, the research of which was facilitated with support from WISCOMP, will be published by HarperCollins in February 2011.

S.P. Udayakumar (Nagercoil, India) is a political scientist and peace educator by training and the Director of South Asian Community Center for Education and Research, Nagercoil, Tamil Nadu, India. He writes for several publications in India and around the world and offers talks, workshops and courses on Conflict Transformation, nonviolence, human rights, sustainable development and future studies. His books include Presenting the Past: Anxious History and Ancient Future in Hindutva India (Praeger, 2005), and Handcuffed to
History: Narratives, Pathologies and Violence in South Asia (Praeger, 2001). Prof. Udayakumar has also been working with the anti-nuclear groups across India under the National Alliance of Anti-nuclear Movements (NAAM).

Sumona DasGupta (New Delhi, India) is a Political Scientist who works as an independent research consultant in Delhi. Her research interests include new issues of security, civil-military relations, peace, conflict, democracy and dialogue. Her most recent publications and writing engagements include a book titled Citizen Initiatives and Democratic Engagements: Experiences from India (New Delhi: Routledge, 2010) and a chapter Borderlands and Borderlines: Re-negotiating Boundaries through a Gender Lens in Jammu and Kashmir (New Delhi: Sage Publications, forthcoming). Dr. DasGupta has co-edited (with Swarna Rajagopalan) a series of five monographs titled Revisioning and Engendering Security (New Delhi: Rupa, 2010) as part of the WISCOMP project on Non-Traditional Security. She has held the position of Assistant Director at WISCOMP and, more recently, was Consulting Editor for the Spring 2010 Volume of Peace Prints, WISCOMP’s South Asian Journal of Peacebuilding. The thematic focus of this journal was Gender, Peace and Conflict.

Swaran Singh (New Delhi, India) is Professor of Diplomacy and Disarmament at the School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. He is also the President of the Association of ASIA Scholars (South Asia Chapter), New Delhi, and General Secretary, Indian Congress of Asian and Pacific Studies, Varanasi. His areas of specialization include arms control and disarmament, war and peace, defense, security and nuclear issues, China’s foreign and security policies, and conflict resolution and peace studies. Prof. Singh has edited China-Pakistan Strategic Cooperation: Indian Perspectives (New Delhi: Manohar, 2007) and authored China-South Asia: Issues, Equations, Policies (New Delhi: Lancers Books, 2003), and Limited War: The Challenge of US Military Strategy (New Delhi: Lancers Books, 1995). In addition, he has contributed numerous chapters, research papers and articles on the above issues to journals and books, in India and abroad.

Taina Jarvinen (New Delhi, India) has over 10 years of professional experience in human rights and gender issues. Her expertise includes human rights in post-conflict situations and in crisis management, democratic governance and transitional justice, human rights mainstreaming and a human rights-based approach to development. She has worked as a human rights expert at the Finnish Foreign Ministry and EU ESDP missions as well as in
the NGO sector. She has also conducted academic research on human rights and has field experience in conflict and post-conflict societies in Asian countries, including Afghanistan, Indonesia (Aceh), and East Timor.

**Vinay Lal** (New Delhi, India) has been teaching History and Asian American Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) since 1993. In recent years, he has been dividing his time between India and the US, and spent 18 months in Delhi as Director of the University of California Education Abroad Program. He will be taking up a Professorship of History at Delhi University later in 2010. Prof. Lal maintains a popular website on all aspects of Indian civilization called MANAS (www.sscnet.ucla.edu/southasia). His books include *Empire of Knowledge: Culture and Plurality in the Global Economy* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), *The History of History: Politics and Scholarship in Modern India* (Delhi: OUP, 2003), *Of Cricket, Guinness and Gandhi: Essays on Indian History and Culture* (Seagull Books, 2003), *Introducing Hinduism* (London: Icon Books, 2005), and *The Other Indians: A Political and Cultural History of South Asians in America* (New Delhi: HarperCollins, 2008). He is presently working on several books, among them a monograph on *Deewar*, an iconic work of mainstream Indian cinema; a scholarly and creative anthology on the Indian city; a study of visual representations of Mohandas Gandhi; and a monograph on political trials in colonial India.

**Yashwant Deshmukh** (Noida, India) is a seasoned communications entrepreneur and Founder-Owner of YRD Media. Under the flagship of YRD Media Network, he launched CVoter News Services, which is South Asia’s largest Indian-owned media and stakeholder research agency. Mr. Deshmukh is the only Indian media person and public opinion expert to have personally covered the Kashmir Valley, apart from other conflict regions such as Congo, Aceh, Sri Lanka, Palestine and Northern Ireland. His latest venture is the dream project *UNI TV* (launched in October 2009). As South Asia’s largest multimedia news agency, *UNI TV* is poised to deliver unique content across television, radio and IPTV formats. Being the audio-visual services arm of the decades-old news wire service (United News of India), *UNI TV* provides daily live feed services – news and features – in Hindi and English to the broadcast media.
Participant Profiles

Akhu (Rangoon, Burma) belongs to the Chin Ethnic region of Burma. Since 2007, she has been living in New Delhi where she holds the position of Health-In-Charge at the Women’s Rights and Welfare Association of Burma (WRWAB). Akhu is also In-Charge of the Southern India branch of the Women’s League of Burma.

Sanchita Ain (Aligarh, India) is pursuing a Bachelors’ degree in Law at the Aligarh Muslim University. She is also pursuing a post-graduate Diploma in Cyber Law from the Asian School of Cyber Law. She has interned with the Ministry of External Affairs in the Legal and Treaties Division in the summer of 2010 and with Singh & Associates, an international law firm, in 2009. Sanchita has attended several conferences and participated in various community initiatives.

Kiri Atri (New Delhi, India) is a Graduate Student of International Relations at Jawaharlal Nehru University. He holds a Bachelors’ degree in Geography from Kirori Mal College, University of Delhi, and has attended conferences and training workshops on peacebuilding, conflict analysis and cross-cultural communication in different countries. He has been an organizer of the International Students Festival in Delhi (ISFiD 2008) and the Youth World Parliament, and was awarded the Swami Vivekananda International Youth Award for the same.

Asnah Avner (Colombo, Sri Lanka) is currently based in Delhi, pursuing a Bachelors’ degree in English from Lady Shri Ram College for Women (LSR), University of Delhi. She has worked as a News Presenter at the “E!” FM Radio Station of Colombo Communications Limited. Asnah is a recipient of the ICCR Scholarship for Sri Lankan Nationals to pursue undergraduate studies in India. She is involved in several extra curricular activities at LSR.

Raja Bagga (New Delhi, India) is a Student of Conflict Transformation and Peacebuilding at Lady Shri Ram College. He is also pursuing a Bachelor’s degree in Law from the University of Delhi. He has worked as a Client Coverage Manager (Global Corporate) at Standard Chartered Bank in Mumbai, following the completion of a Bachelors’ degree in Economics from the University of Delhi.
Jocelyn Bell (Rhode Island, USA) is an Undergraduate Student in Development Studies at Brown University, USA. She is currently an exchange student at Lady Shri Ram College for Women, New Delhi. She has been a Food Service worker at Brown University and a tutor in Woodland Hills' district school. Her research interests include human trafficking, civil society, and public and international policy.

Dipanwita Chakravortty (Gurgaon, India) is pursuing a Masters’ degree in International Relations at Jawaharlal Nehru University. She holds a Bachelors’ degree in History from Lady Sri Ram College, University of Delhi, and has attended several workshops and seminars.

Anuradha Chandra (Faridabad, India) is a Visiting Faculty at Pearl Academy of Fashion, where she teaches photography, film making and communication skills. She is also a freelancer and an independent filmmaker, and holds a Masters’ degree in Fine Arts from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, USA as well as one in Mass Communication from Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi. Her research interests include Film Aesthetics, Cinema of Sensation and the unexplored image possibilities with older techniques in photography. She has directed, produced and edited several short films and has contributed to several documentaries.

Rana Divyank Chaudhary (New Delhi, India) is pursuing a Masters’ degree in Conflict Analysis and Peacebuilding at the Nelson Mandela Center for Peace and Conflict Resolution at Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi. He holds a Bachelors’ degree in Journalism from the Delhi College of Arts and Commerce, University of Delhi. He has worked with The Hindustan Times and The Pioneer as a trainee.

Rishika Chauhan (New Delhi, India) is a Graduate Student of International Relations at Jawaharlal Nehru University. She holds a Bachelors’ degree in Political Science from the University of Delhi, and is presently interning with the National Maritime Foundation, Delhi. Previously, she was associated with The Indian Express as an intern.

Suvolaxmi Dutta Choudhury (New Delhi, India) is an Undergraduate Student of Political Science at Lady Shri Ram College for Women, University of Delhi. She is also pursuing a Postgraduate Diploma in Conflict Transformation and Peacebuilding from the same college. She has worked as a volunteer for the Blind School, Delhi, and as a trainee with Trinita Society for Social and Health Research.
Debak Das (New Delhi, India) is pursuing a Masters’ degree in International Relations from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. He completed his Bachelors’ degree in History from the University of Calcutta. Having worked with a number of newspaper houses and NGOs, he has also engaged with advocacy and especially theater, through the student community.

Jaya Dixit (New Delhi, India) is pursuing Doctoral studies in the South Asian Division of the School of International Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. She holds an M.Phil degree from the same university and worked on India’s role in the reconstruction of post-Taliban Afghanistan. Her book review on Foreign Policy of India by Subhash Shukla was published in the Indian Foreign Affairs Journal in 2008.

Vijaya Dixit (New Delhi, India) is pursuing her Ph.D in South Asian Studies at the School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. She holds an M.Phil from the same university and her dissertation was titled “Industrial Growth and Environmental Degradation in Bangladesh: Post-Economic Reforms Scenario”. Her book review of Negotiating for India: Resolving Problems through Diplomacy by Jagat S. Mehta was published in Indian Foreign Affairs Journal in 2007.

Ahmad Shikib Dost (Kabul, Afghanistan) is a Strategic Communications Specialist with USAID in the Sustainable Water Supply and Sanitation Project in Kabul. He is also a News Anchor for Afghanistan Radio and Television. Shikib holds a Bachelors’ degree in Business Administration from Kardan University, Kabul, and is trained in Radio and TV Journalism. Previously, he worked as a Media Advisor with NATO/ISAF.

Arun Fernandez (Chennai, India) is pursuing a Masters’ degree in Social Work at Loyola College, Chennai. He holds a Bachelors’ degree in Commerce from the same college. Arun is associated with the Youth Services Team, Ma Foi Foundation and has been a part of several volunteering initiatives and mobilization drives. He is also the Student Program Coordinator at the Institute of Dialogue with Cultures and Religions, Chennai.

Ipshita Ghosh (New Delhi, India) is pursuing a Masters’ degree in English from the University of Delhi. She holds a Bachelors’ degree from Lady Shri Ram College for Women, New Delhi. She has been a participant of the Summer Exchange Program with the National University of Singapore (2009), and was a recipient of the Faculty Prize (2010) at Lady Shri Ram College. Ipshita has participated in several literary competitions and inter-college events. She has also worked for the online youth portal The Viewspaper.
Snigdha Ghosh (New Delhi, India) is pursuing a Masters’ degree in Conflict Analysis and Peacebuilding at the Nelson Mandela Center for Peace and Conflict Resolution at Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi. She holds a Postgraduate Diploma in Journalism and a Bachelors’ degree from Miranda House, University of Delhi. She has worked with several news channels, including News X, IBN 7, and ISBM.

Shivani Gupta (New Delhi, India) is an Undergraduate Student of Political Science at Lady Shri Ram College for Women, University of Delhi. She is also pursuing a Postgraduate Diploma in Conflict Transformation and Peacebuilding from the same college. She has worked as an intern with the litigation firm R.L Bhagat and Associates as well as with the national daily Hindustan Times. Her areas of interest include international relations, conflict analysis and legal activism.

Sana Hashmi (New Delhi, India) is pursuing a Masters’ degree in Conflict Analysis and Peacebuilding from Jamia Millia Islamia. She completed her Bachelors’ in Psychology from the University of Delhi, and worked as a Research Intern with the Institute for Defense Studies and Analyses (IDSA) under the Internal Security Cluster.

Sayed Rashad Ikmal (New Delhi, India) is pursuing a Masters’ degree in Conflict Analysis and Peacebuilding at Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi. He holds a Bachelor’s degree in Political Science from the same university. He has been an intern with the European Union’s Third Human Resource and Curriculum Development Program on Peacemaking and Peacebuilding in Europe and South Asia (2010), and has participated in several national and international seminars.

Adilah Ismail (Colombo, Sri Lanka) is currently based in New Delhi where she is pursuing a Bachelors’ degree in English at Lady Shri Ram College for Women. She holds a Professional Diploma in Marketing from the Chartered Institute of Marketing, UK. She is also a freelance writer for The Sunday Times, Sri Lanka.

Bhanu Jain (New Delhi, India) is pursuing a Postgraduate Diploma in Conflict Transformation and Peacebuilding at Lady Shri Ram College for Women. She holds a Masters’ degree in Education from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, and a Bachelors’ degree in Elementary Education from the University of Delhi. She is currently working as a Teacher at the Navyug
School, New Delhi, and is also a Freelance Curriculum Developer with Birla Edutech Ltd.

Amrita Jash (New Delhi, India) is pursuing a Masters’ degree in International Relations at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, and holds a Bachelors’ degree in Political Science from Lady Shri Ram College for Women where she participated in a variety of extracurricular activities. Amrita has worked on several projects in the areas of international relations and peacebuilding.

Caroline Kenward (Pennsylvania, USA) is currently based in New Delhi as an exchange student at Lady Shri Ram College for Women. She is pursuing a Bachelors’ degree in Sociology from Bryn Mawr College, Pennsylvania, where she is a part of the Social Justice Partnership Program. Caroline has worked as a music instructor, soccer coach and political canvasser.

Chandni Khanduja (New Delhi, India) is a Team Leader and Fellow at Absolute Return for Kids, a Delhi-based non-profit organization. She holds a Masters’ degree in Social Work from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, and a Bachelors’ degree in Political Science from the University of Delhi. Chandni has been associated with many organizations in the development sector, working on a variety of issues such as education, child rights, gender, and youth empowerment.

Antra Khurana (New Delhi, India) is pursuing a Masters’ degree in Conflict Analysis and Peacebuilding from Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi. She also holds a Masters’ degree in Business Administration from the All India Management Institute and a Bachelors’ degree in Political Science from Miranda House, University of Delhi. She was earlier associated with New Concept Information System as an Executive (Marketing and Research) and with Srishti Publications as a travel writer.

Arvind Kumar (New Delhi, India) is a Research Associate for an Asia-Link project on Peacemaking and Peacebuilding in Europe and South Asia at the Nelson Mandela Center for Peace and Conflict Resolution, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi. He is a Guest Faculty in the Department of Political Science at Zakir Hussain College, University of Delhi. Arvind holds a Doctorate degree from the School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, and has several publications to his credit.

Pawan Kumar (New Delhi, India) is pursuing his Ph. D in the Department of Political Science, University of Delhi. He is also working as a Consultant
at the Center for Extension Education, IGNOU, New Delhi. He has taught at both graduate and undergraduate levels on a guest basis, and has been associated as a Researcher with the Center for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi.

**Sumitha Narayanan Kutty (Calicut, India)** is a journalist. She has worked as a Reporter with *Times Now* focusing on the Politics and Policies that affect South Asia. She holds a Postgraduate Diploma in Journalism from the Asian College of Journalism, Chennai, and a Bachelors’ degree from Mangalore University. She has worked as a Content Editor with various news bulletins on *Times Now*.

**Bhavana Mahajan (New Delhi, India)** is pursuing a Postgraduate Diploma in Conflict Transformation and Peacebuilding at Lady Shri Ram College for Women. She holds a Masters’ degree in Economics from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, and has interned with the National Foundation for India. She has also worked with Yes Bank Limited, Bank of America, and McKinsey and Co.

**Sreyasa Mainali (Kathmandu, Nepal)** is an Assistant Editor at Sangam Institute for Policy Analysis and Strategic Studies, Kathmandu. She is also pursuing a Masters’ degree in Conflict, Peace and Development Studies at Tribhuvan University, and holds a Bachelors’ degree in Biological Sciences from the University of Alberta, Canada. Sreyasa was earlier Project Coordinator at the Federation of Women Entrepreneurs’ Associations of Nepal (FWEAN) and has also worked with the Jayanti Memorial Trust, Kathmandu.

**Pia Malhotra (New Delhi, India)** is a Research Officer at the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, New Delhi. She holds a Masters’ degree in International Relations from New York University, USA, and Bachelors’ degrees from the University of Delhi and York University (Canada). Her areas of interest include water issues, human rights in South Asia, and the politics and governance of Pakistan. She has written a series of articles and reports on water conflicts and water management in South Asia.

**Shefali Manhas (New Delhi, India)** holds an M.Phil degree from the Center for Political Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. The subject of her research was titled *Redefining Women’s Subjectivity in Militarized Kashmir*. Shefali holds a Bachelors’ degree from Lady Shri Ram College for Women and a Masters’ degree in Political Science from Kirori Mal College, University of Delhi.
Nazir Ahmad Mir (Budgam, India) is pursuing a Masters’ degree in Conflict Analysis and Peacebuilding at Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi. He holds a Bachelors’ degree in Science from Kashmir University and a Postgraduate Diploma in Print Journalism from the YMCA, New Delhi. Nazir has worked as an intern with The Hindustan Times in New Delhi. He follows social and political developments in the Kashmir valley closely, and has written several articles and opinion pieces for newspapers based in Jammu and Kashmir.

Suhas Munshi (New Delhi, India) is a Crime Reporter with Indo-Asian News Service (IANS). He graduated as a Computer Science Engineer from Jaypee University of Information and Technology. He was associated as a software trainee in SDG Software Pvt. Ltd and has interned with The Hindustan Times and LiveMint.

Luwemba Musa (Kampala, Uganda) is currently based in Delhi where he is pursuing graduate studies in Political Science at the Jawaharlal Nehru University. He holds a Bachelors’ degree in Social Sciences from Makerere University, Uganda, and has worked as a Teaching Assistant at the Islamic University (Uganda). He has also been a Project Manager at Ssemwo Construction Company and a Human Resource Specialist at Makerere University.

Sanam Noori (Kabul, Afghanistan) is pursuing a Bachelors’ degree in Business Administration at Bakhtar University of Higher Education. She has worked as a Media Communication Assistant at the World Food Program, as a Finance Assistant with the Laice Group, and as a Branch Manager at BRAC organization. Her areas of interest include capacity-building, human rights and good management.

Nawang Palkit (Ladakh, India) is currently based in Delhi where she is pursuing undergraduate studies at Miranda House, University of Delhi. She has been a volunteer for non-profit organizations in Ladakh and is a member of Passion Movement International. Her interests lie in photography, philately and numismatics.

Devika Parashar (New Delhi, India) is an undergraduate student of History at Lady Shri Ram College for Women. She has worked with Aastha Parivaar (an NGO) and has been an assistant teacher for play-group children. She is also a part of various extracurricular activities at college.
Zoya Bilal Qureshi (New Delhi, India) is a Graduate Student at the Nelson Mandela Center for Peace and Conflict Resolution at Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi. She holds a Bachelors’ degree in Economics from Lady Shri Ram College where she has participated in various extracurricular activities including the Model United Nations and Fine Arts.

Alamu Rathinasabapathy (New Delhi, India) is a Graduate Student of Political Science at Jawaharlal Nehru University. She is also pursuing a Postgraduate Diploma in Conflict Transformation and Peacebuilding at Lady Shri Ram College for Women. She holds Bachelors’ degree in Political Science from the same college. Alamu was previously associated with REACH (Re-Affirming Equity Access Capacity and Humanism) as a Coordinator.

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GLIMPSES
About WISCOMP

WISCOMP (Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace) is a unique South Asian initiative. It provides an interface between academia and the NGO sector, and positions its work at the confluence of Gender and Peacebuilding.

WISCOMP strives to:

- Enhance the role of women as peacebuilders, negotiators and as agents for nonviolent social change;
- Empower a new generation of women and men with the expertise and skills to engage in peace activism through educational and training programs in Conflict Transformation;
- Contribute to an inclusive, people-oriented discourse on issues of security, which respects diversity and which foregrounds the perspectives of women and the hitherto marginalized;
- Facilitate theory-building and innovative research on holistic paradigms that address the transformation of intra- and inter-state conflicts;
- Build synergy at various levels – between theory, practice and policy; between those working in academia, in the formal structures of foreign policy and diplomacy and those engaged in grassroots peacebuilding;
- Build constituencies of peace through training, research and praxis in areas such as multi-track diplomacy, peace advocacy, coexistence and cross-border civil society dialogues; and,
- Work with educational institutions to engender a culture of peace through the development of curricula and innovative methodology.